



Campaign 2008

Media Reality ✓ Check

Expert Documentation of the Latest Liberal Media Bias ✪ September 25, 2008

Press Contact:
Colleen O'Boyle
(703) 683-5004
Vol. 12, No. 7
www.mrc.org

PBS Anchor Asked John Kerry Several Helpful Softball Questions in 2004 Foreign Policy Debate

Jim Lehrer: Not a "Bias-Free" Moderator

Long-time PBS anchor Jim Lehrer, the first host of the 2008 fall presidential debates, is dead serious about his utter lack of bias. Appearing November 27, 2006 on Comedy Central's *The Colbert Report*, Lehrer insisted with a very straight face that "I am bias-free....Bias is what people who hear or read the news bring to the story, not what the journalist brings to the reporting." When Colbert insisted Lehrer must add some flavor, straight-faced Lehrer declared his contribution was "the flavor of neutrality."

Lehrer can offer a different flavor. During live coverage of the Democratic convention on August 25, he gauzily reacted to Jimmy Carter's florid praise of Barack Obama's race speech in March: "If it happens that he is elected, or even his just being nominated, will send positive ripple effects throughout the country on the race issue."

His denial of bias doesn't mean the debate questions haven't favored the more liberal candidate. In 2000, Lehrer moderated all three presidential debates. In the third one, a town hall debate, Lehrer approved mostly liberal questions from the "uncommitted" audience. Eight questions came from the left, only two could be counted as conservative, and five were requests for information without an ideological tone.

One questioner asked: "Would you be open to the ideal of a national health care plan for everybody?" Another poked George W. Bush: "You seemed to overly enjoy, as a matter of fact proud that Texas...led the nation in execution of prisoners. Sir, did I misread your response, and are you really, really proud of the fact that Texas is number one in executions?" Even *Saturday Night Live* satirized the bias of the "uncommitted" questioners in 2000.

In 2004, Lehrer moderated the first George Bush-John Kerry debate, devoted to foreign policy matters. He pressed

Bush: "President Putin and Russia. Did you misjudge him?...Do you feel that what he is doing in the name of anti-terrorism by changing some democratic processes is okay?" He asked Bush to get personal: "Are there also underlying character issues that you believe, that you believe are serious enough to deny Senator Kerry the job as commander in chief of the United States?" Bush protested: "That's a loaded question."

In the same event, Lehrer's questions to Kerry sounded like helpful speech set-ups:

■ "Speaking of Vietnam, you spoke to Congress in 1971, after you came back from Vietnam, and you said, quote, 'How do you ask a man to be the last man to die for a mistake?' Are Americans now dying in Iraq for a mistake?"

■ "'Colossal misjudgments.' What colossal misjudgments, in your opinion, has President Bush made in these areas?"

■ "You've repeatedly accused President Bush – not here tonight, but elsewhere before – of not telling the truth about Iraq, essentially of lying to the American people about Iraq. Give us some examples of what you consider to be his not telling the truth."

Lehrer didn't ask Kerry about his mixed votes and messages on Iraq (which Bush harped on), or about the Swift Boat veteran charges, or about his claiming before the Senate in 1971 that U.S. soldiers slaughtered and tortured Vietnamese civilians and their cows and dogs. It will be interesting to observe the tone of Lehrer's questions about Iraq in 2008, now that the picture has changed dramatically. -- *Tim Graham*

Lehrer Thought Sighing Al Gore Won

"Then there was the 2000 Al Gore-George W. Bush debate in which the vice president notoriously grimaced and sighed his way through his opposition's answers. Lehrer left that contest thinking Gore had clearly scored a victory, only to discover that what he had witnessed was far different from the rest of the audience." — *Huffington Post reporter Sam Stein interviewing Lehrer, September 19.*

To schedule an interview with an MRC spokesman, please contact Colleen O'Boyle at (703) 683-5004