



Media Reality ✓ Check

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New York Times Blames Conservatives for "Soviet-Style Chill" While NBC's Williams Faults "Extortion"

So Reagan's Friends Are the Real Villains?

Who cares if the mini-series on Ronald and Nancy Reagan was unfair and unbalanced, a fact that CBS executives now concede? Some liberal critics think CBS should have aired the mean-spirited movie anyway, rather than acknowledge that conservatives were right.

Indeed, many liberal media types argued that for CBS to pull *The Reagans* after determining it was biased set an alarming precedent. On CNBC Tuesday night, future *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams blamed "mostly Republican pressure groups" for the movie's cancellation, asking former Reagan aide Mike Deaver whether CBS's decision was "dangerous." He asked *New York* magazine's media critic Michael Wolff, "Do you believe what has happened here with this mini-series on CBS amounts to extortion?"

"Certainly capitulation," Wolff agreed, warning: "There is no group as well-organized as the right wing in America at this point in time."

Newsweek's Jonathan Alter couldn't wait for next week's magazine. He posted a column on *Newsweek's* Web site on Tuesday, castigating CBS as "gutless" for siding with conservatives: "It's a big victory for the 'Elephant Echo Chamber,' the unholy trinity of conservative talk radio, conservative Internet sites and the Republican National Committee," Alter mocked. As opposed to the "unholy trinity" of ABC, CBS and NBC?

The *New York Times*, which in a Wednesday editorial characterized the series merely as "less than complimentary," condemned CBS as "wrong to yield to conservative pressure." The *Times* also insulted Reagan fans as akin to the communist menace: "His supporters credit him with forcing down the Iron Curtain, so it is odd that some of them have helped create the Soviet-style chill embedded in the idea that we, as a nation, will not allow critical portrayals of one of our own recent leaders."

Philadelphia Daily News TV critic Ellen Gray voiced her disgust to the *Washington Post's* Lisa de Moraes in a quote

that appeared in Tuesday morning's *Post*. Referring to CBS's May mini-series on the Nazi dictator who killed millions, Gray grumbled, "If Hitler had more friends, CBS wouldn't have aired [its Hitler mini-series] either."

The networks generally refused to admit that the criticism of the mini-series was the profoundly unfair and dishonest way it fictionalized Reagan's life. Instead, ABC anchor Peter Jennings on Tuesday portrayed the critics as thin-skinned complainers who howled "when word got around that it may not have been as faithful to the Reagan story as some conservatives wanted it to be."

Executive Blames CBS's Liberal Bias

"A CBS executive who spoke on the condition of anonymity said the liberal political views of most CBS executives blinded them to the possibility that Reagan supporters might latch on to the movie as a political issue. 'I don't think most people saw it coming,' the executive said. 'It's part of the bubble that we live in.'"

— *Chicago Tribune's* John Cook, Vincent Schodolski, and Frank James, Nov. 5.

This morning's *Today* portrayed conservatives as intolerant of any negative portrayal. Katie Couric framed it as "the heated debate over what can and can't be said about this country's 40th President. Is Ronald Reagan untouchable?" She grilled Reagan's '84 campaign manager Ed Rollins about those awful conservatives: "Does it bother you at all, that one group in America, or many Americans, can basically exert this kind of political

pressure and create an environment where, perhaps, free speech is not exercised?"

But the facts undermine pundits who argue conservatives were just being ultra-sensitive. *New York Times* TV writer Alessandra Stanley today revealed how "the stars gloated about how controversial their film would be. James Brolin said his portrayal of Mr. Reagan was partly inspired by the Reagan puppet on the British satirical show *Spitting Image*," a show which portrayed the President as a mindless do-it.

And last night, CBS chairman Les Moonves told a Yale audience: "Upon seeing the finished product, I felt the movie was quite biased against the Reagans." No wonder some liberals wish CBS hadn't dumped it. — *Rich Noyes*

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