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NBC News Anchor Brian Williams Lionizes Liberals, Castigates Conservatives and Blames America First

New Anchorman, Same Old Liberal Bias

Tom Brokaw steps down tomorrow after 21 years as the sole anchor of *NBC Nightly News*. Over the years, the MRC has documented Brokaw's liberal bias (in August, for example, he disparaged the upcoming GOP convention as a "con game" for headlining moderate speakers such as John McCain). But the old anchorman has also offered a few surprises, such as a tough pre-election interview where he told the high and mighty John Kerry that, based on an analysis of military aptitude tests, "the President...has a higher IQ than you do."

Incoming anchor Brian Williams, already has a long track record, first as NBC's White House correspondent during the Clinton years, later as anchor of cable TV's *The News with Brian Williams* and a frequent substitute for Brokaw. While NBC publicists point to his fondness for NASCAR racing, his on-air comments suggest that Williams — whose on-air style is sometimes convoluted and long-winded — may wind up pushing *Nightly News* even further to the left:

More a Sieve Than a Filter

"I'm not going to judge anybody else in the business, but our work — I can speak for NBC News and our newsroom — it goes through, talk about checks and balances. We have an inordinate number of editors. Every word I write, before it goes on air, goes through all kinds of traps and filters, and it's read by all kinds of different people who point out bias."

— Incoming *NBC Nightly News* anchor Brian Williams on Comedy Central's *The Daily Show*, July 29, 2003.

■ **Blame America for 9/11?** A year after the terrorist attacks, Williams suggested America's "military swagger" was "part of what got the United States in trouble September 11th." On his CNBC program *The News* back on September 18, 2002, Williams brought up the subject of American domination to *Newsweek International* Editor Fareed Zakaria: "The situation hasn't been this lopsided in terms of one breakout superpower on the planet in quite some time." Zakaria suggested "it hasn't been like this since the Roman Empire."

Williams agreed: "I was going to say we'd have to go back to the days of the Empire, and that gives the U.S. obvious military swagger. Does it give them any kind of moral courage above anyone else and anyone's world, and

isn't that world view part of what got the United States in trouble September 11th?"

■ **Wreaking Death and Destruction.** During MSNBC's live coverage of coalition bombing at the start of the Iraq war on March 21, 2003, Williams asked viewers to think about bombing campaigns that destroyed entire cities and killed tens of thousands: "That vista on the lower-left looks like Dresden, it looks like some of the firebombing of Japanese cities during World War II. There's another one.

Still going on. You hear them overhead. Either jet aircraft or cruise missiles, but yet another explosion."

That fatuous analogy drew a thinly-veiled rebuke from Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who told a press conference an hour later: "I heard various commentators expansively comparing what's taking place in Iraq today to some of the more famous bombing campaigns of World War II. There is no comparison. The weapons that are being used today have a degree of precision that no one ever dreamt of in a prior conflict."

■ **No More Moral Authority.** The United States spends billions on foreign aid, and hundreds of thousands of American soldiers gave their lives to bring freedom to the citizens of other countries, but Williams glibly suggested the Abu Ghraib prison scandal was enough to make the U.S. a global bad guy.

Anchoring the May 7, 2004 *Nightly News*, Williams intoned: "The damage is clear: After no weapons of mass destruction showed up in Iraq, the U.S. justified the war by saying that at least the human rights violations would stop — the torture, the abuse and the murders. Tonight, although the scale of this is much different, it is increasingly difficult for the U.S. to make that moral case around the world."

(Continued on Page 2)

BRIAN WILLIAMS' LIBERAL TILT (cont.)

■ **Fawning Over Wonderful Bill.** When he was covering the White House for NBC, Williams gushed over then-President Bill Clinton. "He's perhaps the most intellectually and physically active person to have held the job in decades," Williams told the *Late Late Show's* Tom Snyder on November 17, 1995. "I've also said that if Americans were paying Presidents by the thought, we're getting a bargain in this guy because, my God, he's just always moving, his brain's moving, he hardly sleeps."

■ **Deploring Those Strident Conservatives.** On January 6, 2000, Williams anchored MSNBC's analysis after a debate between the six Republican presidential candidates, a group that included John McCain: "It's red meat for conservatives, the positions rather strident tonight: anti-gay, pro-Jesus, and anti-abortion and no gray matter in between."

■ **Castigating Ken Starr....** On his MSNBC show *The News* on November 17, 1999, a year after Clinton's impeachment, Williams wanted Starr to confess to going too far: "When you are alone with your thoughts and memories and you look back, can you identify in all truthfulness a moment of zealotry, two moments of zealotry?"

Williams also wondered if Starr knew how poorly he was portrayed in the press: "Do you understand now, did you understand at the time, looking at the coverage of yourself — perhaps you saw some of it — that the perception widely held, not among everyone, was that you were going after a case, that was at the end of the day, about a middle-aged man telling kind of run-of-the-mill lies to protect a non-intercourse sexual affair?"

■ **...But Starstruck by Janet Reno.** The ex-Attorney General appeared on MSNBC's *The News* on May 8, 2001, a few months before she declared her candidacy for Florida governor. Williams tossed only the gentlest of softballs: "What do your days consist of these days? What do you read? What do you watch? What do you

listen to?" Reno volunteered that she likes to kayak and "walk in the grass in my bare feet."

Williams not only failed to challenge Reno about any of her controversial decisions, he portrayed her as someone unfairly maligned: "The Sunday shows, all the criticism of you personally, editorial pages, op-ed pieces, did any of it make you want to scream?"

Those Awful "Anti-American" SUVs

"With the U.S. locked in dependence on foreign oil, is it downright unpatriotic to drive an SUV? Should Americans be somehow forced to get better mileage, or should the government stay out of the car business?"

— **Teasing an upcoming segment on MSNBC's *The News with Brian Williams*, January 2, 2002.**

"Gas-guzzling SUVs and light trucks were big winners on Capitol Hill today, but there's concern tonight the environment could be the big loser here."

— **Williams on *The News*, March 13, 2002.**

■ **Enthralled by Liberal Activists.** On the May 3, 1999 *The News*, after Jesse Jackson helped get the release of three U.S. POWs captured by the Serbs, Williams presented *Newsweek's* Howard Fineman with this premise: "Bottom line: No other American was able to do what Jesse Jackson did. Doesn't the American political system need a Jesse Jackson?"

On the same program on October 11, 2002, Williams asked historian Marshall Frady to sum up Jimmy Carter's value: "Is it fair to call him the best former President in, at minimum, modern American history, and perhaps, well, I guess, the last 200 years?" Frady needed no coaxing: "Which embraces the, all presidencies, I think. Absolutely."

■ **Stop Fighting, Start Regulating.** When it comes to the environment, Williams has shown an obvious green streak, especially when it comes to SUVs. (See box.) Filling in on the April 22, 2002 *NBC Nightly News*, he marveled that anyone still doubted liberals' global warming mantra: "When did scientists first suspect that global warming might result from human activities? The answer: way back in 1896, the first theory that emissions from coal burning would lead to global warming. And here we are 106 years later still fighting about it."

The shift at NBC seems unlikely to satisfy those eager for more balanced news. But the public's tune-out of the broadcast news shows means the same old liberal bias now reaches fewer and fewer ears. — *Rich Noyes*

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