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Media

Great lies of the American free press

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June 11, 2005—In several [previous PRAVDA articles](#), I discussed the Bush dictatorship's prominent use of Adolph Hitler's "[great lie theory](#)"—the political tactic where a leader fabricates "great lies," then "eternally" repeats them until a significant portion of the population comes to accept them as truth. The Bush dictatorship also discovered a residual benefit of the "great lie theory": People are often so myopic or so embarrassed by their gullibility that, even after the "great lies" are exposed, they would rather reward the liar than acknowledge the lie.

This benefit, however, has also revealed the disquieting reality that far too many people in the United States, arguably the most powerful nation on earth, do not require legitimate reasons before they will acquiesce to the wasting of billions of tax dollars, and the sacrificing of thousands of lives, in wars based upon nothing but lies.

There, of course, are those who claim the "great lie theory" cannot work in democratic countries like America, because, unlike nations with government-controlled media, there is "freedom of the press." But this criticism is easily muted by the events that occurred a little over fifty years ago, during the height of the "Cold War" era.

In 1950, a politically ambitious senator named Joseph McCarthy, during a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, held up a piece of paper that allegedly contained the names of communists who were employed by America's State Department. This bold announcement helped to usher in an era of hysteria, fear, censorship and blacklisting that only began to wane four years later when an attorney named Joseph Welch asked McCarthy during the televised "Army-McCarthy" hearings, "Have you no sense of decency sir, at long last?"

Both McCarthy's biographers and friends have stated that Hitler's book MEIN KAMPF, which discussed the application of the "great lie theory," played an important role in the development of McCarthy's political strategies. And even though the relatively new medium of television helped to diminish McCarthy's power, the corporate-controlled news media also shared the blame for McCarthy's ability to disseminate "great lies." During the Wheeling speech, no reporter asked to examine the list McCarthy held, and it is said that McCarthy himself later joked to members of his inner circle that nothing was on the paper but a reminder to pick up his laundry.

Meanwhile those in the television industry, now so eager to take credit for the demise of McCarthyism, were also fervent practitioners of blacklisting during McCarthy's heyday. Mark Goodson, a renowned game show producer during the 1950s, wrote in an article for the New York Times entitled IF I'D STOOD UP EARLIER . . . (1991) that he had even been pressured into blacklisting celebrities simply because they shared the same name as suspected communists.

The legacy of McCarthyism demonstrates that, despite popular myth, America does not truly have a "free press." While the Bill of Rights guarantees that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging freedom of the press," it is usually nongovernmental factors—fear of losing readers, viewers and/or advertising dollars—that actually control the decisions made by corporate-controlled news media. These influences can also

be labeled the three "P's": Popularity, Prejudice and Profit. And, to accommodate the three "P's," corporate-controlled news media have persistently ignored two others: the People and the Public Interest.

To achieve popularity, America's corporate-controlled media censor legitimate and detailed news stories in favor of sensationalistic and superficial tripe. Although a celebrity in America cannot have flatulence without an army of reporters analyzing the smell, corporate-controlled news media, to avoid being "controversial," incessantly ignore topics that could actually educate or enlighten.

The most recent example of this was revealed by the British newspaper The Guardian in its article THE FILM U.S. TV NETWORKS DARE NOT SHOW (May 12, 2005). This article discusses the resistance filmmaker Adam Curtis encountered during his attempts to locate a major American media outlet willing to show his documentary film, THE POWER OF NIGHTMARES.

Although this documentary examines the historical events that ultimately led to one of the most catastrophic events in American history—the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon—the cowardice of the American media apparently resides not in the film's analysis of these events, but in its depiction of the "neo-conservative's" exploitation of September 11th for political and personal gain.

According to The Guardian, the "neo-conservative" ideology originated in 1949 when "political philosopher" Leo Strauss argued that "conservative" politicians had to "invent national myths to hold society together and stop America . . . from collapsing into degraded individualism." Of course in today's America "national myths" really mean "great lies," and the efforts to terminate "degraded individualism" really mean the death of the Bill of Rights—the very document designed by America's founders to preserve individual rights and freedoms.

To advance these goals in recent years, "neo-conservatives" have propagated the myth (i.e. "great lie") that America's news media are "liberal." Yet, from their disdain for the anti-war movement to their jingoistic hyperbole and treatment of war as a "video game," corporate-controlled news media's coverage of the conflict in Iraq easily dispels this myth. Like the Spanish-American war a little more than a century ago, the Iraqi war will undoubtedly be remembered by history as an unnecessary invasion fueled by corporate-controlled news media's lust to boost profits.

As I discussed in previous PRAVDA articles, the corporate-controlled news media's self-serving promotion of the Iraqi war was accentuated when several radio stations owned by Clear Channel, one of the largest media empires in the United States, boycotted songs by the Dixie Chicks because of statements the trio made in opposition to the Bush dictatorship; when Sinclair Broadcasting refused to televise a segment of ABC's NIGHTLINE, where the names of those killed in Iraq were read; when Ed Gernon, co-producer of the television mini-series HITLER: THE RISE OF EVIL, was fired from his job after comparing the demise of civil liberties in Hitler's Germany to the demise of civil liberties in America; and when CNN Chief News Executive Eason Jordan resigned amidst allegations that he had claimed American troops were deliberately targeting journalists in Iraq.

By contrast, the corporate-controlled news media have ardently embraced the plethora of cowards who exploited the Iraqi war to advance their own careers while conspicuously avoiding combat duty themselves. Cable television's CNBC rewarded comedian Dennis Miller with a talk show after he hawked the Iraqi war. And, unlike the fate of Ed Gernon, these media have permitted two "neo-conservative" cowards, Rush Limbaugh (who avoided serving in Vietnam because of an alleged "boil" on his posterior) and Ann Coulter, to utilize Nazi analogies with impunity when attacking those they oppose. Bill O'Reilly, who, despite his claims to be willing to "sacrifice" himself for Fallujah, remains safely ensconced in the studios of the Fox "News" (i.e. Propaganda) Network, frequently uses his talk show to demand economic retaliation against university professors and African-American hip-hop artists who express "unpopular" opinions, yet whined about unjust treatment after allegations that he sexually harassed a female coworker made him the subject of ridicule on late-night television. Even the so-called "liberal" Cable "News" Network (CNN) has made a media icon out of Nancy Grace, a narrow-minded former prosecutor who rarely allows her fanatical preconceptions to be diminished by factual realities.

The censorship practiced by corporate-controlled media has helped them build entire "news" networks upon great lies-that coverage is "fair and balanced," that it should be "trusted," or, perhaps the greatest lie of all, that the drivel disseminated deserves to qualify as "news."

The inevitable result of such censorship is that important news stories are frequently ignored until it is "safe" to report on them. Once this safe-haven arises, however, corporate-controlled news media consistently endeavor to conceal their previous censorship with an arrogant "we were concerned all the time" approach.

Today, for example, it would be a challenge to find anybody in the corporate-controlled news media openly praising the excesses of the McCarthy era. Yet during McCarthy's heyday it was a challenge to find anybody in media openly opposing him.

This "belated concern" approach also was evident in media coverage of former Black Panther Elmer "Geronimo" Pratt, who served over twenty-five years in prison after being framed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Although the CBS Evening News did an excellent piece on Pratt while he was still incarcerated, much of the other corporate-controlled news media waited until after Pratt was released before denouncing the illegal tactics used to imprison him.

Where were these media when Pratt's release was still uncertain? Ask Eddie Marshall Conway, a Baltimore Black Panther leader who remains in prison despite similar concerns about the tactics used to convict him.

While some may argue that localized injustices against African-American militants do not a national news story make, it was the illegalities and abuses of the FBI's COINTELPRO operation that played a significant role in many of these injustices. Today, thanks to the so-called "Patriot Act," this very same agency is enjoying almost the same powers it abused in the past. If corporate-controlled news media refuse to remind Americans of these past abuses, history may be destined to repeat itself.

The second "P" spurring the corporate-controlled news media is prejudice. This not only explains their lack of interest in the Pratt and Conway cases, but also the abundance of right-wing "hate" radio dominating the airwaves.

This exploitation of prejudice, however, is not confined to radio: It is practiced by some of America's premier pseudo-journalists. A few months ago one such journalist, Barbara Walters, sanctimoniously announced, to the applause of her predominantly white audience, that she would not interview former football star turned actor O.J. Simpson, who had been acquitted of murdering his wife and a family friend. Yet, subsequent to this announcement, Walters sycophantically interviewed Robert Blake, an actor who also had been acquitted of murdering his wife.

The key difference, of course, was that O.J. Simpson happened to be African-American, and his alleged victims were white, young, and attractive; thus his acquittal inspired outrage across white America. On the other hand, Blake and his alleged victim were both white, and she was older and not as attractive; thus his acquittal scarcely caused a whimper across white America.

Besides pandering to race, corporate-controlled news media convey their biases through "split-screen" interviews. During these interviews the questioner's image occupies half of the television screen, while the image of the respondent occupies the other half. In most cases the respondent has no visual contact with the questioner, relying instead on an earpiece that simply transmits sound. As a result, the questioner can smirk, frown, scowl, or employ numerous other forms of non-verbal communication to indicate approval or derision, all without the respondent's knowledge.

Media censorship can also be based on the personal biases of editors or telephone "screeners," who have the power to decide whether or not a news segment, comment, article or letter should be aired or published.

I experienced such censorship first-hand when I became interested in the plight of a local African-American man, who was serving a seventy-year sentence after being convicted by an all-white jury of crimes I believed he did not commit. I began writing letters and articles about his case, and my local newspaper initially published them almost verbatim. It was later discovered that I was indeed correct about this man's innocence, and he was ultimately released from prison.

Not surprisingly, after his release, a police officer who had been involved in his case decided to adopt the media's "I had concerns all the time" strategy in interviews and articles, even though she had remained publicly silent about these alleged doubts throughout this man's years of incarceration. Although he eventually filed a lawsuit against local officials, including this police officer, seeking compensation for his years of wrongful imprisonment, a federal magistrate dismissed the case, claiming the man had not established that his arrest and conviction were made in "bad faith."

As an attorney, I always had misgivings about the "bad faith" standard, and many states have bypassed it by passing laws to compensate those wrongfully convicted. The state where this man resided, however, had no such laws; consequently I thought his case would provide a good opportunity to expose the egregious nature of the "bad faith" standard. So I wrote an article explaining that, aside from an admission of wrongdoing by police or prosecutors, the "bad faith" standard was practically impossible for a wrongfully convicted person to meet.

After submitting this article to my local newspaper, an editor informed me that my critique of the "bad faith" standard would not be published as written, allegedly because it could be construed as an attack on the professionalism of the local police department.

Subsequently I discovered that the editor who had reviewed my article and the police officer who had belatedly espoused her "doubts" were friends, and this was the real motive behind the censorship. Tragically, an opportunity to raise legitimate concerns about the "bad faith" standard and the injustices it engendered was obliterated by the personal bias of a lone editor.

The final, and most powerful, "P" driving corporate-controlled news media is profit. In their pure form, however, these media are incompatible with standard theories of capitalism.

Capitalism contends that companies manufacturing and marketing similar products will endeavor to improve those products to gain an advantage over their competitors, which, in turn, benefits consumers.

But news is not a product, simply a reporting of events. Nevertheless, to increase profits, corporate-controlled media have decided to "manufacture" and "market" news. Many radio stations owned by Clear Channel sponsored pro-war rallies, while Sinclair Broadcasting, shortly before the 2004 presidential election, sought to air a documentary hostile to candidate John Kerry.

The manufacturing and marketing of news is even accomplished by deceiving people into believing they will be given a fair opportunity to articulate or defend their positions. Most television or radio interviews, unless they are aired live, are usually subjected to "editing." So even though an individual may provide several minutes of intelligent and well-reasoned analysis, the words are often condensed into a few seconds of "sound bites" that can be manipulated to give a deceptive, and even dishonest, impression of what was actually said.

During my brief legal career, rumors had been circulating in our local community that people were being unjustly purged from voter registration rolls. Since I specialized in constitutional and civil rights law, I was asked to contact the proper investigative agency about these alleged practices. Although I did so, I stressed to the investigator that nobody had presented any actual evidence to substantiate these rumors, so I would leave it to her discretion about whether or not an investigation was warranted.

I forgot about this matter until a few days later, when a reporter for a local television station requested an interview. During the course of this interview, I was persistently asked if I believed the alleged purging was the result of one political party trying to dilute the voting strength of the other.

Since I repeatedly replied that this was not the case, very little of the actual interview was aired. What noticeably appeared instead was this same reporter opining that the interview had left her with the impression one political party was attempting to dilute the voting strength of the other!

This experience alone indicates that the corporate-controlled media's impetus to manufacture news rarely results in an honest product. Instead it compels these media to sink to their lowest common denominator, sacrificing truth, impartiality and ethics for the sake of ratings and profit.

This proclivity to sink to the lowest common denominator has even made members of the corporate-controlled news media susceptible to bribery. Armstrong Williams, a "conservative" African-American pseudo-journalist, was recently paid two hundred and forty thousand dollars (\$240,000) by the Bush dictatorship to promote an education reform law on his syndicated television show. Another pseudo-journalist, Maggie Gallagher, was paid twenty-one thousand, five hundred dollars (\$21,500) by the federal government's department of Health and Human Services to encourage marriage. This same department also paid columnist Mike McManus ten thousand (\$10,000) dollars to "train marriage counselors." Yet, according to the Associated Press (1/29/05), "all three columnists failed to disclose to their readers their relationship with the [Bush] administration."

But such bribery does not have to be strictly on a cash basis. During the build-up to the Iraqi war, one of the primary disseminators of the Bush dictatorship's "great lies" was then-Secretary of State Colin Powell. And during this time, in one of those remarkable "coincidences" that nepotism spawns, Powell's son Michael was head of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC)— the very agency that possessed the power to change FCC rules so monopolistic media empires could acquire even a greater share of the marketplace. In return all these empires had to do was endorse, or at least not dispute, the warmongering lies of the Bush dictatorship, and accept, or at least not question, the fraudulent results of the 2000 and 2004 presidential "elections."

Perhaps the greatest hypocrisy of the corporate-controlled news media is that, while they expend a substantial amount of effort questioning or criticizing the actions of others, they are extraordinarily intolerant of criticism themselves. Whenever ordinary people attempt to criticize American media they are guaranteed at least one of three responses.

The first response, already discussed in this article, is censorship. My local newspaper, for example, has flatly refused to publish any of my letters criticizing its use of personal bias to censor legitimate stories. Since this newspaper is the only one with significant readership that reports on local issues, my voice regarding these issues is effectively silenced.

The second response is the "What came first, the chicken or the egg?" This response was ridiculed in a recent episode of the adult-themed cartoon SOUTH PARK. The main characters, all elementary school children, were told that their news program, which they broadcast across the school's closed-circuit television system, was in danger of being canceled due to low ratings. To improve these ratings, the children simply began focusing their program on salacious gossip. When one character expressed concern about "dumbing" down his fellow students, his colleagues replied, "People are already dumb. We're just giving them what they want."

The third response is, "Don't blame the messenger." Even though, as explained above, the corporate-controlled media make ubiquitous efforts to manufacture and market news, they consistently seek to present themselves as mere "innocents" reporting upon events they cannot control.

Ironically, in today's America, people who want real news or honest criticism are better served by not watching "news" programs at all. Comedy Central's satirical program THE DAILY SHOW, for example,

often covers current events with more insight than the so-called cable "news" networks, where "discussion" routinely consists of "experts" of dubious qualifications shouting and interrupting each other.

Following the South Park trend, a character on a recent episode of the animated comedy THE SIMPSONS rhetorically asked where America's "koo-koo, bananas commander" intended to start the next "military quagmire." A character on the medical drama "ER" derisively mocked the Chicago Tribune newspaper for endorsing Bush in the 2004 presidential race, while the series itself devoted several episodes to the war in the Congo, where, as one character said, the suffering is largely ignored because "there is no oil."

Finally, on May 15, 2005, the Associated Press reported that many critics were comparing the decline of civil liberties and democracy in the new "Star Wars" movie REVENGE OF THE SITH to the decline of civil liberties and democracy in the United States. George Lucas, the creator of the Star Wars franchise, acknowledged that much of the film was inspired by "historical transformations from freedom to fascism." Ironically, in a nation that boasts about "freedom of the press," it appears that only the fictitious adventures of characters in a "galaxy far, far away" might awaken Americans to the factual realities here on earth.

For the reasons mentioned above, the hands of America's corporate-controlled news media are now dripping with the blood of those sacrificed in a war promoted and exploited for ratings and profit. May this blood that has been shed for their greed never wash clean, lest we forget how easily corruption, avarice and deceit can usurp democracy, blacken the hearts of humanity, and destroy the soul of a nation.

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