

CHAPTER 16

Control and Bullying of the Media

America's Corporate Media—Right, But Not Correct

To announce that there should be no criticism of the president, or that we are to stand by the president, right or wrong, is not only unpatriotic and servile, but is morally treasonable to the American people.

—Theodore Roosevelt

Even Mickey Mouse, that lovable Disney creature, was afraid of the Bush family Cons and their famous retribution. If Mickey exercised his first amendment rights and “squeaked up,” he knew that Bush’s little brother Jeb would likely come mouse hunting with a big, taxing, State of Florida mousetrap. All loyal Mickey Mouse fans would mourn his loss, but the Bush family would not shed a single tear, not even a small mouse tear.

What are you talking about? The Walt Disney film studio refused to allow its Miramax unit to distribute Michael Moore’s documentary *Fahrenheit 9/11* because it links Bush to prominent Saudis, including Osama bin Laden’s family, and is critical of Bush’s inactions and actions before and after 9/11. Miramax, under contract with Moore, had invested in the film and agreed to distribute it.

However, Disney blocked the film’s distribution, an action challenged by its Miramax unit. Moore’s agent, Ari Emanuel, revealed that Michael Eisner, Disney’s chief executive officer, had asked him to pull out of the Miramax deal because of concerns that the critical film could jeopardize Disney’s tax breaks in Florida, where Jeb Bush was governor. Would the crooked Jeb Bush really squash that lovable mouse? Is there no limit to the Bush family’s depravity?

Disney, however, does not need the Bush family to help it promote the GOP agenda. Disney and the ABC television network, which is part of the Disney corporate empire, are ready, willing and able to do that on their own. *The Path to 9/11* is a good example of this institutional Big Media bias. On the fifth anniversary of 9/11, the ABC television network aired *The Path to 9/11*, a two-part, commercial-free, rightwing propaganda miniseries about 9/11, loosely based on the 9/11 Commission Final Report. ABC initially tried to pass it off as a balanced truthful documentary. It wasn’t.

The film received enormous pre-broadcast publicity not only because of ABC’s extensive advertising campaign, but also because ABC selectively sent advance

viewing copies to many conservative commentators, bloggers, groups, and political talk show hosts—but not to progressive organizations or individuals. The conservative media machine happily promoted the film as if it were God’s truth. A good clue as to the movie’s political bias is the fact that Rush Limbaugh, who boasted he was a “personal friend” of the writer, promoted the movie on his broadcasts.

The office of former President Clinton, however, was denied viewing copies, as were others progressives such as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Promoting its propaganda as a “public service,” ABC even directly pushed it to schools across America. The only member of the 9/11 Commission who consulted for the project was its Republican co-chair, Thomas Kean. ABC paid \$40 million for this politically slanted movie, which was produced by the right and for the right’s agenda.

Because of numerous pre-broadcast complaints, ABC modified some scenes and included a milk toast disclaimer in the movie, acknowledging that it was a “dramatization.” However, outside the United States, it still marketed the hatchet job as the “Official True Story.”

Mainstream Media that Kowtows to the Bush Administration

For too long America’s mainstream corporate media kowtowed to Bush and the Con agenda. This was especially true following 9/11, which created a heightened sense of American patriotism that Bush immediately exploited. Journalists were afraid of being labeled unpatriotic by his rightwing wingnuts, and yellow journalism became popular in the run-up to the Iraq invasion. Warmongering squashed freedom of speech and reason. Critical reporters could expect retaliation by the Bush administration and lots of hate mail. Voices of peace were among the first victims of Bush’s war on Iraq.

America’s journalists by and large uncritically accepted and amplified the mountain of distortions and lies used by the Bush administration to sell its Iraq war to the American people. More than two years after the invasion of Iraq, 70% of Bush’s supporters still believed the United States had actually found WMDs in Iraq. A large majority still believed Saddam was behind 9/11 and worked hand in hand with bin Laden!

The White House controls the press in many subtle and not so subtle ways. For example, Bush propagandists and shills in the media such as Fox News expect and receive special access and privileges.

As the Bush regime’s principal propaganda organ, Fox News is America’s Bushevik version of Pravda. The de facto merger of the Bush White House and Fox/Pravda News became complete in April 2006 when Bush picked Fox pundit Tony “Snowjob” Snow to become his new White House press secretary.

Although America’s domestic press by and large gave Bush a continuous pass regarding Iraq, thousands of journalists, both American and foreign, have courageously risked their lives in Iraq doing their job. On May 29, 2006, Memorial Day, a three-person CBS News crew was hit by a car bomb in the Karada section of Baghdad. Correspondent Kimberly Dozier was critically injured, and James Brolan and Paul Douglas, both British citizens, died in the attack. The explosion also killed an American soldier and an Iraqi interpreter and wounded six American soldiers. The

journalists were doing a Memorial Day story about the life of soldiers in Baghdad and were embedded with the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division.

Reporters Without Borders reported in March 2006 that 86 journalists and media assistants had been killed in Iraq in the first three years of the war. By comparison, about 63 journalists were killed in Vietnam during twenty years of war.

If one had followed only America's mainstream media, one would have concluded that Bush had been blessed with a flawless set of character traits and leadership skills that began to corrode only after the Iraq war was about nine months old. Unfortunately, it was only after the pile of lies got so big that the mainstream media started to raise long overdue questions about Bush and his regime. Only then did a small portion of America's press start to fulfill its independent, fair and balanced role.

Bush's image has been carefully crafted over many years. Countless buckets of whitewash, fumigants and makeup were used to create a bogus portrait of an honest person, a compassionate conservative, and a moral leader who is strong on defense and supportive of democracy and religious freedom. America's media shamefully helped put the lipstick on that pig.

Unfortunately, it required years of Bush League mismanagement and several hundred thousand dead in Iraq for a majority of Americans to realize that a pig with lipstick is still a pig.

Bush's image—like that of the Marlboro Man—was the product of media manipulation. Advertisers know that the endless repetition of slogans like “compassionate conservative” cause them to become truth. The Bush team understood this, and Corporate Media pretended they didn't. However, America eventually realized that Bush's phony image—like that of the Marlboro Man—could not forever mask the cancer within.

Media Concentration

Every American should be alarmed by this disturbing fact: Six huge media conglomerates now own more than 90% of America's mass media. These six huge conglomerates are: Time Warner; Bertelsmann (of Germany); Disney; General Electric; News Corporation (owned by Rupert Murdoch and usually called News Corp); and Viacom (formerly CBS). When we say America's “mass media,” we are not talking about just radio and television, but rather *all* mass media, including the Internet, cable, publishing and movies, as well as radio and television.

Each of the six conglomerates owns a constellation of interconnected companies sprinkled throughout the various segments of the mass media world. You would need a huge scorecard or a computer to keep track of everything. It is likely that not one American in a million could draw a detailed map of this huge Big Business oligopoly that dominates America's media.

For example, let's consider just one of the six giants, Time Warner. Time Warner controls: CNN; Time Warner Cable; many magazines, including *Time*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Fortune*, *Money*, *People* and *MAD*; The WB television network; several cable channels including TNT, Cartoon Network, TBS Superstation, Turner Classic Movies, Cinemax and HBO; television networks including The WB; AOL and AOL's Web Properties Group which includes MapQuest, Netscape, a network of weblogs,

Mirabilis (ICQ), CompuServe and Advertising.com; Timelife music and books; movie studios including Warner Bros. and Cinemax; the Atlanta Braves major league baseball team; Castle Rock Entertainment (a production company); and DC Comics.

Under the Telecommunications Act of 1934, which created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), the electromagnetic spectrum used by radio was viewed as *public* property. The U.S. government granted licenses for spectrum frequencies to *private* companies and individuals provided they broadcast in the *public interest*. Large radio networks like ABC lobbied the government to impose a significant charge on each license, which had the desired effect of pricing amateur and small broadcasters out of the market, including those who were already broadcasting.

A principal purpose of FCC regulations over several decades was to limit the percentage of each geographical market that could be licensed by a single company. These anti-monopoly regulations made sense and served the public interest well for several decades—that is, until the Cons and Big Media jumped into bed together and began screwing America’s democracy.

Big Media and the Republican Party over the last two decades pushed various deregulation schemes, all of which were wolves in sheep’s clothing. Well, the media war is over, and Big Media, Big Money and Big Brother have won. America’s democracy has lost. Here are some of the lowlights:

- The Telecommunications Act of 1996, which was deceptively advertised as pro-competition, resulted in a tsunami wave of mergers involving huge companies.
- By 2003 the ownership limits on single companies had been emasculated by the GOP-dominated FCC and its chairman, Michael Powell, the son of Colin Powell. (We’ll discuss this more later.)
- Stations using America’s airwaves no longer have to be run in the *public interest*.
- Stations no longer have to provide *equal time* to opposing views.

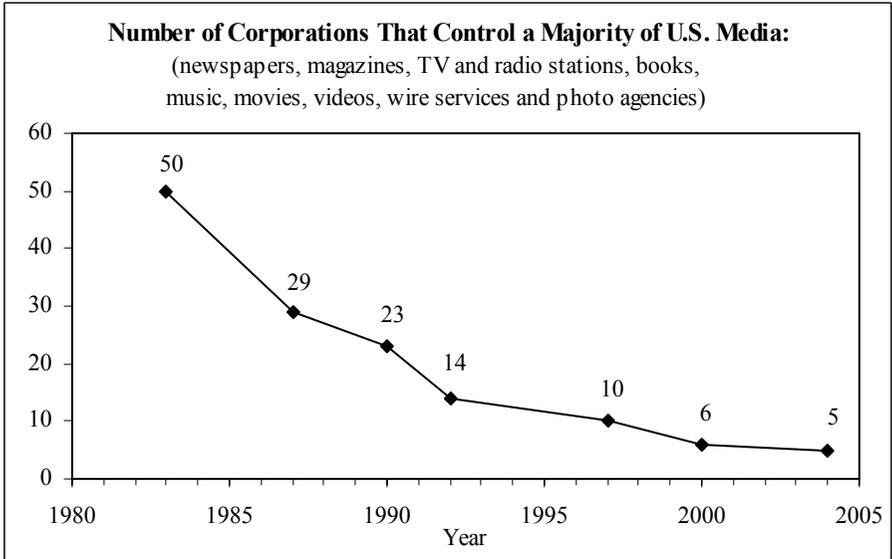
Big Media now control the vast majority of news disseminated to the American public. The structure of America’s media imposes a Big Business bias in news reporting. Funding from Big Business advertisers also plays a role in this bias. To increase profits, budgets for investigative reporting and honest journalism are cut, replaced by the easy regurgitation of propaganda from official government sources and Big Business. Small independent news sources are ignored and discredited. Entertainment and news are commingled because it is profitable and easy—versus tough professional reporting, which is hard. News is dummy downed, and talking points substitute for substantive coverage and debate.

Stories created and paid for by Big Business are frequently aired as news, without indicating their source. Don’t expect much from the FCC investigation of these so-called “video news releases,” or VNRs, which are public relations videos paid for by Big Business and crafted to look like objective TV reporting. VNRs are also called “fake news” in the industry.

Big Media have countless conflicts of interest involving the constellation of companies they control. Largely ignoring these conflicts, they protect and promote their various business interests in the news stories they select, and in what is reported

in each story. They cross promote their business interests in their various media properties. They avoid offending Big Business advertisers.

In 2004 *Forbes* magazine calculated that more than one-third of the 40 wealthiest Americans derived most of their income from media and media-related businesses.



The information in this graph is from Ben Bagdikian's book, *The Media Monopoly*, which has gone through six editions. As early as 1983 Bagdikian was labeled an alarmist for pointing out that 50 corporations controlled the vast majority of all U.S. news media. He later accurately predicted that America's news media would eventually be dominated by only about half a dozen huge corporate conglomerates, as he watched the monopolization trend with growing concern. By 2000, the year Bagdikian published the sixth edition of his book, the number of controlling media giants had in fact dropped to six. His new 2004 book, *The New Media Monopoly*, which expanded the broad definition of media to include the Internet, shows that a majority of the U.S. media market is controlled by only five humongous corporations. These five for-profit giants are: Time Warner; Disney; News Corporation (owned by Murdoch); Bertelsmann (of Germany); and Viacom. General Electric follows closely in sixth place.

A great source for links and resources on media reform is the Media Reform Information Center (www.corporations.org/media/).

In pursuing greater profits, the large media corporations have a vested interest in influencing legislation affecting their business, in particular doing whatever they can to limit free speech and to eliminate barriers to their expansion and concentration. They have a tremendous amount of influence with politicians of both major parties, but they are especially in the pockets of the Cons who get the lion's share of both illegal and perfectly legal money. Big Media offer massive campaign contributions,

media access and favorable reporting. There are now far more Big Media lobbyists than there are members of the U.S. Congress, and none of them work for you.

Big Media were an un-elected partner in the Con-controlled Congress. Big Media not only buy the legislation they want, but in unprecedented fashion they also frequently write the legislation. Writing your own laws is a huge advantage, especially when the legislation is complex, as media legislation is. This also saves the time of lazy corrupt Con legislators and their staffers.

The large media conglomerates have a natural structural bias to support rightwing politicians who support Big Business over other broader public interests, such as consumers, labor, the environment, human rights, and fair balance in the media. Birds of a feather flock together. Vultures flock together. Big Media have a natural bias to support Big Business and Big Money over middle- and low-income workers. They have an incentive to not say or do anything that might offend politicians who write legislation affecting them. At the same time, Big Media have the money—and the mass media, of course—to punish politicians who oppose them.

Europeans especially are staggered by the decline of democracy in America. Money buys anything and everything in America, including the mass media upon which a healthy democracy depends. It buys Congress and the White House.¹²⁹ It buys elections. It buys journalists. In short, money—really Big Money, not the chump change of the bottom 99% of Americans—has purchased and perverted America's democracy. One tragic offspring is the Bush administration. Honesty, integrity and responsibility are gone. America's capitalism—as in m-o-n-e-y—outranks human values and individual rights. Everything is measured in money, and everything is for sale, especially politicians, and the price is incredibly cheap. This may be Right, but it is not right.

There is a growing demand for progressive media to balance the oligopoly of rightwing media, especially in radio and television. Although the profit incentive may cause Big Media to offer more progressive alternatives to their pervasive rightwing rant, it's a safe bet that most of Big Media will continue to engage in a *minimalist strategy* regarding balance and the progressive message, doing just enough to allow them to claim they are fair and unbiased. Unfortunately, nascent progressive talk alternatives—such as Air America Radio, which offers Randi Rhodes, Thom Hartmann, Rachel Maddow and Al Franken (before he left to run for the U.S. Senate in Minnesota)—do not own any media. They only provide content to the media conglomerates that own the airwaves, and are thus at their mercy.

Amy Goodman (Pacifica Radio's *Democracy Now!*) and Ed Schultz are also strong progressive voices.

America's allies and friends are extremely skeptical of the rightwing, Big Business bias in America's media. They are amazed that the Big Lie—"the media is liberal"—gets any traction in America. America's Big Media are owned and controlled by Big Conglomerates and Big Money, not by the poor, the unemployed or the

¹²⁹ Perhaps this scene from *Casablanca* was written with GOP corruption in mind:

Captain Louis Renault: *Rick, there are many exit visas sold in this café, but we know that you've never sold one. That is the reason we permit you to remain open.*

Rick Blaine: *Oh? I thought it was because I let you win at roulette.*

Captain Louis Renault: *That is another reason.*

homeless, not by lower or middle class workers, not by people of color or other minorities, not by women, not by America's small businessmen and businesswomen, not by victims of war, and not by America's finest who are making the sacrifice in Iraq and elsewhere.

America's media were culpable in the run-up to Bush's War on Iraq. America's allies are shocked by the decline in America's press and the extent to which it fearfully regurgitates rightwing government propaganda. A 2005 survey showed that America had dropped to 27th place on a list of nations with the freest press.

The biggest mistake of the progressive movement is its failure to invest the time and money to develop an information distribution system than is comparable in clout to that of America's extreme right, including the Religious Right and hate radio.

SIDEBAR: Rightwing Rant

Michael Savage, popular rightwing radio talk host, May 12, 2004, on the *Savage Nation*:

I tell you right now—the largest percentage of Americans would like to see a nuclear weapon dropped on a major Arab capital. They don't even care which one. They'd like an indiscriminate use of a nuclear weapon. ... I think these people need to be forcibly converted to Christianity ... It's the only thing that can probably turn them into human beings.

Because these primitives can only be treated in one way, and I don't think smallpox and a blanket is good enough incidentally. ... Smallpox in a blanket, which the U.S. Army gave to the Cherokee Indians on their long march to the West, was nothing compared to what I'd like to see done to these people.

Rush Limbaugh, another popular rightwing propagandist, May 12, 2004, on the *Rush Limbaugh Show*, commenting on the victims at Abu Ghraib prison:

They are the ones who are sick. They're the ones who are perverted. They are the ones who are dangerous. They are the ones who are subhuman. They are the ones who are human debris, not the United States of America and not our soldiers and not our prison guards.

Rightwing Rupert Murdoch is a principal shareholder and the chairman and managing director of News Corporation, which owns rightwing Fox News. Murdoch, the Australian-born son of Sir Keith Arthur Murdoch, became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1985 because only Americans could own American television stations. He has been fabulously successful in expanding his global media empire, spreading rightwing propaganda in America, and cross marketing his various cross-media companies.

- *The Economist* reported in 1999 that Murdoch had paid no net corporate tax over the previous 11 years even though he had made \$2.1 billion in profits over that period. Based on its examination of available accounts, *The*

Economist further noted that Murdoch would normally have been expected to pay \$350 million in corporate taxes during that period.

- If you are a warmonger lusting to invade a nation that had zero to do with 9/11, it helps to have a knuckle dragger like Rupert Murdoch on your side. During the run-up to Bush's Iraq war, *all* 175 Murdoch-controlled newspapers worldwide supported the war in editorials. Perhaps you mistakenly assumed each newspaper's editorial board would make its own informed thoughtful decision. But, no, this is Big Media, the antithesis of democracy. Australian-born Murdoch is Exhibit A for the case that America needs better border security.
- In 1995 Murdoch funded and started *The Weekly Standard*, the neocon magazine that had much to do with Bush's invasion of Iraq. Its founder William Kristol is the chairman of The Project for the New American Century. Kristol and neocon Robert Kagan wrote, four years before 9/11, the infamous November 17, 1997, cover story for *The Weekly Standard* entitled, "Saddam Must Go."
- *The Weekly Standard* does not practice objective journalism, but rather is a shill for rightwing causes, whatever the objective reality. In an interview with JournalismJobs.com published in May 2003, *Weekly Standard* senior writer Matt Labash described how it works: "We come with a strong point of view, and people like point of view journalism. ... We've created this cottage industry in which it pays to be un-objective. It pays to be subjective as much as possible. It's a great way to have your cake and eat it too. Criticize other people for not being objective. Be as subjective as you want. It's a great little racket. I'm glad we found it actually."

Progressives by nature relish diverse opinions and try to find the best solutions to problems. They typically do not want to hear a one-sided rant that might mirror the rightwing rant of Rush Limbaugh, Bill O'Reilly and Fox News. The progressive mind doesn't want to hear propaganda; it uses facts and objective reality to determine its conclusions. The small amount of progressive programming that exists serves the greater public good and is centrist for America.

A plethora of rightwing radio shows dominate political talk radio. Even when driving through a predominantly Democratic city like Los Angeles, you will find four or more major rightwing rant radio stations simultaneously striving to outdo each other in hatred and bigotry as they compete for gullible minds, and you'll be lucky to find even one liberal or progressive station. A major factor is media consolidation by Big Media. Rightwing rant by Big Media supplanted local programming and local control. A handful of national rightwing voices provided by Big Sewage replaced local hosts, local callers and local issues.

According to A.C. Nielsen ratings, the top four talk radio programs—all rightwing—are those of Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Michael Savage and Glenn Beck. A survey in 2006 placed two other rightwingers (not-a-real-doctor Dr. Laura Schlessinger and Laura Ingraham) in the top five (behind Limbaugh, Hannity and Savage.)

The corporate media in both America and in pseudo-democratic Russia have engaged in self-censorship in their investigation and coverage of policies of the central

government. Two examples regarding war coverage are Bush's decision to invade Iraq, and Vladimir Putin's handling of the war in Chechnya. In both countries, the press abdicated its essential democratic role, largely out of fear but also out of laziness and institutional bias.

Commentators and so-called investigative journalists in America's mainstream Big Media almost uniformly got the Iraq war wrong. A few later apologized, but it is difficult to find even one regurgitator of Bush League propaganda whose career suffered as a result.

Rush Limbaugh and American Forces Network

American taxpayer dollars are used to fund a rightwing, pro-Iraq war, pro-GOP message to more than one million uniformed radio listeners in the U.S. military in more than 150 countries. Funded by the U.S. government and operated by the Defense Department, the American Forces Network (a brand name used by the United States Armed Forces Radio and Television Service) pushes rightwing propaganda, including that of Rush Limbaugh, over the airwaves on a daily basis to our armed forces around the world. Prior to December 2005, no long-form political talk show other than Limbaugh's enjoyed this special privilege.¹³⁰ At that time—after almost three years of war in Iraq—the American Forces Network finally added Al Franken and Ed Schultz (along with another conservative, Sean Hannity) to the radio programs it provides to its affiliates. It took a lot of progressive effort and congressional action for government to make even this simple change. In June 2004 Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa introduced an amendment to a defense authorization bill that required the American Forces Network to meet its stated goal of providing political balance in its public affairs and news programming. Although the amendment passed the Senate unanimously, it did not become law.

The rightwing bias of our American Forces Network sends a wrong message to our troops, as well as to other listeners around the world. Listeners could fairly conclude that our troops were fighting to promote rightwing media and rightwing causes. This bias makes it more difficult for America to win the hearts and minds of people throughout the world.

Limbaugh's comments about the prisoner abuses in Iraq are especially troublesome because they put our troops at greater risk in Iraq. Limbaugh dismisses all the abuses as just so much fraternity fun or Skull and Bones Society initiation fun. Although it is a big joke to him, it is not to Iraqis and to American troops whose jobs he makes more difficult.

In September 2007 Limbaugh labeled American soldiers who disagree with the Iraq war as "phony soldiers." By so insulting American soldiers and their service, he does America a disservice and deserves to be kicked off taxpayer-funded American Forces Network.

A survey of U.S. troops in Iraq conducted in Iraq in the first two months of 2006 by Le Moyne College and Zogby International shows that the troops were greatly

¹³⁰ Armed Forces Radio did allow a few other shows with different formats, the most prominent of these with a political message being rightwingers Laura Schlessinger and Focus on the Family's James Dobson.

misinformed as to the reasons why America went to war in Iraq. The political manipulation of American Forces Network is part of the problem. An astounding 85% of our troops said America's mission is mainly "to retaliate for Saddam's role in the 9/11 attacks." On the fifth anniversary of 9/11, in a rare moment of truth, Bush himself finally admitted that Saddam had *no* role in 9/11. Nevertheless, he and supporters of his regime continue to use 9/11 and Iraq in the same sentence in order to mislead the listener.

Bush and the GOP do not support the troops—they lie to them.

The same survey also showed that an astounding 77% of America's troops in Iraq also thought that the main or a major reason for the war was "to stop Saddam from protecting al Qaeda in Iraq," which is another complete fabrication. America's rightwing media deserve much of the credit for this "misunderstanding."

The point bears repeating: Bush and the GOP do not support the troops—they lie to them.

The Bush administration and America's military leadership have a duty to correct misinformation regarding Iraq and to tell the troops the truth. They must clearly articulate the mission in Iraq, something they have never done. American Forces Network must also shoulder its share of responsibility for America's troops being misinformed. Our troops are entitled to the truth and an apology. They are also entitled to a balanced mix of politics. They deserve a choice. They deserve the truth.

Clear Channel Communications

Founded in 1972 and based in San Antonio, Texas, Clear Channel Communications benefited greatly from the passage of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, which greatly deregulated radio stations by eliminating the *national ownership limits* applicable to radio stations and greatly reducing the *local market ownership limits*. Prior to this 1996 legislation, a company could not own more than 40 radio stations in the United States. Also effectively discarded was the long-established principle that the public airways should be used for the broader public good. America's Big Media were on the prowl.

This deregulation led to tremendous consolidation in the U.S. radio market, with effective power over the exercise of free speech being increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few humongous politically motivated conglomerates. Leading the charge in radio, Clear Channel grew rapidly by making two huge acquisitions of communication companies. It now owns more radio stations in the United States than any other entity—more than 1,200—which is more than 10% of all stations in the United States, and about five times the number of its nearest competitor.

Clear Channel has a dominant audience share in the vast majority of 112 major markets. It also owns TV stations and outdoor advertising, and, as discussed later, it also handles the vast majority of ticket sales for concerts and clubs in the United States—about 70% in 2001.

Clear Channel's chief executive officer, Lowry Mays, told senators that he believes the radio industry would not be harmed if all radio stations in the United States were owned by only four or five large companies.

One of the most troublesome aspects about the Clear Channel behemoth is its extreme rightwing political agenda when it comes to the Bush family and news report-

ing. Clear Channel organized most of the so-called “Rally For America” pro-war demonstrations in support of Bush’s war in Iraq. The Clear Channel network also airs several rightwing radio programs (such as Michael Savage and Rush Limbaugh) that offer nonstop support for Bush and the rightwing agenda. Limbaugh’s show is syndicated by Premiere Radio Networks, which is owned by Clear Channel.

Of course, it is only a coincidence that Bush and Clear Channel’s top management have close financial ties. Tom Hicks, the vice chairman of Clear Channel, purchased the Texas Rangers in a sweetheart deal that turned Bush into a multimillionaire. Also, when Hicks was chairman of the board of the University of Texas’ endowment management company, he (along with Clear Channel’s Lowry Mays, who also sat on the same board) placed a large portion of the university’s endowment under the management of companies connected to the Bush family and the Republican Party.

In another remarkable coincidence, the GOP-controlled FCC pushed further deregulation favoring Clear Channel’s interests. The Con Party has been working hard to merge Big Government and Big Business, which is the classic definition of fascism. One hand washes the other. It’s a two-way street of favors and big money, and its victims include a democratic free press and middle- and lower-income Americans.

Another instructive lesson was provided when Clear Channel pulled the plug on Howard Stern’s radio show just two days after he announced that he had become an “Anybody But Bush” voter. Clear Channel, strong dope pushers for anything Bush, wanted America to believe it axed Stern because of his vulgarity. It’s quite remarkable that after many years Clear Channel suddenly realized Howard Stern was vulgar!

Well, what happened is that Stern saw the truth about Bush and had a sudden change of political heart. Previously described as “a pro-Bush celeb” by Fox News, Stern made his “Anybody But Bush” announcement to the world on February 23, 2004. This followed a week’s vacation during which Stern read Al Franken’s book, *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them—a Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*. Clear Channel suspended Stern just two days later, on February 25. When it comes to freedom of speech, ownership has its privileges.

“As soon as I came out against Bush, that’s when my rights to free speech were taken away. It had nothing to do with indecency.” (Howard Stern, March 19, 2004.)

All Americans—whatever their political views and whatever they think of Howard Stern’s show (which *is* vulgar)—should be outraged by Clear Channel’s censorship and assault on the First Amendment. All Americans should be concerned about media consolidation and the control of our national airways by the few.

Perhaps the profit incentive will cause rightwing media conglomerates like Clear Channel to eventually offer an array of progressive alternatives, but don’t count on it. One modest positive sign is that Clear Channel by 2006 had started to change some of its AM radio stations to a progressive talk format, including making some room for upstart progressive Air America Radio. Air America, however, does not own any media. As previously noted, it just provides content to the conglomerates that do, and is thus at their mercy. In any case, your support of progressive programming like Air America and its advertisers is important.

Clear Channel and Minot, North Dakota

Ownership in the radio industry has become very concentrated in the United States, especially in small and mid-sized markets in America's heartland, and Clear Channel leads this concentration. A notorious example of this antidemocratic trend is Minot, North Dakota, where Clear Channel owns six of the eight commercial radio stations. That's correct—it owns six of the eight stations.

In the early morning of January 18, 2002, a train loaded with 10,000 gallons of anhydrous ammonia derailed in Minot, resulting in a dangerous toxic spill and cloud. Hundreds of people became ill, and one death was reported. Local authorities, wanting to warn Minot residents to stay indoors and keep away from the spill, telephoned seven Minot radio stations, six of which are owned by Clear Channel, but no one answered the calls.

As the citizens of Minot discovered, you cannot count on absentee-owner, conglomerate-run radio stations to be there when an emergency strikes. They *aren't* there.

SIDEBAR: "Just For Fun"

If you're a small business owner in Minot, North Dakota, and would like to advertise your business on local radio, just drop in on the local production and advertising sales offices of each of your local radio stations. Yes, get to know your business neighbors—offer them some of that lefse and hospitality for which North Dakota is famous. Try to talk with the people who put together the local programming, including the local news. It will take you only a few minutes to visit all six Clear Channel stations—since they all have the same local address! Here's the Minot Chamber of Commerce listing for the six Clear Channel stations:

Clear Channel Communications
 Address:
 KIZZ / KZPR / KRRZ / KMXA / KYYX / KCJB
 1000 20th Ave. SW
 PO Box 10
 Minot, ND 58702-0010
 Phone no: 852-4646
 Fax no: 852-1390

For extra credit—assuming you want to buy some radio advertising—try to negotiate with your six Clear Channel radio stations at that *one* location, playing each one against the others, to get competitive rates. Good luck.

Clear Channel has a well-deserved reputation for cutting costs with little regard to the impact on news reporting, especially local reporting. It is a poor substitute for

diverse, full-service, locally owned stations. Senator Dorgan (D-ND) expressed his concern in 2003: “The public airwaves are extraordinarily valuable and we have licensed them to be used by companies, and over time the usage has changed very substantially. I think the public is not getting the kind of benefit from it that they used to get.”¹³¹

Clear Channel strives to create a phony “local feel” to its programming. Using a technique called *voice tracking*, prerecorded DJ programs out of a central office (say, Los Angeles) can be customized for each local market, making it sound as if the DJ is a local resident. In fact, the DJ may *never* have visited your town. He simply has to read localized scripts for your town that are then spliced into the same music pabulum that is distributed to countless locations across the country.

In addition to its 1,200 radio stations, Clear Channel also controls about 70% of live events promoted in the United States and hundreds of thousands of billboards. *Rolling Stone* reported that Clear Channel sold more tickets in the first six months of 2003 than its 49 biggest competitors combined. According to numerous bands, Clear Channel ruined the concert business and caused ticket prices to skyrocket. It wiped out competitors, and through its play lists and other methods it controls what music the public hears and which artists will be successful.

Media concentration has a chilling effect on free speech, even throwaway comments by popular musicians. On March 10, 2003, just 10 days before Bush’s invasion of Iraq, lead singer Natalie Maines of the Dixie Chicks between songs told a London concert audience, “Just so you know ... we’re ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas.”¹³² Radio stations and conglomerates including Clear Channel—not Dixie Chicks fans—led a boycott of these wonderful Texas ladies, and many country music stations immediately removed their music from their play lists. In this era of media consolidation and censorship, the decision came down from the top, and DJs who wanted to play Dixie Chicks music couldn’t.

At the time of “the comment,” the Dixie Chicks had the No. 1 country music single and were the most popular female group in history. But the Con backlash orchestrated by Big Media drove them from the country music charts. They received death threats, and, reminiscent of Germany in the 1930s, crowds joyfully destroyed Dixie Chicks CDs.

The Big Media backlash created an odd stream of self-censorship and fear-based behavior. In 2003 the American Red Cross refused a \$1 million donation from the Dixie Chicks, and later declared, “the controversy made it impossible to associate with the Dixie Chicks.”

Big Media like Clear Channel support rightwing speech, not free speech. In a rare *trifecta of hate*, Rev. Jerry Falwell sarcastically called the Dixie Chicks three “French hens,” thus simultaneously slamming free speech, three strong American women, and America’s longest-term ally.

Just for the record, your author would be ashamed if Bush hailed from North Dakota, Massachusetts or California, three home states that he loves. He’s glad Bush is

¹³¹ From National Public Radio’s “On the Media.”

¹³² Ironically, Natalie Maines made her remark at a London theatre called the Shepherd’s Bush Empire.

from a red zone of Texas. He's ashamed Bush is from America. He's ashamed Cheney is from planet Earth.

The Dixie Chicks rock! Lovers of free speech and great music definitely should buy Dixie Chicks music, especially their fantastic 2006 album, *Taking the Long Way*. Their CDs make wonderful gifts for intelligent people.

The Dixie Chicks will do fine. They would rather be appreciated by one million intelligent lovers of good music who believe women too have a right to free speech, than to have ten million nitwit fans who worship a warmongering American president who shreds the U.S. Constitution.

2003 FCC Rules to Increase Media Concentration

In June 2003 the Republican-controlled Federal Communications Commission (FCC) voted 3-2 along party lines to further deregulate the media by adopting new rules that would allow TV networks to own local TV stations that reach 45% of the national audience (up from 35%). The new rules would also end a decades-old ban preventing a company owning a newspaper from also owning a television or radio station in the same market.

The FCC action, supported by Bush, was a big victory for several large media companies that lobbied for the new rules—and a loss for just about everyone else. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) called the action “dumb and dangerous,” noting that the new rules would result in a news system with many stations, but with just “one ventriloquist.” He also said, “The airwaves belong to the people. The FCC ignores that requirement and advances corporate interests at the expense of the public’s interest.”

FCC Chairman Michael Powell, the son of Bush’s former Secretary of State Colin Powell, received a lot of criticism for the new rules, which is understandable because they were opposed by a wide variety of organizations and interests across the political spectrum, including Senator Trent Lott (R-MS), consumer groups, the National Rifle Association, religious and civil rights groups, and Common Cause.

The only significant support for the new rules came from the handful of huge media conglomerates that already dominate America’s media. Unfortunately, the Con Party and the Con-controlled FCC both have a habit of doing Big Media’s bidding.

Senator Lott said that local news will “further deteriorate” if the big networks are allowed to purchase more TV stations. Referring to the big TV networks, he noted, “They’re all run by the same crazy people.”

The opposition was so widespread and deep that Congress, after great effort and despite Bush’s threatened veto, successfully blocked the new rules—a rare loss for the media conglomerates. “It’s extremely rare to be able to reverse a regulatory decision that gives away the store to the big boys,” said Representative David Obey (D-WI).

Unfortunately, Big Media know from experience how to keep pushing, and they generally get what they want through campaign contributions and under-the-radar backroom lobbying in Washington. Even in the rare case where the public gets stirred up and apparently scores a victory about an FCC decision favoring Big Media—as was the case with these sweeping new FCC rules (where almost 3 million

citizens sent letters protesting the rules)—Big Media count on the public’s interest to wane, and it generally does. In 2004, in an apparent victory for the public interest, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit in Philadelphia ruled that the FCC had not sufficiently justified its June 2003 rules that weakened the ownership restrictions, and the Supreme Court declined to hear an appeal of the case. However, in the meantime, Big Media still won when the GOP Congress came up with a “compromise” that allows TV networks to increase their local ownership reach to 39%, which is less than the 45% they wanted, but more than the previous cap of 35%. Plus they’ll be back for more.

Fox/Pravda News

Here is some valuable advice: If you want to be misinformed about news and politics, you definitely should tune in to Fox News. If you desire a brain filled with mush and propaganda for Bush and extreme rightwing Con causes, you can count on Fox.

This advice is intuitively obvious to the independent thinker who compares the news reporting of the major television news networks. In addition, there is overwhelming unbiased evidence, including the study discussed below, supporting this advice.

SIDEBAR: Fox News—Unfair and Unbalanced

In 2003 The Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) conducted seven different polls regarding the Iraq war. During the course of the polls the investigators discovered that “a substantial portion of the American public had a number of misperceptions that were demonstrably false, or were at odds with the dominant view in the intelligence community.” This investigative poll is entitled “Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War.”

In the run-up to the war with Iraq and shortly thereafter, significant portions of the public *incorrectly believed* that:

- 1) Iraq was directly involved in the September 11 attacks;
- 2) Evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda had been found;
- 3) Weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq after the war;
- 4) Iraq actually used weapons of mass destruction during the war; and
- 5) World public opinion approved of the United States going to war with Iraq.

The investigators noted, “While, in most cases only a minority has any particular misperception, a large majority has at least one key misperception.”

Their findings raised several questions, including:

- How have these misperceptions related to support for the decision to go to war and subsequently?
- Do these misperceptions vary according to whether the American public gets its news from print media or a particular television network?

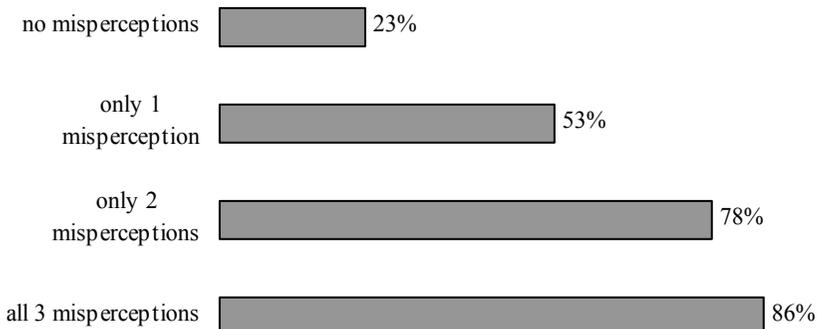
Both of these questions are critical for our democracy and a free press. To explore the misperception results more fully, the investigators repeated three key perception questions in three polls conducted from June to September 2003. The three questions were the questions that found the *most egregious misperceptions*, namely:

- Evidence of links between Iraq and al-Qaeda has been found.
- Weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq.
- World public opinion favored the United States going to war with Iraq.

The investigators found that the misperceptions “played a key role in generating and maintaining approval for the decision to go to war.”

Support for Iraq War and Cumulative Effect of Misperceptions

Support for war among those who have:



The investigators also found: “Misperceptions were not limited to a small minority that had repeated misperceptions. A majority of 60% had at least one of these three unambiguous misperceptions, and only 30% had no misperceptions. (Another 10% just had the more modest misperception that world public opinion was evenly balanced between support and opposition to the Iraq war.) Thirty-two percent had just one of the misperceptions (and no more), 20% had two of the misperceptions and just 8% had all three of the misperceptions.”

So how does this relate to Fox News?

The three polls also included detailed questions as to the individual respondent’s primary source of news (newspapers and magazines, or TV and radio—and, in the case of TV and radio, which network.)

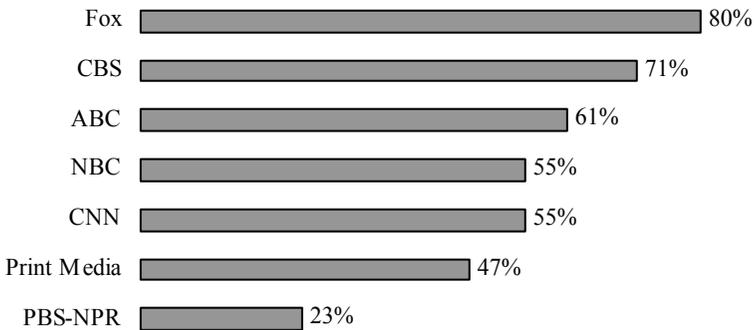
Regarding news sources, the investigators summarized their findings as follows:

Variations in Misperceptions According to Source of News:

The extent of Americans' misperceptions vary significantly depending on their source of news. Those who receive most of their news from Fox News are more likely than average to have misperceptions. Those who receive most of their news from NPR or PBS are less likely to have misperceptions. These variations cannot simply be explained as a result of differences in the demographic characteristics of each audience, because these variations can also be found when comparing the demographic subgroups of each audience.

**Frequency of Misperceptions:
Evidence of al-Qaeda Links, WMD Found,
World Public Opinion Favorable**

Respondents with one or more misperception:



Well, there you have it, something you already knew: If you want to be misled and misinformed about key issues such as the Bush administration going to war on lies and false pretenses, just tune in to Fox News.

If you are a rightwing warmongering leader who wants to wage an illegal, immoral, unjust war on an oil-rich nation, but lack any justification for war other than your own greed and imperial fantasies, then you can count on Fox News to spin and spread whatever lies you need.

The study also considered whether misperceptions were derived from a failure to pay attention to the news. Surprisingly, it found that “overall, those who pay greater attention to the news are no less likely to have misperceptions.” However, “among those who primarily watch Fox, those who pay more attention are more likely to have misperceptions.”

“The Memo” is one effective tool used by Fox News executives to help ensure that their news organization stays “on message” in supporting the Republican Party and Bush. Management distributes the Memo electronically each morning, discussing what stories should be covered and how they should be covered. Although right-

wing hatchets really don't need this direction, Fox newsroom personnel consider it the Bible and are reluctant to offend management.

Fox News supported the election of Bush in countless creative ways. We'll note just one. It concerns Fox polling and Fox's duplicitous promotion of Ralph Nader's third party presidential candidacy in 2004 in order to help Bush (by encouraging independent and progressive voters to waste their votes on Nader.) Along the way Fox denied that Nader would take more votes away from Kerry than from Bush. In a study of 37 polls regarding this issue, only one poll found that Nader took more votes away from Bush than Kerry. Guess which organization ran this poll? Yes, it was Fox News, the Bush League shill that masquerades as a news organization.

Fox News' slogan should be, "Right, But Not Correct."

David Brock and Media Matters For America

Please sit in a stable chair before you read the following shocking revelation—a few lying rightwing ideologues actually do have a conscience. Typically the few who are conscience-afflicted are able to suppress it through years of practiced rage and mindless repetition of slogans, lies and talking points. However, in a few rare cases, the conscience surfaces, the ideologue's brain and heart get turned on, and the ideologue sees the light.

A good example is David Brock, the former lying, rightwing, scandal-creating, paid mouthpiece for the ultra-right, ultra-wrong *American Spectator*. Among his more notorious hatchet jobs is his 1993 book, *The Real Anita Hill*, which became a bestseller when rightwing talk radio promoted it for free. Brock spent years smearing liberal and progressive opponents of the far right—inventing muck at will—until his conscience said, "That's enough!" Brock now runs a website called Media Matters For America (mediamatters.org) whose central purpose is to monitor and correct, in real time, lies and information from the conservative media, which is a full-time job.

It remains to be seen whether other rightwingers such as Rush Limbaugh also have a conscience, and if so, whether the suppressed conscience is strong enough to overcome the years of bigotry and lies. That seems unlikely for Limbaugh, but hope springs eternal. Rush must go to bed each night, crying, "If only Bush and all the other Con cons were liberals ... think of all the real dirt I could work with ... I wouldn't have to make it up. [sobbing]" No wonder Rush abuses drugs. Please pray for Limbaugh to find a conscience, leave the Forces of Darkness behind, and join the correct side.¹³³

In abdicating its traditional watchdog role and putting on its colorful skimpy cheerleading outfits, America's rightwing corporate media helped inspire and fuel the worst criminal and unethical tendencies of the many bad actors in the Bush regime. Even treason became acceptable, which is one of the topics of the next chapter.

¹³³ The following is for *Casablanca* fans. Here are the last lines of the movie:

Victor Laszlo: *Welcome back to the fight. This time I know our side will win.*

Rick Blaine (who finally joins the fight against the Nazis): *Louie, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.*