

“Live” with TAE

He won six Emmy Awards as a CBS News correspondent. But when he blew the whistle on media bias, the TV establishment savaged him. Now he has a best-selling book that documents his charges.

Bernard Goldberg

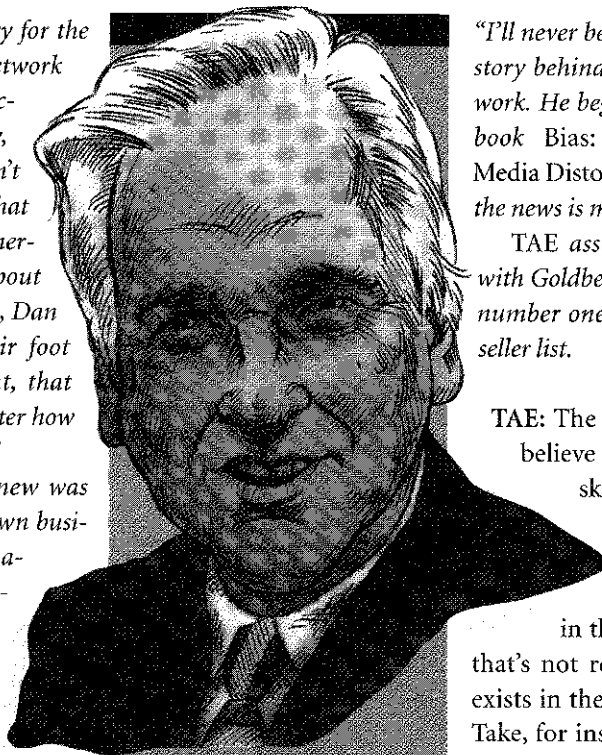
In 1996, Bernard Goldberg wrote a story for the Wall Street Journal arguing that TV network news coverage was tilted in a liberal direction. To most viewers of Tom Brokaw, Peter Jennings, and Dan Rather, this didn't come as a revelation. "I said out loud what millions of TV news viewers all over America know and have been complaining about for years," says Goldberg. "That too often, Dan and Peter and Tom and a lot of their foot soldiers don't deliver the news straight, that they have a liberal bias, and that no matter how often the network stars deny it, it is true."

What made Goldberg's argument new was that he was blowing the whistle on his own business. Having worked at CBS News as a national correspondent since 1972 (appearing on Rather's evening news broadcasts as well as "48 Hours"), Goldberg was the ultimate news insider—lending weight to his complaint (one he says has concerned him for years, and that he often voiced to colleagues).

The fact that Bernard Goldberg isn't a conservative—he backed George McGovern, voted against Ronald Reagan, supports the Roe v. Wade decision, and favors homosexual rights—only strengthens the legitimacy of his complaint.

But among CBS News brass, Goldberg's argument made him persona non grata. Rather stopped speaking to him. "To Dan Rather dissent was betrayal," states Goldberg. Some veterans, though, supported him. Andy Rooney sent this typed message: "Bernie: In the future, if you have any derogatory remarks to make about CBS News or one of your co-workers.... I hope you'll do the same thing again."

In 1998, Goldberg was turned down for a correspondent slot when "60 Minutes II" was being launched (executive producer Jeff Fager told him,



If one of the three big news networks tried giving balanced liberal and conservative views, it would stand out immediately.

"I'll never be able to put that Wall Street Journal story behind me"), so he opted to leave the network. He began working on his recently released book *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distort the News*. In it, Goldberg tells how the news is made, and names names.

TAE associate editor John Meroney visited with Goldberg on the day that *Bias* landed in the number one spot on the New York Times best-seller list.

TAE: The title of your book is *Bias*. Do you believe that network news reporters really skew their stories to reflect favorably on Tom Daschle and the issues he favors?

GOLDBERG: There is some bias in the coverage of political parties, but that's not really my concern. The worst bias exists in the way big social issues are covered. Take, for instance, the negative effect that day care has on children. It's the most important story you never saw on TV.

TAE: You assert in your book that the absence of mothers from American homes is without any historical precedent, and millions upon millions of children have been left with dire consequences because of it. If this is such an important subject for the nation, why has it been ignored by producers and correspondents?

GOLDBERG: It's not an easily reported story. It requires original thinking. Look, lots of us in news are lazy. "There's no culture of ideas around here" is the way one CBS News executive puts it. And it's also ignored because it cuts against the grain of liberalism.

If the evening newscasts did stories saying the country is paying a high price for having two parents work outside the home—that suicide, sexual problems, and alcoholism are up as

a result, and here's what happens when children are left to fend for themselves—some women would resent those stories. They probably feel a little guilty anyway, especially if they're working when they really don't need the money. And anchors don't like the idea of feminists getting angry at them. Anchors are like politicians in Washington, except they campaign for re-election five nights a week.

Good reporters should be saying "We want to tell you about this trend because it's important." Why not do some reports about the parent who doesn't want to work outside the home? Reporters ought to be doing segments about changing the tax code so both parents don't feel they need to work. I haven't seen any stories about that.

But if the subject is day care, the most likely view in newsrooms is, "What do we need to do to make day care more accessible?" Instead, why not ask questions about what needs to be done for the parents who want to stay home with their children?

TAE: Why didn't you report those kinds of stories?

GOLDBERG: I've done reports about how women use children as pawns in divorce cases. How's that for contrarian? Overwhelmingly, networks don't have stories like that. They prefer the same old deadbeat dad piece instead of the one about the angry mother who's making visitation difficult. There's this prism that distorts the view, and more often than not it's liberal.

TAE: You say another way bias manifests itself is in the way news sources are identified.

GOLDBERG: Conservatives are always labeled and identified as conservative, because reporters think viewers need to know. But for some strange reason, they don't think viewers should know who the liberals are. Conservatives are often called "right-wing," but the only time the news media utter the words "left-wing" is when they're talking about an airplane.

Look at what happened during the Clinton impeachment trial, for example. As senators signed the oath book, Peter Jennings had his own running commentary on the air. He described Mitch McConnell as "Senator Mitch McConnell, very determined conservative member of the Republican Party." Barbara Mikulski was merely "Senator Mikulski of Maryland." Santorum? Jennings described him

**In the media,
conservatives
are always
labeled, and
identified
as being
conservative.
But for some
strange reason,
reporters don't
think viewers
should know
who the
liberals are.**

as, "Senator Rick Santorum, one of the younger members of the Senate, Republican, very determined conservative member of the Senate." Daschle? "That's Senator Daschle there in your picture." New York liberal Democrat Charles Schumer was just "Senator Schumer." And on and on it went.

TAE: So what's the mindset behind that?

GOLDBERG: It's one that says, conservatives are out of the mainstream and need to be identified, whereas liberals are the mainstream and don't require explanation. It's just like in the bad old days when journalists were doing crime stories, and the only time they'd identify a suspect by race was if he was black. Blacks were alien. Dangerous. That was part of the times.

Conservatives are identified today for the same reason. The view of most people currently in the news business is that conservatives aren't in the mainstream—just the way black people weren't.

TAE: What kind of response to your book have you received from your colleagues in the news business?

GOLDBERG: Well, I've heard from colleagues past and present who are complimentary. Then there's another group, made up of the anchors of the three major network evening news programs, and the presidents of those news divisions, who refuse to comment, which is interesting because it's an aspect of their business that many people obviously care about. They are certain the only people who are concerned about a liberal bias in the news are right-wing nuts.

TAE: What do your critics think accounts for the success of the book?

GOLDBERG: They won't acknowledge that it has anything to do with my arguments. They believe it's because I write about some famous and influential people such as Dan Rather. Maybe they're in denial. Or maybe they're just arrogant. Regardless, they seem to have convinced themselves that bias in the news isn't an important issue.

TAE: Speaking of Dan Rather, the portrait you paint of him isn't very flattering.

GOLDBERG: Actually, I say there are two sides to Dan. He's funny, generous, and a true patriot. And also ruthless and unforgiving. In the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing, Connie Chung scooped him. But even though she was his col-

league at CBS News, he trashed her. Dan was so incensed that Connie was on the air first and getting all the airtime that when he finally arrived in Oklahoma City, he spent hours and hours on the phone with TV writers, blasting her as a second-rate journalist.

TAE: In the wake of the terrorist attacks of September 11, Dan Rather came off as a flag-waver, even crying on "The Late Show with David Letterman," and announcing that if President Bush wanted him to go and fight, Rather would say, "Where do I get in line?" How does that kind of behavior play among broadcast journalists?

GOLDBERG: Regardless of what Dan's many critics may say, I'm convinced that all of his emotion is genuine. I remember when I filed a report about the Vietnam Memorial in Washington and Dan had to fight back tears on the air.

TAE: But in 1996, when you called to tell him that you were writing your story for the *Wall Street Journal* about slanted news reports, he seemed to think you were questioning his patriotism.

GOLDBERG: Yes, it was strange. I still can't figure what that reaction was all about. His voice started quavering and he told me how he'd signed up twice with the Marines during peacetime. Then it hit me: He was essentially saying, "How could you accuse me of this? I'm a patriot!" That's a sad indication of how far liberalism has fallen: Liberals are afraid that if you say they're liberal, you're saying they're unpatriotic. I wasn't arguing that at all.

TAE: You leave Walter Cronkite out of your book, with whom you've also been associated, who also became infamous for making on-camera insinuations against conservatives.

GOLDBERG: Look, this book isn't a history. But if there was a bias problem when Cronkite was the anchorman on the news, I didn't notice it. Maybe I wasn't paying attention. But it seems to me our coverage of Watergate and Vietnam was much different than the way network news has covered feminism, the homeless, and homosexuals more recently.

TAE: Why do most journalists tend to be left of center in their political philosophy?

GOLDBERG: Certain types of people gravitate into certain kinds of fields. Generally speaking, liberals go into the arts and related professions. Some see journalism as a way to change the world. That's a residue of the 1960s attitude that

**Years ago,
Tom Shales
called me "one
of the brainiest
network news
correspondents."
But then I
did an AIDS
documentary he
didn't like and
from then on he
started writing
negatively
about me.**

said, "We're going to change everything."

TAE: Is that why you went into journalism?

GOLDBERG: No. I've always believed that if you want to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted, then go into social work or the ministry. Don't go into journalism, because sometimes the underdog is where he is because he put himself in that position and doesn't deserve our sympathy. Plus, I really don't want journalists trying to remake the world. What if the world they want is the opposite of the one other Americans desire? Journalists should give us intelligent views from both ends of the political spectrum when they're reporting.

TAE: Is the increased desire of the networks to make money on news programs having a negative effect on reporting?

GOLDBERG: We didn't used to play by entertainment industry rules, that's for sure. If one wanted to do a documentary on Social Security reform, the network would air it and executives rightly felt they were serving the public good by giving exposure to important issues. "CBS Reports" was the most famous documentary series in TV history, and it doesn't exist any more, for the very reason that the network can't make money with it. If one wants to do an hour-long program on welfare reform today, forget it. It ain't going to happen.

TAE: "60 Minutes" was the program that made news profitable, but it still does some pretty solid stories.

GOLDBERG: Sure, I'll concede that. It's responsible for the infotainment trend, but it still manages to maintain high standards.

TAE: Ratings have consistently left Dan Rather in third place. Why hasn't he been fired?

GOLDBERG: Mainly it's because CBS News doesn't have anyone of his stature groomed for that anchor position. The guys in Hollywood now make all those kinds of calls, and there's no way CBS Entertainment president Leslie Moonves is going to let correspondent John Roberts take over, even though he's quite good. Dan Rather is a huge name in this business, and despite being in third place, that position on the evening news is negligible in terms of advertising money. By contrast, the difference between third and second place on the *morning* news programs is huge. That's just the way the business works.

TAE: Of all the journalists in network news,

whom do you consider to be the most objective?

GOLDBERG: On NBC, Tim Russert does a very good job. John Stossel and Ted Koppel over at ABC are good, too. On CBS, Mike Wallace and Morley Safer are at the top of their game.

TAE: How will the success of the 24-hour cable news channels influence the evening network newscasts?

GOLDBERG: Cable news has taken viewers away. But it hasn't had an effect on the content of the network broadcasts. I'm convinced that if one of the three big networks tried giving balanced liberal and conservative views, it would begin to stand out, and within a week we'd all notice the difference.

TAE: Some of your harshest critics, such as Tom Shales of the *Washington Post*, have argued that you've written this book because you were a failure as a correspondent and want to get back at your bosses.

GOLDBERG: I won six Emmy Awards for my work at CBS News, and I was the lead correspondent on a program that won a Peabody Award.

Years ago, Tom Shales called me "one of the brainiest network news correspondents." He seemed to be a big fan. But back when AIDS was emerging, I did a one-hour documentary where I interviewed a bisexual man who infected his wife and she later died. I asked this man, "Do you think you killed her?" Mr. Shales was offended by that question, and from then on started writing negatively about me.

TAE: Speaking of AIDS, in *Bias* you criticize coverage of the disease, citing news reports that said AIDS was going to threaten everyone, when the reality was far from that: It was only harmful to people who behaved in certain dangerous ways.

GOLDBERG: Remember all those news reports saying that heterosexuals were going to be the next victims after homosexuals and drug addicts? After a while, reporters should have looked around and said, "Where are all those heterosexuals who are supposed to be dying?" The reason they didn't is because gay rights is a cause the media elites want to champion.

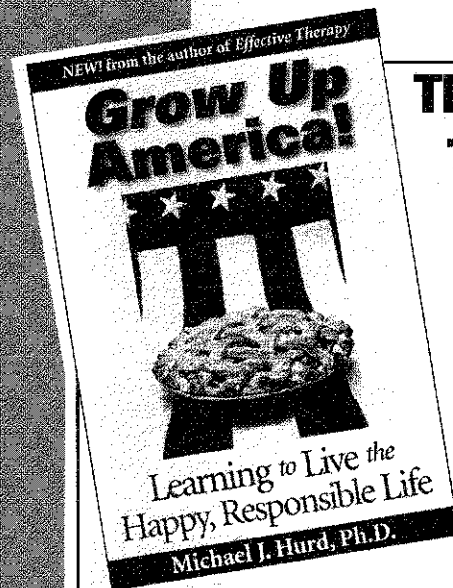
Their position was, "What do we have to lose by getting the general population frightened?" Maybe that will help find a cure. Reporters and producers are very selective about the groups with which they take this

The negative effect that day care has on children is the most important story you never saw on TV.

approach. Can you imagine them working on the side of pro-life activists?

TAE: You also assert that network news is slanted when it comes to crime and punishment stories. You cite as an example CBS coverage of a prison chain gang in Alabama where all but one prisoner was black. A producer objected to showing it, saying that the network shouldn't give viewers the impression that so many prisoners were black.

GOLDBERG: That story is symbolic of how political correctness colors the news. CBS News wanted a quick story with compelling pictures showing people in chains working out in the hot sun. They got more than they bargained for. But only two types of people are going to believe that all blacks are criminals: bigots and morons. And I really don't think network news producers should be filtering the news for their viewers.



The Modern Toolkit for Rational Living

Dr. Michael J. Hurd's latest book now available at amazon.com and finer bookstores.

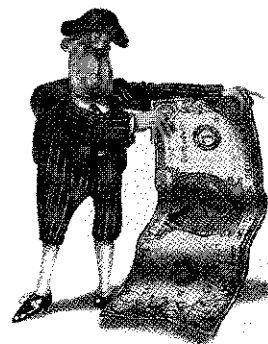
**"...Powerful learning..."
"I love reading the truth!"**

May also be ordered on line at DrHurd.com or by phone at 800-358-3507 ext. 2

DrHurd.com

Forward Observer

James Glassman



Booboo Economics

At last, we're headed for an honest debate between two different approaches to tax policy. The question on the table: Are higher taxes good or bad for an economy that has slowed down?

The battle is being joined because the Congressional Budget Office has pared its projections of U.S. budget surpluses. Last January, the projected surplus over the next ten years stood at \$5.6 trillion. That number was re-estimated at \$1.8 trillion in December.

Why the decline? Three reasons. Because it uses "static analysis" (simply viewing tax cuts as straight revenue reductions, ignoring any economic acceleration created by the lower levies), the CBO estimates that the tax cuts enacted in June will deprive Washington of \$1.3 trillion over the next decade. Second, the economy has moved into a recession that economists did not factor in a year ago. And, third, the terrorist attacks of September 11 have led to boosts in federal spending.

In a speech on January 4, Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle called the federal surplus decline "the most dramatic fiscal deterioration in our nation's history." That's nonsense. The decline may even be beneficial, since it could prevent legislators from embarking on the spending sprees that surpluses provoke.

But the argument presented in this speech by Daschle—the nation's top elected Democratic official—is important. He defined a fiscal position that is economically erroneous and politically perilous.

Daschle asserted "the rapidly disappearing surplus is a key reason long-term

interest rates have barely budged" despite reductions in short-term rates by the Federal Reserve. "Investors understand that the dwindling surplus means the federal government may have to borrow money soon or, at the very least, won't be paying down nearly as much of the debt as had been expected. That is keeping rates higher than they would have been." Thus, tax cuts "probably made the recession worse."

This argument comes straight from the playbook of Clinton Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin. Rubin believes that a hike in marginal tax rates on the most productive Americans is what ignited the economic boom of the 1990s. His logic goes like this:

- Lower taxes do not stimulate the economy. They don't change people's patterns of work or behavior. They simply deprive the Treasury of money, leading to lower surpluses or higher deficits.
- Lower surpluses or higher deficits mean that interest rates will rise because the federal government crowds out other borrowers, who have to offer their debt at higher rates in order to attract lenders.
- These higher interest rates damage the economy, causing recessions.
- The solution is higher taxes.

After Daschle's speech, President Bush responded that taxes would be raised (or the previous cuts rescinded) "over my dead body!" Bush wants *more* tax cuts as the best cure for economic slowdown. So the battle lines have been drawn.

Daschle and Rubin are promoting what could be called Booboo Economics—because it's based on an intel-

lectual mistake, a big fallacy. Paul Evans of Ohio State University has shown that there is no evidence that higher deficits are correlated with higher interest rates. AEI economists Charles Calomiris and Kevin Hassett demonstrate, likewise, that Japanese and U.S. interest rates have followed almost precisely the same patterns even though Japanese government debt soared and U.S. government debt fell. Look at Rubin's own era for further evidence: In 1996, with a federal deficit of \$108 billion, the long-term bond averaged 6.2 percent; in 2000, with a surplus of \$236 billion (a record), the bond averaged 6.5 percent.

Why don't federal borrowing levels dictate interest rates as Rubin suggests? Many reasons, but here's one that non-economists can understand: Federal debt is a small piece of a big pie. According to the latest Federal Reserve data, American people and institutions owe a total of about \$19 trillion. Even if the federal debt rises by \$200 billion in a year, the overall effect is to raise total national debt by just 1 percent.

What really counts in fiscal policy is not whether the government is collecting more than it spends but whether it is spending too much.

Lower taxes leave more dollars in the hands of individual Americans to invest and spend. Raising taxes in the middle of a slowdown is a good way to send the economy into a depression.

Is that the result you had in mind, Mr. Daschle?