

MEDIA

Myopic Media

by Marc Morano

The 1996 Radio and Television Correspondents Dinner in Washington, D.C., in March may be remembered for shock-jock Don Imus's tasteless diatribe, but the real discord occurred behind the scenes. Interviews I conducted with top news players at the dinner revealed a media sharply polarized. Network news titans clashed over the present state of the media.

The journalists in attendance had varied responses to CBS News reporter Bernard Goldberg's allegations of liberal bias in network news. In a March editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, Mr. Goldberg criticized fellow CBS newsmen Eric Engberg for "setting new standards for bias." Goldberg charged, "The old argument that the networks and other 'media' elites have a liberal bias is so blatantly true, it's hardly worth discussing anymore. . . . It comes naturally to most reporters."

Walter Cronkite was exceedingly agitated at the mere mention of Mr. Goldberg's name. He grumbled, "Oh Goldberg, for heavens sake." Mr. Cronkite, then apparently catching himself, abruptly changed his tone and sarcastically stated, "Goldberg's a marvelous fellow. I'm glad you quoted him." He then went on to agree with the basic premise of Goldberg's allegations. Mr. Cronkite explained, "He's got a point, but we've all made the same point before. Everybody knows that there is a liberal—that there is a heavy liberal persuasion among correspondents." He added that reporters are of the "liberal persuasion" because they begin their careers covering courts and police stations, that any reporter "brought up that way has to have a degree of humanity."

Lisa Myers of *NBC News* also agreed with Goldberg. She borrowed a page from Goldberg's analysis when she stat-

ed, "There is, I think, a bias within the media toward dealing with problems in a way that involves spending more money. . . . I think that there is a tendency among many [in the media] to feel that the best solution is a government solution. You may call that liberal."

Mike Wallace of *CBS News* sharply disagreed, denying the existence of any liberal bias in the news media and using the election of recent Republican Presidents to prove it. According to him, the media could not be all-powerful and liberal because Republicans have been so successful at winning the White House. "When people suggest there is a bias in the media and we have all of this power and then of course the bias is always supposed to be liberal and not conservative. Under those circumstances, how many Democratic Presidents and how many Republican Presidents have there been beginning with Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan twice, George Bush. It's just in my estimation, it's almost a joke."

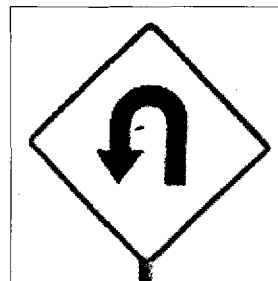
Mr. Wallace added, "I would defy you to know what . . . [Dan] Rather's politics or Walter Cronkite's politics [are] . . ." The challenge is easily met. Dan Rather at a May 27, 1993, CBS affiliates meet-

ing told President Clinton, "If we could be one-hundredth as great as you and Hillary Rodham Clinton have been in the White House, we'd take it right now and walk away winners. . . . Tell Mrs. Clinton we respect her and we're pulling for her." Walter Cronkite recently advocated a new political system. He told *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, "We may have to find some marvelous middle ground between capitalism and communism."

Other journalists at the dinner were not happy with Goldberg's critique. Andrea Mitchell of *NBC News* stated, "I really disagree with that and I think Eric Engberg is a terrific correspondent." Judy Woodruff of *CNN* cautioned that, "I think Mr. Goldberg went a little bit too far." Bill Plante of *CBS News* was in no mood to discuss Mr. Goldberg's charges. He agonized, "My feelings of what Bernie did are too personal and too much connected to CBS to have shared [them]."

According to John Cochran of *ABC News*, Richard Nixon was justified in his distrust of reporters and may not have been the paranoid obsessed man the media portrayed him to be. Mr. Cochran stated that there was "an anti-Nixon bias."

LIBERAL ARTS



DIVORCING THE RACES

Black nationalist and Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan has come up with a final solution for America's racial problems. According to the *South African Mail & Guardian's* February 2/8 issue, Farrakhan told Muammar Qaddafi that he dreamed of establishing an independent black homeland in Africa and populating it with the more than one million black convicts in American prisons. When asked if his proposal amounted to a call for segregation, Farrakhan remarked that "when two people are in disagreement in a marriage, they should first try to reconcile. When their differences are irreconcilable, the judge then will grant the petitioner a decree of divorce."

I'm not even sure it was a liberal bias. . . . I think Nixon was somewhat right, it wasn't just paranoid. Sometimes people really are after you and sometimes that was the case with Richard Nixon."

The members of the fourth estate reacted with disbelief when confronted with a quotation from Bryant Gumbel of NBC's *Today* show. Mr. Gumbel called Pat Buchanan "Mr. Puke-anan" on the February 20 broadcast of *Today*. NBC anchorman Tom Brokaw said, "I didn't hear him say that. I mean I never heard him say that." Bill Plante had the same reaction: "Did he actually say that? I never heard him say it. Was it on the air?" Deborah Norville, former *Today* show coanchor, expressed shock at Mr. Gumbel's comment. Her face conveyed disbelief as she asked, "On the air?" She then added, "I don't think I want to comment." Dee Dee Myers of CNBC, formerly Clinton's spokesperson, was not surprised at all about Gumbel's reference to "Mr. Puke-anan." She stated, "I think reporters all the time say things similar to that. Not necessarily on the air but behind the candidates' back. . . . They don't have much respect for the people they cover." Al Roker, the weatherman of the *Today* show, would not address the question directly. Instead he stipulated, "I've never worked with a liberal anchorman. They're all very conservative." Presumably this would include Mr. Gumbel, who besides the "Puke-anan" reference once promoted an NBC News special on racial attitudes by stating, "This is not going to tell you whether or not you are a racist or a liberal."

The recent Harris survey that showed Americans to be increasingly distrustful of network news did not seem to concern the journalists. Bob Schieffer of CBS News shrugged it off and asked, "What's new about that?" Dan Rather put a positive spin on the lack of trust. He stated, "I think the American people are very smart . . . they're skeptical. That's the way they should be." Juan Williams of CNN explained that people don't trust the news anymore "because people see with their eyes and know that too often we angle stuff and have too much of an edge to it and aren't honest." Mike McCurry, President Clinton's press secretary, feigned shock that trust in the news is down. He asked, "You're kidding?! Surprise! Wake up! These guys need to understand that Americans want to understand what's going on in their

lives."

The new novel *Blood Sport* by James B. Stewart on the Whitewater controversy was dismissed as old news. Tom Brokaw commented, "I don't think that there is any real big smoking guns or big explosions." Bill Plante lamented that, "The problem with the media coverage of Whitewater is it has been done over and over again." John Cochran suggested that Whitewater was not even an important story. He admitted that he had not read *Blood Sport*, but he was reading a "fascinating" book by Elizabeth Drew on the Republican Congress. He related that Ms. Drew's book "had nothing to do with gossip or Whitewater or what happened to Vince Foster or any of that. It has to do with what's happening with the issues of importance to the American people."

Bernard Goldberg's criticism had at least momentarily forced a myopic media to engage in a much needed self-examination. In today's newscasts, sensationalism has replaced sober analysis. The network news media and the political left in America share the same *modus operandi*. Both set out to identify a "crisis," exaggerate the extent of the "crisis," and then invariably point to a lack of government spending or regulation as the chief cause of the "crisis." As a result of this incestuous relationship, the mainstream press has virtually given a leftist bent to almost every issue. Liberal elected officials and advocacy groups have perpetually been able to look to the media as an extension of their public relations efforts. Whether it is the network news hyping the latest environmental "catastrophe" or sounding an alarm about GOP policies that they claim will result in "mean-spiritedness" or "starving children," the mainstream media and the national Democratic party are in lockstep. The orthodoxy of most of today's network news reporters does not allow them even to question the premise of government-sponsored "compassion." Unless the fourth estate is willing to heed critiques like the one put forth by Mr. Goldberg, network news trust and ratings will continue to decline. Talk radio and other alternative news and information sources will continue to prosper as network news becomes increasingly irrelevant.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

The Cuban Cash Cow

by Mario R. Sanchez

When the Cuban air force shot down two unarmed civilian planes, killing four men, there followed yet another round of senseless debate over how to handle Fidel Castro and his aging revolution. Cuban exiles renewed their call for vindication of still more deaths, while *Time* magazine ran Castro's justification of the "defensive" act. The Clinton administration condemned Cuba and sought the counsel (i.e., political support) of the self-proclaimed leaders of Cuban-Americans. The Republican hopeful(s) denounced the atrocity and assured a disbelieving public that Castro would not survive *their* administration. Congressmen of select districts clamored to condemn the inhumanity. The interested media pontificated while the disinterested media shifted the blame.

To promote the status quo, indisputable acts are endlessly disputed. There are those who justify the murders, for after all, the four dead men had in the past flown missions over Havana to drop leaflets; for the planes were "over" Cuban territory (wrong: they were in international airspace, one flying toward the United States and the other in a parallel course); for the dead were merely Cuban troublemakers (wrong: two were Americans, one with two tours of Vietnam as a U.S. Marine to his credit). There are those who ask rhetorically why the murdered "Cubans" did not go back to Cuba, though this is precisely what Cubans have been trying to do for the past 37 years. So endlessly we analyze acts of brutality until . . . the next act of brutality, when the debate begins anew.

And yet, how do we treat Castro today? Like visiting royalty. During his five-day visit to New York to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, Castro received over 200 invitations beseeching his presence (not counting the invitations from those who wanted to kill him), lunched with the Council of For-