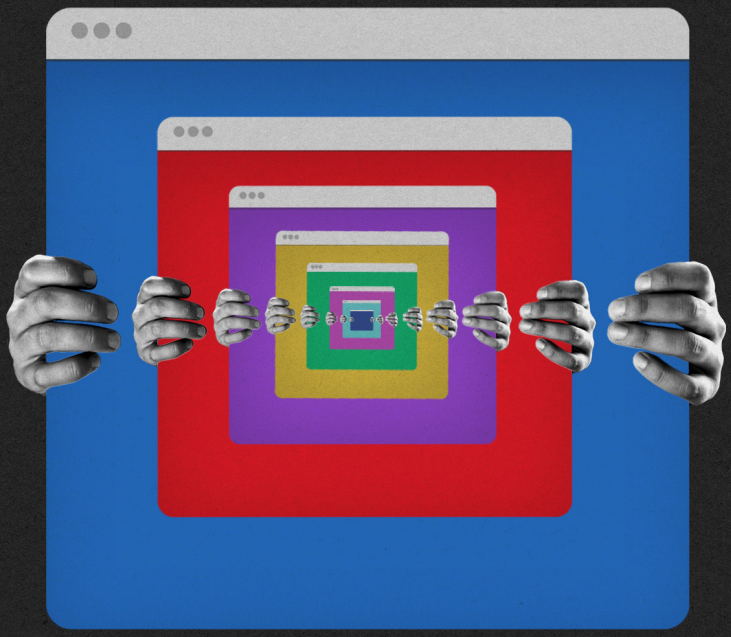
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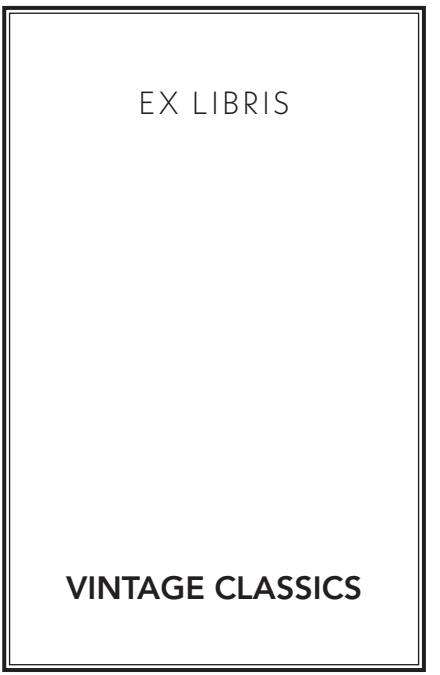
MANUFACTURING CONSENT

The Political Economy of the Mass Media



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'A compelling indictment of the news media's role in covering up errors and deceptions in American foreign policy'
New York Times Book Review



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The Political Economy of Human Rights:
The Washington Connection and Third World Fascism

The Political Economy of Human Rights 2:
After the Cataclysm

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EDWARD S. HERMAN
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MANUFACTURING CONSENT

The Political Economy of the Mass Media

WITH AN AFTERWORD BY
Edward S. Herman

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TO THE MEMORY OF ALEX CAREY

AND

HERBERT I. SCHILLER

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The Iran-contra scandals were blamed on the President's easygoing habits, though the people had every opportunity to know this was his way of doing things or not doing before they put him in the White House, not once but twice.

James Reston

They who have put out the people's eyes, reproach them of their blindness.

John Milton

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Introduction to the 2002 Edition

This book centers in what we call a "Propaganda model," an analytical framework that attempts to explain the performance of the U.S. media in terms of the basic institutional structures and relationships within which they operate. It is our view that, among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them. The representatives of these interests have important agendas and principles that they want to advance, and they are well positioned to shape and constrain media policy. This is normally not accomplished by crude intervention, but by the selection of right-thinking personnel and by the editors' and working journalists' internalization of priorities and definitions of newsworthiness that conform to the institution's policy.

Structural factors are those such as ownership and control, dependence on other major funding sources (notably, advertisers), and mutual interests and relationships between the media and those who make the news and have the power to define it and explain what it means. The propaganda model also incorporates other closely related factors such as the ability to complain about the media's treatment of news (that is, produce "flak"), to provide "experts" to confirm the official slant on the news, and to fix the basic principles and ideologies that are taken for granted by media personnel and the elite, but are often resisted by the general population.[1] In our view, the same underlying power sources that own the media and fund them as advertisers, that serve as primary definers of the news, and that produce flak and proper-thinking experts, also play a key role in fixing basic principles and the dominant ideologies. We

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believe that what journalists do, what they see as newsworthy, and what they take for granted as premises of their work are frequently well explained by the incentives, pressures, and constraints incorporated into such a structural analysis.

These structural factors that dominate media operations are not all-controlling and do not always produce simple and homogeneous results. It is well recognized, and may even be said to constitute a part of an institutional critique such as we present in this volume, that the various parts of media organizations have some limited autonomy, that individual and professional values influence media work, that policy is imperfectly enforced, and that media policy itself may allow some measure of dissent and reporting that calls into question the accepted viewpoint. These considerations all work to assure some dissent and coverage of inconvenient facts.[2] The beauty of the system, however, is that such dissent and inconvenient information are kept within bounds and at the margins, so that while their presence shows that the system is not monolithic, they are not large enough to interfere unduly with the domination of the official agenda.

It should also be noted that we are talking about media structure and performance, not the effects of the media on the public. Certainly, the media's adherence to an official agenda with little dissent is likely to influence public opinion in the desired direction, but this is a matter of degree, and where the public's interests diverge sharply from that of the elite, and where they have their own independent sources of information, the official line may be widely doubted. The point that we want to stress here, however, is that the propaganda model describes forces that shape what the media does; it does not imply that any propaganda emanating from the media is always effective.

Although now more than a dozen years old, both the propaganda model and the case studies presented with it in the first edition of this book have held up remarkably well.[3] The purpose of this new Introduction is to update the model, add some materials to supplement the case studies already in place (and left intact in the chapters that follow), and finally, to point out the possible applicability of the model to a number of issues under current or recent debate.

UPDATING THE PROPAGANDA MODEL

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The propaganda model, spelled out in detail in chapter 1, explains the broad sweep of the mainstream media's behavior and performance by their corporate character and integration into the political economy of the dominant

economic system. For this reason, we focused heavily on the rise in scale of media enterprise, the media's gradual centralization and concentration, the growth of media conglomerates that control many different kinds of media (motion picture studios, TV networks, cable channels, magazines, and book publishing houses), and the spread of the media across borders in a globalization process. We also noted the gradual displacement of family control by professional managers serving a wider array of owners and more closely subject to market discipline.

All of these trends, and greater competition for advertising across media boundaries, have continued and strengthened over the past dozen years, making for an intensified bottom-line orientation. Thus, centralization of the media in a shrinking number of very large firms has accelerated, virtually unopposed by Republican and Democratic administrations and regulatory authority. Ben Bagdikian notes that when the first edition of his *Media Monopoly* was published in 1983, fifty giant firms dominated almost every mass medium; but just seven years later, in 1990, only twenty-three firms occupied the same commanding position.[4]

Since 1990, a wave of massive deals and rapid globalization have left the media industries further centralized in nine transnational conglomerates—Disney, AOL Time Warner, Viacom (owner of CBS), News Corporation, Bertelsmann, General Electric (owner of NBC), Sony, AT&T–Liberty Media, and Vivendi Universal. These giants own all the world's major film studios, TV networks, and music companies, and a sizable fraction of the most important cable channels, cable systems, magazines, major-market TV stations, and book publishers. The largest, the recently merged AOL Time Warner, has integrated the leading Internet portal into the traditional media system. Another fifteen firms round out the system, meaning that two dozen firms control nearly the entirety of media experienced by most U.S. citizens. Bagdikian concludes that "it is the overwhelming collective power of these firms, with their corporate interlocks and unified cultural and political values, that raises troubling questions about the individual's role in the American democracy."[5]

Of the nine giants that now dominate the media universe, all but General Electric have extensively conglomerated within the media, and are important in both producing content and distributing it. Four of them—Disney, AOL Time Warner, Viacom, and News Corporation—produce movies, books, magazines, newspapers, TV programs, music, videos, toys, and theme parks, among other things; and they have extensive distribution facilities via broadcasting and cable ownership, retail stores, and movie-theater chains. They also provide news and occasional investigative reports and documentaries that address political issues, but

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the leaders of these pop-cultural behemoths are mainly interested in entertainment, which produces large audiences with shows like ABC TV's *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* and CBS-TV's *Survivor*, or with movies like Disney's *Lion King* that also make possible the cross-selling "synergies" that are a focal point of their attention and resources.

Important branches of the media such as movies and books have had substantial global markets for many years, but only in the past two decades has a global media system come into being that is having major effects on national media systems, culture, and politics.[6] It has been fueled by the globalization of business more generally, the associated rapid growth of global advertising, and improved communications technology that has facilitated cross-border operations and control. It has also been helped along by government policy and the consolidation of neoliberal ideology. The United States and other Western governments have pressed the interests of their home-country firms eager to expand abroad, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank have done the same, striving with considerable success to enlarge transnational corporate access to media markets across the globe. Neoliberal ideology has provided the intellectual rationale for policies that have opened up the ownership of broadcasting stations and cable and satellite systems to private transnational investors.

The culture and ideology fostered in this globalization process relate largely to "lifestyle" themes and goods and their acquisition; and they tend to weaken any sense of community helpful to civic life. Robert McChesney notes that "the hallmark of the global media system is its relentless, ubiquitous commercialism."[7] Shopping channels, "infomercials," and product placement are booming in the global media system. McChesney adds that "it should come as no surprise that account after account in the late 1990s documents the fascination, even the obsession, of the world's middle class youth with consumer brands and products."[8] The global media's "news" attention in recent years, aside from reporting on crusades such as "Operation Allied Force" (the NATO war against Yugoslavia) and on national elections, has been inordinately directed to sensationalism, as in their obsessive focus on the O. J. Simpson trial, the Lewinsky scandal, and the deaths of two of the West's supercelebrities, Princess Diana and John F. Kennedy, Jr.

Globalization, along with deregulation and national budgetary pressures, has also helped reduce the importance of noncommercial media in country after country. This has been especially important in Europe and Asia, where public broadcasting systems were dominant (in contrast with the United States and Latin America). The financial pressures on public broadcasters has forced them to shrink or emulate the commercial systems in fund-raising

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and programming, and some have been fully commercialized by policy change or privatization. The global balance of power has shifted decisively toward commercial systems. James Ledbetter points out that in the United States, under incessant right-wing political pressure and financial stringency, "the 90s have seen a tidal wave of commercialism overtake public broadcasting," with public broadcasters "rushing as fast as they can to merge their services with those offered by commercial networks."[9] And in the process of what Ledbetter calls the "malling" of public broadcasting, its already modest differences from the commercial networks have almost disappeared. Most important, in their programming "they share either the avoidance or the defanging of contemporary political controversy, the kind that would bring trouble from powerful patrons."[10]

Some argue that the Internet and the new communications technologies are breaking the corporate stranglehold on journalism and opening an unprecedented era of interactive democratic media. And it is true and important that the Internet has increased the efficiency and scope of individual and group networking. This has enabled people to escape the mainstream media's constraints in many and diverse cases. Japanese women have been able to tap newly created Web sites devoted to their problems, where they can talk and share experiences and information with their peers and obtain expert advice on business, financial, and personal matters.[11] Chiapas resisters against abuse by the Mexican army and government were able to mobilize an international support base in 1995 to help them publicize their grievances and put pressure on the Mexican government to change its policies in the region.[12] The enlarged ability of Bolivian peasants protesting against World Bank privatization programs and user fees for water in 2000, and Indonesian students taking to the streets against the Suharto dictatorship in Indonesia in 1998, to communicate through the Internet produced a level of publicity and global attention that had important consequences: Bechtel Corporation, owner of the newly privatized water system in Bolivia that had quickly doubled water rates, backed off and the privatization sale was rescinded; the protests and associated publicity, along with the 1998 financial crisis, helped drive Suharto from office.[13]

Broader protest movements have also benefited from Internet-based communication. When the leading members of the World Trade Organization (WTO) attempted in 1998 to push through in secret a Multilateral Agreement on Investment that would have protected further the rights of international investors as against the rights of democratic bodies within states, the Internet was extremely valuable in alerting opposition forces to the threat and helping mobilize an opposition that prevented

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acceptance of this agreement.[14] Similarly, in the protest actions against the WTO meetings in Seattle in November 1999 and the IMF and World Bank annual gatherings in Washington, D.C., in April 2000, communication via the Internet played an important role both in organizing the protests and in disseminating information on the events themselves that countered the mainstream media's hostile portrayal of these protests.[15]

However, although the Internet has been a valuable addition to the communications arsenal of dissidents and protesters, it has limitations as a critical tool. For one thing, those whose information needs are most acute are not well served by the Internet—many lack access, its databases are not designed to meet their needs, and the use of databases (and effective use of the Internet in general) presupposes knowledge and organization. The Internet is not an instrument of mass communication for those lacking brand names, an already existing large audience, and/or large resources. Only sizable commercial organizations have been able to make large numbers aware of the existence of their Internet offerings. The privatization of the Internet's hardware, the rapid commercialization and concentration of Internet portals and servers and their integration into non-Internet conglomerates—the AOL–Time Warner merger was a giant step in that direction—and the private and concentrated control of the new broadband technology, together threaten to limit any future prospects of the Internet as a democratic media vehicle.

The past few years have witnessed a rapid penetration of the Internet by the leading newspapers and media conglomerates, all fearful of being outflanked by small pioneer users of the new technology, and willing (and able) to accept losses for years while testing out these new waters. Anxious to reduce these losses, however, and with advertisers leery of the value of spending in a medium characterized by excessive audience control and rapid surfing, the large media entrants into the Internet have gravitated to making familiar compromises—more attention to selling goods, cutting back on news, and providing features immediately attractive to audiences and advertisers. The *Boston Globe* (a subsidiary of the *New York Times*) and the *Washington Post* are offering e-commerce goods and services; and Ledbetter notes that "it's troubling that none of the newspaper portals feels that quality journalism is at the center of its strategy . . . because journalism doesn't help you sell things."[16] Former *New York Times* editor Max Frankel says that the more newspapers pursue Internet audiences, "the more will sex, sports, violence, and comedy appear on their menus, slighting, if not altogether ignoring, the news of foreign wars or welfare reform."[17]

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New technologies are mainly introduced to meet corporate needs, and

those of recent years have permitted media firms to shrink staff even as they achieve greater outputs, and they have made possible global distribution systems that reduce the number of media entities. The audience "interaction" facilitated by advancing interactive capabilities mainly help audience members to shop, but they also allow media firms to collect detailed information on their audiences, and thus to fine-tune program features and ads to individual characteristics as well as to sell by a click during programs. Along with reducing privacy, this should intensify commercialization.

In short, the changes in politics and communication over the past dozen years have tended on balance to enhance the applicability of the propaganda model. The increase in corporate power and global reach, the mergers and further centralization of the media, and the decline of public broadcasting, have made bottom-line considerations more influential both in the United States and abroad. The competition for advertising has become more intense and the boundaries between editorial and advertising departments have weakened further. Newsrooms have been more thoroughly incorporated into transnational corporate empires, with budget cuts and a further diminution of management enthusiasm for investigative journalism that would challenge the structures of power.

Over the past dozen years, sourcing and flak have also strengthened as mechanisms of elite influence. Media centralization and the reduction in the resources devoted to journalism have made the media more dependent than ever on the primary definers who both make the news and subsidize the media by providing accessible and cheap copy. They now have greater leverage over the media, and the public relations firms working for these and other powerful interests also bulk larger as media sources. Alex Carey, Stuart Ewen, John Stauber, and Sheldon Rampton have helped us see how the public relations industry has been able to utilize journalistic conventions to serve its—and its corporate clients'—ends.[18] Studies of news sources reveal that a significant proportion of news originates in public relations releases. There are, by one count, 20,000 more public relations agents working to doctor the news today than there are journalists writing it.[19]

The force of anti-communist ideology has possibly weakened with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the virtual disappearance of socialist movements across the globe, but this is easily offset by the greater ideological force of the belief in the "miracle of the market" (Reagan). The triumph of capitalism and the increasing power of those with an interest in privatization and market rule have strengthened the grip of market ideology, at least among the elite, so that regardless of evidence, markets are assumed to be benevolent and even democratic ("market populism"

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in Thomas Frank's phrase) and nonmarket mechanisms are suspect, although exceptions are allowed when private firms need subsidies, bailouts, and government help in doing business abroad. When the Soviet economy stagnated in the 1980s, it was attributed to the absence of markets; when capitalist Russia disintegrated in the 1990s, this was blamed not on the now ruling market but on politicians' and workers' failure to let markets work their magic.[20] Journalism has internalized this ideology. Adding it to the residual power of anticommunism in a world in which the global power of market institutions makes nonmarket options seem utopian gives us an ideological package of immense strength.

These changes, which have strengthened the applicability of the propaganda model, have seriously weakened the "public sphere," which refers to the array of places and forums in which matters important to a democratic community are debated and information relevant to intelligent citizen participation is provided. The steady advance, and cultural power, of marketing and advertising has caused "the displacement of a political public sphere by a depoliticized consumer culture."[21] And it has had the effect of creating a world of virtual communities built by advertisers and based on demographics and taste differences of consumers. These consumption- and style-based clusters are at odds with physical communities that share a social life and common concerns and which participate in a democratic order.[22] These virtual communities are organized to buy and sell goods, not to create or service a public sphere.

Advertisers don't like the public sphere, where audiences are relatively small, upsetting controversy takes place, and the settings are not ideal for selling goods. Their preference for entertainment underlies the gradual erosion of the public sphere under systems of commercial media, well exemplified in the history of broadcasting in the United States over the past seventy-five years.[23] But entertainment has the merit not only of being better suited to helping sell goods; it is an effective vehicle for hidden ideological messages.[24] Furthermore, in a system of high and growing inequality, entertainment is the contemporary equivalent of the Roman "games of the circus" that diverts the public from politics and generates a political apathy that is helpful to preservation of the status quo.

It would be a mistake to conclude from the fact that the public buys and watches the offerings of the increasingly commercialized media that the gradual erosion of the public sphere reflects the preferences and free choices of the public either as citizens or consumers. The citizenry was never given the opportunity to approve or disapprove the wholesale transfer of broadcasting rights to commercial interests back in 1934,[25] and

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the pledge made by those interests, and subsequently by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) itself, that public service offerings would never be buried in favor of the entertainment preferred by advertisers, was never fulfilled.[26] The public is not sovereign over the media—the owners and managers, seeking ads, decide what is to be offered, and the public must choose among these. People watch and read in good part on the basis of what is readily available and intensively promoted. Polls regularly show that the public would like more news, documentaries, and other information, and less sex, violence, and other entertainment, even as they do listen to and watch the latter. There is little reason to believe that they would not like to understand why they are working harder with stagnant or declining incomes, have inadequate medical care at high costs, and what is being done in their name all over the world. If they are not getting much information on these topics, the propaganda model can explain why: the sovereigns who control the media choose not to offer such material.

UPDATING THE CASE STUDIES

In the case studies presented in chapters 2 through 6, we examine the differences in treatment of situations broadly similar in character, except for the political and economic interests at stake. Our expectation is that news as well as editorial opinion will be strongly influenced by those interests and should display a predictable bias. We would anticipate, for example, that an election held by a client-state government favored by U.S. officials would be treated differently by the media than an election held by a government that U.S. officials oppose. It is seen in chapter 3 that in the important elections analyzed there this dichotomous treatment and bias was displayed to an extraordinary degree.

WORTHY AND UNWORTHY VICTIMS

In chapter 2, we compare the media's treatment of victims of enemy states and those of the United States and U.S. client states. Our prediction is that the victims of enemy states will be found "worthy" and will be subject to more intense and indignant coverage than those victimized by the United States or its clients, who are implicitly "unworthy." It is shown in chapter 2 that a 1984 victim of the Polish Communists, the priest Jerzy Popieluszko, not only received far more coverage than Archbishop Oscar Romero,

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murdered in the U.S. client-state El Salvador in 1980; he was given more coverage than the aggregate of one hundred religious victims killed in U.S. client states, although eight of those victims were U.S. citizens.

This bias is politically advantageous to U.S. policy-makers, for focusing on victims of enemy states shows those states to be wicked and deserving of U.S. hostility; while ignoring U.S. and client-state victims allows ongoing U.S. policies to proceed more easily, unburdened by the interference of concern over the politically inconvenient victims. It is not a credible reply that difficulty in getting evidence on "unworthy" victims can account for the application of such a gross double standard, as an alternative press with meager resources has been able to gather a great deal of material on their mistreatment from highly credible sources, such as major human rights organizations and church representatives.[27] Furthermore, only political factors can explain the differences in *quality* of treatment of worthy and unworthy victims noted throughout this book, illustrated in chapter 2 by the more antiseptic reporting of the abuse of unworthy victims (even U.S. women raped and murdered in El Salvador) and the greater indignation and search for responsibility at the top in the case of worthy victims.

That the same massive political bias displayed earlier in the coverage of Popieluszko and the hundred religious victims in Latin America continues today is suggested by the media's usage of the word "genocide" in the 1990s, as shown in the accompanying table. "Genocide" is an invidious word that officials apply readily to cases of victimization in enemy states, but rarely if ever to similar or worse cases of victimization by the United States itself or allied regimes. Thus, with Saddam Hussein and Iraq having been U.S. targets in the 1990s, whereas Turkey has been an ally and client and the United States its major arms supplier as it engaged in its severe ethnic cleansing of Kurds during those years, we find former U.S. Ambassador Peter Galbraith stating that "while Turkey represses its own Kurds, its cooperation is essential to an American-led mission to protect Iraq's Kurds from renewed genocide at the hands of Saddam Hussein."[28] Turkey's treatment of its Kurds was in no way less murderous than Iraq's treatment of Iraqi Kurds, but for Galbraith, Turkey only "represses," while Iraq engages in "genocide."

The table shows that the five major print media surveyed engage in a similar biased usage, frequently using "genocide" to describe victimization in the enemy states, but applying the word far less frequently to equally severe victimization carried out by the United States or its allies and clients. We can even read who are U.S. friends and enemies from the media's use of the word. Thus, with the United States and its NATO allies warring

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Mainstream Media Usage
of "Genocide" for
Kosovo, East Timor, Turkey, and Iraq[1]

	1. NO. OF TIMES WORD APPLIED TO SERBS, TURKS, ETC.[2]	2. NO. OF EDS,/ OP-EDS DOING THE SAME	3. NEWS ARTICLES	4. FRONT PAGE
COUNTRIES/DATES				
1. Serbs/Kosovo 1998–1999	220	59	118	41
2. Indonesia/East Timor, 1990–1999	33	7	17	4
3. Turkey/Kurds, 1990–1999	14	2	8	1
4. Iraq/Kurds, 1990–1999	132	51	66	24
5. Iraq Sanctions, 1991–1999	18	1	10	1

1. Mainstream media used in this tabulation, based on a Nexus database search,were the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*.
2. The numbers in columns 2 and 3 do not add up to the total in column 1, which also includes letters, "World Briefings," and summary items.

against Yugoslavia in 1999, allegedly in response to that country's mistreatment of the Kosovo Albanians, official denunciations of that mistreatment flowed through the media, along with the repeated designation of the abuses as "genocidal." The same pattern applies to the Iraqi regime's abuse of its Kurdish population—after it had ceased to be a U.S. ally[29]—an enemy state, official denunciations, harsh sanctions, and parallel media treatment.

On the other hand, Turkey and Indonesia have long been U.S. allies and client states and recipients of military and economic aid. In consequence, and just as the propaganda model would predict, the media not only gave minimal attention to the severe abuse of the Kurds by Turkey throughout the 1990s, and to the Clinton administration's lavish help to Turkey's implementation of that ethnic-cleansing program, they rarely applied the word "genocide" to these Turkish operations.

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Similarly, the word was not often applied to the Indonesian mistreatment of the East Timorese, who were subjected to another wave of terror as

Indonesia tried to prevent or defeat a U.N.-sponsored referendum on independence in 1999. The United States, after helping Suharto take power in 1965 in one of the great bloodbaths of the twentieth century,[30] and after supporting his dictatorship for thirty-two years, also gave him crucial military and diplomatic aid when he invaded and occupied East Timor from 1975.[31] In 1999, as Indonesia attempted to prevent the independence referendum in East Timor by violence, the United States maintained its military aid programs and refused to intervene to stop the killing, on the ground that what is happening "is the responsibility of the government of Indonesia, and we don't want to take that responsibility away from them" (as stated by Defense Secretary William Cohen in a press conference of September 8, 1999). This was long after Indonesia had killed thousands and destroyed much of East Timor. Shortly thereafter, under considerable international pressure, the United States invited Indonesia to leave the devastated country.

We have shown elsewhere that in 1975 and later the U.S. media treated the East Timorese as unworthy victims, saving their attention and indignation for the almost simultaneous killings under Pol Pot in Cambodia. The victims of Pol Pot, a Communist leader, were worthy, although after he was ousted by the Vietnamese in 1978, Cambodians ceased to be worthy, as U.S. policy shifted toward support of Pol Pot in exile.[32] The East Timorese remained unworthy in the 1990s, as the table suggests.

As the leader of the faction insisting on harsh sanctions against Iraq following the 1991 Persian Gulf War, the United States itself was responsible for a very large number of Iraqi civilians deaths in the 1990s. John and Karl Mueller assert that these "sanctions of mass destruction" have caused the deaths of "more people in Iraq than have been slain by all so-called weapons of mass destruction [nuclear and chemical] throughout all history."[33] A large fraction of the million or more killed by sanctions were young children; UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy pointed out that "if the substantial reduction in child mortality throughout Iraq during the 1980s had continued through the 1990s, there would have been half a million fewer deaths of children under five in the country as a whole during the eight year period 1991 to 1998."[34] However, as these deaths resulted from U.S. policy, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright declared on national television that these 500,000 child deaths were "worth it,"[35] we would expect the U.S. media to find these victims unworthy, to give them little attention and less indignation, and to find the word "genocide" inapplicable to this case. The table shows that this expectation was realized in media practice.

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The case for severe media bias suggested by the usage of genocide shown in the table is strengthened by the fact that, despite the great media attention

to and indignation over the abuse of the Kosovo Albanians by the Serbs in 1998–1999, this mistreatment was almost certainly less severe than that meted out to the Kurds in Turkey in the 1990s and to the East Timorese by the Indonesian army and paramilitary forces in East Timor in 1999. Deaths in Kosovo on all sides in the year before the NATO bombing were estimated by U.S. and other Western sources to number no more than 2,000, and the Serb assault and expulsions that followed and accompanied the NATO bombing campaign also appear to have resulted in deaths in the low thousands (an intensive postwar search for graves had yielded some 3,000 bodies by August 2000, not all of them Albanian civilians or necessarily victims of the Serbs).[36] Deaths in the Turkish war on the Kurds in the 1990s were estimated to be 30,000 or more, a large fraction Kurdish civilians, with refugee numbers running to 2–3 million. In East Timor, where the Indonesian military organized and collaborated with a paramilitary opposition to a U.N.-sponsored independence referendum held on August 30, 1999, an estimated 5,000 to 6,000 East Timorese civilians were slaughtered even before the referendum vote that rejected Indonesian rule, which unleashed a furious Indonesian army–paramilitary assault on East Timorese.[37]

The double standard reflected in the politicized use of "genocide" is applicable to the treatment of news events more broadly, with the media regularly focusing on the abuse of worthy victims and playing down or neglecting altogether the plight of unworthy victims. As an illustration, we may consider the contrasting media treatment of the alleged killing of some forty Albanians by the Serbs at Racak, Kosovo, on January 15, 1999, and the Indonesian army-militia killing of "up to 200" East Timorese at Liquica in East Timor on April 6, 1999.[38] The former was seen as useful by U.S. officials,[39] who were trying to ready the U.S. and Western publics for an imminent NATO attack on Yugoslavia. Although the facts in the Racak killings, which occurred in the course of fighting between the Serbian military and Kosovo Liberation Army insurgents within Yugoslavia, were and remain in dispute—and recent evidence raises further doubts about the NATO-KLA account of events there[40]—the deaths were immediately denounced and featured by U.S. and NATO officials as an intolerable "massacre." The U.S. mainstream media did the same and gave this reported massacre heavy and uncritical attention.[41] This helped create the moral basis for the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia that began on March 24, 1999.

The Liquica killings of East Timorese seeking refuge in a Catholic church by Indonesian-organized militia forces were indisputably a "massacre," apparently involved many more victims than at Racak, and it took place in a territory illegally occupied by a foreign state (Indonesia). It was also neither a unique event nor was it connected to any warfare, as in Kosovo—it was

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a straightforward slaughter of civilians. But U.S. officials did not denounce this massacre—in fact, active U.S. support of the Indonesian military continued throughout this period and up to a week after the referendum, by which time 85 percent of the population had been driven from their homes and well over 6,000 civilians had been slaughtered. The U.S. mainstream media followed the official lead. For a twelve-month period following the date of each event, the mentions of Racak by the five media entities cited in the table exceeded mentions of Liquica by 4.1 to 1, and mentions of "massacre" at the two sites was in a ratio of 6.7 to 1. The greater length of accounts of the Racak event elevates the ratio to 14 to 1 as measured by word count. *Newsweek*, which mentioned Racak and its "massacre" nine times, failed to mention Liquica once.

Thus, with the cooperation of the media, the Racak killings were effectively used by U.S. officials to ready the public for war, not only by their intensive coverage but also by their taking the official allegations of massacre at face value. In the same time frame, the media's treatment of the indisputable massacre at Liquica was insufficient in volume or indignation to mobilize the public, in accord with the U.S. policy of leaving the management of events in East Timor to the U.S. ally Indonesia.

LEGITIMATING VERSUS MEANINGLESS THIRD WORLD ELECTIONS

In chapter 3 we show that the mainstream media have followed a government agenda in treating elections in client and disfavored states. In El Salvador in the 1980s, the U.S. government sponsored several elections to demonstrate to the U.S. public that our intervention there was approved by the local population; whereas when Nicaragua held an election in 1984, the Reagan administration tried to discredit it to prevent legitimation of a government the administration was trying to overthrow. The mainstream media cooperated, finding the Salvadoran election a "step toward democracy" and the Nicaraguan election a "sham," despite the fact that electoral conditions were far more compatible with an honest election in Nicaragua than in El Salvador. We demonstrate that the media applied a remarkable dual standard to the two elections in accord with the government's propaganda needs.

This same bias is apparent in the press treatment of more recent elections in Cambodia, Yugoslavia, Kenya, Mexico, Russia, Turkey, and Uruguay. Cambodia and Yugoslavia were the only two of these seven ruled by a party strongly objectionable to U.S. policy-makers, and it is in these cases that the *New York Times* warned of serious problems: As regards Cambodia, it asserted that "flawed elections are worse than none," and that "the international community must proceed cautiously, lest a rigged election give Mr.

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Hun Sen a veneer of legitimacy."[42] In reporting on the Yugoslavian election of September 2000, in which U.S. officials intervened openly to prevent the re-election of Slobodan Milosevic, the *Times* and media in general repeatedly warned of the possibility of fraud and a rigged election.[43] In the case of Kenya, where U.S. policy toward the ruling government was ambivalent, here also the *Times* was skeptical of election quality, noting that "holding elections is not enough to assure democratic government" and stressing the need for "an independent electoral commission less bound to political parties" and "independent broadcast media, allowing opposition voices to be heard outside election periods."[44]

But in the other four elections, organized and won by governments strongly favored by the U.S. State Department, there were no suggestions that "flawed elections are worse than none" and no featuring of the threat of fraud; the importance of an independent electoral commission and broadcast media was not pressed, and in each case the election was found to be a step toward democracy and hence legitimizing.

In the case of Mexico, long subject to one party (PRI) rule, but supported by the U.S. government over the past several decades, the *Times* has regularly found the Mexican elections encouraging, in contrast with past fraudulent ones which, at the time, the editors also contrasted favorably with those in the more distant past! It has featured expressions of benevolent intent and downplayed structural defects and abuses. Thus, in its first editorial on the 1988 election that brought Carlos Salinas de Gortari to power, the *Times* noted that prior elections were corrupt (the PRI "manipulated patronage, the news media and the ballot box"), but it stressed that PRI candidate Salinas "contends" that political reform is urgent and "calls for clean elections."[45] The editors questioned whether "his party" will "heed his pleas," a process of distancing the favored candidate from responsibility for any abuses to come. In the editorials that followed, the *Times* did not suggest possible ongoing electoral fraud, "manipulated patronage," or media controls and bias, although this election was famous for a convenient "computer breakdown" in the election aftermath, which turned Carlos Salinas from an expected loser into a winner. Just three years later, however, at the time of the 1991 election, the editors stated that "as long as anyone can remember, Mexican elections have been massively fraudulent" as it prepared readers for new promises of a cleanup.[46] But all through this period and later, the *Times* (and its media rivals) did not focus on fraud or call these elections rigged; in both news stories and editorials they portrayed these deeply flawed elections as steps toward democracy and legitimizing.

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In the 1983 Turkish election, held under military rule, with harsh censorship and only three parties "led by politicians sympathetic to the military

government" allowed to run, the *Times* found that "Turkey Approaches Democracy."[47] Similarly, in Uruguay's 1984 election, under another military regime that jailed the leading opposition candidate and also refused to allow a second major candidate to run, but organized by a government approved by the U.S. State Department, the *Times* once again found that "Uruguay is resuming its democratic vocation . . . the generals are yielding to the infectious resurgence of democracy in much of Latin America."[48]

The Russian election of 1996 was important to the United States and its allies, as Boris Yeltsin, the ruler who was carrying out their favored policies of privatization and the integration of Russia into the global financial system, was seriously threatened with defeat. The Yeltsin government had presided over a 50 percent fall in national output and large income declines for 90 percent of the population, while the hugely corrupt privatization process provided windfalls to a small minority, including an important criminal class. The social welfare and health care systems had disintegrated under Yeltsin's rule, contributing to a startling rise in infectious diseases and mortality rates. Just before the 1996 election campaign, Yeltsin's popularity rating was 8 percent. That he could win re-election in such circumstances suggests—and reflects—a seriously flawed election.

However, with the Yeltsin regime strongly backed by the U.S. government and its Western allies, the *New York Times* once again found this election "A Victory for Russian Democracy," and so did the U.S. mainstream media in general. For that paper of record, electoral flaws were slighted or ignored, and its editors declared the very fact of holding an "imperfect" election "a remarkable achievement."[49] The same bias was evident in reporting on the March 2000 Russian election, won by Yeltsin's anointed heir and former KGB operative Vladimir Putin. Putin had built his popularity by conducting a brutal counterinsurgency war against Chechnya, and his electoral success rested heavily on the fact that the powerful state TV and radio stations campaigned furiously on his behalf and denigrated and gave no broadcasting time to his opponents. A September 2000 exposé of the Putin election campaign by the expatriate *Moscow Times*, based on a six-month investigative effort, uncovered compelling evidence of election fraud, including ballot stuffing, ballot destruction, and the creation of 1.3 million "dead souls" inflating the election rolls.[50] The U.S. mainstream media, however, never found any evidence of fraud at the time of the election, and they have been reluctant to report the findings of the *Moscow Times* study.[51] Putin is another "reformer," like Yeltsin, supported by the West, so that it follows once again that for the mainstream media a flawed election—hardly admitted to be flawed—remains better than none.[52]

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THE KGB-BULGARIAN PLOT TO ASSASSINATE THE POPE

During the Reagan era (1981–88), there was a concerted effort to demonize the Soviet Union, in order to support a major arms buildup and a new, more aggressive policy in the Third World and globally. The Soviet Union was described as an "Evil Empire" and accused of sponsoring international terrorism as well as abusing its own and client-nation peoples.[53] When the would-be assassin Mehmet Ali Agca shot Pope John Paul II in Rome in May 1981, this provided the basis for one of the most successful propaganda campaigns of the Cold War era.

Although the pope's assailant was a Turkish fascist and member of a violently anti-left party in Turkey, after a seventeen-month stint in an Italian prison Agca "confessed" that he had been hired by the KGB and Bulgarians. This confession was convenient, fitting well the interests of the dominant Italian parties anxious to discredit the powerful Italian Communist party as well as the Reagan administration's "Evil Empire" campaign. It was extremely suspicious for other reasons, coming so belatedly, and after numerous visits to Agca by Italian secret service representatives, judges, and papal agents, all with a political ax to grind, and with the secret service notorious for ideological extremism and willingness to doctor evidence.[54]

But the mainstream media accepted this story with astonishing gullibility—the possibility of coaching and pressure on Agca to name the KGB and Bulgarians, much discussed in the Italian media, was almost never mentioned as even a theoretical possibility. And the weakness of the alleged Soviet motive, the sheer stupidity of the enterprise if Soviet-based, and the complete lack of confirmatory evidence was almost entirely ignored by the media (as described in chapter 4). When the case was lost in an Italian court in 1986, despite a substantial Italian government investment and effort, for the U.S. mainstream media this merely reflected the peculiarities of the Italian system of justice; the continued absence of hard evidence led to no reassessment of the case or reflections on their own role.

In the years that followed, two developments threw some light on the case. One is that the Soviet and Bulgarian archives were opened up, and Allen Weinstein of the Center for Democracy gained permission from Bulgarian authorities in 1991 for members of his investigative commission to look at the Bulgarian Interior Ministry's secret service files. After a stint in Bulgaria, Weinstein returned home having failed to locate any confirmatory evidence of Bulgarian or KGB involvement. The *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *Time*, each of which had reported Weinstein's initiative and impending trip to Bulgaria in 1991, all failed to inform their readers of his negative findings.[55]

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Later in 1991, at Senate hearings on the confirmation of Robert Gates as head of the CIA, former CIA officers Melvin Goodman and Harold Ford testified that the CIA's analysis of the Bulgarian Connection had been seriously compromised and politicized in support of the Reagan era anti-Soviet propaganda campaign. Goodman testified that not only had the CIA found no evidence of Soviet or Bulgarian involvement in the shooting, but that based on the CIA's "very good penetration of the Bulgarian secret services" its professionals had concluded that a Bulgarian Connection did not exist.[56]

This testimony, which was a brutal *coup de grâce* to the claims of a connection, put the media on the spot. It was now clear that in their enthusiastic support of the plot they had seriously misled their readers and performed badly as news purveyors and analysts, although serving well the propaganda needs of their government. But as in 1986, after the case against the Bulgarians was dismissed in an Italian court for insufficient evidence, none of them felt any obligation to explain their failures and apologize to their readers. They reported the CIA revelations tersely, with some still claiming that while the connection had not been proved it had not been disproved either (ignoring the frequent impossibility of proving a negative).[57] But in general the mainstream media moved quickly on without reassessing their performance or the fact that they and their media colleagues had been agents of propaganda.

The *New York Times*, which had been consistently supportive of the connection in both news and editorials, not only failed to report Weinstein's negative findings from the search of the Bulgarian files, it also excluded Goodman's statement on the CIA's penetration of the Bulgarian secret services from their excerpts from his testimony. The *Times* had long maintained that the CIA and the Reagan administration "recoiled from the devastating implication that Bulgaria's agents were bound to have acted only on a signal from Moscow."[58] But Goodman's and Ford's testimony showed that this was the reverse of the truth, and that CIA heads William Casey and Robert Gates overrode the views of CIA professionals and falsified evidence to support a Soviet linkage. The *Times* was not alone in following a misleading party line, but it is notable that this paper of record has yet to acknowledge its exceptional gullibility and propaganda service.

VIETNAM, LAOS, AND CAMBODIA

VIETNAM: WAS THE UNITED STATES A VICTIM OR AN AGGRESSOR?

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In chapters 5 through 7, we show that media coverage of the Indochina wars fits the propaganda model very well. The United States first intervened in

Indochina immediately after World War II in support of French recolonization, after which it carried out a twenty-one-year effort (1954–75) to impose a government in the southern half of Vietnam that U.S. officials and analysts consistently recognized as lacking any substantial indigenous support, and in opposition to local nationalist—though Communist—forces that were understood to have a mass base. U.S. leaders operated on the belief that their overwhelming military might would not only enable them, but entitled them, to force submission to a minority government of U.S. choice.

By normal word usage this would make the U.S. effort in Vietnam a case of "aggression." The mainstream media, however, rarely if ever found U.S. policy there to be other than highly moral and well intentioned, even if based on miscalculation of its costs—to us (see chapter 5). The media readily accepted that we were protecting "South Vietnam"—a U.S. creation ruled by a dictator imported directly from the United States—against somebody else's aggression, vacillating in their identification of the aggressor between North Vietnam, the Soviet Union, China, or the resistance in South Vietnam engaging in "internal aggression"! It is compelling evidence of the propaganda service of the mainstream media that throughout the war they accepted this basic propaganda assumption of the war managers, and from that era up to today, we have never found a mainstream editorial or news report that characterized the U.S. war against Vietnam, and then all of Indochina, as a case of aggression.

After the United States terminated the military phase of the war in 1975, it maintained and enforced an eighteen-year boycott of the country that it had virtually destroyed. According to Vietnamese estimates, the war had cost them 3 million killed, 300,000 missing, 4.4 million wounded, and 2 million harmed by toxic chemicals; and its land was left ravaged by bombs and Rome plows as well as chemical weapons. With 58,000 killed, the U.S. death toll from the war was under one-tenth of 1 percent of its population; Vietnam's death toll was 17 percent of its population, and only Vietnam's people were attacked by chemical warfare and had their countryside devastated.

Nevertheless, U.S. officials and the mainstream media continued to view the U.S. role in the war as creditable, the United States as the victim. President George Bush stated in 1992 that "Hanoi knows today that we seek only answers without the threat of retribution for the past."[59] That is, the Vietnamese had done things to us that might justify retribution on our part, but we only seek answers regarding our men missing in action.[60] *New York Times* foreign affairs commentator Leslie Gelb justified classifying Vietnam an "outlaw" on the grounds that "they had killed Americans."[61] This reflects the common establishment view, implicit in Bush's comment, that nobody has a right of self-defense against this country, even if it intervenes across the ocean to impose by force a government that the people of that country reject.

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U.S. CHEMICAL WARFARE IN INDOCHINA

It is also of interest how the media have treated the massive use of chemicals during the Vietnam War and the horrifying aftermath for the victim country. In 1961 and 1962 the Kennedy administration authorized the use of chemicals to destroy rice crops in South Vietnam—in violation of a U.S. tradition as well as international law (Admiral William Leahy, in response to a proposal to destroy Japanese rice crops in 1944, stated that this would "violate every Christian ethic I have ever heard of and all known laws of war").[62] Between 1961 and 1971, however, the U.S. Air Force sprayed 20 million gallons of concentrated arsenic-based and dioxin-laden herbicides (mainly Agent Orange) on 6 million acres of crops and trees, besides using large quantities of the "super tear gas" CS and vast amounts of napalm and phosphorus bombs.[63] An estimated 13 percent of South Vietnam's land was subjected to chemical attacks. This included 30 percent of its rubber plantations and 36 percent of its mangrove forests, along with other large forest areas, destroyed by toxic chemicals in programs that included multiple "large-scale intentional effort[s] combining defoliation with incendiaries to produce a forest fire in South Vietnam."[64] A 1967 study prepared by the head of the Agronomy Section of the Japanese Science Council concluded that U.S. anticrop warfare had already ruined more than 3.8 million acres of arable land in South Vietnam, killing almost 1,000 peasants and over 13,000 livestock.[65] This policy of attempting to force enemy capitulation by destroying its food supply was not only contrary to the rules of war,[66] it was notable in that it "first and overwhelmingly affected small children."[67]

Laos was also subjected to chemical attacks in 1966 and 1969, directed at both crops, and vegetation along communication routes. And in Cambodia, some 173,000 acres of rubber plantations, crops and forests were heavily sprayed with Agent Orange in the spring of 1969.[68] The Cambodian government complained bitterly at the violation of its neutrality by this inhumane and illegal action, but Cambodia was too small and weak for its voice to be heard or for it to be able to mobilize a legal or other defense. Although the U.N. General Assembly did strongly condemn the use of chemical agents as contrary to international law by an 83-to-3 vote in 1969,[69] it was powerless to act against the United States, and there was no "international community" mobilization to halt its use of chemical warfare in Cambodia or elsewhere in Indochina.

During the Vietnam war, the use of chemicals was reported and criticized in the U.S. media when first disclosed in 1966, but the subject was quickly dropped. The illegality of chemical warfare and a policy of starvation, and their effects on the victim population, were virtually unreported.

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There were exceptions, such as Orville Schell, Jr.'s 1971 *Look* magazine article "Silent Vietnam: How we invented ecocide and killed a country," but they were rare indeed. After the war, because of the effects of Agent Orange on U.S. soldiers, there was some coverage of this chemical warfare campaign; but the vastly greater impact on the direct targets of this warfare in South Vietnam remained close to invisible. Of 522 articles in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *Newsweek*, and *Time* during the 1990s that mentioned Agent Orange and Vietnam together, the vast majority focused on the harm done to U.S. service personnel; only nine articles acknowledged the targeting of food crops (thirty-nine mentioned forest cover alone as the target); only eleven discussed in any detail the impact on Vietnamese and the Vietnamese environment; only three characterized the use of Agent Orange as a "chemical weapon" or "chemical warfare;" and in only two articles was it suggested that its use might constitute a war crime.

The *Wall Street Journal* did have a lead story on this topic in February 1997, reporting that as many as 500,000 children may have been born with dioxin-related deformities and that birth defects in the South were four times those in the North.[70] The article did acknowledge U.S. responsibility for this disaster but contended that "the United States, emotionally spent after losing the war, paid no heed." But the United States did pay heed to the flight of the "boat people" and was not too exhausted to enforce a vigorous boycott of the target of its aggression, even if it took no responsibility whatever for the condition of its victims.

The large-scale application of chemical weapons, and napalm, in Vietnam was confined to the South. One reason for this was that North Vietnam had a government with links to other countries, so that the use of these barbarous and illegal weapons against it would have been widely publicized. South Vietnam was occupied by the United States and its client regime, so that the victimized people of the South were voiceless and could be treated with unlimited savagery. This of course contradicted the claim that we were protecting them against aggression, but the media not only underplayed the savagery, they failed to call attention to the contradiction and its significance. *New York Times* journalist Barbara Crossette did report that the U.S. failure to get involved in studying the effects of chemical warfare in Vietnam had been unfortunate, because as this country had used it heavily in the South but not in the North, this made Vietnam a controlled experiment in the effects of dioxin on humans from which much could be learned of benefit to ourselves.[71] But neither Crossette nor any other mainstream reporter had anything to say about the fact that the United States had used dioxin only on the ones it was allegedly protecting against aggression, nor did they

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suggest that this constituted a serious war crime, or that this country might have an obligation to help those it had victimized.

During the 1980s, the Reagan administration mounted a major propaganda campaign over alleged victims of "Yellow Rain" in Cambodia and Laos, claiming that chemical warfare had been employed there by the Soviet Union through its Vietnam proxy. This propaganda effort eventually collapsed following the U.S. Army's own inability to confirm this warfare and, more important, the finding that the alleged Yellow Rain was bee feces, not chemicals.[72] Nevertheless, this campaign received vastly more publicity than the real and large-scale chemical warfare carried out by the United States in Indochina. The *Wall Street Journal*, which had heavily featured Yellow Rain and expressed the greatest indignation at this display of Communist evil, never mentioned the U.S. employment of chemicals in that area during its Yellow Rain campaign. The *Journal*'s publisher, Peter Kann, eventually wrote that the Vietnam war record had clarified "who were the good guys and who were the bad guys," definitively shown by "the poisoned fields of Laos" (his euphemism for Yellow Rain).[73] In short, Kann places the massive real-world use of chemical warfare by the United States in Orwell's black hole and demonstrates Communist evil by putting forward the discredited claim of Yellow Rain that his paper has still not admitted to be fraudulent.

But the more important facts are these: that with the help of the media, the Soviet Union was effectively linked to the use of this ugly weapon, based on false evidence; while by treating the real and large-scale use of chemical weapons in Indochina by the United States in very low key up to this very day, the media have helped convey the impression that this country is a moral force on this issue and opposes use of this terrible weaponry. U.S. leaders have opposed the use of chemical warfare—by enemy states—but it is a different matter when they choose to use such weaponry themselves, or when a client state does the same.[74]

REWRITING VIETNAM WAR HISTORY

There have been thousands of books written on the Vietnam War,[75] and that war has been a brooding omnipresence in the U.S. culture since its end in 1975. For the dominant elite the war represents an era in which resistance to national policy and the associated rise of formerly apathetic sectors of society caused a "crisis of democracy."[76] Those unruly sectors and the dissidents are seen as having damaged the cultural and political framework and imposed unreasonable impediments to the use of force, the latter referred to as the "Vietnam syndrome." Within the unruly sectors and among the dissidents, of course, the "Sixties" are viewed as an era of liberation, of

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cultural and moral advance, and a temporary surge of democratization.

The propaganda model would lead us to expect mainstream media retrospectives on the war to reflect elite perspectives, portraying the 1960s as a dark age and the U.S. role in the war as, at worst, a case of good intentions gone awry. Focusing here on their treatment of the war over the past decade, we see that the media have mainly repeated and elaborated several apologetic themes already entrenched by the end of the war.

One theme has been that the U.S. intervention was justified by the fact of "communism on the march" (editorial, *Washington Post*, April 30, 2000). It was argued from the beginning that the Communist advance in Vietnam was part of a global communist conspiracy, a position maintained in the face of the split and hostility between China and the Soviet Union, tension between China and North Vietnam, and the absence of any evidence that North Vietnam was anybody's tool. In his book *In Retrospect*,[77] former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara admits that he and his colleagues made a serious error on this point. But neither he nor the other establishment figures who have used this argument have ever questioned the U.S. right to intervene by force to stop the "march of communism" in a country where the Communists had led a nationalist revolution, were recognized by all official and nonofficial authorities to command the support of a large majority of the population, and where their defeat would require open aggression, mass killing, and the virtual destruction of a distant society.

Closely related was the theme that we were protecting "South Vietnam" and the "South Vietnamese," who "let the Americans take over the fighting" (editorial, *Washington Post*, April 30, 1995). A subtheme of this line is that we "let down" the South Vietnamese. But as noted earlier, South Vietnam as a political entity was a U.S. concoction and the U.S. war managers recognized that most of the southern population supported the side the United States was fighting. This explains why the main thrust of U.S. violence was directed to the South, where napalm, B-52 bombing raids, chemical warfare, the institutionalized killing of civilians, and a scorched-earth policy were used to destroy the base of the popular movement.[78] We also noted earlier that this ferocious U.S. assault on the South—which contradicted the claim that we were protecting South Vietnamese—remains invisible in the U.S. media.

Another important theme in the mainstream media for many years has been the notion that the United States was the victim in the Vietnam war, the Vietnamese the cruel villains. This remarkable inversion of reality has been accomplished by two processes: first, by a massive suppression of evidence on the consequences of the war for the Vietnamese; and second, by demonizing the victims, based in large measure on "the national beatification of

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POWs [prisoners of war] and the myth of POWs as martyrs still being tortured by Vietnam."[79]

The only Vietnamese allowed modest attention in the media have been those mobilized to fight the U.S. war and who were "let down";[80] the vast numbers killed or damaged by the U.S. assault have been treated as "unworthy victims." The overwhelming preoccupation of officials, journalists, pundits, and intellectuals with media outreach has been on U.S. victims and the effects of the war on this country. Robert McNamara's widely publicized book, supposedly a *mea culpa* and moral tract, is notable for the fact that his notion of the war's "high costs," and the error and guilt he feels, extend only to U.S. lives and the effects of the war on "the political unity of our society."[81] He offers neither regrets, moral reflections, nor apologies for his country having invaded, mercilessly bombed, ravaged the land, and killed and wounded millions of innocent people in a small distant peasant society in pursuit of its own political ends.

In a remarkable cultural process, also, the victims have been turned into the villains. As we describe in chapter 5, in an attempt to prolong the war President Richard Nixon seized on the question of the adequacy of Vietnamese accounting for our military personnel who were captured (POWs) and those missing in action (MIAs). He succeeded in keeping the war going, and some 16,000 more U.S. soldiers and untold numbers of Vietnamese died in the further fighting in the purported interest of missing POWs. But although there has never been any credible evidence that a single POW was hidden by the North Vietnamese, this claim became an article of faith and cult that dominated U.S. policy toward Vietnam for many years.[82]

The myth also became the basis of popular culture accounts in movies such as *The Deer Hunter*, *Uncommon Valor*, *P.O.W.*: *The Escape*, and *Missing in Action*, in which Rambo-like heroes slaughter evil Vietnamese as they save our betrayed and tormented POWs. These movies turned history on its head. As Vietnam war historian H. Bruce Franklin points out, "America's vision of the war was being transformed. The actual photographs and TV footage of massacred villagers, napalmed children, Vietnamese prisoners being tortured and murdered, wounded GI's screaming in agony, and body bags being loaded by the dozen for shipment back home were being replaced by simulated images of American POWs in the savage hands of Asian communists."[83] The powerful cultural myth of abused POWs as the central feature of the Vietnam war not only allowed the war to be extended, it helped justify the U.S. failure to aid its victim in accord with end-of-war promises and it provided the basis for an eighteen-year economic war against the victim country. It also functioned as a potent agent of militarization and force weakening the "Vietnam syndrome."

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In his recent book *Vietnam and Other American Fantasies*, H. Bruce Franklin, who had previously exposed the fallacies and cult qualities of the POW-MIA myth, addressed this issue once again, as well as other fantasies (such as the claim that the antiwar activists often spit at returning veterans).[84] Franklin's book was reviewed in the *Los Angeles Times* but was otherwise only twice mentioned in passing in the U.S. mainstream press. On the other hand, a book by Michael Lind, *Vietnam; The Necessary War*,[85] which explains that the war was justifiable because communism was on the march, U.S. "credibility" was at stake, and the Vietnamese communists were cruel and ruthless—demonstrated in part by their refusal to surrender and consequent responsibility for those killed by U.S. bombs!—was treated differently. It received forty-four reviews and was mentioned twenty-seven other times in the mainstream media, and Lind was given Op-Ed space in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, among other opportunities.

In his review of Lind's book, Vietnam War historian Lloyd Gardner noted that any U.S. "credibility" problem that arose in connection with the Vietnam war was a creation of the war managers themselves and flowed from their own decisions; and Gardner also comments, after analyzing a series of Lind arguments in defense of the war, that "the evidence simply washes away his positions like a sand castle on the beach."[86] But Lind was saying what the elite wants said, and Franklin was not, so that mainstream media treatment followed accordingly.

LAOS

Laos's Plain of Jars was subjected to some of the heaviest bombings of civilian targets in history, especially after 1968, when Washington was compelled under domestic pressure to enter negotiations with North Vietnam and had to terminate its bombing there. It turned to Laos, although that small peasant country was a marginal factor in the wars; but Nixon and Kissinger could hardly leave U.S. bombers inactive. Overall, some 2 million tons of bombs were dropped on Laos. These raids wiped out 353 villages and killed thousands of civilians, and they continue to kill now, as the Plain was saturated with hundreds of millions of "bombies"—tiny antipersonnel weapons specifically designed to kill and maim. With their 20-to-30 percent failure-to-explode rate, they remained as potential killers, and their casualty rate is still high, estimates running from hundreds to 20,000 or more per year, half of them deaths and half of the victims children.[87]

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There have been efforts to deal with this humanitarian catastrophe. The British-based Mines Advisory Group (MAG) has been trying to remove the lethal objects, but the British press reports that the United States is

"conspicuously missing from the handful of western organizations that have followed MAG," though it has finally agreed to train some Laotian civilians.[88] The British press also reports, with some annoyance, that the United States has refused to provide MAG specialists with "render harmless procedures," still treated as a state secret for weapons three decades old.[89] The U.S. mainstream media have treated in very low key the continuing human toll suffered in Laos and have maintained almost complete silence concerning the U.S. non-cooperativeness in attempts to alleviate a crisis dating back to the "secret war" against Laos, which again was "secret" only by tacit propaganda service of the mainstream media (see chapter 6).

CAMBODIA

Important changes have occurred in Cambodia since 1988, including Vietnam's withdrawal from that country, elections held under UN auspices, and the death of Pol Pot. We noted in chapter 7 that, after the Vietnamese had ousted Pol Pot in December 1978, although the United States and its allies had denounced Pol Pot as "another Hitler" committing "genocide," they quickly became his supporter, allowing him to retain Cambodia's U.N. seat and otherwise aiding and protecting him in his Thailand refuge. Vietnam was severely punished—by harsh sanctions and by U.S. support for a Chinese invasion to teach Vietnam a lesson—for having terminated Pol Pot's atrocities! President Carter's National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski stated in 1979 that "I encouraged the Chinese to support Pol Pot. I encouraged the Thai to help D.K. [Democratic Kampuchea, Pol Pot's forces]. Pol Pot was an abomination. We could never support him but China could."[90] In the late 1980s and early 1990s, as the Vietnamese sought to end their isolation by exiting from Cambodia, but insisted as a condition for withdrawal that Pol Pot and his Khmer Rouge be excluded from returning to power, the United States objected, and insisted, with eventual success, that the Khmer Rouge be included as a contestant party in the post-occupation settlement.[91]

What dominated U.S. policy and led to its support of Pol Pot was the classic rule that the enemy of my enemy (Vietnam) is my friend, and perhaps also the new tilt toward China, also hostile toward Vietnam. The support of Pol Pot was awkward, given the prior denunciations of his policies, but the mainstream media handled it with aplomb, and the U.S. public was almost surely completely unaware that the United States had become his ally and supporter. (The explicit statement of support by Brzezinski quoted above was never mentioned in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, or *Newsweek*; it was quoted once in both the *Los Angeles Times* and *Time*.)

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However, in the late 1990s, after Vietnam had left Cambodia and U.S. officials' anti-Vietnam passions had subsided, and Pol Pot was no longer a useful instrument of anti-Vietnam policy, U.S. officials and pundits rediscovered Pol Pot's and the Khmer Rouge's villainy and candidacy for war crimes trials. The media handled the previous "tilt" toward Pol Pot mainly by evasion, essentially blacking out the years 1979–95, or vaguely intimating that the U.S. had supported him for reasons of "*realpolitik*," but avoiding both details on the nature and magnitude of support as well as any reflections on the morality of backing "another Hitler." The *New York Times*'s summary of "Pol Pot's Rise and Fall" (April 17, 1998) lists for "1979–1990: Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge are given refuge at Thai border where they fight back against the Vietnamese." "Given refuge" is misleading: they were given economic and military aid and political support by the United States and its allies. The *Times*'s main reporter on Cambodia in early 1998, Seth Mydans, repeatedly blacked out mention of U.S. support, referring to "the decade-long civil war that followed" Pol Pot's ouster (April 13), and a nineteen-year "guerilla insurgency in the jungles of western and northern Cambodia" (April 17).

The *Boston Globe*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *Los Angeles Times*, editorializing on the death of Pol Pot on April 17, 1998, were uniformly indignant over his crimes and regretful at his escape from justice, but all avoided mentioning the long U.S. support of the criminal—as well as the U.S. contribution to the first phase of a "Decade of Genocide."[92] The *Washington Post* blacked out the inconvenient fifteen-year period of support of Pol Pot with this summary: "After the nightmare of Khmer Rouge rule and genocide, the United States and its allies pumped millions of dollars into Cambodia to help rebuild and to hold elections."[93]

It is enlightening to compare the media's treatment of Pol Pot and Indonesian leader Suharto, who was also in the news in 1998, as Indonesia suffered a financial crisis that—along with popular resistance to the dictatorship—eventually led to his ouster. Pol Pot was described in the editorials and news columns of April 1998 as "crazed," a "killer," "war criminal," "mass murderer," "blood-soaked," and as having engineered a "reign of terror" and "genocide." But in 1998 and 1999, and in earlier years as well, while Suharto was occasionally referred to as a "dictator" and running an "authoritarian" regime, he was never a "killer" or "mass murderer" or one responsible for "genocide." The terminological double standard is maintained reliably throughout the mainstream media.[94]

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Less obvious but equally interesting is the difference in willingness to identify the responsible parties for the killings of Pol Pot and Suharto. In the case of Pol Pot, there is no uncertainty or complexity: editorials and

news articles uniformly make him and the Khmer Rouge leadership clearly and unambiguously responsible for all deaths in Cambodia during the period 1975–78. He was the "man who slaughtered two million" (*USA Today*), "the executioner" (*Boston Globe*) who "presided over the deaths" of his victims (*Washington Post*), "the man who drove Cambodia to ruin" (*New York Times*).

But in Suharto's case, we move to an ambiguous responsibility, which means none at all: in the *New York Times*, for example, "a 1965 coup led to the massacres of hundreds of thousands of supposed communists" (editorial, Aug. 23, 1996), where we have no agent doing the killing; or "a wave of violence that took up to 500,000 lives and led Suharto to seize power from Sukarno in a military coup" (Seth Mydans, Aug. 7, 1996), where the massacre not only has no agent, but is falsely situated before the takeover of power by Suharto. In a later piece, Mydans states that "more than 500,000 Indonesians are estimated to have died in a purge of leftists in 1965, the year Mr. Suharto came to power" (April 8, 1997). Note the passive voice, never used in connection with Pol Pot, the word "purge" instead of "slaughter" or "massacre," and the continued failure to identify the agent.

In the case of East Timor, also, the *Times* is uncertain about the source of the killing: "This is one of the world's sadder places, where 100,000 to 200,000 people died from 1974 in a brutal civil war and the consequent invasion through combat, execution, disease and starvation . . ." (Steven Erlanger, Oct. 21, 1990). In addition to the lack of a clear agent, this sentence seriously misrepresents the facts—the civil war was short and left small numbers dead; and the invasion was not "consequent" to a brutal civil war, except in Indonesian propaganda.

Another important difference in the treatment of the "worthy" victims of Pol Pot and the "unworthy" victims of Suharto is in the willingness to explain away the killings. With Pol Pot, as we describe in chapter 7, the background of the first phase of the genocide was completely blacked out in the mainstream account—there is no qualification to Pol Pot's responsibility as a killer because his forces had undergone terrible damage and sought vengeance for the crimes they had suffered; nor are any deaths in Pol Pot's years of rule to be explained by the starvation and disease already pervasive in April 1975. No, the only mentionable background is his Paris training and Communist fanaticism.

But with Suharto we encounter a whole new world of contextualized apologetics. For many years the main protective formula was that the 1965–66 killings were "a result of a failed coup," which "touched off a wave of violence," or followed an "onslaught from the left."[95] This formula, invoked repeatedly, suggests that the mass killings were provoked and thus maybe

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justified by a prior "onslaught." The writers never explain why a failed coup could possibly justify a large-scale slaughter, but the hint is left hanging. In more recent years, usually in connection with the explanation and rationalization of the continuation of a dictatorship, the media regularly juxtaposed political repression with "stability" and "growth": "the signs of his success are everywhere," although Suharto has brought these gains "by maintaining a tight grip on power and suppressing public criticism and political opposition."[96] These statements, from the *New York Times*, offer a kind of context that the paper never gives to Castro, let alone a Pol Pot, and it shows an apologetic that runs deep.

This apologetic extends to the Suharto invasion and occupation of East Timor. For years. *New York Times* reporters have claimed that Indonesia invaded in the midst of a civil war,[97] when in fact that civil war was over well before the invasion. The paper's news coverage of East Timor actually fell to zero as the Indonesian attacks and killings in East Timor reached a deadly peak in 1977–78, a slaughter that elsewhere would be called "genocidal." And although Indonesia occupied East Timor in violation of standing U.N. rulings till its induced exit in 1999, the paper's reporters repeatedly referred to East Timor as a "disputed province" and East Timorese resistance as "separatist," thereby internalizing and explicitly legitimizing the aggression and occupation.[98]

The bias and gentle treatment of Suharto and the Indonesian government in the media is once again correlated with U.S. policy support that dates back to the military coup and slaughters of 1965. These were greeted with enthusiasm by U.S. officials—then Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara referred to the events as one of the "dividends" of U.S. support for the Indonesian military—and the "boiling bloodbath" (*Time*) and "staggering mass slaughter" (*New York Times*) were also seen in the media as a "gleam of light" (James Reston in the *New York Times*).[99] U.S. military and economic aid and diplomatic protection continued throughout the years of the Suharto dictatorship, and the media's finding him a good genocidist followed accordingly.

New York Times reporter David Sanger differentiated Suharto and post-1990 Saddam Hussein—before 1990 he was a U.S. ally—saying "Mr. Suharto is not hoarding anthrax or threatening to invade Australia."[100] That is, Suharto's invasion, mass killing, and long illegal occupation of East Timor is given zero weight, and his slaughter of somewhere between 500,000 and 2 million people within Indonesia some years back is also not mentioned. This tells us all we need to know about how good and bad genocidists fare in the Western propaganda system.

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FURTHER APPLICATIONS

In his book *Golden Rule*, political scientist Thomas Ferguson argues that where the major investors in political parties and elections agree on an issue, the parties will not compete on that issue, no matter how strongly the public might want an alternative. He contends that for ordinary voters to influence electoral choices they would have to have "strong channels that directly facilitate mass deliberation and expression."[101] These would include unions and other intermediate organizations that might, through their collective power, cause the interests of ordinary voters to be given greater weight in the political system.

The propaganda model, and the institutional arrangements that it reflects, suggests that the same forces that preclude competition among the parties on issues on which the major investors agree, will also dominate media choices and rule out "mass deliberation and expression" on those issues. For example, polls regularly indicate that, except in periods of war and intense war propaganda, the public wants a smaller defense budget and favors a spending shift from defense to education and other civil functions.[102] But because the major investors agree that a large defense budget is desirable, the two dominant parties compete only on whether the one or the other is stinting on military expenditures, with both promising to enlarge it (as both George W. Bush and Al Gore did in the presidential election campaign of 2000). And the mainstream media do the same, limiting debate to the terms defined by the two parties and excluding deliberation and expression of the position that large cuts are desirable. The alternative presidential candidate, Ralph Nader, called for such cuts, but the media denied him a voice on the issues, some of them explicitly defending his exclusion from the presidential debates on the grounds that the options afforded by the two parties sufficed.[103]

The U.S. corporate community has favored an immense defense budget—currently more than five times the size of that of a steadily weakening Russia, the second biggest spender—because of the great benefits its members derive from military spending. These include weapons and other contracting business, direct and indirect subsidies in research,[104] and the role played by military power in supporting the global economic expansion in which many U.S. transnational corporations are active participants and beneficiaries. Business also benefits from the market-opening actions of trade agreements and from the supportive operations of the WTO, the World Bank, and the IMF. But these trade agreements and the activities of the international financial institutions have generated controversy and political struggle, because while their benefits to business are clear, their costs are borne heavily by workers forced to compete in a global job market.

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Furthermore, globalization and trade agreements strengthen the political as well as the economic power of the corporate community, in part because they shift decision-making authority from democratic polities to bankers and technocrats who more reliably serve the transnational corporate interest. Here also, as in the case of defense-versus civilian-oriented budgets, polls show a sharp dichotomy between corporate and public preferences, with the latter generally hostile to the agreements and institutional arrangements favored by business.[105]

The propaganda model fits well the media's treatment of this range of issues. Consider, for example, their coverage of the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the subsequent Mexican financial crisis and meltdown of 1994–95. Polls taken before its enactment consistently showed substantial majorities opposed to NAFTA—and later to the bailout of investors in Mexican securities—but the elite in favor. Media editorials, news coverage, and selection of "experts" in opinion columns were heavily skewed toward the elite preference; their judgment was that the benefits of NAFTA were obvious, were agreed to by all qualified authorities, and that only demagogues and "special interests" were opposed.[106] The "special interests" who might be the "losers" included women, minorities, and a majority of the work-force.[107] The media dealt with the awkward fact that polls showed steady majority opposition to the agreement mainly by ignoring it, but occasionally they suggested that the public was uninformed and didn't recognize its own true interests.[108] The effort of labor to influence the outcome of the NAFTA debates was sharply attacked in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, with no comparable criticism of corporate or governmental (U.S. and Mexican) lobbying and propaganda. And while labor was attacked for its alleged position on these issues, the press refused to allow the actual position to be expressed.[109]

In December 1994, only eleven months after NAFTA went into effect, Mexico suffered a major financial crisis, including a massive flight of capital, a devaluation of the currency, and a subsequent bailout by the IMF that required Mexico to carry out painful deflationary measures. Despite the fact that the meltdown occurred within a year of the introduction of NAFTA, which the media had portrayed as ushering in a prospective golden age of economic advance, they were unanimous that NAFTA was not to blame. And in virtual lock-step they supported the Mexican (investor) bailout, despite poll reports of general public opposition in the United States. Experts and media pundits and editorialists repeatedly explained that one great merit of NAFTA was that it had "locked Mexico in" so that it couldn't alter its overall policy direction or resort to controls to protect itself from severe deflation and unemployment. They were oblivious to

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the profoundly undemocratic nature of this lock-in, made more questionable by the fact that it had been negotiated by a Mexican government that ruled as a result of electoral fraud.[110]

More recently, when the growing global opposition to the policies of the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank led to mass protests at the WTO conference in Seattle in November and December 1999, and then at the annual meeting of the IMF and the World Bank in Washington, D.C., in April 2000, media coverage of these events was derisive and hostile to the protesters and almost uniformly failed to deal with the substantive issues that drove the protests. The media portrayed the Seattle protesters as "all-purpose agitators" (*U.S. News & World Report*), "terminally aggrieved" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), simply "against world trade" (ABC News), and making "much ado about nothing" (CNN), but the bases of the protesters' grievances were almost entirely unexplored.[111] Similarly, in the case of the Washington, D.C., protests, the media repeatedly reported on activists' attire, looks, body odors, fadism, and claimed a lack of "anything that can coherently be called a cause" (Michael Kelly, journalist, *Washington Post*), and they continued their refusal to address issues.[112] There were many informed protesters with coherent agendas at Seattle and Washington—including reputable economists, social theorists, and veteran organizers from around the world[113]—but the media did not seek them out, preferring to stereotype antiglobalization activists as ignorant troublemakers. On op-ed pages, there was a major imbalance hostile to the protesters. TV bias was at least as great, and often misleading on the facts. In his November 29,1999, backgrounder on the WTO, Dan Rather explained that the organization had ruled on many environmental issues, implying that those rulings were protective of the environment when in fact they generally privileged trade rights over environmental needs.

Another notable feature of media reporting on both the Seattle and Washington, D.C., protests, and a throwback to their biased treatment of the protests of the Vietnam War era (1965–75),[114] was their exaggeration of protester violence, their downplaying of police provocations and violence, and their complaisance at illegal police tactics designed to limit all protestor actions, peaceable or otherwise.[115] Although the Seattle police resorted to force and used chemical agents against many nonviolent protesters well before a handful of individuals began breaking windows, both then and later the media reversed this chronology, stating that the police violence was a response to protester violence. In fact, the vandals were largely ignored by the police, while peaceful protesters were targeted for beatings, tear gas, torture with pepper spray, and arrest.[116] One *New York Times* article went so far as to claim that the Seattle protesters had thrown excrement, rocks, and Molotov

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cocktails at delegates and police officers; the *Times* later issued a correction acknowledging that these claims were false.[117] Dan Rather, who had falsely alleged that the protesters had "brought on today's crackdown" at Seattle, later suggested that the Washington protesters were possibly "hoping for a replay of last year's violence in Seattle," setting this off against "those charged with keeping the peace" who "have other ideas."[118]

In their eighty-seven-page report, *Out of Control: Seattle's Flawed Response to Protests Against the World Trade Organization*, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) stated that "demonstrators [in Seattle] were overwhelmingly peaceful. Not so the police." The response of the Seattle police to the protests was characterized by "draconian" violations of civil liberties, including widespread use of "chemical weapons, rubber bullets and clubs against peaceful protesters and bystanders alike." But NBC, ABC, CBS, CNN, and the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* all ignored the release of the ACLU's findings, which ran counter to their own uniformly pro-police and anti-protester line.

The media's reversal of chronology and inflation of the threat of activist violence, and their low-keyed treatment of numerous illegal police actions designed to instill fear in those wanting to protest peaceably,[119] provided the enabling ground for both police violence and serious restrictions on free speech. These increased in scope and sophistication between Seattle and Washington, and were then applied to squelch protest at the Republican and Democratic conventions in Philadelphia and Los Angeles in July and August 2000.[120] The corporate media's hostility to the goals of the protests, closely aligned with that of the rest of the corporate establishment, caused their devotion to the First Amendment to flag in a way it never has when their own rights and privileges have been at stake.

As is suggested by the media's treatment of NAFTA and of labor's right to participate in its debates, as well as the media coverage of Watergate, COINTELPRO, and major events in the earlier history of labor-management conflict (the Haymarket affair, the Homestead strike, the post-World War I "red scare"),[121] the propaganda model applies to domestic as well as foreign policy issues. Labor has been under renewed siege in the United States for the past several decades, its condition adversely affected by the deflationary policies of the early 1980s, corporate downsizing, globalization, a vigorous business campaign to defeat unions, and government support of, or indifference to, the damage being inflicted on unions and workers. There was a major drop in union membership from the beginning of the Reagan era, with union density falling from 25 percent in 1980 to 14.5 percent in 1996 (and only 10.2 percent in the private sector). This reflected weakened labor bargaining power and was accompanied by significant concessions in

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