

COLUMN LEFT

The Myth of the Liberal Media

By Alon Barlevy, PhD, President,
Hubert Humphrey Democratic Club

Conservatives have long assailed the mainstream media for having a liberal bias. The liberals are also unhappy with the mainstream media, but not because they think it is too conservative (if that was the case, then the media would have been doing a great balancing job). The liberal's dissatisfaction with the mainstream media comes from the media's choice of what stories it covers, and the stories it hypes.

Most mainstream media outlets do

not cover the important stories of the day, and have turned their news divisions into "Court TV." We have seen lots of coverage of the Michael Jackson, Martha Stewart and Robert Blake trials. We have also seen lots of hype for cases of personal tragedies that serve no great public interest such as a runaway bride in Georgia, a missing teenager in Aruba and the cases of women in Modesto and Utah who were murdered by their husbands.

Unfortunately, crime, sometimes violent, exists everywhere. The media, under pressure from corporate owners, chooses to sensationalize certain crimes while neglecting other crimes of equal relevance (or irrelevance). In making this point, two examples come to mind: the cases of Elizabeth Smart and Alexis Patterson, and the cases of Chandra Levy and Joyce Chiang.

Both Elizabeth Smart and Alexis Patterson were abducted during the spring of 2002. While the media hyped the Smart case, there was barely a word about the Patterson case. Perhaps because Patterson is from a poor black family, while Smart is from a rich white family? In the other example, both Chandra Levy and Joyce Chiang were interns in Washington, D.C. in their 20s, both were murdered, and both were linked to powerful politicians. Chiang was the sister of California Board of Equalization member John Chiang, who has a constituency more than 10 times larger than Gary Condit's. Did the lack of salacious details in Joyce Chiang's case cause the media to completely ignore it?

The media's lack of attention to important news stories was illustrated by Tim Russert on June 5 as he was interviewing Ken Mehlman, chair of the Republican Party. During the inter-

view, Russert referred to the "now famous Downing Street memo" (DSM). The irony is that until Russert asked that question, the DSM was never mentioned by NBC, nor any other broadcast channel! The story about the DSM broke in England on May 1, but for over a month the media did not think it was worthy of any coverage. The DSM is made up of the minutes from a meeting held at 10 Downing Street (the British equivalent of the White House) during the summer of 2002 (nine months before the war in Iraq) where the discussion centered on how to fix the evi-

dence to justify an invasion of Iraq. This is serious! If the allegations are true, then President Bush has committed impeachable offenses. So why has the media chosen to ignore it?

Where can we find the important news of the day? Thankfully, we live in an age where information can easily be accessed on the internet, and a plethora of web logs (blogs) called the "blogosphere" exists. There are two "kinda neutral" blogs that are highly recommended: politicalwire.com, and politics1.com. The latter has links to the major blogs on both sides of the blogosphere.

Text of Article

The Myth of the Liberal Media

Alon Barlevy, PhD.

President, Hubert Humphrey Democratic Club

Conservatives have long assailed the mainstream media for having a liberal bias. The liberals are also unhappy with the mainstream media, but not because they think it is too conservative (if that was the case, then the media would have been doing a great balancing job). The liberal's dissatisfaction with the mainstream media comes from the media's choice of what stories it covers, and the stories it hypes.

Most mainstream media outlets do not cover the important stories of the day, and have turned their news divisions into "Court TV". We have seen lots of coverage of the Michael Jackson, Martha Stewart, and Robert Blake trials. We have also seen lots of hype for cases of personal tragedies that serve no great public interest such as a runaway bride in Georgia, a missing teenager in Aruba, and the cases of women in Modesto and Utah who were murdered by their husbands.

Unfortunately crime, sometimes violent, exists everywhere. The media, under pressure from their corporate owners, choose to sensationalize certain crimes while neglecting other crimes of equal relevance (or irrelevance). In making this point, two examples come to mind: the cases of Elizabeth Smart and Alexis Patterson, and the cases of Chandra Levy and Joyce Chiang.

Both Elizabeth Smart and Alexis Patterson were abducted during the spring of 2002. While the media hyped the Smart case, there was barely a word about the Patterson case. Perhaps because Patterson is from a poor black family, while Smart is from a rich white family? In the other example, Both Chandra Levy and Joyce Chiang were interns in DC in their 20's, both were murdered, and both were linked to powerful politicians . Chiang was the sister of California Board of Equalization member John Chiang, who has a constituency more than 10 times larger than Gary Condit's. Did the lack of salacious details in Joyce Chiang's case cause the media to completely ignore it?

The media's lack of attention to important news stories was illustrated by Tim Russert on June 5 as he was interviewing Ken Mehlman, chair of the Republican Party. During the interview, Russert referred to the "now famous Downing Street memo" (DSM). The irony is that until Russert asked that question, the DSM was never mentioned by NBC, nor any other broadcast channel!! The story about the DSM broke in England on May 1, but for over a month the media did not think it was worthy of any coverage. The DSM is made up of minutes from a meeting held at 10 Downing Street (the British equivalent of the White House) during the summer of 2002 (9 months before the war in Iraq) where the discussion centered on how to fix the evidence to justify an invasion of Iraq. This is serious!! If the allegations are true, then Bush has committed impeachable offenses. So why has the media chosen to ignore it?

Where can we find the important news of the day? Thankfully, we live in an age where information can easily be accessed on the internet, and a plethora of web logs (blogs) called the "blogosphere" exists. There are two "kinda neutral" blogs that are highly recommended: politicalwire.com, and politics1.com. The latter has links to the major blogs on both sides of the blogosphere.