

Media

Mind Control and the American media

By Mary Shaw

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April 8, 2005—The U.S. mainstream media are frequently accused by the right of being too liberal. But consider the following.

For most of March, the U.S. population was fixated on the Terri Schiavo right-to-die case. Discussions and arguments about the Schiavo case took place daily around water coolers, bars, and dinner tables everywhere. It was likely the most talked about topic of the day.

Then Pope John Paul II died, and all attention quickly moved to the late pope, with almost 24/7 coverage of activities at the Vatican and interviews with mourners from around the world. Terri Schiavo was no longer of interest.

Meanwhile, the media has had very little to say about Iraq, where several more U.S. soldiers have been killed, the Abu Ghraib prison was attacked by insurgents, and a Belgian soldier died from "friendly fire" by U.S. troops.

While the Schiavo case and the papal passing were certainly interesting and poignant stories, did they really merit 23 hours of coverage per day on the cable news channels, while other events that more closely impact the lives of the average American citizen went unreported?

The Schiavo case had sex, illness, and death going for it. The papal death features so much pageantry. The entertainment value for these stories is far greater than that for, say, the proposed Bankruptcy Bill and the threats to Social Security. And, conveniently, they distract us from the ethics scandals plaguing House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, the lawsuit against Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld over U.S. torture policies, the deaths of our soldiers in Iraq, and other news inconvenient to the right-wing agenda.

The media are in business to make money. Sensational stories like the Schiavo case and the death of the pope can easily be spun into headlines that sell papers. But the media have a moral responsibility to give us all the news of the day, even if the truth hurts.

The media must remember that their purpose is to inform the public, not to protect or placate the powers that be. They must regain the brave commitment to the truth that has been the hallmark of great journalism through the centuries. And they must be honest without fear of the consequences.

At the same time, the American people must open their eyes, open their minds, and recognize that there is more to life than entertainment. They must snap out of their complacency and their blissful ignorance of what's really going on in the world, and hold the media accountable.

A true democracy requires an informed electorate. With the 2006 mid-term elections just around the corner, there is no time to waste.

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