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Media

Cindy Sheehan, mainstream media and Bush propaganda

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August 28, 2005—George W. Bush once joked before a Gridiron crowd, “you can fool some of the people all of the time, and those are the ones I have to concentrate on.” That offhand joke accurately describes how Bush gains support for his Iraq policy.

Mainstream media commentators sometimes help Bush fool the public. They often parrot Bush’s talking points as if they were “news” and let his outright lies go unquestioned. When it comes to the Cindy Sheehan story, some mainstream reporters still allow Bush to frame the debate in deceptive ways.

When media pundits claim the lies that got us into the Iraq war no longer matter, and that all that currently counts is what we do from here on in Iraq, they miss an important point. Bush keeps peddling the exact same falsehoods as if they’d never been disproved, and he continues to use them in ways that do deadly harm.

It’s now common knowledge among well-informed Americans Bush misled the country about WMD, the imaginary link between Iraq and 9/11, and his shifting rationales for the Iraq invasion. The anti-reality Bush administration still tries to fool the public (or to concentrate their propaganda on the people who can be fooled all of the time) by repeatedly insinuating there really is a link between Iraq and 9/11, and by continuing to try to sell other such fairy tales.

The mainstream media help Bush by failing to forcefully challenge him each and every time he tries to peddle the same old lies. They assist in fooling the easily fooled folks by failing to pose tough questions.

Bush gets away with repeating the tired line: “We have to fight terrorists in Iraq so we don’t have to fight them here at home.” The media should question this Mother of All Non Sequiturs every time it comes up. By what Mad Hatter “logic” could our fighting a few terrorists in Iraq prevent a few others from doing dirty work here? Does Bush expect us to believe such people would be so distracted by Iraq they couldn’t send a few bad guys our way while simultaneously fighting there?

When Bush claims U.S. presence in Iraq somehow makes Americans freer, why won’t reporters ask: “Exactly how has invading Iraq—or how could it even potentially—increase our freedom here? Since Iraq had nothing to do with 9/11, was no more a ‘terrorist haven’ than many other countries we did not invade, and had no known intention of attacking us, by what stretch of the imagination are Americans freer or safer now that we’ve invaded?”

Why won’t mainstream media make every effort to correct the public’s misperceptions about the war? When Bush supporters trump up fake grassroots (AstroTurf) protests, why do mainstream media commentators play along with the pretense? The anti-Cindy Sheehan group called “You Don’t Speak for Me, Cindy,” is being promoted by the Republican PR firm, Russo March & Rogers, backed group, Move America Forward (MAF). Right-wing talk show host, Melanie Morgan, is an MAF vice chair. (For more on this, see Diane Farsetta’s [“Moving America One Step Forward and Two Steps Back.”](#))

Morgan has appeared on TV news programs, including Chris Mathews' Hardball on MSNBC, and she's managed to get away with selling her anti-Sheehan group as one that originated spontaneously from the bottom up, from ordinary people, with no push from a top-down PR firm.

The problem is not that media commentators never help dispel the Bush deceptions. They just don't do it consistently or vigorously enough to constitute their taking a firm stand behind the facts. Their hit and miss, piecemeal truth-telling conveys to the people among us who are easy to fool the false notion that Bush's anti-reality propaganda about Iraq is simply another legitimate side of the debate.

When reporters sometimes state the truth—for example that there's no link between Iraq and 9/11—and at other times let Bush or his supporters slip in the implication there is a legitimate link, it appears the media can't make up its mind between fiction and reality. If a commentator confirms what all the factual evidence shows about Iraq in one breath, but in the next breath gives equal credence to the idea the U.S. is in Iraq to protect American freedom, that commentator is no more reality-based than is the Bush administration.

No wonder Bush can fool some of the people all of the time. The mainstream media won't firmly and consistently set the record straight.

In his Aug. 25 article, "[Will News Media Help Bush Exploit the 9/11 Anniversary Again](#)," journalist Norman Solomon writes that the upcoming fourth anniversary of 9/11 will give the Bush administration many media opportunities to falsely connect the rationale for the Iraq war with 9/11.

Solomon points out that often "the propaganda tag-team of government and media has conveyed implicit lies as actual facts." He notes the media let Bush get away with saying on Sept. 11, 2003, "what our enemies have begun, we will finish." While one network reporter explained that Bush "had the Iraqi leader in mind," no one bothered to remind the public that equating the "enemies" who have allegedly "begun" the conflict (purportedly al Qaeda) with a "finish" in Iraq amounts to an outright lie.

As Solomon says, "with routine assistance from news coverage, the Bush administration touts the U.S. war effort in Iraq as a legitimate response to what happened on Sept. 11, 2001. With the White House now desperate to shore up its sinking political fortunes, a vast amount of such propaganda is on the horizon."

Lincoln said, "You can fool all of the people some of the time, and you can fool some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all of the people all of the time." He probably had no idea a deceitful future president would fool roughly 40 percent of the people into supporting an illegal war of aggression based entirely on lies.

Is it possible Chris Mathews, Wolf Blitzer and all the other network reporters are unaware that their allowing Bush to mislead the nation into an unjust war makes them largely responsible for every soldier killed in that war? Could it be those in mainstream media simply don't know the consequences of their failure to "un-fool" the many Americans Bush has concentrated on fooling?

When Bush-supporting mothers say they happily send their sons to die in Iraq "for our freedom," don't reporters feel remotely obliged to point out in some tactful manner that factual reality opposes the notion that the Iraq war relates to securing America's freedom? Thanks to the Downing Street Memos and other solid sources, most facts are now in regarding Iraq, yet many in mainstream media behave as if these facts are still up for debate.

Cindy Sheehan's critics have claimed her son, Casey, and other soldiers volunteered to fight of their own free will and that Cindy and other soldiers' families, therefore, have no room to complain. Media commentators often fail to mention that many American soldiers volunteered based on Bush's misleading rhetoric, and I've never heard anyone in mainstream media admit they helped further the Bush lies.

With the Republican PR firm's "You Don't Speak for Me, Cindy" group on the march, and with the 9/11 anniversary's propaganda blitz on the horizon, it would be good to have a few people of conscience in mainstream media cut through all the impending bull. If they did, maybe Bush would fool fewer of the people and fool them less of the time, and maybe some lives would be saved in the process.

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