

DECEMBER 26

Announcing the PU-litzer Prizes for 2006

Competition has been fierce for the fifteenth annual P.U.-litzer Prizes. Many can plausibly lay claim to stinky media performances, but only a few can win a P.U.-litzer. As the judges for this un-coveted award, Jeff Cohen and I have deliberated with due care. (Jeff is the founder of the media watch group FAIR and author of the superb new book "Cable News Confidential: My Misadventures in Corporate Media.")

And now, the winners of the P.U.-litzer Prizes for 2006:

*** "FACT-FREE TRADE" AWARD – New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman**

In a press corps prone to cheer on corporate-drafted trade agreements as the key to peace and plenty in the world, no cheerleader is more fervent than Tom Friedman. During a CNBC interview with Tim Russert in July, Friedman confessed: "I was speaking out in Minnesota – my hometown, in fact – and a guy stood up in the audience, said, 'Mr. Friedman, is there any free trade agreement you'd oppose?' I said, 'No, absolutely not.' I said, 'You know what, sir? I wrote a column supporting the CAFTA, the Caribbean Free Trade initiative. I didn't even know what was in it. I just knew two words: free trade.'" (Friedman may not have read even the pact's title; CAFTA actually stands for the Central America Free Trade Agreement.)

*** LOCK UP THE FIRST AMENDMENT PRIZE -- CNN's William Bennett**

Soon after being hired as a CNN pundit, Bennett went on his radio talk show and offered his views on freedom of the press – and on reporters who broke stories about warrantless wiretapping and secret CIA detention sites "against the wishes of the president, against the request of the president and others." Bennett fumed: "Are they embarrassed, are they arrested? No, they win Pulitzer Prizes. I don't think what they did was worthy of an award – I think what they did was worthy of jail, and I think this investigation needs to go forward."

MEDIABEAT 2006 | NORMAN SOLOMON

*** BROKE-BRAIN MOUTHING AWARD – MSNBC's Chris Matthews**

As the movie "Brokeback Mountain" (about a relationship between two cowboys) was gaining attention and audience in January, Chris Matthews appeared on the Imus show to hail "the wonderful Michael Savage" and the talk-show host's nickname for the movie: "Bareback Mounting." Matthews and Savage had been MSNBC colleagues until "the wonderful" Savage was fired – after referring to an apparently gay caller as a "sodomite" and telling him to "get AIDS and die." Now that's hardball.

*** CASUAL ABOUT CASUALTIES AWARD -- Fox mogul Rupert Murdoch**

Echoing an Iraq war talking-point heard regularly on Fox News, owner Murdoch said on the eve of the November election: "The death toll, certainly of Americans there, by the terms of any previous war are quite minute." As FAIR noted, U.S. deaths in Iraq exceed those in the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War and the Spanish-American War, not to mention the combined U.S. deaths of all this country's other military actions since Vietnam – including Lebanon, Grenada, Panama, the first Gulf War, Somalia, Haiti, Kosovo and Afghanistan.

*** FRONT-PAGE PUNDIT AWARD – Reporter Michael Gordon and The New York Times**

With many voters telling pollsters that they want U.S. troops to leave Iraq, the Times front-paged a post-election analysis by Michael Gordon – headlined "Get Out of Iraq Now? Not So Fast, Experts Say" – quoting three hand-picked "experts" who decried the possibility of troop withdrawal. Gordon didn't tell readers that one of his "experts," former CIA analyst Ken Pollack, had relentlessly promoted an Iraq invasion based on wildly false claims about an Iraqi threat. Gordon took off his reporter's hat that night on CNN to become an unabashed advocate for his view that withdrawing U.S. troops from Iraq would lead to "civil war" (as though civil war weren't already underway).

*** "PROVE YOU'RE NOT A TRAITOR" PRIZE – CNN's Glenn Beck**

In November, Beck – an Islamophobic host on CNN Headline News – launched into his interview with Congressman-elect Keith Ellison, a Muslim American, this way: "I have been nervous about this interview with you, because what I feel like saying is, 'Sir, prove to me that you are not working with our enemies.'" Beck then added: "And I know you're not. I'm not accusing you of being an enemy, but that's the way I feel, and I think a lot of Americans will feel that way." Is it possible that primetime bigots like CNN's Beck have something to do with the prejudices "that a lot of Americans feel"?

* **GROUNDHOG DAY AWARD – Ted Koppel**

One role of journalism should be to help the public learn from past government policy disasters in hopes of preventing future ones. But in a New York Times column on Oct. 2, former ABC News star Koppel wrote that Washington should tell Iran it is free to develop an atomic bomb – with a Mafia-like warning: "If a dirty bomb explodes in Milwaukee, or some other nuclear device detonates in Baltimore or Wichita, if Israel or Egypt or Saudi Arabia should fall victim to a nuclear 'accident,' Iran should understand that the United States government will not search around for the perpetrator. The return address will be predetermined, and it will be somewhere in Iran." In other words, no matter what the evidence, Koppel urged our government to attack a predetermined foe, Iran. Didn't that happen in 2003 with Iraq?

So, there they are, the P.U.-litzer Prizes for 2006. Hold your nose and prepare yourself for 2007.

Norman Solomon's book "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death" is out in paperback.