

DECEMBER 22, 2003

Announcing the P.U.-litzer Prizes for 2003

The P.U.-litzer Prizes were established more than a decade ago to give recognition to the stinkiest media performances of the year. As usual, I have conferred with Jeff Cohen, founder of the media watch group FAIR, to sift through the large volume of entries. In view of the many deserving competitors, we regret that only a few can win a P.U.-litzer.

And now, the twelfth annual P.U.-litzer Prizes, for the foulest media performances of 2003:

MEDIA MOGUL OF THE YEAR — *Lowry Mays, CEO of Clear Channel*

While some broadcasters care about their programming, the CEO of America's biggest radio company (with more than 1,200 stations) admits he cares only about the ads. The Clear Channel boss told Fortune magazine in March: "If anyone said we were in the radio business, it wouldn't be someone from our company. We're not in the business of providing news and information. We're not in the business of providing well-researched music. We're simply in the business of selling our customers products."

LIBERATING IRAQ PRIZE — *Tom Brokaw*

Interviewing a military analyst as U.S. jet bombers headed to Baghdad on the first day of the Iraq war, NBC anchor Brokaw declared: "Admiral McGinn, one of the things that we don't want to do is to destroy the infrastructure of Iraq, because in a few days we're going to own that country."

"THE MORE YOU WATCH, THE LESS YOU KNOW" PRIZE — *Fox News Channel*

According to a University of Maryland study, most Americans who get their news from commercial TV harbored at least one of three "misperceptions" about the Iraq war: that weapons of mass destruction had been discovered in Iraq, that evidence closely linking Iraq to Al Qaeda had been found, or that world opinion approved of the U.S. invasion. Fox News viewers were the most confused about key facts, with 80 percent

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embracing at least one of those misperceptions. The study found a correlation between being misinformed and being supportive of the war.

"CLEAR IT WITH THE PENTAGON" AWARD — *CNN*

A month after the invasion of Iraq began, CNN executive Eason Jordan admitted on his network's "Reliable Sources" show (April 20) that CNN had allowed U.S. military officials to help screen its on-air analysts: "I went to the Pentagon myself several times before the war started and met with important people there and said, for instance — 'At CNN, here are the generals we're thinking of retaining to advise us on the air and off about the war' — and we got a big thumbs-up on all of them. That was important."

"CONSERVATIVE TIMES FOR THE 'LIBERAL' MEDIA" AWARD — *ABC News*

Over the years, ABC correspondent John Stossel became known for one-sided, often-inaccurate reporting on behalf of his pro-corporate, "greed is good" ideology. He boasted that his on-air job was to "explain the beauties of the free market," received lecture fees from corporate pressure groups, and even spoke on Capitol Hill against consumer-protection regulation. In May of this year, when Stossel was promoted to co-anchor of ABC's "20/20," a network insider told TV Guide: "These are conservative times. ... The network wants somebody to match the times."

"CODDLING DONALD" PRIZE — *CBS's Lesley Stahl, ABC's Peter Jennings and Others*

On the day news broke about Saddam Hussein's capture, Stahl and Jennings each interviewed Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. In step with their mainstream media colleagues, both failed to ask about Rumsfeld's cordial 1983 meeting with Hussein in Baghdad on behalf of the Reagan administration that opened up strong diplomatic and military ties between the U.S. government and the dictator that lasted through seven years of his worst brutality.

MILITARY GROUPIE PRIZE — *Katie Couric of NBC's "Today" Show*

"Well, Commander Thompson," said Couric on April 3, in the midst of the invasion carnage, "thanks for talking with us at this very early hour out there. And I just want you to know, I think Navy SEALs rock."

NOBLESSE OBLIGE OCCUPATION AWARD — *Thomas Friedman, New York Times*

In a Nov. 30 piece, Times columnist Friedman gushed that "this war (in Iraq) is the most important liberal, revolutionary U.S. democracy-building project since the

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Marshall Plan." He lauded the war as "one of the noblest things this country has ever attempted abroad." Friedman did not mention the estimated 112 billion barrels of oil in Iraq ... or the continuous deceptions that led to the "noble" enterprise. ■

Norman Solomon is co-author (with Reese Erlich) of "Target Iraq: What the News Media Didn't Tell You," published this year by Context Books.