

September 3, 2003

THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK

The Empire is striking back. The media empire, that is. Unsettled by all the resistance to the FCC rule changes, and upset, in the words of one top media exec because it is now “cool to hate the media,” media companies are unveiling their own counterattack against the growing media and democracy movement.

Reuters is reporting that “Viacom’s CBS, General Electric’s NBC and News Corp’s Fox television networks have joined forces to defend media-ownership rules criticized by lawmakers and media watchdog groups, the Wall Street Journal reported on Tuesday.

“The networks’ lobbying effort includes the slogan “America Says: Don’t Get Between Me And My TV” which is featured in ads running in Washington political publications, The Hill and Roll Call,” the Journal said.

PROVING THEIR OWN POPULARITY

AND what gives these mogul-led media combines the right to speak on behalf of the American people. A survey of course, one they paid for. The networks also plan to publicize their public opinion research, which shows that 87% of those polled in a survey think they have an adequate number of choices for receiving news, according to the paper.”

Only 87%? You can’t get 87% agreement for air conditioning on a hot day in this country. Why

not 99%, the percentage of Iraqis Saddam claimed voted for his re-election before the war? The networks seek support for the FCC’s recent changes to media regulations that would allow networks them buy up more local affiliates. Representatives from the three companies were not immediately available for comment.

Media activists are fighting back. Apparently I was wrong yesterday when I told you about media protests in LA and San Francisco. It is, I am told, a national effort. One reader writes: “It’s not just San Francisco that’s holding September 4 FCC protests: plans are afoot for Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Pittsburgh, and one I’m helping to organize in Chicago (details at <http://www.chicagomediaaction.org>).”

Details of the list of national protests is at <http://www.reclaimthefcc.org>

THE “PERFECT STORM”

THE always excellent British website is giving the US media high marks for its total complicity in selling the war on Iraq. “Perfect” is the verdict, reports Open Democracy.net. If the first Iraq war of 1991 was dubbed Desert Storm, the second might be called Perfect Storm,” writes Lance Bennett, professor of political science at University of Washington. “The run-up to the 2003 war witnessed an extraordinary convergence of factors that produced near-perfect journalistic participation in government propaganda operations. ... On a scale from one to ten – if ‘one’ is rigorously skept-

tical and ‘ten’ supine – Perfect Storm scored ten out of ten, far exceeding the already impressive levels of press complicity achieved in the first Iraq war. ... This time, the level of mediated public deliberation was so diminished as to make the preponderance of journalism little more than an instrumental extension – a sort of propaganda helper – of the strategic communication goals of the administration. With few notable exceptions, the press took a pass on its fourth estate prerogatives. Posing the hard questions, testing the administration’s logic and execution at every point, remaining skeptical – all this was drowned in a sea of waving flags and gung-ho celebrations of military technology.”

Bennett itemizes the “top ten factors that created this perfect propaganda storm,” which include: the occurrence of 9/11, “master scripting and directing by Karl Rove,” and “The Fox Effect.”

<http://www.opendemocracy.net/debates/article-8-92-1457.jsp#>

WHEN PERFECT IS NOT PERFECT ENOUGH

GOOD is not good enough for Washington’s spinmeisters. Even “perfect can be improved upon.” And you will see how if you watch SHOWTIME on Saturday evening for the premiere of a new film called DC 9-11, a docudrama which purports to show how president Bush and Co. responded to the terrorist attacks. I have been investigating this propaganda project and present the first of a three-part series on the players and the stakes for which they are playing.

DISSECTOR INVESTIGATION: BEHIND DC-911 PT.1

IN an age when actor Arnold Schwarzenegger

embodies a growing convergence between the worlds of movies and politics in one hulking frame, the power of entertainment-oriented media once again manifests its power to influence what we think and what we think about.

There was a good reason that TIME magazine described the coverage of the war on Iraq as “militainment,” and there is a good reason that the Bush administration is turning to Hollywood to embellish the President’s declining popularity. Their latest pre-emptive strike takes the form of a movie packaged to remake the historical record and re-elect him at the same time.

With the networks all downplaying the second anniversary of the real 9-11, it is not accidental that a made-for-TV movie is likely to draw most of our attention this time around.

THE BACK STORY

THIS report offers part of what our dream factories call “the back story.” It looks into how an anti-Hollywood administration decided to support a motion picture to propagandize what they have branded the “homeland.” It is a clever and creative use of a popular TV format as a weapon of mass deception.

This is the story behind the making of a cable movie called DC-911: TIME OF CRISIS, a well-made and insidiously persuasive docudrama that airs Sunday September 7th on Showtime, a movie channel owned by Viacom, the company that runs MTV, VH-1, Comedy Central, Nickelodeon, and so much more.

So move over Madonna and the Rug Rats and even Leni Riefenstahl, Viacom presents our latest TV superstar: President George W. Bush as produced by Karl Rove, the President’s in-house Machiavelli, with the help of Lionel Chetwynd, a

Republican toady, screenwriter, and producer. The actual production draws on the cast of Star Trek, a comedian known for his role as “the ripper,” and financial subsidies from Canada where this pro-American patriotic epic was actually made to avoid paying union wages.

MOVE ASIDE OLIVER STONE

THIS movie stands Oliver Stone’s JFK on its head. While his assassination caper blended real footage and dramatization to challenge the official version of the death of a president, this TV movie uses some of the same techniques to celebrate the life of a living one.

“JFK” was denounced as Hollywood distorting history. Will GWB meet the same treatment? Don’t count on it.

Laugh if you will, as many of those familiar with all the deceptions and contradictions in the President’s post 9-11 responses already are, but don’t underestimate how a well-produced narrative can shape and “embed” a narrative in our brains, leaving us with impressions, images and ideas that influence our political leanings.

This is a story in three acts.

ACT ONE

Act One: Behind the Scenes

Your name is Karl Rove. You are the political sven-gali who has often been called “Bush’s brain.” And you know you have a problem. You are stage-managing a politician who can be awkward, elusive, and often his worst enemy. He walks stiffly, swallows his words, and comes off at times like a mannequin. You never know what he might say.

After you helped maneuver him into the White House – and what a task it was to get the Supreme Court to sanction that squeaker of an

election – his public opinion ratings started to drop. He was the butt of vicious jokes, and widespread derision. The TV comics were branding him a buffoon, the global village idiot and a lot worse.

And then along came 9/11!

As the country went into shock, as the economy reeled, as fear stalked the land, you played queer eye to this straight guy. You gave him his personal makeover and his political mission while concocting a new mystique with which to sell it.

Poof!

A born-again president who avoided foreign policy like the plague in his first year in office was born again-again as the savior of civilization, and freedom’s best friend. The war on terror was now his crusade and he saddled up to lead the charge.

With you in the wings, Karl, Dubya the loser was transformed into George W Bush, warrior-king and global statesman. You gave him his own dog to wag.

The Afghan war soon followed, and then, Iraq. In the era of “let’s roll,” he and his own Republican Guard were on a roll; ready to impose frontier justice like some Texas sheriff on a global prairie. The President’s ratings quickly rose in a well-hyped climate of patriotic correctness.

And all it took was one media event to turn the tide. DC 9/11 is the official story behind the story of how one well-constructed and delivered speech before a compliant Congress elevated a schlemiel into a statesman. That speech, recreated and rerun at the movies’ end memorializes and mythologizes Bush as Hero.

FYI: “Overall, President Bush’s antiterrorism-themed address marked 22 percent improvement in households (33.6/49 vs. 27.6/42) compared to his address on Feb. 27, 2001. Tuesday’s address,

which lasted about 55 minutes, also marked a 30 percent jump in total viewers (51.7 million vs. 39.7 million) and 26 percent in total homes (35.5 million vs. 28.2 million) compared to his first speech to Congress.”

If one speech transformed the President’s image, will one far better-packaged movie do it again?
(TO BE CONTINUED)

MEDIA TENOR REPORT: REPUBLICANS DOMINATE MEDIA

A NEW study by Media Tenor, the international media monitoring firm, found that Republicans still get considerably more media coverage in the US than Democrats. A new survey on coverage for the first of this year notes:

“The political opposition in the United States is at last rising to the election challenge by heavily targeting Bush, his policies and his government. US Senator John Kerry, now a Democratic candidate for the presidency, accused the Republicans of ‘gross neglect and vision in its energy policy’, according to German daily FAZ. But the gross neglect and vision is as applicable to the Democrat’s presidential media campaign, seemingly still in hibernation, as the content analysis by MEDIA TENOR as well as various polling results from US opinion institutes confirm.

“Republicans receiving majority of coverage
John Kerry: Initially the favorite, now declining
Hillary Clinton: positive image, but candidacy not declared yet

“Gephardt: Volume high, without definite approval

“ Howard Dean: the “internet star”

For more: www.mediatenor.com

TOMORROW: MORE ON THE MEN AND MEDIA COMPANY BEHIND THE MOVIE

EVEN before the film is preparing to screen, the US government is shifting its strategy. Suddenly the UN, which was presented for months as incompetent and worthless, is being asked to authorize a multinational force in Iraq. The shift came after a report by Congress showed more men and money would be needed to sustain the current occupation. (There were more “incidents” (i.e. bombings, snipings, and killings in Iraq yesterday and today).

One of the members of the new chorus calling for revisions in Iraq is Richard Perle, an architect of the original strategy. He told Reuters in Paris that the United States had made mistakes in Iraq and that power should be handed over to the Iraqis as fast as possible.

A NEOCON BUSH ADVISOR REASSESSSES

IN an interview with the Le Figaro daily newspaper to be published Thursday, Perle defended the U.S.-led war in Iraq and restated his belief that France had been wrong to lead international opposition to the conflict.

“Of course, we haven’t done everything right,” said Perle, according to the French text of the interview. “Mistakes have been made and there will be others.

“Our principal mistake, in my opinion, was that we didn’t manage to work closely with the Iraqis before the war, so that there was an Iraqi opposition capable of taking charge immediately,” he said.

“Today, the answer is to hand over power to the

Iraqis as soon as possible,” he added.

AN ISRAELI LEADER REASSESES

AS for reassessments, Avraham Burg, a former leader of Israel’s Knesset, is reassessing too. Writing in a Jewish newspaper, *The Forward*, he calls Israel a “failed society” despite its many achievements. Voices like his rarely break in the media reporting on the Middle East.

“The Zionist revolution has always rested on two pillars: a just path and an ethical leadership. Neither of these is operative any longer. The Israeli nation today rests on a scaffolding of corruption, and on foundations of oppression and injustice. As such, the end of the Zionist enterprise is already on our doorstep. There is a real chance that ours will be the last Zionist generation. There may yet be a Jewish state here, but it will be a different sort, strange and ugly.

“There is time to change course, but not much.

What is needed is a new vision of a just society and the political will to implement it. Nor is this merely an internal Israeli affair. Diaspora Jews for whom Israel is a central pillar of their identity must pay heed and speak out. If the pillar collapses, the upper floors will come crashing down.

“The opposition does not exist, and the coalition, with Ariel Sharon at its head, claims the right to remain silent. In a nation of chatterboxes, everyone has suddenly fallen dumb, because there’s nothing left to say. We live in a thunderously failed reality. Yes, we have revived the Hebrew language, created a marvelous theater and a strong national currency. Our Jewish minds are as sharp as ever. We are traded on the Nasdaq. But is this why we created a state? The Jewish people did not survive for two millennia in order to pioneer new weaponry, computer security programs, or anti-missile missiles. We were supposed to be a light unto the nations. In this we have failed.”

