

How low can corporate media sink?

I TUNED into National Public Radio while showering this morning. The shower is pretty much the only place left where I can stand listening to NPR – with the cool water calming me down as NPR’s “newscasters” and pundits boil my blood with their half truths, shallow analysis and investor-friendly, rest-of-the-world-be-damned attitudes. This morning was pretty much par for NPR. As I stepped into the shower, they were broadcasting a puff piece sounding as if it was penned by the Republican National Committee. It had Senate Republican Majority Leader Bill Frist, longtime opponent of affirmative action, doing a photo and speaking op at the former home of Frederick Douglass, probably the best-known abolitionist and one of America’s first outspoken black civil rights leaders.

Frist was there to announce a chump change program to spend a million dollars to renovate the historic structure – at a time when his party is cutting billions of dollars in programs benefitting historically depressed Black communities. Frist is, according to the National Organization for Women and a host of other groups, one of the only senators with a worse voting record on civil rights issues than his predecessor, Trent Lott, who was forced to step down after pining nostalgically for the era of segregation. Frist, who was a

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member of an all-white segregated Tennessee country club before running for senate, was given a failing grade by the NAACP for his voting record on issues of importance to the Black community. He voted, for example, against hate crimes legislation and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

His visit to the Frederick Douglass homestead was, in essence, a desecration of a civil rights shrine. He used it as a backdrop to spin a yarn about the Republican Party standing for the values of Frederick Douglass. In the 1850s and 1860s it might have supported some of Douglass' agenda, but the days of Lincoln, Lindsay and Javits are long gone, with liberal Republicans about as scarce as dandelions in a cul-de-sac.

Today's Republicans commonly use racial fear and divisive language to drive ignorant white voters to the polls to vote against their own best interests. Bush Senior took the tactic to the national level with his now infamous Willie Horton campaign ads, and Newt Gingrich actually distributed a list of divisive words to Republican congressional candidates to use in their mostly successful television ads. Put simply, no, this ain't the Party of Frederick Douglass any more than Dan Quayle is Jack Kennedy. But Frist kept droning on – expanding on this delusion by claiming that the Republican Party agenda is promoting the "values" of Frederick Douglass.

This was the ultimate outrage. No one at NPR questioned Frist or pointed out the irony of this man, at this particular juncture in history, with the Republican Party attempting to roll back the 20th Century (I got that line from *The Nation*), speaking such rubbish in front of such a sacred place. Yet, on NPR, he went unchallenged – and a visitor from another planet (or an ignorant Wal-Mart shopper) might just believe this nonsense. NPR didn't allow for any African-American voices to challenge or comment on Frist's assertions, nor did they allow any representative of the Democratic Party, the Green Party, or any other opposition political group to challenge Frist.

The news is cut and dry. Republicans are struggling to promote the "agenda of Frederick Douglass," who, in the world of NPR, we can only assume, would support government handouts to corporations, massive tax cuts for the rich, a voting system that purposefully disenfranchises Blacks, cuts to health, education and human services for the still impoverished descendants of slaves, and so on.

The gall!

NPR's next story was about financial woes facing traditional Black Colleges who today still provide 24% of African American college graduates with their degrees. Put simply, many such colleges, despite their illustrious century-plus history, are now facing bankruptcy in these times of dwindling student financial aid. Of course NPR never

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broached the subject of dwindling financial aid. No. In the patronizing manner that is so common among enlightened racists, their pundits droned on about how the colleges needed better financial management. Again, there were no voices representing this so-called bad management. And no chance for anyone to explain the difficulties of educating poor and working people with funds drying up as tax money is diverted to military spending and corporate payoffs in the form of multi-billion dollar contracts to rebuild Iraq for Bush-team supporters such as Bechtel and Halliburton. But there are no dots to connect on NPR. Only dangling sanitized newsbites.

Leno on looting history

It gets worse. Glutton for punishment, I turned on late night TV where Jay Leno's guest was pulling cheap laughs, no doubt with the applause sign flashing like a traffic signal, as he went on and on with Iraqi museum-looting jokes. We know that, while US troops guarded Iraq's oil ministry, as many as 100,000 items were looted from the Iraqi national museum, globally recognized as having one of the most comprehensive collections chronicling the social evolution of civilization and Judeo Christian history. And we now know that US forces stood by and watched this cultural crime take place. But to Leno's guest, NBC regular Dennis Miller, Iraq, the cradle of civilization, had no history. "What history?" he chortled. "Like, who gives a damn!?" Leno's chin was flying to and fro – he could hardly contain himself.

For all this humor about looting, of course, there was also no mention of the seven Iraqi nuclear facilities whose radioactive contents, according to The Washington Post, were also carried away by looters. Suddenly, "Like, who gives a damn?" doesn't work. Throughout this sorry little dialog, the NBC logo shone dimly on the corner of my screen, just in case I might forget that the missile maker was bringing this pathetic putz of a man into my home. I turned the appliance off and took a cool shower.

To laugh, one truly has to believe that Mesopotamia has no history. Or one has to at least want to believe Mesopotamia has no history – at least not any history as grand as say, the Budweiser Clydesdales. What we're seeing is an engineered promotion and celebration of ignorance on an unprecedented scale. For fascism to take root, we have to forget history; ours and everyone else's as well. And we have to create a new more subservient history as we go along.

The accurate Jessica Lynch story

Last month's April Fool's Day made-for-TV "rescue" of Private Jessica Lynch provides a glimpse at just such a history in the making. Jerry Bruckheimer couldn't ask for a better

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screenplay. It starts out with the face of a new post-Saddam Iraq, with Iraqi lawyer Mohammed Rehaief, who told American troops where their missing teen was recovering from her injuries. The ensuing attack on the hospital provided images of a blond Appalachian All-American girl rescued from barbaric Iraqi bondage by chivalrous US Special Forces who never leave a fallen comrade behind. Perhaps that's why the carefully assembled Special Forces team substituted three combatants with two videographers and a still image photographer.

The initial story had Lynch embroiled in superhuman feats of combat, emptying her weapon before engaging in hand-to-hand combat, during which she was shot and stabbed repeatedly. Lynch's father, however, didn't go along with that story and told reporters that none of his daughter's wounds were battle related. We now know that she suffered from blunt trauma, probably the result of falling or jumping from her truck. The problem with the "rescue" story, according to a team of investigative reporters working for the Toronto Star, is that Lynch was actually set free two days before her supposed rescue – when Iraqi forces fled the hospital.

The Toronto Star reports that Lynch received excellent care from Iraqi doctors who reportedly gave her two pints of scarce blood and installed a platinum plate into her broken leg, all while dealing with 2,400 other casualties during her hospital stay. Shortly after the departure of the Iraqi troops, doctors and nurses loaded Lynch into an ambulance and attempted to turn her over to American forces stationed less than half a mile away. The Americans, however, in an embarrassing twist to the story, opened fire on the ambulance, forcing Lynch back to the safety of the hospital.

The Washington Post's new hero

This new information raises questions about Iraqi lawyer Mohammed Rehaief, who bartered his collaboration with the supposed American rescue force into US citizenship for himself and his family, and a cushy job as a Washington lobbyist. If Private Lynch wasn't exactly "rescued," then he wouldn't exactly be the hero the American corporate media is painting him to be. In fact, since his wife worked in the hospital where Jessica was held, he, theoretically, should have been able to tell the American forces that Lynch was no longer a prisoner, and arrange her safe transfer to American care. But, no. With Shiite fundamentalists marching around Iraq by the million, protesting American occupation, the Bush administration propaganda campaign was just as desperate for "heroes" like Rehaief as they were for images of Lynch's rescue.

But, in retrospect, as the rescue story crumbles, so does Rehaief's status as a hero. In the meantime, the now liberated Jessica is nowhere to be seen, recovering and being

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debriefed away from the media.

With all this information, it's hard to understand why, on May 9th – four days after the Toronto Star story broke the Lynch story internationally – the Buffalo News joined newspapers across the US in running a Washington Post story on its front page under the headline, "Hero Iraqi lawyer honored." The lead sentence reported how Rehaief "risked his life to help US military forces rescue prisoner of war Pfc. Jessica Lynch." It's not until paragraph 13, which is continued to page A-7, that the story quietly acknowledges that "several different news agencies" (read: the international press) report "differing versions" of what The News still insists is "the rescue." In reality, it's The News and The Post that are reporting the "differing version" – that being the outdated and discredited original propaganda script. There's absolutely no excuse for The News – with a Toronto Star vending machine in front of their Buffalo headquarters – to keep perpetuating this myth.

How do you spell B-U-L-L-S-H-I-T? ●