

Media Disinformation in America

You Can Say Anything You Want — As Long As It Doesn't Have Any Effect

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"In America You Can Say Anything You Want — As Long As It Doesn't Have Any Effect." – Paul Goodman

Progressive activists and writers continually bemoan the fact that the news they generate and the opinions they express are consistently ignored by the mainstream media, and thus kept from the masses of the American people. This disregard of progressive thought is tantamount to a definition of the mainstream media. It doesn't have to be a conspiracy; it's a matter of who owns the mainstream media and the type of journalists they hire — men and women who would like to keep their jobs; so it's more insidious than a conspiracy, it's what's built into the system, it's how the system works. The disregard of the progressive world is of course not total; at times some of that world makes too good copy to ignore, and, on rare occasions, progressive ideas, when they threaten to become very popular, have to be countered.

So it was with Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States*. Here's Barry Gewen an editor at the New York Times Book Review, June 5, 2005 writing of Zinn's book and others like it:

There was a unifying vision, but it was simplistic. Since the victims and losers were good, it followed that the winners were bad. From the point of view of downtrodden blacks, America was racist; from the point of view of oppressed workers, it was exploitative; from the point of view of conquered Hispanics and Indians, it was imperialistic. There was much to condemn in American history, little or nothing to praise. ... Whereas the Europeans who arrived in the New World were genocidal predators, the Indians who were already there believed in sharing and hospitality (never mind the profound cultural differences that existed among them), and raped Africa was a continent overflowing with kindness and communalism (never mind the profound cultural differences that existed there).

One has to wonder whether Mr. Gewen thought that all the victims of the Holocaust were saintly and without profound cultural differences.

Prominent American historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. once said of Zinn: "I know he regards me as a dangerous reactionary. And I don't take him very seriously. He's a polemicist, not a historian."

In the obituaries that followed Zinn's death, this particular defamation was picked up around the world, from the New York Times, Washington Post, and the leading American wire

services to the New Zealand Herald and Korea Times.

Regarding reactionaries and polemicists, it is worth noting that Mr. Schlesinger, as a top advisor to President John F. Kennedy, played a key role in the overthrow of Cheddi Jagan, the democratically-elected progressive prime minister of British Guiana (now Guyana). In 1990, at a conference in New York City, Schlesinger publicly apologized to Jagan, saying: "I felt badly about my role thirty years ago. I think a great injustice was done to Cheddi Jagan." [1] This is to Schlesinger's credit, although the fact that Jagan was present at the conference may have awakened his conscience after 30 years. Like virtually all the American historians of the period who were granted attention and respect by the mainstream media, Schlesinger was a cold warrior. Those like Zinn who questioned the basic suppositions of the Cold War abroad, and capitalism at home, were regarded as polemicists.

One of my favorite Howard Zinn quotes: "The chief problem in historical honesty is not outright lying. It is omission or de-emphasis of important data. The definition of 'important', of course, depends on one's values." [2] A People's History and his other writings can be seen as an attempt to make up for the omissions and under-emphases of America's dark side in American history books and media.

Haiti, Aristide, and ideology

It's a good thing the Haitian government did virtually nothing to help its people following the earthquake; otherwise it would have been condemned as "socialist" by Fox News, Sarah Palin, the teabaggers, and other right-thinking Americans. The last/only Haitian leader strongly committed to putting the welfare of the Haitian people before that of the domestic and international financial mafia was President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Being of a socialist persuasion, Aristide was, naturally, kept from power by the United States — twice; first by Bill Clinton, then by George W. Bush, the two men appointed by President Obama to head the earthquake relief effort. Naturally.

Aristide, a reformist priest, was elected to the presidency, then ousted in a military coup eight months later in 1991 by men on the CIA payroll. Ironically, the ousted president wound up in exile in the United States. In 1994 the Clinton White House found itself in the awkward position of having to pretend — because of all their rhetoric about "democracy" — that they supported the democratically-elected Aristide's return to power. After delaying his return for more than two years, Washington finally had its military restore Aristide to office, but only after obliging the priest to guarantee that after his term ended he would not remain in office to make up the time lost because of the coup; that he would not seek to help the poor at the expense of the rich, literally; and that he would stick closely to free-market economics. This meant that Haiti would continue to be the assembly plant of the Western Hemisphere, with its workers receiving starvation wages, literally. If Aristide had thoughts about breaking the agreement forced upon him, he had only to look out his window — US troops were stationed in Haiti for the remainder of his term. [3]

On February 28, 2004, during the Bush administration, American military and diplomatic personnel arrived at the home of Aristide, who had been elected to the presidency once again in 2002, to inform him that his private American security agents must either leave immediately to return to the United States or fight and die; that the remaining 25 of the American security agents hired by the Haitian government, who were to arrive the next day,

had been blocked by the United States from coming; that foreign and Haitian rebels were nearby, heavily armed, determined and ready to kill thousands of people in a bloodbath. Aristide was then pressured into signing a “letter of resignation” before being kidnaped and flown to exile in Africa by the United States. [4] The leaders and politicians of the world who pontificate endlessly about “democracy” and “self-determination” had virtually nothing to say about this breathtaking act of international thuggery. Indeed, France and Canada were active allies of the United States in pressing Aristide to leave. [5]

And then US Secretary of State Colin Powell, in the sincerest voice he could muster, told the world that Aristide “was not kidnaped. We did not force him onto the airplane. He went onto the airplane willingly. And that’s the truth.” [6] Powell sounded as sincere as he had sounded a year earlier when he gave the UN his now-famous detailed inventory of the chemical, biological and nuclear weapons that Saddam Hussein was preparing to use.

Howard Zinn is quoted above saying “The chief problem in historical honesty is not outright lying. It is omission or de-emphasis of important data.” However, that doesn’t mean the American mainstream media don’t create or perpetuate myths. Here’s the New York Times two months ago: “Mr. Aristide, who was overthrown during a 2004 rebellion ...” [7] Now what image does the word “rebellion” conjure up in your mind? The Haitian people rising up to throw off the shackles put on them by a dictatorship? Or something staged by the United States?

Aristide has stated that he was able to determine at that crucial moment that the “rebels” were white and foreign. [8] But even if they had been natives, why did Colin Powell not explain why the United States disbanded Aristide’s personal security forces? Why did he not explain why the United States was not protecting Aristide from the rebels, which the US could have done with the greatest of ease, without so much as firing a single shot? Nor did he explain why Aristide would “willingly” give up his presidency.

The massive US military deployment to Haiti in the wake of the earthquake has been criticized in various quarters as more of an occupation than a relief mission, with the airport in the capital city now an American military base, and with American forces blocking various aid missions from entering the country in order, apparently, to serve Washington’s own logistical agenda. But the large military presence can also serve to facilitate two items on Washington’s political agenda — preventing Haitians from trying to emigrate by sea to the United States and keeping a lid on the numerous supporters of Aristide lest they threaten to take power once again.

That which can not be spoken

“The purpose of terrorism is to provoke an overreaction,” writes Fareed Zakaria, a leading American foreign-policy pundit, editor of Newsweekmagazine’s international edition, and Washington Post columnist, referring to the “underwear bomber”, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, and his failed attempt to blow up a US airliner on Christmas day. “Its real aim is not to kill the hundreds of people directly targeted but to sow fear in the rest of the population. Terrorism is an unusual military tactic in that it depends on the response of the onlookers. If we are not terrorized, then the attack didn’t work. Alas, this one worked very well.” [9]

Is that not odd? That an individual would try to take the lives of hundreds of people,

including his own, primarily to “provoke an overreaction”, or to “sow fear”? Was there not any kind of deep-seated grievance or resentment with anything or anyone American being expressed? No perceived wrong he wished to make right? Nothing he sought to obtain revenge for? Why is the United States the most common target of terrorists? Such questions were not even hinted at in Zakaria’s article.

At a White House press briefing concerning the same failed terrorist attack, conducted by Assistant to the President for Counterterrorism and Homeland Security John Brennan, veteran reporter Helen Thomas raised a question:

Thomas: “What is really lacking always for us is you don’t give the motivation of why they want to do us harm. ... What is the motivation? We never hear what you find out on why.”

Brennan: “Al Qaeda is an organization that is dedicated to murder and wanton slaughter of innocents. ... [They] attract individuals like Mr. Abdulmutallab and use them for these types of attacks. He was motivated by a sense of religious sort of drive. Unfortunately, al Qaeda has perverted Islam, and has corrupted the concept of Islam, so that [they’re] able to attract these individuals. But al Qaeda has the agenda of destruction and death.”

Thomas: “And you’re saying it’s because of religion?”

Brennan: “I’m saying it’s because of an al Qaeda organization that uses the banner of religion in a very perverse and corrupt way.”

Thomas: “Why?”

Brennan: “I think ... this is a long issue, but al Qaeda is just determined to carry out attacks here against the homeland.”

Thomas: “But you haven’t explained why.” [10]

American officials rarely even make the attempt to explain why. And American journalists rarely press them to explain why; certainly not like Helen Thomas does.

And just what is it that has such difficulty crossing the lips of these officials? It is the idea that anti-American terrorists become anti-American terrorists to retaliate for what the United States has done to countries or people close to them or what Israel has done to them with unequivocal American support.

Osama bin Laden, in an audiotape, also commented about Abdulmutallab: “The message we wanted you to receive through him is that America shall not dream about security until we witness it in Palestine.” [11]

We have as well the recent case of Humam Khalil Abu-Mulal al-Balawi, a Jordanian doctor-turned-suicide bomber, who killed seven CIA employees at a base in Afghanistan December 30. His widow later declared: “I am proud of him. ... My husband did this against the U.S. invasion.” Balawi himself had written on the Internet: “I have never wished to be in Gaza, but now I wish to be a ... car bomb that takes the lives of the biggest number of Jews to hell.” [12]

It should be noted that the CIA base attacked by Balawi was heavily involved in the selection

of targets for the Agency's remote-controlled aircraft along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, a program that killed more than 300 people in the previous year. [13]

There are numerous examples of terrorists citing American policies as the prime motivation behind their acts [14], so many that American officials, when discussing the newest terrorist attack, have to tread carefully to avoid mentioning the role of US foreign policy; and journalists typically fail to bring this point home to their reader's consciousness.

It works the same all over the world. In the period of the 1950s to the 1980s in Latin America, in response to a long string of hateful Washington policies, there were countless acts of terrorism against US diplomatic and military targets as well as the offices of US corporations.

The US bombing, invasion, occupation and torture in Iraq and Afghanistan, the bombing of Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, and the continuing Israeli-US genocide against the Palestinians have created an army of new anti-American terrorists. We'll be hearing from them for a terribly long time. And we'll be hearing American officials twist themselves into intellectual and moral knots as they try to avoid confronting these facts.

In his "State of the Union" address on January 27, President Obama said: "But if anyone from either party has a better approach that will bring down premiums, bring down the deficit, cover the uninsured, strengthen Medicare for seniors, and stop insurance company abuses, let me know."

Well, ending America's many wars would free up enough money to do anything a rational, humane society would want to do. Eliminating the military budget would pay for free medical care for everyone. Free university education for everyone. Creating a government public works project that could provide millions of decently-paid jobs, like repairing the decrepit infrastructure and healing the environment to the best of our ability. You can add your own favorite projects. All covered, just by ending the damn wars. Imagine that.

Notes

The Nation, June 4, 1990, pp.763-4

"Failure to Quit: Reflections of an Optimistic Historian" (1993), p.30

<http://killinghope.org/bblum6/haiti2.htm>

Statement of Jean-Bertrand Aristide, March 5, 2004, from exile in the Central African Republic, Pacific News Service (San Francisco); David Swanson, "[What Bush Did to Haiti](#)", January 18, 2010; William Blum, "Rogue State", pp.219-20)

Miami Herald, March 1, 2004

CNN, March 1, 2004

New York Times, November 27, 2009

Aristide statement, op. cit.

Newsweek, January 18, 2010, online January 9

White House press briefing, January 7, 2010

ABC News, January 25, 2010

Associated Press, January 7, 2010

Washington Post, January 1, 2010

Rogue State, chapter 1, "Why do terrorists keep picking on the United States?"; this chapter ends in 2005; some later examples can be provided by the author.

William Blum is the author of Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War 2, Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower, West-Bloc Dissident: A Cold War Memoir, and Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire

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