

The P.U.-litzer Prizes for 2012: The “Stinkiest Moments” in American Journalism.

By [Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting \(FAIR\)](#)

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[FAIR](#)

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Recalling some of the stinkiest media moments of the year

They're back: The P.U.-litzers, FAIR's annual rundown of some of the stinkiest moments in American journalism.

As usual, there were more contenders than we could possibly consider. So think of this as just a sampling of the bias, spin and misinformation that we noted over the course of the year.

Without further ado...

-Factchecking the Dark Arts Award: Alex Altman, Time

When Time set out to compare Obama and Romney distortions, there was a big problem: Romney's campaign produced bigger, more substantive lies. How to “balance” that reality? Altman explained [\(10/3/12\)](#) that “sometimes the most effective lie is the one that is closest to the truth, and Obama's team has often outdone Romney's in the dark art of subtle distortion.”

-CEOs Know Best Award: CBS Evening News



With the Beltway media in full panic mode over the “fiscal cliff,” CBS Evening News [turned to some curious experts](#): Corporate CEOs. On November 19, the show presented Lloyd Blankfein of Goldman Sachs as a budget expert. The next night: Honeywell CEO David Cote. And the night after that? Why, more from Blankfein. The pair are part of the corporate-backed “Fix the Debt” campaign, pushing for cuts in social spending—along with tax breaks for themselves.

-Factchecking Your Friends Award: David Gergen, CNN

When a debate broke out over whether the Obama campaign was exaggerating claims about Mitt Romney and Bain Capital, the long-time TV talking head [weighed in](#) with a CNN.com column, “Facts Don't Support Obama's Charges Against Romney” (7/16/12). But

Gergen admitted that he has “a past relationship with the top partners at Bain that is both personal and financial”– including getting paid to speak at Bain events. So how did this conflicted factchecker investigate criticisms of his friends? He “reached two of the top people whom I know in the company.” Well, that’s one way to get at the truth.

-Half-Baked by the Heat Award: George Will, ABC

“How do we explain the heat? One word: summer. I grew up in central Illinois in a house without air conditioning.... Now, come the winter, there will be a cold snap, lots of snow, and the same guys...will start lecturing us, there’s a difference between the weather and the climate. I agree with that. We’re having some hot weather. Get over it.” (This Week, [7/8/12](#))

-Killing Their Four-Year-Old Girls to Save Ours Award: Joe Klein, Time

MSNBC’s Morning Joe (10/23/12) had an unusually blunt discussion about U.S drone attacks. When host Joe Scarborough talked about “four-year-old girls being blown to bits,” Time’s Joe Klein responded:

The bottom line, in the end, is: Whose four-year-old gets killed? What we’re doing is limiting the possibility that four-year-olds here are going to get killed by indiscriminate acts of terror.

-Hunky Wonk Award: Michael Crowley, Time

Reporters and pundits have spent years praising Rep. Paul Ryan, and his selection as Mitt Romney’s running mate did little to temper their enthusiasm. The Washington Post’s Dan Balz ([8/14/12](#)) wrote that Ryan “is a numbers person who likes to break down problems and solve them after digesting reams of data.” But Time’s Michael Scherer outdid him ([8/27/12](#)): “Ryan is to budget math what Carl Sagan was to the science of the cosmos.”

-Anonymous Smears Award: Scott Shane, New York Times

When the British-based Bureau of Investigative Journalism released a report on civilian drone victims, the New York Times ([2/6/12](#)) felt compelled to quote an unnamed “senior American counterterrorism official” in response, who retorted: “One must wonder why an effort that has so carefully gone after terrorists who plot to kill civilians has been subjected to so much misinformation. Let’s be under no illusions—there are a number of elements who would like nothing more than to malign these efforts and help Al-Qaeda succeed.”

The Times officially forbids the granting of anonymity “as cover for a personal or partisan attack.” But how about to smear critics of U.S. policies as terrorist sympathizers?

-A Game That Needs Changing Award: PBS

In the first episode (4/11/12) of a [four-part series called America Revealed](#), PBS reported that the agriculture industry “needed a game changer” in the fight against pests—and found it in genetically modified corn. Remarkably enough, the sponsor of the program, Dow Chemical, [just happens to be lobbying for approval](#) of its own brand of genetically modified corn.

-Strange Problems in Distant Lands Award: New York Times

A New York Times story (6/18/12) reported that “the television revolution has...in some respects been bad news for Pakistan”:

Some shows have given an unchallenged platform to extremists.... Conservative clerics have used the airwaves to reinforce prejudice and even urge violence against minorities. Editorial independence is sometimes curtailed by the businessmen who own the stations and unashamedly use them to peddle their interests.

Controversy also surrounds the anchors, some of whom view themselves as players on the national stage rather than impartial observers of its machinations.

Extremists given a platform? Owners shaping the news? Self-important anchors? It's hard to imagine what life would be like in such a country.



-Fake News Award: New York Post

“OWS MURDER LINK,” declared the New York Post’s [front page](#) (7/11/12), announcing a report that DNA from the scene of a 2004 murder had supposedly been matched with DNA from a chain used to hold open a subway gate in an Occupy Wall Street protest. The Rupert Murdoch-owned paper had 37 paragraphs on the story, along with three large photographs. The story quickly evaporated—turns out the DNA was from a police employee—so the Post gave its follow-up story to the previous day’s front-page story four whole paragraphs, under the headline “’04 Slay DNA ‘Contaminated.’”

Apparently unreliable police work isn’t as exciting a story as a sensational smear against a progressive protest movement.

-Apocalypse Non Award: Gloria Borger, CNN

In 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War, Mitt Romney was a pro-war college student exempt from the draft. The conflict killed 16,000 U.S. soldiers that year. But that doesn’t mean he wasn’t at personal risk. According to CNN’s Gloria Borger (8/26/12), life as a Mormon missionary in France was rough:

In 1968, France was a dangerous place to be for a 21-year-old American. But Mitt Romney was right in the middle of it... The streets of France were in chaos.

Somehow he got through it.

-Asked and Answered Award: David Gregory, NBC

The Sunday after Hurricane Sandy devastated New York and New Jersey, NBC's David Gregory [asked in the opening](#) of Meet the Press (11/4/12): "Should more attention be paid to a changing climate's impact on the severity of these storms?" The answer, apparently, was "no"—that was the last mention of climate change on the show.

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