

A Reporter Fails To Apologise

"Reporter Apologizes for Iraq Coverage", says the headline in "America's Oldest Journal Covering the Newspaper Industry":

In the wake of Richard Clarke's dramatic personal apology to the families of 9/11 victims last week -- on behalf of himself and his government -- for failing to prevent the terrorist attacks, one might expect at least a few mea culpas related to the release of false information on the Iraq threat before and after the war. While the major media, from The New York Times on down, has largely remained silent about their own failings in this area, a young columnist for a small paper in Fredericksburg, Va., has stepped forward.

The "young columnist" in question, Rick Mercier, had stepped forward to say:

The media are finished with their big blowouts on the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, and there's one thing they forgot to say: We're sorry. Sorry we let unsubstantiated claims drive our coverage. Sorry we were dismissive of experts who disputed White House charges against Iraq. Sorry we let a band of self-serving Iraqi defectors make fools of us. Sorry we fell for Colin Powell's performance at the United Nations. Sorry we couldn't bring ourselves to hold the administration's feet to the fire before the war, when it really mattered. Maybe we'll do a better job next war. Of course it's absurd to receive this apology from a person so low in the media hierarchy. You really ought to be getting it from the editors and reporters at the agenda-setting publications, such as The New York Times and The Washington Post.

Quite a climb down, you might think. A dramatic reappraisal of his former views. Others who supported the liberation of Iraq might therefore do well to reappraise theirs? That's certainly how the Communist *China Daily*, and apparently all others who picked up the story, saw it (**Admission of US media's fault concerning pre-Iraq war coverage**). "Rick Mercier is a brave young man" wrote one reader of the report in **InfoShop News**. "It's been a long time since a journalist has taken this level of responsibility"

wrote another, as they unanimously welcomed the convert.

But the whole thing is bunk. In reality, this "person so low in the hierarchy" was no convert to the anti-liberation camp. He had been a virulent opponent of the liberation before, during and after the event, and he was not apologising at all. He was fantasising about other reporters apologising *to him* and other like him. For what? Well, in his fantasy, the media had spent the pre-war months in a frenzy of blind *support* for the liberation of Iraq.

Ironically, but not surprisingly, he does have something to apologise for. A quick visit to Google shows that he did let unsubstantiated claims and blind partisanship drive his coverage. Propagating the '**imminent danger**' canard, and touting an arms embargo against Israel as an alternative formula for regional stability, and speaking wildly of chicken hawks, he was insufficiently critical of 'experts' who claimed that "the Kurds of Northern Iraq aren't too keen on [an invasion]", and that an invasion would be followed by "tens, perhaps hundreds, of thousands of more civilian deaths, particularly among children, the aged, and others of the most vulnerable sectors".

And not one word about the continuing murder and terror that following their advice, and his, would have visited upon the people of Iraq.

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So, where is WMD? Where is Al-Qaeda link?

I agree on Israel issue. I agree that that was an evil regime in Iraq indeed. Millions of people in North Korea are dying from hunger because of even worse regime - so what? I seem to be like a child saying: THE KING IS NAKED. Produce your proof at last!!!

by a reader on Fri, 04/02/2004 - 11:13 | [reply](#)

Media

Who is the "media"? The "media" is not any one source or even a hundred sources. The "media" is the mediums of transmission of words and pictures, synopsised and soliliquy-ized by thousands of mostly invisible journalists, reporters, media-heads, headline writers, editors and the like across all the media mediums. To say that the "media" should apologise completely misunderstands and misstates the nature of the assemblage, massaging, sorting, defining of information which is transmitted across and to the vast audience of people who then receive and digest transmitted information in their own individual minds.

What is more truthful to say is that the "media" is a vast marketplace of words and pictures and sounds across many languages and mediums that is only accountable to its readers, viewers, and listeners. Any opinion and its opposites can easily be found, useful and useless. There is choice, and there is rebuttal. The old adage about marketplaces says, "Let the buyer beware".

Since the "media" is a distributed marketplace of marketplaces and venues, and there is no such thing as one arbiter of the vast media bazaar, might we say, "Let the recipient reason". Choose wisely. Choose critically. Utilize your perceptive capacities and your mind.

Ultimately, there is no one to apologise for "the media". Or, there is everyone to apologise, and to apologise for, but why? There is always specifically bad reporting along with the good, along with the insightful. There is always the competitive scramble to "sell" the particular idea product in any way and by any means that it can be sold. There is always somewhere, the voice of reason, or rather, voices of reason. Some of the products are useful, some of them are useless or worse. Some of this is not "fit to print" or to disseminate. What is so new about that? It has always been so from the times of the first scribes and orators and gossip in the street.

As always, then as now, there is only personal responsibility. We live within a river of the words and pictures and sounds, growing wider, flowing faster, among which we must personally discriminate the flotsam from the jetsam and the eddies from the streams. Although specific distortions are always culpable, responsible or not to someone and somewhere, there is no river god of "media", or even a river god of "big media" to blame.

It is the consumer of information who blindly believes in distorted ideas who should apologize. Yet, apologize to whom, oneself, and for what, ignorance or gullibility? Rather than mea culpa, get on with it, consider the source and the content. Above all, take personal responsibility. Agree, rebut, discuss.

"Let the recipient reason". Set it right within.

by a reader on Fri, 04/02/2004 - 17:36 | [reply](#)

sigh

how about "a large majority of major media outlets that deal with politics acted very badly. each and every one that acted badly ought to apologise for it."

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 04/02/2004 - 17:56 | [reply](#)