

# THE NYT DOES PENANCE?

I just got finished with a long day of politicking (to answer the question bmaz sent by email, at least in my CD, the "uncommitted" delegates were all Obama supporters though there were about 8-12 Hillary supporters trying to pick up some extra delegates by claiming that "uncommitted" delegates could not say who they would support in Denver). So I'm going to have to return to the NYT article on the Pentagon's rent-a-general propaganda.

But for the moment, I just want to look at the circumstances of it. This was not, say, Mother Jones, exposing the extent to which the Pentagon mobilizes the military-industrial complex to (potentially illegally) spread propaganda to the American people. This is the NYT—one of the most important tools of the Bush propaganda machine, certainly at least during the lead-up to the Iraq war. So I wonder—did no one from the NYT recognize the irony of including this sentence in the NYT?

These records reveal a symbiotic relationship where the usual dividing lines between government and journalism have been obliterated.

For that reason, it's a very weird article. The article, after all, states clearly that there was no quid pro quo to the "analysts."

The documents released by the Pentagon do not show any quid pro quo between commentary and contracts. But some analysts said they had used the special access as a marketing and networking opportunity or as a window into future business possibilities.

And it notes that the problem was as much the friendship between analysts and the military as

it was improper ties.

Even analysts with no defense industry ties, and no fondness for the administration, were reluctant to be critical of military leaders, many of whom were friends. "It is very hard for me to criticize the United States Army," said William L. Nash, a retired Army general and ABC analyst. "It is my life."

All in all, the article paints the picture of an economy of influence. Kind of like ... beltway journalists. "It is hard for me to criticize politicians," you can imagine the beltway journalist saying, "It is my life."

But that doesn't mean it's not an important article. It works sort of like the Libby trial did, exposing the Administration's methods for all to see. Watching the way Rummy worked these retired Generals is eerily akin, for me, to watching Cathie Martin describe the way she worked Tim Russert.

But back to the fact that this is coming from the NYT. I find it ironic that it comes just days after the NYT posted one of its worst losses ever.

The New York Times Company, the parent of The New York Times, posted a \$335,000 loss in the first quarter – one of the worst periods the company and the newspaper industry have seen – falling far short of both analysts' expectations and its \$23.9 million profit in the quarter a year earlier.

[snip]

The poor showing stemmed from The Times Company's core news media group, which includes The Times, The Boston Globe and The International Herald Tribune, as well as several regional newspapers.

This is partly due to the rise of Craigslist and online real estate listings. But it's also due to the continued crap the NYT tries to sell us.

So here they are reporting on the crap that someone else sold—through a different channel. (Yes, when I have more time, I do plan to search the NYT articles for the number of times the NYT quoted these Generals.) It's an important article, but does it redeem all the crap that lost them readers?

I'm also curious that David Barstow is the author. Barstow has done similar work to this for the NYT before. There's this article on the government use of video news releases, for example, part of a series.

It is the kind of TV news coverage every president covets.

"Thank you, Bush. Thank you, U.S.A.," a jubilant Iraqi-American told a camera crew in Kansas City for a segment about reaction to the fall of Baghdad. A second report told of "another success" in the Bush administration's "drive to strengthen aviation security"; the reporter called it "one of the most remarkable campaigns in aviation history." A third segment, broadcast in January, described the administration's determination to open markets for American farmers.

To a viewer, each report looked like any other 90-second segment on the local news. In fact, the federal government produced all three.

But he's also the kind of guy who fixes the fuck-ups of his NYT colleagues. He babysat Duff Wilson on some stories after Wilson convicted the Duke lacrosse team in the press before they'd been tried. Barstow explained how the Administration (and, implicitly, Judy Miller and Michael Gordon) got snookered on the aluminum tubes. And he was part of the team that exposed

Jayson Blair's deceptions (I don't have the book with me, but I seem to recall Seth Mnookin's book on the debacle describing in detail how Barstow, in particular, got chosen to bring credibility to the article). Then there's this awkward article that debunks some of the BS Libby claimed to have told Judy—without noticing the underlying problems with Libby's story itself.

In other words, this is the perfect investigation for Bartow—both because of his prior work exposing Bush propaganda, and because he is one of the designated babysitters for the NYT.

As I said, this is superb investigation and really important. And I plan to do a follow-up about how this is the kind of multimedia work that might save NYT's bacon. But I can't help but feel like the NYT is doing penance for its past sins. It's too late, after all, to make up for bringing us into a senseless war. But is it enough to save the discredited press?