

AMBINDER: SORRY I WAS SO STUPID, BUT I WAS RIGHT TO BE STUPID

Mark Ambinder takes the opportunity of Ridge's confirmation that the terror alerts were one big political game to claim he was justified in believing that we DFHers were wrong about the alerts—and in doing so, demonstrates what is so wrong with so much of Village journalism.

Journalists, including myself, were very skeptical when anti-Bush liberals insisted that what Ridge now says is true, was true. We were wrong. Our skepticism about the activists' conclusions was warranted because these folks based their assumption on gut hatred for President Bush, and not on any evaluation of the raw intelligence. But journalists should have been even more skeptical about the administration's pronouncements. And yet — we, too, weren't privy to the intelligence. Information asymmetry is always going to exist, and, living as we do in a Democratic system, most journalists are going to give the government the benefit of some doubt. We can see, now, how pre-war intelligence was manipulated, how the entire Washington establishment (including Congressional Democrats, including the media, was manipulated by a valid fear of the unknown — but a fear we now know was consciously, deliberately, inculcated.

Note, first of all, the false binary that Ambinder the so-called journalist sets up:

Our skepticism about the activists'

conclusions was warranted because these folks based their assumption on gut hatred for President Bush, and not on any evaluation of the raw intelligence.

Somehow, Ambinder read the minds of "activists" across the country and confirmed that "these folks based their assumption on gut hatred for President Bush." Apparently, you see, Ambinder can read the minds of activists, but not Ridge and Bush.

And so then, after reading those minds and/or simply making shit up about why and how "activists" concluded the terror alert system was bogus, Ambinder says that short of having the raw intelligence, journalists have no way of independently assessing whether the terror alerts were a big political game. Either you have gut hatred or you have raw intelligence—there are no other means to get to the truth.

God forbid a journalist use simple empiricism—retrospectively matching terror alerts with reports on which they were based—to assess the terror alerts. God forbid a journalist learn that we went to Code Orange because someone claimed terrorists were going to take down the Brooklyn Bridge with a blow torch, and from that learn to be skeptical of terror alerts going forwards. It's not as if, after all, the election eve alert was a one-off, the only alert in which the hype was later shown to be over-hype. There was a *pattern*. And normal human beings equipped with the gift of empiricism that apparently gets weeded out at journalism school tend to look at patterns and conclude that if a relationship consistently has happened in the past, then it probably will exist in the future.

But no!! Journalists can't do what normal human beings do all the time, and make certain conclusions by watching patterns develop.

Ambinder's lame explanation for why we all knew

the terror alerts were bullshit but he didn't is particularly atrocious for two reasons.

First, he relies on a stereotype—the activists motivated solely by their gut hatred of George Bush—to avoid reflecting on why normal people relying on simple empiricism had access to truths that journalists somehow couldn't access.

But then there's the stereotype itself, the activists motivated solely by their gut hatred of George Bush. Accepting for a moment the totally bullshit premise that *all* of the people who believed the terror alerts were bogus hated Bush and were motivated solely by their hatred of Bush—accepting that false premise as true—how do you think those "activists" got their gut hatred of George Bush? Were they all birthed with it?

Or is there the slightest possibility, Ambinder, that they acquired it? Not just because, after we assessed the claims made before the war, concluded they were hyped, and then learned that we were in fact correct that those claims were hyped, we came to loathe a man who would manufacture a case to go to war? But because of a number of other things—things like outing a CIA spy or reversing decades of environmental regulation or telling the rest of the world to fuck off—all of which have proven to have bad consequences for our country.

You see, by basing his entire self-exoneration on his mind reading of activists and their gut hatred of George Bush, Ambinder can not only avoid really assessing why he was so wrong and real people weren't about the terror alerts. But he can avoid considering whether there wasn't an empirical case to be made—that journalists should have made—about the dire effects Bush's cowboy bullshit was having on our country?

Update: Victory is mine (well, sort of)!

My critics are right. Skepticism about the terror warnings wasn't just based on gut hatred of Bush, although there was some of that..

There was a growing mistrust of the government's prosecution of the war on terror... and I have no way of knowing the motivations of...

a majority of the doubters. Yes, journos by pattern give gov't the benefit of doubt. Doesn't mean they _should. Not sure why this surprises.

Update: Ambinder has posted a more extensive apology for suggesting he knew why liberals did what they did.

My hindsight bias is no less offensive than the bias I attribute to these liberals. It was wrong to use the phrase "gut hatred." Had I spent more time thinking about the post, I would have chosen a different phrase. And I should have.

Thank you for the apology, Ambinder.