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With Bias Toward All

*The news media are damaging their
honesty and credibility*

by John Leo

Some 440,000 copies of Bernard Goldberg's book *Bias* are now in print. Who knew that a complaint about news bias would become a runaway best

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seller? You could tell the book was touching a nerve when two very good journalists, columnist Michael Kinsley and TV critic Tom Shales, both attacked Goldberg with berserk and sputtering, almost vein-popping rage.

Goldberg says reaction to the book shows "a total disconnect between regular people and media people." He thinks most "regulars" understand that the packaging of news reflects the worldview of the packagers, while most media people take the fundamentalist view that

the news is neutral and pure, so anyone who doesn't agree with this must be a right-wing nut. Goldberg got a good ride from radio and cable TV, but the three old-line TV networks have pretended his book doesn't exist. He thinks *Bias* is the first No. 1 non-fiction bestseller of modern times that failed to get a single minute on CBS, NBC or ABC. He was interviewed by Italian *Nightline* but not by the American version, the one that will cause the republic to fall if it is ever replaced by David Letterman.

The reluctance of the news business to hold seminars and conduct investigations of news bias is almost legendary. In 1990, *Los Angeles Times* media critic David Shaw stunned everybody with a 12,000-word, four-part series on press coverage of the abortion issue. He essentially concluded that the American newsroom culture is so strongly pro-choice that it cannot bring itself to report the issue fairly. This apparently explosive report provoked no self-examination, no panel discussions. It quickly made the rounds of newsrooms like *samizdat*. Privately, lots of reporters and editors said it was true, and a few articles appeared. But in general, journalists reacted as if the Shaw report had never happened. I arrived on the advisory board of the *Columbia Journalism Review* a year later, and I pushed hard (but, of course, late) for *CJR* to examine Shaw's findings. No dice. Everyone was determined to look the other way. I cannot think of a major newspaper series that got less attention. The reason, I think, was obvious: feminists in the newsroom would not stand for this issue to be aired. So it wasn't.

Don't Deviate

Since the "diversity" juggernaut has swept through the newsroom, other groups have acquired the power to monitor their own coverage. This is, of course, a deadly threat to the news media's honesty and credibility. Here's a current example of how this system works. For years, Tammy Bruce was a familiar political figure and talk-show host in Los Angeles with all the right tickets for easy

newsroom acceptance. In fact, she was three of the newsroom's favorite lobbies rolled into one person – she was a pro-abortion-rights, lesbian activist, and head of the Los Angeles chapter of the National Organization for Women. (She was pro-gun-ownership too, but nobody's perfect.) Then she made two fateful deviations from the party line: she charged that NOW was muting criticism of O. J. Simpson to keep on the good side of the NAACP, and she wrote an op-ed piece defending Dr. Laura Schlessinger from the gay McCarthyites who eventually drove her off TV for saying that homosexual sex is "deviant." (Bruce says that Dr. Laura has been personally kind to her and to PFLAG, the organization of parents and friends of lesbians and gays.)

Her op-ed piece was mainly a defense of free speech. Instead of printing her op-ed right away, as it usually did, the *Los Angeles Times* delayed and said there were problems, so Bruce sent it to the *New York Times*, which gave it a heavy edit that "bore little resemblance to what I had originally submitted" and was "arguably anti-Laura." She withdrew the piece. It finally ran in the *Los Angeles Times*, tucked away in the poorly-read "Calendar" section, and very late in the quickly unfolding debate over Dr. Laura. Bruce found her status had changed. She had become un-interviewable in the *Los Angeles Times*. She said, "I've found out what it's like trying to get your message out when you are on the wrong side of an issue."

Now she has a strong book out:

The New Thought Police: Inside the Left's Assault on Free Speech and Free Minds. A few conservative outlets plugged it, but in five months she has not received a single review in any mainstream newspaper or magazine, which sort of proves her point about the power of the censoring left. If Norah Vincent, a brave *Los Angeles Times* columnist, had not written about this newsroom-unapproved book, few people in Bruce's hometown would even know she had written it. She is a non-person in the *L. A. Times*, and her book apparently never happened.

Now she knows that Bernie Goldberg is right. •