

**THE BLOG****Ask Mr. Media**

By Marty Kaplan

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Q: Now that it's an established fact that Valerie Plame Wilson was a covert CIA agent whose cover was blown by the Bush administration, don't Victoria Toensing, Fred Barnes, Mort Kondracke, Bill Bennett and all the other media people who insisted she wasn't covert have to correct their misstatements?

A: No. There's no such thing as pundit accountability. They can just deny they ever said it, or deny they're wrong now, or ask you why you hate America.

Q: But what about the networks and newspapers that ran their lie. Doesn't the Fairness Doctrine require Fox to —

A: Please. There is no Fairness Doctrine. Reagan killed it 20 years ago.

Q: Well, how about the Equal Time provision? Don't stations have to give time to people with different points of view to —

A: Nope. A station can be all-creationists-all-the-time, and there's no law saying they ever have to have a scientist on, unless they think it'd get higher ratings, in which case it's called the law of supply and demand.

Q: So when Fox gives as much coverage to Anna Nicole Smith as to Iraq, it's as much about money as about politics?

A: You got a problem with capitalism?

Q: But don't stations promise to fulfill certain public interest obligations when they pay their license fees to the government?

A: There are no license fees. We, the public, give broadcasters our airwaves for free.

Q: Ok. But when they have to renew their licenses every few years —

A: Every *eight* years.

Q: — every eight years, don't they have to prove they aired different viewpoints, and corrected mistakes when they were wrong?

A: No. All they have to do is fill out a postcard.

Q: You're telling me that there's no accountability for what gets put on the air?

A: Bingo.

Q: Not even news? A news program — not an opinion program, a news program — can give all its time over to Republicans, and they spout lying talking points all they want, and there's no law or regulation that can stop them?

A: That's the beauty of the First Amendment.

Q: But I thought there were still some regulations. What if Tom Tancredo goes on Lou Dobbs and says that the immigration bill is amnesty. Doesn't CNN have to put on another presidential candidate who disagrees?

A: Nope.

Q: What about Oprah? What if Mitt Romney goes on Oprah? Doesn't she have to have the other candidates on, too?

A: No way.

Q: Wait a minute. How about Fred Thompson? Don't stations have to stop showing reruns of the *Law and Order* episodes he's in, and his old movies, because they're basically free ads for him?

A: Not until his name is actually on a state ballot, which could be six months from now. And even then, they can still run on cable, which is where a lot of them are, anyway.

Q: This is a nightmare. The media can do anything they want —

A: Stop right there. There *are* some rules. No nipples. No poo-poo. No bad words.

Q: I'd call "traitor" a bad word.

A: Believe me, you don't want the Federal government regulating political speech.

Q: But if a handful of big corporations and billionaires controls the media, and they never have to be accountable for their lies —

A: As long as their lies are *entertaining*. You're always accountable to the audience, and the sponsors. If you lose the audience's attention, you're out of business.

Q: — so as long as the propaganda is a good circus act, there's no recourse for people who care about the truth?

A: Haven't you ever heard of the internets? Media scarcity is so 20th century. Welcome to the era of abundance!

Q: If it weren't for the internet, I'd go nuts. But most people still get way more news from television than they do online.

A: Did you see on the news that Bush thinks Iraq will end up like Korea? We'll have permanent bases there, and thousands of troops stationed there forever. Turns out we didn't go there for WMDs, or for freedom dominoes. It was all about the oil, after all.

Q: No, I didn't see that on the news. I saw it online.

A: Exactly my point. Your life in the blogosphere is proof of the marvelous robustness of the media.

Q: But that's nothing compared to the power of the MSM.

A: I suppose that means you're against taxing the internet?

Q: Fuckin-A, I am.

A: Ask Mr. Media is a civil discourse zone. Good-bye.

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Marty Kaplan 

USC Annenberg professor and Norman Lear Center director