

Beyond 935 Lies: The Decline and Fall of the Corporate Media

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[War is a Crime](#)

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#), [US NATO](#)

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Charles Lewis' book, *935 Lies*, would make a fine introduction to reality for anyone who believes the U.S. government usually means well or corporations tend to tell the truth in the free market. And it would make an excellent introduction to the decline and fall of the corporate media. Even if these topics aren't new to you, this book has something to add and retells the familiar quite well.

The familiar topics include the Gulf of Tonkin, the Pentagon Papers, Watergate, the civil rights movement, U.S. aggression and CIA overthrows, Pinochet, Iran-Contra, lying tobacco companies, and Edward R. Murrow. Lewis brings insight to these and other topics, and if he doesn't document that things were better before the 1960s, he does establish that horrible things have been getting worse since, and are now much more poorly reported on.

The *New York Times* and *Washington Post* were afraid not to print the Pentagon Papers. Nowadays a typical decision was that of the *New York Times* to bury its story on warrantless spying in 2004, with the explanation that printing it might have impacted an election. TV news today would not show you the civil rights movement or the war on Vietnam as it did at the time.

Lewis has hope for new media, including the Center for Public Integrity, which he founded in 1989, and which has produced numerous excellent reports, including on war profiteering, and which Lewis says is the largest nonprofit investigative reporting organization in the world.

Points I quibble with:

1. Human Rights Watch as a model media organization? [Really?](#)
2. The New America Foundation as a model media organization? [Really?](#)
3. Think tanks as a great hope for integrity in public life? [Really?](#)
4. After making 935 of the George W. Bush gang's lies a book title, you aren't sure he "knowingly" lied? Seriously?

This is the guy who wanted an excuse to attack Iraq before he had one. He told Tony Blair they could perhaps paint a U.S. plane in U.N. colors, fly it low, and hope for it to get shot at — after which conversation the two men spoke to the media about how they were trying to avoid war. This was January 31, 2003, and is quite well documented, but I don't think a

single reporter who was lied to that day has taken any offense or asked for an apology. This is the president who rushed the war to prevent completion of inspections. This is the president who made dozens of wild claims about weapons without evidence — in fact with evidence to the contrary.

Not only does overwhelming evidence show us that Bush knew his claims about WMDs to be false, but the former president has shown us that he considers the question of truth or falsehood to be laughably irrelevant. When Diane Sawyer asked Bush why he had claimed with such certainty that there were so many weapons in Iraq, he replied: “What’s the difference? The possibility that [Saddam] could acquire weapons, If he were to acquire weapons, he would be the danger.” What’s the difference? It’s the difference between lying and meaning well. This interview is available on video.

5. Why not bring the trend of lying about wars up to date, I wonder. Since I wrote *War Is A Lie* we’ve had all the lies about drone wars, the lies about Gadaffi threatening to slaughter civilians, the lies about Iranian nukes and Iranian terrorism, the lies about Russian invasions and attacks in Ukraine, the lies about chemical weapons use in Syria, the lies about humanitarian and barbaric justifications for attacking Iraq yet again. It’s hard to even keep up with the pace of the lies. But we ought to be able to properly identify the mother of all lies, and I don’t think it was the Gulf of Tonkin.

6. Lewis’s model of integrity is Edward R. Murrow. Among Murrow’s independent and heroic credentials, according to Lewis, is that he met with President Roosevelt hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Now, I take nothing away from Murrow’s reporting and the stand he later took for a free press. But why did Lewis bring up this meeting? And once he’d brought it up why did he not mention that Murrow told his wife that night that FDR had given him the “biggest story of my life, but I don’t know if it’s my duty to tell it or forget it.” The Murrow depicted by Lewis would have known what his duty was. Murrow later told John Gunther that the story would put his kid through college if he told it. He never did.

That many people will not immediately know what the story was is testimony to a pattern that Lewis documents. Some lies take many, many years to fall apart. The [biggest ones](#) sometimes take the longest.

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