

Covering (Up) Antiwar Protest in US Media

March 18 DC peace march almost completely blacked out in US corporate media

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In the early morning of March 20, 2003, US Navy bombers on aircraft carriers and Tomahawk missile-launching vessels in the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean, along with Air Force B-52s in Britain and B-2s in Diego Garcia, struck Baghdad and other parts of Iraq in a "Shock and Awe" blitzkrieg to oust Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein and occupy that oil-rich country.

Twenty years on, the US news media, as is their habit with America's wars, published stories looking back at that war and its history ([FAIR.org](#), [3/22/23](#)), most of them treading lightly around the rank illegality of the US attack, a war crime that was not approved by the UN Security Council, and was not a response to any imminent Iraqi threat to the US, as required by the UN Charter.

Oddly, none of those national media organizations' editors saw as relevant or remotely newsworthy a groundbreaking [protest rally and march](#) outside the White House of at least 2,500–3,000 people on Saturday, March 18, 2023, called by a coalition of over 200 peace and anti-militarism organizations to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the Iraq invasion.

The **Washington Post**, like the rest of the national news media, failed to mention or even run a photo of the rally in Lafayette Park. It didn't even cover the peaceful and spirited march from the front of the White House along Pennsylvania and New York avenues to the K Street **Washington Post** building to deliver several black coffins as a local story—despite the paper's having a reporter whose beat is actually [described](#) by **Post** as being to "cover protests and general assignments for the metro desk." An email request to this reporter, Ellie Silverman, asking why this local protest in DC went unreported did not get a response.

National press a no-show

The rally, organized by the ANSWER Coalition and sponsors such as [Code Pink](#), [Veterans for Peace](#), [Black Alliance for Peace](#) and [Radical Elders](#), drew “several thousand” antiwar, anti-military protesters, according to ANSWER Coalition national director Brian Becker. He said the demonstration’s endorsers were calling for peace negotiations and an end to US arms for Ukraine, major cuts in the US military budget, an end to the US policy of endless wars, and freedom for Julian Assange and Indigenous prisoner Leonard Peltier.

Becker said that the coalition had a media team that spent two weeks on phones and computers, reaching out to national and local media organizations, including in the seven or eight other cities, including Los Angeles, Chicago and San Francisco, that held rallies on the same day. “Not a single member of the national press even showed up,” he said.

Two local Washington TV stations (**CBS** and **ABC** affiliates) did do brief stories on the rally and march, but **Google** and Nexis searches turned up not a single major mainstream national news report on the event, though it was the second, and significantly larger, antiwar demonstration in Washington in just four weeks, and the first by specifically left-wing peace and antiwar organizations. (The first rally, on February 19, called “Rage Against the War Machine,” organized primarily by libertarians and some left-wing opponents of the US proxy war with Russia, did get a mention in the conservative **Washington Times** ([2/19/23](#)) and promotion a day before the event by right-wing **Fox News** host Tucker Carlson ([2/17/22](#)).

“We talked to reporters and gave them details about our planning events during the two weeks before the march—the kinds of things that journalists years back used to like to attend to hear what the activists were saying and thinking, but nobody showed up from the media at those sessions,” says Becker. “I guess those who make the decisions about assignments and coverage didn’t want this event covered.”

Shift from the '60s

FAIR founder Jeff Cohen noted a shift from the way peace demonstrations were covered in the 1960s. “Even a few hundred antiwar protesters at a local anti-Vietnam War march would get local news coverage,” he recalled:

We weren’t ignored, but every participant complained about the quality of the coverage that so often focused on the length of men’s hair, length of women’s skirts, usage of four-letter words, etc. and not substantive critique of war or US foreign policy. National protests in DC got significant national coverage, but not friendly coverage.

Cohen contrasted this with antiwar protests in recent decades, which have frequently been snubbed by media. “I think the ignoring of local and even national antiwar marches kicked in during the mid- and late 1980s around movements opposing US intervention in Central America,” he said.

Noam Chomsky (who knows from personal experience the sensation of being virtually blacklisted by corporate media) was a speaker at the March 18 event. Asked to explain this latest blackout of antiwar sentiment and opposition to military aid to Ukraine, he responded, “Par for the course.” He added, “Media rarely stray far from the basic framework imposed by systems of power, as FAIR has been effectively documenting for many years.”

Filling the hole

Fortunately, alternative media, which have proliferated online, are filling in the hole in protest coverage, though of course readers and viewers have to seek out those sources of information. There was a news report on the march in **Fightback News** ([3/23/23](#)), for example, and commentary on the **World Socialist Web Site** ([3/21/23](#)) and **Black Agenda Report** ([2/22/23](#)).

Foreign coverage of the March 18 antiwar event in the US was substantial, which should embarrass editors at US news organizations. Some foreign coverage, considering that it appeared in state-owned or partially state-owned media, were surprisingly professional. Read, for example, the report by **Xinhua** ([3/19/23](#)), China's government-owned news service, or one in **Al Myadeen** ([3/18/23](#)), the Lebanese satellite news service, which reportedly favors Syria and Hezbollah.

It's rather disturbing to find such foreign news outfits, not just covering news that is being hidden from Americans by their own vaunted and supposedly "free" press, but doing it more straightforwardly than US corporate media often do when they actually report on protests against US government policy.

Efforts to get either the **Washington Post** or **New York Times** to explain their airbrushing out the March 18 antiwar protest in Washington were unsuccessful. (Both publications have eliminated their news ombud offices, citing "budget issues.")

Fortunately [Patrick Pexton](#), the last ombud at the **Washington Post**, who now teaches journalism at Johns Hopkins University, and writes on media, foreign and defense policy, and politics and society, offered this emailed observation about the March 18 demonstration blackout:

I confess that I am surprised no major national news organization covered it. I know that some people look down their noses at Code Pink and ANSWER Coalition, and journalists generally are supportive of the Ukraine War, but the demonstrators have a legitimate point of view, and my general personal rule is that anytime you get 1,000 people to turn out to protest something, you should at the very least do a local story about it. I don't know what the **Post** rules are today.

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