

The Record of the Newspaper of Record

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Global Research, June 20, 2007

20 June 2007

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Dictionaries define “yellow journalism” variously as irresponsible and sensationalist reporting that distorts, exaggerates or misstates the truth. It’s misinformation or agitprop disinformation masquerading as fact to boost circulation and readership or serve a larger purpose like lying for state and corporate interests. The dominant US media excel in it, producing a daily diet of fiction portrayed as real news and information in their role as our national thought-control police gatekeepers. In the lead among the print and electronic corporate-controlled media is the New York Times publishing “All The News That’s Fit To Print” by its standards. Others wanting real journalism won’t find it on their pages allowing only the fake kind. It’s because this paper’s primary mission is to be the lead instrument of state propaganda making it the closest thing we have in the country to an official ministry of information and propaganda.

Singlehandedly, the Times destroys “The Myth of the Liberal Media” that’s also the title of Edward Herman’s 1999 book on “the illiberal media,” the market system, and what passes for democracy in America Michael Parenti calls “Democracy For the Few,” in his book with that title out earlier this year in its 8th edition.

In his book, Herman writes about the “propaganda model” he and Noam Chomsky introduced and developed 11 years earlier in their landmark book titled “Manufacturing Consent.” They explained how the dominant media use this technique to program the public mind to go along with whatever agenda best serves wealth and power interests. So imperial wars of aggression are portrayed as liberating ones, humanitarian intervention, and spreading democracy to nations without any. Never mind they’re really for new markets, resources like oil, and cheap exploitable labor paid for with public tax dollars diverted from essential social needs.

In “The Myth of the Liberal Media,” Herman explains the “propaganda model” focuses on “the inequality of wealth and power” and how those with most of it can “filter out the news to print, marginalize dissent (and assure) government and dominant private interests” control the message and get it to the public. It’s done through a set of “filters” removing what’s to be suppressed and “leaving only the cleansed (acceptable) residue fit to print” or broadcast electronically. Parenti’s “Democracy For the Few” is democracy-US style the rest of us are stuck with.

Books have been written on how, going back decades, the New York Times betrayed the public trust serving elitist interests alone. It plays the lead and most influential media role disseminating state and corporate propaganda to the nation and world. In terms of media clout, the Times is unmatched with its prominent front page being what media critic Norman Solomon calls “the most valuable square inches of media real estate in the USA” – more accurately, anywhere.

Examples of Times duplicity are endless showing up every day on its pages. The shameless Judith Miller saga is just the latest episode of how bad they can get, but she had her predecessors, and the beat goes on since she left in disgrace. Through the years, the Times never met a US war of aggression it didn't love and support. It was never bothered by CIA's functioning as a global Mafia-style hit squad/training headquarters ousting democratically elected governments, assassinating foreign heads of state and key officials, propping up friendly dictators, funding and training secret paramilitary armies and death squads, and now snatching individuals for "extraordinary rendition" to torture-prison hellholes, some run by the agency and all taking orders from it.

CIA, as Chalmers Johnson notes, is a state within a state functioning as the president's unaccountable private army with unchecked powers and a near-limitless off-the-books secret budget we now know tops \$44 billion annually. It menaces democratic rule, threatens the Republic's survival and makes any notion of a free society impossible as long as this agency exists. Not a problem at New York Times. It worked closely with CIA since the 1950s allowing some of its foreign correspondents to be Agency assets or agents. It no doubt still does.

The Times is also unbothered by social decay at home, an unprecedented wealth disparity, an administration mocking the rule of law, a de facto one party state with two wings and a president usurping "unitary executive" powers claiming the law is what he says it is making him a dictator. It practically reveres the cesspool of corrupted incestuous ties between government and business, mocking any notion of democracy of, for, or by the people. That's the state of the nation's "liberal media" headquartered in the Times building in New York.

The New York Times v. Hugo Chavez

This article focuses on one example of Times duplicity among many other prominent ones equally sinister and disturbing - its venomous agitprop targeting Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez this writer calls the leading model democratic leader on the planet even though he's not perfect, nor is anyone else. That's why after "Islamofascist terrorists" he's practically "enemy number one" on the Times hit list and Washington's. Besides Venezuela being oil rich, Chavez is the greatest of all threats the US faces - a good example that's spreading. His governance shows how real social democracy works exposing the fake American kind.

That's intolerable to the masters of the universe and their leading media proponent, the New York Times. It always plays the lead media role keeping the world safe for wealth and power. So on June 6, it hauled out former Peruvian president and first ever indigenous Andean one in the country's history - Alejandro Toledo (2001 - 2006). His electoral campaign promised a populist vision for Peruvians, to create new jobs, address dire social needs of the country's poor, and end years of corruption and hard line rule under Alberto Fujimori, now a wanted man on charges of corruption and human rights abuses.

Toledo was little better, failing on all counts pushing the same repressive neoliberal policies he was elected to end. He was in tow with Washington's agenda of privatizations, deregulation, IMF/World Bank diktats, debt service, and overall contempt for the essential social needs of his people. He was also tainted with corruption, and during his tenure violence was used against protest demonstrators, criminal suspects in prisons were beaten and tortured, and dozens of journalists were threatened or attacked for criticizing local politicians or him.

No problem for the New York Times that published his June 6 op ed piece titled "Silence = Despotism." In it, he said "Political democracy will take root in Latin America only when it is accompanied by economic and social democracy (under) political systems....free and fair for all." As Peru's president, he thwarted efforts to do what he now says he champions. Toledo continued saying "our citizens" must be heard, and if free speech is silenced in one country, "silence could spread to other nations" pointing his hypocritical finger squarely at Hugo Chavez.

Venezuelans, he says, "are in the streets (today) confronting repressions. Courageous students raise the flags of freedom, refusing to mortgage their future by remaining silent." He quickly gets to the point citing Hugo Chavez's refusal to renew RCTV's Channel 2 VHF license saying "This is about more than one TV station. President Chavez has become a destabilizing figure throughout the hemisphere because he feels he can silence anyone with opposing thoughts (by) silencing them through repression or government decrees." He then called on other Latin American leaders to confront "authoritarianism" and "stand up for continent-wide solidarity" citing his own presidency and how "it never occurred to (him) to silence (critical) media outlets (or) nationalize them."

Toledo's tainted record as president belies his shameless pieties on the Times op ed page. He did more than try silencing critics. He stayed mute when they were attacked or when two or more of them were killed. The New York Times knows his record even though it suppressed the worst of it while he was in office. Yet it gave him prominent space to denounce Hugo Chavez's social democracy and legal right not to renew the operating license of a TV channel for its repeated illegal seditious acts. RCTV was a serial abuser of its right to use the public airwaves. It was then guilty of supporting and being complicit with efforts to foment insurrection to overthrow Venezuela's democratically elected government.

Toledo ignored this saying, as Peru's president, he was "always....respectful of opinions" differing from his own. He would "never agree with those who prefer silence instead of dissonant voices. Those....who embrace liberty and democracy must stand ready to work in solidarity with the Venezuelan people." He failed to say which ones he meant, surely not the 70% or more backing Chavez. And by failing to denounce RCTV's lawlessness, he showed he condoned it. He also forgot his successor as president, Alan Garcia, lawlessly silenced two Peruvian TV stations and three radio stations, apparently for supporting a lawful strike Garcia opposes.

The New York Times has an ugly record bashing Hugo Chavez since he was elected with a mandate to make participatory social democracy the cornerstone of his presidency. That's anathema to Washington and its chief media ally, the New York Times. Since 1999 when he took office, it hammered Chavez with accusations of opposing the US-sponsored Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA) without explaining it would sell out to big capital at the expense of his people if adopted.

Following his election in December, 1998, Times Latin American reporter Larry Roher wrote: (Latin American) presidents and party leaders are looking over their shoulders (worried about the) specter....the region's ruling elite thought they had safely interred: that of the populist demagogue, the authoritarian man on horseback known as the caudillo (strongman)."

The Times later denounced him for using petrodollars for foreign aid to neighbors, equating

promoting solidarity, cooperation and respecting other nations' sovereignty with subversion and buying influence. It criticized his raising royalties and taxes on foreign investors, never explaining it was to end their longtime preferential treatment making them pay their fair share as they should. It bashed him for wanting his own people to benefit most from their own resources, not predatory oil and other foreign investors the way it was before Chavez took office. No longer, and that can't be tolerated in Washington or on the pages of the New York Times.

When state oil company PDVSA became majority shareholder with foreign investors May 1 with a minimum 60% ownership in four Orinoco River basin oil projects, the Times savaged Chavez. It condemned his "revolutionary flourish (and his) ambitious (plan to) wrest control of several major oil projects from American and European companies (with a) showdown (ahead for these) coveted energy resources...." Unmentioned was these resources belong to the Venezuelan people. The Times also accuses Chavez of allowing "politics and ideology" to drive US-Venezuelan confrontation "to limit American influence around the world, starting in Venezuela's oil fields."

It calls him "divisive, a ruinous demagogue, provocative (and) the next Fidel Castro." It savored the 2002 aborted two day coup ousting him calling it a "resignation" and that Venezuela "no longer (would be) threatened by a would-be dictator." It reported he "stepped down (and was replaced by (a) respected business leader" (Pedro Carmona - president of Fedecamaras, the Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce).

Unmentioned was that Carmona was hand-picked in Washington and by Venezuelan oligarchs to do their bidding at the expense of the people. He proved his bona fides by suspending the democratically elected members of the National Assembly and crushing Bolivarian Revolutionary Constitutional reforms, quickly restored once Chavez was reinstated in office. Carmona fled to Colombia seeking political asylum from where Venezuela's Supreme Court now wants him extradited on charges of civil rebellion. Unmentioned also was that the Times had to dismiss one of its Venezuelan reporters, Francisco Toro, in January, 2003 when Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR) revealed he was an anti-Chavista activist masquerading as an objective journalist.

Back to the present, the Times claims Chavez is moving to consolidate his dictatorial powers by shuttering RCTV's Channel 2 and silencing his critics. It portrays him as a Latin American strongman waging class warfare with socialist rhetoric. It asks how long Venezuelans will put up with the destruction of their democratic freedoms? It points to "evidence Mr. Chavez's definition of the enemy has been enlarged to include news media outlets....critical of his government....extending his control beyond political institutions (alone)." This marks a "shift from the early years of his presidency, when he (also) faced vitriolic criticism" from the media.

The Times speculates how brutal he'll become silencing critics and quelling protests wondering if he'll use proxies to do it. It then questions whether Chavez overstepped enough to marshal large-scale opposition to him to push him past the tipping point that will inevitably lead to his loss of credibility and power. Might this be a thinly disguised Times effort to create the reality it supports by wishing for it through the power of suggestion.

Times business columnist Roger Lowenstein is on board to make it happen. He claims, with no substantiation, Chavez "militarized the government, emasculated the country's courts, intimidated the media, eroded confidence in the economy and hollowed out Venezuela's

once-democratic institutions.” Turn this on its head to know the truth Lowenstein won’t report – that Chavez militarized nothing. He put his underutilized military to work implementing Venezuela’s Plan Bolivar 2000 constructing housing for the poor, building roads, conducting mass vaccinations, and overall serving people needs, not invading and occupying other countries and threatening to flatten other “uncooperative” ones.

Venezuela’s courts function independently of the democratically elected President and National Assembly. The media is the freest and most open in the region and the world with most of it corporate owned as it is nearly everywhere. Further, business is booming enough to get the Financial Times to say bankers were having “a party,” and the country never had a functioning democracy until Hugo Chavez made it flourish there.

Times Venezuelan reporter Simon Romero is little better than Lowenstein or others sending back agitprop disguised as real journalism in his Venezuelan coverage, including RCTV closure street protests. He made events on Caracas streets sound almost like a one-sided uprising of protesters against Chavez with “images of policemen with guns drawn” intimidating them. He highlighted Chavez’s critics claiming “the move to allow RCTV’s license to expire amounts to a stifling of dissent in the news media.” He quoted Elisa Parejo, one of RCTV’s first soap opera stars, saying “What we’re living in Venezuela is a monstrosity. It is a dictatorship.”

He quoted right wing daily newspaper El Nacional as well portraying the RCTV decision as “the end of pluralism” in the country. Gonzalo Marroquin, president of the corporate media-controlled Inter-American Press Association (IAPA), was also cited saying Chavez wants to “standardize the right to information (indicating) a very bleak outlook for the whole hemisphere.” He invented corporate-cooked polling numbers showing “most Venezuelans oppose Mr. Chavez’s decision not to renew RCTV’s license.” In fact, the opposite is true and street demonstrators for and against RCTV’s shuttering proved it. Venezuelans supporting Chavez dwarfed the opposition many times over. But you won’t find Romero or any other Times correspondent reporting that. If any try doing it, they’ll end up doing obits as their future beat.

Back in February, Romero was at it earlier. Then, he hyped Venezuela’s arms spending making it sound like Chavez threatened regional stability and was preparing to bomb or invade Miami. Romero’s incendiary headline read “Venezuela Spending on Arms Soars to World’s Top Ranks.” It began saying “Venezuela’s arms spending has climbed to more than \$4 billion in the past two years, transforming the nation into Latin America’s largest weapons buyer” with suggestive comparisons to Iran. The report revealed this information came from the US Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) making that unreliable source alone reason to question its accuracy and what’s behind it.

The figure quoted refers only to what Venezuela spends on arms, not its total military spending. Unmentioned was that the country’s total military spending is half of Argentina’s, less than one-third of Colombia’s, and one-twelfth of Brazil’s according to Center for Arms Control and Nonproliferation figures ranking Venezuela 63rd in the world in military spending. The Center also reported Venezuela’s 2004 military budget at \$1.1 billion making Romero’s \$4 billion DIA figure phony and a spurious attempt to portray Chavez as a regional threat needing to be counteracted. At that level, he’s also outspent by the Pentagon 500 to one, or lots more depending on how US military spending and homeland security readiness are calculated, including all their unreported or hidden costs.

On June 12, Venezuela Analysis.com reported, in an article by "Oil Wars," the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) indicated Venezuela's military spending for 2006 was \$1.9 billion. The report's author voiced skepticism so compared this number to Venezuela's Ministry of Defense expenditures for that year in its "Memoria y Cuenta." It's figure was \$1,977,179,179 thousand Bolivars that converted to US dollars comes to \$919,618,000. To that must be added another \$1.09 billion the Ministry of Defense got from Venezuela's FONDEN, or development fund. Adding both numbers together, of course, shows the country's 2006 military spending at \$2 billion.

Based on The Independent Institute's Senior Fellow Robert Higgs' calculation of US defense spending for FY 2006 of \$934.9 billion, it still means the Pentagon outspends Venezuela's military by around 500 to one. Higgs includes the separate budgets for the Department of Defense, Energy, State, Veterans Affairs, Homeland Security, Treasury's Military Retirement Fund, other smaller defense-related budgets plus net interest paid attributable to past debt-financed defense outlays. Even then, he omitted off-the-books budgets and secret intelligence ones for CIA and NSA.

Back to the Times' Romero and it's clear his reporting smells the same as Iraq's WMDs and Iran's legal commercial nuclear program being threat enough to warrant sanctions and a US military response. Romero is right in step with Bush administration World Bank president neocon nominee Robert Zoellick. He took aim at Hugo Chavez from Mexico City June 16 with warnings Venezuela is "a country where economic problems are mounting, and as we're seeing on the political side it's not moving in a healthy direction."

Romero reports similar agitprop and did it May 17 in his article titled "Clash of Hope and Fear as Venezuela Seizes Land." He began saying "The squatters arrive before dawn with machetes and rifles, surround the well-ordered rows of sugar cane and threaten to kill anyone who interferes. Then they light a match to the crops and declare the land their own." He continued saying "Mr. Chavez is carrying out what may become the largest forced land redistribution in Venezuela's history, building utopian farming villages for squatters, lavishing money on new cooperatives and sending army commando units to supervise seized estates in six states."

Violence has accompanied seizures, says Romero, "with more than 160 peasants killed by hired gunmen in Venezuela (and) Eight landowners have also been killed...." Since Chavez took office, there have been peasant and other violent deaths, but most of them have been at the hands of US-Colombian government financed paramilitary death squads operating in Venezuela.

Romero stays clear of this while making his rhetoric sound like an armed insurrection is underway in Venezuela forcibly and illegally seizing land from its rightful owners. What's going on, in fact, is quite different that can only be touched on briefly to explain. Hugo Chavez first announced his "Return to the Countryside" plan under the Law on Land and Agricultural Development in November, 2001. The law set limits on landholding size; taxed unused property; aimed to redistribute unused, mainly government-owned land to peasant families and cooperatives; and expropriate uncultivated, unused land from large private owners compensating them at fair market value. So, in fact, the government seizes nothing. It buys unused land from large estates and pays for it so landless peasants can have and use it productively for the first time ever benefitting everyone equitably.

Nowhere in his article did Romero explain this although he did acknowledge prior to 2002,

“an estimated 5 per cent of the population owned 80 per cent of the country’s private land.” By omitting what was most important to include, Romero’s report distorted the truth enough to assure his readers never get it from him. Nor do they from any other Times correspondent when facts conflict with imperial interests. That’s what we’ve come to expect from the “newspaper of record” never letting truth interfere with serving wealth and power interests that includes lying for them. Shameless reporting on Venezuela under Hugo Chavez is one of many dozens of examples of Times duplicity and disservice to its readers going back decades.

Former Times journalist John Hess denounced it his way: I “never saw a foreign intervention that the Times did not support, never saw a fare....rent....or utility increase that it did not endorse, never saw it take the side of labor in a strike or lockout, or advocate a raise for underpaid workers. And don’t get me started on universal health care and Social Security. So why do people think the Times is liberal?” And why should anyone think its so-called news and information is anything more than propaganda for the imperial interests it serves?

Robert McChesney and Mark Weisbrot explained it well in their June 1 CommonDreams.org article on “Venezuela and the Media” saying: “the US media coverage (with NYT in the lead) of Venezuela’s RCTV controversy (and most everything else) says more about the deficiencies of our own news media than it does about Venezuela. It demonstrates again (it’s more) willing to carry water for Washington (and the corporate interests it serves) than to ascertain and report the truth of the matter.” At the Times, truth is the first casualty, especially when the nation’s at war.

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