



## Amy Goodman Demands Democracy Now!

### Celebrated independent radio host speaks with CHP about the importance of alternative media and critical journalism

By Leah Bartos

After a conversation with Amy Goodman, the state of journalism seems grim.

Goodman, host of the Democracy Now! radio show, exposes the reporters and editors complicit with the government's agenda in her new book, *Static: Government Liars, Media Cheerleaders and the People Who Fight Back*. From wiretapping to torture, Goodman calls out the journalists who have acted in the interest of the administration, not the people.

But Goodman has hope.

With independent media sprouting across the nation and the rapidly growing audience for Democracy Now!, Goodman envisions the return of "watchdog" journalism.

But as her show celebrates its 10th year on the air, Goodman laments there are still too few independent voices on the airwaves and in the newsstands.

"There is just a vast audience for unembedded voices," she said. "We should not be as unique as we are"

Left-wingers, radical anarchists and UC Santa Cruz students are among the devoted fans of Goodman's show, but she insists that it does not fall within partisan lines. Though often labeled as a liberal program, Goodman says she just wants to be fair.

In this day and age, it seems that simply telling the truth becomes a revolutionary act.

City on a Hill Press: Static seems to portray a sense of impending doom for the future of journalism. How do you foresee the future?

Amy Goodman: I actually am hopeful. There's independent media in this country that's growing. And I think that there's a hunger for it. The media today has reached an all-time low. President Bush not finding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq exposed more than just him-it exposed a media that acted as a conveyor belt for the lies of the administration. And people are looking elsewhere now. They understand the media is not just a mirror reflection of what's going on, that it has presented wrong information, lies, that it has acted uncritically. The media-with the high tech digital age-has presented a picture with ever more static, a veil of lies, opposition, and half-truths and misrepresentations and omissions-and it's unforgivable. We need a media that tells the truth, that doesn't engage in the "access of evil"-that is, trading truth for access. We need a media that covers movements and makes history.

CHP: What advantages does a program like Democracy Now! have over corporate media?

Goodman: We're independent. We're not brought to you by corporations that profit from war-whether it's Lockheed Martin or Boeing or Wal-Mart. We're brought to the listeners and viewers by artists and journalists, supported by viewers and listeners. It's the original model of Pacifica radio that there has to be a media outlet that does not profit from war. And that continues 60 years later. Now we've expanded beyond Pacifica radio. We broadcast on over 500 radio and television stations all over the country as well as the two TV satellite networks. We're the largest independent media collaboration in the country. Two to three news stations a week are picking us up.

CHP: At the same time that the program is growing, does Democracy Now! face greater criticism?

Goodman: I would say that conservative and liberal lines are breaking down. We have people across the spectrum that read, listen to, and watch Democracy Now! We provide a fair forum for debate and discussion. No matter what your view, if you're on the show, you get a fair airing of your views. When we have a debate, people aren't screaming each other down. We're not hate radio or television. We're there to provide a forum for a civilized discussion. And that's why I think it's become so popular. Young people, as well as old. I was in Sarasota College in Florida and a 15-year-old boy was there from the local military academy in a uniform. And I asked him why he was there and he said, "I wouldn't miss Democracy Now!"

CHP: Do you think, though, there are still people who don't take Democracy Now! as serious journalism?

Goodman: Oh I think it's taken very seriously from the number of calls from mainstream journalists who want to follow up on our contacts and the people we interview. It happens so much that I think it's taken seriously.

CHP: Some of those journalists, I understand, have also picked up stories that you've broken?

Goodman: Like the story Raed-Jarrar, the Iraqi architect who tried to get a flight from Kennedy to San Francisco and he was told that he couldn't get

on if he was wearing the T-shirt he had on, which had the words, "we will not be silent" on it. They said it wasn't the English the bothered them, it was the Arabic and that was threatening. [They said] it would be like walking into a bank wearing a T-shirt that said, "I am a robber." And so he was forced to put a T-shirt on that covered his.

CHP: So you broke the story and then what happened?

Goodman: Then all the networks picked it up, ABC, NBC. It became a top story in many places. And that's our motto at Democracy Now! They didn't print it up, but we say, "steal this story." We call it "trickle up journalism."

CHP: Do you ever fear that you are preaching to the converted, so to speak?

Goodman: Again, conservative and liberal lines are breaking down. [Our listeners include] people across the political spectrum. In Salt Lake City we interviewed Sgt. Marshall Thompson who's walking across the reddest state in the country, Utah. He just came back from being in Iraq for a year where he was the editor of the Anaconda Times. He interviewed thousands of soldiers and realized when he was there that the majority of the soldiers were opposed to the war.

CHP: You mentioned that your audience has grown significantly since Sept. 11, 2001. What is the significance of this correlation?

Goodman: The pretext for war has been exposed. President Bush floated various ideas that Saddam Hussein is a tyrant-and that of course I think is right-and people believe it. But it wasn't enough; people did not accept that as a reason to attack Iraq. But when he floated "weapons of mass destruction," people did, because they were afraid. And understandably. You want to protect your family and your country. But that wasn't the truth. And I think it's absolutely critical that the media tell the truth. And so people are now looking at the places that got it right, like Democracy Now!

CHP: What do you want your listeners to take away from Democracy Now!?

Goodman: I want people to hear a full spectrum of debate and discussion about the most important issues of the day. The bedrock of democracy is informed citizenry. I mean, when you have the U.S. government paying companies in Iraq tens of millions of dollars to plant propaganda secretly written by the U.S. military in Iraqi papers, paying off publishers, newspapers, reporters, that's a big problem. Iraqis see that what's being printed or broadcasted isn't true, and so they come to distrust their media. Media is the hope of a democracy.

CHP: What motivates you on a daily basis?

Goodman: Meeting people all over the country who are committed to making the world a better place, who up against all the odds continue that work. I find that very inspiring and a serious challenge to really have the debates that are critical for a functioning democratic society. To be able to provide those debates also fuels me.

CHP: Do you have any advice to students and aspiring journalists?

Goodman: Just to do it. And I think it's so important because young people have all the qualities that make for a seasoned journalist. You are optimistic but you are critical, you challenge authority, and that's all very important. That's what you need not only in the beginning of your career, but at the end. And independence. I was lucky enough to find in the beginning of my career, that independence. And that's the essential ingredient for you as a journalist. And we need young journalists. It is absolutely critical that reporters go to where the silence is. So good luck.

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