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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Amy Goodman's Left Hook for Cable TV

by Joe Hagan

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NYTV

In the wide, wide political spectrum of cable-news punditry—that

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is, Beltway Red and Blue, Republican and Democrat—Amy Goodman is a nice shade of shocking pink. She's a good old-fashioned lefty.

But if you think the 47-year-old host of the liberal radio and TV show *Democracy Now!* and author of *The Exception to the Rulers: Exposing Oily Politicians, War Profiteers, and the Media That Love Them*—is on the far left, that's just because everything you're seeing and hearing on TV is in shades of red.

"It's the right debating the far right," said Ms. Goodman on Monday, Nov. 15. "We need something outside that." Until now, Ms. Goodman has mainly had to confine her classic activism to a narrow sliver of FM radio—Pacifica Radio's WBAI 99.5 FM—and to a simulcast cable-access program on Manhattan Neighborhood Network, BCAT, QPTV and CUNY-TV.

But now that the roar of the Presidential election has finally subsided, and Scott Peterson's news value has screeched to a halt, cable newsmakers are looking for fresh material. Enter Ms. Goodman, an unapologetic progressive within a media that has run out of so many story lines that liberal activists are interesting once more. In her book, Ms. Goodman accuses the press of sucking up to government officials—"the access of evil"—and consisting of talking heads who, she said, "know so little about so much, commenting on every issue."

You know who you are.

On Friday, Nov. 12, Ms. Goodman turned up on Tucker Carlson's PBS show, *Unfiltered*, which led to a big booking on MSNBC's *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, set for Wednesday, Nov. 17. Mr.

Matthews' executive producer, Tammy Haddad, saw Ms. Goodman "on Tucker's show, and I thought she was an amazing talker and certainly worth talking to. Her point is that journalists are in collusion with officialdom."

Ms. Haddad said she found that point "interesting."

"Amy Goodman appears to have great passion and a singular voice, which is basic to cable success," she added.

Ms. Goodman said a voice like hers was necessary for network and cable-TV news operations to cleanse their sins after a shameful last few years.

"The Bush administration not finding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq exposed more than the Bush administration," she said. "It exposed a media that beat the drums for war for several years Fox is easy to attack and it should be, but we're talking about ABC, NBC, CBS, CNN, all of them."

In keeping with her constituency, Ms. Goodman got booked on Mr. Carlson's show thanks to a lefty San Francisco cab driver. "We were having this conversation about politics," said Mr. Carlson. "He was a radical lefty—I kind of like that, better than liberals—and he said, 'Do you know Amy Goodman?', and he said, 'You gotta have her on.' And I called my booker and we booked her."

"Well, we do have a very large cab-driving audience, for sure," said Ms. Goodman.

Mr. Carlson said he had wanted to bring more left guests on his PBS show. "She's kind of hostile to America, but it was good," said Mr. Carlson, who bristled at Ms. Goodman's contention that cable news coverage is influenced by its conglomerate owners. "But I don't think people are trying to please their corporate masters, and so I don't buy that. She's a big self-promoter. She gave her satellite coordinates on my show, which bugged me."

It's not as though Mr. Carlson had never encountered a self-promoter on CNN's *Crossfire*, which is Channel 200 on the DISH Network, by the way. But he'd have her on again, he said.

"She's not a lifestyle liberal," said Mr. Carlson. "Her first concern is not making sure you drive a Prius. She's actually interested in reordering society. Again, I disagree with her. But I thought she was a good guest."

Ms. Goodman said she was pleasantly surprised to hear from Mr. Carlson, but that didn't buy him a reprieve. "I'm concerned about a right-wing takeover at PBS," she said, referring to the recent departure of Bill Moyers and the addition of a show featuring *The Wall Street Journal* editorial board and also Mr. Carlson's show.

Was Ms. Goodman—who can't weigh more than 130 pounds—ready to go toe-to-toe with Mr. Beef himself, Chris Matthews?

"I'm anxious about what happens to people in Iraq, I'm anxious about people covering Timor," she said. "I'm not anxious about going on Chris Matthews' show."

That's the spirit.

On TV, Ms. Goodman comes off as a no-frills Noam Chomsky pinup and anti-Deborah Norville who will rip your throat out if you don't answer the question—as President Bill Clinton learned on election day in 2000, when he made a routine call-in to her radio show to plug Hillary R. Clinton's Senate run. Ms. Goodman pummeled the President on whether Ralph Nader's run was made possible by Mr. Clinton turning the Democratic Party to the right during his eight-year term.

"Now let me ... now, wait a minute," stammered an angry Mr. Clinton. "You started this and every question you've asked has been hostile and combative. So you listen to my answer, will you do that? Now, you just listen to me. You ask the questions, and I'm going to answer. You have asked questions in a hostile, combative, and even disrespectful tone."

She's ready for prime time. NYTV asked Ms. Goodman if she would ever take a regular gig on a TV show like *Fox News Sunday*—as NPR's Juan Williams did. She didn't count it out. The TV news media, she said, "has reached an all-time low. So I welcome the opportunity to talk about these issues."

Calling Brit Hume!

Ms. Goodman's book was published by Hyperion, a subsidiary of Disney. And Tucker Carlson prodded Ms. Goodman to respond to the question of whether criticizing the big media from a big-media platform opened her up to criticism.

"If you want to be able to communicate with many people who are watching the mass media, you have to go where they are," said Ms. Goodman.

Hiya, kids! This morning on the Disney Channel, it's Club Chomsky!

Tonight, Ms. Goodman broadcasts from an old firehouse in Chinatown. [*CUNY, 75, midnight*]

Thursday, Nov. 18

Tonight, Seth Cohen has had it with *The O.C.* again and—in a complicated deal between Jeff Zucker and Rupert Murdoch that involves the issuance of high-yield

bonds—decides to move in with *Joey*. [FOX, 5, 8 p.m.]

Friday, Nov. 19

Last week, Mel Gibson's film company, Icon Productions, sent one too many faxes to Larry Gelbart, *Sly Fox* playwright, *Tootsie* screenwriter, producer of TV's *M*A*S*H*.

The company was mass-faxing members of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and the Director's Guild of America, inviting them to attend a Nov. 15 screening of *The Passion of the Christ*—presumably to drum up buzz for an Oscar nomination.

"I'm sure it won't be long before the script, dripping blood, will be received [by me] as a member of the Writer's Guild," said the 81-year-old Mr. Gelbart on Monday, Nov. 15.

In response, Mr. Gelbart started a counter-fax offensive, sending a cover sheet that read in big, upper-case, handwritten block letters:

"SAVE YOUR POSTAGE. KINDLY DO NOT SEND ME INVITATIONS TO SCREENINGS OF 'THE PASSION.' EACH INVITATION IS AN ADDITIONAL AFFRONT TO ME. THANK YOU."

Signed, Larry Gelbart.

Mr. Gelbart said he hadn't seen the movie, but he was offended by the purported anti-Semitism of the film, in which Jews were depicted as the vindictive killers of Jesus.

"I'm sorry he made the film," said Mr. Gelbart. "He's just added to a question which seemed answered some time ago. I guess I'd say, 'Why?', and then I look at the grosses. I don't think he did it for the money. I don't think he did it to make trouble. But both results have been achieved."

Tonight, Col. Potter decides to hold a *M*A*S*H* Olympics—but don't blame Mr. Gelbart. He'd left the show by this 1977 episode. About that time, Mr. Gibson was playing an uncredited baseball player in *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden*. [HALMRK, 107, 5 p.m.]

Saturday, Nov. 20

Listen, Bush re-election or not, it's not O.K. to get totally drunk and watch back-to-back episodes of *Baywatch* again. [TVLAND, 85, 8 p.m.]

Sunday, Nov. 21

Here's some little-known trivia about tonight's episode of *Arrested Development*:

According to actor David Cross, it features the first appearance of the black bounty hunter named "Ice." Originally, the writers wanted to call him "Hawk," but it violated the 30-year statute of limitations on names one can use for black bounty hunters on TV shows. Really! He said there was once a "Hawk" on *Spencer: For Hire* (played by Avery Brooks).

"You have to wait 30 years, otherwise you can sue and bring down the entire network," he said. [*FOX, 5, 9 p.m.*]

Monday, Nov. 22

The Observer has learned that the owners and operators of the Dan Rather-bashing Web site, Ratherbiased.com, will soon pull the plug on their four-year-old enterprise. While a million right-wing bloggers gear up for the verdict of CBS News' internal investigation into what went terribly, terribly wrong when a Wednesday edition of *60 Minutes* aired the faked National Guard memos showing President Bush had shirked his duties, Mr. Rather's arch nemeses on the Web were finally winding down. And in the euphoria of it all, Matthew Sheffield, a 26-year-old computer consultant, and self-described "political scientist" who operates the site out of northern Virginia—where else?—with his 23-year-old brother, Greg, was trying to contain his own magnanimity.

"In many ways, I see this whole end of his career as the flip side of the Nixon press paradox," he said. "That's what catapulted him to the national stage as a TV reporter, and, you know, I think Rather was more gracious toward Nixon when he resigned than some other people in the press were."

He offered this message to Mr. Rather: "No hard feelings."

Mr. Rather's spokeswoman had no comment.

During the Bush–National Guard scandal, the Web site became the nexus for haters of "The Dan," as Mr. Sheffield sometimes called the anchor, and supposed examples of his bias. The latest headline on Ratherbiased reads, "Poll Finds Americans Moving to Net News," and also features CBS News' "The Eye" logo with a Democratic donkey inside. The quote of the day was a question by Mr. Rather, directed at Pat Buchanan in 1996: "Are you, as some of your critics charge, interested in being a kind of moral dictator?"

What? Is there something wrong with that? Whatever. These guys wanted to be the roving hit men for Rather-hater, former CBS News correspondent and righty renegade Bernard Goldberg. "I think that without Ratherbiased, Memogate wouldn't have been as big as it was," observed Mr. Sheffield. "I won't say if it

curtailed his career or not, because people have been talking for a long time of getting rid of Rather."

Wasn't Mr. Sheffield feeling just a little bit sad now that he might not have Dan Rather to kick around any more?

"You know, in a certain sense, yeah," he said. "Actually, people who are reading this from CBS will probably not believe it, but in a certain ways, we think we actually like Dan Rather as a cultural figure. He's one of the most interesting people who've come on to the national stage in a long time and especially for as long as he's been there ... though there's a lot of relief that we're able to move on to other things."

Mr. Sheffield said he and his brother were starting another site dedicated to media and politics—this one for profit—as well as an extensive message board. They even said they'd start addressing bias at Fox News.

Tonight, if you see a special mad-dog twinkle in Mr. Rather's eye on the *CBS Evening News*, that twinkle is for you, Matthew Sheffield. And for John Roberts, who's probably going to have to put up with this crap someday. [*WCBS, 2, 6:30 p.m.*]

Tuesday, Nov. 23

Citizen Gelbart!

While still considering how to express his feelings to *The Passion of Christ* people last week, he was also dreaming up a long letter to send to Michael Powell, the chairman of the F.C.C.

Mr. Gelbart wasn't finished at press time, but he said the letter mainly consisted of a description of a scene from *Fear Factor* that he saw recently, in which the show visited New York City. In it, the host of the show put a bald rat in a blender and added a bit of water, preparing a little something for two female contestants to try and slurp down.

"I guess that's what the recipe called for, and he whipped up this rat shake and each woman drank it," he said. "One had a terrible time getting it down and couldn't finish, and the winner—who all but licked the bowl—she won. The host, after announcing her the winner, gave her a baggy waste basket so she could puke on camera. *Jesus Christ!* Are we only about tits? This whole degradation is so much more offensive. And it's General Electric. G.E. owns NBC."


(According to our friend Ms. Goodman, General Electric also made most of the parts for most of the weapons used in the first Persian Gulf War, but we digress.)

An NBC spokesman offered a small correction to Mr. Gelbart's description.

"What they did actually was they took headless frozen rats and put them in a blender," he said. "And they added a little liquid to make it frappe. And both of the women ate down completely the portion. And then one of them went over to, um, use something."

Tonight, contestants have to survive a room full of tear gas. When Larry Gelbart gets on board an issue that by rights belongs in Sheffield brothers territory, maybe it's time to think things through, Mr. Zucker. *[FX, 69, 6 p.m.]*

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