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The Arts

August 30, 2006

ANTI-WAR PUNDIT LOBS BOOK INTO MEDIA FRAY SPEAKS ON ISLAND

BY MARLI GUZZETTA

Author Amy Goodman is an unapologetic critic of this war and this administration - but



Amy Goodman

also of the media that is supposed to explain it to us.

Whether you are on her side or not, you cannot argue with the contention of her latest release, "Static: Government Liars, Media Cheerleaders and the People Who

Fight Back," which states that there are things we are not seeing and hearing regarding the war in Iraq and the war on terror - and that is the prerogative of the administration and of the mainstream media.

"The dictionary defines 'static' as criticism, opposition or unwanted interference. That's what the media is supposed to provide," said Goodman, who co-

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authored the book with her brother, author and journalist David Goodman, as a "sequel" to their 2004 bestseller "The Exception to the Rulers: Exposing Oily Politicians, War Profiteers, and the Media that Love Them." She will speak on the book this Saturday at the Unitarian Church.

"Instead of revealing the truth, media interferes with the truth, makes it more difficult to see, even with all the channels there are to find out what's happening in the world," she said via phone interview. "Instead, we need a media that does something else - that is really about challenging those in power."

While the Fox-watching wing of the American viewing public considers the media to be liberally biased, Goodman re-asserts that this is an administration induced myth - that the mainstream media has become compliant to Washington in order to maintain access. The Goodmans' main sources in proving this are, according to their press release, "activists, dissidents, and others too often excluded from official debate to confront Washington and its corporate sponsors," including Cindy Sheehan.

"The Bush administration has had tremendous success in maintaining power over the media," Goodman said. "Dan Rather was the first to say that the media basically had to line up behind the President, because if they asked tough questions, they would be neckless. I don't mean that literally; I mean they wouldn't be able to do their work. He knew the pressure. He was pushed out, because his own news organization cowed to the pressure."



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"Static" is, in a sense, cahier for a revolution that has not yet completely happened - a laundry list of the administration's greatest hits in using the media to convey its own message, and of the media's greatest misses in their attempt to report the truth.

To display her point that the administration lacks respect for the importance of free media, Goodman points to the hostility faced by combative journalists like Helen Thomas in White House briefings as opposed to the access granted to "Paid Off Pundits" like James Guckert.

Guckert was the gay hustler who, seemingly overnight, became the conservative writer of a semi-obscure Web site who was not only granted access to White House press briefings, but also allowed to ask softball questions over seasoned reporters.

In the book, the Goodmans also re-examine the payoff of Armstrong Williams, a conservative black news commentator who took money from the Education Department in order to remark favorably on No Child Left Behind. They discuss the Lincoln Group, a communications and PR firm hired by the administration that incurred derision for paying Iraqi news outlets to run planted stories. (All these stories were, it should be noted, covered by mainstream media outlets, though not long-term.)

The book does not place all the blame on government. It also points a finger at networks like CNN, which has displayed "real" images of war on its international stations while broadcasting only tame images on its domestic stations.

"I really do think people care, but if they don't know what's happening, there's this illusion that the media is bringing us the true information," Goodman said. "What's missing is the gore of war, the true horrors of war, the disparity of what we see in this country and what the rest of the world sees."

Goodman concedes that the media is not entirely mute on relevant information. (Would she agree to "selectively open-mouthed?") *The Wall Street Journal*, she noted, ran the story on the difference in images on CNN international and CNN domestic. She also pointed to the immediate coverage following Hurricane Katrina as an example of an unencumbered mainstream media. Goodman noted

that on the days just after Katrina hit, while the federal

government was not yet in New Orleans, the news anchors had no line to toe.

"You had the whole administration in absentia, so you didn't have the government controlling the media; people reported what they saw," she said. "I think that a lot of journalists start from a good space. They want to report the truth; they want to report on what they're seeing, experiencing, learning. But as you go higher up, in the more rarified levels of corporate media, that gets filtered out. There is a lot of pressure on reporters to walk in lockstep. They know the kind of stories they can suggest that let them rise, and the ones that get them marginalized."

In short, the Goodmans are trying to show that the administration has worked

to make the mainstream media its tool,
and that the media has been compliant.

But the Goodmans are members of the media themselves - even if they take their coffee on the left end of the spectrum. Amy is the host of radio's Democracy Now! David is a reporter for *Mother Jones* magazine. So, in a sense, the Goodmans are using a few of the master's tools. While they're not trying to take down the whole house, they certainly wouldn't mind re-opening windows that have been blacked out with TV screens.

I

LECTURE AMY GOODMAN

When: Saturday, September 2, 1 p.m.

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For more information, call 228-5466. For more

information on Amy Goodman, go to www.statictour.org

or www.democracynow.org.