

Killing Iraq: A look at agency and power in relation to the U.S. mainstream media

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## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to those whose voices are never heard, but whose lives are shattered by the geopolitical struggles of our times.

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## Introduction

There are moments when you know the world has changed; September the 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 was one of those moments. I went to sleep the same fourteen year old boy on the 11<sup>th</sup>, but the cold shivers and the surreal shock that had pulsed through my body that day had began a change deep in my intellect. I had an idea about Western foreign policy shady dealings because of my background as a Nigerian immigrant, but I did not understand how much ignorance informed the general discourse surrounding foreign action. The first awakening I had to the change that transpired in my intellect came in my reaction to the much repeated explanation after 9/11 that Al Qaeda attacked us because of “our freedom”. As a fourteen year old, I could not believe that a human would solely attack another human because of his freedom (especially when Bin Laden referenced specific U.S. foreign policy actions as his reasons and justification for 9/11). So I became interested in U.S. foreign policy and I began to learn as much about it – particularly U.S. policy as it relates to the Middle East.

Having initially agreed with the decision to invade Afghanistan and to go after Al Qaeda, I was perplexed when in the fall of 2002 there was the sudden talk about invading Iraq. From my little knowledge of Iraq, I knew that it was highly doubtful that Iraq and Al Qaeda worked together and I was rock-positively convinced that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction. I had come to these conclusions based on the history of Iraq and U.S. relations I had read, from my personal scrutiny of the arguments made by the administration and television pundits, and from the testimony of experts on Iraq that I found mainly on the internet. For example, I recognized that the U.S. had sold biological and chemical weapons to Iraq, and that a lot of them had been

destroyed during the Gulf War and the ensuing occupation. I also recognized that the U.S. had spied and was spying on the Iraqi Government's activities through overflights of planes that were supposed to monitor the no-fly zones only<sup>1</sup>.

The cognitive dissonance produced by the difference between the knowledge I had and the information relayed by the media and the government to the public shattered a once almost innate trust and acceptance I had of the information I received from these sources. It is this fundamental disillusionment that I have with the U.S. mainstream news media and the U.S. government that led me to write this thesis.

What is the role of media in society? The United States is a country that was founded on the idea of contractual rule where the government derived its right to rule from the consent of the people. The basic idea behind the U.S. governmental system as set up by the Constitution is for the government to work for the interest of the people and derive its power from the consent of the people. The crucial mediator between the people and the government is the press media. It can be argued that even the idea of a nation state is intrinsically tied to the development of the press as an institution. But contrary to popular belief there is no such thing as a free press. The press has always been beholden to power and has existed at its mercy or under its duress<sup>2</sup>. The

quintessential age of free press that most modern day pundits usually refer to is the age

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<sup>1</sup> The no-fly zones are regions over the north and south of Iraq established by the U.S. and U.K. after Saddam's crushing of Kurdish rebellion in the north in April 1991 and Shiite rebellion in the south in August 1992. (BBC Containment: The Iraqi no-fly zones 11/30/08 [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/crisis\\_in\\_the\\_gulf/forces\\_and\\_firepower/244364.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/events/crisis_in_the_gulf/forces_and_firepower/244364.stm))

<sup>2</sup> Edward Rothstein reviewed an exhibition that chronicles the gradual spread of information in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century from private correspondence to publicly sold pamphlets hence birthing the precursor of the modern newspaper. He explains that the emergence of these public pamphlets were in and of themselves very instrumental in form the sense of public, which later newspaper would claim to serve. Also he notes that from its inception public journalism always involved the coverage of the sensational and was dependent on government approval for operation, erasing the idea of an ideal free press as the precursor to the modern press. Rothstein, Edward. (2009, January 24). When The News Was New. *New York Times*,



of Thomas Paine and writers of the American Revolutionary period, but who actually did their writing in stark opposition to power and under its direct force. But with the establishment of the U.S. government and Constitution came a public obsession with the protection of the press against direct control by the government<sup>3</sup>. But governmental power was still tied to the press. And through control of the means of production of news, the elites asserted their influence on the kind of information that was delivered to the people about their government. And in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the rise of monopolies and sprawling corporations started to produce the phenomena that we recognize today as the U.S. mainstream press<sup>4</sup>. And newspapers like all business in capitalist society are reliant on capital. This financial tie between the so-called gatekeepers of the democracy and the elites and owners of society corrupts and distorts the production of news. The news media today represents itself as the defender of the public and the custodian of the truth, but watch almost any mainstream media television news show and you are bound to see at least one of the monikers “fair” “unbiased” “accurate” “balanced,” regardless of how myopic the show is. The utter lack of self-reflexivity is deafening.

What my thesis aims to do is to take the media coverage of the build up to the Iraq War as a case study in the operation of power, and its effects in the media. I am particularly interested in the individual and how the individual’s agency functions in the web of power that structures our society and that made possible the invasion of Iraq.

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<sup>3</sup> From the collection of essays *Our Unfree Press*, in the essay “Bondage of the Press,” it gives the example of President John Adams who got passed the “Sedition Act,” “empowering him to punish political criticism in newspapers. It was one of the main reasons he was defeated in the next election. *Our unfree press : 100 years of radical media criticism* In edited by Robert W. McChesney and Ben Scott., McChesney R. W. and Scott B. (Eds.), New York : New Press, 2004. (p.81)

<sup>4</sup> Also from *Our Unfree Press*, in the essay “Big Business and the Press” George Seldes expands on the tie between industrialization of news, the influence of business in the news, and the crowding out of small newspapers.

### ***Why is it important to look at the media's role?***

It is important for media to be critically examined for two reasons that William Dorman in his essay, "A Debate Delayed is a Debate Denied: U.S. News Media Before the 2003 War With Iraq," points out. First, once a war begins critical thinking in any society, free or not becomes virtually impossible because of nationalism and patriotism, fear and rage and "all history leading up to it is immediately based on the war itself" (Leading to the 2003 Iraq war, 2006, p.11). The second reason is "the press is the only institution that can reasonably be expected to make possible a robust debate over foreign policy (and war in particular) in a timely enough way to make a difference in the choices made by policy elites" (Leading to the 2003 Iraq war, 2006, p.11). The mainstream media was crucial in enabling the drive to war because they did not bring to light nearly enough of the evidence that was available to contradict the Bush administrations rhetoric. While there were many dissenters who pointed out the evidence because none of them had the backing of a major news organization, a robust debate over decision to invade Iraq never occurred.

Another important factor to consider is the effect of the media on public opinion. A study by the Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) conducted from January 2003 through September 2003 showed "that before and after the Iraq war, a majority of Americans have had significant misperceptions and these are highly related to support for the war with Iraq" (World Public Opinion, 2003, para. 1). The three main misperceptions in the study were "that evidence of links between Iraq and al Qaeda have been found [48% believed this], 22% [believed] that weapons of mass

destruction have been found in Iraq, and 25% [believed] that world public opinion favored the U.S. going to war with Iraq. Overall 60% had at least one of these three misperceptions” (World Public Opinion, 2003, para. 3). In addition to this, the study also said that “those who pay greater attention to the news are no less likely to have misperceptions,” and “among those who primarily watch Fox, those who pay more attention are more likely to have misperceptions. Only those who mostly get their news from print media have fewer misperceptions as they pay more attention” (World Public Opinion, 2003, para. 10). This last statement is significant because it shows if people read passed the headlines and paid more attention, they could have actually gained some sort of clarity about the Iraq issue from print media. This implicates the agency of the individual in the formation of misperceptions. Overall, we see that the majority of American had at least one major misperception, which is a scary thought that a majority of the country can be so easily misinformed. What we see in this thesis and particularly chapter two is how these misperceptions can get created through the media coverage.

Also, it is important to recognize online news media and non-mainstream news media. While these are incredible sites of talkback and contestation, they still do not carry the same power as print and television news media to produce mass effects on the public. They are still vastly important, but in this thesis I am primarily concerned with television and print news media.

## ***Literature Review***

### **Chomsky**

I want to spend a little time looking at Noam Chomsky because he is how I initially got exposed to the dark-side of U.S. foreign policy and he has been immensely

helpful in my continued discovery of knowledge. Chomsky was one of the people, I read to get more information on U.S. foreign policy when I decided to research more about it.

Noam Chomsky (1992) in *Manufacturing Consent*, a documentary that brought about a massive shift in my understanding of U.S. foreign policy, basically sees the media as a tool of the elites used to control public opinion and marginalize dissenting voices. He points to the structure of television programs, the selection of "expert" guests, choice of stories covered, and the sources of information as some examples of media manipulation of information. One big example he uses to drive his point home of government control of media is the disparity in cover of the atrocities in East Timor versus Cambodia. The atrocities in Cambodia were committed by ideological opponents of the U.S, the Khmer Rouge, and hence in Chomsky's estimation the massive amount of coverage on the subject as opposed to the invasion of East Timor by Indonesia, which Chomsky said had tacit U.S. backing (Chomsky, 1992). The information about East Timor was totally new for me and very shocking because I didn't think something like that would first be hidden from the public, and second be supported by the U.S. government. I knew the U.S. government had a poor foreign policy record in the past, but I did not know that it had such recent acts of cruelty and cynicism, and that the acts were on such a grand scale.

Chomsky in his book, *Media Control*, gives a model of society (specifically U.S. society) and power that is very similar to the Marxist model. He sees the "real power" as resting with the "owners of society" who are the business class or the elites basically those with the financial power. Then there is the specialized class "who

analyze, execute, make decisions, and run things in the political, economic, and ideological systems” (Chomsky, 2002, p.16). The specialized class according to Chomsky acquires its authority by pledging to serve the interests of the owners of society. The last class in the model is the bewildered herd, who the elites think have to be kept distracted by the specialized class so as not to let them interfere with the herd’s own interest. The specialized class not the bewildered herd is the group that is capable of looking out for the herd’s interest.

According to Chomsky’s class schematic the government and media are part of the specialized class, who works for the business class/elites. Within the specialized class, the government is in control of the media, which itself is a corporate monopoly. Further more for Chomsky in this model; the media, schools, and popular culture are operated in order to condition adequately both the specialized class and the bewildered herd. For the specialized class, “they have to provide them some tolerable sense of reality, although they also have to instill proper beliefs” (Chomsky, 2002 p.18). While for the bewildered herd, the primary purpose of the media, education, and popular is to serve as a distraction making sure individuals stay out of trouble and do not start trying to think for themselves.

For Chomsky this all rests on the philosophy of democracy that the elites are running on, which is starkly different from the generally accepted definition of democracy. He says the philosophy of democracy that the elites are operating under is that of the “Spectator Democracy,” which is the idea that the bewildered herd cannot possibly decide what is best for them so they need a “specialized class’ of ‘responsible men’ who are smart enough to figure things out (Chomsky, 2002, p.15).” And the

bewildered herd for the most part should be uninvolved and distracted spectators, but “because it’s a democracy. Occasionally they are allowed to lend their weight to one or another member of the specialized class,” and say “we want you to be our leader (Chomsky, 2002, p.17).” This is in contrast to the generally accepted notion of democracy as a society “in which the public has the means to participate in some meaningful way in the management of their own affairs and the means of information are open and free (Chomsky, 2002, p.9).” This is part of Chomsky’s idea of manufactured consent.

It is from Chomsky who I my initial idea of how power and class function in society. My ideas have drifted from his a bit, and I am more aware of how much a certain level of consent among the bewildered herd plays into the ability of the elites to exercise power through the specialized classes. In Chomsky’s description of power and class, the consent of the bewildered herd is not up for debate, it is simply manufactured.

## **Power Theories**

There are three classic theories of the way power functions in society that I’ll use in looking at the relationship between the media, the government, and the public. I’ll be surveying Marx’s conception of power as a solid objection (i.e. the means of production) that the bourgeoisies possesses and exercises on the Proletariat, Gramsci’s idea of power as being coercive and hegemonic—applied top-down by the State, but still requesting the consent of the dominated , and Foucault’s representation of power as fluid, decentralized, and invested in the individual. Chomsky falls somewhere between Marx and Gramsci on the power theory spectrum, which has Marx on one end, Foucault on the other end and Gramsci in the middle.

## **Marx**

The Marxist model of power defines power as control over the means of production and ownership of property, and sees “the history of all...existing society [as] the history of class struggles” (The Marx-Engels reader, 1978, p.473). The oppressor class, the Bourgeoisie, has control of the means of production and extracts capital from the labor of the oppressed class, the Proletariat<sup>5</sup>.

We can interpret the narrative of the build up to the Iraq war through the lens of Marx’s theory of power. The war can be explained as a blatant attempt by the Bourgeoisie of the U.S. to acquire possibly the most valued commodity in the modern era, oil, and to demonstrate and reassert the might of its power. The owners of the means of production are the owners of society and the ones who determine governmental actions. Through their monopoly of the means of production, in this case of specifically media, they were able to galvanize enough members of the Proletariat into buying into the lie of working towards “national interests” in order to fragment the Proletariat’s opposition to the war. As we’ll seen with the lack of coverage of war dissenters and protests, those, who did not agree with the goals of the Bourgeoisie, were sidelined and made irrelevant through the exercise of the Bourgeoisie monopoly on mainstream mass media. And when other nations did not agree with its decision, the U.S. Bourgeoisie brought to bear the naked force of capitalist production to crush all dissent both militarily and legally. Where Marx and Chomsky differ, is that Chomsky inserts a third consenting class, the specialized class, in his theory while Marx argues for a dichotomy of two main classes.

## **Gramsci**

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<sup>5</sup> This reading of Marx comes from the primarily the Communist Manifesto.

Gramsci's model of power centers on the superstructure of society, which he splits into two major divisions: "political society" or "the State" and "civil society." Political society is the realm of the "public" and is dominated by coercive power, and civil society is the realm of the "private" and is dominated by hegemonic power<sup>6</sup>.

The Gramscian model fits well with a narrative of the build up to the Iraq as an event dominated by both the State (in this case, the U.S. government) and civil society (of which, the media is a part). The State, which is a complex and compound entity headed by the President, made the decision to invade Iraq and then sought through the media the "spontaneous consent" of the great masses of the American population. This "consent" was achieved through a synergy of "intellectuals" working through both the State and civil society to structure a hegemony discourse in which invading Iraq was the moral, intellectually correct response to the "threat" of WMDs and Al Qaeda links. I use intellectuals as Gramsci (1992) defines them, "The intellectuals are the dominant group's 'deputies' exercising the subaltern function of social hegemony and political government," basically the same group Chomsky calls the specialized class (p.12). Moreover, the State retained its coercive power, and although it used the power mainly in the act of unilaterally invading Iraq after it failed to gain the consent of the international community.

What is significant when analyzing the build up to Iraq war using the Gramscian model is how much the dominant group relied on the hegemonic power of civil society (at least within the country) versus the coercive power of the State. So while there were no mass arrests of journalists to keep them from reporting inconvenient stories, through different social and economic pressures the dominant group was able to achieve the

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<sup>6</sup> This reading of Gramsci comes from "the Intellectuals" and "the State and Civil Society" essays.



same effect without having to brazenly expose the nature of its domination. In the Gramscian sense there is a massive over growth of civil society, which has been very successful in applying “educative pressure...to single individuals so as to obtain their consent and their collaboration, turning necessity and coercion into ‘freedom’” (Gramsci, 1992, p.242). This is where Gramsci differs from Marx. Gramsci recognizes explicitly the consent of individuals is involved in the domination of them by the dominant group. And he differs from Chomsky in that Chomsky characterizes the bewildered herd, or in Gramsci’s terminology the “great masses,” as distracted by education and media with little consent, but Gramsci claims that they are socialized so as to give their consent seemingly freely, although the threat of coercion always lurks in the background.

### **Foucault**

Foucault’s model characterizes power as decentralized and not localized in the State apparatus, but as transmitted on a finer level through each individual. Bourgeoisie society according to Foucault has democratized the Sovereign power and has hidden in it disciplinary power, which is the power to punish behaviors that do not falls in the societal acceptable range. And “the individual is an effect of power, and at the same time, or precisely to the extent to which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation. The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle” (Foucault, 1980, p.98). He defines the Sovereign, as “the amalgamation of a certain number of separate individualities, who find themselves reunited by the complex of elements that go to compose the State” (Foucault, 1980, p.97-98). But again he says the Sovereign power is diffused.

Foucault is though less interested in the center of power than in its periphery, and he emphasizes the net-like organization of the exercise and distribution of power. He also emphasizes that the individual is not just the “inert or consenting target” of power, but is “always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power” (Foucault, 1980, p.98).

If we take Foucault’s model of power and apply it to the pre-invasion story, we can characterize the workings of power in media as affecting and reproduced by every individual involved in our society. From the administration officials who hashed out the policies, to the journalists who reported on the policies, to the private citizens who read and reacted to the policies, all in a Foucauldian sense through the transmit of power-knowledge (a term Foucault uses to signify the deep interconnectedness between knowledge and power) were implicated in the net production of power of U.S. society, which was the invasion of Iraq.

In addition, Foucault (1980) argues for an intellectual who has a “three-fold specificity: that of his class position...that of his conditions of life and work... lastly, the specificity of the politics of truth in our societies” (p.132). This intellectual according to Foucault (1980) can “struggle at the general level of that regime of truth which is so essential to the structure and functioning of our society”—and by “truth,” he means “the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true (p.132).” Basically Foucault’s intellectual corresponds to Gramsci’s intellectual and Chomsky’s specialized class, except Foucault’s intellectual is of unclear allegiance as compare to Gramsci’s and Chomsky’s who is a servant of the dominant groups/elites.

Foucault's idea of "truth" is an important one in thinking about what happened before the war. The pro-war intellectuals' discourse was one of "truth"—Iraq has WMDs—and power—therefore the U.S. has the right to preemptively strike Iraq because of WMDs. And this is what exactly anti-war intellectuals were questioning by putting forward their own "truth"—Iraq does not have WMDs and therefore the U.S. does not have the right or the power to attack Iraq. Foucault's intellectuals can be thought of in the Iraq context more simply as those people who produced power-knowledge by writing or speaking on the issue of invading Iraq. And in our society, the mainstream media has a multiplier effect on the knowledge that intellectuals produce. This is why the imbalance of different intellectual voices in the media was crucial in leading the nation into war.

### **The Three Together and My Position**

First, a sorting of terms for describing the different classes in society is needed. The elites<sup>7</sup>, the owners of society, the business class, the Bourgeoisie, the dominant group, and the owners of the means of production all gesture to the same group that Chomsky, Marx, and Gramsci place at the center of power in society. Only Foucault disagrees with this understanding and considers power as decentralized. In this thesis, I consider this group, unlike Foucault, to be existent and to wield some central control over power in society. I refer to them in this thesis either as the elites or the owners of society. Next is the specialized class, the intellectuals, or experts who I refer to as the intellectuals. And I use this term in the Foucauldian sense for those who are

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<sup>7</sup> The term "elites" as I explain refers to those individuals who own the major businesses in society. But it is somewhat vague because it is hard to point just exact who does. The most common industries mentioned as exercising the kind of power I describe the elite as possessing are the military-industrial complex, big oil, and the multinational financial institutions.

professionals (media or government) and struggle either for or against the power of the elites. The last class, the bewildered herd, Proletariat, or the great masses, I refer to primarily as the public or individuals.

I am positioning myself between Gramsci and Foucault on the power spectrum because as I mentioned, unlike Foucault, I believe in some concentration of power in the hands of an elite, but unlike Gramsci, I believe individuals' have greater agency than he affords them.

I want to now highlight three terms referring to important concepts, which I utilize heavily in this thesis. The first is knowledge, which I link to the individual and his agency. Every individual has knowledge, and knowledge is power. So every individual possesses some kind of power, which the individual has to decide how he will use, and his ability to decide how he uses his power is his agency. This is similar to Foucault's idea of power-knowledge in that I consider knowledge intrinsically linked to power, but unlike Foucault I believe that knowledge and power can be possessed by individuals as well as flow in a hegemonic network<sup>8</sup>. The next term is "truth," which as Foucault uses it, means, in this thesis, the rules by which what is accepted as true or false is determined. This is very important in considering what is the "truth" of the history of Iraq-U.S. relations or the "truth" of the U.S. claims against Iraq. Last is the term hegemony, which I mainly relate to the power of the government, mainstream media, or those back by institutional power to determine "truth." This term is very important because it help us to think of the position of resistance to power. Because as we'll see in the thesis, there are contrary voices in the mainstream news media that

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<sup>8</sup> My idea of nature of knowledge is similar to the idea of the dual nature of light in physics—that is, light is both a wave and a particle, something that is discrete and something that is continuous. It is same with knowledge for me. Knowledge is possessed by the individual, but also flows through the individual.

speak against the official “truth” and there are moments when some official “true” might seem to be questioned in the mainstream news media, but when the elites decide to take an action, like invading Iraq, there is a crucial tightening up of hegemonic power. And until the action is taken, dissent is pushed in the margins.

### ***Methodology and Context of Ethnographic work***

I interviewed six Duke Students for the ethnographic portion of my thesis. The interviews ranged from 15mins to an hour long. I did not record any of the interviews, but I took note of keywords and phrases that characterized the sentiments of my interviewees in my notepad. I had originally intended to conduct surveys among the local Durham population excluding Duke University affiliated individuals and draw possible interviewees from a list of those who signed up at my survey stations. But after spending hours at Brightleaf square and Southpoint Mall in Durham trying to get locals to fill my survey and only obtaining a total of 11 respondents and two contacts, I decided to change course. Also, after researching deeper into the history of Iraq and the discourse around the build up to the Iraq War, I decided that my surveys were not crucial in linking population opinion about the war to the media coverage of it. This kind of work has already being done, and it was easier and more accurate to cite larger pollsters.

In addition, I wanted to interview journalists, but the two main contacts I made never responded into my emails inquiring if they were be interested in being interviewed about their experience in the world of journalism. So in order to get pass my ethnographic impasse, I enlisted the help of my fellow Duke students who were

very gracefully in accommodating my requests and making time to answer my questions.

Although not my original plan, my interviews with this group of six Duke students carries a strong relevance to the core of my thesis because they give a glimpse into how individuals represent and understand their agency in relation to the influence of the government and the media. There is additional complicating factor in my interviews. The three Chronicle reporters I interviewed for my thesis, I also interviewed for another project, which was on the Duke chronicle for another cultural anthropology class (CA 194). Therefore some of their answers are in relation to questions I asked about the Chronicle, but most of their answers relate directly to their understanding of the role of news media.

The ages of my interviewees around fourteen and fifteen immediately after 9/11 makes my argument about agency in the latter chapters a bit tenuous, but they still reveal some deep themes in the way people received the media coverage of the war.

I had a golden opportunity fall into my lap during the later part of this thesis project. Stephen Hadley, a former Bush administration official, came to speak at Duke and so I attended his talk and even got to ask him directly a question. This encounter and its connections with the other interviews will be explored also in chapter three.

### ***Chapter Outline***

My thesis is divided into three chapters and an epilogue each performing a specific function in helping us understand the coverage of the build up to the Iraq War and the larger issues of power and the agency of the individual that are associated with

it. Chapter 1 is *Where is Baghdad?* In this chapter, I attempt to locate Iraq and by extension the build up to war in the historical context of Iraq and U.S. relations, and U.S foreign policy more generally. It is designed to provide you with knowledge to understand the extent to which the U.S. Government was dishonest in how it presented its relationship with Iraq and Iraq's weapons. Chapter 2 is *Selling "Bombs over Baghdad."* In this chapter, I characterize the coverage of the U.S. mainstream media during the leading up to the invasion, and I also focus on the story the press told about its failure to cover the issues during this period adequately. Chapter 3 is *Looking Back through the Mushroom Cloud.* In this chapter, I present my interviews and my interaction with an administration official and examine how people saw themselves and the media coverage during the pre-invasion period. I then draw connections from the interviews to the larger themes of agency and power. In the epilogue, I explain the larger implications of the U.S. mainstream media's coverage during the build up to the Iraq and the place of power and the individual's agency in the determining society's actions.

Now we proceed to chapter one, do you know where Baghdad is? Knowledge will be served.

## Chapter 1: Where is Baghdad?

In 1979, Michael Rosenblum was an intern at ABC when the Iran hostage crisis erupted. His boss discovered that Michael speaks Arabic (actually Farsi, but his boss didn't know the difference) and lived in Iran. Michael is hired on the spot as the ABC News in-house expert on the Middle East and then 10 minutes later he is whisked off to the big conference room with all the executive producers, Peter Jennings, and all the other important staff. Then "this woman, who was the vice president of news, pulled this map down and to tell the truth, she spent 10 minutes looking for Iran like this with her finger until she could find it because no one knew anything about Iran" (C-SPAN, 2008).

Geography and history are important because they give us a spatial and temporal context from which we can make sense of the present. As this story shows, we Americans tend to learn our geography by conflict. While Iran is not Iraq, the same problem of a lack of basic knowledge of both countries haunts the American public. If a senior executive of a major news agency can't find the second largest (by land mass) Middle Eastern country, and an executive producer doesn't know the difference between Arabic and Farsi, what hope is there that the mainstream news media will produce nuanced, intelligent, and insightful news? Moreover, how are individuals who consume the mainstream media's product as their primary source of information about the world influenced by the quality of information they receive? How are their worldviews influenced? And what effects on their agency does such influence produce?

Let us ignore this instant of ignorance and relegate to the period of pre-conflict ignorance. What I hope to show in this chapter is that for Iraq, we have had enough



prior conflict documented by the major news organizations to have an effective decent working history of the country and our relationship with it. But as we see in the next chapter the major news organizations did not provide this history, and hence the public did not have the knowledge necessary to understand the historical context around the push for war with Iraq. Also as I said in the introduction, it is important to dig deep into the history of Iraq because it gives us the knowledge to understand why the coverage of the lead up to the war was especially deceitful and awful.

Before we get into the actual history, here is a quick word on the sources I used for my history of Iraq and Iraq-U.S. relationships and where I got my “Truth” from. Given that I have foregrounded my extreme suspicion of the U.S. government, I found it necessary to compensation for my own bias in source selection. I used Charles Tripp’s *A History of Iraq*, which is a straight forward historical account that does not really take anybody to task and sticks to who did what, where, and maybe why. It was especially useful for learning about the earlier years of Iraqi history. *Iraq: A country study* is actually produced by the U.S. army for training purposes. It gives very good insight into strategic concerns of the U.S. in Iraq. I also used George Washington University’s National Security Archive, which had good information on the restoration of Iraqi-U.S. relations in the eighties. I used many mainstream media articles to supplement certain parts of my history. I came across a lot of them searching through lexis-nexis academic. Last I also used a couple of polemically sources, *Iraq Under Siege*, the Iran Chamber Society’s web page on the tanker war, and *Arming Iraq: how the U.S. and the British secretly built Saddam’s war machine*. Many of the events, I cite from these source are covered else ever in less polemically sources albeit usually in a

less critical and insightful light. The polemical sources are really helpful because they are unafraid of implicating the CIA in the internal politics of Iraq.

### ***Brief Overview: from the Formation of Iraq to the Raise of Saddam***

Let's begin at the formation of the modern state of Iraq. Iraq is creation of the British government during the mandate period after World War I and the defeat of the Ottoman Empire. The modern borders of the Iraqi State were forged together in the 1920s when Britain merged together what had been the separate Ottoman vilayets of Baghdad, Basra, and Mosul. The British had been forced by the revolt of 1920, which was mainly due to a popular push for independence and a reject of non-Muslim rule, to rearrange their military rule of the country and provide a way for Iraqi self-rule. This was accomplished at the Cairo Conference of 1921, where the British installed King Faisal I of the Hashemite dynasty in 1921 and appointed to government and military officer positions other Sunni Arabs elites, continuing a tradition of Sunni domination of the governing structure started under the Ottoman Empire. The Iraqi population saw Faisal as not an Iraqi<sup>1</sup> and the monarchy as a British creation. Hence the monarchy never truly enjoyed popular support (Tripp, 2002).

In 1930, Nuri al-Said was appointed prime minister by King Faisal I. Nuri al-Said, an experienced political actor from the Ottoman years would become a major player under the Iraqi monarchy. The British granted Iraq its independence at the urging of King Faisal I in 1932. After Faisal's death in 1933, he was succeeded by his son, King Ghazi, who was then overthrown by a military coup lead by General Bakr Sidqi. General Bakr Sidqi in turn was assassinated and his government overthrown by

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<sup>1</sup> Faisal's family is original from Hejaz region of Saudi Arabia (Tripp, 2000).

the army who restored the monarchy. A military coup in April 1941 forced the regent<sup>2</sup> from power, but the British invaded Iraq in order to prevent the Iraqi government, which was suspected of axis ties, from cutting off oil supplies to the Allied nations. The British then restored the regent to power. The monarchy lasted until 1958, when a coup by Brigadier General Abdul Karim Qassim and Colonel Abdul Salam Arif finally put an end to it. The coup met virtually no opposition and was widely supported due to popular dislike of the monarchy and its strongman, Nuri al-Said. In 1963, Gen. Qassim was overthrown by the Baath Party whose leaders tried to consolidate power by appointing Colonel Abdul Salam Arif, who had a falling out with Qassim during Qassim's presidency that caused him to be removed from the leadership ranks. But Arif taking advantage of the Baath party's lack of unity overthrew the party and gained real control over the government. Arif was killed in a helicopter crash in April 1966, and his brother, Abdul Rahman Arif, became President. In 1968, the Baath Party again mounted a successful coup and overthrew Arif and installed their leader, Ahmed Hassan Al-Bakr, as president. With a more tightly organized party structure, the party was able to retain its grip on power this time. It was in this period that Saddam, who was the nephew of Ahmed Bakr, rose as a reliable strongman in the party. Eventually, he was able to consolidate his power take over leadership of the party and the Revolutionary Command Council, Iraq's supreme executive body at the time, while leaving a trail of bodies. And in July 1979, he formally rose to the office of president after the ailing Al-Bakr stepped down (Tripp, 2002).

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<sup>2</sup> The regent who ruled in the stead of the infant King Faisal II, the son of King Ghazi (Tripp, 2000)

## ***U.S. involvement in Iraqi and the First Regime Change Success***

U.S. involvement with Iraq began with the IPC (Iraqi Petroleum Company). The IPC was originally formed by several rival Western oil companies in 1912 under the name TPC (Turkish Petroleum Company) to obtain a concession from the Ottoman government to explore for oil in Iraq. Originally American oil companies were not included in the formation. But in the aftermath of World War I, American companies were allowed to buy into the company with negotiations ending in 1928. In March of 1925, a concession was granted to the IPC by the Iraqi government, but the deal included none of the original Iraqi demands. Hence “many Iraqis felt cheated from the beginning of the concession” (Iraq, a country study, 1990, p.134). As Iraqi oil production and revenues increased the Iraqi government started trying to assert more control over their nation’s oil resources. In 1952, “a 50 percent tax on all oil company profits made in the country” was enacted (Iraq, a country study, 1990, p.137). And under the Presidency of Brigadier Qassim, oil interests and geopolitical shifts finally came to ahead and prompted the U.S. government to intervene in Iraqi internal politics.

First, in 1959 Brigadier Qassim withdrew from the 1955 anti-Soviet Baghdad pact that Nuri al-Said had signed with Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, and which was supported by Britain and the U.S. And he increasingly turned to Soviet sources for foreign aid and for military supplies. These developments in the country prompted then director of the CIA, Allen Dulles, on April 28<sup>th</sup> 1959 to tell the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that “Iraq is today the most dangerous spot on earth” (Iraq, a country study, 1990, p.52). Then in 1961, Qassim laid claim on Kuwait and took from the IPC 99.5 percent of its concession area (which it had left undeveloped) and leaving the company only those areas that were under current production. The claim over

Kuwait, which had been before by King Ghazi in 1937, stemmed from “the assertion that Kuwait had been a district of the Ottoman province of Basra, unjustly severed by the British from the main body of the Iraqi state when it had been created” (Tripp, 2002, p.165). This claim to Kuwait was repeated again with additional justifications by Saddam Hussein.

James Critchfield, a senior CIA officer and expert on communist infiltration, was sent by CIA Director Dulles to the Middle East in 1960 to run the agency’s Middle East and South Asia operations. With the developments in Iraq, he was focused mainly on the country. Using Cairo-based Iraqi exiles (of which Saddam Hussein was one at the time), the CIA established links with the Iraqi Baath party. On February 8<sup>th</sup> 1963, a coup plan was carried out. Later on, in speaking about the coup Critchfield remarked, “We really had the ‘t’s crossed on what was happening... we regarded it as a great victory” (Cockburn, Andrew and Patrick, 1999, p.79). So with champagne, the U.S. government celebrated its first major intervention in Iraq.

The coup story has more eventful connections to recent Iraqi history. A Reuters article on April 20<sup>th</sup> 2003 by David Morgan involves an interview with ex-CIA officer, Roger Morris who claims that Saddam was on CIA payroll leading up to the 1963 coup and that the CIA actively encouraged the 1968 coup. Morris says about the Al-Bakr regime that took over in 1968, “It’s a regime that was unquestionably midwived by the United States, and the (CIA’s) involvement there was really primary” (Morgan, 2003, para. 12). A CIA spokesman declined to comment on U.S. involvement in the internal politics of Iraq, but called the allegations of Saddam having once been on CIA payroll “utterly ridiculous” (Morgan, 2003, para. 15). The article does go on to claim that most

experts “say there is little to suggest U.S. involvement in Iraq in the 1960s” (Morgan, 2003, para. 22). While this article was published after the fact of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, it is still relevant to the project at hand because it shows that there were people available to the media who had an alternative “truth” on the history of Saddam-U.S. relations. The article through the testimony of the former CIA officer also connects the CIA to the rise of the Baath in 1968, and hence implicates the U.S. in creating the conditions that allowed Saddam’s rise to power. The fact that the Arif government broke relations with the U.S. over the 1967 Arab-Israeli war and established relations with the Soviets gave an incentive for the U.S. government to have pursued regime change. Another interesting idea from the article is the claim that most experts “say there is little to suggest U.S. involvement in Iraq in the 1960s.” As will be examined in chapter two, the appeal to experts (or intellectuals in our analytical framework) can be misleading because depending on who or what the intellectual is subservient to, he might give an answer that is self-serving and masks other “truths” out there. For example, our CIA spokesman in this story obviously has the backing of a very power institution behind, and it is a given that he must have consent to present the CIA’s “truth” in order for the institution to place him in his position.

However, the Baathist regime, regardless of what level of support they received from the CIA in coming into power, saw relations with the U.S. deteriorate due to the Arab-Israeli conflict, the polarizing nature of Cold War geopolitics, and the United States’ strong support of Iran (one of Iraq’s main regional rivals) and its Shah. The first signs that things were not going the way the U.S. had hope with the emergence of a new government might have been discerned with al-Bakr’s offer of cabinet posts to the

Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) in August 1968 (Tripp, 2002). Apprehensive of the Baathist regime due to the memory of Baathist repression of communists in 1963, the ICP refused the offers. This led to a curious back and forth of repression and courting that finally led to the inclusion of the communist party in the National Patriotic Front (the Baath party's ruling coalition) in April 1972. In addition, the regime was still battling IPC over the 1961 concession reversal, which was probably continual source of tension with nations of the companies that held shares in IPC. Eventually the regime nationalized the IPC in June 1972 and came to compensation deal with the shareholding companies in February 1973 (Tripp, 2002). Moreover, Iraq signed an agreement with the USSR in 1969 to help explore its oil fields. Then in April 1972, Iraq and USSR signed the Iraqi-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation and trade agreements, which guaranteed USSR access to Iraqi oil and Iraq a fixed consumer. With the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973 and the Iraq's close ties to USSR, the U.S. and Iraq were not in good standing. Lastly, the Carter administration placed Iraq "on its list of states sponsoring terrorism for providing funding, training, and other support to the PLO and other Palestinian terrorist groups" (Phythian, 1997, p.11). So by Saddam's inauguration in 1979, the U.S. and Iraq relations were none existent.

### ***The Iran-Iraq War and the Renewal of Iraq-U.S. Relations***

But with the ascension of Saddam Hussein to the Iraq presidency a new era of Iraq-U.S. relations was set in motion catalyzed by the Iran-Iraq War. The war started with an Iraqi invasion of Iran on September 22<sup>nd</sup> 1980 after a period of border disputes, and during a period internal disorganization in Iran. Saddam intended to catch Iran off guard and was worried about the Islamic revolution in Iran radicalizing the Iraqi Shia

population. Saddam also got reassurances of Iran's weakness from Jordan and Saudi Arabia who passed on U.S. prepared intelligence reports on Iran's military capability<sup>3</sup>. The initial reaction to the invasion by the international community and specifically by the U.S. was one of wait and see. The official position of U.S. like that of many other Western nations was one of neutrality towards the conflict, but the war worked well into the U.S. philosophy of "dual containment" since Iran and Iraq were both possible challengers to U.S. interests in the Middle East<sup>4</sup>. The lower Gulf States were considered key strategic allies in the region, and Iraq or Iran could not be allowed to come into a position of regional dominance. Even though Saddam's actions in invading Iraq were tantamount to the war crime of War of Aggression that the Nazi were hang for at the Nuremburg Trials<sup>5</sup>, this was not a reason for the U.S. to vilify Saddam especially when he was fighting U.S. public enemy number one at the time Iran (who gain this status from the Iran Hostage Crisis). Iran was seen as the worse of two evils. While Iraq's Soviet relationship was a sore point in relations with the U.S., the treat of Iran's Islamic revolution spreading was identified as a bigger geopolitical danger than any Iraq increase in regional influence could pose.

After the initial Iraqi offensive, Iranian forces were able to reorganize and halt the Iraqi offensive, and then repel the invaders from Iranian territory in June of 1982. It is probably of significance to note that almost from the start of the conflict the Reagan administration allowed Israel to sell "arms of U.S. origin to Iran to prevent an easy and

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<sup>3</sup> This information was got from Phythian's book, *Arming Iraq*.

<sup>4</sup> Phyllis Bennis in *Iraq Under Siege* explains "dual containment" as the U.S. strategy that saw both Iraq and Iran as "as key potential challengers to US interests in the region" (*Iraq under siege*, 2003, p.59)

<sup>5</sup> The Nuremberg Principles were based on the trials of Nazi and they are the basis for the international criminal categorizations like crimes against peace (which war of aggression is under), war crimes, and crimes against humanity.



early Iraqi victory,” again this is in keeping with the overall U.S. strategy (Phythian, 1997, p.20). With Iraqi army retreating back over the border, Iran went on the offensive. The change in tide of war had prompted the U.S. to start resuscitating U.S.-Iraqi relations even before the Iranian offensive. “High-level officials exchanged visits” and the U.S. State Department remove Iraq from its State Sponsors of terror list in February 1982 (George Washington University, 2003, para. 4). The U.S. sometime around this period or prior to it began to give intelligence support and to sell arms to the Iraq in order to maintain the balance of the conflict and allow both countries to perpetuate the “dual containment” strategy. Donald Rumsfeld one of the main proponents of the current Iraq War, was sent as President Reagan’s special envoy to Saddam Hussein in order to establish “direct contact” with the dictator<sup>6</sup>. However, in 1985 the U.S. government also secretly began “direct and indirect negotiations with Iranian officials that resulted in several arms shipments to Iran” (Bahl & Syed, 2003, p.249). These shipments will eventually be revealed as part of the Iran-Contra affair in November 1986, which involved profits from these arms sales to Iran to be funneled to the Contras in Nicaragua who were trying to overthrow the Sandinista government. Also, the U.S. had been secretly selling WMDs to Iraq including chemical and biological precursors to such weapons after formal diplomatic relations were restored in November 1984 (GWU, 2003). One specific example is the sale of “biological weapons material to make anthrax, E. coli, botulism” and other biological disease by the “American Type Culture Collection, under contracts approved by the U.S. Commerce Department” (Iraq under siege p.57). Iraq used chemical weapons, in particular mustard gas and tabun nerve agent, as the Iranian forces almost daily from 1983 on.

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<sup>6</sup> The GWU National Security Archives website has the picture of Saddam shaking hands with Rumsfeld.

Another bizarre sequence of events that highlighted the dubious nature of U.S. foreign policy during the Iran-Iraq War was the USS Stark incident during the “Tanker War”. The “Tanker War” was an escalating series of attacks by Iran and Iraq on neutral shipping vessels in Persian Gulf transporting enemy oil from 1984 to 1988. The war was started by Iraq when it attacked Iranian tankers and the oil terminal at Khark Island in 1984. The attack led to retaliatory strikes by Iran on tankers carrying Iraqi oil including those of Gulf Nations supporting Iraq. Iraq reciprocated, and the tanker war began in full force. Kuwait, whose vessels were suffering much of the carnage, started leasing Soviet and U.S. tankers. U.S. warships also began escorting neutral oil vessels in the Persian Gulf. But on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1987, an Iraqi F-1 Mirage warplane spotted the USS Stark and proceeded to fire two missiles that struck the Stark, killing 37 sailors. Iraq apologized for the attack offering the explanation that pilot must have confused the U.S. vessel for an Iran one. Iran calls the attack a “divine blessing.” And in a twist of irony, the U.S. accepted Iraq’s apology and blamed Iran for the incident claiming it escalated the tanker war. Then, after a period of harassment by Iranian speed boats of U.S. flagged vessel in the Persian Gulf, Iranian forces struck a vessel with an American flag, in October 1987. This led to swift retaliation by Washington, which destroyed two Iranian oil platforms, and the U.S. navy thereafter essentially entered war afterwards effectively on the Iraqi side. It was this intervention that eventual forced Iran to the negotiating table it had avoided for over six years (Iran Chamber Society).

### ***From Friend to Foe***

The First Gulf War which can be causally linked to the state of Iraq post the Iran-Iraq conflict. Post-war Iraq was in a direr state economically. The war had damage

Iraqi infrastructure and put the country in massive debt. It was in this atmosphere that Saddam tried to find a solution to the economic crisis, which he saw as a severe threat to his hold on power and as something that encouraged coup plots against him. He urged OPEC, particularly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, to restrict their production in order to increase oil's price, but they refused. He also asked Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to consider the \$40 billion in loans they had given Iraq as grant and to contribute to Iraq's economic reconstruct. These demands were rejected too, and Iraq's requests had become increasingly aggressive and threaten. It was at this point that Saddam considered invading Kuwait as part of a scheme to alleviate his country's economic crisis by using Kuwait as a bargaining chip with the other oil-rich Gulf States. Unfortunately for Saddam, he miss calculated the response of other Gulf States and the U.S. to his invasion of Iraq. He had not yet learned the nature of U.S. foreign policy (Tripp, 2002).

The degeneration of the tie between the U.S. and Saddam began with Saddam's invasion. The U.S. considered Saddam's invasion of Kuwait as a treat to lower Gulf States who were critical allies for the U.S. and as a play by Iraq for regional dominance. The official U.S. narrative of the war centered on taking on a cruel dictator who had a blatant disregard for human rights and had invaded a sovereign country and threatened its other neighbors. Cited by Bush Sr. as Saddam main crimes, where Saddam's gassing of the Kurds in Iraq in 1988, Iraqi atrocities committed against Kuwait especially the story removal of Kuwaiti babies from incubators by Iraqi soldiers during the invasion (which proved crucial in turning public opinion and influencing the Senate), and a famous Amnesty International report all in addition to his regional aggression and

threats. The incubator story turned out to be a fake and the invention of the U.S. and Kuwait governments as a form of propaganda<sup>7</sup>. But it accomplished its purpose like the other stories emphasized by the administration—it made Saddam out to be a ruthless dictator who needed to be checked. It matched the official “truth” around which Bush Sr. could build an ahistorical image of Saddam that did not implicate the U.S. in his pasted atrocities.

President Bush I in an address to National Religious Broadcasters on January 28 1991 (this is after the aerial bombardment of Iraq had began) laid out the moral underpinnings of the Gulf War. He explained “the war in the Gulf is not a Christian war, a Jewish war or a Muslim war—it is a just war” (Johnson & Weigel, 1991, p.142). He claimed further “we seek nothing for ourselves. As I have said, U.S. forces will leave as soon as their mission is over, as soon as they are no longer needed or desired...we do not seek the destruction of Iraq. We have respect for the people of Iraq” (Johnson & Weigel, 1991, p.143). Bush’s words are ironic given the U.S.’ past support of Iraqi aggression against Iran, our disregard for Saddam’s repression of the Kurds, and our history of being interested in Iraq for primarily oil and other geopolitical reasons since the time of Iraq’s monarchy.

The Iraqi narrative of the war given by Tariq Aziz foreign minister of Iraq in a PBS interview differed substantially from the one presented by the U.S. government and mainstream media (PBS Frontline, 1996). For Aziz, the Gulf War was about the

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<sup>7</sup> The Center for Media and Democracy has a great page on how the Persian Gulf War was sold through PR included in the incubator story and a debunking of it. Center for Media and Democracy: PR Watch.org. How PR Sold the War in the Persian Gulf. Retrieved November 30, 2008, from <http://www.prwatch.org/books/tsigfy10.html>

economic survival of Iraq. He accused Kuwait and the U.S. of waging an economic war on Iraq in order to destabilize Iraq and to allow the U.S to control the oil reserves in the region. He claims that Kuwait was intentionally over producing oil thereby reducing the price of oil and cutting into Iraq's profits which it desperately needed after the devastation of the Iraq-Iran War.

Interestingly enough the first intersection of Saddam and Al Qaeda comes during this period. “In 1990 Iraq invaded Kuwait, and bin laden offered [to Saudi Arabia] to mobilize 10,000 mujaheddin to liberate the kingdom from its occupation by Saddam Hussein’s secular Ba’athist regime” (Colonial Present p.38-39). But the Saudi royal family rejected his offer and opted for U.S. military might whose assistance came at the price of permanent U.S. bases on Saudi soil. It was the presence of these “infidel” outposts in the holy land of Mecca and Medina that motivated Al Qaeda’s declaration of jihad against the U.S. which culminated in the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the attacks themselves which can be linked to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Such a causal chain of events linking U.S. foreign policy to Al Qaeda’s attacks, while it is incomplete and partial, it became all but impossible to consider it in the discourse on the “War on Terror” and Iraq because it did not conform to the official line of Al Qaeda hating us for our freedoms.

After obtaining a U.N. resolution that demanded for the Iraq to withdraw or face military action, the U.S. led coalition including a number of Gulf States on January 16<sup>th</sup> 1991 started bombing Iraq and Iraqi positions in Kuwait. When the aerial bombard failed to dislodge the Iraqi forces, coalition ground troops moved in to liberate Kuwait. Although the U.S touted the use of smart bombs during the Gulf War, only 9% of the

bombs dropped on Iraq were smart bombs, and they were required to be stirred to the target by the bomber pilot. In addition, the Pentagon never released videos of B-52s carpet-bombing Iraqi troops or of smart bombs that missed. In total 70% of the bombs dropped on Iraq missed their targets, and “the United States-led coalition dropped more than 88,000 tons” of bombs (Schmitt, 1997, para. 1). Again, we see the knowledge provided to the public by the government lining up with a certain kind of “truth”. A “truth” that dismissed evidence that did not line up with the picture of the Gulf War as a civilized and just war that employed high tech weapons to minimize collateral damage.

### ***Sanctions and Bombing: Iraq till 2000***

In the wake of the First Gulf War, Saddam’s army had been decimated, and Iraq lay in shambles. The U.S. working with the U.N. Security Council decided that in order to prevent future Iraqi aggression to place sanctions on the country. The sanctions included a ban on Iraqi sells of oil for foreign currency, and severe restrictions on imports (in theory with the exemption of food and medicine). But in practice the combine effect of the devastation of the Iran-Iraq War, the Gulf War, the debts from both wars, and the inability to import materials (that were label as dual use) necessary for agriculture, and for electric and water purification systems lead to catastrophic effects in the Iraqi population. Also Iraq was forced to commit to pay reparations, recognize Kuwait’s sovereignty, and open up the country to U.N. weapons inspectors who were empower to search for and dismantle Iraq’s biological, chemical, nuclear weapons programs along with any long range surface to surface missiles (Tripp, 2002). All this led to a humiliated and impoverish Iraq.

Also shortly after the conclusion of the First Gulf War, the U.S. encouraged Iraqis to rebel against Saddam's regime. This led to wide spread rebellion by many Shiite and Kurdish Iraqis. Although weakened by two wars, the Iraqi state apparatus under Saddam was still able to brutally crush the rebels in the Shiite South and Kurdish North. The brutality of Saddam repression of the rebellion led to the U.S., UK, and France to establish no-fly zones in Iraq, one in the north and the other in south.

However the legality of the no-fly zones was contested by Iraq and others. Iraq argued that no Security Council resolution authorizes the enforcement of the no-fly zones while U.S. argued that Security Council resolution 688 "which stipulates that Iraq cannot hurt its own people, provides the legal basis for the zones," (BBC News, 1998). The no-fly zone combine with the inspection regime allowed U.S. intelligence to develop a better understanding of Iraq's weapon capabilities.

On October 29<sup>th</sup> 1997, Iraq demanded that the U.S. members of U.N. weapons inspection teams leave Iraq by a given deadline (they left on Nov 13<sup>th</sup> 1997), accusing them of spying for the U.S. and promoting U.S. policy through their positions. Deputy Prime Minister of Iraq, Tariq Aziz, also accused the U.S. of flying reconnaissance missions into Iraq airspace under the auspice of the U.N. mandate, and he threatened that Iraq would shoot down U.S. planes in Iraq airspace. The U.S. countered by threatening military action. Air-strikes were avoided by Russian diplomatic action that allowed U.S. inspectors to be reinstated as part of the inspection teams in Iraq. But this success was short lived and by August 1998, Iraq stopped cooperating with the U.N. inspectors again. As USA Today reported in March 1999, this led to the U.S. and Britain "to launch airstrikes to punish Iraq for its lack of cooperation with the arms

inspectors,” and the U.N. inspectors from Baghdad, after being alerted by the U.S. and Britain about the impending strikes, leave Iraq (Slavin, para. 11). Operation “Desert Fox” lasted from December 16<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>.

It was only after Desert Fox that information came out that confirmed the Iraqi government’s claimed that the U.S. was spying through the weapons inspection regime. As Washington Post reported, “United States intelligence services infiltrated agents and espionage equipment for three years into United Nations arms control teams in Iraq to eavesdrop on the Iraqi military without the knowledge of the U.N. agency that it used to disguise its work, according to U.S. government employees and documents describing the classified operation” (Gellman, March 2 1999, para. 1). The Clinton administration until a week before this story had categorically denied running any covert operations through the U.N. inspection regime and characterized Iraqi complaints as part of “Saddam Hussein’s propaganda machine” (Deputy State Department spokesman James Foley, Feb 23 1999).

The bombing of Iraq did not end with the completion of operation Desert Fox, but “since the December 1998 bombing campaign against Iraq, U.S. and U.K. fighter planes have flown thousands of sorties over the northern and southern ‘no-fly’ zones... the U.N. Office of the Humanitarian Coordinator for Iraq reported that U.S. and U.K. bombs have killed hundreds of innocent civilians and injured more” (Iraq under siege, 2003, p. 92). But even more devastating than the bombing by U.S. and other Western powers on the Iraqi population were the sanctions imposed since the end of the gulf war.



The effects of the sanctions on the Iraqi people were not covered adequately by many of the mainstream media outlets. For example, a 1999 UNICEF report released August 12<sup>th</sup>, which was “the first comprehensive, countrywide survey since 1991 of child and maternal mortality in Iraq,” was not mentioned by CBS and NBC (*Iraq under siege*, 2003, p.103). And ABC, four days after the report was released, broadcasted a report on life in Baghdad, which failed to mention any findings from the UNICEF report. The major newspapers also had scanty coverage of the report. In a Lexis-Nexis search on the word “Iraq” in the two months following the report, Ali Abunimah and Rania Masri, contributors to *Iraq under siege*, found out that only seventeen of the 810 items also contained the words “sanctions” and “UNICEF” (*Iraq under siege*, 2003).

### ***Media Complicity in Sanctions***

The effects of the sanctions were not unknown to the media. Although when the U.S. government and mainstream media did talk about them, they put the blame of the suffering of the Iraqi people squarely on Saddam’s shoulders and glossed over their own complicity in perpetuating the violence. Two articles from the New York Times show just how much information the press had about the effects of the sanctions.

The first, *Smart Bombs, Dumb Sanctions* written by Stephen Kinzer and printed on January 3, 1999, is about the effect of the U.N. sanctions on the Iraqi population vis-à-vis the effect of the American-led bombings on them. The article states that the sanctions “kill more civilians each month than bombs have killed since 1991,” and that Iraqis were growing in anti-American sentiment due to the effects of the sanctions (Kinzer, 1999, para. 11). The article also mentions that three months prior, the chief of the United Nations humanitarian workers in Iraq resigned in protest saying that the

sanctions “are starving to death 6,000 Iraqi infants every month” (Kinzer, 1999, para. 14). Another effect that is highlighted in the article was the crippling effect of the dual-use ban. Mr. Farid Zarif, who was the deputy director of the United Nations humanitarian aid program in Iraq at the time, explained that pencils were ban because of the fear that “carbon could be extracted from them that might be used to coat airplanes and make them invisible to radar” (Kinzer, 1999, para. 16). The article, while enumerating the effects of the sanctions, only in passing, calls attention to the American government’s inconsistency in its dealing with Iraq. And the article does not challenge the official story that Iraq’s invasion of Iran and of Kuwait are “evidence that Mr. Hussein’s regime is incurably aggressive and untrustworthy,” because that would be going against the official “truth.” We all know that the U.S. government is definitely a “bastion” of “non-aggression” and “trustworthiness” given what we have learned from my history (Kinzer, 1999, para. 10).

The second story, *Iraq Poverty Said Undermine Food Program* written by Christopher Wren and printed on October 20, 2000, challenged a key assertion of the official U.S. line on Iraq, namely that food and medicine did not get to the people because the government was hoarding the supplies for international political leverage. The article is really an interview of Tun Myat, who was the administrator of the U.N. “oil for food” program. Mr. Myat states “I think the Iraqi food-distribution system is probably second to none that you’ll find anywhere in the world...It gets to everybody whom it’s supposed to get to in the country,” but he also adds to this that Iraqi desperate situation will not improve until the countries infrastructure and essential services can be restored (Wren, 2000, para. 9). Mr. Myat was in New York to brief the

Security Council on the situation in Iraq and encourage the “release of \$2.25 billion in contracts for civilian goods that the Iraqi government” had requested (Wren, 2000, para. 5). However, the U.S. and its allies blocked the sale citing “dual-use.”

## **Conclusion**

This is a basic history of Iraq-U.S. relations prior to the Bush administration and their build up to the invasion of Iraq. It is one of violence, power, and domination. And yet all too often it is portrayed as clash between good and evil, a contest between foreign liberators and a local tyrant that threatens the security of the world. And the space for self reflection, so crucial for the proper functioning of our democracy—the space that the media is supposed to fill, was left vacant by the mainstream media. Instead of reporting stories in a historical and geopolitical context, we got paper-thin caricatures of the issues that all too often were in lock step with the official “truth.” As we have seen from the earliest interactions, U.S. involvement in Iraq has always been about oil and geopolitics. The concern has never been about the Iraqi people or democracy. Iraq was dangerous, a state supporter of terror, and untrustworthy when it did not behavior according to the wishes of the U.S. government or more specific U.S. elites. We can see that U.S. foreign policy operates primary on the Gramscian idea of political state coercion when dealing with Iraq. The intellectuals in the U.S. that work in the political state and civil society for the elite came out (during the Gulf War, the sanctions period, and the Iraq War) fiercely supporting and arguing for the elites’ economy interest by denouncing Iraq’s non-compliance and advocating all measure necessary to achieve compliance without regard to the cost in Iraqi blood. But when Iraq served the elites interests, U.S. government took Iraq of the terror list and sold

them the WMDs that the U.S. government started looking for after the 2003 invasion. This chapter is design to help us understand just how large the volume of knowledge out there was that contradicted the administration's official propaganda and that should have spurred news organizations to more critical and analytical coverage.

In the next chapter, we'll read about the media coverage during the lead up to the 2003 Iraq War with the knowledge we have obtained concerning in Iraq in mind. Now that we know where Iraq is because we have dropped enough bombs on the country, let's see how the 2003 invasion was sold to the public and why the intellectuals in the mainstream media consented to the official "truth" surrounding Iraq.

## **Chapter 2: Selling “Bombs over Baghdad”**

On March 20<sup>th</sup> 2003, the United States along with four other “supporting” countries invaded the territory of Iraq<sup>1</sup>. For months prior to this invasion, the U.S. government through the media had been engaged in an intense PR campaign to sell the need for this military action. The mainstream U.S. news media, still recovering from the state of nationalistic fervor that followed 9/11 and experiencing pressure from the U.S. government, the elites, and the public, did not rise to its stated objectives of “objectively” reporting and representing the “facts” concerning the case for war with Iraq. What is especially poignant about this failure in journalism was the abdication of agency on the part of so many intellectuals in the media who consented to reporting the “truth” that the government pushed.

In this chapter, first we revisit some of the coverage from the pre-invasion period, and then we examine how the media itself criticized its own coverage and observe what power relations are involved in the coverage. We specifically focus on how the media intellectual positioned themselves in terms of their agency in produce news during pre-invasion period. Finally, we discuss briefly some of the information that media had previously reported that could have contradicted the official “truth” on Iraqi-U.S. relations.

### ***9/11: The Beginning of a New American Century***

To understand the news coverage during the build up to the invasion we have to start from the incident that cast a long shadow over the period and dictated the discourse surrounding the decision to invade Iraq. September 11<sup>th</sup> was a day that shook

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<sup>1</sup> The other countries among the invading forces were Britain, Australia, and Poland.

the soul of America. For the first time since the Cold War, there was a sense of collective danger posed by an external threat. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, pundits and journalists (media intellectuals) would repeat the refrain “everything has changed.” And in fact, everything did change. President Bush’s approval rating shot up to a blistering 85 percent (from hovering between 50 and 60 percent) and the media itself seemed to be imbued with a new sense of patriotism and duty to the nation<sup>2</sup>. As Dan Rather stated on David Letterman’s Tonight Show on Sept 17<sup>th</sup> 2001 “George Bush is the President, he makes the decisions. And you know, as just one American, wherever he wants me to line up, just tell me where” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007). Indeed, in the coming months and over the next year and a half, the President and his administration would tell the press exactly where they needed to line up. And many media intellectuals like Rather would abdicate their agency and line up where they were told to.

Within hours after the 9/11 attacks, Donald Rumsfeld put Saddam Hussein on the target list<sup>3</sup>. And within days after the attack newspapers around the country began speculating on a possible Iraq–Al Qaeda connection. James Woolsey, a former director of the CIA, wrote an article for the New Republic two days after the attacks titled *The Iraq Connection*. In the article he speculates on the likely links between Al Qaeda and Iraq citing their mutual hatred of the U.S. and referencing historical suspicion of Iraqi involvement in past terrorist attacks against the U.S. (Woolsey, 2001) While on the same day, Laurie Mylroie, in her article *The Iraqi Connection Did Osama bin Laden*

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<sup>2</sup> I obtained the percentage from Professor Pollkatz’s pool of polls website. It has aggregate data of most of the national polls on Bush’s Presidential approval rating. <http://pollkatz.homestead.com/>

<sup>3</sup> CBS would break this on September 4 2002, 7 months before the invasion in the Joel Roberts article *Plans For Iraq Attack Began On 9/11*. <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2002/09/04/september11/main520830.shtml>

*act alone? Not Likely*, argues that as a non-state actor Al Qaeda is not able to put together the resources needed to stage such an attack and hence must have had the help of a state actor. Following on that point, she further argues that Al Qaeda and Iraq have a relationship through Sudan. She specifically cites the “suggestive” timing between the 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and Saddam Hussein’s campaign to end the U.N. weapons inspection regime as possible evidence to this relationship (Myroie, 2001). And on September 16<sup>th</sup> Richard Pearle stated on CNN, “Even if we cannot prove to the standards that we enjoy in our own civil society that they were involved, we do know, for example that Saddam Hussein has ties to Osama bin Laden, that can be documented” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007). And this was how “truth” was decided by the pro-war intellectuals working for the government and the media, not based on certain standards of proof, but based on trust. Their stance was even if they cannot prove it, trust them because they know what is really going on and be afraid because Saddam and Al Qaeda are always plotting.

In the days after these articles were published more articles and stories came out in the press about possible connections between Iraq and Al Qaeda. On September 23<sup>rd</sup> on NBC’s *Meet the Press*, Senator Joseph Lieberman argued, “As long as Saddam Hussein is in power in Iraq, the United States is in danger” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007). He added that there is evidence that “suggests Saddam Hussein may have had contact with bin Laden and the al-Qaeda network, perhaps [was] even involved in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007). Also, he said that an even more important reason for action against Saddam was that he “has worked on chemical and biological weapons and has used them against his own people

and against the Iranians” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007). He finished his argument with, “therefore, in my opinion, Saddam is a terrorist—and it should be a centerpiece of our policy, after we’ve finished the business in Afghanistan and bin Laden, to end [the Iraqi] regime” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007). Given the history that we have just learned, Lieberman’s statements could have only be taken seriously if there was a total lack of knowledge on the part of the mainstream media, or more probable, those who had the knowledge to have contested Lieberman’s “truth” consented to not challenging this “truth” or were marginalized by institutional power, which suppressed their knowledge.

One particular story, a meeting in Prague between Mohammed Atta, the ring leader of the 9/11 hijacks, and Iraq intelligence officers was touted as the smoking gun that connected Iraq to Al Qaeda. By November 12<sup>th</sup>, one pundit, William Safire of the New York Times called the Prague meeting “an undisputed fact” in his editorial the Prague Connection. And after this more links began to be made between Al Qaeda and Iraq (Safire, 2001).

On November 18<sup>th</sup> 2001 during the ABC’s *This Week News Show*, Richard Perle asserted “Weapons of mass destruction in the hands of Saddam Hussein, plus his known contact with terrorists, including Al Qaeda terrorists, is simply a threat too large to continue to tolerate” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007). About a week later Bill Kristol stated on Fox News “One person close to the debate said to me this week that it's no longer a question of if, it's a question of how we go after Saddam Hussein” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007).



More and more media intellectuals asserted or presumed a connection between Saddam and Al Qaeda, but an interesting synergy between those who pushed the hardest for aggression against Iraq within and outside the administration was not properly explored by the mass media. Like the elites in Gramsci's model of power, the U.S. elites adopted a two pronged strategy of utilizing political and civil society in tandem to push forward their agenda.

On January 26<sup>th</sup> 1998, a letter was written to President Bill Clinton declaring to him that "the only acceptable strategy" for dealing with Iraq was removing Saddam Hussein from power. And the primary threat posed by Saddam according to the letter was his possible possession of weapons of mass destruction, which threatens "the interests of the U.S. and our friends and allies around the world" (Project for a New American Century, 1998, para. 1). This letter was signed by among others, William Kristol, Richard Perle, James Woolsey, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz. And almost four years later the very same characters, turned up all over the news media advocating attacking Iraq as a national security imperative. It is significant to notice once again that in this official letter sent by former and soon to be members of the government the main reason given for regime change centered on geopolitics like the previous actions of the U.S. government related to Iraq.

The frequency with which pro-war intellectuals appeared on television news and penned op-ed columns in major newspaper in contrast to war anti-war intellectuals or independent experts was very telling of the hegemonic control of the elites over the mainstream media. According to Phil Donahue who had a news show on MSNBC at the time, "You could have the supporters of the President alone. And they would say

why this war is important. You couldn't have a dissenter alone. Our producers were instructed to feature two conservatives for every liberal” (as cited in Moyers & Hughes, 2007). Ironically Donahue himself counted as two liberals. Donahue’s boss, Eric Sorenson—the president of the station, told the New York Times in an article on November 7 2001 “Any misstep and you can get into trouble with these guys and have the patriotism police hunt you down” (Rutenberg & Carter, 2001, para. 6). In the same article, the New York Times reported that CNN decided, after receiving criticism (particularly from conservative sources) for lacking patriotism, “to require that reports of civilian casualties in Afghanistan be balanced with reminders of the Sept. 11 toll” (Rutenberg & Carter, 2001, para. 8).

And related to this pro-war bias is the reliance of the news media on administration officials as sources of information. According to media analyst Andrew Tyndall “of the 414 stories on Iraq broadcast on NBC, ABC, and CBS from September 2002 to February 2003, all but thirty-four originated at the White House, Pentagon, and State Department” (as cited in *Our unfree press*, 2004, p. 289). So in a very real sense the U.S. government got to control the news topics that were reported by the press. A clear example of this can be seen with the debate surrounding the aftermath of the invasion (something the administration avoided discussion on). Again referring to Andrew Tyndall, “of the 574 stories about Iraq that aired on NBC, ABC, and CBS evening news broadcasts between September 12, 2002 (when Bush addressed the U.N.), and March 7, 2003 (a week and a half before the war began), only twelve dealt primarily with the potential aftermath” of the invasion (as cited in *Our unfree press*, 2004, p. 295). Administration officials and pro-war intellectuals virtually enjoyed

unchallenged air-time and print space on the national media level. According to Steven Weisman of the New York Times “journalists are never going to fill the vacuum left by a weak political opposition” (as cited in *Our unfree press*, 2004, p. 295). The only problem is that they do this all the time with non-political stories. When was the last time a new scandal was not reported because the principal party involved refused to speak about it? Given the extensive history between the U.S. and Iraq that I documented in the previous chapter and the media’s knowledge of it, does not the administration’s blatant distortions and omissions of the U.S. history with Iraq constitute a scandal?

### ***Excuses and Explanations***

In the aftermath of the invasion and the revelations that followed many of the mainstream U.S. news outlets sought to justify or explain their gross reporting concerning the period leading up to the invasion. Of the national newspapers, the Washington Post took the boldest step—printing a front page story on August 12, 2004 titled *The Post on WMDs: An Inside Story* with the caption below the title *Prewar Articles Questioning the Threat Often Didn’t Make the Front Page*. The article is an internal critique of the Washington Post’s failure to question the administration’s evidence for WMDs and the general march to war, and as the subtitle suggests one of the main failures was that of the critical stories that made it to print, almost all were relegated to the back pages. From a period beginning August 2002 through March 19<sup>th</sup> 2003, the Post had 2 skeptical (note not critical) pieces run on the front page compared with “140 front-page stories that focused heavily on administration rhetoric against Iraq” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 16). This article presents us with unusually canny

insight into the mainstream news journalists' perception of their coverage of the war and of the pressures that influenced the coverage. Examining the article, I have identified a number of different explanations and excuses that primarily Washington Post reporters and editors gave to explain their coverage. To help us digest and make connections between the explanations, I have roughly divided them into categories: external and internal.

### **External Pressures and Explanations**

The first excuse I want to focus on is the limited space on the front page of newspapers. This excuse is tied to the commercial nature of the U.S. newspapers and the nature of U.S. news media in general. The newspaper medium and the television medium have limited space. Therefore editors in both mediums have to decide what can make it into the news coverage and the order in which it appears. Newspapers in general are more restricted than television stations in that their front pages do not only announce what are the important stories of the day but also serve as the primary marketing tool to hook readers into buying the paper. What appears on the front page is not merely a decision on what news might be most pertinent for the public to know, but has to reflect what editors think the public is most interested in and will sell the most papers. As the article states, "The front page is a newspaper's billboard, it's a way of making a statement about what is important, and stories trumpeted there are often picked up by other news outlets," so the article even extends my argument on importance of front page stories by asserting that front page stories do not only set the agenda for an individual newspaper but influence the coverage of other papers (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 12). Continuing with the article, it states that the Post's front page

usually has six or seven stories and the Executive Editor Leonard Downie Jr. “likes to feature a broad range of subjects, including, health, science, sports and business” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 12). Taking the Post’s estimation that leaves about three stories free for international and national news.

This leads to the second excuse, given by Bob Woodard, namely that “it is risky for journalists to write anything that might look silly if weapons were found in Iraq” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 13). The connection between this line of logic and the first excuse is simple—the newspaper’s front page is its billboard, and its crucial representation of its image to the public (and in this case the government). Therefore, it cannot be represented by something risky that can have an adverse effect on business. It has to stick to those stories that are safe and that are in the mainstream of “public” sentiment. Dana Priest, the Post’s national security reporter, buttresses this argument by describing the pressure the “public” can put on newspapers and reporters—“Priest noted...that skeptical stories usually triggered hate mail ‘questioning’ your patriotism and suggesting that you somehow be delivered into the hands of the terrorists” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 14). This shows reporting is not received neutrally by the public. Hate mail being sent by members of the public makes sense considering the climate of fear that I described earlier after 9/11 and which persisted through 2002 with the constant terror alerts<sup>4</sup> and the speculation by the government and the media of possible attack scenarios. But it also implicates the public showing that they do have power to influence the mainstream media’s news coverage.

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<sup>4</sup> The ubiquitous Homeland Security Current Threat Level with the color codes was a major contributor to public anxiety.

In the intense atmosphere of patriotism, people who spoke out against the war and dissenters, especially in the government, were very likely to experience some sort of backlash for their stance. A lot of informants in the government were very unwilling to attach their names to criticism of the Bush administration policy, and many higher ups in the administration were bound by policy to not to disagree with the President in public<sup>5</sup>. So while in a July 27<sup>th</sup> 2002 front page Washington Post article, Thomas Ricks reported that many of the generals in military, even among the Joint Chiefs of Staff, disagreed with Bush's policy to invade Iraq, he could not put their names next to their criticism, but had to rely on quoting retired generals, who were not bound by policy. This turned out to be a problem for his editor, who in the Post's self-reflective article says "the inability of dissenters 'to speak up with their names' was a factor in some of his news judgments" (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 22). When this excuse is combined with the view of then national security editor Matthew Vita that "journalistically, one of the frustrations with that story [referring to another Ricks story in 2002 October (which was killed by Vita and never published)] was that it was filled with lots of retired guys," adding as a lame qualifier that given the situation he "completely understood the difficulty of getting people inside the Pentagon' to speak publicly" (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 29). We can see clearly that there was a dynamic interplay between external and internal factors that produced the coverage during the build up to the war. The utter silliness of Downie's and Vita's appeal to some journalistic ideal or convention as a reason for disregarding the opinions of generals and high ranking military officials because they are retired or silenced by government policy is hard to overstate. It makes

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<sup>5</sup> As the Commander-in-Chief the President is a senior officer to all active duty members of the military and they cannot publicly criticize the President.

one wonder about what “journalistic” goals they are trying to achieve especially when they gave pro-war administration officials front page placement “even when their warnings were repetitive” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 43). As former assistant managing editor, Karen DeYoung, admitted, “we are inevitably the mouthpiece for whatever administration is in power...if the president stands up and says something, we report what the president said.’ And if contrary arguments are put ‘in the eighth paragraph, where they’re not on the front page, a lot of people don’t read that far” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 43). To me, the beginning and end are the most remarkable part of the quotation. Here is a reporter with one of the nation’s top newspapers basically demoting her profession to that of a glorified stenographer in the first part of the statement, and then admitting that the nuance in her newspaper’s reporting is buried within the text and often missed by her audience. It does not occur to her that she might have an obligation to make the nuance in her reporting apparent, especially considering the far reaching impact of the president’s words. This shows how deeply entrenched the hegemony of the government is in the media that DeYoung basically forfeits a good portion of his agency. However, her criticism of the public is a fair one that pulls into the equation the agency of the individual news consumer. As the PIPA case study from the introduction showed, the individuals who paid more attention to the print news had less misperceptions about the Iraq War than those who paid less attention it. Presumably, those who read less probably were not getting to the eighth paragraph.

## **Agency and Internal Explanations**

There is an uncertainty of allegiance at the core of the explanations that I have characterized as internal. The distinction between external and internal pressures and explanations, again, is not clear-cut, and there is vast interplay between both categories. This division is just to help us cut through and make sense of the myriad reasons given by the Post and by extension other mainstream media outlets.

As we see with DeYoung in the section above, there is this casting off of agency among the media intellectuals and particularly among the editors. The editor of any news agency print or even television have the primarily task of deciding what to report and how it can be reported. They can kill stories or keep them in the news cycle ad nauseam. That is why it is so surprising to read the statements of the Post editors denying their agency and their role in creation of news and the hegemonic “truth” that frames media coverage. As Pentagon correspondent Thomas Rick commented, “There was an attitude among editors: Look, we’re going to war, why even worry about all this contrary stuff” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 6)? This, again, is another abject abdication of agency. Instead of giving the public the information and context to better understand the story, the editors decided they already knew the future and hence were going to act accordingly in order to position themselves to be on top of the war coverage (media intellectuals with “reputations” can’t get sources from the government which apparently is key in covering war). This makes perfect sense considering DeYoung’s description of her profession, and recalling Steve Weisman’s (of the New York Times) statement that journalists are not going to argue the contrary if the political opposition does not. So the custodians of our democracy are telling us that they are dependent on political power to determine what news they should cover. This



is significant. Considering that in the same article in which DeYoung's was quoted, the Post referred to its "reputation for helping topple the Nixon administration" (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 14). While the Post editors are telling us part of the reason they missed the WMD story is because they are somehow attached to government for information and because they lack the power to change the outcome of political decisions, their paper is telling us that they have in the past helped to change a U.S. administration.

The contradiction apparent in the Post's words is indicative of a split allegiance and diverse obligations. Most journalists will readily admit to us that they have an obligation to the public in terms of getting the information or the "truth" out there and they couch this sentiment in terms of "objectivity," "accuracy," or "fairness." But we hardly ever notice journalists acknowledging their obligations to their newspapers as profit making businesses (public owned media operates differently) and the supplier of their incomes and the implications of this relationship. As such the knowledge journalists transmit is bounded by how willing they are to work for or go against the obligations they have to these primary influences. We see in the Post's self-reflective article that there is almost a division among the Post staff between the editors and the reports. Over and over again, Post editors are represented in the article as being "unenthusiastic" about pieces challenging the White House, "not front-paging" them, and characterizing such articles as lacking in official sources, difficult to read, too "well sourced," difficult to edit, not "definitive," or crusade-like and as such risky. On the other hand, the article represents Post reporters more complexly than the editors. It tells us that reporters wrote skeptical stories but faced resistance from the paper's editors,

and although they lobbied “for greater prominence for stories that questioned the administration’s evidence,” most did not want to push too hard because of the risk of being wrong and on the wrong side of the story (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 5).

Some Post journalists in the article did acknowledge their own agency, but even these acknowledgments were tied to external factors or assertions of competency in the face of failure. Bob Woodward was the main reporter (he is also an assistant editor) quoted who reflected on his performance during the build up to the war, “we did our job but we didn’t do enough, and I blame myself mightily for not pushing harder” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 3). Woodward later in the article is reported as saying that there was a groupthink among intelligence official concerning WMDs and that he thinks he “was part of the groupthink” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 13). While we should recognize Woodward’s regret as sincere, we still have to examine why reporters like him did not “push harder”. Woodward, himself gives us the first crucial reason—groupthink a.k.a. lazy reporting. As we’ll see in the next section, the information to write more “definitive” stories questioning the administration was available, and the Post itself reported some of it. What was missing were reporters making the connections and considering the possibility of war important enough to risk challenging their allegiance to their newspapers and the elites’ interests.

The Post did have at least one reporter who did that. Walter Pincus was making connections and writing in the words of his editors “too well sourced” difficult to read and edit stories. The article describes him as “a white-haired curmudgeon,” and I find this significant because he was the only journalist described negatively in terms of personality and as having a *reputation* as hard to work with (Kurtz & Writer, 2004,

para. 33). The Post editors also “complained that he was ‘cryptic,’” which means in non-euphemistic language that he did research (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 36). Pincus’ self-reflections are not quoted in the article, but the article gives us some key insight into his reporting style and why his stories seem prescient post invasion. First, Pincus is experienced. He has been a staff reporter for the last 32 years and covered the Iran-contra scandal for 5 years. Second, he reads documents, something he says people forget to do. Last, once he gets on a subject he stays with it, and as such he develops expertise<sup>6</sup>. Pincus’ type of journalism stands in stark contrast with the journalism practiced by his editors and many other mainstream media journalists, which centers on quoting political power.

I should recognize that Woodward, although was not producing Pincus type stories, used his influence that he accrued from his Watergate work, to lobby the other editors to allow Pincus’ work to be published. In mid-March, as the invasion loomed, one key story that Pincus had written about the lack of evidence for war was held up by the editors who claimed in the article “we weren’t holding it for any political reason or because we were being pressured by the administration” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 49). But Woodward stepped in, conferred with Pincus (although both men’s stories about the editing of the piece differ) and he then pushed through the story and it was printed on March 16 (four days before the invasion) albeit on Page A17. The national security editor at the time, Vita explained “we were dealing with an awful lot of stories, and that was one of the ones that slipped through the cracks” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 54). It seems that critical stories were always among “the ones that slipped

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<sup>6</sup> “He has long been an expert on nuclear weapons” and he met Han Blix, who was the chief U.N. weapons inspector in Iraq, back in 1959 (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 33).

through the cracks.” And this is the limitation of the agency of reporters; they do not determine what stories get into the paper or what order. All they can do is write the story. It is the editors who hold the keys to the printing press.

### **The Editors**

In contrast to Woodard’s and his fellow reporter’s expressions of regret and penitence, the editors, while admitting mistakes, consistently deflect blame and refuse to take responsibility for their coverage and any of the influence it might have had. The Executive Editor Downie, in explaining Post coverage during the build to the war said, “We were so focused on trying to figure out what the administration was doing that we were not giving the same play to people who said it wouldn’t be a good idea to go to war...that was a mistake on my part” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 7). Downie, representing the editors, couches his admission of fault in terms of focusing on the administration.

Downie again, this time on scrutinizing Colin Powell’s speech before the U.N., “We were not able to marshal enough evidence to say he was wrong,” Downie said of Powell (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 47). “To put one of those out on the front page (he is referring to critical articles that were again buried in the paper) would be making a statement on our own: ‘Aha, he’s wrong about the aluminum tubes’” (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 47). This is another abdication of agency. The Post however did not have a problem running in the opinion pages columns stating that Powell’s presentation was solid positive proof condemning Saddam. The article states that “there is a church-and-state wall between the newsroom and the opinion pages,” and the Editorial Page Editor like Downie reports directly to the Post Co. Chairman Donald Graham (Kurtz & Writer,

2004, para. 48). This is the Post article's defense against accusations of advocating for the war through their editorials. The editorial pages are not under the control of the newsroom. Valid or not, the defense does reveal a higher power in the hierarchy of the Post that of that Chairman whose primary interest is in the Washington Post as business. This connection was lost in the way the Post's media intellectuals presented themselves.

Liz Spayd, the assistant managing editor for national news: "I believe we pushed as hard or harder than anyone to question the administration's assertion on all kinds of subjects related to the war...Do I wish we would have had more and pushed harder and deeper into questions of whether they possessed weapons of mass destruction? Absolutely...Do I feel we owe our readers an apology? I don't think so" (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 31). Her words say it all. Just forget everything you learned about journalism being a public service because clearly at least this editor did not feel a responsibility to the public or her readers. And this was the attitude that many of the editors, we did our jobs, yeah we could have done better, but we do not anyone apologies. Remorse seems like an infinitesimal thing to ask for in relation to enabling the invasion of a nation that has led to hundred of thousands of dead people.

It is significant that although Pincus is the most senior member of the Post's staff in terms of longevity, he is not in an editorial position. This is fact raises again questions of media ownership and control of the means of production of news. The private control of media and its concentration in the hands of a few it one of the least talk about facts in the mainstream media's self critics. "In 1983 over 50 corporations controlled the vast majority of all news in the U.S.," but by "2000, the number had

fallen to six (as cited by Media Reform Information).” And this is the link that we must have in mind as we contemplate the behavior and reasoning of mainstream media intellectuals.

The Washington Post “did better than most other news organization” in critically covering the lead up to the war (Kurtz & Writer, 2004, para. 11). This is vitally important because the Washington Post represents the high-end of critical mainstream news media journalism during the period. As we have seen in the PIPA polls people who had television as their primary source of news had more misperceptions about the Iraq war than those who read print media. The Post is among the best print sources in the mainstream media so if this is the kind of coverage it produced, it reflects poorly on the rest of the mainstream media and calls into question the reliability of mainstream media. It would seem that the Washington Post did a fairly decent job if not for the fact that as we have seen in chapter one there is just so much information and history that calls into question the U.S. government’s statements and motives concerning Iraq. In fact, during the period before the invasion there were articles written that rehashed some of the history I mentioned in chapter one. Again these articles were available, but the information they contained never got incorporated into the mainstream media discourse on the war.

### ***The Historical Present:***

Here is a quick sample of some of the highly damning information that was available and current while the “war debate” went on. First is the BBC news article, *Saddam’s parallel universe*, published on January 26<sup>th</sup> 2003, two months before the invasion, by journalist Allan Little. Little (2003) acknowledges the role of the CIA in

supporting the first Baath party coup, stating “the coup that brought the Baath Party to power in 1963 was celebrated by the United States,” and he also reports that the CIA backed the coup at least through funding (para. 28). He then quotes U.S. diplomat James Akins, who served in the Baghdad Embassy during the coup, as saying “I knew all the Ba'ath Party leaders and I liked them... the CIA were definitely involved in that coup. We saw the rise of the Ba'athists as a way of replacing a pro-Soviet government with a pro-American one and you don't get that chance very often... Sure, some people were rounded up and shot, but these were mostly communists so that didn't bother us” (Little, 2003, para. 30-32). Two themes emerge from this particularly candid quote that we are seeing again and again over the course of this thesis. The first is the reporting by major news organizations of pertinent opinion busting facts and information, but the neglect to employ those facts in their analysis of related situations. It is important to recognize that while BBC is not a U.S. news organization, it is a major international news agency, and, as such, major U.S. news organizations can be reasonably expected to pick up on their stories. The second is the reiteration by U.S. official after U.S. official that their interests in Iraq revolve around U.S. strategic concerns and is not related to number of dead Iraqi bodies strewn across the country. This observation becomes important because the official story surrounding the U.S. actions that were taken against Saddam’s regime always at some point invariably ends up being justified by the need to protect Iraqis from their tyrannical dictator.

Next is a December 30, 2002, Washington Post article by Michael Dobbs, *U.S. Had Key Role in Iraq Buildup: Trade in Chemical Arms Allowed Despite Their Use on Iranians, Kurds*, details the history of Iraq-U.S. relations in the 1980s and the U.S. role

in supporting Saddam's regime. What is significant about this article is first the timing of this article. It comes in the middle of the pre-invasion campaigning for war with Iraq by the Bush Administration. Clearly this article shows that the U.S. was intimately involved in the developing of Iraq WMD capabilities in the 1980s. "The story of U.S. involvement with Saddam Hussein in the years before his 1990 attack on Kuwait -- which included large-scale intelligence sharing, supply of cluster bombs through a Chilean front company, and facilitating Iraq's acquisition of chemical and biological precursors -- is a topical example of the underside of U.S. foreign policy" (Dobbs & Writer, 2002, para. 3). Michaels not only shines light on these inconvenient truths, but he also alerts his reader to the fact of an underside to U.S. foreign policy, which often missing in mainstream news analysis of U.S. international relations. Continuing, Michaels explains that although Bush Jr. administration's spokesmen claimed that Saddam's use of chemical weapons against his own people "and particularly the March 1988 attack on the Kurdish village of Halabjah" showed that his regime "presents a 'grave and gathering danger' to the United States," in actuality, even though there were reports on Iraqi use of chemical weapons at the time, the U.S. expanded military intelligence to Iraq in 1988 (Dobbs & Writer, 2002, para. 32). He cites U.S. Air Force intelligence officer Rick Francona who "reported finding widespread use of Iraqi nerve gas when he toured the Al Faw peninsula in southern Iraq in the summer of 1988, after its recapture by the Iraqi army" (Dobbs & Writer, 2002, para. 33). And in the same period U.S. officials considered their strategic alliance with Iraq as more important than confronting Iraq over its use of chemical weapons, as "Assistant Secretary of State Richard W. Murphy wrote in a September 1988 memorandum that addressed the



chemical weapons question, ‘The U.S.-Iraqi relationship is . . . important to our long-term political and economic objectives’” (Dobbs & Writer, 2002, para. 31). Again the U.S.’s geopolitical position is more important than the salvation of Iraqi bodies.

Last even though this article is a bit dated for our time period, it is a Washington Post article that does tremendous work in revealing the nature of U.S. foreign policy. The article was published on June 23 1991, and is entitled *Allied Air War Struck Broadly in Iraq; Officials Acknowledge strategy Went Beyond Purely Military Targets*. In it, the reporter Barton Gellman argues that U.S. military modified its official story concerning its selection of targets during the 43-day air bombardment of Iraq at the start of the First Gulf War after evidence contradicting their initial assertions was revealed. There are a few points that in the article that are key to understanding how the U.S. military saw Iraqi civilians. First, the U.S. intentionally bombed civilian structures to “amplify the economic and psychological impact of international sanctions on Iraqi society, and thereby compel President Saddam Hussein to withdraw Iraqi forces from Kuwait without a ground war,” and also to incite Iraqi citizens to rise against the Iraqi leader (Gellman & Writer, 1991, para. 4). In tandem with goal was the hope to “destroy or damage valuable facilities that Baghdad could not repair without foreign assistance” hence creating some post war leverage (Gellman & Writer, 1991, para. 5). Air planner Said explained “Big picture, we wanted to let people know, ‘Get rid of this guy and we’ll be more than happy to assist in rebuilding. We’re not going to tolerate Saddam Hussein or his regime. Fix that, and we’ll fix your electricity’” (Gellman & Writer, 1991, para. 39) Also Col. John A. Warden III agreed that this was a leverage strategy “Saddam Hussein cannot restore his own electricity . . . He needs help. If there are

political objectives that the U.N. coalition has, it can say, ‘Saddam, when you agree to do these things, we will allow people to come in and fix your electricity.’ It gives us long-term leverage” (Gellman & Writer, 1991, para. 38). Lastly, among the justifications offered was that “Iraqi civilians were not blameless for Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait” (Gellman & Writer, 1991, para. 7). As one senior Air Force officer put it “they do live there, and ultimately the people have some control over what goes on in their country” (Gellman & Writer, 1991, para. 7). This is eerily close to Al Qaeda’s justification of its actions, namely civilians are not innocent of their government actions and hence are fair game. Again it should be noted that the real strategy here was by destroying lives of ordinary Iraqis U.S. policy makers and military planners hoped to achieve regime change or at least coerce Saddam into obeying U.S. commands.

The combine weight of just these three articles should be enough to arouse suspicion of the intent and truthfulness of the U.S. government. But as we have seen this is not what the current guardians of the democracy think to be journalism. On the contrary, this kind of deep investigative journalism that brings into play history and exposes bold face governmental lies is seen as “too hard to edit” and partial. But isn’t that it? All knowledge is partial, and the responsibility of the news media is to help contextualize such partial knowledge for their audience.

## **Conclusion**

The media presents the “truth,” which is mostly a regurgitation of the U.S. government talking points. The mainstream media was always quick to claim that Saddam’s accusations against the U.S. were just propaganda, while at the same time they spewed U.S. government propaganda. In this chapter we have seen how the

intellectuals in the mainstream media, particularly the editors abdicated their agency and consented to the hegemonic power of the government and the elites. But we also briefly saw that the public is not free from complicity in determining the media coverage during the pre-invasion period. Finally, we saw some of the connections between the elites and the mainstream media and the ways in which the elites through the intellectuals that consent to their interest (government officials, pundits, and journalists) dominated the news coverage with their “truth.”

In the next chapter we explore the thoughts of some individuals from the public on the coverage leading to the war and we examine how they do or do not represent their agency in relation to the coverage.

## Chapter 3: Looking Back through the Mushroom Cloud

The stories individuals tell about their memories of the coverage and their thoughts on media are significant. So far we have heard the voices of administration officials and media intellectuals, now we hear the voices of those who were at the receiving end of the knowledge the intellectuals transmitted.

I interviewed six different Duke Students about their views on media and the media coverage during the Iraq war. Included in the sample is a Duke republican, a trio of Duke University Chronicle journalists, a student with family ties to Iraq, and a student who lives in New York City and was in the city during the 9/11 attacks. These interviews are not meant to represent all people who identify with the primary categories I have given my interviewees, but I do hope to draw some connections between the sentiments of my interviewees and the larger themes of agency, power, and the role of the media. I left out one of my Chronicle journalist interviews because of length concerns and because he covered a lot of the same issues as the other journalists.

This chapter is laid out in an alternating pattern consisting of descriptions of an interview or pair of interviews and of sections of analysis after the descriptions. In my analysis, I try to position my respondents with respect to the frameworks of power that we have been working with. I am aware of the violence involved in condensing individual's views and opinions into theoretical positions. This, however, is hard to get around because of the nature of representation and fact that the whole can never be fully represented in another medium. But I hope the knowledge that we get from the interviews and the analysis offsets some of the reductionist violence done to the persona of my interviewees. Last at the end of the chapter I include a chance I had to question a

Bush administration official, Stephen Hadley, on the reasons for invading Iraq. The encounter was a critical one for me because it allowed me to use my knowledge in the contest for “truth” with a pro-war intellectual and because it revealed some of the ways in which individual closely tied to the policy of invading Iraq conceived of their agency.

As the title of the chapter indicates, these interviews are an exercise in memory, especially the memory of the individual’s agency and the factors that influenced it. There is a specificity about the period before the Iraq invasion, in which fear predominated, that brought about a memory gap of the period. As we’ll see in the interviews, there is this haziness surrounding the period, and most of my interviewees have trouble calling specific facts about the period. Part of my argument in this chapter is that this phenomenon is partially the work of hegemonic power. Because while there can be reflection and debate about it, the past is not allowed to be linked to the present in the hegemonic “truth” precisely at the moments the elites seek to implement their power. So because the mainstream media presented the hegemonic “truth” and did not give the historical context to couch the geopolitical debates surrounding the invasion, many Americans like some of my interviewees have no frame work to understand the developments that led to the invasion and whereas such confused. The mushroom cloud is emblematic of the fear and confusion created through the media coverage and governmental actions post-9/11. The fear and conflict is tied to the abdication of agency by individuals and the strengthening of hegemonic power.

(All interviewee have had their names change and certain descriptions left vague to make their identities untraceable)

### **“Wow, I’m living through history”**

This was the sense Sarah had watching in her New York City home the opening bombing of Baghdad on ABC news. “I am living through a war, you [only] read about it in textbooks.” Here we were in the Duke’s Great hall dining area, sitting at one of the tables lined up against the wall, which had exits leading to the plaza. A group of female students to my right and her left were busily talking away about student concerns unrelated to the gravity of the conversation taking place a few seats away from them.

Sarah is junior and my friend. We have had many previous conversations on a wide range of topics from faith and politics to plans on starting a new student group. But this conversation was different because of the formal nature of the interview set up and my relative reticent in comparison to my more engaging personality. I began the interview quickly explaining what my project was about “the media coverage of the build up to the Iraq 2003” and that I was interested in her memory of it. I began the first interview with the question, “What did you think of the 2003 Iraq invasion at the time?”

Sarah began by saying she was “slightly bias” because she lived in New York City and 9/11 was “very real and very visible” to her. She was so “preoccupied with 9/11” that there was “not enough space in my memory” to remember the other events that led to the war. She did remember that “the media didn’t explain Iraq’s connection with 9/11” and was associating Iraq with 9/11, which for her was very confusing. But overall she did not remember the transition from 9/11 to Iraq. They seemed seamless to her. Part of this it is related to the fact that she was in boarding school at the time of 9/11 and over most of the period spanning the build up to the war. Her friends and she “didn’t talk about it much because we were busy with school; teachers didn’t talk much

also.” She does remember the sense of fear and panic in New York City in the period after 9/11 and mentioned that on television there were “a lot of programs saying where you could get anti-terror gear,” and that NYC had terror codes that made the threat of terror feel very real.

I asked her about the news stations she watched, and she favored ABC and UPN 9 news (a New York Station). She commented that at the time of the invasion she “still felt like it was going to be a quick thing,” and then added, “maybe I was watching the wrong channel.” She said according to older people talking about the media that the media has changed, and it is not what it used to be. And then she mentioned the News Hour channel 13 as “objective” and representing both sides of stories and also alluded to NPR as “good, in part” stating that “news stations cater to their audience.” And “public channels have a different goal and a different relationship with their viewers.” In contrast, she pointed out the cable and network news stations get their “support from commercials and are held to a different standard.” Relating this, she mused that ABC has different goals because of their different relationship with viewers and “money is a driving force” in news coverage.

But for Sarah “the war hit home when American soldiers started dying” and this “affected my experience of the war.” The deaths of American soldiers made a “big idea more relatable” because she was “more concerned with individuals” than the big idea of war.

I did a follow up interview with her to get at her sense of agency and let her review the first interview. I asked her with agency in mind, “Did you try to sort through the confusion of information during the build to the war?” She responded, “I was a

freshman in high school, and I was in boarding school. I didn't have the ability to figure it out." I then asked her about her positionality in the narrative of the build up to the war. I inquired, "Do you feel duped by the news stations?" and I added in, "I know it is a loaded question." She started her answer by saying, "We are always limited by news sources in the States," this is something she became more aware of when she saw how the Iraq War was being covered in Belize (a lot more dead bodies were being shown). Sarah continued "You could not appreciate the magnitude of it [the war] because of how they show it." And then she addressed directly my question, "Do I think they duped me?" She sat and thought hard. "I don't know," she remarked. "I don't know if they misled me. They said we were at war. I don't know."

Caught in history, this is the sentiment that comes to mind when I think of Sarah. Immensely affected by the trauma of 9/11 like everyone, Sarah seemed to never form an understanding of what took place during the build up to the war. The mainstream media had the effect of confusing her knowledge and as we'll learn in the last chapter knowledge is key. Because of knowledge confusion, even though she had a suspicion of the driving force behind news coverage, she was not able to translate this suspicion into any kind of understanding of the coverage. An additional effect of the knowledge confusion is that she was unable to place her agency. She was not sure how the mainstream media's coverage impacted her. The age factor like in all the students I interview plays an important role in Sarah's inability to wade through the confusion.

However, like most Americans, she had access to resources that could clarify her understanding. She had the power to access knowledge, and she chose not to use it



to resolve her “confusion.” In contrast to the unclear “noise” of the media, Sarah’s, her friends’, and her teachers’ silence around the issue of Iraq is telling. This silence might have to do with Iraq war being on the peripheral in their lives as Sarah said the war did not become concrete to her until America bodies “brought it home.” Similar to the journalist from the previous chapter, she represented herself as an individual buffeted by external power and never quite acknowledged her own agency and power. We almost get a glimpse of this in her acknowledgment, “maybe I was watching the wrong channel.” In the end, Sarah story is that of the individual affect by power (the power of the media) and rendered confused because she did not have and was not willing to obtain the knowledge necessary to decipher the information broadcast by the mainstream media.

***“It is the editor’s butt on the line”***

Adesuwa stated in part of her answer to my question about the role of the editor in the news selection process. She said “the Editor in Chief deals with the outside,” and is more of the face of the Chronicle. So when something goes wrong, the editor usually receives the blame. She cited the Lacrosse case and a story on an attempted suicide as incident when the Chronicle and particularly the editor where put in a very tough spot.

Adesuwa is my friend and although like previously stated the interview context changes the dynamics of a conversation, I think she felt relatively comfortable sitting at a table with me in the Mary Lou William Center. She understood that I wanted to learn about the Chronicle for my CA 194 project, and was very willing to oblige. I had solicited her help after repeated attempts to establish a link inside the Chronicle fell apart.

I began by asking for a basic understanding of the structure of the Chronicle and she drew out a position diagram on my notebook. It consisted of the Editor in Chief at the top, the Managing Editor under the editor, then under the Managing Editor the Department Editors (News, Sports, Edit pages, Recess, and Photography). She introduced me to CLAP (Chronicle Leadership Apprenticeship Program)—which includes all the editors—and explained that the Duke administration had been trying to force the editors off CLAP, which lets them underload multi-times in their Duke career. The Chronicle as a daily paper “takes a lot to time to run,” and is more tasking than regular extra-curricular activities. Because of the workload the editors tend to spend a lot of time with each other. And this develops a hierarchy within the Chronicle between the editors and the reporters who are more like volunteers.

I then asked how they decided what stories to cover. And Adesuwa answered, “There is a daily budget meeting, after this the top editors decide what goes in the paper and where in the paper it is placed...the News Editor has a schedule of news assignment and the size of the paper changes daily.” The editors read a lot of newspapers and pick up information about Duke from Google. The Chronicle has a relatively limited scope and has a small region to cover because they are focused on the university and try to relate everything back to the university. “The Chronicle caters to the university but also tries to challenge it.” Working in this kind of intense atmosphere (60 to 80 hours a week among editors), puts her in the habit of getting stories.

The Chronicle trusts the Associate Press when it reports news outside the scope of Duke. Page 2 is the world and nation section. Adesuwa sees the New York Times and the Economist are seen as “good sources”. She added that last year the section

“World and Nation” was changed from containing two big AP stories to shorter snippets more geared towards picking the interest than giving in depth information.

I asked about why they don’t cover more on the world/national level. She said their resources limit what can be reported on the world/nation level. And also they are not political experts, but are novices so they cannot analysis world and national stories. What they try to do is “to tie world events back to Duke Students.”

However the lacrosse case presented an opportunity to witness national level reporting up close. She said the Chronicle “objectively covered the case. The lacrosse case is the closest the Chronicle came to criticizing a national story. The rolling stone article was a particularly sore point. “It was very frustrating because we know what they are writing is not right when we have access to the information... reading written documents is better than speaking to people.” She went on, saying that the major news organizations just went to the powerbrokers for quotes and information, and did not bother to read the documents. Adesuwa explained that on days when much didn’t happen, the national media would find something to report, and that there was a lot of sensationalism and exciting reporting. She exclaimed, “Listening to Nancy Grace was mind blowing!” She complained a lot of the reporting by the news media was “entirely pre-mature...the evidence was not there”. She did say it was exciting and terrifying to cover a case like the lacrosse scandal because of “the power of a story, the power of a single event.” I asked why it was not reported fairly. She said, “They knew the lines and were just waiting for the story to catch up.” Can’t rid people of their opinion, but make it clear that is their opinion. “There is a difference between being fair and being balanced.” “There is often clear wrong doing.”

Last Adesuwa added that the Chronicle is a teaching organization. First reporters are taught to be balanced and get both sides of the story but this is seen as low level reporting. Then they are taught to be fair. She then referenced Fareed Zakaria saying you “know that he is thorough so you can trust him.” She said that opinions are “separate from professional news” and that “no one is objective,” but we “can be consciously fair.”

**“By integrity, I mean journalistic integrity—don’t cheer if Duke scores a bucket or something spectacular happens, just keep a straight face”**

Shane said after I pushed him to give me “a functional definition of integrity”. He continued, “You have to the attitude of a neutral observer, and by neutral I don’t mean 50:50 coverage.” He then said the Chronicle’s sports reporting differ from national sporting reporting in that “our stories are targeted at a Duke audience.” The kind of angle the Chronicle takes is “usually the angle...what Duke did to win or lose a game.” And he continued that getting the other teams perspective is not important, “that’s not what our audience wants and that’s not what matter to us.”

Shane is a friend of mine who I met through another Duke organization. He works with the Chronicle sports department as a reporter with a primary focus of covering the Duke Basketball team. He is also the sport editor elect. We met in the Alumni lounge on West Campus but there were too many people there so we went up to the Mary Lou Williams Center. The space was relatively quiet, and he had his back to the door. I was seated on his right side, and we were seated at a roundtable. He told me on the way to the MLWC that he could only talk for about 15 or 20mins because he had a Chronicle meeting afterwards.

First, I explained my project to him as for CA194 and being about my wanting to know how the “knowers” know and go about getting information. He was not satisfied with my answer so asked me what “I was trying to get at” so I explained my project in relation to this thesis. I basically told him I was trying to get at how news media gets its information and how that information influences the public it reports to. He then let me know that the sports reporting works a little different from news reporting in the Chronicle. I said ok and I asked my first question, “How do you decide what stories to cover?”

He answered, “We cover every basketball and football game because they are the most popular sports.” And then he said the next tier in popularity and coverage were “lacrosse, baseball, men’s women’s soccer, then the true non-revenue like tennis, swimming, wrestling, golf but it gets more attention,” and then sports that get less attention than these get covered the least. Space reflects what they can cover; he explained, “If there is not enough space only the most popular sports get covered.” He showed me the day’s Chronicle, “see 12 pages” and then he showed me the numbers of pages in the sports section, “one, two,” connecting the space in the sports section to the paper’s size. Hence that day mainly basketball was covered. I asked him “what determines the paper’s size?” He responded, “Ad-revenue, because of economy there has been a drop in advertising,” hence papers this year have been smaller, mostly 12 pages, than previous years, usually 16-20 pages. He added, “they [the Chronicle] are doing better than the national media because they are insulated by the college campus and advertisers know who they are advertising to.” In order to combat the shrinking the paper, Shane said the Chronicle was increasing its online stories.

Switching gears a little bit I then asked Shane “how should a reporter’s views play into a story?” Shane answered, “I’d like to say not at all and that a reporter should be 100% objective, but I know that is not possible...we don’t cheer in the press box, but we can cheer for Duke while we are not working...reporters have to be objective and accurate.” I followed up his answer and asked, “Define objective?” Shane replied “Ignoring personal bias in writing, it means not using I or we in referring to the team [the Duke basketball team].” He also mentioned, “Behaving like an industry reporter” and “upholding the standard of integrity” associated with being objective. This is when I asked him to give me “a functional definition of integrity,” with “examples in practice of what you mean [by integrity]?” And he replied it meant being neutral and having a stoic attitude. He also added, “as a reporter you distance your person from the reporting, you try to report like an outsider with intimate knowledge...you analyze the game and you don’t show off personal knowledge...journalists have a skewed sense of service is not about personal glory it is about getting the story right.”

An important part of getting the story right is fact checking so I asked Shane, “How do you verify information?” He answered, “first hand, we are there at the games and when we can’t go, we use goDuke.com. They usually have somebody...there. We verify our information personally, either by being there or 1:1 interviews with the players or coaches.”

Last I asked Shane what he thought of mainstream news media like CNN, Fox, the network stations, the New York Times, USA today, and Washington Post. He said he doesn’t really watch TV and “I think that people know what they are getting with Fox news: right leaning and MSNBC: left...I’m not really partisan, right or left.” He then

singled out the New York Times, saying, “the New York Times is incredible and they do a great job...they are more impressive than USA Today.” He then weighed in on the effects of the economy, “I think the press is hurting because of the economy. I think though the New York Times economic coverage has been lacking a bit.” Finally, he added the “the New York Times is more highbrow [sic] and it doesn’t target ordinary people.”

Journalists in Training, these are what Adesuwa and Shane are. This is also why the Duke Chronicle is an important locus in understanding our news media and how journalists operate. One of the first things that I want to point out in both interviews is how their journalistic ideals almost overlap with the ideals given by mainstream media journalists, specifically the idea of news as objective and separate from opinion. To be fair both, Adesuwa and Shane, recognize the impossibility of the objective ideal, but there is still this attitude, especially in Shane’s interview, of the need to remove oneself from the news and reify its production as professional and mechanical. Shane refers to this need to uphold “the standard of integrity” of by not overtly identify with the Duke team who he is deeply tied to, and Adesuwa’s maxim of opinion being separate from professional news flies in the face of what the mainstream new professionals were practicing during the build up to the war. What is even more interesting about her interview is that when she was in close contact with the mainstream media during the Lacrosse case, she realized how untrustworthy their reporting of the situation was yet that same suspicion does not seem to be exercised when the mainstream media is covering other stories. When I asked Adesuwa why they don’t cover world and national stories themselves she cited limited resources and lack of expertise. But as we have

seen in the previous chapter expertise is something that is not utilized in coverage of many world and national events. What this shows to me is an abdication by the Chronicle to the mainstream news media of its agency to cover such stories.

This abdication of agency is indicative of the trust the Chronicle and specifically Shane and Adesuwa have for the mainstream media. But as we have seen in the previous chapter, the mainstream media is not the most trustworthy bearer of knowledge, and their blend of “truth” is very convenient for the U.S. government. And by not being actively critical of the media except in the face of direct observations of contradictions, the Chronicle and its workers confine their knowledge to operate within the boundaries of “truth” set by the media just as many individuals during the build up to the Iraq war did.

Last, in Adesuwa’s interview we see the mainstream media engaging in the practice of quoting officials and abdicating to the officials’ representation of the situation, reminiscent of the reporting on the Iraq invasion. Adesuwa in reporting on the Lacrosse case actually sounds like Walter Pincus from the Washington Post. She criticized clear wrong doing, read the documents pertain to the case, and recognized the discrepancies in the official “truth” concerning the case.

### **“A new can of worms”**

Is the way, Raj said his father described what would result from the invasion of Iraq. Raj’s father was born in Iraq, and he left Iraq at the age of five during the exodus of Jews from Arab countries following the Arab-Israeli War of 1948. Raj’s father came to the U.S. where he grew up and where eventually Raj was born. His father’s sentiments caused Raj to have mixed feelings about the invasion. When I asked him



what he remembered about the transition from 9/11 to Iraq, he said, “it was a very smooth transition...9/11 happened and everything just seemed to follow afterwards.” He remembers the weapons inspectors going back to look for weapons and the suspense around it. According to Raj the government and the media made things seem seamless, “there was no real jolt [after 9/11].”

Raj is another friend of mine that I have known since freshman year, although we have not been in constant communication over the past three years. And it is really this senior year that we have had deeper conversations. I interviewed him for the first time on a school night at his apartment. We sat at his dinner table, and he was relaxed and casual with his feet up on the table.

Raj continued on with his assessment of the pre-war period adding, “I don’t think it was a conspiracy theory, but looking back it looks like everything was planned or orchestrated.” Raj commented, “Americans are removed from the immediate impact of their actions.” He added that “things started getting crazy in the airport,” as description of the general feeling of the time.

I asked him if he remembered any protests. He said there were protests at his high school, but he had conflicted feelings towards protestors because he thought, “Where were the protests when Iraq was killing Kurds, why didn’t you protest Saddam’s regime.” He wanted for the protestors to “acknowledge the humanity of the U.S. in terms that the U.S. people are allowed to protest here versus protesting Saddam or some other dictator.” And he mentioned a very Republican friend in the army who he didn’t agree with, but made him think. His friend told him “the protestors protest the war because they value American life more than Iraqis dying.” This made Raj to think that at some

level it was “egocentric and a double standard to protest...because you can’t protest Saddam, Saddam does not care.” However he added, “I was upset by the hanging of Saddam...the [U.S.] politicians saying they were here [in Iraq] for freedom but let people dance on Saddam’s blood—very hypocritical.”

Next, I asked him if during the build up to the war, teachers and other students at his high school talked about what was going on. He said teachers talk about the build up to the war, “after 9/11 it was a huge part of the discourse at school.” He mentions again that there were protests at his high school, and he recalled one antiwar rally that was led by a girl he had a crush on. The protests were controversial because he lived in a very Republican district that was mainly White and Jewish. Raj said, “I feel out of context because I am first generation on my Dad’s side,” in reference to how he feels in the community. There was an additional touch of discomfort in that a lot of his parents’ friends were very Pro-Bush and were upset at his parents because of their questioning of the invasion. He said, “From Bush’s win in 2004, I learned how stupid the older generation was.” And he mentioned that the 2000 and 2004 election might have been rigged.

I then asked him what he thought of the media coverage during the build up to the war. He said, “The news media was repetitive and lacked new information.” And he found consuming news media very “frustrating and stressful.” He added, “I don’t know if people find anything [new information]...you have to be at the interface and know people high up to know what is going on.” And he then further clarified, “TV is the most annoying, most superficial, and gets away with the less substance.” Looking back retrospectively, he thinks the war was about “dependency on foreign oil,” but quickly

interjected “I’m not at the center so I can’t know.” But then he continued, “The national economy is linked to oil,” and the speculation around this issue “contributed to cynicism over the war.” He further expounded on saying that one of his Duke Professors was much more outspoken about the war in class than any teacher he had in high school, and the professor compared George W. Bush and his father to a pair of father and son crusader kings. Continuing he talked about the history of warfare pointing out that it has always been about conflicts involving countries, which have “resources more powerful countries want.” Adding to this Raj said “most people don’t know why we are in the war.”

I then asked him if he knew that the U.S. had supplied Iraq weapons in the past. He said that he knew, and he found this out soon after the discussion of war started, although he doesn’t quite remember when. He then asked me “what do you think about all this?” I gave him an answer similar to my position in the introduction. I let him know how I was shocked the cognitive dissonance between what I knew and the reporting on television, and how that led to deeper research. In particular I emphasized how after 9/11 the phrase, “they hate us for our freedoms,” was utterly perplexing to me. Raj latched on to my sentiment, and he went into a discussion about his Jewish heritage, the experience of Jews in Iraq, and issues related to the State of Israel. Raj asked me not to record his specific comments when he made them.

At the end of the interview, Raj said, “It is easy to assume your lifestyle has no connection with the suffering of others...life is global.” He said this to characterize the chicken and egg nature of terrorism (do we intervene and motivate terrorism? or does terrorism motivate us to intervene in foreign countries?). “Liberalism is weird” he

added, “it promotes cultural diversity but supports outside [like outside the country] groups who are super conservative.” Finally, he said “extremism is a mutual generative phenomenon.

Like with Sarah, I did a quick follow up interview with Raj. I let me look over my section about him. And again similar to Sarah’s follow, I focused in this interview on the issue of agency. I asked Raj if he had any special knowledge about Iraq because of his ancestry to which he answered, “There is no special knowledge because my Dad was born there,” simply he indicated that he obtained his knowledge on Iraq mainly on his own. And when I asked him “What is the role of the agency of the individual in finding out what is happening in the world?” He replied, “People who have access to a variety of materials have a responsibility for reviewing them. I would emphasize the importance of variety and looking at different sources.” He also mentioned that he had mixed feelings about the invasion because “it [stopped] the massacre of the Kurds,” but brought the “destruction of Iraq’s infrastructure and killed other people on the other hand.” Finally he weighed in on the media and educational system saying, “There is a disconnection between what is being taught in schools and shown in the media versus what is going on in the world.”

If I was involved in a straightforward Marxism analysis, Raj would definitely not be operating under the illusion of the Bourgeoisie. The first thing, I would like to highlight is fact of Raj’s tie to Iraq. In the preview interviews and in the interviews following this one, there is very little focus on the suffering and the effect of U.S. foreign policy actions on the lives of Iraqis. For example in Sarah’s interview the war

itself did not hit home for her until U.S. body bags started trickling home. But for Raj, a central frame for how he looked at invasion of Iraq was the welfare of the Iraqi people. Related to this concern is not only his ancestral connection to Iraq, but also his knowledge of the history of Iraq-U.S. relations. This knowledge let him see through the media coverage as shallow and superficial. His knowledge allowed him to then consider the main societal institutions for distributing knowledge and see how they were reproducing a world that, as we have seen specifically with the media in the previous two chapters, was in many way divorced from reality. He clearly articulated the idea of knowledge and its linkage to responsibility and agency. And he implicated the individual in the story of the invasion by putting the onus on the individual to use his power to access knowledge about the contested issues in the invasion.

Also Raj's story shows how hegemony does not work solely through the media and other institutions, but also through individuals like his parents friends. Its power is felt by those who oppose it goals. But his story also shows how individuals can actively combat the hegemonic "truth" through the exercise of their knowledge. For example the protesters at his school upset what on the surface looked like community consent for the war effort by transforming the issue of Iraq (at least for the time they protested) from something out there to something here real and physical. But Raj's criticism of the protesters faults them for being too centered on American bodies and not questioning the hegemonic "truth" that made Iraqi bodies invisible. This shows how opposition to hegemonic power can be produce from different "truths", which can be connection to the hegemonic "truth" in varying degrees. The hegemonic truth has different layers. A layer could be not to think of the effect of the war in general, and another layer could be

to think of the effect of the war, but on Americans only. And this is what Raj's criticism shows—just because an individual is antiwar does not mean that the individual is operating totally free from the hegemonic “truth”.

### **“Bad Intelligence”**

This is what Saffron claimed was to blame for the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and the discrepancy between the administration's claims of what weapons Iraq possessed and what was found. I asked him about his news sources and he said he read his local newspaper San Jose Mercury, and watched CNN and Fox News. He remembers talk about the invasion. And he said the debate mainly centered on “how multilateral the invasion should be,” and that there was “no dispute about WMDs. He added, “In looking back the media has kicked itself over WMDs and the Bush administration. When things went wrong, the media overcompensated ignoring the progress that has been made in Iraq.”

Saffron is a member of the Duke Republicans. I contacted him at the recommendation of a friend to be interviewed for my thesis. I told him that he was not going to be speaking officially for the Duke Republicans as a whole and that I just wanted his opinions.

I first inquired, “What do you remember about the coverage of build up to war—specifically in the period between 9/11 and the invasion” He replied, “It's hard to remember the coverage... I remember that there was a lot of national unity and less scrutiny.” He followed, “I think the administration was acting on behalf of the nation.” I asked again multiple times if he could remember anything he said he could not

remember much about the period so I moved on to question him about his current knowledge.

I asked him about his knowledge of U.S.-Iraq relations. He began his history of U.S.-Iraq relations with the First Gulf War saying the U.S. and coalition forces attacked Iraq because of Iraq's occupation of Kuwait and exploitation of oil. Then Saffron transitioned to the 2003 Iraq War, "Saddam did not take the U.S.' threat serious, he wanted to front [as if he had WMDs to maintain his regional power]." And because of this "he didn't let weapons inspectors come in, and the U.S. misread Iraq's actions." According to him the war was caused by a confluence of "bad intelligence and misunderstanding."

I continued asking about specific periods and events relating to U.S.-Iraq relations to see what he knew. First, I asked him what he remembered about U.S.-Iraq relations during the period between the First Gulf War and the 2003 Iraq War. He remembered the U.S.-Iraq sanction program and the oil for food scandal involving France and Germany. I then asked if he was aware of protests during the lead up to the 2003 war, he said "no, I was not aware of protests." I then asked him if he was aware of the Iraq-Iran War, and he was not aware of that also. Next, I inquired about his knowledge of pre-9/11 Iraq, he said, "Iraq was run by the Baathist regime" and functioned aligned with a minority Muslim group, it was an Authoritarian State and relied on oil revenues. I asked him, "Do you remember the transition from 9/11 to the Iraq War debate?" He said "I don't remember the transition." To close out the interview, I inquired about his current news sources. He said, "Not TV... I read the News York Times, Wall Street Journal, and political blogs."

My impression of Saffron from the interview formed an almost caricatured image of the stereotypical pro-war conservative. Although I consciously tried not to apply stereotypes in my understanding of his view points, he was hitting every one of my assumptions of what I thought he would have to believe to think the administration acted in good conscience. He watched Fox news. He did not suspect the administration, but instead blamed “bad intelligence” for the disconnection between the administration’s rhetoric and the actual facts on the ground. He had a selective understanding of Iraqi history, and all this can be probably attributed more to age, he had little memory of the period from 9/11 to the Iraq invasion. Another thing that is important to note is that Saffron recognized the reduce scrutiny of the media after 9/11 and connected this is the media attempts post invasion to be more critical. His argument almost positions the Bush administration as victims of the media’s attempts to be more credible. At the center of Saffron’s position is an explicit trust of administration, “I think the administration was acting on behalf of the nation,” which is tied to his virtually total consent to the “truth” the U.S. government puts forth. His understanding of the invasion and the period surrounding it is tied deeply to pro-war intellectual positions, and, as we see below, is almost identical with them.

### ***“Truth and Character”***

This is how Steven Hadley began his answer to the first question asked by Peter Feaver, Duke Professor of Political Science, who was moderating the event. This event was sponsored by the Duke University Program in American Grand Strategy, and it was advertised as “a discussion on U.S. National Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century with the former National Security Adviser.” The event though was more about bureaucracy as a



career and the policy decisions of the Bush administration relating to “the War on Terrorism,” than any grand strategies for 21<sup>st</sup> Century national security

Steven Hadley is the former 2001 to 2004 Deputy National Security Adviser, and the former 2005 to 2008 National Security Adviser. Steven Hadley was part of Bush’s National Security Council, which decided and fomented many of the policies that the administration pursued over the eight years of its tenure including the decision to invade Iraq. Hadley in 2003 took the blame for letting the “yellow cake” uranium from Niger reference into Bush’s 2003 State of the Union address. He offered his signature for the mistake, but Bush declined it.

Feaver began the Duke event by asking Hadley about his job because Feaver said this was the position most of his students aspired to. Hadley responded that it was important to “tell the truth” and to have “character”. And he added, “if you like policy, the National Security Adviser is the best job in the government.” Then Feaver asked to know if students should focus on a specific area of knowledge versus developing their writing skills. Hadley said that students should focus on a specific area of knowledge, but it was important to be smart. He added, “Being smart will get you in the door, but having a reputation for character will determine a lot of how far you go.” He talked about wanting to know where a potential employee is from and where the employee’s parents are from because it was important for employees to have a strong sense of self. He also said that he looks for people with values and principles. And that it is more important in some instances to have character than to be intelligent because of the extreme pressures in government. Hadley also said that he makes his employees promise not to write tell-all books before he hires them because he does not like “kiss

and tell” books.

Next, Feaver asked Hadley about a day in his position. Hadley said his former job consists of working long hours. He referred to a union boss who pushed communists out of his union who when asked how he did replied “wake up early and go to sleep late.” Hadley continued, saying the National Security Advisor probably spends more time with the President than any other person does with the exception of the First Lady. His day starts at about 4:15-4:30am, gets to his office at around 5:15-5:30am and prepares to brief the President about yesterday’s event, learns about the new intelligence, and gets ready to give the President a brief for the day. Hadley noted that the National Security Adviser is “often the last person to see the president before he makes key decisions...there was usually a short time span between when he proposed ideas and when they were implemented.”

Hadley was then asked to talk about what he thought was the Bush administration’s biggest success and failure were in terms of how history was going to judge the decisions. For success, he said the war on terror, he thought that history would be kind to his administration’s decisions and would bear them out better than they are currently portrayed in the public and in the academia. “The War on Terror, which has generated a lot of controversy, is actually something that stands the country in good stead and the President in good stead,” he said.

He referenced the fact that there had not been another 9/11-type attack. Also he mentioned the climate of the times for why certain controversial actions were taken. He talked about the anthrax attacks and the government’s inability to determine where the attacks were coming from and the intelligence warnings that other terrorist attacks on

the country were eminent. And he said that these pressures forced the government to take aggressive actions to ensure the security of the country. Measures like the harsh interrogation methods and warrant-less wiretapping. And he continued that making such a decision in secret was debatable, but it was important in that the effectiveness of the tactics implemented required the enemy not knowing that they were being employed. He also stated that Congress had been briefed on all their activities so there was that form of oversight. And he said the interrogation techniques were not wide spread and were confined to the CIA program which was small and confined to about 30 prisons and only three out of the 30 were actually waterboarded, but that they were high value Al Qaeda operatives who gave up information that was crucial in preventing further terrorists attacks. "The proof is in the pudding," Hadley said. "We were able to uncover real plots and save lives." He also mentioned the "success" of the surge strategy and that Iraq was being transformed into a democratic nation as proof of the success of the war on terror also. When defending torture against a question asked, he said as one of the reasons why it was ok that it was being carried out by professionals and they had medical staff on hand. And also that it was a small program separate from what the military's interrogation programs, which followed the army field manual.

He was asked a question about planning for the post war period and he mentioned Phase IV planning (formal planning for stabilizing an area after military victory) as a mistake that was made, adding the primary cause of the post war mess was that the administration had underestimated how much it did not know about Iraq. Also he mentioned that they did not know how bad the infrastructure was and specifically talked about the electric grid as a major headache after the invasion. And also that they

had hope the oil industry would come back online quick and could be used to fund the Iraq occupation.

After a couple other questions, I got a chance to directly ask Hadley a question. I was slight nervous, but felt a lot of anger at the same time. This for me was a moment of confrontation, in which I was brought face to face with my own agency and privilege to literary speak to power, and with a representation of a system and a government that I had come to deeply distrust. I have through my faith been convinced not to hate anyone but to hate the systems of oppression they operate in (I had a pastor lead me in prayer of forgiveness towards Bush and Cheney). So I tried not to single out Hadley, but the system in which he operated. I said a little prayer for strength, and then restraining my emotion so as to be understandable while letting some seep into my voice as to be human, I began my question.

I said that I was writing a thesis on the media coverage of the build up to the Iraq War, and my question had to do with our reasons for invading Iraq. I said “you started this discussion talking about truth and character,” and I continued “given our history with Iraq, as you mentioned with that we sold weapons to Iran,” (he mentioned the 1987 and 1988 investigations related to the arm sells to Iran in answering another question) and that “we sold weapons to Iraq also during the Iraq-Iran War funding both sides of the conflict, given that when Saddam was gassing the Kurds in the 80s we said nothing about it, until the first Gulf War, and considering that we had sanctions on and were bombing Iraq through out the 90s, and then our original reasons for invading were WMDs and Al Qaeda, and then after the invasion they were changed our reason to bringing democracy and freedom to the Iraqis, how then can we talk about truth and

character, how then can we talk about freedom and democracy given our history with Iraq.” I felt a definite sense of empowerment after the question, and it seemed like the air had been taken out of the room.

To my initial surprise and delight, Hadley began his answer on an apologetic tone (I have watched enough C-SPAN events to know the politicians and bureaucrats can often ignore inconvenient questions by a myriad of tricks). He first admitted that the U.S. has made a lot of foreign policy mistakes in the past, and acknowledge my references to the United State’s behavior during the Iraq-Iran war and the Kurdish massacres. He then turned to the heart of my question about the reasons for going to war. He acknowledged that there has been no evidence linking Saddam to 9/11 and that we did not find WMDs after the invasion, but he said they had more reasons for attacking Iraq. He said that there were Security Council Resolutions that Iraq broke, and “Bush did not like that Iraq broke the resolutions.” He added that they wanted to itemize all the reasons in the United States proposed resolution to the Security Council. The reasons included that Saddam attacked his people, invaded Kuwait, and worked with and supported terrorists. But in order to “sell the war” some within the administration, not including him, decided to push the WMDs reason. There was an internal debate, and the administration decided to separate the WMDs reason and from the others and pass them as separate resolutions. However, Hadley said only the WMDs resolution was ever put forth (and the U.S. withdrew it in the face of certain failure). He noted that this develop was something he regretted.

Last, Hadley did show some bluster, he said “one bone to pick I have is when people say that Bush lied.” He said that Bush did not lie and he was just trying to

follow the intelligence. He added that members of the Congress had access to the “same intelligence” as the administration. In the end, he brought it back to the issue of “intelligence.” Also through out his discussion and answers, he referred to the ambiguous terrorists and an undefined enemy that we are fighting against.

My interaction with Hadley is a prime example of the power of knowledge in action. Before my question, although Hadley had received some questions concerning other controversial policies of the Bush administration, those questions were asked in an ahistorical fashion that let Hadley feign that the administration had noble intentions and was not abusing the public trust. Similar to Saffron’s, Hadley’s main argument for the policies rested on the assertion that the administration was acting on behalf of the nation and for its protection, and if certain illegal things had to be done, it was done with a greater goal in mind. Also Hadley, like most former Bush administration (or any other administration for that matter) officials, must be used to having his motives challenged, and probably had a preset idea of how he was going to respond to such challenges. But my framing of the Bush administration’s decision to invade Iraq within the historical context of Iraq-U.S. relations forced into the discourse hidden knowledge that I think Hadley was not necessarily expecting to address. He could not deny the facts I cited because they are a matter of public record, but he could have scarcely wanted to confirm them because they seriously under the moral motivation and altruism on which the invasion was supposedly based. I had challenged his “truth” and brought his authority and power to frame “truth” under question. And this is why such challenges are so dangerous for administration officials because they have the power to disrupt the “truth”, which these intellectuals have been so carefully crafting.

Finally, when Hadley apologized for a mistake or explained a controversial action, he always invoked some outside force as acting on the situation and did not address his agency. In justifying the criminal act of torture, he invoked the fear and uncertainty that existed post 9/11. He used fear as a hegemonic device to ward off criticism. In a sense, he was saying we took these actions because of the public's fear. At the same time, he totally ignored the role the administration's media campaign had to do with producing the climate of fear. Also in talking about the decision to press the WMDs argument as the main reason for war, he mentions that he did not think it was a good approach, but that others in the administration decided to go the route. But what did he do about it? He went on with the administration's agenda. And in his conversation at Duke, he was still pushing the administration's agenda by claiming that bad intelligence was the reason for war when the administration had been so dead sure that Saddam had weapons of mass destroy. We get only a glimpse of Hadley's agency in action from the story of his offered resignation over the "yellowcake" issue. At least in that one instance, he tried to take responsibility and acknowledge his agency in producing the problem, even though there were some politically dubious over tones to the resignation.

## ***Conclusion***

The central theme of this chapter and a major one in this thesis is the abdication of agency. Through out all the interviews with the exception of Raj's, the interviewees engaged on some level in this abdication. Whether a member of the public, a budding journalist, or a senior governmental intellectual, they all located the problem of the flawed action (the invasion) in the problem of failed knowledge (bad intelligence, bad

reporting, etc). They positioned this flawed knowledge as external to them and never recognized the internal nature of knowledge and the involvement of their own agency in the production of the flawed knowledge. So while Adesuwa can spot the flawed reporting of the mainstream media on the Lacrosse case, she and the Chronicle still trust the mainstream media's reporting and run its story in the Chronicle—spreading further the hegemonic “truth” of the mainstream media. It is precisely moment like the Lacrosse case, these powerful single events, that can produced the cognitive dissonance necessary for certain “truths” to be disrupted and new ones to come into being. Like Sarah going to Belize and seeing the Iraq War from different perspective that was bloody and corporal instead of clean and disembodied (i.e. uniform pictures of dead soldiers versus their wounded bodies). And this is the thing about hegemony power, for all of its effectiveness, it is not perfect, and there are cracks in the shell of “truth” that it constructs. If the inquisitive mind pushes far enough, it will find itself staring back at a mushroom cloud—the haze of fear and confusion that let's certain “truths” exist, which have weak foundations in reality.



## Epilogue

It is clear at this point that there was something terribly wrong with the way knowledge about Iraq flowed in our society and how that knowledge was used. My basic theoretical frame work for understanding the effects and implications of the way knowledge followed in this case rests on this series of relationships. Following Foucault, I posit that knowledge and the ability to know is power. And with power comes responsibility, therefore with knowledge comes responsibility. An individual's agency is linked to his knowledge level and his access to knowledge. Agency is the choice an individual makes of how to exercise his power. And last, agency is not neutral. An individual's choice determines how the power of others acts on him and how his power acts on others.

The story of the media coverage of the build up to the Iraq War is one of agency. As we have seen the knowledge to call into question and expose the nature of the invasion of Iraq was available. The missing part of the equation was the critical mass of individuals' agencies—that point at which enough individuals are speaking out that it overwhelms the mechanisms of power of the ruling class, which is invested in society's institutions. Society's institutions amass their power by coalescing vast amounts of knowledge from individuals and from retaining an extensive network of mechanisms that gives them the ability to know. Like many of the administration's officials stressed intelligence is of great importance because without knowledge there is no power. But the power of institutions is finite and can be combated through the power possessed by individuals who oppose them. However, opposition to institutional power

is not without consequence and carries great risk. It is at this point that the individual's agency becomes crucial.

The agency of those in the institutional apparatus is especially important because institutions provide amplification to the power of their constituent members. This is why the role of journalists (editors and reporters alike) is so important because their voices are amplified by their media institutions. By controlling institutional power, the ruling class make sure only those individuals who consent to their agenda are placed in the strategic institutional positions. And this is what we discussed in chapter two. The editors of the Washington Post were constantly more attune to covering the official sources, or to not challenging the administration, and they consistently abdicated their agency in favor of letting the administration claims to be disperse without any challenge to the "truth" being told by the administration. And as we saw those like Walter Pincus who chose to challenge the administration were marginalized and given very little institutional amplification to get their knowledge and their "truth" out.

Private individuals too are essential in the exercise of societal power, but for all the aphorisms that proclaim the power of one individual, the dominant societal idea for change is institutional and groups the individual into a larger conglomerate. The hegemonic power of the institutions target the individual to him think that apart from the institution he has no power, and he is just part of a mass of humanity among whom his opinion, his power counts as nothing. But this is untrue because all individuals have knowledge and especially in America most individuals have immense access to knowledge, therefore have profound power that they can tap into if they realize it. Like

I said in the introduction it is the work of others like Chomsky, John Pilger, and more who through the exercise of their knowledge transformed my understanding of US foreign policy to a whole new level. It is then the place of the individual come has stubble across such knowledge to be burden with the responsibility of utilizing that knowledge.

It is important to recognize that the nature of hegemonic power is once of fluidity and flexibility, which allows for some resistance and speaking out in the open after the action that the elites wanted performed has taken place. Like in the case of the Iraq invasion, the debate was delay and denied until after the invasion had occurred. This made all debate hypothetical debate after the war about whether or not we should have gone in a moot point. At the critical moment of decision making that is when hegemonic power tightens it grip, and we witness a shut down of dissent like we did in the pre-invasion period. And it is in periods like this that speaking out carries the greatest rewards and the greatest risks.

This thesis has focused on the mainstream news media and mainly on the print and television part of it. But as print news media has declined, there has been an increase in internet news media. The internet is a very interesting site of resistance and decentralization of knowledge and hence power. It was through searching on the internet that I was able to bypass the filter of the mainstream media be exposed to knowledge out the hegemonic “truth”.

Speaking out knowledge that challenges institutional “truth” is again not without its risks. Phil Donahue from MSNBC after he had Scott Ritter, the Chief U.N. weapons inspector on his show, found himself without a job a few weeks later (Moyers

& Hughes, 2007). Joe Wilson, who spoke out against the administration's story about Iraq obtaining enriched uranium from Niger, saw his wife, Valerie Plame's identity revealed in the press. U.S. generals, who did not agree with the decision and prepare for war against Iraq, got marginalized within the Pentagon and eventually pushed out<sup>1</sup>. So speaking to the Washington Post editors, agency requires risk. But when these risks are considered and measured against the outcome of the invasion of Iraq, it is hard to argue against taking the risk. In the end, we are all complicit on some level with the invasion of Iraq because as Raj said, "It is easy to assume your lifestyle has no connection with the suffering of others...life is global." We cannot escape because while we might have broken through the official "truth" around U.S. foreign policy, the lives we live and enjoy today are deeply linked to the U.S. world dominance. What other official "truths" are we buying into that help to reproduce the conditions of our existence? We have the luxury of believing such "truths", but those on the receiving end of them do not. Iraq has been a place of conflict for the last three decades with a large part of this due to the actions of the United States. Now that you have been invested with knowledge on this issue, you have a responsibility to exercise your agency and do something about it.

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<sup>1</sup> A famous example of a general that was pushed out of command was General Shinseki who questioned the cakewalk scenario that the Bush administration was putting forward on the Iraq invasion.

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