Public Abstract
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The Elite Press, the Bush Administration, and Iraq: Ideology Confines Scrutiny in the
Post and the Times
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This study examines the Iraq war coverage in the Washington Post and the New
York Times to evaluate how ideology influenced the way in which the newspapers
portrayed events. By August 2004 each newspaper had admitted that its coverage nearly
two years earlier of the run-up to war should have better scrutinized the Bush
administration. The newspapers laid out a host of explanations, from editing demands to
competitive pressures to a reliance on official sources, but this study examines whether
an ideology shaped their coverage both before the invasion and after their mea culpas.
The preemptive strike on Iraq signified a radical shift in U.S. foreign policy. It followed
the September 11 terrorist attacks, an episode of unprecedented magnitude. Covering this
war during this time represented a unique challenge for the U.S. media. By undertaking a
close reading of stories from the Post, the Times, and the (London) Guardian, the author
reveals patterns, emphases, and omissions that reflect an ideology of moral imperialism.
By moral imperialism, the author means a perspective held by the Post and the Times that
the United States is right and just and its system of beliefs and government is superior to
that of the rest of the world. The study shows how that ideology restricted context,
marginalized dissent, and limited scrutiny of the government. The results afford a better
understanding of the influences upon the elite media during times of armed conflict and
provide guidance to journalists on how to better cover similar events.