

Public Abstract

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MA

Journalism

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.