

THE ELITE PRESS, THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, AND IRAQ:
IDEOLOGY CONFINES SCRUTINY IN THE *POST* AND THE *TIMES*

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ABSTRACT

This study examines whether ideology or a reliance on official sources is the primary influence upon the elite media during times of armed conflict by analyzing the Iraq war coverage in the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. By August 2004 each newspaper had admitted that its coverage nearly two years earlier of the run-up to war failed to adequately scrutinize the Bush administration. Each newspaper vowed to do better. The *Post* and the *Times* laid out a host of explanations for what influenced their reporting, including individual, media routines, organizational, and extramedia factors, but this study shows that an ideology of *moral imperialism* perpetuated the hegemonic frame of the Bush administration both before and after each newspaper's published self-criticism. 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. A textual analysis of the news stories shows how that ideology restricted context, marginalized dissenting viewpoints, and limited scrutiny of the U.S. government. The research suggests that ideology rather than a reliance on official sources is the primary media influence during times of armed conflict.