UNDERSTANDING THE “WAR ON TERRORISM”:
THE CULT OF PATRIOTISM
Part 5 – Distract Members From Thinking Undesirable Thoughts

Compiled by Bob Aldridge

Propaganda does not lead a life of its own; it emerges only sporadically –
when an ideology tries to expand.
– Ellul, p. 194..

PRELUDE

Propaganda is invariably used by rulers to mold the thoughts and actions of their people, and to distract their attention from undesirable ideas. This paper is the fifth part of a series on the “Cult of Patriotism.” In it I will present cogent examples of how the Bush administration is manipulating certain factions of the media for propaganda purposes – examples which epitomize the widespread efforts in the US today to shape people’s thoughts. The examples set forth in this paper are ruthless, they are crafty, and they are also illegal. But the Bush administration uses them with impunity.

Perhaps one could describe those drawn to the Cult of Patriotism as having become sentimental over some preconceived ideal for America. As inaccurate as that ideal may be, their views become firmly fixated on it. They reject anything that challenges it although such idealized thinking fails to recognize the decay of American freedom and democratic processes. Organized propaganda then reinforces the cult members’ sentimentalized perception and distracts from undesirable thoughts about the government.

A true patriot, on the other hand, remains alert and recognizes when his or her country strays onto undesirable paths. Then that true patriot takes appropriate action through democratic channels to maintain a course that seeks the well-being of all peoples. It is the purpose of this paper to help everyone understand true patriotism.

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1This paper is part of a series on understanding why we are fighting terrorism. There is nothing new in it that hasn’t been published elsewhere, and of course the coverage is not comprehensive. The purpose of this paper is to compile some pertinent information together so that a pattern can be seen. In this Part 5 of a six-part series on manipulating public opinion to form the Cult of Patriotism, I will discuss how a cult leader must distract his members from thinking undesirable thoughts. BA
INTRODUCTION.

In their book, Age of Propaganda, Pratkanis and Aronson devote one chapter to describing “How To Become A Cult Leader.” The term cult is used to describe a pattern of social relations within a group. The Cult of Patriotism is a political cult. The Bush administration has been using it to muster support for their War on Terrorism. The techniques for accomplishing this are nothing more than propaganda in its most profound sense. Those techniques, as outlined by Pratkanis and Aronson, are:

1. Create your own social reality (discussed in PLRC-040224).
2. Create a granfalloon (discussed in PLRC-040516).
3. Create commitment through a rationalization trap (discussed in PLRC-040527).
4. Establish the leader’s credibility and attractiveness (discussed in PLRC-040704).
5. Send members out to proselytize for the unredeemed (omitted).
6. Distract members from thinking “undesirable” thoughts (discussed below).
7. Fixate members vision on a phantom. (to be discussed in Part 6 of this series.)

In previous papers I have discussed how the first four techniques have been use to foster a Cult of Patriotism in the US. The fifth one I have omitted. Number six – distracting members from thinking “undesirable” thoughts – will be discussed in this paper.

The techniques used to guide people’s attention away from “undesirable” thoughts and events are so numerous that it would take volumes to explain them all. During the war and occupation of Iraq we have seen how reporting casualties and fatalities have been confined to the US and UK military, as if those are all that matter. There have been no official estimates of over 100,000 Iraqi civilian deaths, or of the many thousand Iraqi military deaths, to say nothing of US and other civilian contractors and mercenaries hired to fight the war. It sounds much cleaner to focus on a comparatively small number of US military deaths. But even then the concept is sanitized by forbidding photographs of flag draped coffins as they return to the US. None of this says anything about masking even higher numbers of non-fatal casualties.

Those are just a few examples of techniques used to distract cult members from thinking undesirable thoughts. As with all propaganda, for those techniques to be successful the cult leader must control the mass media. In Iraq, most of the reporters were embedded with the military, ostensibly for their own protection but obviously so they will slant the news as the US desires. Those who chose not to be embedded provided a wider view of the news but they were on their own. Reporter casualties in this war have been high.

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2Pratkanis and Aronson, Chapter 36, pp. 302-317.
3Pratkanis and Aronson, p. 306
423 journalists and 16 media support workers were killed in Iraq during 2004, three-quarters of them were Iraqi’s or other Arab reporters who are much more critical of the US occupation. Nine of the 23 were officially considered murdered. Since the war began in March 2003, 51 journalists and media assistants have been killed trying to report the war.

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Now I will return to the home front. I have discussed in a previous paper how large corporations – those that support the Bush administration and benefit from it – have gained ownership of the media.\(^5\) It has been hard to miss how, during March and early April of 2005, the front page news has focused on such things as extensive detail into the Indonesian Earthquakes and its resulting Tsunami activity, the Terri Schiavo life decision, Barry Bonds being on baseball’s disabled list, Pope John Paul II’s illness and death, a finger in Wendy’s chili, and sundry other items of highly-inflated sensation. This detracts from the problems in Iraq and Europe’s disenchantment with US policies. Likewise, Bush is the first president ever to attend a Pope’s funeral. This has prompted global speculation that by associating himself with the Pope, Bush will detract attention from his declining approval ratings. And then there is the leaked news that House Speaker Tom DeLay’s political friends are initiating an aggressive media campaign to detract attention from his ethics scandal. The daily news is replete with attempts to form a favorable public mind toward the neoconservative administration of our country.

All of these and sundry other techniques can be observed in the daily “news.” However, there are even more surreptitious activities going on with the media to mold the public mind and **distract people from thinking undesirable thoughts**. In this paper I will discuss government control of public broadcasting and covert propaganda by the government, both of which are illegal.

**Government Control of Public Broadcasting.**

There is a large Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) which purports to be independent and tends to present more depth in controversial issues. But it is not as publicly-controlled as the name implies. Let me present a little history.

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, says public broadcasting funding comes “directly from individuals through donations or fees, or indirectly as state subsidies that originate in taxes or other national funding sources.”\(^6\) Philanthropic organizations also provide grants for specific programs and sometimes corporate donations are received in exchange for some advertising. This advertising is much less intense and attention-grabbing than on commercial stations. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) is a public broadcaster whose mission is to “inform, educate, and entertain.”\(^7\)

Whereas public broadcasting is most popular throughout the world, commercial broadcasting is only present in a few western countries. Wikipedia explains: “Public service broadcasters generally transmit programming that aims to improve society by informing viewers. In contrast, the aim of commercial outlets is to provide popular shows that attract an audience – therefore leading to higher prices when advertising is sold.”\(^8\)

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\(^5\)See PLRC-040224, *Understanding the “War on Terrorism”: The Cult of Patriotism, Part-1 – Creating Your Own Social Reality*.

\(^6\)Wikipedia.

\(^7\)Quoted in Wikipedia.

\(^8\)Wikipedia.
History of Public Broadcasting in the US.

In 1952, during the dawning years of television, National Education Television (NET) was founded with a grant from the Ford Foundation. It started as a means of exchanging and distributing educational materials among local TV stations. By 1954 it was airing five hours daily with in-depth treatment of subjects, and interviews with people of literary and historical expertise. In 1958, NET was the nation's fourth television network, along with CBS, NBC, and ABC. Then in 1963 NET began hitting hard to inform people on sensitive social issues such as racism and poverty.

The forthright approach of NET was praised by many but some conservative affiliate stations started objecting to the perceived liberal slant in programming. By 1966 the Ford Foundation started withdrawing financial support and funding for NET became questionable. Congress stepped in in 1967 with legislation to form the Corporation for Public Broadcasting that temporarily provided funding for NET.\textsuperscript{9} However, the main purpose of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was to set up its own network for public broadcasting because some NET affiliates were dissatisfied with the liberal slant of NET.

When, in 1969, NET refused to stop airing some controversial programs, especially those critical of the government, the Corporation for Public Broadcasting set up the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Net helped produce some programming at first, but would not abandon its issue-oriented programming. The government-subsidized Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Ford Foundation threatened complete withdrawal of funds from NET, which forced it to eventually merge with station WNDT-TV channel 13. The combination then became WNET-TV (now an active affiliate of PBS). NET broadcast its last independent program under that name in 1970 although some non-controversial NET programs (such as Sesame Street and Mr. Rogers) continued on PBS.

It should be noted that the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) is not the same as the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). The former is a non-profit entity chartered by Congress through which grants are provided to produce Public Broadcasting programs.\textsuperscript{10} Although CPB is severely restricted as far as actually producing programs, it can choose which programs it will finance.\textsuperscript{11} PBS, on the other hand, is the actual TV public broadcasting system in the US. It has a network of 349 member stations who pay

\textsuperscript{9}The Corporation for Public Broadcasting was created on 7 November 1967 by the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 (47 U.S.C. 396) as a private, non-profit corporation chartered and funded by the US government. Its purpose is to make grants to promote public broadcasting. That statute also restricted government-produced programming for domestic audiences. That law also prohibits the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (not to be confused with PBS, itself) from directly producing any news programs.

\textsuperscript{10}CPB provides approximately 15\% ($2 billion) of the yearly operating budget of PBS and its affiliated stations. PBS and member stations collect the bulk of their funding (about 25\%) from membership drives and pledges. The balance comes from corporations, state & city governments, universities, foundations, and a variety of other sources. [Auletta, 7 June 2004]

\textsuperscript{11}Nevertheless, The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 specifies that “it is in the public interest to encourage the development of programming that involves creative risks and that addresses the needs of unserved and underserved audiences, particularly children and minorities.” The Act also specifies that it is in the public interest that public broadcasting be used for “instructional, educational, and cultural purposes.”
for the programming after it is produced.\textsuperscript{12} “PBS has no central program production arm or news department. All of the programming carried by PBS – whether news, documentary, or entertainment – is created by (or in most cases produced under contract with) individual member stations.”\textsuperscript{13} In the discussions that follow, please distinguish between these two abbreviations – CPB and PBS – and recognize them with their proper meaning.

It should be noted that National Public Radio (NPR) is also a public broadcaster and is similarly organized.\textsuperscript{14} NPR also receives grants from the federally-chartered Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

With that history of public broadcasting, – and an understanding on how it is geared to educate, inform, and entertain – let me now move to what is happening today under the Bush administration.

**Ideological Pressure on US Public Broadcasting.**

Public broadcasting in the US has become one of the few means of hearing unvarnished presentations on issues. It is known for its speakers, interviews, and news reports which provide information not readily available on commercial channels or in mainline newspapers. Receiving this information has stimulated what some factions of government consider “undesirable thoughts.” The result, as stated by Chellie Pingree, is that: “New and intensifying ideological pressures from the Bush administration have forced the public broadcaster to add new programs and alter others in an attempt to be ‘more balanced’ in the view of the current leadership. ...this ideological pressure may gag one of the few sources of independent, substantive news and commentary that Americans can count on.”\textsuperscript{15} Balanced programming – that is, giving facts on both sides of a controversy – is good. But trying to balance critical facts with misleading rhetoric is deceiving the viewers.

How is this ideological pressure being applied? It is through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), from which public radio and public TV receive much of their funding. Recall that CPB was set up as a nonprofit corporation to distribute federal funds and “serve as a ‘heat shield’ between government and public broadcasting, protecting programming from government interference.”\textsuperscript{16} But it is fast losing that “heat shield” function.

\textsuperscript{12}PBS headquarters is located in Alexandria, Virginia and has a staff of nearly 500. Pat Mitchell is president. PBS owns none of its 349 affiliated stations. Neither does it produce programs or news. All the programming is done by individual stations although most of it is by contracts negotiated through PBS. These member stations pay dues to PBS which gives them the right to share each others programs and negotiate funding through PBS for programming.

\textsuperscript{13}Wikipedia.

\textsuperscript{14}NPR’s listeners grew about 60 percent between 1999 and 2004.

\textsuperscript{15}Pingree, 2 June 2004.

\textsuperscript{16}The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, which created the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, specified that “a private corporation should be created to facilitate the development of public telecommunications and afford maximum protection from extraneous interference and control.”
How is CPB losing its “heat shield” function and becoming a conduit for ideological interference? The key is through political appointments to CPB’s board of directors – that is, appointing those who possess ideological loyalties rather than a commitment to the spirit of public broadcasting.\textsuperscript{17} Kenneth Tomlinson, chairman of the board, was appointed during the Clinton administration after being recommended by republicans. He has ties to the Bush White House and is a close friend of Karl Rove, Bush’s political advisor. Tomlinson told \textit{The New Yorker}: “We serve the underserved ... It is absolutely critical for people on the right to feel they have some ownership stake in public television as people on the left have.”\textsuperscript{18} It is true that \textit{The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967} said programming should “address the needs of the unserved and underserved,” but the obvious meaning of the statute was the unserved and underserved in society, not on PBS. The so-called “right” can not be classed as underserved in the broader media. Nevertheless, as I will soon show, this ideological misinterpretation has affected PBS programming.

\textbf{Michael Pack} was appointed by Bush in January 2003 as senior vice president for television programming at CPB. I’ll talk more about Pack later.

\textbf{Cheryl Halpern} was another board member appointed by Bush. Besides being an active republican fundraiser she was also a member of Voice of America’s parent body. Voice of America is a US Government broadcasting station that sends the viewpoint of the current administration into foreign countries. It is frequently the vehicle of government propaganda which is legal only because it is not broadcast in the US. Halpern is experienced in such broadcasting.

During Halpern’s November 2003 confirmation hearings, Senator Trent Lock referred to Bill Moyers’s post election statements as “The most blatant partisan, irresponsible thing I’ve ever heard ... and yet [the CPB] has not seemed willing to deal with ... that type of programming.” Halpern replied: “The fact of the matter is, I agree.” She added that when there were accusations of improprieties in Voice of America “we were able to aggressively step in, review the transcript of potential violations, and initiate penalties.”\textsuperscript{19} It is just this type of censorship that \textit{The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967} forbade, yet Halpern implies that is just what she would do. With that intention and her ideological inclination, it is easy to see why she is a Bush nominee.

\textbf{Gay Hart Gaines}, another republican fundraiser, and chair as well as member of Newt Gingrich’s political action committee, is another Bush appointee to the CPB board.

On the other hand, a person nominated by the democrats, Chon Noriega, was not confirmed. He is a UCLA professor of film television and digital media. But he is also a co-founder of the National Association of Latino Independent Producers and a democrat. When asked in Senate hearings if it was appropriate for the CPB to intervene in programming that was considered politically biased, Noriega replied that “the CPB should intervene only in extraordinary circumstances.”\textsuperscript{20} He was not confirmed.

\textsuperscript{17} CPB has nine board members which are appointed by the US President and confirmed by the Senate. No more than five members can be from the same political party. The board members usually serve a six-year term.

\textsuperscript{18} Quoted in Auletta, 7 June 2004.

\textsuperscript{19} Quotations from Auletta, 7 June 2004.

\textsuperscript{20} Auletta, 7 June 2004.
Bill Moyers called these politically-connected appointees “ideological warriors.” PBS president, Pat Mitchell added: “You have to have some concerns when a politically appointed board would be involved with content.”21


Paul Gigot is the editorial page editor of The Wall Street Journal. He formerly appeared as a news commentator on PBS’s “The Newshour With Jim Lehrer.” Previous to that he was a White House Fellow under President Reagan and a speech writer for then Treasury Secretary James Baker. The Goldwater Institute describes his writing as “gentlemanly conservative punditry” with “decidedly conservative views” and “trenchant conservative commentary.”22

Now Gigot is moderator and host for his own PBS program, “Journal Editorial Report,” which is described as a weekly news and discussion series on current issues. Gigot will call members of his editorial board on The Wall Street Journal to be on the panel, along with others who write for his op-ed pages as well as the Leisure & Arts pages. For instance, Michael Rubin of the arch-conservative American Enterprise Institute appeared on the 28 January 2005 segment to discuss Iraqi elections.

A partial transcript of the 21 January 2001 segment is available for review on the internet.23 The topic is Bush’s second term and the segment illustrates how, amidst miscellaneous chit-chat, the Bush administration’s agenda is promoted. Gigot throws out some leading questions or comments and the discussion follows. Problems are discussed but the message is upbeat for the republicans – “where they’ve got both the House and the Senate, and the White House, and a president whose willing to lead them,” the opportunity is unique. There are no opposing viewpoints and there is repeated emphasis on a “president who wants to get things done.”24

On the other hand, democrats and the democratic party are treated with more aversion on this segment. The transcript is replete with phrases like “the democratic party has changed ... It is now driven not so much by the labor unions, in part, but by MoveOn.org, and all these activists who fuel the party with hundreds of millions of dollars.” Or, “Barbara Boxer and a bunch of House democrats actually questioning the legitimacy of Bush’s election – which is extraordinary. That was driven by those activists.” And then

21Quoted in Auletta, 7 June 2004.

22Goldwater Institute Announcement.

23See PBS Transcript for web address (URL).

24PBS Transcript.
there was the reference to “the Clinton health insurance scheme that the republicans succeeded in killing.”

That is not public broadcasting. That is not factual reporting or even airing differing opinions. That is strictly one-sided partisan propaganda aimed at engineering the public opinion and helping the cult leader distract members from having undesirable thoughts. Yet this new PBS program is receiving major taxpayer funding from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Tucker Carlson: Unfiltered.**

The other new PBS program I will describe, which CPB is financing with public money, is “Tucker Carlson: Unfiltered.” Touted as a weekly public affairs series, it is not only hosted by Tucker Carlson, he is also the managing editor. Carlson was previously a conservative co-host on CNN’s “Crossfire.” He made his fame writing for the conservative magazine *The Weekly Standard*, edited by William Kristol. Kristol is also chairman and co-founder of The New American Century, the neoconservative organization which has had so much influence on the Bush administration.

While working for CNN, Carlson used tactics to misdirect his audience in favor of Bush’s programs. He had former Clinton administration economic adviser Gene Sterling on the 16 December 2004 “Crossfire” episode. Sterling correctly stated that “Social Security does not become insolvent until 2042.” Carlson replied: “In 2018, just to correct you, which is only 14 years from now, according to the board of trustees of overseers of Social Security, that’s, again, only 14 years, benefits will overtake revenues. So that’s actually pretty soon.”

Both were speaking accurately but the average person doesn’t differentiate between “insolvent” and “benefits will overtake revenues.” Then amplifying the short time until the latter is reached puts urgency to Bush’s crisis rhetoric. What *Status of the Social Security and Medicare Programs: A Summary of the 2004 Annual Reports* prepared by the Social Security and Medicare Boards of Trustees actually says is:

> Projected OASDI [Social Security] tax income will begin to fall short of outlays in 2018 and will be sufficient to finance only 73 percent of scheduled annual benefits by 2042, when the combined OASDI trust fund is projected to be exhausted.

In other words, until the trust fund is exhausted in 2042, full projected benefits can be paid. After that, the tax income will only cover 73% of the benefits. Social security will not become “insolvent” until 2042, but that is an “undesirable thought” for the people to think.

Another deception occurred earlier on the 26 September 2003 segment of “Crossfire.” General Wesley Clark had given a fund-raising speech in Little Rock, Arkansas on 11 May 2001. He drew on the substance of that speech for a 26 September 2003 op-ed article in *The Wall Street Journal*. In extolling the first President Bush – George H. W. Bush – Clark said: “And President George Bush had the courage

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25PBS Transcript.


28*Status of the Social Security and Medicare Programs: A Summary of the 2004 Annual Reports*. The 2005 report moves these dates ahead one year. Benefits paid out will start exceeding revenues from taxes in 2017, and the trust fund reserve will be depleted in 2041.
and the vision to push our European allies to take the risk to tell the Russians to leave, and to set up the conditions so all of Germany and later many nations of Eastern Europe could become part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, part of the West with us. And we will always be grateful for President George Bush for that tremendous leadership and statesmanship.”

On the next issue of “Crossfire,” the same date as the article was published, Carlson added a middle initial to the name and took parts of Clark’s statement out of context, thus deceiving his audience by implying that General Clark admired the current president. Carlson said on his show: “General Wesley Clark now in the [presidential] race. It was uncovered the day before yesterday that, on May 11, 2001 – this was after the Florida recount, after the Bush administration was recognizable to democrats as something they really didn’t like – gave a speech in Arkansas to a republican group in which he came out [for] Ronald Reagan, attacked old Europe, and then said this – and I’m quoting now. This was about President George W. Bush. Quote: ‘President George Bush had the courage and vision. And we will be grateful to President George Bush for that tremendous leadership and statesmanship.’ He goes on but I won’t torture you.”

(continuation added)

Well! That convenient switch of son for father in an out-of-context quote certainly boosted George W’s credibility. It certainly distracted from a lot of undesirable thoughts about the cult leader.

**Summary on Public Broadcasting.**

So, now we have the two new conservative program hosts on PBS funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting – Paul Gigot and Tucker Carlson. Michael Pack, the Bush appointee as senior vice president for supervising CPB’s television program funding, pushed for the Gigot and Carlson shows on PBS. He told *The New Yorker* magazine that “his colleagues at PBS had ‘narrowed their voices too much’ and needed to include more views, particularly from the right, to ‘raise the level of discussion’.”

That is fine if there is true discussion or debate on the issues. Presenting facts, problems, or issues to stimulate discussion is one purpose of PBS. Providing shows to promote a political slant is not.

Bill Moyers, who has produced programming for PBS since the 1970s, was probably the biggest cause of tension between PBS and CPB. Many CPB board members wanted to get rid of him. CPB chairman, Kenneth Tomlinson accused Moyers, in his program “NOW With Bill Moyers,” of offering unsuitable

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29Clark, 26 September 2003.

30Quoted in CNN.com Transcripts, 26 September 2003.

31Six months after Tucker Carlson’s debut on PBS, he met his Waterloo on CNN. It actually started a couple months earlier when Jon Stewart, host of “The Daily Show” on Comedy Central, appeared on “Crossfire.” But the encounter wasn’t comedy. In a heated exchange, Stewart told Carlson: “Here’s what I wanted to tell you guys. Stop. Stop, stop, stop, stop hurting America. ... What you do is not honest. What you do is partisan hackery.”

[Quoted in CNN.com Transcripts, 15 October 2004]

The following January, CNN president Jonathan Klein told Carlson they would not be renewing his contract. Klein said: “I agree wholeheartedly with Jon Stewart’s overall premise.”

[Quoted in *NNDB: Tracking the Entire World*, circa January 2005] Carlson was sacked from CNN. MSNBC announced in late January 2005 that Tucker Carlson will join their network. [MSNBC.com; “Tucker Carlson to Join MSNBC,” 2 February 2005]. He will still continue with PBS.

32Auletta, 7 June 2004.
commentaries.\textsuperscript{33} Others like Citizens for Independent Public Broadcasting say Moyers is acting within the mission of public broadcasting by offering a “forum for debate and controversy.”\textsuperscript{34}

“NOW” has now been cut from a one-hour program to 30 minutes. CPB vice president Pack stated that “PBS will have to make that choice,” and went on to say that while CPB provides financial support for Gigot and Carlson there won’t be any CPB funding for “NOW.” Bill Moyers comments: “This is the first time in my thirty-two years of public broadcasting that CPB has ordered up programs for ideological instead of journalistic reasons. So now we have CPB funding two right wingers, Gigot at [The Wall Street Journal] and Carlson at CNN – God bless them both! – who already have big megaphones in commercial media. How does that make public television different?”\textsuperscript{35}

Nevertheless, this ideological control of programming through misuse of public funds serves the Bush administration’s agenda. It\textit{ distrusts people from having undesirable thoughts}. But PBS isn’t the only network in which taxpayer money is being unlawfully used for ideological purposes. Covert propaganda, contrary to explicit legislation forbidding it, has infiltrated the corporate-owned media.

\section*{COVERT PROPAGANDA – PREPACKAGED NEWS STORIES.}

This section revolves around a public relations/propaganda tool called the Video News Release (VNR). It is usually a tape or disk containing both audio and visual elements which is prepared by a PR firm and given to television news agencies for use on the air. The VNR usually has three parts. The first part consists of video clips called the “B-roll film. These are supplied in case the news agency wants to put together and edit its own report. The second is a collection of statements and facts about the corporation supplying the VNR, also to help the news agency prepare its own news report. The third part is a “prepackaged news story.” Also called story packages, these 90-second segments also include scripts for the station’s news anchor to lead into and conclude the story. Since prepackaged news stories have all the characteristics of a regular news clip prepared by real reporters, they save the stations the expense of preparing their own. PR agencies have found these story packages to be well received by TV news stations.

VNRs with prepackaged news stories have become very popular in the corporate world. Since it is almost always used as-is, the corporations and their PR agencies can tailor these stories to suit corporate propaganda needs. Almost invariably they are made to look like reports developed by independent journalists. Often the name of the corporation is not mentioned – either in the story package or the scripts for news anchors – thus masking the fact that it is PR propaganda. For a private corporation this is not illegal, though highly deceptive and ethically unsound. Journalism scholars “began questioning the effect of this third-party material” because of the perception by the viewing audience “that news was derived from a neutral source. In particular, scholars raised concerns regarding the influence of third-party sources.”\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{33}Bill Moyers retired at the end of 2004. NOW is now hosted by former co-host David Brancaccio.

\textsuperscript{34}Quoted in Auletta, 7 June 2004.

\textsuperscript{35}Quotations in Auletta, 7 June 2004.

\textsuperscript{36}B-302710.
Government Restrictions on Covert Propaganda.

For the government to prepare VNRs with prepackaged news stories that do not tell the viewer – either in the story or the anchor scripts – what agency produced it, is another matter. US Comptroller General David M. Walker explains:37

Since 1951, Congress has enacted an annual, government wide prohibition on the use of appropriated funds for purposes of ‘publicity or propaganda.’ ... In the course of our work, we learned that prepackaged news stories have become common tools of the public relations industry, and that some federal agencies are adopting them as well. The purpose of this letter is to remind agencies of the constraints imposed by the publicity or propaganda prohibition on the use of prepackaged news stories and to advise vigilance to assure that agencies’ activities comply with the prohibition. ... prepackaged news stories can be utilized without violating the law, so long as there is clear disclosure to the television viewing audience that this material was prepared by or in cooperation with the government department or agency. ...

The current publicity or propaganda prohibition states: “No part of any appropriation contained in this or any other act shall be used for publicity or propaganda purposes within the United States not heretofore authorized by Congress.” [emphasis added] Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005, Pub. L. No. 108-447, div. G, title II, §624, 118 Stat. 2809, 3278 (Dec. 8, 2004). (The language of the prohibition has remained virtually unchanged since 1951.)

Two key exceptions implied in the publicity and propaganda prohibition are: (1) appropriated funds may be used for broadcasting PR and propaganda outside the US, such as done by Voice of America,38 and (2) publicity and propaganda may be broadcast within the US if authorized by Congress. The first was discussed above with regard to PBS. The second was determined by the Government Accountability Office (GAO) as not relevant to the cases discussed below, although the culpable agencies tried to raise that excuse.39

Hyping Bush’s Medicare Prescription Drug Plan.

The first case of covert propaganda to be discussed here arose in 2003 and was investigated by the GAO.40 During the campaign to promote Bush’s Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement and Modernization Act of 2003, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS)41 sent out flyers and VNRs containing prepackaged news releases. The GAO’s decision was that the flyers were legal because they appropriately showed they were issues by CMS. The prepackaged news stories were another matter. In it’s 19 May 2004 decision, the GAO found that CMS’s “use of appropriated funds to pay for the production and distribution of story packages that were not attributed to CMS violated the restriction on using appropriated funds for publicity and propaganda purposes ... In neither the story packages nor the

37 B-304272.

38 Two other broadcasting stations besides Voice of America, established and funded by Congress, that send the US viewpoint to foreign countries are Radio Free Europe and Radio Free Asia.

39 The Government Accountability Office (GAO) is the investigative arm of Congress.

40 See B-302710.

41 CMS is under the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).
Fake news stories aren’t the only form of deception perpetrated by the Bush administration to promote the Medicare prescription drug plan. The plan was Bush’s means of cosying up to the elder generation to get their votes in his upcoming reelection campaign. The Congressional Budget Office estimated the plan would cost $395 billion over 10 years. But Congress wanted to know what Medicare’s chief actuary (numbers cruncher) Richard Foster figured the plan would cost, as 13 House members from Bush’s own party threatened a negative vote if it exceeded $400 billion over 10 years. Foster figures were between $500-600 billion but on five separate occasions between June and October 2003 Foster’s boss, then Medicare administrator Thomas A. Scully, forbade him to comply with Congressional requests. Foster said he was threatened with dismissal if he revealed his figures. Cybele Bjorklund, aid to Congressman Pete Stark, said Scully told her “If Rick Foster gives that to you, I’ll fire him so fast his head will spin.” [Stolberg and Pear, 18 March 2004] Based on an opinion by White House legal advisers (then under current Attorney General Alberto Gonzales), it was determined that Scully broke no law by concealing information from Congress.

Ketchum, Inc. subcontracted to Home Front Communications to produce the VNRs. The final VNR packages were reviewed and approved by HHS and CMS. There were three VNRs with story packages produced for CMS – two in English and one in Spanish. The two English-language story packages have someone called Karen Ryan as moderator. The Spanish-language script has a narrator named Alberto Garcia. The news anchor’s lead-in script, far from informing the listeners that CMS prepared the story package, implies that an independent reporter is narrating. In one script the lead-in ends with “Karen Ryan explains.” The second English-language lead-in notes “there have been a lot of questions” about the new Medicare prescription drug plan and “Karen Ryan helps sort through the details.” The Spanish-language anchor lead-in the same except it is Alberto Garcia who “helps sort through the details.” The story packages end with

42B-302710.

43Fake news stories aren’t the only form of deception perpetrated by the Bush administration to promote the Medicare prescription drug plan. That plan was Bush’s means of cosying up to the elder generation to get their votes in his upcoming reelection campaign. The Congressional Budget Office estimated the plan would cost $395 billion over 10 years. But Congress wanted to know what Medicare’s chief actuary (numbers cruncher) Richard Foster figured the plan would cost, as 13 House members from Bush’s own party threatened a negative vote if it exceeded $400 billion over 10 years. Foster figures were between $500-600 billion but on five separate occasions between June and October 2003 Foster’s boss, then Medicare administrator Thomas A. Scully, forbade him to comply with Congressional requests. Foster said he was threatened with dismissal if he revealed his figures. Cybele Bjorklund, aid to Congressman Pete Stark, said Scully told her “If Rick Foster gives that to you, I’ll fire him so fast his head will spin.” [Stolberg and Pear, 18 March 2004] Based on an opinion by White House legal advisers (then under current Attorney General Alberto Gonzales), it was determined that Scully broke no law by concealing information from Congress.

44On its website, Ketchum, Inc. touts itself as one of the world’s leading public relations industries with offices worldwide. It was founded in 1923.

45Quoted in B-302710.

46Home Front Communications is a public relations firm in the Washington, D.C. area that specializes in making video news releases (VNRs).

47Karen Ryan runs her own PR firm called Karen Ryan Group Communications. Although she is a former reporter, she is not an independent reporter in the CMS story packages. She is a subcontractor reading a script prepared for propaganda purposes.
“In Washington, I’m Karen Ryan reporting,” or “... I’m Alberto Garcia reporting.” CMS contended that such misleading story packages are “standard practice in the news sector” and a “well-established and well-understood use of a common news and public affairs practice.” The GAO responded that “our analysis of the proper use of appropriated funds is not based upon the norms in the public relations and media industry.” Its findings continue that the story packages prepared by CMS “raise concerns as to whether they constitute ‘covert’ propaganda because they are misleading as to the source. ... The critical element of covert propaganda is the concealment of the agencies role in sponsoring the materials. ... findings of propaganda are predicated upon the fact that the target audience could not ascertain the information source. ... 41 million medicare beneficiaries ... were the intended audience” and that audience did not know “that Karen Ryan and Alberto Garcia were paid with HHS funds for their work.” Then the GAO finding concludes: “Because CMS did not identify itself as the source of the news report, the story packages, including the lead-in script, violate the publicity or propaganda prohibition.”

**Illegal Means to Promote Bush’s anti-drug Program.**


Seven of the eight VNRs discovered contained prepackaged news stories (story packages) which were classed as covert propaganda because they did not identify to the viewing audience that ONDCP was the producer and distributor.

ONDCP contracted with Fleishman-Hillard for the PR work and Fleishman-Hillard in turn engaged subcontractors Gourvitz Communications and Harbour Media to produce and distribute the VNRs. The seven story packages included narration by an unseen “announcer” who is variously identified as Mike Morris, Karen Ryan (again), and a third person not identified in the script. The lead-ins provided for the station’s news anchor contained such phrases as “Mike Morris has the story” and “Mike Morris has more.” None of these narrators were affiliated with a news agency at the time the story packages were produced and distributed.

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48 Quotations in B-302710.

49 CMS also provided the GAO with two VNRs, including prepackaged news releases, that were produced in 1999 under the Clinton administration. These were promoting Clinton’s position on prescription drug benefits and preventive health benefits. The story packages were similar but the deception did not come to light at that time.

50 Quoted in B-302710.

51 B-302710.

52 See B-303495.

53 Fleishman-Hillard has a global network of PR offices as well as having offices in 22 US cities.

54 ONDCP identified this third person as Jerry Cosini.
The GAO “concluded that ONDCP’s prepackaged news stories violate the ban on covert propaganda ... ONDCP designed and executed its story packages to be indistinguishable from news stories produced by private sector television news organizations.” In addition, “ONDCP’s prepackaged news stories reached more than 22 million households without disclosing to any of these viewers – the real audience – that the products they were watching, which ‘reported’ on the activities of a government agency, were actually prepared by that government agency, not by a seemingly independent third party. This is the essence of the ‘covert propaganda’ violation.”

The head of the GAO, Comptroller General David M. Walker, became so concerned about these blatant violations of the publicity or propaganda prohibition for appropriated funds that in mid-February 2005 he wrote a letter to all federal departments and agencies. He called attention to the covert propaganda sent out by two US agencies during the past year, and cautioned again that “agencies may not use appropriated funds to produce or distribute prepackaged news stories ... that conceal or do not clearly identify ... that the agency was the source of those materials. It is not enough that the contents of an agencies communication may be unobjectionable. Neither is it enough for the agency to identify itself [only] to the broadcasting organization ...” Then he warned that “Agency officials should scrutinize any prepackaged news stories to ensure appropriate disclosures.”

The Bush administration bristled. Joshua B. Bolton, director of the White House Office of Management and Budget said he disagrees with GAO’s ruling. He is backed-up by Steven G. Bradbury, the Justice Department’s principal deputy assistant attorney general. They contend that it is the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Council, not the GAO, that makes legal interpretations that are binding on federal agencies. This is bureaucracy in its most blatant form. Who can better convey the intention of Congress in legislation passed by Congress than the investigative arm of Congress? In the vested interests of bureaucracy, interpretations are skewed and loopholes envisaged to meet a predetermined ideological agenda. In addition, Bradbury wrote: “Our view is that prohibition does not apply where there is no advocacy of a particular viewpoint, and therefore it does not apply to the legitimate provision of information concerning the programs administered by the agency.”

Comptroller General Walker denounced the Bush administration’s disclaimers as both contrary to appropriations law and unethical. On March 14\textsuperscript{th} he said: “This is more than a legal issue. It’s also an ethical issue and involves important good government principles, namely the need for openness in connection with government activities and expenditures. We should not be seeking to do what’s arguably legal. We should be doing what’s right.” Nevertheless, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said that same day: “As long as they are providing factual information, it’s OK.”
Summary on Prepackaged News Stories.

According to *The New York Times*, these 90-second government-produced story packages are more common than what meets the eye. David Barstow and Robin Stein wrote about three which were obviously not just providing factual information.\(^6\) The first, produced by the US State Department on reaction to the fall of Baghdad, has an Iraqi-American saying “Thank you, Bush. Thank you, USA.” The second, on “another success” in the “drive to strengthen aviation security” prepared by the Transportation Security Administration, has a public relations expert posing as a reporter and calling the drive “one of the most remarkable campaigns in aviation history.”\(^6\) A third story package was put together by the Agricultural Department’s communications office to tell how the administration is determined to open markets for American farmers (corporate farmers?).

*The New York Times* also reports that, in all “at least 20 federal agencies, including the Defense Department and Census Bureau, have made and distributed hundreds of television news segments in the past four years,” and “many were subsequently broadcast to local stations across the country without any acknowledgment of the government’s role in their production. ... the administration’s efforts to generate positive news coverage has been considerably more pervasive than previously known.”\(^6\) In some cases, it is fair to report, the culpability is with the news stations which have on occasions edited out reference to the government. But, in “most cases, the ‘reporters’ are careful not to state in the segment that they work for the government.”\(^6\)

Still, the Bush administration is determined to continue using these story packages without revealing they are government produced. Even implying that such covert propaganda is non-controversial and merely informing the public is misleading.\(^6\) And, as the comptroller general has stated, it is an ethical question. Concealing that the government produced the “news” segments and leading the viewer to believe they are

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\(^6\)See Barstow and Stein, 13 March 2005.

\(^6\)Quotations in Barstow and Stein, 13 March 2005.

\(^6\)Barstow and Stein, 13 March 2005.

\(^6\)Barstow and Stein, 13 March 2005.

\(^6\)California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger has also generated fake news reports which are essentially identical to the prepackaged news stories being used by the Bush administration. They use fake reporters, do not reveal that the state produced the segments, and have deceptive scripts and lead-ins for the station’s news anchor to use. These story packages have been used to promote the governor’s political agenda regarding teacher tenure, nurse staffing in hospitals, and lunch breaks for union employees. This covert propaganda is being investigated at the state level.

\(^6\)President Bush has been personally involved in this fine line between his duty to inform the people and using taxpayers money for propaganda and political purposes. Congressman Henry Waxman, the ranking minority member of the House Committee on Government Reform, has asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate Bush’s 6-stops-in-60-days lobbying tour to push his social security initiative. According to the *Washington Post*, by the time the tour was slightly more than half over it had cost more than $2 million for flights alone. (Cited in Imse, 8 April 2005.) People were prevented from attending the town-hall-type meeting solely because of such things as a bumper sticker saying “no more blood for oil” or for wearing a Young Democrats t-shirt. Waxman says that “expelling people with opposite views and promoting a partisan agenda are ‘hallmarks of campaign events, not government-funded political meetings.’” (Imse, 8 April 2005.)
an independent, neutral analysis, is not conducive to the openness which fosters trust in government. But, even if these reports “generally avoid overt ideological appeals ... the government’s news-making apparatus has produced a quiet drumbeat of broadcasts describing a vigilant and compassionate administration. ... They often feature ‘interviews’ with senior administration officials in which questions are scripted and answers rehearsed. Critics, though, are excluded, as are any hints of mismanagement, waste, or controversy.” 66 In other words, these story packages **distract people from having undesirable thoughts**.

Story packages are not the only place where the Bush administration is using fake reporters. They are also being embedded elsewhere in the media.


Paying sympathetic reporters to clandestinely champion specific items on the Bush administration agenda has also been a practice. This practice not only distracts people from thinking undesirable thoughts, it makes certain they do think those that are desirable. In this section I will discuss four such cases that have come to public attention.

**Armstrong Williams on Education.**

The first to become publicly known was the case of Armstrong Williams, a conservative black commentator, who was paid $240,000 by the Department of Education to provide favorable publicity for Bush’s No Child Left Behind education bill. This contract was awarded through the same firm that handled the prepackaged news stories featuring Karen Ryan and Alberto Garcia – Ketchum, Inc.

Williams, who is a syndicated newspaper columnist as well as having a television and radio show, was at the same time being paid by Sinclair Broadcasting Co. 67 One of Williams’ guests was then Education Secretary Rod Paige, also black, with whom Williams conducted an interview flattering Bush’s education program without revealing to the audience that he was being paid to do just that. Later Williams had a similar interview with Vice President Dick Cheney, to whom he also pitched softball questions. 68

Sinclair Broadcasting claims it knew nothing about Williams being paid by the government. “Williams has repeatedly admitted he used bad judgment in accepting the [Education Department] contract ... But when asked if he would give the $240,000 back, Williams ... said no. ‘My business ethics are not in question. I’m comfortable with the fact we delivered in terms of the advertising. That’s why [the Education Department] renewed the contract after six months. We delivered.” 69

66 Barstow and Stein, 13 March 2005.

67 Sinclair Broadcasting is well known for championing the Bush administration’s conservative agenda, In May 2004 it refused to air “Nightline” when Ted Koppel read the names of all the US soldiers killed in Iraq. It also presented a skewed anti-Kerry documentary on the eve of the 2004 presidential election. (Boehlert, 12 January 2005.)

68 One such question was: “Why do you think the media is so obsessed in trying to tie you to Haliburton? (Quoted in Boehlert, 12 January 2005.)

69 Boehlert, 12 January 2005.
Williams, being an African American, was also supposed to get other black people in the media to favorably influence the black population regarding Bush’s education “reforms.”

Federal Communication Commission chairman, Michael Powell, on 14 January 2005 ordered an investigation into whether Williams broke the law by being paid for covert propaganda. On that same day Senators Byron Dorgan and Ron Wynden requested the Government Accountability Office to investigate if the Education Department violated the prohibition of using appropriated funds for covert propaganda and, if so, who should be held accountable. I have seen no reports on either of these investigations at the time of this writing.

I have seen reports of an internal investigation by the inspector general of the Education Department. It’s report, not surprisingly, “found no evidence of unlawful or unethical behavior in connection with Mr. Williams contract but criticized top department officials for ‘poor management decisions’ and lax oversight. ... The report did not address questions about whether hiring Mr. Williams to promote President Bush’s signature education initiative amounted to covert propaganda.” Neither was there any consultation with those in the Education Department who were critical of hiring Williams.

Representative George Miller, who had requested the inspector general investigation, accused the White House of using executive privilege to prevent staff members from cooperating. Regarding the report, Miller commented that it “paints a very troubling picture of irresponsible, and potentially criminal, mismanagement of expensive contracts by the Department of Education.”

Maggie Gallagher Upholding Bush’s Marriage Initiative.

Later in the same month – January 2005 – that the Armstrong Williams scam was discovered, another journalist was discovered on the Bush payroll. Maggie Gallagher, a columnist for Universal Press Syndicate, had in 2002 written approvingly on Bush’s marriage initiative. She wrote that the initiative “would emphasize the importance of marriage to poor couples [and] educate teens on the value of delaying childbearing until marriage.” She even gave Bush a big plug, calling him a “genius” at playing ‘daddy’ to

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70Section 317 of the Communications Act, as amended, 47 U.S.C. § 317 requires broadcasters to disclose that matter has been broadcast in exchange for money, service or other valuable consideration. The announcement must be made when the subject matter is broadcast.

Section 507 of the Communications Act, as amended, 47 U.S.C. § 507 requires that when anyone pays someone to include program matter in a broadcast, the fact of payment must be disclosed in advance of the broadcast to the station over which the mater is to be carried. Both the person making the payment and the recipient are obligated to disclose the payment so that the station may make the sponsorship identification announcement required by Section 317 of the Act. Failure to disclose such payments is commonly referred to as “payola” and is punishable by a fine of not more than $11,000 or imprisonment for not more than one year or both. These criminal penalties bring violations within the purview of the Department of Justice.

71Kornblut, 16 April 2005.

72Quoted in Kornblut, 16 April 2005.

the nation—“Mommies feel pain. Daddies give you confidence that you can ignore the pain and get on with life.” Quoted in Dowd, “Right-Wing Pundits: We’re Not on the Bush Payroll,” 27 January 2005. All of that is fine, except she did not tell her readers that she had a $21,000 contract with the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to promote that initiative and to make the Bush administration look good.

Gallagher claims her relationship with HHS was along the lines of an academic doing independent research. She wrote: “I should have disclosed a government contract when I later wrote about the Bush marriage initiative. I would have, if I had remembered it. My apologies to my readers.” Jonah Goldberg, editor at large for National Review Online, retorted: “She’s doing better than I thought if she doesn’t remember getting paid $21,000. ... In the wake of the Armstrong story, she showed poor judgment by not coming clean about this.”

In a 25 January 2005 press conference, Bush disclaimed any knowledge of such payments as to Armstrong and Gallagher. He did acknowledge inadvertent breaches of ethics by his administration and ordered that hiring journalists to push administrative agendas would cease. This is something he still has not done with regards to video news releases and prepackaged news stories. Bush avoided the question of whether there were any more such contracts but his press secretary, Scott McClellan, said the White House was not aware of any. But it turned out there were more.

Michael McManus Also Upholds the Marriage Initiative.

Just the day after Bush admonished his cabinet secretaries not to hire journalists and commentators to create a favorable image for the administration’s political agenda, another well-known conservative journalist surfaced on the government payroll. Michael McManus, author of the syndicated column “Ethics & Religion” which appears in some 50 newspapers, was paid about $10,000 to promote Bush’s marriage initiative. The Department of Health and Human Services contracted Ketchum, Inc. who in turn subcontracted McManus. Then McManus plugged the ideological agenda in his columns without telling his readers he was paid to do just that.

The Department of Health and Human Services, of course, says it is implementing Bush’s direction to stop hiring journalists to further the administration’s programs. Dr. Wade Horn, assistant secretary for children


76There are earlier cases of such covert propaganda in the newspapers. In 1986, President Reagan proposed transferring the Small Business Administration (SBA) to the Department of Commerce. The SBA composed editorials to push this transfer and circulated them to newspapers around the country. But because the SBA was not identified as the source, it was found to be covert propaganda which violated the publicity or propaganda prohibition of the appropriations act.

During the following year, 1987, the Department of State’s Office of Public Diplomacy for Latin America hired consultants to write op-ed articles in support of the administration’s policy in Central America. But because the neither the newspapers nor the readers were advised that the State Department paid for producing these articles, they constituted “deceptive covert propaganda” designed to influence the media and public, and were therefore illegal. (See B-302710)
and families, assured the media: “The policy is being implemented and we’re moving forward.” Horn insists, however, that his department didn’t pay people like Gallagher and McManus to write those articles, but because they are marriage experts. He claimed: “We live in a complicated world and people wear many different hats. People who have expertise might also be writing columns. The line has become increasingly blurred between who’s a member of the media and who is not.” But those dissembling remarks didn’t fly for Tim Casey, attorney for the women’s rights group, Legal Momentum. He called Gallagher and McManus “ideological sympathizers who propagandize,” and identified them as members of the “extreme religious right.”

Neither were democrats on the House Committee on Government Reform taken in by Horn’s excuses. They wrote a letter to Bush demanding that he “immediately provide to us all past and ongoing efforts to engage in covert propaganda, whether through contracts with commentators, the distribution of video news releases, or other means.” As we will see below, they received no reply.

James Guckert and Gannongate.

White House news conferences are sometimes tricky affairs. An embarrassing question from a reporter can stimulate all kinds of undesirable thoughts. Even though the reporters are carefully screened and their number limited, it is neither politically possible nor desirable to have the attendees look like a partisan assemblage. Therefore reporters critical of government do attend.

That being the case, it is very helpful to the administration’s public image to have a strongly supporting person in the press corps who can be called upon to defuse tense situations. Jeff Gannon was one such person who had obtained White House media credentials. At least that is the name he was registered under. But it was discovered early in 2005 that he was a plant. His real name is James D. Guckert and he claims to be a reporter for TalonNews.com, a website claiming to be “committed to delivering accurate, unbiased news coverage to our readers.”

Although Gannon/Guckert claims that Talon News “is a separate, independent news division” of GOPUSA, it is far from that. Talon News is closely affiliated with GOPUSA, which has a stated purpose of “bringing the conservative message to America.” Furthermore, Gannon/Guckert was first admitted to the White House press corps in February 2003 – before Talon News was created – when he was still working for the blatantly partisan GOPUSA dedicated to bringing the conservative message to America.


79TalonNews.com is no longer available since Gannongate. The 24 February 2005 edition of Editor & Publisher reported: “The website ... posted a message on its home page today announcing that Talon was going offline for, as it said, a ‘top-to-bottom’ review.” A similar notice still exists on its website at the time of this writing.

80Quoted in Rich, 19 February 2005.

81Quotes from Savage and Wirzbicki, 2 February 2005.
Both GOPUSA and Talon News are operated by a Texas republican activist named Bobby Eberle, who was also a republican delegate in 2000. Eberle created Talon News in April 2003 because he feared GOPUSA appeared to have a political bias. The operative word seems to be “appear.” Talon News may not “appear” to have the political bias as GOPUSA because it has a more impartial mission statement. But that statement is questionable. Both being owned by the same person doesn’t inspire much confidence that Talon News is unbiased.

In addition, Talon News and GOPUSA hardly qualify as news organizations. GOPUSA’s news staff “consists largely of volunteer republican activists with no journalism experience.”62 According to Eberle, “Talon has employed 8 to 15 people as full- or part-time reporters.”63 Gannon/Guckert’s media expertise was often to simply rewrite GOP press releases for posting on the TalonNews.com website – or he “often copied entire sections from White House press releases and pasted them into his stories, according to an analysis done by Media Matters.”64

Gannon/Guckert did not obtain access to White House press briefings by obtaining Capitol Hill press credentials and then going through the extensive background check required for a permanent pass. Instead, he entered time and again for two years running by obtaining temporary one-day passes – passes usually reserved for occasional out-of-town reporters.65 He also attended the invitation-only White House Christmas parties for the press in 2003 and 2004. When White House Press Secretary Scott McClellan was asked how a GOPUSA reporter was cleared to enter the briefings, he replied: “The staff assistant went to verify that the news organization existed.”66 In December 2004, a personal note was posted on GOPUSA in which Eberle thanked White House political advisor Karl Rove for his “assistance, guidance, and friendship.”67

With today’s level of security, especially in the nation’s capital, one wonders how a bogus reporter can walk around the White House with credentials bearing a phony name. Gannon/Guckert had been doing that for two years.68 Guckert made a ridiculous declaration that he adopted a fake name because “Jeff
Gannon is easier to pronounce and easier to remember.” But Bruce Bartlett, “a White House veteran of the Reagan-Bush era, wrote ... that ‘if Gannon was using an alias, the White House staff had to be involved in Maintaining his cover.’ (Otherwise, it would be a rather amazing post-9/11 security breach.)”

During the presidential Campaign, Gannon/Guckert posed his softball questions with such phrases as the democrats being “divorced from reality. He also linked democratic candidate John Kerry with Jane Fonda who made the controversial trip to Hanoi. And he “questioned why anyone would dispute Bush’s national guard service.”

Gannon/Guckert’s downfall came during a 26 January 2005 news conference, when Bush selected him, over many more-experienced reporters, to pose a question. The question was: “Senate democratic leaders have painted a very bleak picture of the US economy. [Minority leader] Harry Reid was talking about soup lines, and Hillary Clinton was talking about the economy being on the verge of collapse. Yet, in the same breath, they say that Social Security is rock solid and there’s no crisis there. How are you going to work – you said you’re going to reach out to these people – how are you going to work with people who seem to have divorced themselves from reality?”

That leading question went out live over national TV. It was picked up by bloggers on the lookout for suspicious behavior in the White House. The manner in which that question led into Bush being able to defend his unpopular Social Security initiative was not missed by critical observers. They started investigating Mr. Jeff Gannon and uncovered his charade. The result was Gannongate.

Congress became concerned, especially after so much other misuse of the media for covert propaganda. Representatives John Conyers, Louise Slaughter, Bennie Thompson, Charles Rangel, and Henry Waxman announced on 3 March 2005 that they had authored and sponsored a Resolution of Inquiry into Gannongate. This resolution would require the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security to turn over all documentation regarding James Guckert’s (a.k.a. Jeff Gannon) regular access to the White House.

Representatives Slaughter and Conyers had previously sent repeated requests to the White House and the Department of Homeland Security (which has jurisdiction over the Secret Service) for all records regarding Gannongate, but had received no response. Slaughter announced: “We cannot allow the White House to stonewall the United States Congress and the American people on an issue of such importance. This is a matter of national security and unethical White House media manipulation. Everyday more questions are raised and the White House is not providing any answers. We intend to find out what the White House is hiding.”

House press secretary Scott McClellan says he used his real name when applying for day passes. (Cited in Kornblut,18 February 2005)

89Quotations from Rich, 19 February 2005.

90Savage and Wirzbicki, 2 February 2005.

91Quoted in Boehlert, 10 February 2005.

92These representatives are the ranking minority members of the House Committees on Judiciary (Conyers), Rules (Slaughter), Government Reform (Waxman), Homeland Security (Thompson), and Ways and Means (Rangel).

93Quoted in Slaughter, 3 March 2005.
Conyers added: “We had hoped that the half dozen congressional and senate requests for information would have been sufficient. However, to date, they have not even merited a response from the White House or its agencies. We hope that this resolution gets to the bottom of whether any processes were abused in favoring Mr. Guckert, a fake reporter from a fake news organization.”

 Possibly in an effort to defuse, and stonewall, the House resolution, the Department of Homeland Security on 4 March 2005 released a letter saying: “Thank you for submitting your Freedom of Information/Privacy Acts (FOI/PA) requests, received by the United States Secret Service, on March 8, 2005, ... We wish to inform you that a search for files responsive to your requests is being conducted. When the results of the search are known, you will be notified.”

 This belated and open-ended reply from a lower government official, to a legislative inquiry – an inquiry which had been downgraded to a citizen request – prompted Slaughter to comment that she is still “deeply disappointed that the President and the White House continue to stonewall Congress and the American People by not providing any details on the nature of their relationship with this disgraced, discredited ‘reporter,’ ...” Conyers added: “It is a sad day when US Representatives have to make FOIA requests to get simple answers to important questions.”

 But a careful surveillance of the clandestine manner in which the Bush administration operates will explain the fact that releasing such information would be much more damaging than suspicions of foul play. By avoiding such a smoking gun, this stonewalling distracts people from thinking thoughts that would be more undesirable than what they are imagining.

**CONCLUSION.**

An astute person will sense a persistent and consistent effort by the Bush administration to distract Americans from questioning their government’s actions. Such questioning would come under the heading of undesirable thoughts. As Pratkanis and Aronson explain it: “the task becomes one of preventing further close scrutiny and thought by the membership.” The methods being used are manifold, and have been developed and refined over the past century. In this paper I have focused on manipulation of the media for covert propaganda. But again, what is discussed here is only what has come to light. An observant citizen would recognize that there is much more activity not discovered that is being used to influence our thought processes.

Edward Bernays was a “far-sighted architect of modern propaganda techniques who, dramatically, from the early 1920s onward, helped to consolidate a fateful marriage between theories of mass psychology and

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94Quoted in Slaughter, 3 March 2005.


96Quotations in Slaughter, 4 April 2005.

97Pratkanis and Aronson, p. 315.
schemes of corporate and political persuasion." Similarly dubbed the Father of Spin, he has continued to influence the PR/propaganda industry until his death in the 1990s. Bernays postulated that for a successful public persuasion campaign we must “understand the mechanisms and motives of the group mind, it is now possible to control and regiment the masses according to our will without their knowing it.” This technique of opinion molding is what Bernays called “engineering of consent.”

In his 1990 interview with Bernays, then 99 years of age, Stuart Ewen reports that throughout the interview “Bernays expressed an unabashedly hierarchical view of society. Repeatedly, he maintained that, while most people respond to their world instinctively, without thought, there exist an “intelligent few” who have been charged with the responsibility of contemplating and influencing the tide of history.”

Ewen continues: “Throughout our conversation, Bernays conveyed his hallucination of democracy: a highly educated class of opinion-molding tacticians are continuously at work, analyzing the social terrain and adjusting the mental scenery from which the public mind, with its limited intellect, derives its opinions. ... While some have argued that public relations represents a ‘two-way street’ through which institutions and the public carry on a democratic dialogue, the public’s role within that alleged dialogue is, most often, one of having its blood pressure monitored, its temperature taken.”

It is the neoconservative faction in the Bush administration that has arrogated the role of the “intelligent few” destined to influence the tide of history. They consider themselves the “educated class of opinion-molding tacticians” destined to form the public mind, “with its limited intellect.” These neoconservatives, since the 2000 election, have been gradually and consistently molding the public mind to support their vested-interest agendas. This paper has illustrated one method — a technique Bernays called the indirect and unknown use of a third-party authority. In the examples given above, that authority is the charade of an independent media which is supporting the Bush administration’s agenda. **It is actually a deceptive and scripted drama aimed at dispelling all undesirable thoughts.** It is a deception is paid for by the tax dollars collected from the people being deceived.

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<td>NET</td>
<td>National Educational Television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ONDCP</td>
<td>Office of National Drug Control Policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PBS</td>
<td>Public Broadcasting Service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td>Public Relations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SBA</td>
<td>Small Business Administration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV</td>
<td>Television.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UCLA</td>
<td>University of California at Los Angeles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VNR</td>
<td>Video News Release.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>