

9/11: The ABC's of Propaganda

Written by

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The Nation - Eric Alterman - You may have heard talk of the TV network that decided to devote hours and hours of its prime-time schedule to a deliberately false rendering of significant historical events in order to flatter the ignorance and ideology of its nation's rulers and mislead its citizens. Yes, it's true. Al Manar, the Hezbollah television network, did recently broadcast in Lebanon a prime-time series based on the notoriously dishonest Protocols of the Elders of Zion.

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Lying About 9/11? Easy as ABC

The Liberal media by Eric Alterman

The Nation

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Here at home another network, ABC, and its parent, Disney, broadcast a prime-time, commercial-free miniseries, *The Path to 9/11*, also devoted to a deliberately dishonest rendering of history designed to flatter our current rulers.

How did Disney's decision differ from Hezbollah's? It's hard to say. The various statements coming from Disney and ABC executives have been so contradictory--both internally and when compared with known facts--it's nearly impossible to figure out what they intended to accomplish. After all, it's not every day that a global media corporation spends tens of millions to make a film to give away without commercials and offer free on iTunes, and bases it all on lies. It is particularly odd when it turns out to be the very same corporation that decided to forgo hundreds of millions of dollars when it refused to distribute another movie, *Fahrenheit 9-11*, that took a differing view of this same historical event because, as one of its executives explained, "it's not in the interest of any major corporation to be dragged into a highly charged partisan political battle."

The network initially trumpeted the program in full-page ads as "based on the 9/11 Commission Report." But it explicitly contradicts the findings of almost every part of that report, in order to cast blame on the Clinton Administration--inventing scenes, characters and dialogue along the way. To take just one of many examples, as Editor & Publisher reported, the film "explores the terrorist threat starting with the 1993 bombing at the World Trade Center, and there is little question that President Clinton is dealt with severely, almost mockingly, with the Lewinsky

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scandal closely tied to his failure to cripple al-Qaeda." The commission concluded exactly the opposite. Clinton instructed his staff to ignore his domestic troubles and, as the report explains, "All his aides testified to us that they based their advice solely on national security considerations. We have found no reason to question their statements."

Former National Security Council senior director for counterterrorism Roger Cressey has added in a Washington Times op-ed that Clinton "approved every request made of him by the CIA and the U.S. military involving using force against bin Laden and al Qaeda." Recall that most Republicans and many in the media were themselves obsessed with the President's penis at the time and accused Clinton of playing "wag the dog" with every attempt to take action against Al Qaeda.

In what might otherwise be considered a comedy of errors, New York Times television critic Alessandra Stanley--who has earned what must be the largest collection of corrections on staff despite having the job only of watching television--repeated this lie, about Clinton's supposed focus on Lewinsky at the expense of the hunt for bin Laden, in the Paper of Record. Stanley's faulty rendering of history, although corrected in the Times, demonstrates the danger presented by ABC's irresponsibility. If a Times reporter and her editors can't tell the facts from the fiction, how in the world can Mr. and Mrs. American--or Mr. and Mrs. Foreigner--be expected to?

ABC News, which might have taken a stand on behalf of what its own staffers know to be the truth, took a collective pass on the problem. Its amazingly comprehensive daily digest The Note all but ignored it. This Week host George Stephanopoulos made no effort to defend either historical truth or his former colleagues in the Clinton Administration. ABC News correspondent and blogger Jake Tapper went so far as to imply that those who cared enough to protest ABC's lies were giving aid and comfort to the enemy. "I wonder," he wrote, sounding much like Donald Rumsfeld or Dick Cheney, "what would bin Laden prefer us to focus on? A TV show, or improving this country's defenses?" (As Media Matters's Jamison Foser pointed out about Tapper's challenge: "This from a guy who, just two days earlier, had devoted a post to Dancing With the Stars appearances by country music singer Sara Evans and [Tucker] Carlson, whom Tapper described as 'my personal favorite contestant' and 'my pal.'")

Just why was the network willing to humiliate its news division, costing its stockholders tens of millions in order to slander public servants with a story it knows to be a tissue of lies? Why did it ignore the protestations of its own consultants, including FBI agent Thomas Nicoletti, who quit after less than a month, calling parts of the program "total fiction"? And why did it ignore protests from many members of the 9/11 Commission? President Clinton's lawyers and Cabinet members? A group of distinguished historians (in whose company I was honored to be

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included)? All Americans who hold the history of that horrible day as something to be honored, not trampled upon?

ABC execs offered up one Mickey Mouse excuse after another. One day they defended their depiction as true; the next they claimed it was a "dramatization, not a documentary." But as Max Blumenthal reports on the Huffington Post and TheNation.com, the program is part of a plan hatched by a group of right-wing extremists dedicated, in the words of the organization founded by the film's director, David Cunningham, "to a Godly transformation and revolution TO and THROUGH the Film and Television industry." The scriptwriter, a young friend of Rush Limbaugh's named Cyrus Nowrasteh, was a featured speaker at the Liberty Film Festival, an annual event founded to promote right-wing films, which calls itself "A Program of the David Horowitz Freedom Center." ABC also passed along hundreds of advance screeners to right-wing taste-makers like Limbaugh but refused to allow even the ex-President to have an early look.

What Liberal Media?

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