

"liberal bias"—that is, of publishing news favorable to groups and individuals who advocate government-funded social programs, economic regulation of business, and limited government intervention in people's private lives on such matters as abortion and homosexual rights. As the Media Research Center report in this chapter documents, members of the media do tend to be liberal in their political views, to vote Democratic, and to eschew conservative positions on many key political issues.

Still, evidence of a consistent liberal bias in media coverage is much harder to nail down, and some of the most successful news outlets in the nation either have no obvious or consistent ideological or partisan bias, or are perceived by some to tilt toward conservative and Republican views in how they package and present the news—Fox News, for example. Common professional training and competitive pressures to make money, "make news," and "get the story first," among other factors, may well exert as much or more influence over what, when, and how reporters report as any individual attributes (gender, race, age, class background—or personal partisan preferences or political ideology). Furthermore, even if most "mainstream" media were consistently biased in one political direction or another, today, the diversity of media sources—including local and national newspapers, newsmagazines, radio talk shows, the Internet, cable television networks, and others—means that even a casually determined consumer can easily find lots of unfiltered factual information as well as multiple opinions and competing perspectives on virtually any civic or political issue.

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## 8.1 Whereas, He Is an Old Boy, If a Young Chief, Honor Him (1994)

MAUREEN DOWD

### INTRODUCTION

The following article by Maureen Dowd raises important questions about the content of news stories. It appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* the day after President Bill Clinton visited Oxford University, which he attended in 1968–1970 as a Rhodes Scholar, to receive an honorary degree. Dowd's article, labeled a "news analysis," sparked controversy because of the

Maureen Dowd, "Whereas He Is an Old Boy, If a Young Chief, Honor Him," *New York Times*, June 9, 1994. Copyright © 1994 by The New York Times Co. Reprinted with permission.

first sentence: "President Clinton returned today . . . to the university where he didn't inhale, didn't get drafted and didn't get a degree." Critics, including many journalists, said Dowd's sentence was a more appropriate introduction to an opinion column than to a news story, while others argued that the facts were correct and that a "news analysis" permitted more creativity on the author's part than a regular news article. As this story shows, how journalists present the news can become as important as the information on which they report.



President Clinton returned today for a sentimental journey to the university where he didn't inhale, didn't get drafted and didn't get a degree.

The last got rectified by Oxford University in a ceremony conducted by men in black gowns speaking in Latin in a 325-year-old stone building designed by Christopher Wren. Mr. Clinton, who studied politics at University College as a Rhodes Scholar from the fall of 1968 to the spring of 1970, was awarded an honorary doctorate in civil law.

At the gilded Sheldonian Theater, the university Chancellor, Lord Jenkins of Hillhead, read the text of the degree in Latin, featuring eight clauses beginning with "Whereas," one with "Therefore" and one with "Witness Whereof." Lord Jenkins said Mr. Clinton was honored for being "a doughty and tireless champion of the cause of world peace," for having "a powerful collaborator in his wife," and for winning "general applause for his achievement of resolving the gridlock which prevented an agreed budget."

Wearing a red gown, beneath a high ceiling painted with cavorting cherubs, Mr. Clinton recalled for the audience at the Sheldonian how he had felt, as a young man fresh from Arkansas, a sense of nagging inadequacy at Oxford, the oldest university in the English-speaking world, a place of musty glamour once described by Henry James as "a kind of dim and sacred ideal of the Western intellect."

Looking at the British dons, men in flowing robes and mortarboards, some carrying gold-headed scepters, the President said: "I always felt a mixture of elation and wariness, bordering on intimidation, in your presence. I thought if there was one place in the world I could come and give a speech in the proper language, it was here, and then I heard the degree ceremony. And sure enough, once again at Oxford I was another Yank a half-step behind."

Mr. Clinton said he was honored by the degree and the honorary fellowship, adding wryly: "I must say that, as my wife pointed out, I could have gotten neither one of these things on my own. I had to be elected President to do it."

The mood at the ceremony, on the last day of the President's weeklong European tour, was good-natured. And even the sounds drifting in from the

chanting students outside, protesting increases in housing and food fees, were the cause of an amused comment by the President, who was once an anti-establishment demonstrator himself, on the Vietnam War.

"Just listen outside here," Mr. Clinton said, remarking. "Everything from disputes over the nature of the Italian Government to the character of the word 'skinhead' is being debated even as we are here."

At a lunch before the ceremony, Mr. Clinton saw the men who were his tutor and his porter, and his master read some confidential information from first-year progress reports from his tutor. The tutor had said Mr. Clinton was a "satisfactory" student who was "doing well," and added a note of confidence that "we'll see even more improvement in his writing."

Hillary Rodham Clinton was given a claret jug with a Latin inscription hailing her as "the Lady in charge of Universal Health."

### BROWSING AT THE BOOK STORE

Later, at a reception with American students at the Rhodes House, Mr. Clinton was blunt. Jennifer Bradley, a student from Austin, Tex., said the President had warned against Generation X cynicism, telling her, she said, that "the whole Generation X thing was bull." (One of Mr. Clinton's foreign-policy speech writers on the trip, Eric Liu, 25, was on the cover of Newsweek last week on a report about Generation X because he has written a book on the subject.)

The President also tried to tell the students not to be cynical. "I feel more idealistic today than I did as a student," Mr. Clinton told them privately, according to George Stephanopoulos, a 33-year-old Presidential aide who was also a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford. Mr. Stephanopoulos said that many of the students handed letters to the President and the First Lady, which they kept to read on the flight home. In addition to the letters, the President was quoted as saying, "I got the business cards" from the job-hunters in the group.

After leaving Rhodes House, the President walked to Blackwell's book store. On the way, some students unfurled a sign reading, "Inhale Next Time, Bill."

During the campaign, Mr. Clinton confessed that he had tried marijuana here, but quickly insisted, "I didn't inhale," explaining that he did not like the taste.

In the elegant bookstore, he and Mrs. Clinton browsed for more than half an hour. Mrs. Clinton did not buy anything but the President purchased "Principle of Duty" by David Selbourne; "Behind the Battle: Intelligence in the War With Germany, 1939-45," by Ralph Burnett; "Global Ecology," an anthology edited by Wolfgang Sachs, and "The World in 2020," by Hamish McRae.

The University issued a list of books drawn by Mr. Clinton from the University College library during his student days. Showing an early taste for

the weighty nitty-gritty of government, he signed out "Presidential Leadership, the Political Relations of Congress and the Chief Executive."

Mr. Clinton walked around the grounds and reminisced with his old Oxford roommate, Robert Reich, the Secretary of Labor. And he visited his old dormitory room in Helen's Court at University College, now occupied by Emma Caldwell, a first-year law student from Northern Ireland who said she had no idea she was sleeping where the President once slept.

"Nothing was said when I first moved in and there are no signs that it was his," she said. "He didn't carve his name in the furniture."

Showing he had learned the art of dogged debating at Oxford, Mr. Clinton wrote a rebuttal this afternoon on a poster on the door of another student who lived in his old dormitory. The poster was protesting the "cultural imperialism" of those Americans who had wanted to intervene to prevent the caning of a young American in Singapore.

The President wrote an explanation of his stance against the caning, saying "that's not the issue," that opposing the caning was not about imposing American values, but about whether the punishment was out of proportion to the crime and whether the young man was really guilty.

The President had originally planned to visit Oxford before the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy. But the White House changed the stop to the end of the President's European trip, presumably to avoid having embarrassing stories about Mr. Clinton's activities as a Vietnam protester crop up on the eve of the D-Day anniversary. Mr. Clinton arrived in England in 1968 as a 22-year-old Rhodes Scholar, just out of Georgetown University in Washington, at the height of the Vietnam War.

By his own admission, it was here that Mr. Clinton rode out part of the war, and it was here he wrote the now infamous letter to the commander of the Reserve Officer Training Corps back home in Arkansas—"Thank you for saving me from the draft"—for helping extend his deferment. He said he hoped to maintain his "political viability."

The young Oxford student said in that letter, "I am writing too in the hope that my telling this one story will help you to understand more clearly how so many fine people have come to find themselves still loving their country but loathing the military."

In interviews in Europe this week with American networks, he has reflected on his opposition to the war. He told Tom Brokaw of NBC News that he did not regret his position then. He seemed to show a bit of revisionism, perhaps not recalling the "loathing" line or how many in the 1960's disdained authority and those in uniform. "I think all the people who grew up in my generation were hurt maybe worse than any other generation could have been by their ambivalence over Vietnam because we all loved the military so much."

After all, Mr. Clinton said, "I grew up on the war movies—you know, on John Wayne and John Hodiak and Robert Mitchum and all those war movies."

## LEFT TO GO TO YALE

Mr. Stephanopoulos said Mr. Clinton did not get his degree because he switched from one program to another, ultimately pursuing a B.Phil. in Politics, and had a year left to go to get a graduate degree when the opportunity came to go to Yale Law School.

A Rhodes scholarship provides for two years of study at Oxford University, with a third year granted by application. Most Rhodes Scholars earn degrees at Oxford, and all are expected to remain full-time students until they complete their programs, but Mr. Clinton is not the only one to have left after two years without having done so.

In interviews in British newspapers and on television shows in recent days, former professors and colleagues remembered the young Bill Clinton as an earnest innocent.

He received middling reviews from several English students at Oxford, where they are well tutored in the essential British arts of irony and faint praise. "It was absolutely appropriate to the occasion," said Adam Shapiro, a 20-year-old wearing the traditional black robe and white tie. "It was completely anodyne."



## 8.2 Spin Cycle: How the White House and the Media Manipulate the News (1998)

HOWARD KURTZ

### INTRODUCTION

In this reading selection, *Washington Post* journalist and media critic Howard Kurtz examines media coverage of the Clinton White House. Kurtz depicts efforts by President Bill Clinton's media team to "spin" the news—that is, to try to dictate the timing, tone, and content of stories about Clinton and his policies. He zooms in on presidential press secretary Mike McCurry's handling of the media in the wake of Clinton's admission that he had a relationship with a young White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. But the White House, Kurtz suggests, does not "spin" the news all by itself. He hints that both the media and the White House seek to use each other for their own purposes. Together,

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