

Book Review

Goldberg, Bernard. *Bias: A CBS Insider Exposes How the Media Distorts the News*. ISBN 0-89526-190-1

Reviewed by Fizah Shahbaz

The book "*Bias: A CBS insider exposes how the media distort the news*", by Bernard Goldberg, meticulously explains the left wing bias in the mainstream US media. The book reveals a total default on responsibility on the part of media by analyzing the media coverage of a number important events including homelessness, racism, gender roles, AIDS, and increasingly sensitive issues like terrorism and tells the readers how the popular media culture thrives on hypocrisy and double standards of liberal media elites who color the news stories to pursue their narrow agendas.

An American bestseller in non-fiction genre, the book highlights the techniques that media executives employ spin the reality and present a distorted picture of facts to the wide scale American audience. Taking CBS's lack of objectivity as a basic argument, the author – who had worked his way for 28 years up to the top of CBS news – attempts to unveil the narrowness of intellect and limitation of professional genius that overwhelms the mainstream media culture of which, he himself has been a part. Comprising of fifteen chapters, the book is written in first person pronoun and the author shares his personal experiences as a veteran CBS reporter to tell the readers that liberal bias pervades the mainstream media.

First few chapters discuss Goldberg's career life at CBS and how despite being a leftist, he witnessed the obvious liberal bias in the news coverage. He joined CBS News in 1972 and remained associated with the network for good 28 years till he was forced to resign by certain circumstantial factors in 2000. During his stay at CBS, he won seven Emmy awards for numerous journalistic endeavors. He was very much ensconced in the liberal environment at CBS as his claim regarding his political affiliation testifies. He said that he always voted for Democratic presidential candidates. However, continued trend of slanting of news at major broadcast networks of America disillusioned him and he started whining about it before the network executives. The trend, however, continued unabated.

As a consequence, he chose to go public with his criticism of the inherent liberal bias in the media. He wrote an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1996 in which he fiercely criticized the coverage given

to tax proposal by media. His temerity brought him the wrath of all the media pundits who were once his friends. He was personally and professionally sidelined and his career came at the verge of destruction. People equated his move with a professional suicide on the part of Goldberg. Finally, in 2001, he wrote another op-ed in the same journal and exposed – in rather harsh words – how the so-called liberal media elites have responded to his criticism. He furthered his argument by saying that his erstwhile colleagues were so much angered and shocked because they were not aware of their inherent leftist tendency. Rather, they think they were projecting fairly reasonable views in their broadcast. Bias, according to Goldberg, had penetrated so deep down in their thinking that it comes naturally to them, without their deliberate effort.

Subsequent chapters discuss the various examples given by Goldberg to vindicate his stance. He discussed one event in one chapter and gave a detailed analysis of the event emphasizing upon the widening gap between the ground realities and mediated realities. First example comprises insistence on an ideological semantic which Goldberg referred to as politically correct language. Talking particularly about the evening news at CBS, he mentions that one is bound to use the euphemisms like 'Native American' and 'handicapped' for 'Indians' and 'disabled' respectively on air.

Next example of Goldberg revolves around the issue of homelessness in America. He gave a comparison of figures given by General Accounting Office and those given by the three leading networks i.e. CBS, CNN and NBC. No wonder, the figures were greatly exaggerated by the networks with CBS giving the most exaggerated account. He further points out that contrary to what media shows, not all homeless are deprived sympathetic people being roughed at the hands of state or fate. Rather, most of them are drug addict demented people who deserve their fate. Furthermore, he exposed the underlying agenda of media by mentioning that media was so ardent is seeking sympathy for the homeless during Republican president's regime but it ceased to be newsworthy shortly after Democratic president took oath.

According to Goldberg, the issue of AIDS among normal heterosexuals was also a virtual threat created by media to further other underlying agendas. He said that the issue was unduly highlighted to draw people's attention towards AIDS activist. A \$ 5 million advertising campaign was launched by the federal government

to warn people of something which, according to the author, was not really a threat.

In the chapter dealing with the feminist attack on men, the author talks about the obvious feminist stance of liberal media by comparing the number of stories devoted to feminists' cause with the number of stories devoted to men's cause, no matter how just the latter are. Goldberg explains in detail how certain policies of custody and visitation were actually exploited by women to take revenge from their male counterparts and media chose to stay totally silent over it. On the other hand, one finds stories of brutal insensitive fathers and husbands everyday on media. Goldberg claims that it is politically correct for leftist media to show women as victims in an apparently men's world.

The chapter on multiculturalism exposes the policy of certain media outlets where it is mandatory for the reporters to ad a minority reference in all the stories they cover. Goldberg calls it a veritable parody on ideological extremity. He further exposes the hypocrisy of media elites in this chapter by mentioning that one hand they call for affirmative action for the right of minorities whereas on other, they make sure their kids get admissions in top rated Ivy League schools.

Goldberg points out another very interesting ideological dilemma which is obvious yet unnoticed by many people. He says that we see people on right as being publically identified as 'Rightists' but those no left, even extreme left are not given such identifying labels. If conservatism is an ideology worth being identified with, so is liberalism. He quotes the example of Phyllis Schlafly who was publically known as a conservative, but no such ideological label was used for Catharine MacKinnon who according to author was a radical left wing professor.

Numerous thoughtful individuals have migrated from left to right over the past few decades and expressed their transition in their published works. Two books that talk clearly of the prevalence of this ideological hegemony over intellectual culture of Europe and America are worth consideration.

First one is Harry Stein's book *How I Accidentally Joined the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy (and Found Inner Peace)*. He has long been a left wing journalist and contributed columns and editorials to several media besides writing a number of books. Unlike Goldberg, Stein's transition to right is marked predominantly by his family life when he started seeing everything through the prism of parenthood. The book shows how despite being a content liberal wedded to a content liberal wife, Stein found it relieving to watch his kids playing traditional

gender roles and his wife giving up her career to raise the kids. Where Goldberg's *Bias* has a serious, rather angry expression, Stein' book has a humorous and satirical appeal.

Another is William McGowan's *Coloring the News: How Crusading for Diversity Has Corrupted American Journalism*. McGowan is also a well known journalist and been associated with reputed media organizations including the Manhattan Institute. His book emphasizes on the fact that American media is exhibiting an undue yearning for multiculturalism which is distorting he gave example of USA Today where it was mandatory for the editor to feature a colored person on its front page. McGowan also referred to the case of Mathew Shepard, a homosexual who was kidnapped and murdered to cause a stir in the media and civil society. He quoted that American press published over 3000 stories about this incident. On the other hand, a young boy who was raped and murdered by two homosexuals received only 46 stories. McGowan's book pertains more to the editorializing policy of leading print media outlets and provides qualitative as well as quantitative analysis of what he calls news coloring.

Goldberg's book provides a bold and daring commentary of today's media practices and fairly exposes the shortcomings that underlie the coverage of some of the most important events in American as well as world history. One of the book's major strengths is the identity of its author. While conservatives have been whining about the liberal bias in the media for decades, it sounds more like a confession when it comes from a veteran CBS insider i.e. a liberal. Furthermore, the way Goldberg has used examples of real incidents and their coverage by mainstream media whilst mentioning stats and drawing comparisons to vindicate his point of view gives the book immense credibility and the reader is compelled to look at the news coverage critically.

One of the major criticisms on the book comprises the staleness of its arguments. Liberal bias in the media has been a topic of debate for decades and what Goldberg presented as newly found revelations is in fact his much belated realization.

Ideologically this book is a waste, for it neither stands with liberals nor with conservatives. Goldberg has vehemently criticized the liberals whilst constantly denying his allegiance to the conservatives which make his ideological allegiance pretty confusing. Several critiques find him in a very awkward position on ideological sphere. Goldberg, along with the authors of other two said books i.e. Stein and McGowan, talk

vehemently of the liberal bias that pervades the leftist media, yet insists that his arguments should not be seen as an endorsement of conservative values.

One does not need to read the book twice to find the author is extremely angry. The book clearly reflects the author's anger and frustration over the wrath of his former colleagues that he invited by going public with his criticism. At certain points in the book, Goldberg has used severely harsh words and gone fairly brutal in his condemnation of his colleagues, so much so, that the reader is forced to think whether purpose of this book was to bring objectivity in the media or to settle personal scores.

About the author

Bernard Goldberg is the winner of 12 Emmy awards for excellence in journalism. Having worked for thirty years at CBS, he now works for HBO and reports for 'Real Sports'. He is author of five books including *Bias*, namely: *A Slobbering Love Affair*, *Crazies to the Left of Me*, *Wimps to the Right*, *Hundred People Who Are Screwing Up America* and *Arrogance: Rescuing America from the Media Elite*. He has contributed editorials for *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Washington Post* on a wide range of subjects. He is also a news and media analyst for Fox News where he comments regularly on the state of the press.