

MAY 28

Media Memorial Day

People who are concerned about the state of the U.S. news media in 2006 might pause to consider those who have lost their lives in the midst of journalistic neglect, avoidance and bias.

We remember that while TV and radio news reports tell the latest about corporate fortunes, vast numbers of real people are struggling to make ends meet — and many are in a position of choosing between such necessities as medicine, adequate food and paying the rent.

We remember that many Americans have lost their limbs or their lives in on-the-job accidents that might have been prevented if overall media coverage had been anywhere near as transfixed with job safety as with, say, marital splits among Hollywood celebrities.

We remember that the national and deadly problem of widespread obesity is in part attributable to constant advertising for products with empty calories and plenty of fat.

We remember that despite public claims by tobacco companies, the ads that keep trying to glamorize smoking continue to lure millions of young people onto a long journey of addiction to cancer-causing cigarettes.

We remember that superficial news reports and commentaries, routinely describing war in flat phony antiseptic terms, are helpful to the U.S. war efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq — where the deaths of American troops, while horrific, are small in number compared to the civilian deaths as a result of daily slaughter catalyzed by U.S. military activities.

We remember that each war death takes a precious life, and media outlets rarely convey more than surface accounts of the actual grief of loved ones left behind.

We remember that massive amounts of front-page space and unchallenged air time on television and radio are used by the president and other top administration officials, who speak glibly about patriotism and sacrifice while their long records of deception continue to underlie insistence that sacrificed lives must be honored by sacrificing more lives.

MEDIABEAT 2006 | NORMAN SOLOMON

We remember that lies from the White House, widely parroted and commonly touted as credible by news media, have preceded every major U.S. military action in the last five decades, including invasions of Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Panama, Afghanistan and Iraq.

We remember that after the United States led the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia for 78 days in the spring of 1999, more than a few American journalists joined with Pentagon commanders to hype the fact that no American lives were lost in combat during that time — as if the killing of people on the ground was of scarcely any human consequence.

We remember that onslaughts of media spin followed by exuberant coverage of high-tech U.S. air attacks can shift public sentiment drastically almost overnight. That's why opponents of reckless and deadly policies should draw little comfort from the Pew Research Center's mid-May report that at the moment "the American public strongly prefers non-military approaches to dealing with Iran's nuclear technology program," with just 30 percent in favor of "bombing military targets in Iran."

We remember that, no matter how much glorious rhetoric and how many chronic euphemisms are brought to bear on public opinion, most of war's victims are not — by any definition — combatants or enemies. As New York Times reporter Chris Hedges, a former war correspondent, has pointed out, "In the wars of the 1990s civilian deaths constituted between 75 and 90 percent of all war deaths."

We remember that, although it received scant and fleeting U.S. media coverage when released by the Lancet medical journal in late October 2004, a study using sample-survey techniques found that about 100,000 Iraqi deaths had occurred over an 18-month period as a result of the U.S.-led invasion and occupation of Iraq — and, according to the study's data, more than half of those who died were women and children killed in air strikes.

We remember that it's easy for hot-dogging pundits to sit in TV studios or in newsrooms to cheer on the use of cutting-edge technology by the Pentagon. Those pundits leave it to others to bury the dead and to deal with the anguish of losing relatives and friends.

We remember that standard journalism fails to do much to put us in touch with human realities of war.

The paperback edition of Norman Solomon's latest book, "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death," is being published in early summer. For information, go to: www.WarMadeEasy.com