

MAY 23

And now, it's time for . . . Media Jeopardy

The endless show that seems to fill America's every waking moment — and many of its nightmares — could be called “Media Jeopardy!” Before proceeding, here's a reminder of the rules: Listen to the answer and then try to come up with the question. Let's get started.

The first category is “Media Untouchables.”

1. They're an ideological pair and stylistic opposites. On television, one is a slathering fount of bombast, the other is icy cerebellum, but both are widely syndicated columnists dedicated to helping the right wing of the Republican Party. One had a role in the scandal involving the Bush administration's payback “outing” of a critic's wife who was a CIA undercover agent. The other has been guilty of numerous ethical lapses, from unacknowledged conflicts-of-financial-interest to utilizing debate-prep papers stolen from the Carter White House to coach then-challenger Ronald Reagan in the fall of 1980. Yet neither man seems to suffer professional or legal consequences.

Who are Robert Novak and George Will?

2. This cable network, partly owned by a major Pentagon contractor, has been trying to “outfox Fox” ever since the start of the Iraq invasion.

What is MSNBC?

Our next category is “Prejudice and Jingoism.”

3. He has spewed out vile bigotry against Arabs on his morning show that's nationally simulcast on radio and television. Yet network managers don't seem to mind, and many politicians across the narrow liberal-to-conservative spectrum never seem to tire of cozying up to him on the air.

Who is Don Imus?

MEDIABEAT 2005 | NORMAN SOLOMON

4. While tributes are often paid to members of the U.S. Armed Forces who lose their lives in Iraq, these human beings are rarely mourned in the mainstream American media.

Who are Iraqi people?

Now it's on to "Not-So-Public Broadcasting."

5. This network is now under so much effective political pressure from the Bush administration that alarm has spread across the nation. In a May 2005 editorial (headlined "A Publicly Funded Fox News?"), the St. Petersburg Times expressed concern that the network is apt to "increasingly find itself at the mercy of government and corporate masters with deep pockets and hidden agendas." Yet the current media debate rarely mentions that – for more than a quarter of a century – this network has done very little to challenge those masters ... and much to help them.

What is PBS?

We're now in Double Jeopardy. The category is "Real Live Journalists."

6. As a Newsday reporter specializing in science and health, this journalist broke new ground with books and countless articles. She won the Peabody, the Polk and the Pulitzer prizes. In February 2005, resigning from the Newsday staff, she left a memo to colleagues that noted the recent evolution of the newspaper's ownership, first with management changes at the top of Times Mirror and then the purchase by the Tribune company. "Ever since the Chandler Family plucked Mark Willes from General Foods, placing him at the helm of Times Mirror with a mandate to destroy the institutions in ways that would boost dividends, journalism has suffered at Newsday," the reporter wrote. What's more, she added, "The deterioration we experienced at Newsday was hardly unique. All across America news organizations have been devoured by massive corporations, and allegiance to stockholders, the drive for higher share prices, and push for larger dividend returns trumps everything that the grunts in the newsrooms consider their missions."

Who is Laurie Garrett?

7. This intrepid journalist broke many stories about the Iran-Contra scandal during the 1980s when he worked for The Associated Press. Years ago, he founded the

website ConsortiumNews.com, which features ongoing investigative journalism.

Who is Robert Parry?

8. She has covered the White House for longer than anyone else alive. Now, as a syndicated columnist, she is so insightful that President Bush goes out of his way to prevent her from asking questions at news conferences.

Who is Helen Thomas?

Now, we're moving into Final Jeopardy. Our ultimate question is in the category of "Use It or Lose It."

9. They're just a few words. And these days, many people in top positions of government power don't seem to have the foggiest notion what they mean. But those words express the most crucial principle that journalists and the rest of us are depending on to preserve a constitutional system in the United States.

Time's up. Can I see your answer please? *That's correct. The First Amendment.*

Norman Solomon's latest book, "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death," will be published in early summer. His columns and other writings can be found at: www.normansolomon.com