

JANUARY 29

# The question journalists don't ask Bush

**W**ith great fanfare the other day, Oprah Winfrey asked James Frey a question that mainstream journalists refuse to ask George W. Bush: "Why would you lie?"

Many pundits and news outlets have chortled at the televised unmasking of Frey as a liar. The reverberations have spanned from schlock media to highbrow outlets. On Friday, the PBS "NewsHour With Jim Lehrer" devoted an entire segment to what happened. The New York Times supplemented its page-one coverage with an editorial that concluded "Ms. Winfrey gave the audience, including us, what it was

A key reality of the National Security Agency spying story is: President Bush lied. But routinely missing from media coverage is a demand to hear the truth.

More than two years after he started the NSA's domestic spying without warrants, Bush was unequivocal. During a speech in Buffalo on April 20, 2004, he said: "Any time you hear the United States government talking about wiretap, it requires – a wiretap requires a court order. Nothing has changed, by the way. When we're talking about chasing down terrorists, we're talking about getting a court order before we do so."

Frey lied about his personal life in a book, and that infuriated Oprah Winfrey. "It is difficult for me to talk to you, because I really feel duped," she said, confronting him in the midst of the Jan. 26 telecast. "I feel duped. But more importantly, I feel that you betrayed millions of readers."

Yet the journalists who interview Bush aren't willing to question him in similar terms.

The president didn't merely betray millions of readers. He betrayed hundreds of millions of citizens.

Bush lied about basic civil liberties in the United States. Instead of relying on euphemisms, the news media should directly confront him with the question: "Why would you lie?"

During the "Oprah" show, while lecturing a powerful book-publishing executive who had served as an enabler for the author's mendacity, Winfrey declared: "That needs to change." But what about the powerful news-media executives who keep enabling the

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president's mendacity?

When Frey tried to weasel out of responsibility for concocting a phony story about a root canal without anesthetic, the host interrupted after the words "I've struggled with the idea of it —"

"No, the lie of it," Winfrey said. "That's a lie. It's not an idea, James, that's a lie."

But high-profile journalists are unwilling to confront President Bush on national television with such clarity: "That's a lie. It's not an idea, George, that's a lie."

*Norman Solomon's latest book is "War Made Easy: How Presidents and Pundits Keep Spinning Us to Death." For information, go to: [www.WarMadeEasy.com](http://www.WarMadeEasy.com)*