

OPINION

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The Portland Observer

USPS 959-680

Established 1970

4747 NE Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.,
Portland, OR 97211

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Portland Observer PO Box 3137, Portland, OR 97208
Periodical Postage paid in Portland, OR. Subscriptions are \$60.00 per year

503-288-0033 • FAX 503-288-0015 • EMAIL: news@portlandobserver.com subscription@portlandobserver.com ads@portlandobserver.com

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Media Mishandles Iraq Story

Complicity worse than a problem of bias or passivity

By MARK WEISBROT

The U.S. media's mishandling of the Iraq war — including the build-up and aftermath — has brought an unusually wide range of criticism and condemnation. The most obvious evidence of this failure is a "results-based" measure. A Gallup

poll last August found that 53 percent of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was "personally involved" in the massacre of Sept. 11, 2001. Where did they get this idea, for which no evidence exists?

They got this idea from hearing it implied — not even stated outright — repeatedly by the Bush administration. The broadcast media transmitted this information over and over again, with only occasional rebuttals, if any.

Regardless of their own views on the war, American journalists became the Bush administration's major means of promoting it, even through misinformation. This misinformation included the alleged weapons of mass destruction, the forged documents and aluminum tubes put forth as evidence of an Iraqi nuclear program, and other falsehoods.

The broadcast media is most important, because that is the main source of information for the "swing voters" and Americans whose views are not determined by party affiliation. This media will have to be reformed. Journalists must begin to treat government lying as any other form of malfeasance such as bribery or stealing. It is something to be exposed to the public as news, not glossed over and reinforced with endless repetition.

In a political move beginning last August that was as transparent as it was cynical, the Bush team used a manufactured threat from Iraq to remove from the electoral agenda all the domestic issues on which it was politically vulnerable.

Among these: a series of scandals involving the administration's highest officials (including President Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney), the economy, the budget, Medicare and Social Security.

The strategy worked, and helped them win both houses of Congress for the Republican Party. They then invaded Iraq, causing the media and the public to rally even more around the president, and lifting his approval ratings. Now the press is

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talking about whether he can "use the capital from the military success to push forward his domestic agenda."

That is not likely, as the economy continues to sputter and unemployment rises. The odds are therefore very high that we will find ourselves confronting another "security threat" before the next election — North Korea, Iran, Syria... there are many to choose from.

Yes, it can happen again. The media's complicity in such scams is therefore much worse than a problem of bias or passivity. It is one of the greatest threats to democracy — and security — that this country faces.

Mark Weisbrot is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C.

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Predatory Lending Targets Homeowners of Color

By MAUDE HURD

Two years ago, Celestine and Earl Jackson almost completely owned their home. After two decades of making mortgage payments, they looked forward to enjoying their retirement in a stable neighborhood.

But in the upside-down world of predatory lending, dreams turn into nightmares and African-Americans like the Jacksons are often targeted for loans that flip them over, from owning almost all of their home to virtually none of it.

While the media spotlight has recently shined on predatory lending and politicians are responding to communities outraged by the abuses, destructive loans continue to be made in our neighborhoods. Some of the country's biggest home mortgage lenders — including the Jacksons' lender, Wells Fargo — are raking in big bucks making predatory loans to unsuspecting borrowers.

The past decade's explosive growth in subprime lending has been particularly hard on our neighborhoods, as subprime loans are heavily targeted to African-American homeowners. In 2001, African-American homeowners were 4.4 times more likely to receive a subprime refinance loan than whites. And it's not just an income issue, since upper-income African-American



Maude Hurd

can homeowners looking to refinance were more likely than low-income white homeowners to receive a subprime loan — an outrageous commentary on how our country's financial system really works.

Only when homeowners who've been hurt step forward and join together will we ever stop these loan sharks from preying on our neighborhoods.

If you may have received a predatory loan, or to get involved in the fight against predatory lending, please contact the local Association for Community Organization and Reform Now office at 503-788-4362.

Maude Hurd is the national president of ACORN.