



Iraq War Stories:

How Newspapers Covered the First Days of
the War



May 2, 2003

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This Capstone is dedicated...



to my parents Thomas and Deborah Kees. My parents have always been there to support me in every endeavor that I have taken.

Their unconditional love and support is what gives me confidence and strength to take on the challenges one faces throughout life.

Completing this Capstone and graduating from California State University Monterey Bay are successes that I will look back upon and be proud of. And it would not have been possible without my parents. So Mom and Dad, I would like to dedicate this project to you and say Thank you for always supporting and loving me.

I Love You,

Brian



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I. Introduction

Throughout history the spread of information (news) has gone through many mediums. In recent history the media has developed these mediums of “news” into a very big business. Newspapers are one of the main sources of news. Because newspapers are a business and run by different individuals and companies who have their own opinions, the information that is put out there by certain media outlets can be severely different, especially in wartime.

In this paper I am going to look at how newspapers are involved with the recent war our country embarked on against the country of Iraq and their President, Saddam Hussein. The United States (U.S.) has once before waged war with Iraq 12 years ago to stop Hussein from trying to conquer Kuwait. But, this war had a different goal. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the United States’ realization of the constant threat of terror, the U.S., led by the Bush administration, put pressure on Hussein and Iraq to disarm his country of weapons of mass destruction. When Hussein did not meet the deadline set for him, a coalition force led by the U.S. military waged war on Iraq. The goal was to rid the country of their tyrannical leader, who had brutally assassinated many of his own people, and rid the country of the surplus of destructive weapons. The hope was giving the Iraqi people an opportunity for a more free society, and the rest of the world peace of mind

from the threat that Hussein could wage a new age destructive war, and support terrorism.

Because the media plays such a huge role in today's society, the non-stop coverage of the war by all types of media outlets has been remarkable, a virtual 24/7 news society. Unlike the first Gulf War, this war with Iraq has opened a new door for the media. In talking about the first Gulf War "the U.S. media were a too often willing subject of censorship and propaganda by the U.S. government and military... The military gave uninformative or at best guarded briefings, denied unfettered access to the battlefield, used limited reporter pools, engaged in story delaying reviews of copy, and imposed outright censorship." (Paletz 282) By doing this, the media had a problem with accuracy, and was not able to provide the general public with sufficient knowledge of the war.

Unlike the first Gulf War, or any other war, the U.S. military set up a media center at the coalition's Central Command (CENCOM) in Doha, Qatar giving press conferences and briefings daily. Reporters from just about every major media outlet are reporting from either CENCOM or from their experiences of being attached to different units that are fighting in Iraq. Never before has the media been given such access to the military and its operation.

Since the start of the war, newspapers devoted much of their space to all sorts of different stories and spins about the war. There is so much information being gathered during the war by journalists from all corners of the world that it is impossible for each newspaper to have the same

information. But, the differences between one newspaper to another can be quite remarkable. There are 135 major daily newspapers in the U.S. alone, so it is no wonder why there can be so many different opinions and how certain people have knowledge of an issue and certain people don't.¹ The information that people are gaining from this war comes from the media, and when people get their information from certain newspapers, they will have different knowledge of the war.

The goal of this paper is to examine how 3 major newspapers covered the war with their first few issues during the first 5 days, through the first weekend, and how their biases shaped different coverage. By examining three of the largest circulated papers in the country an East Coast paper, *The New York Times*; a West Coast Paper, the *San Francisco Chronicle*; and a national paper, *USA Today* I will be able to show that there are differences in what “news” Americans receive based on their desired reading, and how that can contribute to shaping opinions. This will be explored by focusing on news culture, bias, protests in the news, and overall coverage of the three papers.

II. News Culture

In this day and age, America has more media outlets than in any other time or any other country, including 135 daily newspapers and several 24-hour

¹ Information on # of newspapers taken from <http://www.freep.com/jobspage/links/00details.htm>

news networks. From the mediums of television, radio, Internet, magazines, and newspaper there is more information out there for the population to sort through now then ever. A.C. Nielsen, which measures television viewer ship, reports that there are an average of 105.5 million households tuned in to their television every night, and an average of 36.2 million viewers per night tuning in to one of the networks for major news.² Although not as highly consumed as television, newspapers are still a major part of our culture and a big player in the distribution of information to society. Three of the largest newspapers, which are being looked at, have the largest daily circulations. The *Chronicle*, which is ranked #11 in circulation, in the U.S., has an average daily circulation of 530,000; *The Times*, which is ranked #3 in circulation, has an average daily circulation of 1.1 million (highest for any city located newspaper), and *USA Today* has the largest circulation of any paper in the U.S. with a daily average of 2.3 million.³

But this doesn't always mean that the population is well informed of the news. In the book "The Power of News", Michael Schudson says regarding the flood of information fed to the public, "I do not conclude from this that we have the right information at the right time or that available information is distributed equitably or that citizens are well informed. Our increasingly dazzling library of information provides only an illusion of knowledge and a false promise of competence."

² Information Nielsen ratings taken from <http://tv.zap2it.com/news/ratings/>

³ Information on newspaper circulation taken from <http://www.adage.com/page.cms?pageId=627>

The news media has become so institutionalized in our society that we, as consumers, are bombarded with a multitude of information that varies from different outlets. “While people may not always be happy with what is in the news, they tend to believe what they hear or read.” (Parenti 22)

Newspapers and television have been the major source of information about wars for about the last century, but that has never been so prevalent as it was during the first Gulf War. A study showed that the more people read about and watched about the Gulf War crisis, the more likely they were to support the US effort, but the less they knew about the underlying issues. (Parenti 22)

Our society is moving at such a quick pace, wanting everything, “now, now, now”, that the news has catered to the theory of attention getting. This is why *USA TODAY* has been able to reach such a high level of success. Only 20 years old now, that publication has the largest circulation of any paper in the country. The reason for this is because the articles and items covered are very short and succinct, oftentimes lacking the “story” of the story. *USA Today* is a perfect example of how short and to-the-point information, with lots of color and pictures, grabs attention, and business. During the first Gulf War, *USA Today* and CNN, the cable news channel, came to the forefront of the outlets providing information to the public. Their get-to-the point technique enabled them the ability to provide more stories to the public. The business of CNN nearly tripled because of the gulf war, and nearly doubled the business of *USA Today*. The huge increase in business during the first Gulf War was able to

carry CNN and *USA Today* into being two of the major players in the news business.⁴

III. Bias

There are many theories of news bias. There have been many books written on how news can be slanted based on the bias that one media outlet might have, and this is a major reason why information can differ from one news publication to another. There are many theories on bias and the media and how that affects the news. Bias is very prevalent in how news is given from the “right” bias, to the “left” bias, to bias of community, advertisers, ownership, individual, and even now the bias of immediacy.

Community bias is a major bias among the newspaper industry. It would make sense that a news publication caters to the community that makes up its clientele. Of the three news publications being examined here, it is obvious because it is a local paper that the *Chronicle* caters most to a specific community, “one of the most liberal cities in the country”.⁵ But being the second largest paper on the West Coast, the *Chronicle* also caters to the whole San Francisco Bay Area and a large portion of California. *The Times*, on the other hand, has a much different clientele than the *Chronicle* has, so *The Times*

⁴ Information found in Taken By Storm on page 247

⁵ Quote taken from David J. Blumberg on opinion page of the *San Francisco Chronicle* printed on March 21, 2003

must focus its information differently. It is the largest metropolitan paper in the country, in the largest metropolitan city in the country, and has readers all over the nation and world. Much of the readership of *The Times* is involved in international business, so *The Times* has a larger worldview than do most metropolitan newspapers. *USA Today*, on the other hand, is quite different from both *The Times* and the *Chronicle*. Being the largest national newspaper, *USA Today* has basically no local issues to focus on. Rather, it focuses on many more national and world events with a summary approach that mainly focuses on the “who, what, why and when” instead of detailed stories.

There is a constant debate on whether the media leans toward the “right” or the “left”. There are many articles and books published on the idea of either a conservative bias or a liberal bias in the media. There is a large argument that says, “journalists' views are to the left of the public, and journalists frame news content in a way that accentuates these left perspectives.”⁶ A poll done by Louis Harris and Associates for the nonpartisan Center for Media and Public Affairs in 1996 showed that “almost three-fourths of Americans see a “fair amount” or “great deal” of political bias in the news. And by more than a 2-to-1 ratio (43%-19%), poll respondents said that bias is liberal rather than conservative.”⁷

Although it is debated by the “left” that the media has a “right” bias and vice versa, it is discussed in many books and articles that the media leans

⁶ Quote taken from David Croteau at <http://www.fair.org/reports/journalist-survey.html#intro>

⁷ Information taken from <http://www.gargaro.com/bias.html>

towards a “conservative” bias during wartime. One of the main causes for the conservative bias in the news is the ownership and advertisers who strongly support the military, because the majority of the public does as well. Today most media outlets that are successful are owned and operated by large corporations. Large corporations make up a majority of the advertisements that support newspapers. The left does try to get its side across, usually by protests, but often they are not covered as well as they would be during peacetime. The right however, controls the flow of business with the large corporations. Although the media has the ideal to stay balanced and neutral, they usually end up being “more receptive to the right than to the left because its owners and corporate heads share the rights basic feelings about free enterprise, capitalism, and U.S. global supremacy.” And the common denominator more often than not is that “the right has the money to buy the media exposure and the left does not.” (Parenti 99-100)

We are able to see the biases from both sides during peacetime, but the right is definitely more apparent in wartime. It has been a factor throughout past wars that it is unpopular for the media to criticize the military during a war, while our men and women are risking their lives for an effort, because the media can help to shape public opinion. “The press does have a tendency to engage in the professional practice of patriotic journalism.” (Kalb 4)

This form of bias definitely can affect the mindset of the mass population. News publications, will quite often, print the stories that are unsupportive of the effort, but frequently those stories are moved to a less prominent section of

the paper. If supportive stories dominate the spotlight in the news, then support more often than not, will end up being the sentiment of the population. The front page, or page one of the newspaper is the most important page of the newspaper, the spotlight, especially in this day and age of “attention grabbing”. “The front page is often seen as the major selling point of the paper, it is what attracts the potential reader to buy the paper and to read further. The size and position is also an important signifier of the importance of the story”.⁸ Because the front page is so crucial to the business of the paper, publications oftentimes tend to stray from seriously negative stories regarding a military effort because of the fact that when the military is involved in a situation there is overwhelming support for them. “Over all frequency of stories of criticism aren’t equaled by supportive stories, and they are usually obscured by their placement, and support dominates the narrative flow.” (Entman & Page 87) This form of bias has never been more evident than in printing stories of protest regarding this war.

IV. Protests in the News

As discussed above, protests about a war are very scrutinized, especially during a war by the press due to the tendency to practice “conservative bias” or “patriotic journalism” during a war.

⁸ Quote taken from Paul Carter at <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Students/pmc9601.html>

“Ever since the Vietnam War, U.S. military journals have been stuffed with anti-media cant designed to prove that the press-not the Pentagon, not the U.S. government, not the nature of revolutionary struggle, not the tenacity of the North Vietnamese-lost the war. Nonsense-foolish, self-deluding, destructive nonsense. And, ever since the Vietnam War, the press has been determined to prove not only that it did not lose the war but that it is also composed of “the right stuff,” the stuff of red-white-and-blue-blooded, pork-rinds-eating, beer-drinking, flag-waving Americanism, hardly the sort of press that would undermine a war effort by raising embarrassing questions about an administration’s earlier dealings with Saddam Hussein, or its involvement in the war.” (Kalb 4, Taken By Storm)

This analogy was very apparent in the first five days of the war coverage by the three newspapers. While there was coverage of the major protests regarding the war, during these five days, there was only one article of a protest that made a front page of the three newspapers. There were major protests regarding the war prior to the U.S. led invasion of Iraq, but on March 20, 2003 the first full day of the war, there were many protests being staged from different parts of the globe. The



Chronicle printed several articles regarding the protest, but only a portion of one article regarding the major protest in S.F. made the front page, with one

picture depicting a protester being arrested, while seven other articles regarding the war effort including many pictures filled the rest of the front page.

That protest staged in S.F. was largest protest on day one. While a portion of the coverage of that protest was printed on the front page, it jumped to page W3 where the majority of the coverage took place. The article was slanted towards the police view, because only the police were quoted, no protesters. The facts about the protest, and why the protest was so disruptive to the city were discussed, but not why the protest had value to antiwar support. The article states that thousands of people that joined the protests in the streets



around San Francisco's financial district shut down nearly 40 blocks. Nearly 1,400 people were arrested by the end of the day. Policing these protests will end up costing the city nearly

\$500,000 in overtime costs. It was interesting to see the closing quote to the portion that was on the front page, because it emphasized the police slant, it was given by Assistant Police Chief Alex Fagan Sr. who said, "This is the largest number of arrests we've made in one day and the largest demonstration in terms of disruption that I've seen."⁹ The article that jumps to page 3 of the section devoted to the war, goes on to have sections titled "Muni Buses

⁹ Quote taken from article printed in the *San Francisco Chronicle* on March 21, 2003

Detoured”, “S.F. Mayor Irritated”, and “Trying To Live Our Lives”, which gave the perspective of a man who said he was antiwar but was upset by the disruption to the city, because as the title states he is trying to live his life. In the first five days of the war the *Chronicle* printed an average of 6 articles a day regarding protests from SF and around the globe, while printing an average of 26 war related stories a day.

The *Chronicle* did, however, give some recognition to the protesters and their side, on day four (Saturday) by printing a story about how the protesters thought they were being treated unfairly by the police, and the time they had to spend in jail, but that story was buried on page W7. In the Sunday edition on day five the *Chronicle* did give more attention to the protests, and the more peaceful protests that occurred on the weekend. It even gave mention to the article on the front page in the inside index box, story printed on page W3. To find opinions and insight of people who were totally anti-war, you had to turn to the opinion page, but even then those opinions were put next to opinions of people who might have been anti-war, yet also anti-protest. It was quite a mixed bag.

The Times, on the other hand, did not put any protest articles on the front page. In the first few days, *The Times* printed only an average of less than two articles a day regarding the protests, while printing an average of 33 stories a day regarding the war. The very interesting thing, though, is how the Times intertwined their story of protest with support. After major protests took place in cities all over the world, including New York, you wouldn't see anything

printed on the protests until page B6 in their war devoted section. While the article and pictures related to the protests covered three quarters of the page, it was interesting to see that there was one small picture of a man holding a sign that reads “Support Our Troops”, strategically placed directly in the middle of the text. The only article printed by *The Times* was more of a synopsis that there were protests around the globe, but nothing in-depth about each protest or its possible impact, rather focusing on the military’s effort. *The Times* did, however, print three articles regarding protests in Sunday’s large edition. On Saturday there was an estimated 100,000 people in the streets of N.Y. near Times Square, so it’s no wonder *The Times* would actually print stories of such a large event that took place in the heart of the city. The three stories, the most for *The Times* in the first days, were printed on page B11.



USA Today covered the protest much like *The Times* did. In the first few days of the war, little recognition was paid to the mass of protests around the globe. It is of note that *USA Today* prints only one paper for Friday-Sunday, so there was just one edition for days 3-5. But in that one edition for the weekend they had just 1 article regarding protests in the first two days while printing an average of 30 articles regarding the war. It is very interesting that *USA Today* had just the one article which was printed on page 12A, and that not only was there little recognition to the protests, they printed that 500

people were arrested in S.F., while the *Chronicle* directly quoting a Police Officer, printed that there were nearly 1,400 arrests. Like *The Times*, the article not only talked about antiwar protests from around the globe, but also gave recognition to support rallies. Not only did they give equal credit to the supporters, the protest article was also directly under a *USA TODAY/ CNN*

USA TODAY CNN Gallup Poll <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Do you approve or disapprove of the United State's decision to go to war with Iraq?	
Strongly approve	60%
Approve, not strongly	16%
Disapprove, not strongly	5%
Strongly disapprove	15%
How long do you think the war in Iraq will last?	
A week	7%
Less than a month	27%
1-3 months	34%
4-6 months	13%
7-12 months	6%
More than a year	8%
<small>Source: USA TODAY/CNN/Gallup Poll of 602 adults Thursday. Margin of error: +/-4 percentage points. Totals do not add up to 100% because of other responses not shown.</small>	

Gallup Poll that showed the majority of Americans approve of the war. Which likely happens to be why protests, and their side to the war is often buried.

As I stated earlier, the media seems to not give that much attention to the mass of protests that happened around the globe after the U.S. led invasion took place.

The Times and *USA Today*, two of the three largest publications in the country, barely gave any attention to the protests, and the attention they did give was mostly intertwined with portrayals of support. It is no surprise that the *Chronicle*, the paper that self proclaims the city “one of the most liberal cities in the country”, gave attention to the protests, and did print many articles daily about the protests. But the *Chronicle* did bury the articles to pages deep inside the paper, not as much, but like the other two, seem to take some part in that so called practice of “patriotic journalism”.

V. USA Today Coverage “WAR WITH IRAQ”

USA Today because of its summary approach to the news had a very interesting way of covering the war through the first days. Every media outlet seemed to name the war something different; *USA Today* used the name “War With Iraq”. As I mentioned earlier, *USA Today* prints only one edition for Fri-Sun, so their coverage was limited to 2 days of coverage during



the first 5 days of the war. The publications approach to covering the first days of this war was informational on the effort of the military, and little on the personal side regarding stories of military personnel, military families, or Iraqi families. The focus, however, was on military strategy, including many charts, graphs and pictures of the strategy, equipment, and targets. The coverage also focused on the leaders of the Coalition and their duties, and



politics of war from back home in the U.S.

As I have discussed before, the front page is definitely the grabbing point for any newspaper, and the major headlines and stories above the fold of the paper are the most important selling points. Because a new war had started, newspapers on Thursday, March 20

had some attention to grab. *USA Today* like most papers devoted the majority of the front page, and all of the space above the fold to the war. The title “U.S. begins second Gulf War with a surprise missile strike at Iraq leaders”¹⁰ was spread across the entire top of the front page, with a photograph of President Bush giving his speech from the night before, and a photograph of the explosions from the first missile strike in Baghdad. Something that was definitely attention grabbing on the first day is that the publication put a chart on the bottom of the page that displayed the death toll of military personnel from every major war America took part in. In total numbers of pieces in their coverage, *USA Today* on day one printed 25 articles related to the war effort, 29 pictures attached to those articles, and graphs and charts that pertained to the war, taking up a total of 8 of the 16 pages in the front section.



Revolutionary War	4,435
War of 1812	2,260
Mexican War	1,733
Spanish-American War	385
World War I	53,402
World War II	291,557
Korean War	33,741
Vietnam War	47,414
Persian Gulf War	147

Source: Defense Department

Coverage by most newspapers was much more intense by the second day. Two days of the war had taken place and there was a lot more information, and activity that had occurred by this time. Still using big headlines and eye grabbing pictures, the publication spread the following headline across the front page: “Troops head for Baghdad; U.S. says war will intensify”.¹¹ One thing that I am sure captured the attention of potential readers because it is somewhat new and rarely seen by the majority of the public, was a big picture

¹⁰ Headline taken from the *USA Today* on March 20, 2003

¹¹ Headline taken from the *USA Today* on March 21, 2003

seen through night vision equipment of army personnel checking dead Iraqi soldiers after a post was seized. There was also a picture an exploding Baghdad building.



When a reader turned to the second page, they were shown a large half page story that speculated Saddam was no longer in charge of his army. There were several stories of the first few strikes, and what had been destroyed and taken over so far. There was a story that detailed the path to war, describing the Bush administration's dealings with the United Nations, Congress, and finally the ultimatum that was not met. This issue also gave us the one story printed about protests, and support rallies. In seeing how important war coverage is, on day two *USA Today* devoted 16 of the 20 pages in the first section of the paper, including a whole page devoted to opinions and five cartoons. Those 16 pages included 34 articles, 39 pictures, and seven charts/graphs/and maps including ones on the progress of the military in moving toward Baghdad.

In total, *USA Today* was somewhat limited in their coverage of the first five days for many reasons such as only one paper for the weekend, and their summary approach rather than in-depth personal stories. The paper stuck to

printing stories of events, the plan, and printing a large amount of pictures and graphics of the war to help illustrate how the war was taking place, and shape.

VI. The *San Francisco Chronicle* Coverage “WAR ON IRAQ”

The coverage by the *Chronicle* was quite different than the coverage of *USA Today*. The *Chronicle*, as discussed before is a metropolitan newspaper that caters to a specific community, so their coverage had to more personal because it serves a local **San Francisco Chronicle** specific day-to-day community. The coverage of the *Chronicle* dramatically changed throughout the first days of the war. The coverage went from big headlines and big pictures, with a history of why the war took place, to having a whole section devoted to the war daily with articles of events, and stories of people from the S.F. Bay Area community. Like *USA Today* and most other publications the *Chronicle* had a name for the war and their coverage, it was called “War On Iraq”.

As I discussed above the newspapers after the first day of the war on Thursday, March 20, 2003 were focused on attention grabbing. Big headlines and big pictures were spread across the front page of most major newspapers.

Because the front page is the door to the inside of the paper, and what grabs the consumers attention, the *Chronicle* like other publications used this tactic to get readers to buy their paper, and who knows, if a person buys their paper that day, they might become part of their continued readership. In my opinion, the *Chronicle* did the best job of attention grabbing on March 20. Above the fold, where most attention grabbing is accomplished, the title “War on Iraq”¹² was very large and covered about a third of the space above the fold. Also

there was a large photograph of an army unit with guns pointed in the air and yelling something. Along with the headline and the large



photo, only one small article graced the front page above the fold, a small sliver of an article that simply said “US Strikes”. During that first day of coverage, there wasn’t a lot of articles based on the war, only 11, but there were interesting ones. There was an article on Saddam’s family with a family portrait, detailing who every family member was. The article that caught my attention was a three quarter page article on how to talk to your kids about the war. It included what to say to kids; with quotes, ideas, and tips from local bay area Mothers, and psychologists. This type of article would typically not be found in *USA Today*.

¹² Headline taken from the *San Francisco Chronicle* on March 20, 2003

Day two dramatically changed the *Chronicles* coverage of the war. As I discussed earlier, publications had much more information after two days of war, in what was taking place and what was the plan for the future. Now that press briefings were taking place from CENCOM, and journalists had traveled to the Middle East, coverage kicked into high gear for most publications. The *Chronicle* on day two started devoting their entire front section to the war. The twelve-page section, which later turned into a sixteen-page section,



covered the rest of the paper with an alternate front page, including the banner “War on Iraq”. The *Chronicle* had a unique feature in their war section; they divided the

pages to discuss different aspects of the war. There was a “Home Front” page that discussed what leaders of our government were doing, and their reactions. Additionally, another two articles appeared on Friday and Saturday to highlight our media’s involvement. This page started as page two in the war section, but later moved to W3 and even W7 when protests were a big part of the home front coverage.

The other sections included a section called “The Front” which took up a majority of the pages and gave updates on the battlefield and what was happening in Iraq. The “Leadership” section in the first few days mainly gave us articles on President Bush and his administration, their dealings with other

governments, the UN, and Congress. This section also gave daily polls on Bush's approval rating.

The section titled "Strategy" was a daily update on the military's plan of attack, which was not very detailed until after action took place. This page gave us many of the charts and maps of Iraq, and the militaries assault on the Iraqi army. There were also charts and graphics on the tactics that the military was using, such as the equipment, and the arsenal being used. This page was the first one to include possible rebuilding ideas, and was printed on Sunday.



The section titled "Families" produced daily articles on military personnel from the S.F. Bay Area serving in the Gulf. The Families page gave a local spin to Bay Area residents that they wouldn't find in other papers, giving a sense of community, including compassion for your neighbor, and the fact that its not so far away because neighbors in their community have many family members and friends fighting in the Gulf.

Overall the *Chronicle* devoted a large amount of space in its paper to the war. After the first day of minimal information, the paper kicked its coverage into high gear devoting its own war section that fluctuated between 12 and 16 pages. Unlike other papers, the *Chronicle* divided that section into mini sections that made different aspects of the coverage easier to find. During the

first issues of the war section the *Chronicle* averaged 26 articles a day, while averaging 29 pictures per issue, and 7 charts/graphs/and maps. Of the three newspapers being, the *Chronicle*, examined gave the most protest coverage, as well as the most personal coverage of family issues. With the above information, it is apparent that the *Chronicle* does the most to serve their community bias (a more liberal bias for a liberal community), and the stories that are most important to the S.F. Bay Area.

VII. The New York Times Coverage “A NATION AT WAR”

The New York Times coverage was very different then the *Chronicle* or *USA Today*. *The Times* serves the most diverse community of any paper. It not only serves the largest metropolitan city in the country, but a large part of the nation as well, so *The Times*, not surprisingly would differ from the **The New York Times** other two. Like the other two, and most other papers *The Times* had a unique title given to their coverage of the war, “A Nation at War”. Unlike the other two publications, *The Times* on the first day of coverage didn’t use the same tactic of large headlines or extremely large pictures. In that first issue, on Thursday, March 20, 2003 the headline that was spread

across the front page was “U.S. BEGINS ATTACK WITH STRIKE AT BAGHDAD AFTER DEADLINE FOR HUSSEIN TO GO RUNS OUT”.¹³ The title was definitely longer and not near as large as the other two on their front pages. Under the heading was a picture of tanks ready to fight on the Kuwait border of Iraq.



Different from the other two papers *The Times* filled their front page with more articles, and only three pictures on the first page.

One picture on the front page however was very interesting to me. Interesting because of the three newspapers here, *The Times* was the only paper that showed a picture of, or talked about the leaflets that coalition planes dropped over Iraq. The leaflets intended for Iraqi troops said, “Take an offensive posture and you will be destroyed” with a picture of an exploding tank, and on the back said “Do not take an offensive posture and you will not be destroyed” with a picture of a tank in good



condition. I thought it was very interesting that of the three papers *The Times* was the only to bring attention to these leaflets.

Another item on the front page can be attested to the bias of the Times. During that first day, on the front page, *The Times* printed an

¹³ Headline taken from *The New York Times* on March 20, 2003

article titled “Move to War Leaves Californians More Alienated Than Threatened”. This article is a perfect example of a community bias. The article, which has quotes saying, “Californians were puzzled by the connection between the terror attacks of September 11 and the danger posed by Saddam Hussein, something taken for granted in other parts of the country.” Another eye opening quote was, “many Californians acknowledge they might feel differently if they were being led into battle by a Democrat. One Californian who does not have the same sentiment can only wonder why this article would portray Californians to the rest of the country as having such a left bias and anti-war sentiment on the first day of the war.”¹⁴

The first day coverage of *The Times* was more than either of the



other two papers, yet considerably less in the percentage of coverage compared to the amount of stories to the rest of

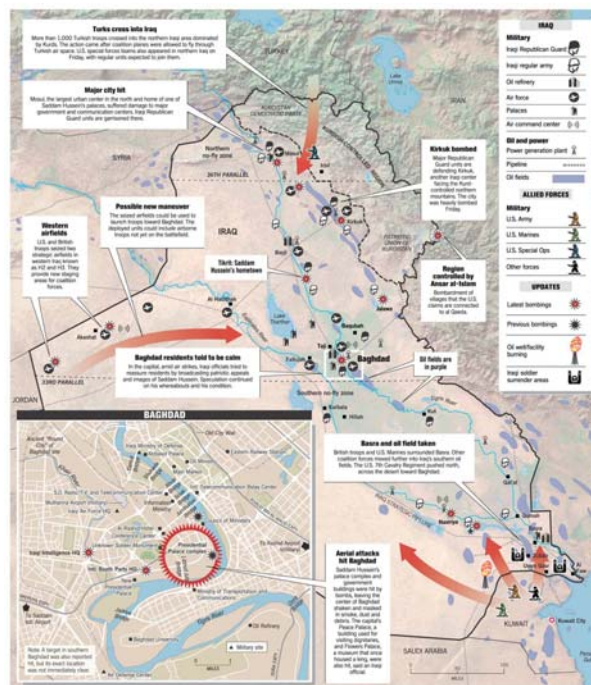
the paper. On that first day, *The Times* had 33 stories regarding the war, taking up 10 of the 32 pages in the first section. Like the *Chronicle*, *The Times* devoted a whole page to personal stories of Army personnel and their families. Yet unlike the *Chronicle*, *The Times* appeals to a more

¹⁴ Information and quote taken from article printed by *The New York Times* on March 20, 2003

diverse community, many of the stories of Army personnel were about soldiers of Middle Eastern, and Iraqi descent, especially two features on Middle Eastern females and what the war might be like for them.

Day two in *The Times* turned out to be like it was for the other papers in that the significantly increased their coverage. *The Times*, like the *Chronicle* devoted an entire section to the war. Section B was previously the Art section, but was now “A Nation at War”. *The Times* now devoted 16 pages a day in this section to anything and everything regarding the war. Unlike the *Chronicle*, which put its war section before the main

paper, *The Times* had its war section inside the paper, allotting space on the normal front page to war headlines and pictures. However, once inside, the war section each day had an enormous picture on the first page



that covered about half of the page. On Friday it was a collage of headshots from a marine unit in Iraq, on Saturday, a picture of explosions in Baghdad, and on Sunday a Marine walking through a sandstorm. One aspect that was also unique to *The Times* was a new daily map detailing the progress of the coalition forces. In the center pages of the section B8-

B9, *The Times* devoted those pages to what they called “Scenes From the Battle Front”, which were two pages of pictures from the war, many quite graphic.

A part of *The Times* coverage that was unique, included a daily story of an Iraqi family that now lives in the U.S., and how they felt about this war. From Friday through Sunday one family living in Los Angeles, and the other two living in New York, but each family had immigrated with in the last 15 years. A quote that came from one Iraqi man now living here was very insightful to the psyche of Iraqi’s. The man said, “I support Bush to kick out Saddam and his group, it is incumbent that he be brought to justice for the crimes against his people, against the Iranians, and the Kuwaitis. I just worry about my family members in



Iraq.”¹⁵ *The Times* showing the aspect of Iraqi immigrants supporting the war effort was very unique and important to show the

support needed for the war effort. In those first days, *The Times* showed more stories of support from Iraqi immigrants than stories of the mass protests from around the world, we can see by this the signs of “patriotic journalism”

¹⁵ Quote taken from Hassan Hakkak in article printed by *The New York Times* on March 20, 2003

Like the *Chronicle*, *The Times* had each page of its section labeled with a title for the page. However, unlike the *Chronicle*, the titles and the content of what the titles discussed changed daily. Overall *The Times* had the most coverage of the war amongst the three papers. Like *USA Today*, *The Times* had a bias that was not necessarily pro-war, but was definitely pro-military. They stayed away from printing too many articles that either put the effort, or the military in a bad light. But their coverage was extensive, devoting a whole section and 16 pages a day to the war. *The Times* printed an average of 32 articles a day regarding the war, 35 pictures, and 8 charts/graphs/maps a day. *The Times* is the largest paper in the U.S. that is looked to for in-depth coverage, and that was definitely apparent in its coverage of the first days of war. It devoted the largest exclusive war section, the most articles, pictures, and graphics a day to the war. While bias is definitely apparent in *The Times* coverage, the publication did the most complete job of covering the stories the war.

VIII. Conclusion

As stated previously the goal of this paper was to examine how three major newspapers covered the initial part of the war with their first four issues during the first 5 days, and how their biases shaped different

coverage. As I stated in each section the three publications amount of coverage varied.

	Pages	Articles	Pictures	Charts/Graphs/Maps
<i>USA Today</i>	12	29.5	34	3.5
<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	14	26	29	7
<i>The New York Times</i>	16	32	35	8

It is apparent to me because of this and the many forms of bias; community bias, ownership, immediacy, personal, conservative or liberal bias that *USA Today*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The New York Times* have portrayed aspects of this war quite differently.

Bias as explained has many forms, and can contribute to very different coverage of news. Each of the three papers have different biases that contribute to shape how each covered the first days of this war. *USA Today* appeals to a reader who wants quick and general information, a style that has become more prevalent in recent years. The *Chronicle* appeals to a large portion of Northern California, San Francisco, and its surrounding Bay Area, and was even cited in the *Chronicle* as being one of the most liberal cities in the nation. Notwithstanding it still has a different goal than *USA Today*, which is the goal of appealing to community, and including more in-depth and personal stories. *The Times*, like the *Chronicle* shares the goal of appealing to its community and sharing more news. Including in-depth coverage. Their community is made up of not only the largest metropolitan city in the country, but a large portion of the country as well. *The Times* printed more pages,

articles, and coverage then any of the papers, which fits in with its goal of serving such a large community who desires such in-depth coverage.

The bias of each paper can be seen in how they covered the protests. *The Times* and *USA Today* did not give much space to the protests and displayed a form of that aforementioned “patriotic journalism”. It is not surprising that the *Chronicle* gave more coverage to the protests, since that a large number of them took place in San Francisco. Like the other two, the *Chronicle* did have a tendency to place the protest stories further back in the overall coverage of the war. We can also see some East Coast and community bias in *The Times* with the story they published on the first day on how Californians felt alienated.

With so many media outlets in today’s society and the resultant explosion of information to sort through, it is easy to see why these different news publications can differ so much in how they covered the beginning of the war. While these papers didn’t print any stories that dramatically altered the scope of the war, the differences in what they did print could have skewed the perception of a reader into thinking or believing one thing is important, and one thing isn’t, and the national mood could be this way or that way. Despite being three of the largest and respected publications in print media, it is prudent to know what you’re reading and why. “Real media bias is the result of how those in the media see the world-and their bias directly affects how we all see the

world.”¹⁶ Thusly, we as American consumers need to pay close attention to the information understanding the source we use, and for conclusions and opinions based upon such understanding.

¹⁶ Quote taken from Bernard Goldberg at www.fightthebias.com

APPENDIX

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Reflection

When looking back at the process of this capstone process, the first thing that comes to mind is the word wow. Being a Human Communication major requires that we as students write several papers on various subjects for all classes. In my time at CSUMB I have written 20 plus papers, and none were as taxing and difficult as this capstone paper. I know understand why we as students must take a course and an entire semester to write a paper. I spent the majority of my time for an extended period during the semester engulfed in my research and writing. And I believe it paid off.

My concentration in HCOM is journalism, so it was my goal to analyze a topic and question that involved newspapers. Being that newspapers and media are so involved in coverage of war in this day and age, the war with Iraq gave myself a perfect subject for capstone. The coverage that the media had of this war was so much more intense than any other war, which led to the opening of different coverage. As I discussed in my paper it was very interesting to me to look at how three of the largest papers covered the first days of the war. It was interesting to analyze their war coverage, but for myself, it was interesting as journalism major to look at how these papers were run. I have worked on high school and college newspapers and had a vague idea about bias, and coverage based on my biases, but until this paper I had never really analyzed the biases. I am very glad I chose the topic that I did for many reasons. I am happy that I finally did a research/ analysis

paper of what my concentration involves, instead of merely writing articles. I am very happy I studied media bias, and how they cover news differently. I feel much more informed about “news” and its process now. And by looking at the coverage of the newspapers at the beginning of the war I was able to be more informed about what was actually happening, and not just digesting information from one source, as many citizens do.

Overall I am very pleased with the outcome of this capstone. Down the road to have a copy of this portfolio I will be able to look back at and know that it helped me become a more informed consumer of news, a more informed journalism graduate.

Capstone Prospectus

Section 1: The title of my capstone project is called Iraq Conflict (war) Stories: How Media Outlets Portray Events Differently. Throughout the history of the world there has been an abundance of wars and there has always been some form of media, from newsletters, flyers, to newspapers, radio, and television. People run all of these media outlets, and people have biases, and opinions. Therefore, depending on the media outlet an individual is focusing on they might receive a skewed portrayal of that war or event compared to other media outlets that are reporting on the very same topic.

Right now our world is facing a very serious situation. There has always been in recent year's conflict between the United States and Iraq. The situation had calmed somewhat after the end of the Gulf War, but since 9/11 and realization of the constant threat of terror, the United States led by the Bush administration is putting pressure on Saddam Hussein, the President of Iraq, to disarm his country of destructive weapons.

I as a normal person have been able to notice differences in reports and articles on the ever-escalating situation just in American reports. There is so much information that media outlets sort through and report based on this situation that it is obvious why different people form different opinions on the subject. If we bring in the scope of the entire world into this equation, the information and portrayal of that information is completely different based on where and who that info is coming from. My goal in researching this topic is to analyze news stories and reports from different US outlets and outlets from around the world (especially Iraq because they are the opposition) to see how much the information might differ and to understand why it differs.

The main questions I am asking are: are events portrayed in different ways? How are events portrayed in different ways? Why are events portrayed in different ways? I believe that the topic is very interesting to people as I hope people would want to know where their information is coming from and why is different info provided based on the outlet you are receiving this info from. This topic is not only beneficial to students but to the mass population, as I would hope they care greatly about the validity and bias of the info that is spoon-fed to them every day.

Section 2: The MLO's that I plan to use are #2 (research), #4 (Philosophical Analysis), and #1 (Critical Communication Skills). I chose these MLO's because I feel that they will help me in my research and forming this project the way I want it. Obviously I have a lot of research ahead of me so the basis I was given in learning MLO #2 will be very helpful, although the amount of research and type of research involved in this project will be much more difficult. MLO #4 will be helpful in analyzing why certain things happen and why there are biases and what the reasons for those are in delivering the information about war through the different outlets. And MLO #5 will be very useful for that fact of looking at media, which is a form of communication, and effectively communicate how newspapers and their information affect us. I am hoping that these MLO's that I have chosen have given me the proper skills to form this project on the topic of media and war, so that I may create a piece that is very insightful.

Section 3: As I mentioned in brief earlier there are many questions to be asked in this area. These questions include: Is there a difference in how different US media outlets

portray a war situation? Is there a difference in how different foreign (Iraq, and others in their respective countries) media outlets portray a war situation? What are the differences? How do these differences occur? Is it because of personal or organizational biases? What information do Arabs and other foreigners receive that Americans do not? What information do we receive that they do not? And why is there info that they or we do not receive? Does the difference in media portrayals have a serious effect on national opinions? Does the difference in media portrayals have an effect on the war itself? These are the many questions I hope to be able to analyze and answer by the completion of my project.

Section 4: At the moment most of my sources are web sites that are linked to the different media outlets across the country and the world that I wish to research. I do have two books ordered that I am interested in looking at which I will list as well. My sources include many newspapers and their websites, as the situation is ever evolving the moment. My main sources include: USA Today, The Washington Post. My secondary sources include many of the web sites with links to media all over the world: mediachannel.org, worldpress.org, onlinenewspapers.com, abyznewslink.com, uruklink.net, and world-newspapers.com. The books that I have coming are also going to be valuable sources and they are: *Common Cents: Media Portrayal of the Gulf War and Other Events*, by James Winter, and *What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias and the News*, by Eric Alterman. I am also sure that I will be adding more sources such as journals, web sites, and perhaps more books as my research continues.

Section 5: The other sources I plan to obtain during my research somewhat depends on the media outlets around the world and the stories they produce, and whether or not I think they will help my piece. Some of the web sites that I listed above such as mediachannel.org, abyznewslink.com, and the newspaper web sites have hundreds of links to almost every newspaper and news organization throughout the world. These sites are very helpful because I am able to link to media outlets and search to see their recent articles on the developing situation, daily. I am also searching for books, articles and journals through other schools and bookstores to see if there are pieces that have been written before that is similar to my topic so that I might go off what was already researched and discovered. I have only found 2 books so far through Amazon, and none from our own school that might help, but I am hoping more will turn up.

Section 6: The form that I am planning my capstone to take is obviously the form of a well-developed research paper that answers many of my questions and thoughts on this topic. What I would like to include also is examples of some of the pieces that I used for my research. For example, I would like to have a little booklet of articles that are in sections, and in each section is two or more from different media outlets that discuss the same issue but portray that issue in a different light. So when people read my paper, there are examples for them to look at to understand the validity of the paper and how this issue actually does exist.

Section 7: I know some of my problems but I also may be blinded to some of my problems as well. I have a good idea about my research on what to do through looking at

newspapers through web sites and other ways. I am worried about finding books or journals related to my topic because it's been a struggle finding them so far; I am hoping that I am able to find more books that could shed a little light on some of the questions I intend to answer. I think my topic is fairly clear but I am wondering through others perspectives if the topic or research for the topic seems too broad. I think I'm ok with where I am going with it and the research I need to do but if it needs to be narrowed I would appreciate feedback. I do also feel that I need help using the skills I learned from the MLO's and how to integrate them into the piece. I understood the class material when I took those courses, and I understand the validity of using them in my piece. But exactly how to integrate them is a little vague at this point. Other than those concerns I am very confident in my writing and researching skills, and I look forward to developing this piece further.

Section 8: Yes, I plan to archive my capstone.