



WHAT'S THE MATTER MEDIA MATTER





ER WITH ERS?

The George Soros-backed liberal attack machine continues in its efforts to bully the press into advancing the left-wing agenda. Its crazed anti-conservative smears reveal the ugly truth about the nonprofit "impartial" watchdog.

by Matthew Vadum

Liberal billionaire philanthropist George Soros raised the money necessary to launch and fund the far-left Media Matters. (AP/Chip East)



If conservatism is a disease, David Brock’s group, Media Matters for America, believes it’s the cure.

Of course, those few conservatives who actually work in the liberal-dominated media are not infallible. A bona fide media watchdog that monitored the right and kept reporters and pundits honest might contribute something of value to society, but

that’s not what Media Matters is about.

Masquerading as an impartial media watchdog, it is the mission of the left-wing opposition research organization to bully reporters into toeing the liberal line. Even the *New York Times* describes Media Matters as a “highly partisan research organization.” This raises the obvious question—why is the 501(c)(3) nonprofit tax-exempt? Radio talk-show host Mark Levin slams Media Matters regularly, calling for its tax-exempt status to be revoked because it engages in partisan activity, which is a strict no-no, according to the IRS.

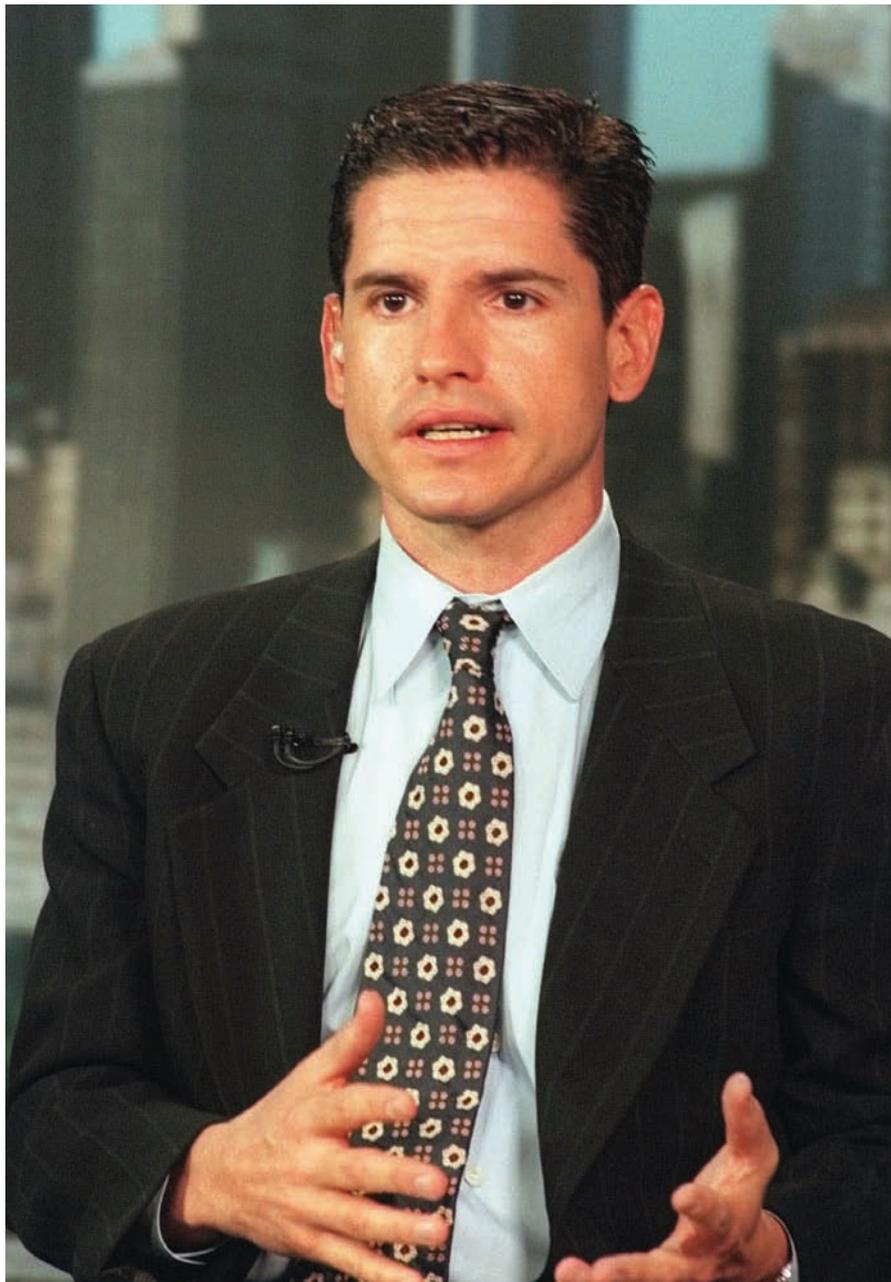
Come down on the wrong side of an issue and risk being labeled ignorant or evil by the smear Web site. Say that tax cuts lead to economic prosperity, and you’re attacked. Criticize illegal immigration, and you’re attacked. Say affirmative action is racist and discriminatory, and you’re attacked.

Republican pollster Frank Luntz gave the *New York Times* an earful about Media Matters last fall. “I think they are one of the most destructive organizations associated with American politics today,” said Luntz, who conducts voter focus groups on Fox News, one of the group’s favorite targets.

“They are vicious. They only understand one thing: attack, attack, attack,” Luntz said. “If I were a Democrat, I would tell them to shut up.”

David Folkenflik, media reporter for liberal National Public Radio, was similarly unimpressed by Media Matters. “They’re looking at every dangling participle, every dependent clause, every semicolon, every quotation to see if there’s some way it unfairly frames a cause, a party, a candidate that they may have some feelings for.”

The group’s Web site, MediaMatters.org, relies heavily on personal attacks, rather than substantive or fact-based



Liberal journalist David Brock runs the left-wing media “watchdog” Media Matters. Brock, a former conservative and admitted serial liar, is convinced that there is a right-wing bias in the national media and has a goal of ridding the media of conservative “filth.” (AP/Marty Lederhandler)

arguments. It settles scores. Large swaths of the site are dedicated to skewering specific media personalities such as Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, G. Gordon Liddy and Brock’s former friend, Laura Ingraham. What results is not even-handed analysis of what they say or write, but personal scrutiny, including minute parsing and microscopic analysis of every comment and its presumed meaning. Conservatives such as Bill O’Reilly, winner of the group’s 2004

“Misinformers of the Year” award, are attacked as though their opinions are inherently offensive and dangerous.

Today, Media Matters is one of the loudest voices in the liberal media echo chamber as it feeds hard-line left-wing media critiques to liberal blogs, sympathetic and lazy reporters, and pundits in an attempt to silence non-compliant journalists and muscle right-leaning media figures out of the public debate entirely.



Former Clinton Chief of Staff and co-chair of President Obama's transition team John Podesta, left, teamed with George Soros to help get Media Matters off the ground. (Reuters/Marty Lederhandler)

The group makes the astonishing argument that the media is, if not dominated by conservatives, unduly influenced by them.

According to the group's in-house columnist Eric Alterman, *New York Times* Executive Editor Bill Keller is a "neoconservative" and *The New Republic* magazine is a right-wing rag. Alterman is a radical journalist who wrote the 2003 book, "What Liberal Media? The Truth About Bias and the News." "The myth of the 'liberal media' empowers conservatives to control debate in the United States to the point where liberals cannot even hope for a fair shake anymore," he wrote.

Sharing Brock's delusion, Alterman's argument boils down to this: The mainstream media are biased in favor of the Right because there are more conservative pundits than liberal pundits and because major media outlets are owned by big corporations—and, as everyone knows, corporations are rabidly right-wing by nature. Viewing the world through the Marxist filters of race, sex and class, evidently Alterman cannot grasp the difference between straight reporting and opinion-based commentary. A columnist for *The Nation* magazine and "senior fellow" at both Media Matters and the Center for American Progress, Alterman writes the "Altercation" blog that appears on the Media Matters Web site.

As for Brock, he's a deeply narcissistic, scandal-plagued former conservative

journalist who renounced his beliefs in the 1990s because of imagined conservative intolerance of his homosexuality and because the pay and social scene were better on the Left. He lays out the justification for taking on America's conservatives in his book, "The Republican Noise Machine: Right-Wing Media and How It Corrupts Democracy."

In the book, published in 2004, the admitted serial liar, who throughout the 1990s relentlessly attacked Bill Clinton in the pages of the *American Spectator*, labels the "verbal brownshirts" of the Right as a threat to the Republic. This brutal propaganda machine will carry on "until its capacities to spread filth are somehow eradicated."

Brock and the Clintons have kissed and made up, and Brock recanted his sensational Arkansas "Troopergate" stories. Hillary Clinton, now secretary of State, bragged in 2007 that she helped create what she called "a lot of the new progressive infrastructure," including Media Matters. The group was created in spring 2004 in time for the presidential election campaign. It was initially funded by \$2 million in contributions that liberal philanthropist George Soros and former Clinton White House chief of staff John Podesta helped raise.

FUNDING

Media Matters has an annual budget of more than \$10 million and acknowledged in tax forms that it received just under \$17 million in grants

from 2003 through 2006. *Politico* reports that Media Matters has more than 100 full-time researchers and media monitors, but other research suggests the figure is closer to 60.

Major funders of Media Matters include the Tides Foundation (\$2,287,972), Schumann Center for Media and Democracy, whose president is PBS pundit Bill Moyers (\$500,000) and the Barbra Streisand Foundation (\$40,000). The Bohemian Foundation gave \$475,000 in 2004-5. Its president is Colorado heiress Patricia Stryker. The Glaser Progress Foundation, whose president is RealNetworks founder Rob Glaser, gave \$100,000 in 2005.

The group has received \$7 million under the auspices of the Democracy Alliance, a Soros-led consortium of wealthy liberals that matches donors to causes it believes will make a lasting contribution to the success of the so-called progressive movement. The \$7 million donation may have come from Soros himself, though Media Matters denies it. If Soros, the preeminent funder of the Left in America, is not funding Media Matters, the group certainly expends significant resources to defend him. A search on the group's Web site for "George Soros" generated 242 hits. That's a lot of defense to play for someone who remains virtually unknown except by political junkies and those interested in finance.

'CONSERVATIVE MISINFORMATION'

It is the stated mission of the ostensibly nonpartisan media watchdog to identify what it calls "conservative misinformation." It describes this mythical beast as "news or commentary that is not accurate, reliable or credible and that forwards the conservative agenda."

To Media Matters, the phrase "conservative misinformation" has nothing to do with factual accuracy but instead refers to conservative ideas themselves. Such ideas are, after all, "filth," according to Brock.

The group's approach bears a striking resemblance to that employed by race-baiting ambulance chaser Morris Dees's ultra-wealthy Southern Poverty Law Center, which, as a matter of policy, exaggerates the scope of racism in the



U.S. to frighten donors into opening their wallets. Those who question the center's approach to race are blacklisted as contemptible bigots. Conservative, libertarian, anti-tax, immigration reductionists and other groups are all seen as legitimate targets for demonization.

In the eyes of the SPLC, one practices "hate" whenever one fails to genuflect with politically correct reverence before every human difference. Translation: Do what we say or we'll slander you and have activists hound you.

Similarly, Media Matters believes if you're on the political Right, something must be wrong with you and you need to be dealt with.

Reduced to a crude syllogism, the Media Matters philosophy is: (i) Conservatism equals hate; (ii) Hate is bad and should be eradicated; (iii) Therefore, conservatism should be eradicated—using any means possible.

To Media Matters, Americans on the Right are irretrievably stupid and bigoted hayseeds too brainwashed to realize they're acting against their own interests by not jumping on the liberal bandwagon. It is the group's mission to stigmatize and marginalize conservative ideas in order to save Americans from themselves.

This crusade is carried out by way of an aggressive outreach program. The group says it works "to notify activists, journalists, pundits and the general public about instances of misinformation, providing them with the resources to rebut false claims and to take direct action against offending media institutions." Frequently, the Media Matters Web site provides the contact information of the offending media institution, thus giving activists the opportunity to harangue and harass the media figure into submission.

Conservatives are not the group's only targets. Mainstream media figures such as Katie Couric, Matt Lauer and Chris Matthews are also on the watch list. The crime they are often accused of is not always and immediately contradicting conservative assertions in the news. Brock's group keeps a lookout for instances in which the media are anything less than supportive of liberals and Democrats. It is always searching for



Leftist PBS pundit Bill Moyers is president of the Schumann Center for Media and Democracy, which has donated \$500,000 to Media Matters. (AP/Ric Francis-File)

any political offenses that a mainstream media figure may commit.

The news content analysis of Media Matters is a complete sham. Such examination of political news has traditionally focused on detecting journalistic bias. The Brock approach is to try to stamp out views with which its left-wing content analysts disagree.

It's not that hard to do if you start thinking creatively and can tolerate mind-numbing hairsplitting. Media Matters will typically isolate a small facet of a media story that can be twisted in such a way that suggests that the reporter or commentator is a liar or hypocrite. That is then used to suggest that everything he says must be false and deserving of censure.

Not surprisingly, Media Matters treats conservative thinkers as infidel purveyors of hate, and commentators such as Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, and Bill O'Reilly are routinely smeared, not because they make mistakes or are biased but precisely because they hold conservative views.

TAKING ON BECK AND LIMBAUGH

Last year, Media Matters targeted then-CNN Headline News host Glenn Beck, who has since moved to the Fox News Channel, the network whose very name sends liberals into paroxysms of rage. Beck's show irritates extreme liberals who find it difficult to

tolerate conservatives represented in a mass medium.

Working with Think Progress, the blog of the liberal Center for American Progress, Media Matters misquoted a Beck interview from March 4, 2008, and suggested Beck was deadly serious when he asked a guest whether then-Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama was the biblical Anti-Christ. In reality, Beck was attempting to dispel this notion. He began his question using a melodramatic tone of voice and waved his fingers furiously to imitate hysterical viewers who expressed an idea the host obviously believed was absurd.

That didn't matter to the humorless members of the left-wing smear machine. Neither Web site retracted the claims, nor did MSNBC's Keith Olbermann, who repeated them the same day, even after Beck's denials.

"If you could actually see the video, you could see that I'm laughing as I say it, as I ask the question," Beck told listeners on his nationally syndicated radio show later the same week. "The reason this is so unbelievably entertaining is because obviously the truth doesn't matter, but even more ... it is so very predictable."

Media Matters did something similar to talk-radio titan Rush Limbaugh in 2007. It invented a media controversy by falsely claiming Limbaugh called anti-war Iraq veterans "phony soldiers."



Limbaugh wasn't criticizing U.S. troops in Iraq. Rather, he was talking about left-wing activists who make up military credentials to give their anti-war arguments added credibility.

But Media Matters didn't care about the truth. It edited the full context of Limbaugh's remarks and e-mailed a butchered transcript to left-leaning reporters. The controversy went away after an accurate transcript was circulated.

Media Matters, working with congressional Democrats, also launched a pressure campaign to get the Defense Department to remove Limbaugh's program from a military broadcasting service for troops overseas.

After the allegations of prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq surfaced, Limbaugh made light of the claims, likening the soldiers' behavior to fraternity hazing. He said the incident was blown out of proportion by the media and that the soldiers were merely "blowing off steam."

With more money than brains, Media Matters plopped \$100,000 down to run ads against Limbaugh on major TV networks. Brock wrote to then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld demanding Limbaugh's show be purged from the American Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS), which carries U.S. programming to troops abroad. Brock claimed Limbaugh's show "divides rather than unites Americans." The talk show host "condoned torture" and the U.S. military had to be protected from his ideas, Brock wrote.

Brock also made the ridiculous claim that AFRTS had a right-wing bias. In fact, the service plays mostly music and provides a sampling of mainstream programs from the United States, including programs from National Public Radio. The Media Matters campaign, after an initial flurry of press coverage, went nowhere.

Limbaugh is still broadcasting and last year celebrated his 20th year of national syndication. His success continues to be a thorn in the Left's side. Even President Barack Obama found it necessary to denounce Limbaugh within days of being inaugurated. The partisan grandstanding of Media Matters has arguably made the conservative ratings champ even more influential.

RECENT CAMPAIGNS

Of late, the paid partisan hacks at Media Matters have concerned themselves with defending Obama's various socialist policy initiatives, including universal health care, the so-called Fairness Doctrine and the theory of manmade global warming, as well as Obama's parade of tax cheats who joined or tried to join the Obama cabinet. Sliming and smearing is what the group does.

As if on cue, during the nomination process of Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, who had failed to pay various taxes after repeatedly being advised to do so, Media Matters repeatedly attacked "The O'Reilly Factor" for having pundit Dick Morris on to discuss the political ramifications of Geithner's actions. Media Matters pointed out that Morris has his own history of tax delinquency, which was, of course, completely irrelevant to the discussion at hand.

In February, after it was revealed that the radical community activist

give air time to CNBC business news correspondent Rick Santelli, whose passionate on-air denunciation of Obamanomics days earlier made him a household name. Santelli is the former trader who on the floor of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange let loose the so-called "rant heard round the world" that threw liberals' class-warfare rhetoric back in their faces.

"The government is promoting bad behavior," Santelli said. "Do we really want to subsidize the losers' mortgages? ... This is America! How many of you people want to pay for your neighbor's mortgage? President Obama, are you listening? How about we all stop paying our mortgage?"

Anxious to blacken Santelli's name, Media Matters attacked the messenger, rehashing ancient history about Liddy's role in the Watergate scandal. Media Matters also claimed to be able to read the mind of White House press secretary Robert Gibbs. At a press briefing, Gibbs was dismissive of Santelli, saying, "I'm

"Media Matters treats conservative thinkers as infidel purveyors of hate, and commentators such as Rush Limbaugh, Glenn Beck, and Bill O'Reilly are routinely smeared, not because they make mistakes or are biased but precisely because they hold conservative views."

group ACORN would be able to get its hands on some of the money in the economic stimulus package, Howard Dean presidential campaign veteran Karl Frisch, who is now communications director at Media Matters, savaged conservatives.

The naïve writer called ACORN, the liberal shakedown artists with a creative approach to voter registration, "the Right's new boogeyman" and mused that conservatives "don't like that an organization actually exists with the sole purpose of assisting low- and moderate-income people through voter registration, community organizing, issue campaigns, ballot initiatives and direct services to communities in need."

A Feb. 23 blog post took radio host G. Gordon Liddy to task for daring to

not entirely sure where Mr. Santelli lives or in what house he lives."

Liddy said that the Gibbs comment was a "veiled threat" against Santelli and Santelli agreed. "And that's a veiled threat, you know, 'We know where you live,' and so forth," Liddy said.

Amazingly, Media Matters claimed, "Gibbs was not threatening Santelli, but rather asserting that Santelli—whose CNBC.com profile calls him a 'veteran trader and financial executive'—is out of touch with the concerns of 'the American people.'"

Whatever Gibbs meant, how would Media Matters be able to divine the Obama spokesman's true intent from his ambiguous statement? Media Matters, which routinely chastises conservative commentators for not providing evidence



when they make claims, failed to disclose how exactly it knew what Gibbs was thinking. It's all too convenient.

Media Matters' commentary, frequently written by former Democratic staffers, can also be petty, mean-spirited and deeply personal. On the group's blog, Eric Boehlert committed to text a puerile hissy fit against Matt Drudge's influential Web site, the Drudge Report. The site "has become largely irrelevant," and Drudge's personal influence on the news cycle has "cratered," he wrote in October posts.

"[A]s the White House campaign hits its final stride under the ominous shadow of the Wall Street meltdown and the deep recession that's hurtling this way," Boehlert wrote, "perhaps the only silver lining—the one unexpected pleasure—has been watching the Drudge Report be completely neutered by current events."

Media Matters remains bitter that one of TV journalism's liberal icons, Dan Rather, self-destructed in 2004 after standing behind his story about the obviously fake Texas Air National Guard service record documents that put President George W. Bush in a bad light. In October 2008, Boehlert linked to a Huffington Post story written by Rather's producer, Mary Mapes, who was fired by CBS for her handling of the fake story.

"The monster—the Republican attack machine which has dominated and damaged American politics for so long—is dying," wrote Mapes in the Huffington Post story. Boehlert couldn't restrain himself. In an Oct. 24 post, he delights in the supposed demise of right-wing bloggers' influence in the recent election cycle: "Nothing makes me happier than seeing once swaggering players like Powerline, Free Republic and Little Green Footballs forced onto the sidelines, left to limply watch this campaign pass by like a parade in which they play no meaningful part. They just don't matter anymore."

Jamison Foser, executive vice president of Media Matters, recently criticized journalists for being too critical of the so-called economic stimulus bill enacted in February. For example, on Feb. 6 he singled out MSNBC's Mika Brzezinski after she complained that buried deep within the legislation were hidden welfare programs.



Even left-wing MSNBC anchor Chris Matthews has been trashed by Media Matters for having a conservative bias and was even named the 2005 "Misinformers of the Year." (AP/Paul Drinkwater/NBC NewsWire)

Foser chastised Brzezinski for not sharing the view of leftists that welfare spending is a boon for the economy. He accused her of "demonizing 'welfare spending' without any regard for the simple truth that such spending not only helps those Americans who are struggling the most feed their families, it also does more to stimulate the economy than anything else you can think of." This would no doubt be news to economists.

MISINFORMERS OF THE YEAR

In the Media Matters parallel universe, MSNBC's Chris Matthews, who was a speechwriter in the Carter White House and an aide to the late House Speaker Tip O'Neill, is a right-winger.

Matthews, who recently flirted with the idea of running for the U.S. Senate as a Democrat in Pennsylvania, received the Media Matters 2005 "Misinformers of the Year" award. He has been unsparing in his criticism of the prosecution of the Iraq War and anyone who regularly watches "Hardball" knows he is a fervent liberal who came close to endorsing John Kerry for president in 2004.

Yet he received a hearty thumbs-down from Media Matters, succeeding Bill O'Reilly as "Misinformers of the Year." His crime? Every once in a while he said something nice about President George W. Bush. "Sometimes it glimmers with this man ... that kind of sunny nobility," Matthews said of the 43rd president. "Everybody sort of likes the president,

except for the real whack-jobs, maybe on the Left—I mean, likes him personally."

Matthews said one Bush speech was "brilliant" and has, infrequently at best, criticized Democrats, including Hillary Clinton.

The ABC television network won the 2006 "Misinformers" award after ABC News political director Mark Halperin appeared on the Fox News Channel shows "Hannity & Colmes" and "The O'Reilly Factor." Halperin committed the sin of acknowledging that "old media" such as TV network news and newspapers were "biased against conservatives; there's no doubt about it ... I think we've got a chance in these last two weeks [before the then-upcoming 2006 midterm elections] to prove to conservatives that we understand their grievances. We're going to try to do better."

To Brock's way of thinking, that constitutes an unpardonable admission of bias. An admission of past news media bias against conservatives somehow becomes evidence of current media bias against liberals.

In the world of Media Matters, that makes perfect sense. •

Matthew Vadum is a senior editor at Capital Research Center, a Washington, D.C., think tank that studies the politics of philanthropy.