

## Is Media Reported Cruelty Realistic?

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Human kindness has never weakened the stamina or softened the fiber of a free people. A nation does not have to be cruel to be tough. - Franklin D. Roosevelt, 32nd US President (1882-1945) Not only do some nations seem to believe that they must be cruel to be tough, many individuals have adopted this belief as if it will either assure them of success in business or at least protect them from those who want to take away their power. The United States military is tough. Many American citizens have joined with millions of people elsewhere in the world to make everyone aware of the atrocities at Abu Graib prison, the murder of innocent Iraqis, the slaughter of several troops of their allies (four Canadians at one shot) in incidents of friendly fire and more events that suggest the US military is cruel. By association, people come to believe that the United States must be a cruel country. This is not true. Seldom are the many good deeds that the US military does in Iraq or Afghanistan daily reported in mainstream media. They aren't as interesting as people dying. The humanitarian and rebuilding efforts, the assistance with setting up government systems and training security forces so that the people of these countries can tend to their own problems go almost unnoticed. To people who have come to believe that oppression and restrictions are how life should be, teaching them the concept of freedom is a big job. Afghanistan, still the largest producer of opium poppies in the world, all of it under the control of rogue warlords, receives a constant supply of aid from the US to convert its agriculture base to something the rest of the world will respect and appreciate. If the small poppy farmer sees little help from the US, it's because the US can't put its experts in the field on a one-to-one basis to help everyone. They need to trust someone and sometimes they trust the wrong people. In Iraq, the US challenge is not to subdue the Sunnis or the Shi'ites, but to keep the two factions from trying to annihilate each other in their struggle for dominance. The "Iraq War" is a US led mission to prevent the entire Middle East from turning into a bloodbath as the two flavours of Islam defy the most fundamental rules of the Prophet Muhammed by killing other Muslims, including unarmed and non-aggressive women and children. US troops who could face death from a sniper or suicide bomber at any moment of any day receive full press coverage when one of them goes berserk from fear or stress overload and kills someone who wasn't a threat after all. The offence is reported, the stress seldom receives any attention. The patina of cruelty by the US in Iraq or Afghanistan consists of nothing more than Hollywood style trash reporting by the media with little or no attention given to balance or depth. Television, especially the reality shows, are trending toward cruelty among individuals in their attempts to outdo each other in the ratings, which are all about advertising dollars. Does the world really want to know which contestant on The Apprentice will be hired by the Trump Empire, or does the audience want to see what creative ways The Donald can devise each show to lead up to "You're fired!"? Soap opera style incidents enlivened the competition on programs such as Survivor in the easy series, but dirty tricks get the attention today. Someone has to suffer if the show is to retain its popularity. People eagerly watch on television behaviour they would be ashamed to have happen in their own families. That's not real life. In real life, Americans are helping Americans every day. And they contribute to charities and NGOs that help people around the world, every day. These events seldom make the news. During and after the Katrina disaster, did we hear about the good work that was done by thousands of volunteers from many parts of the country and from other countries daily or did we hear about those who suffered because someone didn't get to them soon enough? The media have a right to choose what they print and broadcast. We have no right to interfere unless they break a law. However, we have the right to boycott the advertisers who pay for programs that twist the truth until it sounds like lies. And we have the right to turn our favours to programs and publications that produce more balanced reporting. We don't need to be concerned about people who know the difference between propaganda and truth, between slanted reporting and balance. We need to be concerned about people who can't tell the difference. That includes young people who are just beginning to take an interest in world affairs but have not been taught to recognize propaganda and editorials masquerading as news. They are vulnerable. They are potential victims, our sons and daughters. We need to teach those who don't know so that they don't reproduce more people who don't know. Bill Allin 'Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems,' striving to put it all into perspective. Learn more at <http://billallin.com>

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