

cultural studies,

identity and politics

between the modern

and the postmodern

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Reading the Gulf War

Production/text/reception

In previous chapters, I indicated some of the ways cultural studies could analyze how cultural texts transcoded political and ideological discourses on both the macro level of major political events and struggles and the micro level of everyday life. I suggested how cultural studies could also use its readings of cultural texts to illuminate the socio-political events and realities of the era and how analysis of the competing political discourses and struggles could be used as a framework to analyze cultural texts. In this chapter, I will indicate how the methods of cultural studies can be used to analyze and critique political events like the “Gulf War” and will also be concerned with expanding my conception of a multiperspectival cultural studies.

In a sense, the 1990s war against Iraq was a cultural-political event as much as a military one.¹ In retrospect, the Bush Administration and the Pentagon carried out one of the most successful public relations campaigns in the history of modern politics in its use of the media to mobilize support for the war. The mainstream media in the United States and elsewhere tended to be a compliant vehicle for the government strategy to manipulate the public, thereby imperiling democracy which requires informed citizens, checks and balances against excessive government power, and a free and vigorous critical media (see Kellner 1990a, 1992b).

And so cultural studies faces the challenge of explaining *how* the successful manipulation of the media and public took place during the “crisis in the Gulf and the war against Iraq. A politically active cultural studies should intervene in the key social and political debates of the day and attempt to illuminate major political events and crises, as well as the popular texts of media culture and audience reception and practices. As we shall see, cultural studies is particularly well suited to undertake such tasks and practitioners who wish cultural studies to be political and to connect with the key political events of the era should not shirk such responsibilities. It is also the duty of good citizens to learn techniques of media manipulation and to see through government and commercial propaganda and disinformation, since democracy can only flourish if there are informed and active citizens.

In this chapter, I will thus apply the methods of cultural studies to the text and effects of the “Gulf War” (itself a media construct, as we shall see). I will also

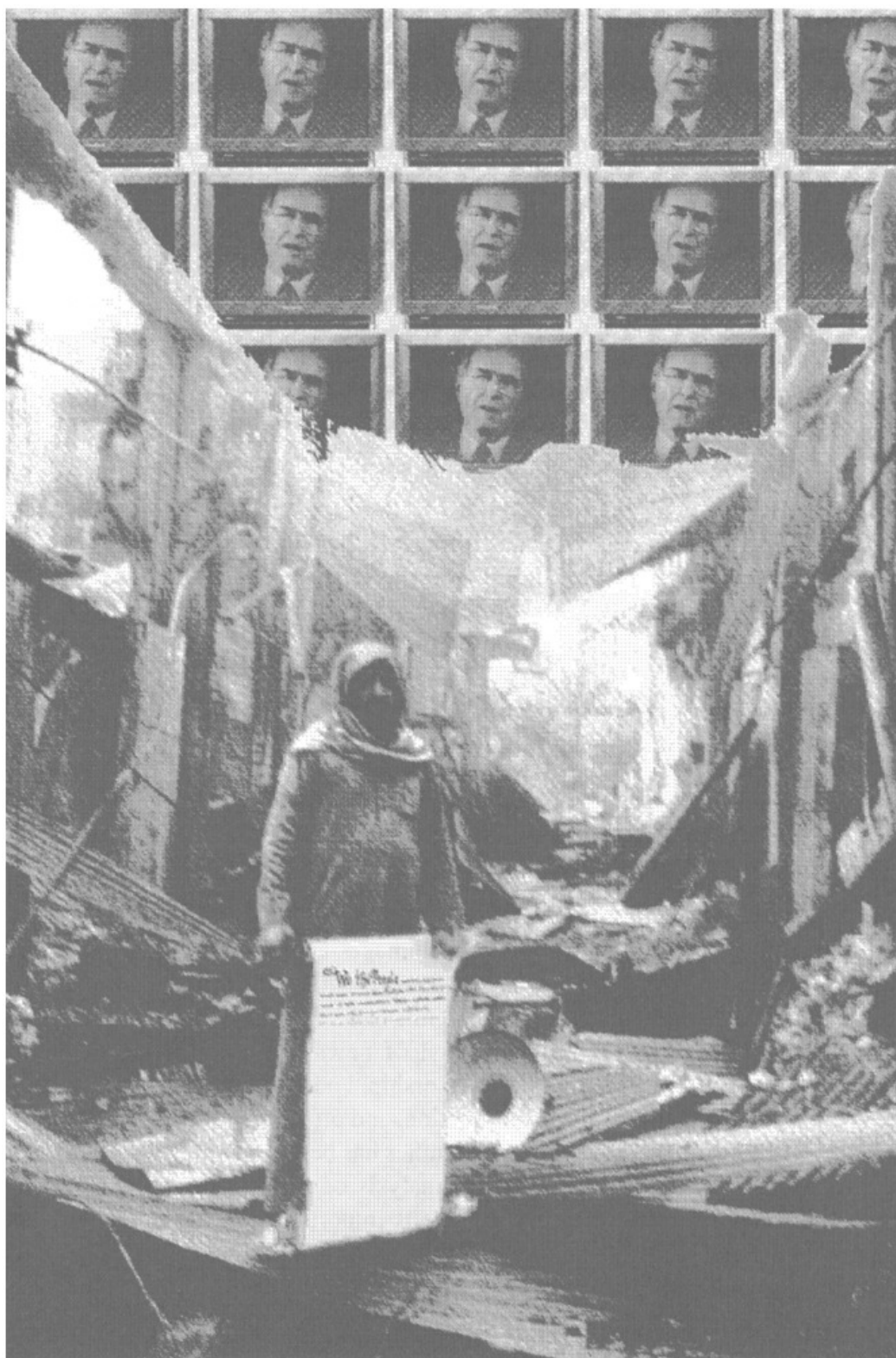
illustrate my model of a multiperspectival cultural studies, which combines 1) analysis of the production and political economy of texts with 2) textual analysis and interpretation, and 3) analysis of audience reception and use of media culture. I argued in Chapter 1 that, on the whole, recent work in cultural studies has tended to ignore political economy and the production of culture and has been overly textualist, or has focused narrowly and one-sidedly on ethnographic study of audience reception of texts. Thus, cultural studies has tended to focus critical attention on the analysis of media and consumer culture and its reception at the expense of context and analysis of how media culture is produced. I will accordingly demonstrate the need to focus on the production, reception, and effects of the texts of media culture in order to explain the role of the media in events like the war against Iraq.

This multiperspectival approach is necessary to overcome more limited approaches that primarily focus on text and audience. Accordingly, I first discuss the production of the text of the “crisis in the Gulf” and then “the Gulf War.” This will involve analysis of disinformation and propaganda campaigns by the Bush Administration, the Pentagon, and their allies, as well as analysis of the constraints produced by the so-called pool system. I also indicate how the political economy of the media in the United States facilitated the manufacturing of consent for U.S. government policies. Then I analyze the meanings embedded in the text of the war against Iraq and the reception of the text by the audience. The latter process will involve some speculation on why the Gulf War was popular with its audiences and how the Bush Administration and the Pentagon mobilized public support for the war. My example indicates how I envisage cultural studies as a political project concerned with the key issues of the day.

DISINFORMATION AND THE PRODUCTION OF NEWS

The war against Iraq can be read as a text produced by the Bush Administration, the Pentagon, and the media which utilized images and discourse of the crisis and then the war to mobilize consent and support for the U.S. military intervention. Unpacking the text of the “crisis in the Gulf” and then the “Gulf War” requires analysis of the process of the production of news and information, including analysis of sources, gatekeeping and censorship, codes and practices of “normal” journalism, the sociology of news production, and processes of disinformation and propaganda. This dimension of cultural studies has been downplayed and I believe that this is highly unfortunate because analysis of the production of news and information, as well as entertainment, sheds important light on the origins and context of the emergence of cultural texts which contributes to understanding their meaning and effects.

Analysis of the text of the “crisis in the Gulf” indicates that from the beginning the mainstream news institutions followed the lines of the Bush Administration and Pentagon.² Mainstream media in the U.S. are commercial media, subject to intense competition for audiences and profits. Consequently, mainstream television,



newspapers, and news magazines do not want to alienate consumers, and thus are extremely cautious in going against public opinion and the official government line. The mainstream media also favor official government sources for their stories, especially in times of crisis. Thus, they tend to be conduits for U.S. government policies and actions, though there are significant exceptions (see Kellner 1990a).

In response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in early August 1990, the U.S. government began immediately, first, to build consensus for the U.S. military intervention and, then, to promote a military solution to the crisis, and the mainstream media were compliant accomplices. When the Bush Administration sent a massive troop deployment to the region, the mainstream media applauded these actions and became a conduit for mobilizing support for U.S. policy. For weeks, few dissenting voices were heard in the mainstream media and, especially, TV reports, commentary, and discussion strongly privileged a military solution to the crisis, serving as a propaganda vehicle for the U.S. military and national security apparatus which was facing severe budget cutbacks on the very eve of the invasion. No significant TV debate took place over the dangerous consequences of the massive U.S. military response to the Iraqi invasion, or over the interests and policies which the military intervention served. Critics of U.S. policy were largely absent from the mainstream media coverage of the crisis, and little analysis was presented which departed from issues presented by the Bush Administration.

Big lies and disinformation

The Bush Administration controlled the media discourse in part through disinformation and propaganda, and in part by means of control of the press via the pool system. In the early days of “the crisis in the Gulf,” for instance, the Bush Administration carried through a highly successful disinformation campaign by means of their control and manipulation of sources which legitimated the U.S. military deployment in Saudi Arabia on August 8, 1990. During the first days of the crisis, the U.S. government constantly claimed that the Iraqis were mobilizing troops on the border of Saudi Arabia, poised to invade the oil-rich kingdom. This was sheer disinformation and later studies revealed that Iraq had no intention of invading Saudi Arabia and did not have large numbers of troops on the Saudi border in a threatening posture (see the discussion below and Kellner 1992b for documentation of this claim).

The disinformation campaign that legitimated the U.S. sending troops to Saudi Arabia began working through the *Washington Post* on August 7, 1990, the same day Bush announced that he was sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. In a front page story by Patrick Tyler, the *Post* claimed that in a previous day’s meeting between the U.S. *chargé d’affaires*, Joseph Wilson, and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, Hussein was highly belligerent, claiming that Kuwait was part of Iraq, that no negotiation was possible, that he would invade Saudi Arabia if they cut off the oil pipes which delivered Iraqi oil across Saudi territory to the Gulf, and that American blood would flow in the sand if the U.S. sent troops to the region.

A later transcript of the Wilson-Hussein meeting revealed, however, that Hussein was cordial, indicated a willingness to negotiate, insisted that he had no intention of invading Saudi Arabia, and opened the doors for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. The *Post* story, however, was taken up by the television networks, wire services, and press, producing an image that there was no possibility of a diplomatic solution and that decisive action was needed to protect Saudi Arabia from the aggressive Iraqis. Such a storyline legitimated the sending of U.S. troops to the Gulf and provided a perfect justification for Bush's intervention in the region.

Editorial columns in the *Washington Post* the same day supported the imminent Bush Administration deployment. Mary McGrory published a column titled "The Beast of Baghdad," which also assumed that Iraq was set to invade Saudi Arabia and which called upon Bush to bomb Baghdad! Precisely the same line appeared in an op-ed piece by the *Post*'s associate editor and chief foreign correspondent Jim Hoagland who kicked in with a column: "Force Hussein to Withdraw" (p. A19). As certain as McGrory of Iraq's imminent invasion of Saudi Arabia, Hoagland opened by proclaiming that:

Saddam Hussein has gone to war to gain control of the oil fields of Kuwait and ultimately of Saudi Arabia. The United States must now use convincing military force against the Iraqi dictator to save the oil fields and to preserve American influence in the Middle East.

(*Washington Post* August 7, 1990)

According to Hoagland, Saddam Hussein "respects only force and will respond to nothing else."

The rest of the article consisted of false analysis, questionable analogies, and bellicose banality. Hoagland claimed that the "Iraqi dictator's base of support is too narrow and too shaky to withstand a sharp, telling blow." Yet some six weeks of the most vicious bombing in history were unable to dislodge Hussein whose support, or staying power, was obviously much stronger than Hoagland could imagine. Hoagland also believed that "he [Hussein] is so hated at home that his defeat, even by foreign forces, will be greeted as deliverance by his own nation and by much of the Arab world." As it turned out, both Iraq and the Arab world were deeply divided over Hussein and the sweeping generalities that Hoagland proclaimed were totally off the mark.

Hoagland also claimed that Ronald Reagan's decision to bomb Libya was the right model for Bush to follow. This example was revealing because Muammar Qadhafi preceded Saddam Hussein as a symbolically constructed enemy upon which national hatred could be projected, and thus served as an object lesson for Third-World countries that refused to submit to domination by the neo-imperialist superpowers.³ Moreover, it is far from certain that the terrorist incident for which Qadhafi was "punished" (i.e., the bombing of a Berlin disco) was carried out by groups affiliated with Libya. But facts have little relevance in an ideologue's brief for bombing.

In his opinion piece, Hoagland lectured George Bush on why he must take

urgent and forceful action to save his presidency and, like McGrory, urged military action against Iraq. Hoagland assumed both that Iraq planned to invade Saudi Arabia and that only a military blow from George Bush could save the day. In fact, there were important Arab diplomatic initiatives underway, blocked by the United States, but these efforts were ignored by the war-mongering Hoagland.⁴ Letting his reactionary beliefs slip through, Hoagland interpreted Iraq's invasion of Kuwait as a challenge to "the legitimacy of all remaining monarchies in the Arabian Peninsula, where Britain established most existing boundaries and political systems in the colonial era." Hoagland thus defined the principles at stake as the legitimacy of some of the most reactionary monarchies in the world, with borders drawn by British colonialists who deliberately deprived Iraq of a viable seaport and robbed national groups like the Palestinians and the Kurds of their homelands.

Indeed, Hoagland's whole article manifests what Edward Said (1978) described as an "Orientalist" mentality in which white Westerners establish their superiority by vacuous generalizations about people in the Arab world. Hoagland characterized Arabs as understanding only force and incapable of defending themselves and solving their own problems. For him, the Gulf crisis is thus the locus of "a rare case where the United States would be unwise not to use force." Analyzing such intellectually bankrupt pleas for a military strike against Iraq would not be worth the time and energy except that Bush Administration officials paid close attention to Hoagland's columns. Further, his poorly written, badly argued, and banal punditry was highly acclaimed in political circles; indeed, he was awarded a Pulitzer prize "for searching and prescient columns on events leading up to the Gulf War." In addition, his and McGrory's columns are significant because they were published in the *Washington Post*, supposedly a bastion of liberal enlightenment, and read by U.S. policymakers. Further, McGrory's demonization of Hussein was retooled and republished in *Newsweek* (Sept. 3, 1990), part of the Washington Post Company.

Thus, the Bush Administration and *Washington Post* disinformation and propaganda concerning the Iraqis' readiness to invade Saudi Arabia worked effectively to shape media discourse and public perception of the crisis and to legitimate Bush's sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. In particular, Patrick Tyler's front-page story concerning Hussein's meeting with Joe Wilson and Iraq's alleged refusal to negotiate a solution or leave Kuwait provided the crucial media frame through which debate over the advisability of sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia was conducted.⁵ On August 7, PBS McNeil-Lehrer discussion of the proper U.S. response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, co-anchor Judy Woodruff stated: "Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein was quoted today [in the *Post* story—D.K.] as saying the invasion of Kuwait was irreversible and permanent." Later on the same show, former national security adviser (and Iran/Contra felon) Robert McFarlane quoted the story as evidence that Hussein was not going to leave Kuwait, and that therefore U.S. military intervention in Saudi Arabia was necessary. And in a discussion with Arab-American leaders as to whether a U.S. military intervention was justified, Woodruff interjected: "the U.S. *chargé* in Baghdad did have a two-hour meeting with Saddam Hussein yesterday which by all accounts was very unsatisfactory as

Saddam Hussein insisted that he was going to stay in Kuwait and made what were reported to be veiled threats against other nations in the area”—all lies that Bush Administration officials fed to the *Post*, which were then disseminated by other mainstream media.

In his early morning television speech on August 8, which announced and defended sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia, Bush claimed that “the Saudi government requested our help, and I responded to that request by ordering U.S. air and ground forces to deploy to the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.” However, accounts of the Saudi-U.S. negotiations later indicated that the United States pressured the Saudis to allow U.S. military intervention into their country (Woodward 1991:241ff. and Salinger and Laurent 1991:110ff.). Bush repeated the dubious claim that “Iraq has massed an enormous war machine on the Saudi border,” and his administration emphasized this theme in discussion with the media, which obediently reproduced the argument. At 9:24 a.m. on August 8, for instance, Bob Zelnick, ABC’s Pentagon correspondent, dutifully reported that the Pentagon informed him that Iraqi troop presence had doubled since the invasion of Kuwait, that there were now more than 200,000 Iraqi troops in Kuwait with a large force poised to invade Saudi Arabia.

Yet it is not at all certain how many troops Iraq actually deployed in Kuwait during the first weeks of the crisis. All pre-invasion reports produced by the Bush Administration indicated that Iraq had amassed about 100,000 troops on the border of Kuwait. Initial reports during the first few days after the invasion suggested that Iraq actually had between 80,000 and 100,000 troops in Kuwait, more than enough for an occupation, as the Bush Administration liked to point out and as the mainstream media diligently reported; once the U.S. forces were on their way to Saudi Arabia, the Iraqi forces suddenly doubled and reports claimed that there were at least 100,000 Iraqi troops amassed on the border of Saudi Arabia. But these figures invariably came from Bush Administration or Pentagon sources, and sources critical of the U.S. claims concerning the number of Iraqi troops deployed revealed a quite different figure.

St. Petersburg Times reporter Jean Heller published two stories (November 30 and January 6) suggesting that satellite photos indicated far fewer Iraqi troops in Saudi Arabia than the Bush Administration claimed (the January 6 story was republished in *In These Times*, February 27, 1991:1–2). Heller’s suspicions were roused when she saw a *Newsweek* “Periscope” item that ABC’s “Prime Time Live” had never used several satellite photos of occupied Kuwait City and southern Kuwait taken in early September. Purchased by ABC from the Soviet commercial satellite agency Soyuz-Karta, the photos were expected to reveal the presence of a massive Iraqi troop deployment in Kuwait, but failed to disclose anything near the number of troops claimed by the Bush Administration. ABC declined to use them and Heller got her newspaper to purchase the satellite photos of Kuwait from August 8 and September 13 and of Saudi Arabia from September 11. Two satellite experts who had formerly worked for the U.S. government failed to find evidence of the alleged buildup. “The Pentagon kept saying the bad guys were there, but we don’t see anything to indicate an Iraqi force in Kuwait of even 20 percent the size the

administration claimed,' said Peter Zimmerman, who served with the U.S. Arms Control and Disarmament Agency during the Reagan administration" (Heller, *In These Times*, February 27, 1991:2).

Both satellite photos taken on August 8 and September 13 showed a sand cover on the roads, suggesting that there were few Iraqi troops on the Saudi border where the Bush Administration claimed that they were massed, threatening to invade Saudi Arabia. Pictures of the main Kuwaiti airport showed no Iraqi planes in sight, though large numbers of U.S. planes were visible in Saudi Arabia. The Pentagon refused to comment on the satellite photos, but to suggestions advanced by ABC (which decided not to show the photos) that the pictures were not of high enough quality to detect the Iraqi troops, Heller responded that the photograph of the north of Saudi Arabia showed all the roads swept clean of sand and clearly depicted the U.S. troop build-up in the area. By September, the Pentagon was claiming that there were 265,000 Iraqi troops and 2,200 tanks, deployed in Kuwait, which posed a threat to Saudi Arabia. But the photographs reveal nowhere near this number and, so far, the U.S. government has refused to release its satellite photographs.

Indeed, Woodward (1991) noted that the Saudis had sent scouts across the border into Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion to see if they could detect the Iraqi troops that the United States claimed were massed for a possible invasion of their country. "The scouts had come back reporting nothing. There was no trace of the Iraqi troops heading toward the kingdom" (Woodward 1991:258–9). Soon after, the U.S. team arrived with photos of the Iraqi troops allegedly massed on the Saudi border, and General Norman Schwarzkopf explained to the Saudis that the Iraqis had sent small command-and-control units ahead of the mass of troops, which would explain why the Saudi scouts failed to see them (*ibid.*, 1991:268). Former CIA officer Ralph McGehee told journalist Joel Bleifuss: "There has been no hesitation in the past to use doctored satellite photographs to support the policy position that the U.S. wants supported" (*In These Times*, September 19, 1990:5). Indeed, Emery (1991) reported that King Hussein of Jordan was also sent pictures of tanks moving along roads near the Saudi-Kuwaiti border which had been shown to the Saudis, and that King Hussein claimed that the Saudis had "pressed the panic button" when they saw the photographs. King Hussein was skeptical and "argued that if Saddam Hussein had wanted to invade the Saudis, he would have moved immediately, when the only thing between him and the Saudi capital was a tiny and untested—if expensively equipped—Saudi army" (Emery 1991:15).

Here is how the disinformation campaign worked to legitimate U.S. deployment of troops in Saudi Arabia: high Bush Administration officials called in journalists who would serve as conduits for stories that Iraq refused to negotiate a withdrawal from Kuwait and that they had troops stationed on the borders of Saudi Arabia, threatening to invade the oil-rich kingdom. The Pentagon and the Bush Administration also released information at press conferences concerning the Iraqi threat to Saudi Arabia and unwillingness to negotiate, and these "official" pronouncements supplemented the unofficial briefings of reporters. In turn, editorial writers and commentators on TV networks took up these claims, which they used

to bolster arguments concerning why it was necessary for the U.S. to send troops to Saudi Arabia.

Hence, disinformation stories were planted and then reproduced and circulated, producing the effect desired. Indeed, as noted, there are reasons to believe that the Bush Administration may have exaggerated the number of Iraqi troops in Kuwait and the threat to Saudi Arabia to scare the Saudis into accepting the U.S. troops and to justify its own troop build-up in the region and eventual military action. The mainstream media reproduced the U.S. claims and figures as facts with newspapers like the *Washington Post* and the television networks serving as conduits for Bush Administration disinformation. Moreover, *Post* editorial writers and columnists actively promoted a military solution, urging an attack on Baghdad even before Bush announced that he was sending troops to Saudi Arabia, thus becoming doubly complicit in legitimating Bush's policies.

Moreover, the major newspapers, news magazines, and television networks did not criticize Bush's deployment or debate whether it was wise to send so many U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia in the first place. Peace activists and the alternative press argued against the deployment and for a U.N. peace-keeping force to be sent to the area, rather than a massive U.S. military force, but this position got no hearing in the mainstream media (FAIR, Press Release, January 1991). Furthermore, the leaders of the Democratic party also failed to criticize the U.S. military deployment and the press tended to neglect those congressional and other voices that opposed the deployment, especially during its first weeks. Indeed, there were many oppositional voices to the Bush Administration's policies that were simply excluded from the mainstream media, thus precluding serious debate over the proper U.S. response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. But the mainstream media only draw on an extremely limited repertoire of voices and privilege the same administration officials and top Democratic party leaders, thus freezing significant views out of public policy debates and contributing to the crisis of democracy which is now a central aspect of political life in the United States (Kellner 1990a).

The Hill and Knowlton propaganda campaign

And so we see that a successful disinformation campaign was undertaken by the Bush Administration and the Pentagon in order to legitimate sending U.S. troops to Saudi Arabia. Beginning in early October, a sustained propaganda campaign was underway that legitimated the U.S. use of military power to force Iraq out of Kuwait. This campaign involved demonization of the Iraqis for their "rape of Kuwait" and the demonization of Saddam Hussein as "another Hitler" and the incarnation of evil.⁶ This campaign was inspired by a British campaign during World War I, repeated by the U.S. when it entered the war, on the "rape of Belgium" which demonized the Germans as rapists and murderers of innocent children—charges later proven to be false.

The demonization of Hussein and the Iraqis was important because if they were absolutely evil and a threat on a par with Hitler and the Nazis, no negotiation could

the possibility of a war in the region that could take many U.S. lives. Perhaps, despite the lack of critical discourse on the media, many individuals could still think for themselves and produce antiwar opinions against the grain of the dominant promilitary solution government and media discourse. Perhaps the memory of Vietnam and U.S. military misadventures produced apprehensions over a war in the Persian Gulf. But the disinformation and propaganda campaigns were successful in that they persuaded the majority of nations in the U.N. and the U.S. Congress to support a declaration legitimating the use of force to expell Iraq from Kuwait. And once the war began, the Bush Administration was quickly able to mobilize support for its positions. How was this possible and how can cultural studies contribute to explaining the public support for a nasty and vicious military adventure?

THE MEDIA PROPAGANDA WAR

When the U.S. began military action against Iraq on January 16, 1991, the mainstream media became a conduit for Bush Administration and Pentagon policies and rarely allowed criticism of its positions, disinformation, and atrocities during the war. Television served primarily as a propaganda apparatus for the multinational forces arrayed against the Iraqis and as a cheerleader for their every victory. Anchors like Dan Rather of CBS and Tom Brokaw of NBC went to Saudi Arabia and, along with the network correspondents there, seemed to totally identify with the military point of view. Whenever peace proposals were floated by the Iraqis or the Soviet Union, the networks quickly shot them down and presented the Bush Administration and Pentagon positions on every aspect of the war (for systematic analysis and critique, see Kellner 1992b).

The media framed the war as an exciting narrative, as a nightly miniseries with dramatic conflict, action and adventure, danger to allied troops and civilians, evil perpetuated by villainous Iraqis, and heroics performed by American military planners, technology, and troops. Both CBS and ABC used the logo "Showdown in the Gulf" during the opening hours of the war, and CBS continued to utilize the logo throughout the war, coding the event as a battle between good and evil. Indeed, the Gulf War was presented as a war movie with beginning, middle, and end. The dramatic bombing of Baghdad during the opening night and exciting Scud wars of the next days enthralled a large TV audience and the following weeks provided plenty of excitement, ups and downs, surprises, and complex plot devices. The threats of chemical weapons, terrorism, and a bloody Iraqi ground offensive seemed to produce great fear in the TV audiences and helped to mobilize support against the villainous Iraqis (see discussion below for documentation). The ground war in particular produced a surge of dramatic action and a quick resolution and happy ending to the war (at least for those rooting for the U.S.-led coalition).

Television also presented the war visually with dramatic techno-images, playing repeatedly the videos of high-tech precision bombing and the aerial war over Baghdad and the Patriot/Scud wars over Saudi Arabia and Israel. The effects of the war on American families was a constant theme, and patriotism and support for

the troops was a constant refrain of the commentators. The military released videotapes of high-tech precision bombing which were replayed repeatedly, similar to replays of heroics in a sports event. Indeed, sports metaphors were constantly used and the pro-war demonstrators who chanted "USA! USA!" rooted for the American side as sports fans, as if the Gulf War were the Super Bowl of wars. The military and media kept daily tally of the score of Iraqi tanks and equipment eliminated, though the sanitized war coverage contained no "body count"; figures and images of wounded or dead soldiers were strictly forbidden. The "winnability" and justification for the war were stressed and the narrative was oriented toward a successful conclusion which was presented as a stunning victory.

It was obviously in the TV networks' interests to attract the audience to their programming and competition revolved around presenting the most patriotic, exciting, and comprehensive coverage. To properly explicate this dimension of the text of the Gulf War, one needs to focus on the production of the text within the framework of the political economy of commercial television. First, the sources of the news on the mainstream media were severely limited to the Bush Administration and the military. This was partly the result of the pool system that restricted media access to the theater of battle and that exercised censorship over every image and report filed. Yet the networks themselves also restricted the range of voices that appeared. A survey by FAIR of the TV coverage of the first two weeks of the war revealed that of the 878 news sources used by the three major commercial networks, only 1.5 percent were identified as antiwar protestors—roughly equivalent to the amount of people asked to comment on how the Gulf War disrupted their travel plans. In the forty-two nightly news broadcasts, only one leader of a peace organization was interviewed, while seven Super Bowl players were asked their views of the war (cited in Joel Bleifuss, *In These Times*, March 20, 1991:5).

On the other hand, in report after report, television portrayed prowar rallies, yellow ribbons, and the wave of patriotism apparently sweeping the country. The networks also personalized the U.S. troops and their families, thus bonding the public to the troops in the desert, helping manufacture support for the U.S. military policies. In these ways, the audience was mobilized to support every move of the Bush Administration and the Pentagon and as the war went well and relatively fast, the country was swept along in a victory euphoria, as if it was winning the Super Bowl of wars and was thus number one in the world. Such imagery and discourse helped create support for a war that barely 50 percent of the public and Congress desired on the eve of Bush's bombing of Baghdad.

Furthermore, the audience was terrorized into support for the U.S. troops by a series of propaganda campaigns, masterfully orchestrated by the Bush Administration and the Pentagon. Early in the crisis, reports were leaked that Iraqi chemical weapons were being brought to the field of battle, and throughout the war there were many reports of the threat of Iraqi chemical weapons. In addition, there were almost daily reports on the threats of terrorism manipulated by the Iraqis. When the Iraqis paraded U.S. POWs on TV, there were claims that they were torturing coalition troops. Such reports created a mass hysteria in sectors of

the audience, who were positively bonding with the troops. Moreover, after the Iraqi Scud attacks on Israel and Saudi Arabia, there were reports of thousands of people buying gas masks and vignettes of families producing sealed rooms in their home in the case of chemical attack. Obviously, such hysteria helped mobilize people against the Iraqis and desire their military defeat and punishment.

Analyzing the war discourse from the perspective of the production and effects of the media representation of the war, television and the mainstream media arguably served as propaganda arms for U.S. government policy. The media endlessly repeated Bush Administration “big lies,” such as its alleged efforts to negotiate a settlement with the Iraqis when it was actively undermining the possibility of a diplomatic settlement. The mainstream media repeated that the goal of the U.S. war policy was the liberation of Kuwait until the very end when it was obvious that the destruction of the Iraqi military and Iraq’s economic and military infrastructure was the goal. And the media repeated every propaganda line of the day, amplifying Bush Administration claims concerning alleged torture and mistreatment of U.S. POWs (later revealed to be highly exaggerated), that an Iraqi infant formula milk factory destroyed by U.S. bombing was really a military installation producing chemical/biological weapons, that a civilian sleeping shelter was really a military command and control center, or that Iraqi “environmental terrorism” was responsible for the Persian Gulf oil spill and other ecological devastation (whereas allied bombing was also responsible; see the documentation of all these claims in Kellner 1992b).

The mainstream media projected the image of the war most desired by the Pentagon and the Bush Administration; i.e. that it was fighting an eminently clean and successful high-tech war. From the beginning, the bombing of Iraq was portrayed as efficient and humane, targeting only military facilities. Over and over, despite pictures from Iraq which revealed the contrary, the Pentagon and Bush Administration stressed the accuracy of their bombing strategies and the oft-repeated images of the precision bombs, with video cameras built into their heads, presented an image of such accurate bombing. Likewise, the frequent pictures of Patriot missiles apparently knocking out Iraqi Scud missiles created the impressions of a clean high-tech war. Later, the Pentagon itself admitted that only 7 percent of the bombs used were so-called “smart bombs” and admitted that over 70 percent of its bombs missed their targets, but the dominant images of a high-tech war presented an impression of a highly efficient techno-war. It was also revealed that a large percentage of U.S. casualties resulted from “friendly fire,” from the bombing of one’s own troops.

Although the mainstream media served as propaganda conduits for the U.S. government and military, in my interpretation, the media are not propaganda instruments *per se* for the state as some argue (Herman and Chomsky 1988; Chomsky 1989). Rather, one should see the major commercial networks primarily as money machines seeking ratings and profits. If the war is popular, then in pursuit of ratings the networks will provide a positive picture of the war, eliminating discordant voices, as happened in the Persian Gulf War. Moreover, General Electric

and RCA, which own NBC, are major military contractors who will benefit tremendously from a successful war, and NBC dutifully served as a Pentagon propaganda organ from beginning to end of the war (for evidence, see Kellner 1992b). It was claimed that GE produced parts of every major weapon system used in the war, so that the file footage of U.S. weapons and the gushingly positive reports of their technological wonder were in effect free advertisements for products produced by GE/NBC—indeed, desire to promote U.S. weapons for sale was one of the major purposes of the war in the first place.

But it was “liberal” Dan Rather of “liberal” CBS who served as the biggest booster and cheerleader of the military. During the first days of the war, Rather was the most skeptical and critical network reporter. But Rather’s ratings were falling and so he went to Saudi Arabia to report the war directly. Henceforth, he celebrated the military and became the most fervent supporter of the ground war, exulting in the “blow out” and “magnificent” and “brilliant” military action which slaughtered the hapless Iraqis, totally demoralized after forty days of bombing and without the technology to fight a high-tech, U.S.-led, multinational coalition military machine.

The lack of significant critical voices in the mainstream media during the crisis in the Gulf and then the Gulf War also can be explained by reflection on the political economy of the media and the system of media production in the United States. The broadcast media are afraid to go against a perceived popular consensus, to alienate people, and to take unpopular stands because they are afraid of losing audience shares and thus profits. Because U.S. military actions have characteristically been supported by the majority of the people, at least in their early stages, television is extremely reluctant to criticize what might turn out to be popular military actions.

The broadcast media also characteristically rely on a narrow range of established and safe commentators and are not likely to reach out to new and controversial voices in a period of national crisis. The media generally wait until a major political figure or established “expert” speaks against a specific policy and that view gains certain credibility as marked by opinion polls or publication in “respected” newspapers or journals. Unfortunately, the crisis of democracy in the United States is such that the Democratic Party has largely supported the conservative policies of the past decade and the party leaders are extremely cautious and slow to criticize foreign policy actions, especially potentially popular military actions. The crisis of liberalism is so deep in the U.S. that establishment liberals are afraid of being called “wimps” or “soft” on foreign aggression, and thus often support policies that their better instincts should lead them to oppose.

Consequently, the only criticisms of a major U.S. military intervention that appeared in the mainstream media during the first weeks of the U.S. intervention came from hawks like Zbigniew Brzezinski, and even some far right conservatives like Pat Buchanan, while Democrats and liberals tended to go along with the initial military build-up, until Bush doubled the U.S. forces after the November 1990 election. Then the Democrats supported the policy of sanctions (rather than calling for a

negotiated settlement) and once the war began, for the most part supported the Bush Administration policies, pointing again to the crisis of liberalism in the U.S.

In addition, the commercial nature of the broadcast media also intensified the propagandistic effects of Gulf War coverage. The big advertising agencies were extremely nervous concerning the perceived negative impact of having their products associated with controversial and perhaps depressing events like war.⁸ Yet as the war proceeded, many corporations tailored their advertisements to the growing patriotism, sprinkling their ads with flags, praises of troops, and patriotic slogans. Red, white and blue merchandise boutiques appeared in Bloomingdale's and Neiman Marcus's department stores and in their advertising. Ralph Lauren robes, bathing trunks, and other objects appeared embroidered with the flag. Britches ads spouted "Rugged Patriotism" fashion, while Ross-Simon ads displayed "Fashionable Patriotism" (McAllister 1993:224). Advertising discourse shifted from "you" to "our" appeals, binding together the product and nation with "our troops." Golf balls appeared with Saddam Hussein's face on them, a T-shirt was marked with a drawing of Hussein fleeing a missile with the caption: "You can run but you can't hide." Another ad featured a Saddam Condom with "Directions: use this condom to help prevent unwanted mistakes like Saddam Hussein", and a mass of other Desert Storm paraphernalia was marketed (*ibid.*, 1993).

The result of the propaganda blitz and war hysteria was a warrior nation that turned many in the TV audience into fanatic supporters of the Bush Administration war policy.

WARRIOR NATION

Part of the reason why people supported the Gulf War has to do with what might be called "territorial herd instincts." When a country is at war and in danger people tend to support their government and pull together.⁹ It could be argued, however, that during the Gulf War the country was not really in danger, that a diplomatic rather than a military solution could best serve the national interests, and that support of the troops required bringing them home as soon as possible. Moreover, the country was genuinely divided at the start of the war and there was a large antiwar movement in place before Bush began the military hostilities with Iraq. Furthermore, Kolko (1991:25) points out that public opinion since 1969 has been increasingly anti-interventionist and that every Rand Corporation poll had indicated that U.S. military intervention would not receive adequate public support. Yet during the Gulf War, the public was mobilized to support Bush's interventionist policies, in part at least, because of the media support for the war.

To begin, the prowar consensus was mobilized through a variety of ways in which the public identified with the troops. TV presented direct images of the troops to the public through "desert dispatches" which produced very sympathetic images of young American men and women, "in harm's way" and serving their country. TV news segments on families of the troops also provided mechanisms of identification, especially because many of the troops were reservists, forced