



“News Casters as Gladiators”

a review by Dick Burkhart of

Hate, Inc.

Why Today's Media Makes Us Despise
One Another

By Matt Taibbi (2019)

Taibbi illustrates in excruciating detail the collapse of TV news into money-making-like shows, with all the ethics of professional wrestling. If there's no partisan “hook”, then it's not news. If there is, then it's either full bore Left (Rachel Maddow) or full bore Right (Sean Hannity). The key is to make your audience angry at the other guy – no nuance allowed, let alone rational and honest dialogue. “We sold anger – this involved cranking out stories about people our viewers loved to hate” (p 18).

Taibbi himself, though more on the Left, hits hard at all sides, with the goal, perhaps futile, restoring some sanity to US politics. For example, he hits the Democrats hard for overhyping “Russiagate” (= Mueller Report) while Trump gets a shellacking for acting the “heel” (= nasty bad guy) of a pro-wrestling match to whip up a bloodthirsty crowd. As Taibbi says “Humanity is to me the Three Stooges, and gets funnier the more it attempts to deny it.” (p 4).

Yet when Taibbi lifts the hood that camouflages the engine of money and politics, the gunk stinks to high heaven: “We manufactured fake dissent to prevent real dissent” (p 21). That is, it's a divide and conquer strategy: Two ideas or two people bashing each other, always blaming someone else and likening them to Hitler.

The reality is that “Trump doesn't happen in a country where things are going well.” (p 64). The financial crash of 2008 was a mystery to the mainstream media because both political parties were in on it. By 2016 voters were ignoring the media sports show, taking note of who was bailed out and who wasn't, the escalating inequality that could not be hidden. In 2003 most of the media jumped on board the neocon bandwagon for the Iraq War, despite public skepticism. Later Trump took full advantage of this disaster, even as neocon influence became deeply embedded in both the Democratic and Republican party establishments, just like Wall Street influence. Same thing for police accountability – both parties have kowtowed to the police unions and public support for “law and order”, so until now nothing has gotten done, even as horrific incidents multiply (see Taibbi's book on Eric Garner).

As Taibbi points out, the news media is touted as the “Fourth Estate” – the watchdog of democracy, but these days it is mostly the handmaiden of the state, or of some faction that is

battling for the spoils. TV news-wise, it's more like being in a third world country than a beacon of 21st century civilization. Taibbi's hero's are Noam Chomsky and Thomas Frank.