
Book Reviews

Book warns press: 'Black out LaRouche'

by Anita Gallagher

Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism Has Transformed American Politics

by Larry J. Sabato

Free Press, New York, 1991

306 pages, hardbound, \$22.95

University of Virginia Professor Sabato's book demonstrates two things: that the discipline known as "political science" is no more a science than voodoo; and that its practitioners are about as concerned as witch doctors with the truth, or even the consistency, of their underlying assumptions.

This book is important, however, because it attempts to deliver a strong warning on the eve of the 1992 U.S. presidential election that Lyndon LaRouche's political movement must not be allowed to force issues into the press which could destroy "major" candidates, as happened with Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis in 1988. Sabato also seems to suggest that, now that voters are revolted by press revelations about candidates and elected officials, this is the time to officially restore candidate selection to the elites who run both parties.

The press puff this otherwise-silly book received at its August publication and the announcement of a national speaking tour this fall for the author indicate that this book is to be used to move the United States further along the road to political dictatorship.

Sabato's book examines four instances of massive negative press coverage of candidates ("feeding frenzies"), including the issue of Dukakis's mental health in 1988. Lacking proof to the contrary, since Dukakis refused to release his mental health records even at the request of the *New York Times* and the *Detroit News*, Sabato nevertheless calls the Dukakis "mental health" controversy "one of the most despicable episodes in recent American politics. . . . The corrosive rumor that the Democratic presidential nominee had

undergone psychiatric treatment for severe depression began to be spread in earnest at the July 1988 national party convention. The agents of the rumormongering were 'LaRouchies,' adherents of the extremist cult headed by Lyndon LaRouche . . . who claims that Queen Elizabeth II is part of the international drug cartel."

In a footnote here, the scholarly Professor Sabato cites *as an academic reference* the slander of LaRouche written by Dennis King, a left-gutter journalist who formerly wrote for *High Times*, for the drug lobby! King later received a grant from the Smith-Richardson Foundation to write his book to set up a climate for LaRouche's prosecution in 1988. Smith-Richardson is a conduit for the mind-control division of the U.S. intelligence community. This unabashed display of hypocrisy by Sabato is almost laughable, since his book is full of denunciations of the common journalistic practice of lifting a story from a dubious source without independent investigation.

Shoot the messenger

Sabato loudly hints that the LaRouche movement's publications must be denied press credentials. He makes his case with a description of the 1988 White House press conference where an *EIR* reporter asked President Reagan if he thought Dukakis should make his medical records public. Sabato recounts: "A jovial Reagan replied, 'Look, I'm not going to pick on an invalid,' " and thus, Sabato says, he "propelled into the headlines a rumor that had been only simmering on the edge of public consciousness." Sabato not only endorses the method of attacking those trying to uncover the truth, but demands that it not be allowed to fail in 1992.

In preparing his book, Sabato has interviewed, and thereby "organized" 150 well-known journalists on how to control the 1992 election, with the Dukakis incident in mind. The *Wall Street Journal's* Ellen Hume is quoted that, instead of covering the allegations about Dukakis, the American press instead should have attacked the source of the story. National Public Radio's Nina Totenberg told him, "We were stampeded on the Dukakis story, and we should never have let it happen."

In fact, there was no "rumor." In *EIR's* Aug. 19, 1988 *Feature* ("I Never Claimed Dukakis Had Been Cured,") LaRouche cited two biographies that claimed Dukakis had undergone treatment for depression: *Dukakis: An American Odyssey*, by Charles Kenney and Robert L. Turner (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988); and *Dukakis: The Man Who Would Be President*, by Richard Gaines and Michael Segal (New York: Avon Books, 1987). LaRouche concluded: "With the approach of 1989, our nation and the world are entering into a period of the most dangerous crises in the modern history of this planet. The next President will be confronted by a complex of grave emergencies like no other President of this century. It is from that vantage-point that an objective assessment of the mental health of the next President must be made."

Controlling the news

It is almost as if Professor Sabato aspires to be a functionary in an Orwellian dictatorship. Just as he thinks the public should not know whether a man running for President has a history of mental health problems, he maintains that “efforts to link [vice presidential candidate] Geraldine Ferraro and her husband John Zaccaro, to the Mafia in 1984” were “strained.” Prosecutors saw the matter a bit differently than our professor, and John Zaccaro pleaded guilty in 1985 to criminal fraud in attempting to finance a real estate deal.

And, in contrast to the exposure of the Dukakis story, Sabato praises the *Washington Post* for having “wisely ignored the the grandstanding headlines of its minor rival, the *Washington Times*, in the summer of 1989 when the *Times* claimed to have uncovered a massive homosexual ‘call boy’ scandal entangling ‘key officials’ of the Reagan and Bush administrations” (emphasis added). This refers to the ring in which top Republican Craig Spence (a 1990 “suicide”) was involved, organizing midnight tours of the White House for the participants, among other activities. This magazine has reported on sworn testimony presented to the Nebraska Senate’s “Franklin Committee” on procurement of children for high-ranking GOP pederasts’ parties in Washington, D.C. But Professor Sabato believes that the Spence story, about which there is much more to learn, “wisely” should be covered up.

‘Politically correct’ mistresses

Sabato likewise praises the restraint of the dominant press for withholding the story of George Bush’s reputed mistress(es), which goes back to February 1981. Sabato says, “The rumor boiled down to this: Vice President George Bush had been nicked by a bullet as he left a woman’s town house late one evening. The woman was his mistress—and here is where two separate versions developed—she was either a longtime member of his staff or the widow of a former Midwestern Republican congressman.”

On Oct. 19, 1988, a rumor that the *Washington Post* was going to publish the story caused the Dow-Jones Industrial Average to fall 43 points. Sabato seems to endorse the rationale of the *Washington Post*, which laid off the story because, unlike former Sen. Gary Hart, George Bush was discreet, and either or both of Bush’s supposed mistresses were adult, and single or widowed—all of which seems to add up to a “politically correct” mistress, and therefore, not to be reported.

Sometimes our “political scientists’ ” opinions display mind-boggling naïveté: “Examples of press corruption today are exceedingly rare, and not even the most extreme of the modern media’s critics charge otherwise.” Has Professor Sabato ever heard of grants, such as those Dennis King receives (not to mention Sabato’s own from the Virginia Foundation for Humanities and Public Policy)? Professor Sabato also tells us, “The media constitute no monolith,” but later quotes CBS News’s Dan Rather: “If the *Washington Post*, *New York*

Times and *Los Angeles Times* run a page one story for more than a day, the heat’s on to run it and we usually do.”

Why the U.S. press stinks

Actually, the most interesting portions of Sabato’s book are profiles cited from other authors of today’s press—which, as he says, “correctly perceives that it has replaced the political parties as the screening committee” for the candidates. The U.S. press maintain no formal educational requirements for journalists; e.g., *Parade Magazine* recently reported that ABC News’s top editor and anchor, Peter Jennings, is a grade-school dropout. (Two-thirds of all reporters are under 36 years of age.) Sabato also reports the observation of the *Washington Post*’s Watergate reporter Bob Woodward that even back in 1984, he could name 40 people in the *Post*’s newsroom who used cocaine. Sabato reports that only 10% of all news stories deal with real policy questions; no wonder, the reporters lack the training and attention span to report issues in depth, and thus can be easily manipulated to stick to establishment feeds or the fluff of “personalities.” Thus, despite thousands of journalists in the U.S. who earn \$50,000 a year, the story of the decade, the illegal arms shipments to Iran, broke first here in *EIR*, in 1979, and was revived in 1986 by the Lebanese paper *al Shirra*.

Sabato also provides profiles of the press organizations: In 1940, some 83% of the U.S. dailies were independently owned. By 1990, only 20% were independent. In 1945, when President Harry Truman held a news conference to announce dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, 12 reporters attended. The last time Iranian hostages appeared on the White House lawn, 3,000 reporters came.

As an interesting aside on gutter coverage, Sabato describes how U.S. libel law was loosened in 1964, by a ruling that, for a victim of libel to win, it was not enough to prove that a defamatory falsehood was published; a plaintiff also needed to show the falsehood was published with “actual malice.” Three years later this ruling was extended to libels against all “public figures,” thus reducing the success rate in libel suits to only one in ten. The direct fixing of the news by the FBI and Secret Service is also clear from Sabato’s book. The nomination of the late Sen. John Tower for secretary of defense was wrecked by press leaks of “FBI reports” on his drinking that consisted merely of every *allegation* ever raised, without verification. Sabato also raises the charge that the Secret Service agents assigned to candidates are often the leakers of later press scandals.

Perhaps the litmus test of Professor Sabato’s own integrity was provided when this reviewer asked, since his subject was attack frenzies by the press, whether he had used the LaRouche legal frameup in his home state of Virginia as an example. “No, there’s nothing about that in there,” Sabato said, neglecting to mention that LaRouche-proofing the 1992 elections is the real subject of his book. So much for the objectivity of the “political scientist.”