

# UGLY WAR

PRETTY PACKAGE

How CNN and Fox News  
Made the Invasion of Iraq  
High Concept

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### *False Heroes*

CNN and Fox News Channel journalists situated France, Russia, U.S. antiwar protesters, and Arab television (particularly Al Jazeera) as bad guys, albeit a more deceitful sort of bad guy. CNN and especially Fox News Channel personnel felt betrayed by these groups. Yet because the members of these groups claimed that they were doing the right thing, they complicated the simple war narrative both networks clung to. As a way of handling this complication, network journalists constructed them as false heroes. The false hero, as constructed by Vladimir Propp, is the deceitful character who attempts to assume the role of the hero but who ultimately must be exposed and punished for the usurper that he or she is. False heroes are not true villains, but they are obstacles in the way of the hero's successful completion of the quest. Propp's term offers the most accurate way to describe how CNN and Fox News Channel positioned participants in the war narrative who claimed that Iraq posed no threat, characterized the United States as the aggressor and rogue nation instead of Iraq, and claimed to be on the side of righteousness. In short, everything the false heroes stood for threatened the marketable concept.

France's opposition to the U.S. invasion elicited the most frustration and vitriol from Fox News Channel. The network's journalists aggressively typed France as unreasonable and obstinate. They repeatedly wondered aloud how the French would respond if the invading troops found WMDs in Iraq. Da-

vid Christian remarked, "The proof's in the pudding. We can tell [President Jacques] Chirac 'Here it is' and prove to the world 'Here are the sites. We told you so.'" Mark Ginsberg claimed that France would be "left in the dust" and "left with their pants down" if WMDs were found. He said that they would either "shamefully crawl their way back to our good graces or shamelessly oppose us to the bitter end." Tony Snow and Patti Ann Browne wondered how much proof the French needed to convince them of the good intentions of the United States and the existence of WMDs in Iraq. In response to speculation about where the coalition would ship recovered WMDs, Rita Cosby enthusiastically said: "France! What about France? Let's bring it all to France!" (Fox News Channel March 21). Fox News Channel journalists personalized France as a stubborn naysayer that would not listen to reason, and they compounded that portrayal by essentially accusing the French of conspiring with Hussein and his regime.

Fox journalists sought to discredit Chirac and all of France by associating them with Hussein, all the while ignoring the cordial ties of the United States to Hussein in the 1980s. The false hero must be exposed in the course of the narrative, and Tony Snow sought to do precisely that when he said, "The French have a lot to hide, that they have far more extensive commercial and even possibly strategic ties to Iraq" (Fox News Channel March 21). Senator John McCain echoed that claim two days later (Fox News Channel March 23). Ginsberg took this accusation further by stating that France had served as Hussein's "lawyer" for twenty years and that France's leaders had sided with Hussein and not the Iraqi people (Fox News Channel March 21).

When Chirac announced that the UN should be involved in the reconstruction of Iraq, Fox personnel sought to expose him as a weak-minded opportunist. David Christian likened France's leaders to "sheep . . . following the shepherd" into the reconstruction efforts. Brit Hume interpreted Chirac's move as France wanting "a piece of the action." Mort Kondracke called Chirac "arrogant," while Charles Krauthammer called him a saboteur eager to have veto power over a "war won with the blood and treasure of the Americans and British" (Fox News Channel March 21). David Asman said the French were "squirming to get back" into Iraq, and E. D. Hill exclaimed, "You know what? Stay home!" (Fox News Channel March 23 and 24).

Fox News Channel stood by this approach and applied it to another adversary when the U.S. State Department revealed that Russian companies had sold radar-jamming equipment and night-vision goggles to Iraq (Fournier 2003). The "slippery Russians," as Shepard Smith called them, joined the French as covert Hussein supporters (Fox News Channel March 23). Both Andrea Koppel

of CNN and Julie Kirtz of Fox News Channel emphasized that the equipment made and supplied by the Russians was an immediate threat to U.S. troops (CNN March 23; Fox News Channel March 23). General McChrystal denied that claim at the March 24 Department of Defense briefing. Responding to a question about the sale of GPS jammers to Iraq, McChrystal responded, "In fact, we have been aware for some time of the possibility of GPS jammers being fielded. And what we've found is, through testing and through actual practice now, that they are not having a negative effect on the air campaign at this point" (U.S. Department of Defense 2003f). On the day of McChrystal's briefing, CNN's Wendell Goler added Iraqi civilians to the list of potential victims of the Russians, saying that the attempts of the United States to avoid hitting civilians with missiles and bombs could be impeded by the equipment Russia had supplied.

In spite of the fact that Russian President Vladimir Putin denied government involvement in the sale, John McCain implicated both Putin and the Russian government:

I think it's disgraceful, I think that what this Russian government is doing in a number of areas [including] their brutal repression of the Chechnyan people, which to some degree we haven't given as much attention or concern about because of our desire to have good relations with the Russians. Let's not forget Mr. Putin's career was spent as a KGB agent, so his ideas of international dealings and . . . respect for human rights may be somewhat different from ours. (Fox News Channel March 23)

The evolution of the story at Fox News was striking. The culprits named for selling the equipment evolved from a global accusation against all "the Russians" to a more qualified subset, "Russian arms dealers," and finally, fourteen stories after the first report, to a much more accurate story about "one Russian company" (Fox News Channel March 23). Even after several Fox News Channel reporters attributed the arms sale to only one Russian company, network journalists peppered the coverage with statements that placed blame on Russia generally (Fox News Channel March 24). Even after the White House specifically stated that a Russian "company" or "companies" was responsible (White House 2003c), Alexander Haig reimplicated Putin late on March 24 with the statement, "If Putin wanted to do away with these shipments, they'd be done away with rather promptly" (Fox News Channel March 24). The aim of all of this was to discredit another leader who opposed Bush's plan to invade Iraq and who stood with Chirac in blocking the UN Resolution to authorize forceful disarmament (Xinhua General News Service 2003; Radyuhin 2003).

Fox News Channel journalists linked Putin to Chirac by raising questions about his ties to Hussein in an attempt to expose him as a traitor and thus an enemy of the United States. France and Russia—along with Germany, China, Cuba, Morocco, Cyprus, and others—were part of an international group that was opposed to the war (Agence France-Presse 2003). These countries presented themselves as conscientious objectors, but Fox News Channel personnel described them as deceitful opportunists who ultimately would harm the efforts of the United States to disarm Iraq and liberate the Iraqi people with minimal casualties.

Fox journalists did not confine this sort of character typing to international opposition to the war. Their treatment of the U.S. antiwar movement followed many of the same patterns. The typing of U.S. antiwar protesters is an example of striking difference between the two networks. Kellner's claim that "antiwar voices and protests were necessarily excluded in the profit-driven and pro-war atmosphere of media coverage" (2005, 68) is not quite accurate. In late March, antiwar protesters appeared multiple times on both CNN and Fox News Channel. Both networks reported on the U.S.-based antiwar protests in relation to seven primary topics: the significance of the rallies in a democracy, the size of the antiwar rallies, polls about public support for the war, the rationale for protesting, pro-war or pro-troop rallies or sentiment, protests that the networks characterized as "violent" or "disruptive," and the troops in Iraq. Each network's coverage used these topics to type the protesters, and Fox News Channel specifically used each to reject the premise that protesters were heroic in their exercise of democracy and freedom of speech.

According to Fox journalists, the protesters hated the United States and therefore did not practice democracy. The Fox reporters constructed a storyline that said that the number of protesters was minimal and that they represented the minority in public opinion about the war. They had no reasons for protesting other than to overthrow the U.S. government. They were violent and encouraged violence, which contradicted their verbal appeals for peace. They said they wanted democracy but they supported Hussein—not the U.S. troops—and did not believe in bringing democracy to the oppressed Iraqis. They claimed to speak truth to power heroically, but they merely represented another evil power. According to Fox journalists, the U.S. citizens who exercised their democratic right to oppose a war they considered unjust were no less than traitors.

CNN journalists also disagreed with the actions of the protesters, but they handled their coverage of antiwar events much differently than the Fox network did. Instead of vilifying the protesters, they co-opted their message by emphasizing how antiwar activity demonstrated the tolerance of U.S. democ-

racy. Aaron Brown asserted that he and his colleagues at CNN were "great believers in the right to demonstrate," and both he and Judy Woodruff gave small speeches on the superiority of U.S.-style democracy, of which protests were a vital part (CNN March 20–22). Guest commentator Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison stated that the right to protest was "in line with freedom of speech" (CNN March 21). Fiske notes how statements made in support of protesters illustrate the process of "inoculation" in news programming, an incorporation of radical voices into an official narrative so that the opposition actually fortifies the status quo. In this process, journalists first accord the oppositional speech minimal importance so that the rhetoric can subvert the dominant ideology without exacting any real damage. In addition, the representatives of the news media "[speak] the final 'truth,'" an act that frames oppositional speech from a specific viewpoint (Fiske 1987, 290–291). CNN journalists allowed protesters to have their sound bites and then defused the power of antiwar speech by applauding a tolerant democracy.

CNN's practice of "ideological containment" was just as problematic but less combative than the tactics presented on Fox News Channel. The Fox network did not feature the protesters as much as CNN. By way of explanation, Shepard Smith announced that Fox News Channel was keeping coverage of the antiwar protests "limited" in order to keep the network's overall coverage "fair and balanced" (Fox News Channel March 20). However, when the network did focus on the protesters, its journalists failed to uphold the right of U.S. citizens to protest in a time of war. Although guest commentator Mayor Rudolph Giuliani called the protests "a necessary part of democracy," an exchange between Fox's John Kasich and Congressman Greg Meeks became heated when the subject of democracy arose. In response to Kasich's "stunned and mystified" reaction to the protests, Congressman Meeks expressed his hopes for a democracy in which people had the right to dissent. Kasich responded by telling the protesters to "shut up," prompting Congressman Meeks to accuse him of not believing in democracy (Fox News Channel March 22). Alan Colmes, the self-identified "liberal" of the program *Hannity & Colmes*, voiced the most prominent defense of free speech on Fox News Channel with this remark: "People have the right to [protest], and certainly that's not in debate, but I think some of these people feel they have to prove they have the right, but they don't have the obligation" (Fox News Channel March 24). If Fox journalists gave any attention to the antiwar protests at all, it was only to imply or even to insist that they should not be speaking. The network gave no time to the real news of the antiwar protest stories, which would necessarily have focused on the issues the protestors were raising and the points they were making.

Reports of the size of the protests also produced differing coverage at CNN and Fox News. CNN's Aaron Brown characterized the size of rallies in Chicago and San Francisco as "significant," though Wolf Blitzer said the Chicago rally was smaller than the antiwar protests at the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago (CNN March 20). Maria Hinojosa estimated a New York City protest to be twenty blocks long and said that approximately 200,000 people were there (CNN March 22). In contrast, Shepard Smith asserted that the antiwar protests were "not enormously large," and Brian Kilmeade called all of the protests in the United States "small" (Fox News Channel March 20 and 21). The pro-troop/pro-war rallies covered by CNN and Fox News Channel were substantially smaller than the antiwar protests, but both networks covered them in the self-proclaimed pursuit of objectivity.

CNN and Fox News Channel both discussed opinion polls, which provided some degree of context in their coverage of the war, but Fox News Channel used polls to dismiss the validity of dissenting views. Fox personalities repeatedly noted the CNN/*U.S.A. Today*/Gallup polls that showed that 72 percent of people in the United States supported the war, and they often cited the polls during or after stories about antiwar protesters (Newport 2003). A statement that Rebecca Gomez made typified the tone of Fox News Channel's coverage. Gomez covered the protests (as did the *Latinas* on CNN—Maria Hinojosa and Teresa Gutierrez), and she introduced one of her pieces with the statement that "the antiwar crowd refuses to acknowledge the polls" (Fox News Channel March 22). In her perception, polls should dictate opinions rather than reflect them. This (mis)perception was characteristic of the attitude of Fox News Channel's personnel: the protests were irrelevant annoyances because the polls said so.

However, Fox News journalists quickly decided that the protests were indeed newsworthy as reports of violence and disruption became part of the story. The issue of disruptive protests led the network's personnel to label the demonstrators a "safety hazard," further discrediting their intentions. Journalists consistently declared that the protests were a danger. Rebecca Gomez claimed that protesters "nearly attacked" her and her crew; she interpreted this as evidence that the protesters "seemed to want to take their anger out on someone" (Fox News Channel March 22). Reporting on a protest in Washington, D.C., Shepard Smith said the demonstrators were "making a mess of the morning commute" and were keeping firefighters "from answering emergency calls." He also declared San Francisco to be in a state of "absolute anarchy" (Fox News Channel March 20). Brian Kilmeade said protesters were "out of control" and were "breaking the law" (Fox News Channel March 21). Bill Cowan called Market Street "ground zero" in the protesters' "mission to paralyze downtown"

Chicago and frustrate "innocent drivers" (ibid.). Bob Sellers highlighted arrests in San Francisco and police chasing protestors at a New York City rally (Fox News Channel March 22). Rebecca Gomez called the crowd at the rally she covered in New York "out of order" and raised the concern that marchers "diverted limited resources from stopping possible terrorist strikes" in a "city already hurt financially by 9/11" (Fox News Channel March 22). John Kasich, Miami police commissioner John Timoney, Brian Kilmeade, and Linda Vester all argued that protestors diverted resources from homeland security (Fox News Channel March 22-24). According to Fox News Channel, the protestors were violent and posed dire threats to the safety of the United States—a claim that linked the protestors to terrorists.

CNN's reporting of the protests was much more balanced. It reported that 1,000 arrests and various run-ins with police had occurred at protests in New York City and San Francisco, but both Aaron Brown and Wolf Blitzer pronounced the protests "peaceful" (CNN March 20 and 21). Blitzer even prefaced a story about the protestors in New York City with the line "Freedom of speech led to urban gridlock," emphasizing the disturbance but linking it to a constitutional right (CNN March 22).

Fox News Channel journalists insisted that the "disloyalty" of protestors was particularly disturbing a time when they perceived unity to be the true sign of patriotism. Personalities on Fox News Channel achieved this by characterizing protestors as opposed to the troops, freedom, and democracy and supportive of terrorists. The issue of supporting the troops was less black and white on CNN. Aaron Brown stated that one result of the Vietnam War was that "we don't blame soldiers" for policy decisions (CNN March 21). With that, Brown defended the protestors by distinguishing anti-troop sentiment from anti-policy sentiment. Fox News Channel journalists were unable to tolerate any distinction between criticism of government policy and criticism of the troops. Guest commentator Scott O'Grady, a former Air Force Captain who had been shot down over Bosnia and later rescued, suggested that the protestors realize "that there are evil people in this world, and this is a just war, and we need to be supporting" the troops (Fox News Channel March 23). Guest Jeffrey Zaun, a former POW of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, took this a bit further, claiming that the protestors were "insulting" the troops (Fox News Channel March 23). Rebecca Gomez summed up the tone of Fox News Channel by saying, "Some of the protestors claim they do support the troops, they just don't support the war, and they seem to think that they can do both" (Fox News Channel March 22). Her statement reflected the kind of consciously uncomplicated logic that Fox News Channel typically used when speaking of the protestors.

Accusations that the protestors were disloyal grew increasingly severe on Fox News Channel over the course of the first five days of the invasion. By claiming that the protestors stood "against any war for the liberation of Iraq," Bob Sellers simultaneously supported the Bush administration's official reasons for the invasion and typed the protestors as obstacles in the quest for freedom (Fox News Channel March 22). Shepard Smith hinted at an insidious conspiracy when he declared that the antiwar protests were "part of a synchronized movement to stage protests" (Fox News Channel March 20). His statement was in keeping with the network's numerous attempts to link antiwar protestors to organizations that Fox journalists deemed to be subversive—a tactic similar to the network's typing of France and Russia as disloyal to the United States because they criticized the war. Tony Snow modified the commonly used phrase "pockets of resistance," a way to describe what U.S. troops were up against in Iraq, to "little pockets of protest," his way of at once describing and minimizing the impact of antiwar activities in the United States and the United Kingdom (Fox News Channel March 22). David Asman argued that the protestors were vulnerable to Iraqi propaganda, and one guest claimed that the protestors' rhetoric "play[ed] into the hands of our enemies" (Fox News Channel March 22 and 24). In addition to calling "most" of the protestors "stupid," Fred Barnes accused them of being "objectively . . . pro-Saddam"; in disgust, Tony Snow replied, "Enough of them" (Fox News Channel March 22).

E. D. Hill faulted other news outlets for not disclosing the financial backers of protests. "What you find out when you start looking at who's financing them," she revealed, "is that many, many of the organizations are linked to Castro, to, to dictators" (Fox News Channel March 21). Former Republican senator and Hollywood actor Fred Thompson also accused the protestors of acting in the service of terrorists. He claimed,

This whole antiwar protest so-called movement is being used by international groups and so forth that are virulently anti-American, anti-west, anti-free enterprise, who use this in order to move from a demonstration . . . to stopping things and attacking really some of the same sites that the terrorists would. (Fox News Channel March 24)

Thompson was also concerned about "organizations that are international in scope," a statement that fed into the overall xenophobic tone of Fox News Channel news coverage. David Horowitz, president of the Center for the Study of Popular Culture, combined all of the previous claims into one large accusation. He denied the existence of a peace movement, calling it instead "hardcore . . . Communist." According to Horowitz, the protestors, who "hate America"



and spewed "Marxist absurdities," were running a "sabotage campaign" that endorsed "commit[ing] violence" and "smash[ing] the state." He wrapped up by accusing the protesters of being involved with "Palestinian terrorist organizations and terrorist support organizations" as well as with North Korea (Fox News Channel March 24).

In short, in Fox News Channel's estimation, the protesters were not to be trusted. Fox journalists and guests typed the protesters as false heroes with even more fervor than they exhibited when typing France and Russia. In contrast, CNN reporters and guests did not resort to the type of inflammatory rhetoric that was a mainstay on Fox News Channel; CNN's approach was to contain the message of the protestors by pointing to the right of citizens in a democracy to free speech rather than focusing on the issues the protestors were raising.

CNN altered this approach somewhat in its reporting about Arab television. Both networks, in fact, joined forces in the common project of constructing another false hero: the Al Jazeera satellite news network. CNN and Fox News Channel news personnel presented a generally negative view of Arab television from the outset, accusing the various Arab networks of being dangerous, anti-American, and propagandistic. CNN's Wolf Blitzer discussed the possibility that "inflammatory" images on Arab television "could generate more terrorism" (CNN March 22). Fox's William La Jeunesse dwelled on the theme of inflamed emotions when he claimed that Arab media was "playing this war" to incite emotional responses (Fox News Channel March 24). The general sense that Arab television networks had aligned against the United States was prevalent on Fox News Channel. Linda Vester reported that Arab networks were pleased that the Iraqi military could "poke the American military in the eye" by using their embedded footage against them (Fox News Channel March 23). Simon Marks relayed the message of Jordan's media that the war was "an unjust war of aggression . . . designed to enslave the Iraqi people" and "seize Iraq's oil" (Fox News Channel March 24). The overwhelming description of Arab television on CNN and Fox News Channel, then, was that it was a vehicle for pro-Hussein propaganda.

The propaganda value of images and stories on Arab television was not lost on CNN and Fox News Channel news presenters. In the context of a discussion of the slow rate of information disclosure at CENTCOM, Jane Perlez said that some information was available from Arab television, but she explained, "It's not information. It is an Arab version of how this war is going" (CNN March 24). Whenever Fox journalists mentioned Arab television, they quickly noted that the information it conveyed could be false. For example, when Rita Cosby reported news of Iraqi resistance and U.S. deaths, she immediately said, "But

of course that's all coming from Arab television and the Iraqi information minister. U.S. officials are saying no such thing" (Fox News Channel March 22). Steve Harrigan emphasized that there were "two different wars, two very different versions of how this war is going depending on which channel you're watching"; later, he explicitly stated that Arab television was televising a "radically different war" (Fox News Channel March 24). David Christian called Al Jazeera and the Abu Dhabi television network "propagandists" (Fox News Channel March 23).

Because CNN no longer had a stranglehold on 24-hour satellite news as it did in 1991, both CNN and Fox had to contend with competing images of war in 2003. The greatest foe of both networks in 2003 was not the whole of Arab television but rather the network known as "the Arab world's CNN"—Al Jazeera (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002, 24).<sup>2</sup> Al Jazeera, the only independent network in the Middle East, was founded in 1996. The network's Web site claims that it brings a balance to news reporting by giving voice to new perspectives, particularly those from the developing world, in a way that challenges the current flow of news based on a developed-world point of view. Al Jazeera feels that it offers a more balanced perspective that has "changed the face of the news" through "accurate, impartial and objective reporting" (Al Jazeera 2008). According to El-Nawawy and Iskandar, the satellite network's philosophy is "built

2. When the BBC's Arabic television division lost its Saudi funding in 1996, most of the staff was hired by executives who were creating a new satellite news network, Al Jazeera. Al Jazeera, in turn, received \$140 million in funding from the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani. Sheikh Hamad conceived of Al Jazeera as an independent and nonpartisan news organization operating without government supervision (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002, 31, 33). Al Jazeera, the "first truly liberal, independent satellite channel in Middle Eastern history," has between 35 and 70 million Arab viewers, depending on the source (Bhatnagar 2003; DemocracyNow.org 2005; Fahmy and Johnson 2007; NOW on PBS 2005; Sharkey 2004; Wu 1999). The network made its first major impression on the U.S. media with its exclusives from Afghanistan after September 11, 2001. Soon after that, Al Jazeera entered into contractual video-sharing relationships with CNN, ABC News, the BBC, and Germany's ZDF (Zednik 2002). Al Jazeera dissolved its partnership with CNN in January 2002 after CNN obtained and aired a videotape of Osama bin Laden that Al Jazeera had chosen not to air (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2002, 169). Nevertheless, in March 2003, every U.S. news network used footage from Al Jazeera, whose cameras in Baghdad were an inadvertent "intelligence tool" for the United States, making it possible for U.S. officials to assess the damage U.S. bombs had done (Sharkey 2003).

argument that Al-Miraz had made at the beginning of the interview—that the intended audience was the key in determining the propriety of images—his line of questioning fixated on the broadcasting of the tape without addressing the issues that Al-Miraz had raised. Had Brown engaged with Al-Miraz on any of the pertinent issues—the representation of war, the wide circulation of the tape beyond the Middle East, the repeated images of Iraqi POWs on U.S. television, and CNN's own history of televising dead U.S. soldiers—the conversation may have yielded a more nuanced view of the role of Al Jazeera. Instead, Brown constructed Al Jazeera as an irresponsible tabloid pandering to morbid curiosity.

While CNN journalists focused on the graphic detail of the POW video and what they believed to be the poor judgment Al Jazeera exercised in airing it, Fox News Channel journalists associated the entire situation with propagandistic aims. Disregarding Fox News Channel's (and CNN's) repeated use of images of Iraqi POWs, Brian Kilmeade asked, "What about Al Jazeera? Why would you air something over and over again, every half-hour, every forty-five minutes? . . . How does that help any news organization to air captive people?" Steve Doocy replied, "I'll tell you why Al Jazeera's running it. 'Cause they're not on our side." As if to affirm that view, Chris Jumpelt asserted that the POW video was a "morale booster" for Iraqis who viewed the liberation as an invasion (Fox News Channel March 24). For Fox News Channel personnel, Al Jazeera's actions represented more than sensationalism; the POW video incident "exposed" Al Jazeera as a network intent on helping state-run Iraq television spread propagandistic and violent images.

The treatment of Al Jazeera at CNN and Fox News revealed as much about the two networks as it did about Al Jazeera. In other words, Al Jazeera's position within the war narrative hinged on how each network defined its own place within the profession of journalism. Al Jazeera posed a threat to both networks in two major ways. First, Al Jazeera threatened the power over distribution that CNN and Fox News Channel enjoyed. Fiske writes that the immediacy that defines television news privileges the "large multinational news corporations" that have the means to distribute news quickly via satellite. This control over distribution means that internationally distributed news has been, as Fiske puts it, "white," meaning that most network news delivers only the perspective of the white-dominated Western world (Fiske 1987, 289). Thus, Al Jazeera's satellite distribution challenged the international reach and dominance of Western megacorporation Time Warner—via CNN International—and News Corporation—via Sky News. That challenge increased considerably with the debut of Al Jazeera's English-language channel.

Second, CNN and Fox News Channel represented a considerably different approach to the war than Al Jazeera did, and the POW tape brought that difference to a head. Al Jazeera's conception of its audience and of the role of a free press during wartime simply did not translate to the language of commercial U.S. media or to the logic of high concept. In their statements, CNN and Fox News Channel news personnel restricted their understanding of Al Jazeera to visceral reactions and nationalistic fervor. Their concern centered on public relations and not on the material reality of a large-scale invasion. In limiting the dialogue about the POW tape, CNN and Fox News Channel personnel disregarded Al Jazeera's context. They rejected the stated goals of Al Jazeera—to shed the appearance of "war-as-videogames" and report as "independent news media," as Al-Miraz put it—and emphasized their disgust and feelings of betrayal at Al Jazeera's refusal to behave as commercial U.S. news networks would (CNN March 23). Though both networks continued to use images from Al Jazeera's cameras, they assigned a character type to the Arab network that would not be redeemed.

## *Images from Embedded Reporters*

A crew member with embedded reporter Martin Savidge summed up the prevailing attitude toward embedded footage when, during a series of explosions, he was heard to exclaim, "Fuck, this is good stuff!" (CNN March 22). Fox News Channel's Bill Cowan noted that U.S. soldiers in Iraq would be able to watch this footage with their grandchildren and expressed his regret that he did not have footage of his fighting days in Vietnam. Later, he repeated his lament that he had "nothing to show" for his time in Southeast Asia (Fox News Channel March 21). The footage produced by embedded news crews was interpreted by the networks to be factual documentary footage that displayed the resources of the military in a visually exciting way—it was the twenty-first-century spectacle as Giroux envisions it. Discussing the heightened interplay between images and power, he writes,

Not only have these new mass and image-based media . . . revolutionized the relationship between the specificity of an event and its public display by making events accessible to a global audience; they have also ushered in a new regime of the spectacle in which screen culture and visual politics create spectacular events just as much as they record them. (2006a, 20)



The convergence of the military's narratives and the networks' narratives endowed the footage with the power of justification (particularly since the images obscured the war's lethal consequences). Although the look of the footage was neither sleek nor stylized, it advanced the networks' aim of high-tech visual appeal—an aim made evident by their in-house graphic embellishments.

In the first five days of the invasion, video satellite linkups were rare, and much of the embedded footage came in the form of satellite images via phone transmission. The grainy quality of these images made the experience of the military and the reporters embedded with it seem dustier, harsher, and thus more real. Green-tinted night-vision footage of firefights compounded that look by making everything appear shadowy and insidious. The response of studio news personnel to this footage was one of sheer amazement, which made the footage more about spectatorial pleasure than about the hardships of war.

CNN's Walter Rodgers and Fox News Channel's Greg Kelly, who were both embedded with the 3rd Infantry, transmitted similar images to their home networks, to the delight of their colleagues in the studio. They documented the push into Iraq, and for hours the audience stared at the rears of military vehicles as the reporters rode in their Hummers and tried to see through the dust. Aaron Brown called Rodgers's footage "incredible" and "amazing," at one point exclaiming, "Oh, look at that!" (CNN March 20 and 21). Rodgers called the image a "lovely picture" and said that "sadly," the viewers could not get a sense of the sheer number of tanks participating in the convoy (CNN March 21). Anderson Cooper admitted that he was "transfixed" by Rodgers's images, Lou Dobbs could not "get enough" of them, and Bill Hemmer called the images "fascinating" (ibid.). Kelly's images generated the same type of response on Fox News Channel. Brian Wilson called them "astonishing" and Gregg Jarrett described them as "truly remarkable" (Fox News Channel March 21). Rita Cosby, Bill Cowan, and David Hunt described the shots as "amazing," "dramatic," and "remarkable," respectively (Fox News Channel March 22). Firefights and footage of aircraft on carriers provoked similar responses at the two networks.

On-air journalists praised the embedded footage as a "technological miracle," and even Aaron Brown—no stranger to satellite technology—expressed how "amazing" it was for him to watch the images while sitting in Atlanta (CNN March 21). Despite the inferior quality of the images transmitted by the satellite phones, technology triumphed.

CNN and Fox News Channel juxtaposed the quality of those "real" images with the eloquence of still photography. The embedded and unilateral print journalists (those who entered the war zone without military permission) in Iraq generated photographs of the war, and both networks drew viewers' at-

tention to still images from the battlefield at specific points in the coverage. By using photos, the networks attempted to create a stable meaning, a permanent "caption," as McAlister puts it. However, the historical specificity of the stills and our inevitable reevaluation of them both counter the meaning networks tried to impose with the captions. McAlister reflects on the intentions and interpretations of stills like those publicized in 1991:

By asking the right questions of a photograph, we may discover what rendered it powerful at a particular place and time. . . . Photographers invite us to see them as transparent representations, as a kind of historical record. Yet, photographs are inevitably fragments. (2005, 268)

They are also signifiers of a level of gravity and restraint typically shunned by moving images on the news.

CNN used still photographs as a transition to half-hour updates, displaying the photos as a slow-moving montage with the *Strike on Iraq* theme playing over them. Aaron Brown called the photographs "moments of war quite literally frozen in time" (CNN March 21). The photos of soldiers pointing guns at or giving water to surrendering Iraqis were devoid of the frenetic movement and excited rhetoric that the embedded footage relied on. Their stillness and relative subtlety accorded them a degree of cultural prestige lacking in the video documentation.

Fox News Channel characterized its still photographs as evidence of the just mission. In his introduction to a series of stills that functioned as a transition at the end of the hour, Brit Hume described the photos as documentation of U.S. soldiers "doing the dangerous work of Operation Iraqi Freedom" in Iraq (Fox News Channel March 24). While the photographs appeared, no verbal commentary steered viewers toward any particular narrative or ideological direction. The music performed that duty as the photos were left alone, supposedly displaying reality as it unfolded. Accompanying the photos was an atonal piece of music that consisted primarily of different percussive sounds. The music was somber, austere, and serious without the excited victorious military connotations of Fox's *Operation Iraqi Freedom* theme. Instead, the music was reflective with a trace of military influence. In the context of the war coverage, only still photography warranted such a subtle, introspective moment at Fox News Channel.

The photographs added an odd low-tech stillness to the frantic production of television news. They also permitted a greater deal of reflection than grainy images and quickly edited video could. However, the still photographs served the aims of high concept. Each image was striking, and some of them served

the networks' purposes of promoting the official narrative of the war. As in 1991, when images of "soldiers framed against the backdrop of a blazing sunset replaced mangled bodies and bloodied wounds" (Giroux 2006b, 3), in 2003 the photos of the war promoted the same whitewashed version of reality. Hume's comment that the soldiers in the photos were "doing the dangerous work of Operation Iraqi Freedom" drew the images into the marketable concept while emphasizing the realism in the representation.

The idea that the footage provided by embedded news crews was a realistic version of the war was a constant refrain at both networks. The commentary networks provided about their access to embedded crews highlighted the role of technology in producing the material—which, though rough in appearance and sonically delayed, was a sensation in the minds of commentators in network studios. Network personnel in the United States marveled at the sights and sounds that embedded crews transmitted back to the states. At both networks, the fetish for all things military overshadowed the human realities of the invasion, and embedded reporters became part of the spectacle, enabling the war apparatus to monopolize screen time.

#### *Images from the "Other" Side*

There was one moment when the physical toll of war received attention on 24-hour network news—when the networks received the footage of the soldiers of the 507th Maintenance Crew who had entered the Iraqi-held town of Nasiriyah, where they had been captured by the Iraqis. The video of the POWs, which was produced by Iraqi television, challenged the official war narrative and provoked outrage on the U.S. networks, where it posed a threat to the highly controlled flow of images. The POW video, which was aired by Al Jazeera and other networks around the world, featured a makeshift morgue with bodies strewn about, including some with fatal head wounds. It also included Iraqi television interviews with the captured soldiers.

CNN and Fox News Channel refused to air the POW video in its entirety and stated their reasons for this decision regularly. They chose instead to air one still image to represent the video footage. Each network used its own disclaimer to introduce whichever segment of the POW video it had decided was appropriate to air. CNN aired an almost indistinguishable still of what appeared to be bodies lying on the ground, which various on-air personalities prefaced by saying that the video had been "transmitted by Al Jazeera . . . was shot by state-run Iraqi television. These pictures and the interviews were disturbing. . . . CNN has decided not to show the video of those killed and will instead use this single image with no identifiable features" (CNN March 23). When CNN began to show

a brief clip of the POWs, Aaron Brown rationalized the decision, consciously differentiating it from Al Jazeera's decision to run the entire video. He said that the brief segment was necessary to show the identity and status of each soldier (CNN March 24). The image Fox News chose to broadcast was preceded by the reassurance that "considerable reflection and consultation" had informed the decision (Fox News Channel March 23). Fox also assured viewers that the image did not violate Pentagon rules because it revealed no identifiable features. CNN and Fox News Channel conceded that the tape was newsworthy, but with every disclaimer they stressed their disapproval of Al Jazeera by underscoring how tastefully and responsibly they had chosen to use the POW footage.

Needing to "caption" the images in order to control how viewers received them, personalities on both networks frequently expressed their disgust. On CNN, Paula Zahn declared that the video had "made [her] sick," Aaron Brown called it "vivid and horrible," Carol Costello deemed the images "disturbing," and Lou Dobbs described the video as "gruesome" (CNN March 23 and 24). Fox News Channel personnel echoed those sentiments, calling the tape "disturbing," "chilling," "grotesque and sick," "utterly, utterly gruesome," "revolting and sickening," "monstrously gruesome," "garish," "quite horrific," "shocking," and "deplorable" (Fox News Channel March 23 and 24).

Despite the fact that state-run Iraqi TV was responsible for the production of the tape, CNN and Fox News Channel focused their attention on Al Jazeera for broadcasting it. Aaron Brown proclaimed the tape to be "far more horrible than anything we would ever show . . . on American television" (CNN March 23). Congressman Jim Gibbons, appearing on Fox News Channel, stated that he was "disgusted with Al Jazeera" because they were "breaking every rule" (Fox News Channel March 24). No one ever explained the "rules" of American television about this sort of traumatic event; broadcasters simply assumed that all U.S. viewers shared their sense of where the boundaries of propriety lay concerning images of U.S. soldiers. Of particular importance in this incident was the Pentagon's request that Al Jazeera stop airing the footage, ostensibly so military officers could notify the families of the dead and captured soldiers. With this action, the Pentagon stepped in to halt the transmission of images by a news organization whose audience was not based in the United States.

Surely the Pentagon and all of the networks involved in airing and exco-riating those who had produced the images surmised, as Giroux puts it, that in the context of "a media saturated with images of American violence against Muslims," the POW video was the beginning of "a means of response and a measure of revenge in the Arab world" (2006a, 49–50). POWs are a fact of war; U.S. networks had shown their own abundant footage of Iraqi POWs, some

with guns pointed at their heads. But the fact that the enemy of the United States produced a video of dead and captured U.S. soldiers and submitted it for circulation on satellite news networks was a fundamental challenge to the staid and sanitized images supplied by U.S. networks. If the video produced by the murderers was an act of “revenge,” then Al Jazeera’s decision to air it was an act of balance (Fahmy and Johnson 2007).

It was also a matter of audience. In 2004, Shahira Fahmy and Thomas J. Johnson conducted a Web-based Arab-language survey to determine how viewers of Al Jazeera living in fifty-three countries<sup>5</sup> perceived the news outlet’s signature graphic imagery. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents felt that Al Jazeera should show graphic images, and 81.4 percent felt that viewing graphic images of the Iraq war was a “good decision” (ibid., 255–256). One respondent did not consider the images to be “unpleasant”; rather, this individual likened the images to the “naked truth” that journalists should always unearth (256).

In hindsight, the POW video marks an intriguing precursor to the photographs taken at Abu Ghraib. Both sides were obviously capable of the same type of atrocities. Even though one set of images was meant for mass distribution and the other set was clearly intended for personal gratification, both groups chose to document their crimes. The pictures that emerged contested the veracity of the mainstream media’s version of the war.

### Conclusion

During the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the spectacular look and sound of technology dominated war coverage. As Guy Debord maintains, the images and sounds themselves were not the spectacle. The power of the constructed look and sound to contain discourse and deny the material consequences of the war made them a spectacle, which Debord defines as “the existing order’s uninterrupted discourse about itself” (1967, 24). Rarely did the war coverage challenge the existing order’s dominance; the spectacle remained intact in the discourse of the news.

The graphics, animation, and embedded reports the two networks broadcast used the latest technology to put the superiority and hardware of the U.S. war apparatus on display. CNN and Fox News Channel journalists praised

the technological might of the United States while they derided the outdated machinery of the Iraqi military. The visual celebration of weaponry bolstered the part of the war narrative that assured viewers that the United States could achieve its goals. Animated sequences were constructed with the assumption that the Iraqis would attack the United States with banned weapons and that the United States was ready with much more sophisticated hardware. The animation promoted the notion that the Hussein regime was a threat and the Iraqi military was a foe, if not a completely worthy one. The sequences answered the question “How can the Iraqis be a formidable enemy if we have such a magnificent arsenal?” by claiming that the Iraqi military had dangerous weapons too—illegal Scuds and hidden chemical weapons. Those claims sustained the momentum of the war narrative.

Technologically advanced ways of seeing, hearing, showing, and telling coalesced in a war narrative that tried to bring the interests of news viewers in line with the interests of the U.S. military. Up to March 24, Fox News Channel had exhibited a high level of adherence to the war narrative that CNN had not demonstrated. CNN never wavered from the narrative in any significant way but its studio news commentators seldom expressed the brash enthusiasm of the Fox News Channel personalities. The networks’ different approaches to their respective visuals and sounds provided a balance in their participation in the war narrative, however. Fox News Channel employed an aggressive verbal discourse, but CNN depended on its visuals to do the talking.

Driven by distinct visions, both networks maintained the sleek high-tech look and sound of high concept. Their allegiance to catchy theme music, title sequences, and graphics that promoted the ideology of the official war narrative completed the style of high concept. Frequently, sounds and imagery were used to excess, pushing the tools of the U.S. military to the fore and pulling back the narrative. Though complicated by narrative inconsistencies about the nature of the Iraqi threat, the elements of high-concept style explored in this chapter never abandoned the marketable concept.

5. While they lived in fifty-three different countries, 98 percent of the 638 respondents were originally from twenty Arab countries plus Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## *The Marketing of the 2003 Invasion of Iraq*

In 2003, toy manufacturer Dragon Models created a series of action figures modeled on the U.S. soldiers in Iraq. One of those figures was named “Cody,” and his specific assignment was special operations in southern Iraq (Dragon-ModelsLtd.com 2003). Although Cody was available commercially, Dragon Models crafted him for the Army and Air Force Exchange Service, which sells discounted products to military personnel and their families and donates the proceeds to the Army and Air Force (Taranto 2005). According to a Dragon Models marketing coordinator, Cody was “meant to look like a U.S. soldier who might be serving in Iraq.” That likeness proved to be convincing. In 2005, the militant group Al-Mujahideen Brigade claimed to be holding a U.S. soldier captive and posted a photo of the hostage on the Internet as evidence. The photo appeared legitimate to the untrained eye, but upon closer inspection, military officials immediately noticed the so-called hostage’s nonregulation military attire and detected the hoax. Dragon Models ultimately confirmed that the “soldier” was indeed Cody, whose toy assault rifle was pointed at his own head in the photo (CNN.com 2005). As an action figure, Cody represents the toy industry’s take on the war. As a convincing decoy, he illustrates the scope of high-concept merchandising.

This chapter examines the 2003 invasion of Iraq as a commercial venture embraced by CNN, Fox News Channel, and other enterprises that exploited coverage of the war. CNN and Fox News Channel marketed their coverage and, in many ways, the Bush administration’s premises for the war using promo-

tional strategies during news programs and commercial breaks. Tie-ins from high-ticket merchandise like weaponry to more common consumer goods like action figures played a large role in selling the 2003 invasion to a U.S. audience. Of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Jean Baudrillard writes, "The media promote the war, the war promotes the media, and advertising competes with the war. Promotion . . . allows us to turn the world and the violence of the world into a consumable substance" (1995, 31). CNN and Fox News Channel's coverage of the 2003 invasion of Iraq was one such "consumable substance" that in turn helped to commodify particular elements and experiences of the war.

### High-Concept News versus High-Concept Films

Like the turn toward high-concept filmmaking in the 1980s, the presence of high-concept values in news programming is a result of media conglomeration. The first wave of conglomeration in the 1960s aimed to decrease financial risk and increase the likelihood of substantial hits. Since the second wave in the 1980s, media conglomeration has been the active site of synergy, whereby the conglomerate promotes one media product across many of its holdings. Synergy is one way to achieve the maximum exposure a film requires to peak and sustain viewers' interest. Synergy, therefore, enables film companies to market movies aggressively and fuse a movie's style and content with its promotional life almost seamlessly. Other developments in the fields of marketing, technology, and film distribution enabled high concept films to thrive, and those same types of developments—combined with conglomeration—have likewise fostered the existence of high-concept news.

High-concept news is a more comprehensive manifestation of entertainment-driven journalism. In chapter 1, I discussed "infotainment"—a type of news that Thussu characterizes as "high-tech" with "complex graphics" and a style similar to video games (2003, 117). While infotainment accurately describes a contemporary trend in television news, the term high concept properly contextualizes and expands our understanding of the commercial reach of news.

What distinguishes high-concept advertising campaigns from all others is a marketable concept that is tailor-made for cross-fertilization in all the components of a corporate conglomerate (Wyatt 1994, 106). Advertising is the platform on which the excessive style of high-concept films makes sense and comes together. High concept is best understood as both an efficient packaging of a media artifact for maximum commercial gain and a strategy to keep the artifact in circulation for as long as possible, incessantly promoting itself and

the system that allows it to circulate. Marketing and merchandising attempt to achieve those ends in high-concept news. During the first days of prolonged concentrated news coverage, as in times of war, viewership is high and television news outlets promote their coverage in ways similar to that of high-concept films.

However, the relationship between coverage of the 2003 war and high-concept marketing and merchandising is complicated by the simple fact that news coverage of a war is not a feature film. Obviously, some aspects of promoting a film do not translate wholesale to the arena of television news. One major difference is that the marketing of the 2003 war coverage involved an overtly political sell. The fixation of the networks on the procedures and tools of war—and not their deadly effects on human beings—infused their coverage with a celebratory anticipation of the unfolding events. Additionally, the majority of merchandising did not originate with the networks. That is not to say that the war coverage was devoid of commercial promotion. Indeed, CNN and Fox News Channel made a genuine effort to market the war, just as high-concept films promote consumer lifestyles.

The marketing and merchandising of the war depended on the creation of the ideal marketable concept, or the "hook," in Wyatt's terms (1994, 20). That hook grew out of the rhetoric of the Bush administration, which argued that there were undeniable connections between the September 11, 2001 attacks, Al-Qaeda, the Hussein regime in Iraq, and WMDs. The invasion of Iraq would produce a recognizable enemy (to replace the elusive Osama bin Laden), assert U.S. dominance to correct the nation's vulnerability on September 11, and bring democracy to the Iraqis. The U.S.-led coalition would execute a "humane effort" using high-tech weaponry that would spare the lives of Iraqi civilians and usher in a new era of democratic freedoms in Iraq (U.S. Department of Defense 2003d). Created by the Bush administration and the Department of Defense and maintained by CNN and Fox News Channel, the marketable concept of the 2003 invasion was the execution of vengeance through technological and moral superiority. CNN and Fox News Channel used different promotional techniques to communicate the marketable concept and to unite it with the networks' visions for their war coverage.

### Self-Promotion

Within the coverage of the war, promotional advertisements at CNN and Fox News Channel communicated an "image" in much the same way that ad campaigns for high-concept films do. In the film world the image conveys what



the concept is, what genre it belongs to, and who stars in it (Wyatt 1994, 133). Media scholars argue that news networks have adopted many of the tactics of film companies to promote their products. Robert Stam writes that news programming "imitates the commercials by advertising itself . . . and by exploiting some of the same manipulative procedures" and techniques as commercials (1983, 36). Richard Cohen sees a link between the development of a feverish editing pace in commercials and the adoption of those techniques in news reports. The resulting content, he argues, is "practically subliminal" (1997, 37). Programming merges with the commercial aesthetic during commercial breaks in "boundaryless flow," a technique that McChesney attributes to the need for news programs "to satisfy those paying the bills" (1999, 51). News programs and commercials flow into one another so that viewers will resist the urge to channel-surf during breaks or avoid advertisements altogether. The flow of television programming combines programming, promotional spots, and commercials in a fluid sequence rather than offering hour upon hour of disjointed units (Williams 1974, 91).

Nick Browne argues that a complete understanding of and engagement with a television text—a news program, for instance—requires an awareness of a supertext—the relationship between the program, the industry, and the marketplace (1994, 71–72). If we look at coverage of the war at CNN and at Fox News Channel as competing supertexts, we can begin to see the intimate relationship between the units of "news" and "commercials," which seem to be discrete entities but actually are not. One example of the supertext is a network's use of promotional spots. The promo is placed at either end of the commercial break so that it will not interrupt commercials. It acts as a transition that takes on the style of the ads. The promo either weans the viewer away from news coverage to move into the more explicit commercial terrain or it reacquaints the viewers with the coverage they left just minutes before. In both cases, the news interacts with commercial breaks to achieve a commercial look in a way that is similar to the convergence of the high-concept film with its marketing campaign. By adopting the style of advertisements, news programming becomes a greater part of the commercial environment than it already is. During the coverage of the war, news networks inserted action sequences of U.S. soldiers in Iraq into their promos, removing the military campaign from its broader geopolitical context and engulfing it in the structure of a short commercial break.

After an initial period of commercial-free coverage, CNN and Fox News Channel resumed their commercial breaks on March 22. The number of breaks varied according to the pace of the day's breaking news, and the overall number

of commercials was lower than usual across the cable news landscape. CNN aired commercials at a level that was only 50 percent of its normal rate, while MSNBC operated at 70 percent of its prewar levels (Greppi 2003). At Fox News Channel, most breaks included the networks' promotional spots, blurring the difference between news programming and blatant commerce. These promos sustained the marketable concept outside the context of traditional news coverage. In effect, the techniques that CNN and Fox News Channel news personnel used to promote the events and machinery of the war constituted another form of commodification. The world of war that CNN and Fox News Channel projected was in many ways the world of the commodity.

### *Promotional Spots*

During the initial days of the 2003 invasion of Iraq, CNN and Fox News Channel aired promotional spots that emphasized the work of their embedded journalists (see appendix C). Fox News Channel's promo packed considerably more information into thirty seconds than CNN's did, but both networks employed many of the same motifs. Both promos conveyed the genre of coverage (war), the characters (soldiers), and some of the stars (Bush and embedded reporters). The use of maps of Iraq and the region in general alerted the audience to the location. The information in these promotional spots gave viewers enough information to piece together a rough narrative.

In CNN's spot, the voice-over was as follows:

CNN puts you alongside the troops. With soldiers: Walter Rodgers, Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Ryan Chilcote. With sailors: Frank Buckley, Kyra Philips, Gary Strieker. With airmen: Gary Tuchman, Bob Franken. With marines: Jason Bellini, Art Harris, Martin Savidge. Plus, CNN joins forces with top news organizations and our network of affiliates to put more reporters in the region than anyone. No one gets you closer than CNN—the most trusted name in news. (CNN March 22)

The promo featured CNN embedded reporters in various shots that put them close to the action of war. Martin Savidge sat alongside a military vehicle and a soldier; Walter Rodgers reported next to several military vehicles; and Dr. Sanjay Gupta, wearing a flak jacket, stood in front of stacks of sandbags.

Fox News Channel aired a comparable 30-second promotional spot during March 2003 with the following voice-over:

Fox News Channel. The country at war. Stay with us for breaking news and live updates, fair and balanced, exclusively from the team you trust: Fox News Channel. On the ground. In the air. Reports from the front. Inside the conflict.



War coverage, second to none. Fox News Channel. The political fallout. With eyes around the world, a commitment here at home. The first place to turn for the latest in news—Fox News Channel. Real Journalism. Fair and balanced. (Fox News Channel March 24)

Both promos placed viewers in the position of the U.S. soldiers by providing them with the soldiers' points of view. The CNN promo showed two soldiers pushing an inflatable raft onto a ramp, shots from the point of view of a jet's cockpit, and soldiers walking into an abandoned building. The Fox News Channel promo also visually privileged the military's point of view. In it, viewers saw a full-frame shot from a tank's point of view that placed them behind the tank's gun; a shot of a soldier behind a tank's gun; a canted shot of a tank rolling from the bottom left of the frame to the top right; a shot from an airborne pilot's point of view; and a shot of soldiers' legs running in the desert, followed by a wider shot of those soldiers engaging in military exercises.

The images, which at times passed too quickly to be discernable without slow motion, were bold and active. Even if the images were of ordinary events—Fox News Channel's Mike Tobin walking through an Arab market, for instance—the pace of the editing determined the level of excitement. In less than two seconds during Fox News Channel's promo, viewers saw a close-up of a soldier, a shot of another soldier looking intently into a tank periscope, an exterior shot of a tank firing, and a shot of a jet flying away from an aircraft carrier. The pace of the editing heightened the drama of coverage, the involvement of the embedded journalists, and the mission of the military.

The final major sequence in Fox News Channel's promo involved the political aspects of the war, with shots of President Bush at a podium, Ari Fleischer at a podium, and a very low-angle shot of General Myers at a podium. The architects and mouthpieces of the war effort appeared quickly and in positions of power within the frame. No protesters or dissenting politicians appeared. The Bush administration's dominance in Fox News Channel's coverage of the war was apparent.

CNN and Fox News Channel also promoted products of their parent companies. CNN's promo, for example, advertised publications owned by Time Warner as well as other media outlets with which CNN had news-sharing agreements. When the promo's voice-over finished recounting the names of embedded journalists, a shot of a reporter in front of a helicopter with the U.S. flag waving in the background appeared. The on-screen text was the *TIME Magazine* logo. The next image revealed a group of soldiers peeking out of the top of a tank; the accompanying text was the *New York Times* logo. The logo of the *Boston Globe* appeared alongside an image of a soldier opening the

cockpit door of a plane. Finally, the logo of *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* appeared in conjunction with a soft close-up of a soldier that gradually came into focus.

Fox News Channel's promo, too, involved a significant commercial element. At the end of the promo, a camera in the desert focused on a commercially available Hummer (not a military Humvee) driving toward it. As the Hummer passed by the camera, the video slowed so that the civilian driver (an embedded reporter) became visible. The text "The Latest News" appeared as the Hummer passed by the camera. The Fox News Channel logo appeared, this time with another logo frame that included the tagline: "Real Journalism. Fair and Balanced." This type of product placement merged promotion of the war and promotion of a commercial product in footage that prepared the audience for its entrance into the standard commercial break.

CNN's and Fox News Channel's promotional spots devoted as much time to promoting the military effort and, by extension, the war effort, as they did to promoting the networks. The shots and the way they were arranged brought the actions and weapons of the military and the coverage of embedded journalists to the fore. The final shot of CNN's promo featured (possibly staged) footage of a soldier running with his back to the camera. A cameraman with his back to another camera pursued the soldier. The shot contained the kind of tension and excitement that made for a compelling visual, but it also performed a narrative function. Prior to this shot, the promo had established the location, the genre, and the characters and had established some stars and a rough narrative. The action shot at the end reminded viewers that in this war, reporters played a more central role in the narrative and in promoting that narrative than in previous wars. The commercial value of embedded reporters was obvious in these promos. As stars in this drama, they needed to be visible throughout the coverage and even afterward.

### *Built-in Promotional Spots*

CNN and Fox News Channel aired a number of other types of built-in promos throughout the initial days of the 2003 invasion. CNN boasted a detailed Web site devoted specifically to the invasion of Iraq titled "Special Reports: War in Iraq." CNN used its text crawl at the bottom of the television screen to promote the branded Web site, which carried links to other sites owned by Time Warner such as CNN International, Headline News, and CNN TV. The text crawl invited viewers to visit the Web site: "Go behind the scenes with CNN correspondents on the front lines at CNN.com"; "Go to CNN.com for 3-D models of stealth fighter, tomahawk missile, and other weapons in U.S. arsenal"; "What

weapons of mass destruction is Iraq suspected of having? An interactive breakdown at CNN.com"; "Go to CNN.com's war tracker for a daily briefing on the war in Iraq, with the latest info, maps, statistics & other news"; and "What areas have coalition troops secured in Iraq? Find out with CNN.com's war tracker" (CNN March 20–23). These text crawls promoted CNN's branded Web site, the war effort, and the war narrative. They identified Iraq in terms of the WMDs it supposedly was harboring and identified the United States in terms of its superior weaponry and pre-written conquest.

Like every other news network and, indeed, like fictional programs, CNN and Fox News Channel used teaser devices in their coverage to hold the attention of their audience. Stam discusses the ways in which the news "titillates our curiosity and keeps us tuned in and turned on," but Fox News Channel's built-in promos exceeded the usual "coming up" moments on television news (1983, 32). Shepard Smith, Mike Emanuel, and E. D. Hill transposed teasers onto the developing war events. Before the "shock and awe" bombing campaign, both networks covered the anticipation of the event and the frustration at its delay. On March 20, Smith commented, "What we have not yet seen and what is promised is a campaign of shock and awe. . . . There'll be no mistaking it, and we'll be here for you to cover it" (Fox News Channel March 20). Smith's comment built up the campaign and used the bombing as a device to promote Fox News Channel's coverage. Emanuel did likewise when he assured viewers that Fox News Channel's "cameras [were] all pointed in the right direction" (Fox News Channel March 21).

On two occasions on March 24, Hill used an imminent bombing as a built-in promo. The first time Hill used this tactic, she suggested that viewers take note of the time that B-52s were taking off from an airbase in the United Kingdom and then add six and a half hours (the time it would take the aircraft to reach Iraq). Hill said, "You just make sure that you're tuned to the TV set because that is when *live* you will see what happens in Baghdad" [her emphasis]. Three hours later she inserted another teaser: "In just about three hours you want to make sure you are tuned to Fox News Channel because at that time, if they're going after Baghdad, the B-52s should be right about there" (Fox News Channel March 24). This differed from a typical teaser, as it did not promote something relatively benign like an upcoming edition of *The O'Reilly Factor*. Fox News Channel journalists explicitly used a destructive bombing run—"going after [a city of 6 million]"—as a promotional tool, an approach that seemed to contradict Hill's statement on the same episode of *Fox & Friends* that "[Fox News Channel news personnel are] not a pro-war or bloodthirsty bunch" (Fox News Channel March 24).

Other self-promotion came in the form of guests, whose presence synergistically promoted other brands within the networks' respective conglomerates. For instance, CNN studio personnel frequently carried on phone conversations with the embedded reporters of its corporate sibling *TIME Magazine*. When that happened, the *TIME* logo always appeared on screen. Bill Kristol (who edits the *Weekly Standard*, owned by Fox's corporate parent News Corporation) and guests from Sky News (News Corporation's British news channel), were similar fixtures on Fox News Channel. These incidents created multiple opportunities for cross-media promotion and demonstrated how the parent companies of the two networks insert their corporate interest in the content of the news.

### *The Benefits of Self-Promotion*

CNN and Fox News Channel engaged in self-promotion during commercial breaks and news programs and through merchandise connected to their coverage of the war. In July 2003, CNN released the video *CNN Presents: War in Iraq—the Road to Baghdad*. One of the many items Fox News Channel advertised was the video *War Stories from Iraq with Oliver North*, which is part of a series of videos about military history. This particular volume dealt specifically with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. A book entitled *War Stories: Operation Iraqi Freedom* accompanied the video. The promotional materials referred back to the network's coverage of the war and to the narrative it constructed, solidly linking the network's news to commercial space.

The most significant benefit of the promotion came in the form of ratings, however. During March and April 2003—the first two months of the invasion of Iraq—CNN and Fox News Channel had their largest audiences since September 2001. In March 2003, CNN surpassed its September 2001 viewership of 2.1 million viewers, drawing 2.3 million viewers—a number that fell to 2.2 million the following month before dropping to below the 1 million mark again in May. Fox News Channel's audience size surpassed CNN's by almost 1 million viewers in March. The 3.2 million viewers that chose Fox News Channel in March rose to 3.5 million in April and fell to 1.6 million in May (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2005, "Audience" section).

### **Promotion of the Military and the War**

No clear distinction exists between the two networks' promotion of their coverage and their promotion of the war. I distinguish between self-promotion and war promotion based on degrees of emphasis. In both types of promotion, CNN and Fox News Channel maintained the marketable concept and their respective

styles, but they promoted different products for different beneficiaries. Former ABC correspondent Beth Nissen called the 1991 Persian Gulf War coverage “an advertisement for the U.S. military: the bombs always hit the targets, the U.S. government always scored perfectly. The pictures were like Pentagon commercials and we just played them” (Andersen 1995, 212). If we consider Nissen’s claim in light of promotion of the 2003 war at CNN and Fox News, we can conclude that the biggest beneficiaries of the networks’ promotion of the war were the official proponents of the marketable concept.

### *Code Names*

The most obvious instance of war promotion came in Fox News Channel’s use of the military’s code name for the invasion, or what one might consider the brand name of the war. T. G. Riese & Associates, a consulting firm that helps companies develop strong brands for their products, noted that “every war needs a compelling brand proposition, whether or not it is publicly acknowledged” (Tomkins 2003). The goal of war branding is the same as the goal of all branding—to create and maintain a strong relationship between consumers and products. The most visible manifestation of war branding is the use of code names for military operations, a practice that began in covert operations after World War II (Blumenstein and Rose 2003). Code names were available for media consumption in 1989 when the United States invaded Panama (Laing 2003). Since Operation Just Cause in Panama, the U.S. has used such code names as Desert Shield, Desert Storm, Restore Hope, Uphold Democracy, Shining Hope, Determined Force, Provide Promise, and Enduring Freedom (Laing 2003). Carolyn Said (2003) writes that the 1991 Persian Gulf War “is widely considered the first instance of a brand-centric war, consciously tailored for the mass media.” She also argues that the military and the U.S. government used the devices of advertising much more extensively in 2003 than they had in the 1991 war. A clear example of that practice was White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card’s statement about why the invasion began in the spring: “From a marketing point of view, you don’t introduce new products in August” (quoted in Johnson 2003).

An even clearer example, and one that leans toward high concept, was the code name given to the operation that eventually located Saddam Hussein: “Red Dawn.” The operation was intentionally named after *Red Dawn* (1984), a movie about a group of teenagers who fend off a Soviet invasion of their hometown in Colorado. The code name even prompted a trivia question on CNN that asked, “Which military operation is named after a Hollywood movie?” (CNN December 16, 2003). News organizations do not have to incorporate

official operation code names into the titles they assign to their war coverage. Nevertheless, Fox News Channel wholeheartedly accepted the official code name that communicated part of the marketable concept—“Iraqi Freedom”—and packaged its 2003 war coverage accordingly. Fox News Channel’s adoption of the code name as its war coverage title was transparently promotional.

### *Soldiers (Retired and Active)*

Another conduit for war promotion was military personnel, who typically “spare journalists the trouble of looking for people who really have something to say” (Bourdieu 1998, 30). In their coverage of the 2003 war, CNN and Fox News Channel relied heavily on military analysts and thus privileged the military’s point of view. Fox News Channel had at least nineteen military analysts on the payroll, according to its Web site’s list of contributors, and CNN had approximately five permanent military analysts. The constant rotation of in-house military analysts at both networks kept commentary squarely focused on military strategy rather than on the effects and the social or political context of the war.

At Fox (but not at CNN), network advertisements also promoted the war effort. Two promotional campaigns merged the identity of the network with the U.S. soldiers fighting the war. Beginning on March 21, Fox aired a series of spots entitled “Heart of War.” Jon Scott introduced the first “Heart of War” spot with this statement:

It is said that nobody hates war more than the people who have had to fight in them, but if you spend any time around our professional soldiers . . . you know that they are very well-trained, very smart, and very patriotic. We wanted to give you a chance to meet some of these folks. Take a look now at the heart of war. (Fox News Channel March 21)

Each spot featured a soldier wishing his family and friends well and concluded with the soldier making a plug for Fox News Channel.

An additional set of promotional spots was reminiscent of commercials for companies like Qwest, whose “the spirit of service, there for you” campaign featured and praised its reservist employees (Ellin 2003). This set of Fox promos featured slow, respectful music and still photography. In lieu of voice-over, on-screen text read: “To our armed forces. For your courage, for your sacrifice, for your bravery, we salute you” (Fox News Channel March 22). The first photograph featured a portion of a soldier’s dress uniform in the light while the rest of the frame was shrouded in darkness. Next was a photo of soldiers hanging from a helicopter. After that was a photo of a pilot looking out a win-

dow. Similar photos followed; some were action shots and others were more introspective. The promo concluded with the Fox News Channel logo. Fox News Channel carried at least three versions of this type of promo, aligning the network undeniably with the troops and reinforcing the soldiers' heroism and the network's patriotism.

### *Weapons (Part 1)*

Both networks contributed to the marketable concept by promoting the weapons in the U.S. arsenal. CNN posted an extensive section on U.S. and Iraqi weapons on the special war coverage page of its Web site entitled "Special Reports: War in Iraq," which devotes a great deal of space to military matters. The main menu of the site includes the categories War Tracker, Forces (which included the three subcategories of U.S. & Coalition, Iraq, and Weapons), Maps, On the Scene, Sights & Sounds, Impact, Heroes of War, and Struggle for Iraq. In the section entitled Forces: U.S. & Coalition, the Web site chronicles the units involved in each branch of the U.S. military; lists the names of the U.S., British, and Australian commanders; lists the members of the coalition forces; and provides a full list of U.S. weapons. The site provides comparable information for the Iraqi military.

By far the most detailed part of the Web site is the section devoted to coalition and Iraqi weapons. The site breaks the weapons down into munitions, ground weapons, aircraft, warships, and WMDs. Three-dimensional models of select U.S. munitions, aircraft, and ground weapons are available as well. For instance, clicking on the hyperlink for the Massive Ordnance Air Blast bomb opens another window with a picture of the bomb and its relevant statistics. Clicking on the hyperlink for an aircraft carrier such as the USS *Constellation* reveals an entire page of statistics, images of the carrier battle group, and a large photo of the *Constellation*. The sophistication of CNN's weapons site approaches the sophistication of on-air graphic representations of weapons and aircraft on both networks (see chapter 5 and appendix B).

The networks' promotion of the marketable concept required them to promote the U.S. military and the general war effort. CNN and Fox News Channel performed these promotional tasks differently but with similar energy. Fox News Channel adopted the official code name of the operation. Fox News Channel's pro-troops promotional spots and CNN's military-heavy Web site marked an interesting divide. In spite of the fact that both networks emphasized the marketable concept, Fox News stressed an emotional connection to the soldiers in its promos, while CNN's Web site focused on the technology the soldiers used. CNN's display of weapons functioned to promote the marketable concept

in two ways: it celebrated high technology, glossing over the lethal consequences of weaponry in the process, and it served as a form of merchandising.

### War Sells

Merchandising functions most successfully in the service of films that are based on bold images, hence the hyperstylization of high-concept films. The field of film merchandising includes both products officially licensed to promote the film and products that function as ancillary tie-ins. The key distinction is that ancillary tie-ins do not benefit the studios directly. They are unlicensed, so their value to the studio stems from their ability to create and sustain awareness of the film. To illustrate the value of tie-ins, Wyatt discusses the fashion trends inspired by *Flashdance* and *Saturday Night Fever* (1994, 153). "Inspired-by" looks are not connected to the films' producers legally, but they promote the films nonetheless. The applicability of ancillary tie-ins to the coverage of the war in 2003 is substantial. The merchandising that circulated outside the networks—including the marketing of products such as weapons, automobiles, action figures, and video games—supported and sustained the war narrative and the marketable concept. These merchandising exploits were made possible in part by the war narratives and the coverage of the war at both networks. The ideas that those networks helped to create will remain in circulation because of these products.

### *Weapons (Part 2)*

The ways that CNN and Fox News promoted weapons assume another level of significance when one considers the international market for those weapons. A 2003 *Washington Post* article discusses how the war functioned as an advertisement for the products of U.S. weapons producers in the international market. The coverage of the war highlighted the fact that these munitions were now "battlefield-tested weapons." The director of arms sales monitoring at the Federation of American Scientists went so far as to say that CNN was "the best marketing tool" for the weapons trade (Merle 2003). That sentiment is hardly new. Andersen writes that in the coverage of the 1991 Persian Gulf War, weapons became like the products in television commercials that could perform feats of magic: "Weapons became the magical objects that, in the most simple, clean, and easy way, would solve the problem in the Persian Gulf" (1995, 217). Engelhardt argues that the 1991 war was a "forty-three-day-long ad, intent on selling both domestic and foreign markets in the renewal of U.S. qualities, as well as on the specific weapons systems that were in the process of renewing

those qualities" (1994, 87). These trends in war coverage were replicated in 2003; Merle notes that the weapons-heavy coverage of the 2003 invasion reproduced the marketing environment that boosted arms sales after 1991 (Merle 2003).

The types of weapons in high demand were the satellite-guided precision weapons that CNN and Fox News Channel devoted so much time to describing (*ibid.*). While network personnel focused on how precision-guided munitions had the capacity to prevent massive civilian casualties, Merle reminds us how that type of coverage might benefit the arms trade. Indeed, sales of such munitions increased dramatically internationally in 2003 (Berrigan, Hartung, and Heffel 2005).

### *Toys*

Toys that targeted children and adults were a significant part of the merchandising of the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Military-themed action figures and video games replicated the narrative and character types represented on CNN and Fox News Channel. These toys contributed to the high-concept merchandising of the war coverage by latching onto the marketable concept the news networks promoted. One film executive asserts that a media text "must develop into toyetic applications—characters which have a personality that can be easily transferred to dolls and playset environments" (Wasko 1994, 207). The way that a high-concept film can spawn toys that transparently promote the film is a testament to one of the fundamental characteristics of high concept: ease. The easy pitch and the easy sale translate to an easily understood narrative and easily understood characters. The rhetoric from the White House and the networks seamlessly and easily promoted the high concept of the war, and the toys soon followed.

One of the biggest lines of merchandise to spring from high-concept films is the action figure. The earliest action figures were military-themed toys, which have evolved from basic wooden figurines to detailed plastic figures that are tailor-made to signify the latest military conflict. The influence works both ways: astoundingly, one Pentagon spokesman has even admitted that the M-16 and a number of other items in the military arsenal, including drones and assault weapons, were based on creations by toy manufacturer Mattel. A palpable connection exists between the military, toy manufacturers, and news networks, as an exchange at a toy fair early in 2003 indicates. An Army and Air Force Exchange Service buyer recommended to some toymakers that they wait until the invasion began and then use the same logos that would appear on CNN once the war started. That way, the toys would be more specific to the current

conflict. As instructed, toymakers eagerly watched the news coverage for "new battle tools" that might prove profitable as "new battle toys" for the upcoming Christmas season. The presidents of toy manufacturers Small Blue Planet and Plan-B Toys even acknowledged that news coverage of the countdown to the invasion drove new toy production (Hamilton 2003).

Older toys still in circulation also received a boost from the buildup to the war. Sales of Hasbro's GI Joe line increased before and during the 2003 invasion. Noting that Hasbro had expected the increase, one retail spokesman remarked, "People get rather patriotic, and they go out and buy their GI Joes. It happened before the [1991] Persian Gulf War" (Associated Press 2003). Small Blue Planet's president, Anthony Allen, admitted that the company "started work when the 'Showdown' buzzword hit the airwaves"; the line of action figures that resulted was branded "Special Forces: Showdown with Iraq" (Hamilton 2003). Dragon Models named its series of Iraq-specific figures "Dragon Extra 4: Operation Iraqi Freedom." In addition to the Cody figure I mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the line consisted of such action figures as "Fernando," an M-240B marine gunner on the highway to Baghdad, and "Walt," who performs reconnaissance on the outskirts of Basra.

Other action figures that were not soldiers also appeared on the Web sites of smaller toy manufacturers. For example, Blue Box Toys developed "Elite Force Aviator," also known as the President Bush action figure. The toy Bush appeared in the "traditional naval aviator garb" the president wore for his widely televised May 1, 2003, landing on the USS *Abraham Lincoln* (Jacobs 2003). And Herobuilders.com featured a variety of action figures of Bush, Iraqi information minister Mohammed Said al-Sahhaf, Saddam Hussein, and others. That Iraqi action figures existed at all was not a complete surprise; Karim H. Karim argues that the figure of the "violent Muslim" carries a lot of weight in popular culture. He writes, "Commercial and ideological purposes dovetail neatly in products that exploit the basic stereotypes of Arabs and Muslims" (2006, 120). That profitability was evident to toymakers. In an e-mail on January 10, 2006, a Herobuilders.com spokesman revealed to me that the information minister figure "sold the best in the shortest period of time" and that the Bush action figure had the second highest sales figures. The 2003 war coverage, rooted in formulaic narrative, genres, stars, and character types, proved to be very "toyetic."

Video games surpass even action figures in popularity. The video-game software industry claimed \$5.8 billion in overall sales in 2003 (NPD Group 2004). Military-themed video games are a subset of strategy and first- and third-person shooter games. One of the titles at Gotham Games is *Conflict*:



*Desert Storm*, Sony Computer Entertainment has *SOCOM* (the acronym for United States Special Operations Command), and the U.S. Army promoted two video games on its Web site: *America's Army* ("the official U.S. Army game") and *Medal of Honor* (created by Electronic Arts). At the end of the first quarter of 2003, *SOCOM: U.S. Navy Seals* (released August 2002) had the eighth-best sales figures among U.S. video games (The NPD Group 2003a). *SOCOM II: Navy Seals* (released November 2003) debuted at number five, although it fell to ninth one month later (NPD Group 2003b, 2003c). *Medal of Honor: Rising Sun*, a World War II-themed game (also released in November 2003) debuted at number two (NPD Group 2003b, 2003c). Although it fell to number seven one month later, it was the tenth best-selling console video game of 2003 (The NPD Group 2004). In general, games set in the Middle East with "themes of terrorism and war" performed well in 2003 (WorldWatch Institute 2003).

The video game most relevant to the 2003 invasion of Iraq is entitled *Kuma\War* from Kuma\Reality Games. *Kuma\War* is a free downloadable game that offers print news stories, Department of Defense briefings, video footage of soldiers, and official information about operations conducted in Iraq in a first- and third-person shooter video-game format. The director of *Kuma\War*'s video services is William B. Davis, a former ABC News producer (Gaudiosi 2003). The game's video footage comes from Department of Defense photographers, the Associated Press and other wire services, broadcast television networks, overseas television stations, and "home video." Videos from the Department of Defense and the wire services figure heavily in the game because they are the least expensive to obtain (Anderson 2003).

The news reports in the video game function as bits of intelligence that players use to educate themselves about the missions they are about to play. The game's Web site offers this advice:

Look at the Mission Intel Pack before you play and you'll learn what the 101st Airborne was up against when they captured the Hussein brothers or the 10th Mountain Division when they took on Al-Qaeda—then you can jump in the game and see for yourself—in single player or multiplayer, co-op or red on blue intense action. (*Kuma\War* 2004)

In the game, which boasts "Real War News," an actor portraying a news anchor presents the footage of soldiers as actual news. The news report acts as an introduction for each mission. Of eighty-three missions currently available, there are ten different missions set in Fallujah, one mission that portrays Operation Red Dawn, two missions that link Al-Qaeda and Iraq, and two missions devoted to

the campaigns that resulted in the deaths of Uday and Qusay Hussein (*Kuma\War* 2008).<sup>1</sup>

Because it is not affiliated with CNN or Fox News Channel, *Kuma\War* demonstrated (and continues to demonstrate) the reach of the war narrative the two networks constructed beyond the conventional news arena. That the Department of Defense approved the use of footage for entertainment purposes in *Kuma\War* speaks to its willingness to perpetuate the official war narrative on a multiplicity of platforms. Furthermore, the participation of major news networks like ABC and former news personnel underscores the porous nature of the barrier between news and entertainment. The combination of actual footage, a "fake" news format, and a gaming context illustrates precisely to what degree the 2003 invasion has come to be constructed as a high-concept commodity. The narrative construction of the invasion by television news producers provided the formula such merchandise needed in order to thrive.

### Music

The marketing potential of recorded music was not tapped into on a large scale until the 1970s, though the film and music publishing industries began a lucrative relationship once sound technology put songs on film (Wyatt 1994, 134). The soundtrack market is now a given in the overall merchandising scheme of high-concept films, even when some soundtracks feature songs that were inspired by the films but were not actually in the films. The same pattern exists in times of crisis. As in the case of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the 2003 invasion of Iraq inspired a wealth of musical responses, both for and against the war. The pro-war songs are extremely faithful to the version of events posited by the Bush administration, CNN, and Fox News Channel. Each contains elements of the war narrative that the network war coverage emphasized, and two that were released before 2003 act as a transition between the war narrative's cause (the September 11 terrorist attacks) and its effect (military intervention). Four songs from the country music genre exemplify the value of the tie-in for the high-concept text.

One of the transitional songs, Toby Keith's "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)," was the number-one single on Billboard's

1. Most of the missions relate directly to Iraq, but some—like Mission 73: Mexican Border Battle—focus on other themes related to national security (*Kuma\War* 2008).



"Hot Country Singles and Tracks" for two weeks in the summer of 2002 (Pietroluongo, Patel, and Jessen 2002). Although the song was released well before the invasion, it clearly links the September 11 attacks to the need for military action—a link that has persisted throughout the war in Iraq. At the beginning of the song, Keith sings, "Now this nation that I love / Has fallen under attack / A mighty sucker punch came flyin' in." He concludes with the threat of nationalistic vengeance:

Justice will be served  
And the battle will rage  
This big dog will fight  
When you rattle his cage  
And you'll be sorry that you messed with  
The U.S. of A.  
'Cause we'll put a boot in your ass  
It's the American way. (Dreamworks Nashville 2002)

The connection between September 11 and military retribution couched in jingoist terms persists in another transitional song, Charlie Daniels's arguably racist piece, "This Ain't No Rag, It's a Flag." He begins by alluding to a derogatory stereotype of Arabs: "This ain't no rag it's a flag / And we don't wear it on our heads." Like Keith, he concludes the song with the threat of retribution: "We're gonna hunt you down like a mad dog hound / Make you pay for the lives you stole" (BMG Heritage 2001). The Charlie Daniels song reached number thirty-nine on Billboard's "Hot Country Singles and Tracks" in 2001 (Pietroluongo, Patel, and Jessen 2001).

A third song that perpetuates the marketable concept as well as the war narrative's character types is "Have You Forgotten?" sung by Darryl Worley. The song was country music's number-one song for six weeks in spring 2003 (Pietroluongo, Patel, and Jessen 2003). Worley explicitly referred to September 11, 2001, at the beginning of his song: "Have you forgotten when those towers fell?" He concluded by linking those events to the war:

I've been there with the soldiers  
Who've gone away to war,  
And you can bet that they remember  
Just what they're fighting for. (Dreamworks Nashville 2003)

Clint Black's "Iraq and I Roll" does not broach the subject of revenge, but its jingoistic lyrics invoke the technologically advanced U.S. arsenal and mention Hussein by name. In the middle of the song Black sings,

It might be a smart bomb  
They find stupid people too  
And if you stand with the likes of Saddam  
One might just find you  
I rock, I rack 'em up, and I roll  
I'm back, and I'm a high-tech GI Joe  
I've got infrared, I've got GPS, and I've got that good old-fashioned lead  
There's no price too high for freedom  
So be careful where you tread. (Clint Black 2003)

Military might and arrogant rhetoric joined forces in Black's song and all of the others that followed the Department of Defense's narrative as closely as CNN and Fox News Channel did.

These songs formed a soundtrack to the war as seen on television. The two songs released before the 2003 invasion served as a bridge between the September 11 terrorist attacks and the U.S. military action that followed in Afghanistan and in Iraq. The two songs released after the 2003 invasion repeated the same themes stressed on CNN and Fox News Channel, and they featured the same character types. They were the musical equivalent of some of the more extreme war coverage found on Fox News Channel; they brimmed with nationalistic pride and simplistically linked September 11, Al-Qaeda, and Saddam Hussein. Like the war coverage, the songs adhered to a formula that was eminently marketable, a necessary attribute for songs recorded on major labels.

Action figures, video games, and recorded music all performed similar functions during and after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. They were committed to the military stars—the soldiers. Some even went so far as to embody Iraqi stars. These ancillary tie-ins were valuable because they kept the motifs of the war coverage in circulation; Kuma\War actually circulated war coverage in the context of a computer game. In turn, uncomplicated and sanitized coverage of the war created interest in the products. The relationship was symbiotic, even if the producers on each side were not directly involved with the other.

## Conclusion

The specificities of television problematize a faithful adherence to the elements of high concept used in the film industry. The marketing and merchandising of war coverage on CNN and Fox News was understandably different from the marketing and merchandising of high-concept films like *Batman* or *Stars Wars*. However, one should never underestimate commercial television's basic need to market. The merchandising on the two news networks occurred on a

## **UGLY WAR, PRETTY PACKAGE**

small scale, but the networks' efforts to promote themselves and the war were considerable.

The merchandise that revolved around the war narrative ensured that it would saturate popular culture. The war tie-ins advertised the story, stars, character types, genres, and ideology of the high-concept war narrative. The success of the products provided evidence that the concept of the war was marketable.