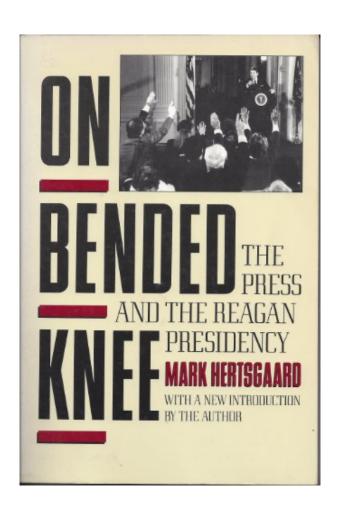
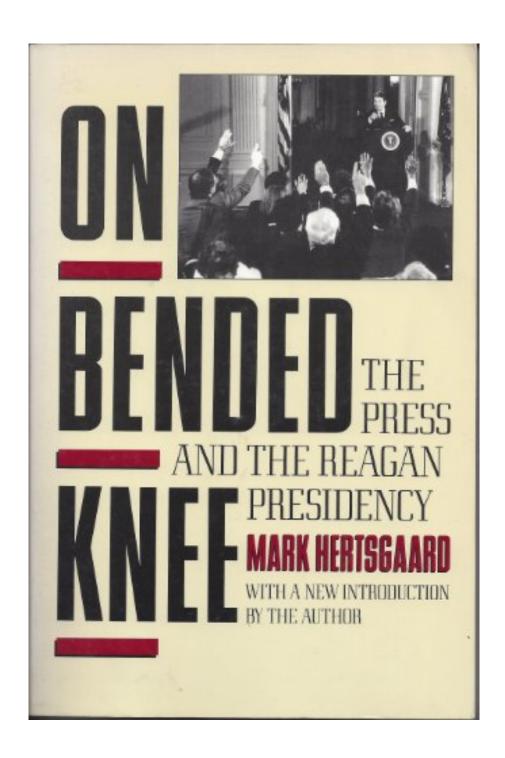
ON BENDED KNEE: THE PRESS AND THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY BY MARK HERTSGAARD



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From Publishers Weekly

Based on some 175 interviews with top administration officials, senior journalists and news executives, plus analyses of newspaper articles and television stories, Hertsgaard (Nuclear Inc.) argues that the Reagan White House not only tamed the media but transformed it into "a willing mouthpiece of the government" in its coverage of issues ranging from economic policy to arms control. In addition to providing examples of the media's "accommodating passivity" on major issues, he contends that the Reagan propaganda apparatus (or "Deaver & Co.," as he also calls it, referring to the president's former image wizard) chose the First Lady's pet project (i.e., the dangers of drugs) for her to draw attention away from her lavish lifestyle, which the public was beginning to notice and resent. Hertsgaard also claims that evidence suggests a 1980 deal with Iran to delay the hostage release until inauguration day, and that this alleged deal was the genesis of the Irancontra affair. But these are mere sidelights in this charge-packed attack on the media's "subservience to state authority" and the "witless malevolence" of recent presidential image-making. Hertsgaard's most controversial indictment is that the nation's press lords deliberately reined in their troops. Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Library Journal

During the Reagan years, the White House Press Corps has "functioned less as an independent than as a palace court press," according to Hertsgaard. Basing his arguments on hundreds of interviews with important administration leaders and reporters, Hertsgaard convincingly portrays the White House press as noncritical and sycophantic. As members of the same power elite that they write about, White House reporters more often than not agree with the President's policies. In addition, they have been reluctant to strongly criticize Reagan for fear of being cut off from the flow of information and of losing their privileged status. Recommended for media and current affairs collections. Karl Helicher, Wolfsohn, Memorial Lib., King of Prussia, Pa.

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ON BENDED KNEE: THE PRESS AND THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY BY MARK HERTSGAARD PDF

Hertsgaard presents a history and an indictment of the relations between the mjor news media and the Reagan Administration. He shows how the press, both through government manipulation and through voluntary self-censorship, abdicated its responsibility to report what was really going on in the Reagan Administration.

• Sales Rank: #1412520 in Books

Published on: 1989-09-09Released on: 1989-09-09Original language: English

• Number of items: 1

• Dimensions: 1.21" h x 4.09" w x 7.06" l,

• Binding: Paperback

• 408 pages

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"Severin, Severin, speak so slightly, Severin, down on your bended knee."

By Andrew McCaffrey

ON BENDED KNEE: THE PRESS AND THE REAGAN PRESIDENCY is (now) a historical snapshot and a thorough analysis of that emerging picture. The focus of attention is upon the exact relationship between (not surprisingly) the press apparatus of the Reagan Administration and the press itself. And his conclusion -- that Reagan faced a press that rarely even thought about trying to draw blood -- is something that any Reagan supporter would find hard to argue. After all, author Mark Hertsgaard even gets some quotes from Reagan Administration officials who basically agree with his argument.

ON BENDED KNEE was published in 1988 (the book mentions the on-going Presidential campaign of that year, but seems blissfully unaware of its conclusion), and the main feature separating this political book from political books of today is that there appears to have been actual research put into it. While some modern books seem content to rest their conclusions on the backs of half-remembered interviews on CNN or from rumors they gleamed off the Internets, Hertsgaard interviewed over 175 persons. Persons from both the press and the Reagan Administration.

It's these interviews that drive the book. Hertsgaard's technique is to proceed chronologically, letting the quotes build up an individual story, and then inserting his own analysis to show how these specific events fall into an overall pattern. Hertsgaard spends time analyzing both the construction/distribution of the Reagan "message" and how that message was parsed by the media. The pattern seems eerily similar to the post-9/11 coverage of today's government and those parallels will seem obvious and ominous.

I found this to be a very convincing argument. Hertsgaard obviously has a point of view (negative on both the Reagan policies and on the press coverage they received), but he's very logical and meticulous in laying out his case. People looking for how the Reagan people played puppet-master with the press may be disappointed, as the overwhelming attention is placed on the self-censorship that took place within the press itself with little need of any influence from the Administration. However, he does take some time to show how the Reagan Public Relations circle manipulated news and images to place their man in the best light possible.

It's interesting to read about the birth of many awful aspects of the media which were new at the time, but which are now depressingly ever-present. The author looks at the Presidential Election of 1984 and points out how the media focused more attention on the horse-race, on the latest polls and on the question of who will win at the expense of covering where each candidate actually stood on the issues and whether those positions were wise or foolish. Hertsgaard correctly points out how such attention on trivia rather than issues does a disservice to the audience and, ultimately, the politicians themselves.

Many of the book's subjects are still hot topics of political conversation today. The blurring of news and entertainment. The fact that more news outlets are owned by fewer and fewer companies and individuals. The timidity of a press, terrified at the thought of doing anything that might be considered "liberal". Still important issues, this is where many of them had their beginnings.

Unfortunately, such reporting is commonplace nowadays. I'd love to see a follow-up from Hertsgaard written today, analyzing the trends he first noted here. It would probably be a depressing and predictable read, but it would have to be an important one. ON BENDED KNEE may be discussing events of twenty years ago, but the points he raises still have resonance today.

14 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Bend Over Backwards To Help

By John G. Hilliard

The cover of this book has a picture of President Reagan in front of about 10 reporters. This is about the same ratio of press verse political coverage in the book itself. This book was recommend or mentioned in a number of other books I have read covering the Reagan Presidency or how the media deal with the White House. Thus, I thought it would be an interesting book on how the Reagan image machine worked. I just came away a bit disappointed because of the heavy amount of reporting on the press. I guess I thought the book would be more balanced and have a deeper look at what the Reagan administration did with the press and how they put out information to the press. Basically, I wanted to know more details on how the political people control the media.

If you are part of the population that does not believe in the "Liberal Media" chant so many conservatives have been going on about for years then this book will add many new examples to your cocktail party debates. This book is a great pre book to Alterman's "What Liberal Media" The authors really dig into how the press viewed partisan or the appearance of partisan coverage during the 80's. It almost came across like most of the press where more worried about how there paper was viewed by the White House image team then by the readers. The author gave example after example and quotes galore from media types that talked about how stories were rewritten or pushed further back in the paper due to the subjects. There were also some very interesting examples about how the White House used terrorism and the Middle East to first sell American involvement and then excuse American withdrawals. It seemed to me that the current White House may be using some of these same tactics.

One last comment on the book. I do not know if I can correctly explain this, but this author had a very dense way of writing. It almost seams as though you need to take about twice as long as you normally would to get through a chapter. It was not dull nor wooden. It just seemed to take more energy yet I did not come away thinking this was a great book. Maybe it is just me. Anyway the book is interesting and gives you a lot of nice information about the press and the Reagan Administration. If you are at all interested in either the media or Reagan then I bet you will enjoy this book. I would warn you though that the author does not sugar coat the truth and he has no problem pointing out Reagan's mistakes or weaknesses. If you are a fan of Ron then you may be aggravated with many pages.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Remembering the press gang and those like Sam Donaldson (ABC News reporter) I will enjoy reading ... By John A. Jago, Jr.

Remembering the press gang and those like Sam Donaldson (ABC News reporter) I will enjoy reading this book soon. Timing of receiving it was great.

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