



Media on Trial: Guilty of Gosnell Blackout

ITEM: U.S. News & World Report writer Susan Milligan reported on April 18, 2013:

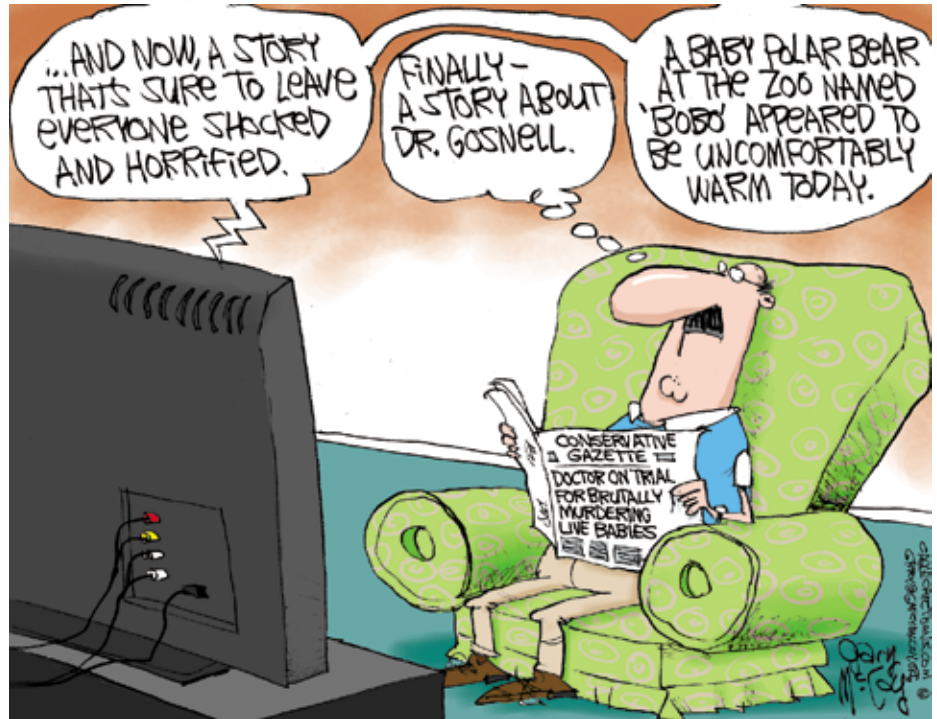
Conservative and anti-abortion groups are outraged over what they see as the lack of media attention to the trial of Gosnell, who is accused of committing gruesome, illegal third-trimester abortions.... But suggestions that the “media” were deliberately ignoring the story to protect a so-called “abortion doctor” are ludicrous.... The Gosnell case is a local murder trial. It’s a particularly gruesome one — perhaps a bit too pornographic even for cable news.

ITEM: The Washington Post’s executive editor Martin Baron was quoted in a Post article by Paul Farhi on April 14. “In retrospect, we regret not having staffed the trial sooner. But, as you know, we don’t have unlimited resources, and ... there is a lot of competition for our staff’s attention.” Added Baron, “We never decide what to cover for ideological reasons, no matter what critics might claim. Accusations of ideological motives are easy to make, even if they’re not supported by the facts.”

ITEM: A Newsweek/Daily Beast story by Josh Dzieza entitled “Why Are the Media Apologizing About Kermit Gosnell Coverage?” on April 12, 2013, argued:

There are plenty of possible reasons the story hadn’t made the leap from local to front-page national news until now. First of all, every detail of the story is ghastly. I had to force myself to read the report; Pictures of dead fetuses are the stuff of abortion-clinic protest signs for a reason: they make people uncomfortable.

CORRECTION: The murder trial of Philadelphia abortionist Dr. Kermit Gosnell has forced an extraordinary outpouring of public confession, catharsis, denial, and rationalization by members of the liberal-left mainstream media (MSM) — unlike any other event in recent memory. After



completely ignoring the sensational trial the MSM were stung by mounting criticism that their failure to cover the story amounted to outright censorship due to political bias.

The explanations and justifications offered by MSM spokesmen for their spectacular collective failure to cover Gosnell would be laughable were the issue not such a serious life-and-death matter. The media excuses fall into a number of categories: 1) It’s a local story and we’re a national news organization; 2) It’s too gruesome; 3) We don’t have enough reporters and resources to cover *everything*; 4) We goofed — we weren’t aware of the story; and 5) What “blackout?” We *have* been covering it.

On April 4, 20 prominent leaders of the conservative and pro-life movement demanded that the broadcast networks stop censoring coverage of the Kermit Gosnell trial. The group of critics, led by Media Research Center founder Brent Bozell, included Penny Nance, president of Concerned Women for America; Fr. Frank Pavone, national director of Priests for Life; Tony Perkins, president of the Family Research Council; Mario Lopez, president of the Hispanic Leadership Fund; and

Austin Ruse, president of the Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute.

The media blackout on Gosnell increasingly became an issue in the conservative blogosphere and on talk radio. On April 11, eleven members of the U.S. House of Representatives made speeches on the floor of the House denouncing the media blackout of the Gosnell trial.

“If Dr. Gosnell had walked into a nursery and shot seven infants with an AR-15, it would be national news and the subject of presidential hand-wringing,” said Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.), one of the 11. “Will the decades-long major national news media cover-up of the brutality — and violence — of abortion methods ever end?” asked Smith, an outspoken and longtime member of the House pro-life caucus. “Will Americans ever be told the horrifying details as to how — and how often — abortionists dismember, decapitate, and chemically poison innocent babies?”

On the same day, April 11, Kirsten Powers, a writer for the liberal-left *Newsweek/Daily Beast* and commentator for Fox News, penned a column for *USA Today* that is credited with being the “name and shame” call-out that caused the MSM to finally react.



Correction, Please!

“A Lexis-Nexis search shows none of the news shows on the three major national television networks has mentioned the Gosnell trial in the last three months,” Powers wrote. “The *Washington Post* has not published original reporting on this during the trial and the *New York Times* saw fit to run one original story on A-17 on the trial’s first day. They’ve been silent ever since, despite headline-worthy testimony.”

“Let me state the obvious,” said Powers. “This should be front page news.... The deafening silence of too much of the media ... is a disgrace.”

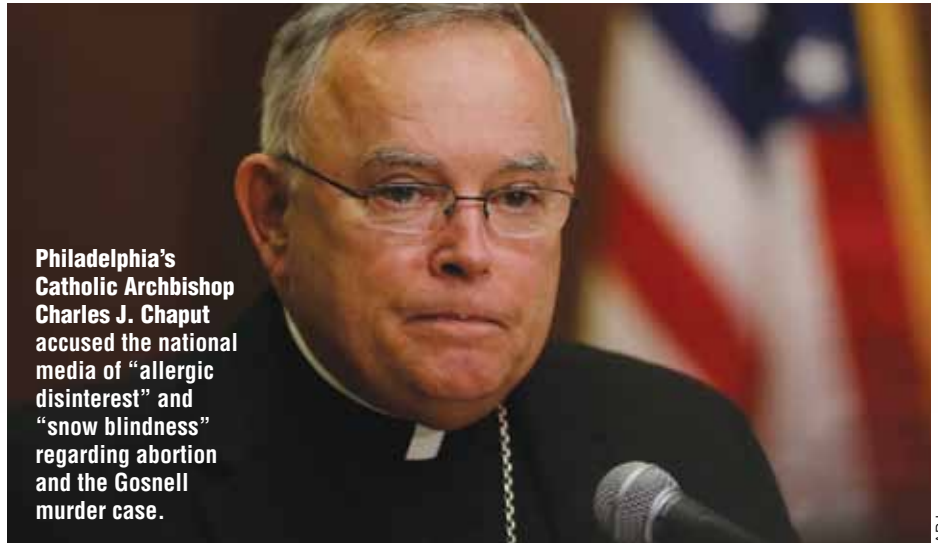
On April 12, staff writer Conor Friedersdorf wrote a lengthy article for *Atlantic*, entitled “Why Dr. Kermit Gosnell’s Trial Should Be a Front-Page Story,” that quoted heavily from the Gosnell grand jury indictment and trial testimony. Friedersdorf says that until he read Kirsten Powers’ story the day before, he “wasn’t aware of this story.” He wrote that Powers made “a powerful, persuasive case that the Gosnell trial ought to be getting a lot more attention in the national press than it is getting.”

After just a little digging, Friedersdorf was able to see that this is a “thoroughly newsworthy” story.

“To sum up, this story has numerous elements *any one of which* would normally make it a major story,” said Friedersdorf. “And setting aside conventions, which are flawed, this *ought* to be a big story on the merits. The news value is undeniable.”

Many other journalists and news organizations have cited the Kirsten Powers column and the more comprehensive Friedersdorf article for providing the impetus to finally cover the story. But it is clear that without the continuous prodding from vocal pro-life and conservative critics, the Gosnell trial would have come and gone with the vast majority of Americans having never heard of it. Even so, the coverage so far has been given grudgingly and, in the case of most media groups, still amounts to little more than drive-by reporting.

Newsbusters, a website of the Media Research Institute, has played a key role in holding the MSM feet to the fire on the Gosnell censorship. In an April 9 News-



Philadelphia's Catholic Archbishop Charles J. Chaput accused the national media of “allergic disinterest” and “snow blindness” regarding abortion and the Gosnell murder case.

AP Images

busters story, Matthew Philbin compared the extensive media coverage lavished on the “shocking” Rutgers basketball coach “scandal” versus the blackout on Gosnell. Wrote Philbin:

The Rutgers basketball story continues to transfix the media, and why shouldn’t it? Mike Rice, the disgraced former Rutgers basketball coach, allegedly killed a woman and at least seven viable, born-alive babies “by plunging scissors into their spinal cords” in his filthy, macabre “house of horrors” abortion clinic.

Oh wait, my mistake. Rice was fired last week from Rutgers over video of him shoving, kicking and yelling at his players, throwing basketballs at them and — most damning — using “homophobic slurs.” That’s made Rice the most notorious villain in America. And in one week it earned him 36 network news stories clocking in at 41 minutes, 26 seconds of air time on ABC, CBS and NBC.

Now, had Rice been accused of killing a woman and eight babies, he’d be enjoying the same anonymity as Kermit Gosnell — provided the killings were carried out in an abortion clinic. Gosnell is the West Philadelphia abortionist who ran an unimaginable charnel house of a “clinic,” for 30 years. Witnesses testified that he may have murdered over

100 babies outside the womb. Gosnell’s trial, underway for weeks, has featured wrenching testimony and horrific details. And it has received exactly zero seconds of airtime on the broadcast networks.

Which story is inherently more important, errant coach or mass-murdering doctor? Most people would not be in a quandary over selecting the latter as the more important story. But by April 9 Coach Rice’s terrible “crime” of unprofessional behavior had garnered 36 network news stories. And Gosnell’s abattoir of death? Zero network stories.

Many media critics have contrasted the Gosnell blackout with the wall-to-wall, gavel-to-gavel media circus that accompanied the Jodi Arias trial in Arizona, which ran simultaneously with much of the Gosnell trial. The comparison is apropos — and the contrast is staggering. Arias was convicted of the gruesome killing of her boyfriend: stabbing him more than 20 times, slashing his throat, and shooting him in the head. Matt Hadro of the Media Research Center reported on May 14, 2013 that “CNN gave more coverage to the Jodi Arias trial in one day than it did to the entire Kermit Gosnell trial over the span of eight weeks.”

“When the verdict was reached in the Arias trial,” noted Hadro, “CNN’s coverage for the day totaled almost a whopping three hours. In contrast, the network gave



just under 100 minutes to the Gosnell story in eight weeks since the trial began on March 18.”

Hadro further noted:

Anderson Cooper, who on April 12 noticed that “this story has not received the kind of media attention that one might expect,” didn’t touch the story for another month until Monday night.

...When CNN announced that a verdict had been reached in the Arias trial, at 2:35 p.m. ET on Wednesday, May 8, the network devoted almost two full hours of coverage to the trial in the next two-and-a-half hours, including a full hour of non-stop live coverage of the verdict. Monday’s Gosnell verdict saw only 50 minutes of airtime for the entire day, in contrast.

And even after the Arias verdict was announced, the network gave over an hour to the story throughout the prime-time hours of 5-11 p.m. ET on May 8. Gosnell exited the news much more quickly, getting just six minutes of coverage during those same hours on Monday.

But CNN wasn’t even the worst. Dan Gainor reported on Fox News on May 14, 2013:

ABC was the worst. It took that network a couple years after the arrest and 56 straight days of trial to acknowledge Gosnell existed. ABC found more than three hours of air time for other court cases during that time, but waited until Gosnell was convicted before it ever admitted he was even on trial.

While most of the MSM commentariat — almost universally pro-abortion — continue to insist that there is no, and has been no, conscious effort by the media to censor this story, a few have been more candid. Professor Marc Lamont Hill of Columbia University is one who has admitted what millions of Americans already knew to be the case.

“For what it’s worth, I do think that those of us on the Left have made a decision not to cover this trial because we worry that it’ll compromise abortion rights,” Professor Hill said during a panel discussion on Fox News. “Whether you agree with abortion or not, I do think there’s a direct connection between the media’s failure to cover this and our own political commitments on the Left.” “I think it’s a bad idea,” Hill said of the blackout. “I think it’s dangerous, but I think that’s the way it is.”

Professor Hill certainly is not a “right-wing extremist.” He’s a hardcore radical Marxist who has treated recent murderer/

Media misdirection: The MSM were saturated with gavel-to-gavel coverage of the lurid details of the Jodi Arias trial, while ignoring Gosnell.

cop-killer Christopher Dorner as a folk hero, and has defended Maoist-communist Van Jones and Weather Underground terrorist/cop-killer Assata Shakur (aka Joanne Chesimard).

Another welcome admission came from Melinda Henneberger of the *Washington Post*, one of the establishment media organs most culpable for spiking the Gosnell story.

In a column entitled “Why Kermit Gosnell hasn’t been on Page One,” Henneberger confessed:

I say we didn’t write more because the only abortion story most outlets ever cover in the news pages is every single threat or perceived threat to abortion rights. In fact, that is so fixed a view of what constitutes coverage of that issue that it’s genuinely hard, I think, for many journalists to see a story outside that paradigm as news. That’s not so much a conscious decision as a reflex, but the effect is one-sided coverage.

It is a qualified admission, which says, in essence, “We don’t consciously conspire, we just all react reflexively in unison.” Maybe WaPo needs a little newsroom “diversity”? One of Henneberger’s colleagues at the *Post*, Paul Farhi, makes a similar argument in his April 14 article, “Is media bias to blame for lack of Gosnell coverage? Or something far more banal?” So, you see, the MSM are not biased, just banal.

In her April 12, 2013 confession “Why I Didn’t Write About Gosnell’s Trial — And Why I Should Have,” for *Newseek/Daily-Beast*, Megan MaCardle concedes that “the MSM has barely covered a story that could plausibly be named ‘The Trial of the Century.’ And that demands explanation.” Unfortunately, she offers no convincing explanation. And most of her MSM colleagues are in denial that an explanation is needed or any correction of course is necessary. ■

— WILLIAM F. JASPER