

Welcome Amy Goodman. Now, Let's Speak Some Truth to Left-wing Power

The title of this essay may seem a bit presumptuous. After all, since when did the left-wing come to any "power" in American society? In fact, they have not ascended to any level of power, except in regard to their own internal left-wing communities. That is the intended examination here: to see how some of those who have put themselves into positions of being spokespeople for the progressive cause, but more importantly their followers, have succumbed to the cult of personality and capitulated to liberal elitism. Such cultic behavior from those on the left, leaders and followers alike, is both puzzling and dismaying.

There are two sides to this problem: those progressive media personalities who put themselves forward to cash in on their celebrity, both financially and perhaps egotistically, and the fans that are willing to shell out their money and their adoration to fill the economic and psychological coffers of those who put themselves forward for left-wing worship and money.

Let us look first at those who put themselves forward for cult worship. I would choose as prime examples, Amy Goodman, Cornell West, and George Lakoff. On the other side, the rabid fans who would bow prostrate to their secular gods are the fans of Noam Chomsky and Howard Zinn, both of whom have publicly disavowed the god-like status foisted upon them by their devotees.

First, let us begin with those who encourage the cult of personality. Amy Goodman is coming to the Bay area this weekend (November 14-16) in yet another cashing in on her fame. But someone should ask Ms. Goodman whether she is a newscaster or a celebrity. If she is trying to set herself apart from the mainstream news media, why follow their lead by making herself into a cultish figure by traveling the nation selling her books? Is she a newscaster or a news-casher?

Let's be fair about this: no one can doubt the incredible things Ms. Goodman has accomplished in establishing a liberal news network and in handling some of the stories that are ignored or trashed by the mainstream media. But does that entitle her to be acclaimed as the liberal version of a media guardian? If so, does that excuse her from her own censorship actions, such as interviewing only liberal intellectual elites instead of many other liberal thinkers and activists who have something to contribute (her news program is, after all, called "Democracy Now" and not "Liberal Elites Now")? Where are the *Project Censored* people and others from similar organizations that make substantive contributions to furthering democratic ideals? Moreover, does her status as a cultic liberal figure allow her to escape indictment for censoring substantive 9/11 Truth debate?

Further, is she a journalist or a columnist? If she fashions herself as both, why does she write "a column" in which she simply reorganizes the transcripts from her news and interview show? Why not be more original and write something of her thoughts on the news, instead taking an inferior journalistic way out by rebroadcasting her show in print? Admittedly, that might be difficult to do if one attempts to remain objective in the reporting of news. But then one might ask if one can be objective in any sense while writing a column that takes a slant on the news at all, let alone trying to do it while simultaneously cashing in on celebrity. Once again we must ask Ms. Goodman the point to her actions in these cases of columns and cash-in touring.

While I'm suggesting questions for Ms. Goodman, I would like to know whether she really does "speak truth to power" in her broadcasts, or whether she speaks truth to those with whom she already is in agreement. Where are those in power "to whom" she is speaking her truth? Are they even listening? If not, why claim to be speaking truth to power to begin with?

Let us move on to another left-wing craver of cultish worship, Dr. Cornel West. Dr. West is undeniably a superb orator. But what has he done substantive to contribute to human growth and development? Has he published any groundbreaking books that have captivated a large segment American culture? Well, he has published his "memoirs," but how can someone promote his memoirs in the absence of significant achievement? Has he produced any works of the depth that, say, Noam Chomsky has? And do his works have the rigorous argumentation and handle a multitude of the facts as deftly do philosophical activists such as Jurgen Habermas?

What about George Lakoff? How many times has KPFA in Berkeley, for example, and at one time the Democratic National Party, worshipped Lakoff as the "cognitive science expert," without asking him a single substantive question challenging his cognitive relativism or his tendency to appeal in his writings to "what cognitive science says" without citing the actual evidence cognitive science allegedly presents to support his claims? Even if there is a bit of evidence to support some of his claims, is it not noticeably superficial of such news journalists and Democratic Party elites not to question in detail his highly dubious and unsupported claims that cognition is reducible to metaphor? My suggestion to KPFA interviewers is that they stop burning incense to Lakoff and start asking him some penetrating questions next time they have him on. Let me help the interviewers by suggesting some sample questions: where does cognitive science "prove" some of his incredible claims about brain structure and metaphor, and how does it do so? Has he heard of Steven Pinker? Does Lakoff have a grasp of the fact that people must be able to think beyond metaphors in order to speak in metaphors? Even if metaphorical frames are fixed in the brain, how does that imply his conclusion that we are thus determined by these frames? Has he failed to understand the structures of communication between persons, or the presumptions one needs to communicate successfully (e.g. truth; truthfulness, etc.)?

Next, let us turn to the fans of the cult leaders of the left, beginning with Noam Chomsky's fans. I recently attended the Noam Chomsky religious rally in Oakland, otherwise known as one of his public talks. The worshipping comments of persons, both in the public question session and in the reception afterward, makes one wonder whether they have gone to an intellectual talk or to a church service in which the Messiah has actually come. One gets the sense that Chomsky is slightly bemused by it all. He has warned against the cult of personality, but his fans seem to miss that warning. For example, not only were there no challenging questions put to him at all that evening, but my very modest challenge—commenting to him that Jurgen Habermas' theory of language sees an inherently political function of language, in contradistinction to Chomsky's position that there is very little connection between the two—was met with a completely derisive remark by Chomsky: "There is nothing in Habermas that a ten-year-old couldn't figure out." At that very moment, I was elbowed out of the way by the faithful, who were clamoring to shower him with their love. But why are liberal icons permitted to derisively reject those who disagree with them, without their fans holding their feet to the fire when they fail to argue their position? Further, why do fans not engage them in tough questioning as they would, say Rush Limbaugh?

Where are the “cons” to their “pros” when they talk, especially in the questioning sessions? That very thought is anathema to the faithful; one just doesn’t assault the high priests of the cult.

Does Howard Zinn not face the same treatment as Chomsky from his pew-sitters? His public speaking events proceed like Chomsky’s: adoring fans prostrating themselves before him, while actual challenging questions and intense dialogue is scarce or often missing.

The point here is that if there are to be “public intellectuals,” that implies an intellectual public—i.e. a public which can ask the tough and critical questions of those who present themselves as experts regarding current conditions and issues of society. Short of doing this, the followers are substituting their own elitism for the elitism that they object to in government and in conservative policies (e.g. economic policies).

As a point of contrast, compare public talks given by Jurgen Habermas or Richard Rorty. In each case, there were no fan clubs present; no adoration or incense burned to them. Rather, there were intense and challenging questions presented to each thinker. In each case, the respective thinker challenged us to think through our positions and examine our presuppositions, and we challenged in return. It would seem that if anything is truly liberal, it is that type of discourse, not the worship of public liberal figures that has come to characterize public talks by those named above, among others.

So by all means, go see the liberal big names such as Amy Goodman when they come to our area. But do not be afraid to ask them the tough questions. You further democracy when doing so, but you harm it if you worship them and become an autograph and picture hound instead of asking them why they believe what they do or why they do what they do. Or better, if you have to get the autograph, why not deliberately get the tough questions in as well?

So welcome to the Bay area, Amy Goodman! Please enjoy our hospitality and the incredible beauty and wonder of this gem of a city and treasure of a people who live here by the Bay. But also know that some of us are onto you, and want to speak truth to *your* power.