

Judging Amy

Progressive program host has amassed an impressive global audience from her studio near the ruins of Ground Zero.

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If you're not a political activist with a fixation on foreign policy, the name Amy Goodman probably means nothing to you. Sure, you may have stumbled across her hour-long daily news broadcast while channel-surfing Comcast, Dish or Direct TV. As likely you dismissed the show and its anchor as public access drivel. With her long, unstyled hair and barely a hint of cosmetic concealer, Goodman doesn't look anything like Katie Couric, Leslie Stahl or Diane Sawyer. Those women enjoy multi-million dollar contracts, studios in Manhattan highrises and personal stylists. Goodman, on the other hand, broadcasts from an old firehouse near the World Trade Towers site and makes enough money to get by.

But the Harvard-educated journalist is hardly a minor player in the business. Her show, *Democracy Now!*, airs weekdays on nearly 500 TV and radio stations across America and in Canada, disseminating all the particulars on the latest Bush Administration scandal, human rights abuses worldwide and the deteriorating situation in the Middle East. (Locally, the broadcast can be heard at 6 a.m. and again at 9 a.m. on KPFA, 94.1 FM.)

From a handful of listener-sponsored radio stations that



Photo: Democracy Now!

Eclectic newscaster Amy Goodman keeps the flame for social justice burning.

carried her signal a decade ago, Goodman's signature production has by now reached the radar of media critics. Many say it's the best progressive news program to come along in some time.

More importantly, *Democracy Now!*'s staff of 27 and annual budget of two million dollars have managed to scoop the networks on a regular, if not daily basis. Many top-tier journalists working for the competition make a point of dropping by Goodman's bohemium abode whenever it's time to roll out new books or promote their latest investigative news assignments.

In fact, *Democracy's Now!*'s diverse collection of guests range from the grassroots to the regal, from folks like Julia Butterfly Hill, Cindy Sheehan and Michael Moore to heads of state, like Ven-

ezuelan President Hugo Chavez, and celebrities on the scale of Vanessa Redgrave, who Goodman has interviewed twice. Even Bill Clin-

ton called in to the program one day, and he was still President at the time. Stumping for wife Hillary and other Democrats in the 2000 general election, his quick get-out-the-vote pitch transformed into a full blown press conference as Goodman grilled the leader of the free world on everything from NAFTA to Iraq sanctions, the fate of death row inmate Leonard Peltier and immigrants' rights.

At one point, Clinton struck a reef, ejaculating "Now let me...now, wait a minute... You started this, and every question you've asked has been hostile and combative, and frankly disrespectful."

To which Goodman replied, "They've been critical questions." And the two went right on trading jabs for another twenty minutes.

As the *Washington Post's* Michael Powell put it, "In this age of corporate media conglomeration, when National Public Radio sounds as safe as a glass of warm milk, *Democracy Now!* retains a jagged and intriguing edge."

In June, the newscaster visited Sonoma County to speak at the annual Harmony Festival. It must have seemed a world away from life in Lower Manhattan as Goodman stood squinting from an outdoor stage on a lazy afternoon fragrant with wildflowers and sage (not to mention a good deal of reefer). She more or less

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preached to the choir about Iraq, its trail of broken lives, and the legacy of Henry Kissinger.

Then scores of hippies, goddess worshippers and reggae enthusiasts abandoned their comfortable digs in the sun and filed into a drab county fair auditorium to hear Goodman recount personal stories from the trenches.

She lingered long after that to sign copies of her two books, *Exception to the Rulers*, a bestselling critique of the Bush Administration, and *Static*, which charts the demise of western media at the hands of the aforementioned corporate conglomerates.

Of the mainstream media, Goodman has few kind things to say. She told Lizzy Ratner, a reporter for the *New York Observer*, in 2005, "They just mine this small circle of blowhards who know so little about so much. And yet it's just the basic tenets of good journalism that instead of this small circle of pundits, you talk to people who live at the target end of the policy."

Ratner's article about the left-wing icon appeared in *The Nation* and included a physical description that still applies today. "Dressed in her customary black vest and cargo pants, her wispy gray-brown hair hanging to her shoulders, she looks like a journalist in combat mode, as if she's just come off the war-beat in Baghdad."

As for Goodman's assessment of the weapons of mass destruction claim that brought us the Iraq War, "It laid bare media that act as a conveyor belt for the lies of the Administration. You know governments are going to lie, but not the media," she said.

To find a TV or radio station that broadcasts Amy Goodman's show in your area, visit democracynow.org.

From Reporting the News to Becoming the News

In 1991, Goodman was nearly killed in East Timor. She and fellow correspondent Allan Nairn traveled there to cover a Portuguese delegation researching human rights violations by the Indonesian military, which occupies the country.

The situation on the ground was so unstable that the Portuguese investigators canceled their trip at the last minute. Goodman and Nairn stayed on to conduct interviews, and during a funeral march for some protesters shot a few days earlier by the army, the

"I don't really think of it as, there's politics and then there's your life..."

reporters got caught in a massacre. By the time the shooting stopped, at least 270 Timorese were dead. The two Americans survived to tell of the atrocity, but not before undergoing a savage beating. Nairn, who Goodman says shielded her body with his own, had his skull fractured.

"To be there as these soldiers opened fire on innocent people and gunned them down," Goodman explained to Ratner, "and ultimately understanding there was nothing we could do to stop it, that it was only getting word out that could make a difference..."

Two more years would pass before U.S. military aid to Indone-

sia stopped. Goodman is generally credited with bringing international attention to the plight of the tiny nation. Her documentary film about East Timor won the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Prize for journalism and an Alfred I. DuPont/Columbia Silver Baton.

In 1999, Goodman's work on a film about Chevron's role in Nigeria, called *Drilling and Killing*, led to another awards ceremony, this one thrown by the prestigious Overseas Press Club. Tom Brokaw sat on its board at the time. However, when keynote speaker U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Richard Holbrooke announced that American jets had just bombed a Serbian television station, Goodman became furious. She turned to Brokaw and said, "Thank you, but no thank you," then left the event without accepting the award.

If she's adamant about principles, it's likely the news host's radical parents might have something to do with it. Goodman grew up on Long Island in the suburban home of an ophthalmologist and a social worker. Her mother founded a local chapter of SANE, the anti-nuclear activist group, while her father set up a section of Physicians for Social Responsibility.

Goodman picked up a bachelor's degree in anthropology at Harvard. Then she moved back to New York and signed up for an apprenticeship at listener-sponsored WBAI, part of the Pacifica radio network that includes flagship station KPFA in Berkeley. WBAI eventually hired her to run their news department. Ten years later, with the help of Larry Bensky (who anchored Pacifica's gavel-to-gavel coverage of the Iran Contra hearings), Goodman launched Democracy Now!

A younger sibling, David

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Goodman, works as a staff writer for the San Francisco based *Mother Jones* magazine.

In 1999, Goodman traveled to Peru to interview MIT graduate Lori Berenson, who is serving a life sentence for her alleged participation in a terrorist plot. Despite receiving support from numerous members of Congress, Berenson has languished in an Andean prison for nearly a decade. Goodman was the first western journalist to visit her there.

Democracy Now! was also the first American news broadcast to expose the danger of hazardous dust emanating from Ground Zero after the 9/11 attacks. Goodman's co-anchor Juan Gonzalez, who writes for the *New York Daily News*, reported exhaustively on the warnings of experts about toxic respiratory contaminants. Both local and federal officials, including EPA chief Christine Whitman, vigorously denied those risks for weeks, and Gonzalez's editors were pressured into burying his articles on the back pages.

It's estimated that several hundred residents and relief personnel at Ground Zero eventually contracted a serious illness as a result of their exposure. (The plight of four uninsured rescue workers who became ill is recounted in the Michael Moore film, *Sicko*.)

In more recent years, Goodman has broadcast from the London home of Vanessa Redgrave, as well as from the United Arab



Photo: Democracy Now!

The Firehouse Studio. Goodman interviews musician turned human rights campaigner Harry Belafonte in June, 2006.

Emirates, where several editions of the show were produced at the studios of al Jazeera.

Feminists not Amused with *Hustler* Collaboration

In 2005, many Democracy Now! listeners experienced a jolt of irritation when Goodman devoted an entire broadcast to an interview with Larry Flynt, publisher of *Hustler* magazine.

Not particularly known for his human rights initiatives, Flynt is accused by detractors of engaging in hate-mongering against women and minorities, in addition to sex crimes. In her 1998 autobiography, Flynt's daughter Tonya Flynt-Vega said he molested her as a child and earned money needed to start his magazine from women he pimped on streetcorners.

Gale Dines, Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at Wheelock College in Boston, was among those who complained to Democracy Now! following the Flynt broadcast. "In the last ten years pornography has moved from a marginalized kind of small enterprise to front and center in pop culture," she says.

The left in general has been slow to make the connection between globalization and the use of women's sexuality as a form of commerce, Dines alleges, noting that media moguls who own major cable networks nowadays distribute pornography to their mainstream channels as a matter of course.

"So what you have is not just the convergence of the imagery, you have a convergence of the economic interests as well."

Even after a torrent of angst walloped Democracy Now!, the program allowed *Hustler* to reprint Goodman's interview with John Perkins, author of the bestselling *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*,



On the road again. Goodman delivers a eulogy on Iraq and its collateral damage at the Harmony Festival June 9th.

in the magazine's July 2005 issue. Denis Moynihan, outreach coordinator for the show, defended the deal to irate feminists, explaining, "Who are we to pass judgment on the readers of *Hustler* as potential supporters of Democracy Now!?"

In the aftermath of the controversy, a website called "Hustling the Left" sprang up, criticizing the ties between leading progressive activists and the pornography industry. Its title was taken from an essay by Auro Bogado, a broadcaster at Pacifica's KPFK station in Los Angeles, who said she was dragged into the controversy after objecting to an anti-war campaign that boasted the support of Larry Flynt. Bogado said she simply asked to be removed from the list of endorsers.

A representative for the peace-group Not in Our Name responded by contacting both her supervisor at KPFK and Bruce David, the editor of *Hustler* magazine. A deprecating cartoon of Bogado was published in a subsequent issue and she was described as a "femi-fascist".

Hustling the Left also took aim at Noam Chomsky, considered

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Excerpt from *Hustler* interview: Source: DemocracyNow.org

AMY GOODMAN: What about the criticism, Larry Flynt, that you have profited for so many years off of the exploitation and degradation of women, like showing a woman in a meat grinder. Your response:

LARRY FLYNT: Well, most of the criticism comes from the radical feminist movement, whose really only claim to fame is to urge a bunch of ugly women to march behind. Other than that, I haven't received criticism. I have had thousands of models pose for me. I have never had one case where a model has said she felt she was exploited...

AMY GOODMAN: But that imagery. I'm surprised that you -- I am surprised that you would say "the radical feminist movement," the very same kind of words that people like Rush Limbaugh talk about when women are standing up and fighting for their rights.

LARRY FLYNT: Well, I support the women's movement, equal rights, equal pay, non-discrimination in the workplace, but I just can't convince myself that Andrea Dworkin and Gloria Steinem speak for the average woman in America. I talk to average women all the time, most of the officers in my company are women, and I just don't see the connection. When I am using the word feminism or radical, I'm talking about the French. I'm not really talking about the average American woman.

AMY GOODMAN: Let me read to you from something. This came out after the film about you [The People Vs. Larry Flynt], and Gloria Steinem wrote an op-ed piece in the New York Times. She said, "Unlike his film character, the real Mr. Flynt is hardly an unwavering advocate of free speech. Indeed, other feminists and I have been attacked in *Hustler* for using our First Amendment rights to protest pornography. In my case, the men calling me dangerous and putting my picture on a most wanted poster. I was also depicted as the main character in a photo story that ended up in my sexual mutilation. Given the number of crimes that seem to imitate pornography, this kind of attack does tend to get your attention..."

LARRY FLYNT: Well, nothing that I'm going to say is going to change Gloria Steinem's attitude. She was very useful to the women's movement in the 1960s. But she's remained very much in the 1960s. I think she's out of touch, and as I said earlier, I don't think that she is speaking for the average American woman.

AMY GOODMAN: But what if she is speaking for herself? What if she is speaking -- she is just voicing her opinion on, would you have something like this, an African American splayed out with degrading images, that -- I guess one of the questions is, you have taken on power your whole life, and the criticism of a number of feminists is that you reinforce the images of the powerful with these images of, for example, women being mutilated, like being put through a meat grinder.

LARRY FLYNT: You know, that is totally unfounded, misinterpreted to a very large degree. I mean, we have our own base of readership, and we do a lot of outrageous, political and social satire and a lot of black humor. Some of it is offensive. But the First Amendment gives me a right to do anything, it gives me the right to be offensive, and if Gloria Steinem is offended she shouldn't read the magazine.

one of America's leading political intellectuals, for agreeing to be interviewed by Flynt's magazine. (Chomsky is a frequent guest on Democracy Now!) The legendary writer and speaker said afterwards he was unaware that *Hustler* was a pornographic title at the time he gave the interview.

Moynihan of Democracy Now! eventually announced that the program had refused to accept any payment from *Hustler* for the Goodman interview of Perkins and promised there would be no future deals. (*Hustler's* editor Bruce David said he donated \$1,000 to Democracy Now! to make up the difference.)

How the episode affected Goodman is unknown. During her interview with Flynt, she didn't shy away from asking tough questions (see excerpt), and a debate about pornography was broadcast on a subsequent edition of the program. Since then, Goodman has interviewed several feminists from Iraq and Afghanistan, including Malala Joya, a young Afghan legislator banned from the country's parliament after she called for some of its members to be tried for human rights crimes.

At 50, the broadcaster is still going strong. She delivers five shows a week before hopping on a plane most weekends to fulfill an endless stream of speaking engagements. (She's also one of Pacifica's most prolific fundraisers.) According to Ratner, Goodman has the stamina of The Grateful Dead. On last check, her grandmother was pushing 108.

Rosemary Regello

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