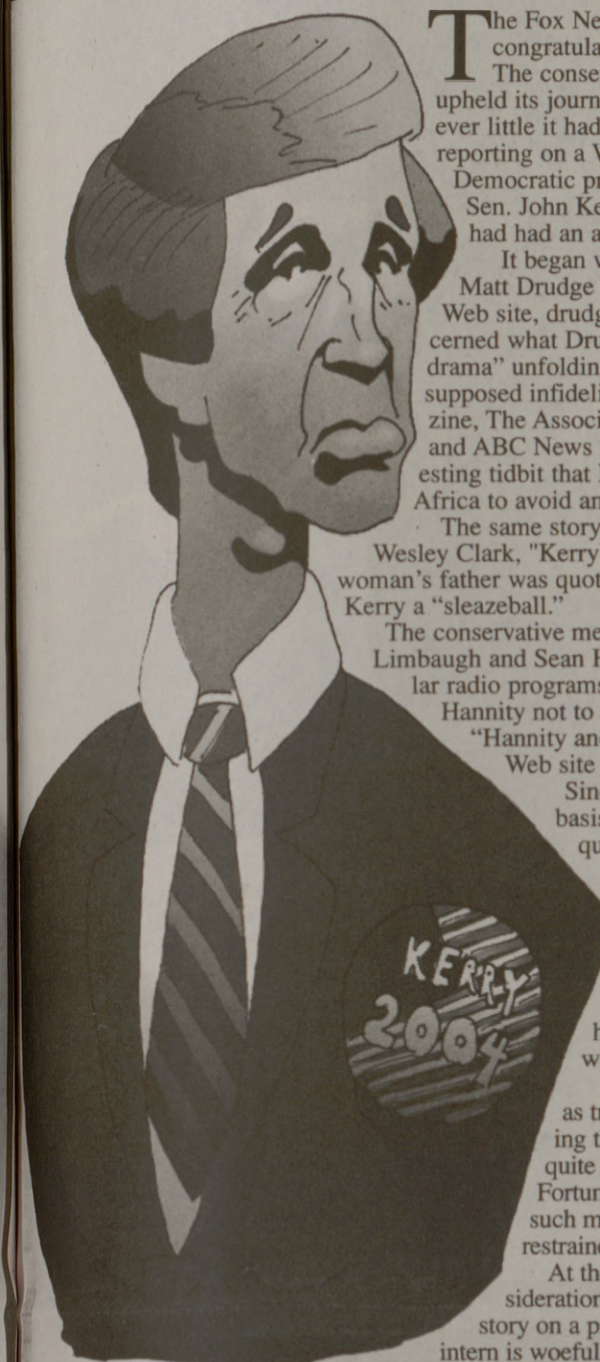
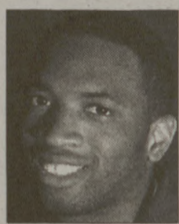


Partisan bickering

Drudge dropped the ball when he reported unsubstantiated claims about Kerry



The Fox News Channel deserves congratulations. That is not a typo. The conservative news network upheld its journalistic integrity — whatever little it had to begin with — by not reporting on a Web rumor that Democratic presidential front-runner Sen. John Kerry of Massachusetts had had an affair.



COLLINS EZEANYIM

It began when online muckraker Matt Drudge posted a story on his Web site, drudgereport.com, on Feb. 12. The report concerned what Drudge called a “frantic behind-the-scenes drama” unfolding around Kerry due to media probes of his supposed infidelity with an intern. Drudge said Time magazine, The Associated Press, The Hill, The Washington Post and ABC News were investigating the rumor with the interesting tidbit that Kerry may have made the woman flee to Africa to avoid any leak of their relationship.

The same story also included an alleged quote by Gen. Wesley Clark, “Kerry will implode over an intern issue.” The woman’s father was quoted in the British tabloid, The Sun, as calling Kerry a “sleazeball.”

The conservative media was quick to pick up on the story. Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity both reported about it on their popular radio programs. However, Fox News apparently told Hannity not to mention the Kerry rumors on his TV show “Hannity and Colmes,” according to conservative news Web site chronwatch.com.

Since then, any indication that the rumor had a basis in reality unraveled when the woman in question, Alexandra Polier, said in a statement that she had never had a relationship with Kerry, according to USA Today.

Furthermore, her father claimed that he had been misquoted by The Sun and even intended to vote for Kerry. The Clark quote also doesn’t make sense considering he dropped out of the race the next day and went on to endorse Kerry.

Drudge posting the rumor and submitting it as truth is an indication that partisan politics during this election year will have the potential to be quite ugly, especially when it involves the Internet. Fortunately, the American people now know that such mudslinging will be balanced by cautioned and restrained reporting by major media outlets.

At the very least, Drudge should have had the consideration of coming up with an original scandal. A story on a prominent Democrat having an affair with an intern is woefully unimaginative.

Of course, conservatives such as Limbaugh say the lack of

reporting on the Kerry rumor betrayed a liberal bias on the part of the media, according to USA Today. Conservatives say there’s a double standard between the way the Kerry rumor was handled and the current media frenzy over Bush’s attendance during his National Guard duty.

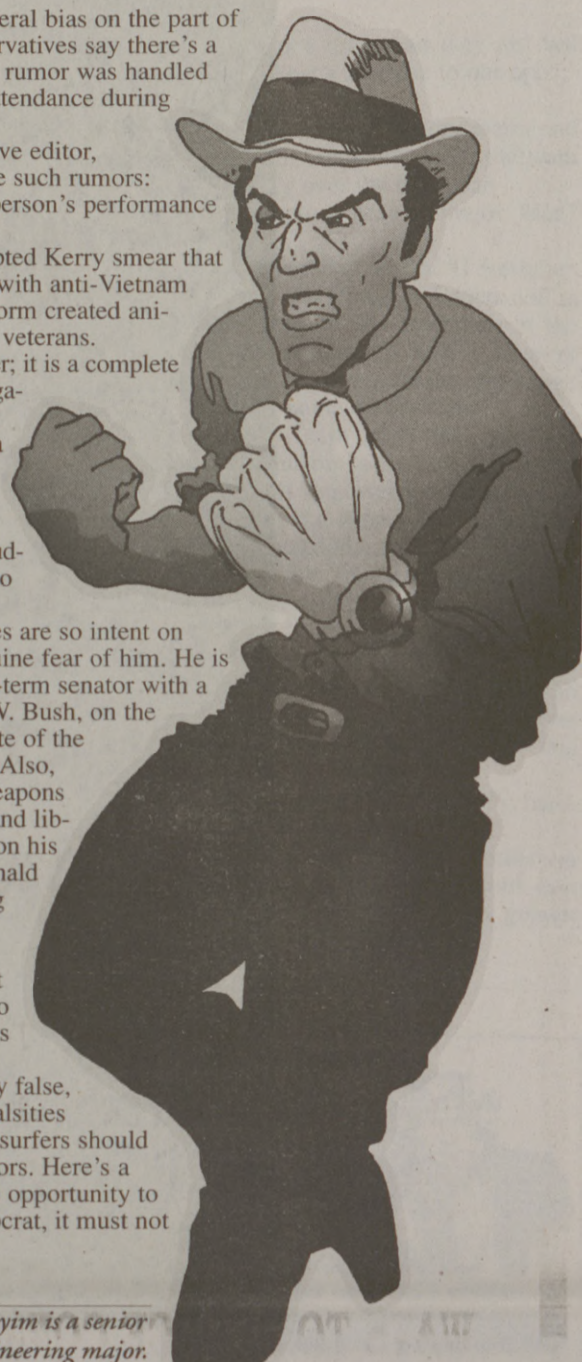
But Leonard Downie, The Post’s executive editor, explained best how the media should handle such rumors: “One: Is it true? Two: Is it relevant to that person’s performance or public life?” he told USA Today.

Unfortunately, this is not the only attempted Kerry smear that originated online. A photo depicting Kerry with anti-Vietnam War activist Jane Fonda at a speaker’s platform created animosity toward Kerry among many Vietnam veterans.

There’s a problem with the photo, however; it is a complete forgery. In fact, the photo is a doctored amalgamation of a photo of Kerry taken in Mineola, N.Y., on June 13, 1971, and a photo of Fonda at a rally in Miami, Fla., in 1972. Furthermore, the photo was attached with the AP logo to make it appear authentic. It is OK if someone doesn’t like Kerry, but to fraudulently use copyrighted works in an attempt to defame him is not only wrong, but immoral.

The most likely reason why conservatives are so intent on smearing Kerry is because they have a genuine fear of him. He is an intelligent person, a war hero and a four-term senator with a moderate voting record. President George W. Bush, on the other hand, has had a terrible 2004. His State of the Union address was full of feckless content. Also, David Kay concluded that there were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Conservatives and liberals alike thought Bush performed poorly on his “Meet the Press” interview with former Ronald Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan, stating for opinionjournal.com, “The president seemed tired, unsure and often bumbling.” Not to mention the National Guard flap that the president and his handlers can’t make go away. It is not surprising some conservatives would do anything to bring Kerry down.

Even if what they come up with is totally false, the Internet has the power to spread these falsities worldwide with unprecedented speed. Web surfers should be extra skeptical of any fantastic Web rumors. Here’s a good litmus test: If Fox News passes on the opportunity to report on something negative about a Democrat, it must not be true.



Collins Ezeanyim is a senior computer engineering major. Graphic by Chris Griffin

Disqualification of reformers spells trouble for Iranians

Move further debilitates the election process in Iran

In the Middle East, countries with elections are hard to come by, and absolute dictators abound. Thus, the fact that Iran continued to hold elections for its representative body, the Majlis, and assorted lesser offices was amazing. Although these elections are not truly free like those in a democracy, they still gave the average Iranian a way to express himself to the political class in the Islamic Republic.

But now the hard-line conservative clerics at the head of the “republic” are in fear of losing power after gains by moderates in the 2000 elections, and have been conducting a steady campaign to retake control of all levels of the government. This culminated last week with the disqualification of more than 2,000 reform candidates in the general election, according to the British Broadcasting Corp.

Although moderates protested in an open letter to the Ayatollah Khamenei, and urged supporters to stay away from the polls, they were defeated in elections over the weekend. This change bodes poorly for the freedom of the average Iranian. It may have permanently destroyed the efforts of reformers, and it surely changes the foreign policy equation in the region.

The conservative Council of Guardians, a 12-member body appointed by Ayatollah, carried out the disqualifications less than a week before the elections were to occur. The disqualifications essentially eliminated any chance reformers had of winning by eliminating the reformers themselves. In protest, the reformers urged supporters to stay away from the polls and wrote an open letter to the Ayatollah questioning the judgment of the council, according to the BBC.

Writing a letter openly questioning the leadership of a man who supposedly makes decisions based on divine guidance was an unprecedented step. The letter, likely authored by the 80 members of the Majlis who were unable to run for re-election, asked if the Ayatollah had allowed the council to openly disobey his wish that some of the disqualified candidates be reinstated, or if he simply sided with the reformists. However, the letter did not change the ruling of the council.

On top of the disqualifications, the reform movement is facing waning support. After it rode a wave of discontent to power in elections in 1997 and 2000, its supporters gradually became disillusioned with the reformers. This was because while there has been some relaxation of social rules, the reformers have been unable to make any substantive changes. Aware of this, moderate President Khatami asked for moderates to turn out to the polls to prevent a clean sweep by conservatives.

He failed in his efforts, however, as conservatives look certain to



DAVID SHOEMAKER

obtain a majority with most of the votes already counted. But the conservatives’ victory is not likely to be viewed as a mandate, either at home or abroad. The voter turnout in the election was one of the lowest since the 1979 revolution, just 50.6 percent, according to the BBC.

The lack of legitimacy of the election could haunt Iran in the future. The people are clearly not happy with the hard-liners, but are not very happy with the moderates either. The honeymoon with the clerical rulers seems over, as the populace desires greater personal freedom, which the current theocracy prohibits. If the current regime wishes to remain in control despite this erosion of its power, it may have to yield on some domestic issues.

Internal strife in Iran will make the hard-liners vulnerable internationally as well. Without a broad power base, Iran’s theocracy may either be pressured more easily, or turn to “deals with the devil” to keep control.

From the American perspective, this will result in either improvement in relations with Iran or a serious deterioration. The positive aspect could be realized by moves by Iran similar to those made by Libya recently. Like Libya, the leaders of Iran have no real intention of becoming good global citizens, but they may wish to reduce the number of enemies they have.

This is especially pertinent with regard to the United States, which has several divisions in Iraq, just over the river from Iran. Faced with weakened internal support and no mad dictator across the border, the theocrats may want to strike a deal where they patch things up with the United States over sore points such as weapons of mass destruction.

But they could also choose an opposing route, trying to consolidate things at home by making a common cause against an overseas enemy, like the United States. If things progress down this path, events could get messy both for Iranians and the United States. With the United States heavily involved in Iraq, it would be a serious problem if Iran were to become a safe haven for those who want to stop efforts to bring peace there. It may be fortuitous for the United States to try to broker a deal with the weakened clerics like the one recently done with the Libyans.

The changes wrought in the Iranian political landscape by this election will have far-reaching effects. Domestically, Iranian clerics will have to heed at least some of the criticism of the populace; their free ride is over. And in the international spectrum, a change in the direction of Iran’s foreign policy may be ahead. But, only time will tell how drastic these changes may be.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.

MAIL CALL

Christians are persecuted, too

I am sick of opening The Battalion to the mail call section and reading how I am a close-minded, ultra-conservative fool because I don’t approve of homosexuality. I am fed up of hearing what a hard-knock life it is because people disagree with that lifestyle. I know about persecution as much as anyone. Christians have been the most persecuted group throughout history.

There have been a reported 45 million Christian martyrs in the 20th century. A study done by Regents University showed that more than 164,000 Christians were killed because of their beliefs throughout the world in 1999 alone. Why does that never make headlines?

I am also tired of the double standard that is constantly being used. In reference to Mr. Abel’s column, he stated that groups participating in a “straight pride” day were engaged in a bigoted activity. My question to this is why can’t people be proud of being straight? Why is it okay to have a gay pride day, but not a straight pride day? What is the difference?

You cry for tolerance, but yet you show none yourself. If you want people to be tolerant of your views you should be tolerant of their views, and stop screaming “BIGOT!” when someone disagrees with you.

Nathan Moore
Class of 2006

Gays are not being denied marriage

In response to a Feb. 23 news article:

I don’t understand how human rights are being violated. I don’t see anywhere that these people are being denied the civil right to marry. Any gay man or woman can marry, no one ever said they cannot. They just have to marry a member of the opposite sex. I am a heterosexual woman, and I can’t marry another woman. Are my civil rights being violated? I don’t think they are.

I have the right to marry anyone from the opposite sex, just as long as he isn’t related to me. There is no law declaring that homosexuals cannot marry.

Margaret Marris-Mayfield
Class of 2003

