

UNCLE WALTER AND THE HOSTAGES

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We continue to be annoyed by the manner in which the American hostage situation in Iran has been presented to the public by the news media. In particular, CBS and its television evening news seem determined to turn the whole episode into a continuing soap opera production. By the time this appears in print, all may be over—one way or another; but no matter, the criticism of how it has been handled will still be valid.

On April 8th, "The 157th Day," Walter Cronkite showed a film of the hostages who, despite his concerned and grieving tones, looked remarkably hale and hearty. Walter was worried about the dire psychological effects after such a long period of incarceration. He also offered a tear-jerking view of a distraught hostage wife who has suffered such debilitating mental anguish over separation that she intends to sue the Iranian government for one billion dollars to ease her distress. Her greed and self pity were more evident than her sorrow.

While one must sympathize with the hostages' plight and deplore the fact that the Carter administration has displayed such incompetence in dealing with it, one should remember that these are just 50 people, all in government service of some kind, who were unfortunate enough to be caught in the middle of an undeclared state of war between nations. One should also remember that there were once tens of thousands of Americans, all in service of this country, who were incarcerated and held as hostage prisoners in the prison camps of Japan, Germany, North Korea and Vietnam. The conditions under which these former hostages lived (and often died)—for periods of years instead of months—were much more uncomfortable than those to which the present handful has been subjected. There were also tens of thousands of wives and families here at home who experienced separation and anguish, and with even less hope for the eventual return of their sons, daughters and husbands.

Under the conditions of actual war, there was not a great deal that our government could do about the fate of the earlier prisoners, but at least the affected families accepted it stoically and silently hoped for the best. There was very little public hand wringing, and the families were not preyed upon by media personalities in search of maudlin sensationalism.

Since Cronkite is listed as the director and managing editor of the CBS evening television news, certainly much of the responsibility as to what is chosen as news, how it is edited and how it is presented belongs in his lap. In the case of the hostages and their families, there is undoubtedly genuine concern and grief, but the necessity for playing it

to the hilt in emotional fashion and bringing it into the nation's homes night after night while shedding a few crocodile tears is a rather degrading type of news reporting.

Well, Uncle Walter, the anchorman supreme who has been named as one of the nation's ten most influential leaders will soon be retiring. Unfortunately, his handpicked successor, Dan Rather is cut from the same cloth though in poorer taste. Like the economy, CBS television news will get worse before it gets better.

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