

Making Noise: How Right-Wing Think Tanks Get the Word Out

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[This is part 2 of an article on the power of right-wing think tanks. See [part one](#).]

Malkin's book on internment was no more accurate than the corporate misinformation about global warming. Historians quickly showed the book badly distorted the government records and secret cables it purported to describe. As just one example, Malkin writes that a Japanese message stated they "had [Japanese] spies in the U.S. Army" when it actually said they hoped to recruit spies in the army.[†] But it should be no big surprise that Malkin, who is, after all, an editorialist and not a historian, didn't manage to fully understand the complex documentary record in the year she spent writing the book part-time.[†]

Malkin's motives, as a right-wing activist and proponent of racial profiling, are fairly obvious. But how did Mary Dombrowski, the Bainbridge Island parent, get caught up in this latest attempt to rewrite history? Opinions on global warming were changed because big business could afford to spend millions to change people's minds. But racial profiling seems like less of a moneymaker. Who invested in spreading that message?

The first step is getting the information out there. Dombrowski probably heard about Malkin's book from the Fox News Channel, where it was ceaselessly promoted for days, and where Malkin is a contributor. Or maybe she heard about it on MSNBC's *Scarborough Country*, a show hosted by a former Republican congressman, which had Malkin as a guest. Or maybe she heard it while driving and listening to FOX host Sean Hannity's radio show, or maybe Rush Limbaugh's. Or maybe she read a review in the *New York Post* (which, like Fox News, is owned by Rupert Murdoch). Or maybe she read about it on a right-wing website or weblog, like Townhall.com, which publishes 10 new conservative op-ed columns every day.

All of these organizations are partisan conservative outlets. Townhall.com, for example, is published by the Heritage Foundation, a right-wing Washington, D.C. think tank. Most people imagine a think tank as a place where smart people think big thoughts, coming up with new ideas for the government to use. But that's not how Heritage works. Nearly half of Heritage's \$30 million budget is spent on publicity, not research.[†] Every day, they take work like Malkin's that agrees with their ideological prejudices and push it out through the right-wing media described above (Fox News, Rush Limbaugh, *New York Post*) and into the mainstream media (ABC, NPR, *New York Times*, *Seattle Times*).

They use a variety of tactics. Heritage, for example, publishes an annual telephone directory featuring thousands of conservative experts and associated policy organizations. (*The Right Nation*, 161) And if looking up somebody is too much work, Heritage maintains a 24-hour hotline for the media, providing quotes promoting conservative ideology on any subject. Heritage's "information marketing" department makes packages of colored index cards with pre-printed talking points for any conservative who plans to do an interview. (*The Right Nation*, 167) And Heritage computers are stocked with the names of over 3,500 journalists, organized by specialty, who Heritage staffers personally call to make sure they have all the latest conservative misinformation. Every Heritage study is turned into a two-page summary which is then turned into an op-ed piece which is then distributed to newspapers through the Heritage Features Syndicate. (*What Liberal Media?*, 83)

It all adds up: a 2003 study by Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, the media watch group, found conservative think tanks were cited nearly 14,000 times in major newspapers, television, and radio shows. (By comparison, liberal think tanks were cited only 4,000 times that year.)† That means 10,000 additional quotes of right-wing ideology, misleading statistics, distorted facts, and so on. There's no way that doesn't unfairly skew the public debate.

Next: [Part 3: Endorsing Racism](#)