Freedom and its what?!

As an experienced reporter for a respected organization like ABC News, John Stossel’s name implies journalistic credibility. Reasonable people may simply assume that when John Stossel speaks he’s giving you the facts straight up. You might be inclined to trust that when he quotes statistics that the numbers are accurate, or that when he’s reporting controversial scientific research that he seeks out diverse opinions from qualified experts. You might think that when he comes upon material contradicting his claims, that he’d find a way to account for the contradictory material rather than just dismissing it. After all, he’s a reporter, right?

The progressive “media watch” group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting investigates and reports on issues like bias and censorship in the corporate/mainstream media. They have documented a history of factual inaccuracies, selective presentation of data, and questionable reporting practices in his work. This packet contains just a few of the press releases and essays from FAIR’s website (www.fair.org) and their magazine *EXTRA!,* describing several concerns with Stossel’s work.

However, obviously Stossel is speaking tonight as a commentator, not merely a reporter. At a lecture like this most people are fully expecting him to editorialize and to provide his personal opinions. And even to the extent that Stossel’s opinions may be based on his experience as a reporter, basic fairness requires us to remember two basic facts: 1) *All* reporters have biases, and 2) *All* reporters occasionally make errors, and so documenting errors and biases would not in itself be an indictment of his credibility. Rather, the question becomes: are the errors and the biases connected? In other words, does Stossel have a proven track record of basing his conclusions on a foundation of accurate reporting, or of shaping his reporting to fit preconceived conclusions?

These three quotes taken from the following essays give you the gist of that authors’ conclusions. But don’t take their word for it. You are encouraged to listen carefully to Stossel’s lecture, consider the material in this packet, and come to your own conclusion.

“While there is a long and honorable tradition of U.S. journalists with definite points of view who hoped that their reporting would have a political impact – from Thomas Paine to Ida Tarbell to I.F. Stone – what distinguishes Stossel is his willingness to warp reality to fit his ideological preconceptions. His reports, notable for their one-sided sourcing and rejection of inconvenient facts, are frequently marred assertions from Stossel and his favored guests that are misleading or factually incorrect.” Peter Hart, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, *Extra!* March/April 2003 issue

“[Stossel’s ABC special *Is America #1?* makes it clear that Stossel does indeed think it’s his job to promote an ideology, and that he is willing to sacrifice factual accuracy, misrepresent sources and abandon other journalistic standards to achieve that goal.” Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting Action Alert, 9/28/99

“His reports are billed as news, but they sometimes rely on questionable methods such as deceptive editing that distorts arguments made by interviewees, the exclusion of facts that might conflict with his personal opinion, and the provocation of guests so as to broadcast their reactions out of context.” Rachel Coen, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, *Extra!* March/April 2003 issue

It is also worth considering that in response to these concerns Stossel has more than once simply dismissed those who have criticized the inaccuracies and questionable practices in his work by calling them the “Totalitarian Left.” Wow. Is insisting on basic standards of fairness and factual accuracy from the news media all that Stossel thinks is necessary to qualify someone as a “Totalitarian?” He claims his “intolerant” critics want to “silence him.” *Not at all.* In fact, you should listen to him very carefully.
You are encouraged to read carefully each of the essays that follow. But so as not to distract your time and attention from Stossel’s lecture this evening, for now here is a quick recap of a few highlights. Documentation and sourcing is provided in the essays.

- In 2000 an investigation revealed that a 20/20 segment by Stossel contained outright fabrication – he presented the ‘results’ of lab tests that were never actually conducted, along with other misleading presentations of scientific data. When the fabrication and inaccuracies were revealed, Stossel was reprimanded by ABC News and was ordered to deliver an on-air apology. The producer of the segment was suspended by the network.

- During the production of a special report about government regulations, two of the three producers hired to do research for the piece ended up resigning from the project in protest when the show would not include findings from their research that contradicted Stossel’s viewpoint.

- For a story on environmentalism, Stossel interviewed schoolchildren in an effort to show that kids are being scared by teachers into believing in environmentalism. But those children’s parents accused Stossel of misleading them about the purpose of the report and manipulating their children with leading questions. According to the parents that were present, Stossel would “repeat the questions until he got the answer he wanted” from their kids. The parents were so angered by Stossel’s treatment of their kids that they demanded ABC News pull those segments from the story.

- In a special about economics called “Is America #1?”, Stossel took a brief clip from an interview with a noted university economist out of context, and used it to imply that the economist was saying the opposite of what he was actually saying. After media criticism of the inaccuracy, ABC revised that part of the report before rebroadcasting it.

- Stossel’s reports often contain inaccuracies that should have been caught by even a cursory fact-checking. For example, in a 1999 report he cited the “Federal Reserve’s wage data,” but the Federal Reserve does not collect or publish data on wages. He has misreported that Parkinson’s disease kills more people than AIDS, but according to the Centers for Disease Control the opposite is true. In a 1999 report he included a statement claiming that Hong Kong is the only government that makes a budget surplus, even though that’s plain wrong. At the time of that report, the US was running at a surplus, as was Canada, Australia, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden.

- When presenting complex and conflicting data, Stossel has been criticized for presenting only the parts of the data that support his argument. For example, in one report he claimed the EPA has documented a drop in “every major pollutant that the government measures,” but that’s not true for carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulfur hexafluoride. In the same report, cited an estimate that new anti-pollution regulations would cause gas costs to “go up 56%.” But the actual study he was citing estimated a price increase somewhere in the range of 11% percent to 53%, which is obviously not the same. In another report, he argued that workers’ complaints about rising CEO salaries are unreasonable, because factory workers’ salaries are also rising – “up 70 percent in the last 15 years,” he said. Actually, the Bureau of Labor Statistics says something different: after adjusting for inflation, manufacturing workers’ wages actually decreased by 6% during that time period.

- When producing a segment about scientific research on gender differences, Stossel’s staff did contact scientists who are critical of the point of view that Stossel was advocating, but Stossel did not include any of that material in his report. Instead, he only quoted scientists that supported his positions. For an opposing viewpoint, he only included non-scientists, who would not have the proper expertise to critique the scientific data. One of the dissenting scientists later told a reporter it seemed clear the producers had “marching orders” to obtain only material supporting a particular view.

- In a 1999 report about how money for medical research is allocated, Stossel criticized the amount of funding spent on AIDS research compared to other diseases, stating that Parkinson’s disease receives less research funding even though it kills many more people. But that’s not true. In the years preceding the report, AIDS was ranked by the Centers for Disease Control as the 14th leading killer in the US, whereas Parkinson’s disease is not even in the list of the top 15.

- In a piece about “political correctness” on the campus at Brown University in the wake of an intensely controversial rape case in 1997, Stossel commented on the “intolerance” of a group of protestors while showing video footage of some protestors angrily shouting at him. However, what he doesn’t include is an accurate description of how the shouting started. According to another journalist who was covering the event for a Providence newspaper, Stossel himself was responsible for the orderly protest turning nasty. First, he took the mic at the rally and started questioning the legitimacy of the protest. But the angry yelling didn’t actually start until Stossel inflamed tempers in the crowd by cursing at them.

Bonus! This memo [www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/johnstossel1.html](http://www.thesmokinggun.com/archive/johnstossel1.html) from Stossel to ABC producers tells them that when prepping him for an interview, they should provide a list of the sound bites they want him to “elicit” from the interviewee.

Again, it is important to keep in mind that all reporters have biases, and that all reporters sometimes make mistakes. The critical question to ask in this case is whether there is a consistent pattern that emerges, and if so, how that might lead one to re-evaluate their reaction to his lecture.
The Stossel Treatment:  
Selective editing and other unethical tactics  
By Rachel Coen

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting  
EXTRA!, March/April 2003 issue

Sometimes John Stossel's technique is no different from the sensationalism of any other tabloid TV entertainer. Witness his report on "dwarf tossing" (20/20, 3/8/02), in which he professed indignation at "busybodies" who want to stop the practice. "Dave Flood is a dwarf who is angry because his rights are being violated," declared Stossel. "He wants to be tossed."

But Stossel's approach can transcend the merely embarrassing, becoming careless or unethical. His reports are billed as news, but they sometimes rely on questionable methods such as deceptive editing that distorts arguments made by interviewees, the exclusion of facts that might conflict with his personal opinion, and the provocation of guests so as to broadcast their reactions out of context.

"We were hoodwinked"

One controversy that caught mainstream media's attention concerned Stossel's interview of a group of grade-school students for his ABC News special "What's Wrong With Tampering With Nature?" (6/29/01). The children's parents had signed releases for them to appear on the show, but after witnessing Stossel's methods, several withdrew their consent and protested to ABC.

The special caricatured environmentalists as "preachers of doom and gloom" whose fanaticism would have us all "running around naked, hungry for food, maybe killing a rabbit with a rock, then dying young." A key theme was Stossel's claim that U.S. schools have become an "environmental boot camp" to indoctrinate children with green propaganda, when in fact the environment is doing just fine.

To illustrate his point, Stossel arranged an interview with a group of California kids, asking what parents described as leading questions to try to show that the children had been taught environmentalist lies. Several parents said they hadn't known about this slant when they granted permission for the interviews. They complained that ABC had "misrepresented" the segment by telling them simply that it was an Earth Day special, and by concealing Stossel's involvement (L.A. Times, 6/26/01).

One father, Brad Neal, told the Washington Post (6/26/01) that Stossel's questioning was "entirely misleading," and that "he'd repeat the questions until he got the answer he wanted.... We knew we were hoodwinked." Parents said Stossel even tried to lead the children in chant suggesting that "all scientists agree there is a greenhouse effect" (L.A. Times, 6/26/01).

As a result of the negative publicity, ABC pulled the interviews before the show aired, though the network stood by Stossel's work. Stossel's own response was instructive. He found new kids to interview, apparently with the same techniques: On the special, they responded in well-coordinated unison to Stossel's questions. He also went on the attack against the parents, saying that they had been "brainwashed" by environmental activists, whom he characterized as "the totalitarian left" (O'Reilly Factor, 6/27/01).

Tricky editing

Little kids aren't the only ones who should beware of Stossel's tactics. During his one-hour special "Is America No. 1?" (9/19/99), Stossel used tricky editing to misrepresent the views of James K. Galbraith, a leading economist at the University of Texas.

Rife with factual inaccuracies (Extra!, 11-12/99), the show attempted to demonstrate that laissez-faire economics are "what makes a country work well for its people." Stossel claimed that Europe has high unemployment rates because of policies that provide benefits such as paid parental leave and make it "very hard" to fire workers.

The facts are so persuasive, said Stossel, that "many economists who once argued that we could learn from Europe, like James Galbraith, have now changed their minds." Stossel then played a clip from his interview with Galbraith: "There might be a moment for the European to learn from us, rather than for us to be studying them." The implication was clear: Galbraith believes Europe should follow the U.S.'s lead and require fewer protections and benefits for workers.

In fact, Galbraith is an outspoken opponent of the adoption of U.S.-style laissez-faire policies in Europe. "My point is quite different from the one Stossel makes in the lead-in," Galbraith told Extra!'s Seth Ackerman (11-12/99). Galbraith explained that he had actually told Stossel that "Europe could, in short, benefit from adopting some of the continent-wide transfer mechanisms, such as Social Security,
that we have long enjoyed in the United States." In other words, Galbraith did feel Europe could learn from the U.S. by expanding social benefit programs--the opposite position, essentially, from the one implied by Stossel's editing.

After FAIR issued an Action Alert (9/28/99) critiquing this and other distortions in "Is America No. 1?" Stossel issued an evasive rebuttal (11/6/99)--signed, oddly, by Stossel and "some of his staff"--which insisted that Galbraith's "views on this particular matter were not misrepresented," but hedged that "we did not intend anyone to think he endorsed every statement made in the hour."

Despite Stossel's claim that he had done no wrong, the sentence introducing Galbraith's soundbite had been changed when ABC rebroadcast "Is America No. 1?" a year later (9/1/00). "Even economists who like Europe's policies, like James Galbraith," said Stossel the second time around, "now acknowledge America's success."

**Some facts are better than others**

Sometimes Stossel responds to uncomfortable facts not by spinning them, but by omitting them. In one instance, producers resigned from a Stossel special after their findings were dismissed because they cast doubt on Stossel's "preconceived notion" of the truth. The show was "Are We Scaring Ourselves to Death?" (4/21/94), a 90-minute special about the evils of government regulation.

Positing that America's ability to "compete in a world economy" could be compromised if we worry too much about "dangerous-sounding" things like "pesticides, pollutants, bioengineering, electromagnetic fields" and so forth, Stossel reassures us: Today, "we live longer than ever." Therefore, advocates like Ralph Nader--who is portrayed as a fear-monger who "screamed about everything"--have it all wrong. The real danger is regulation, since "regulations may shorten lives by making people poorer."

It's tough to argue with such relentlessly simplistic logic, as Stossel's own staff found out. As reported by Karl Grossman (**Extra! Update**, 6/94), a source close to ABC said that two of the three producers hired to work on the special resigned because their findings were unwelcome.

Producer Jan Legnitto found that government product-safety regulation was cost-effective, while Vicky Sufian's research on comparative risk indicated that some regulations actually served to protect people. Neither finding supported Stossel's anti-regulatory stance, so their research was dismissed. Both producers asked to be released from their contracts and left the program.

Similarly, in the 1995 special "Boys and Girls Are Different" (2/1/95), Stossel's team seems to have discarded evidence that complicated the show's biology-is-destiny slant. Claiming that men and women think differently "because our brains are different," Stossel argued that "trying to fix these differences will be pointless, expensive, even hurtful." On this basis, Stossel attacked remedies for inequality such as sex discrimination laws and affirmative action, saying they force unnatural outcomes.

As documented for **Extra!** by Miranda Spencer (5-6/95), Stossel featured a variety of scientists supporting biological explanations for gender traits and roles. Instead of contrasting these views with the numerous scientists who disagree with that approach, Stossel set up feminists without scientific backgrounds to refute them. Spencer found that Stossel's staff had in fact talked to some of the scientific authorities who were left out of the program, including Brown University biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling, a prominent figure in gender studies.

Fausto-Sterling--whose research has found more overlap than difference in male and female abilities--was contacted by fact-checkers for the program before the show aired. Her input, however, didn't seem to pass the litmus test. One ABC producer told Fausto-Sterling that interviews were already "set up" and that it was too late to restructure the show to introduce more balance.

Joan Bertin--then co-director of Columbia University's Program on Gender, Science and Law, now a professor at Columbia and executive director of the National Coalition Against Censorship--was also called by an ABC staffer who had no interest in material that didn't confirm Stossel's preconceived notions. "She left me with the clear impression she had explicit marching orders to find material to support gender differences," Bertin told **Extra!** (5-6/95).

**Part of the story**

Particularly troubling is Stossel's 1997 report about a rape allegation at Brown University. The controversial sexual assault charge was prominently covered by Brown's newspaper--it also generated stories in the Associated Press, Boston Globe and USA Today, among other outlets--and sparked rallies on campus, along with intense debate about sexual assault and Brown's disciplinary system.

In 1996, Brown student Sara Klein charged that she had been raped by a fellow student, Adam Lack, while she was too drunk to consent or remember the event. Lack maintained that the sex had been consensual. Klein filed a complaint with Brown's disciplinary council and Lack was suspended for sexual misconduct. On appeal, the judgment was reduced to "flagrant disrespect" and the suspension reduced to probation (**Providence Journal-Bulletin**, 1/30/97). Lack later sued both Brown and Klein, a case which
was settled in December 1997 (Brown Daily Herald, 10/25/00).

The facts behind the Lack/Klein case remain unclear, but Stossel's 20/20 report about it--"When Yes Means No" (3/28/97)--exploited the incident to make some disturbing claims about sex and rape. The way 20/20 told it, the questions about consent and assault raised by the case were problematic primarily because of Brown's "political correctness."

"There is something of an authoritarian atmosphere surrounding women's issues on this campus," Stossel announced, adding this memorable bit of wisdom: "If nobody had sex except when they were totally sober, I bet there would be a lot less sex on this campus."

The report consisted of an extensive interview with Lack (Klein reportedly declined to be interviewed) and footage of a verbal fight between Stossel and students at a campus rally against sexual assault.

As portrayed in the segment, the rally was angry and combative. "I got a feeling for the intolerance when the activists asked if anyone else wanted to speak," Stossel said, introducing his own entrance into the story, in which he took the stage to ask the crowd to define rape. According to Stossel's report, students were unwilling to consider his questions even though he was "just trying to educate" himself, and so drowned out his innocent inquiries with hostile chanting.

An article in a local paper, the Providence Journal-Bulletin (1/30/97), told a different story. According to the paper, the "orderly rally" degenerated into a "free-for-all" only after Stossel stepped out of his journalistic role to take the microphone.

Stossel reportedly "responded with an obscenity" when a student questioned his journalistic integrity, mocked a student who quoted Brown's discipline code--"I'm glad for $30,000 you learned to read"--and tried to provoke one woman by asking her, "If I were dating you, and put my arm around you and put my arm around you and put my hand on your breast...."

Stossel's cursing and innuendos were not included in his 20/20 report.

When all else fails, fabricate

In 2000, revelations about Stossel's shoddy journalism caused a brief media furor that ended with an on-air apology by Stossel for having cited non-existent test results in a report.

The report was "The Food You Eat," originally aired by 20/20 on February 4, 2000. In it, Stossel warned that organic produce may be more dangerous than conventional produce, saying that tests commissioned by ABC found increased levels of E. coli bacteria in organic sprouts and lettuce. He also stated that the tests found no pesticide residue "on either organic or regular produce," thereby obviating a key reason for buying organic food.

But, as the Organic Trade Association pointed out in a letter sent to ABC before the report aired (11/8/99), Stossel's E. coli tests were non-specific, meaning that they did not distinguish between dangerous and benign strains of the bacteria. The distinction is crucial to a story about food safety, but the 20/20 report omitted it, leaving the impression that the presence of any E. coli whatsoever could prove fatal.

OTA also pointed out that although one of their representatives was interviewed on the show and asked to comment on the study, Stossel's producer replied evasively to their "numerous" requests that he "clarify what types of E. coli were tested for." The group says that they learned the details of the test only after they were interviewed.

What's more, the pesticide tests Stossel cited were never done. In July, a story brought to light by the Environmental Working Group was picked up by the New York Times (7/31/00): The scientists that ABC commissioned--Michael Doyle and Lester Crawford--said that they never tested any of the produce for pesticides, only for bacteria.

In addition, Crawford told the Times that he did perform similar tests on chicken, and found pesticide residue on the conventional poultry but not on the organic poultry. That data is nowhere in Stossel's report, which suggests that, true to form, he took a selective approach to reporting scientific evidence.

Prior to these revelations, several groups--including FAIR, EWG and OTA--had voiced concerns about other aspects of "The Food You Eat," including its failure to disclose a primary source's ties to the chemical industry. At the time, ABC dismissed the questions, and rebroadcast the report uncorrected on July 7.

After the news about the non-existent test was picked up by mainstream media, ABC announced that it would reprimand Stossel and suspend his producer, and Stossel issued a lengthy on-air apology (8/11/00). FAIR wrote to ABC News urging them to take the occasion to investigate Stossel's overall record on accuracy, and to consider whether it lived up to the network's journalistic standards. The network, however, seemed to have decided to treat the debacle as an isolated incident. FAIR never received a response.
Give Us a Break: The world according to John Stossel
By Peter Hart

Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting
EXTRA!, March/April 2003 issue

ABC News reporter John Stossel enjoys a special position in broadcast network news: Though not usually often identified as a commentator, Stossel is routinely allowed to use his one-hour primetime specials and his regular "Give Me A Break" features on 20/20 to explicitly promote his personal ideological agenda--from singing the virtues of corporate greed to attacking child labor laws--a perspective that is distinctly different from the generally muted centrisim that pervades broadcast TV news.

While there is a long and honorable tradition of U.S. journalists with definite points of view who hoped that their reporting would have a political impact--from Thomas Paine to Ida Tarbell to I.F. Stone--what distinguishes Stossel is his willingness to warp reality to fit his ideological preconceptions. His reports, notable for their one-sided sourcing and rejection of inconvenient facts, are frequently marred assertions from Stossel and his favored guests that are misleading or factually incorrect.

Stossel's errors are often so obvious that one wonders how they could have ended up on the air. In a 20/20 report on medical research (10/11/99), Stossel complained that too much funding was going to AIDS research, claiming that spending on the disease was "25 times more than on Parkinson's, which kills more people."

In fact, AIDS killed more than 16,000 people in the United States in 1999--down from 43,000 in 1995. Parkinson's, which is not itself generally fatal but contributes to other illnesses, has a mortality rate of 2 per 100,000 to less than 1 per 100,000, depending on the demographic group (BC Medical Journal, 4/01)--which works out to a death toll in the United States of less than 4,000 per year.

Stossel once reported (11/12/99) that "98 percent [of Catholic school students] graduate, vs. 49 percent for the public schools." Actually, according to data from the Department of Education, no state reports a public high school graduation rate as low as Stossel's figure--in 1995-96, the last data available when Stossel made his claim, the rates ranged from 53.2 in the District of Columbia to 89.9 in Vermont (Postsecondary Education Opportunity, 9/99).

What may seem like honest, even careless mistakes are in fact distortions in service of Stossel's agenda. In the first case, Stossel was slamming the "AIDS lobby," who know how to "make money and influence the government," for getting too much government research funding. In the latter example, Stossel's point was that private schools are more efficient than what he calls "government" schools. When Stossel gets a fact wrong, it's nearly always in a way that promotes his ideology.

Wealth & Poverty

At the core of much of Stossel's reporting is his fervent belief in the efficiency and justice of laissez-faire capitalism, and the evils of most forms of government regulation. To Stossel, a fact like persistent U.S. income inequality is merely dogma circulated by lazy journalists who don't know the truth. But it is Stossel's reporting that often gets it backward. In his "Greed" special (2/3/98), Stossel reported that while management compensation had increased in the past 15 years, "that doesn't mean the workers were hurt. Factory wages were up, too--up 70 percent." According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, at the time the show aired, wages for manufacturing workers had risen 55 percent since January 1983. But Stossel's real statistical sleight of hand is that he didn't adjust for inflation. Taking inflation into account--which is indispensable for determining whether "workers were hurt"-- factory workers' real wages fell by more than 6 percent between 1983 and 1998.

Stossel's rhetoric on poverty relies on similarly mistaken statistical formulas. Consider this claim (1/27/01): "America now spends about $40,000 a year on every family of four below the poverty line.... You could just cut them a check for that and they'd be out of poverty." This figure seems to derive from the work of Heritage Foundation welfare analyst Robert Rector, whom Stossel had cited in previous specials. In a 1995 book, Rector calculated that the government spent $324 billion on "welfare." When that number was divided by the number of families then below the poverty line, the result was roughly $40,000. The problem? Rector's number for total "welfare" spending includes programs that go to millions of non-poor families--including spending on Medicare and Medicaid, two of the most expensive government programs. Rector takes this total amount, and then divides this by the number of poor people alone. Such a figure tells you nothing about what benefits to poor people alone actually cost.

Not only do we spend too much on the poor, Stossel claims (9/19/99) that poor Americans enjoy the same access to medical care as the wealthy: "Our system does sometimes fail poor people, but the
truth is that when someone is denied care, it makes headlines because it's so unusual."

So unusual? Analyzing data from the 1987 National Medical Expenditure Survey--at a time when fewer Americans lacked health insurance than today--David Himmelstein and Steffie Woolhandler concluded that 945,000 people were unable to receive emergency care that year (American Journal of Public Health, 3/95). Almost two-thirds of those unable to obtain care cited "high costs or lack of insurance." Were there really hundreds of thousands of "headlines" that year about the poor being denied access to basic healthcare?

The "victimhood" of labor laws

One has to give Stossel credit for being willing to stake out a strong and often controversial position. Consider his assertion that strengthening labor laws has set a dangerous precedent (10/26/94): "Most of the immigrants who poured into America knew work wouldn't be easy, that hiring practices might not be fair. There were few laws to protect them. But that gradually changed, and by this decade America had anti-discrimination laws protecting women, minorities and people over 40." Sounds good, right? Not to Stossel: "That put most of us in protected status and alerted us to our potential victimhood."

One area of "potential victimhood" in the workplace might be the protections against workplace hazards. In a Stossel piece slamming the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (1/21/00), OSHA's Charles Jeffress told Stossel: "Since OSHA was created 27 years ago, workplace fatalities have been cut in half." Stossel's response: "The regulators can cite specific successes, but look at the record." But Jeffress was citing OSHA's overall record, not specific successes. Stossel went on to cite a few anecdotal cases of OSHA's supposed malfeasance--precisely the anecdotal tactic he accused Jeffress of using.

Stossel's report on OSHA centered on the agency's attempt to provide employers with safety guidelines for some at-home workers. He applied the idea to his own work, claiming he could "sue ABC if, for example, he tripped "on the stuff the kids leave on the stairs." But under no circumstances could he sue his employer for OSHA violations--OSHA regulations are enforced by the agency, not by individuals' lawsuits against employers--and the safety rules were to apply to a home worksite, not the entire home. Toys left on the stairs by his kids would not likely fall into that category.

In the same report, Stossel referred to ergonomics as "a new and uncertain science." A report by the National Academy of Sciences (New York Times, 10/2/98) confirmed that in workplaces where stress on the upper body, neck and back was more common, "the positive relationship between the occurrence of musculoskeletal disorders and the conduct of work is clear." At the end of his report, Stossel complained: "They're spending $200 million a month? I think most of it is waste." If by "they" he means OSHA, his numbers don't match the agency's budget for the 2000 fiscal year, which was about $388 million--about $168 million less per month than Stossel claimed.

Getting the greens

Environmentalists are a frequent target of Stossel's ire. In a report on schools teaching about the environment (6/29/01), Stossel wondered, "Is this education or environmental boot camp?" The ABC correspondent lamented students' ignorance: "Why don't they know the facts? The EPA says over the past 30 years, the air has been getting cleaner.... Every major pollutant the government measures is decreasing." The implication is that EPA data show environmental improvement across the board--but that's a partial reading of the data. The EPA's website states that what it calls "total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions"--which include carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulfur hexafluoride--rose by more than 11 percent from 1990 to 1998. Are the emissions that may be fundamentally altering global climate not "major pollutants"?

Criticizing the international Kyoto Protocol to reduce greenhouse emissions, Stossel cited an Energy Department study that "says if we try to reduce global warming by restricting emissions, gas prices will go up 50 percent. Electricity 80 percent." He seems to be referring to an October 1998 study by the Energy Information Administration (EIA), which supplies data for the Energy Department. The EIA predicted that if the Kyoto Protocol were implemented, electricity prices might rise anywhere from 20 percent to 86 percent by 2010, while gasoline prices might rise from 11 percent to 53 percent. The EIA report also cautioned: "The amount prices must rise is uncertain.... Forecasting technological change and public response to it under various pricing scenarios is an inexact science." In other words, Stossel reported only the most extreme numbers in the study, and ignored the report's caveats about uncertainty--fishy techniques that most journalists probably couldn't get away with.

Stossel also warped reality to make concerns over the pesticide Alar, used by apple growers to protect the appearance of fruit, sound like a hoax (12/22/00). "These people said a chemical in apples was a carcinogen," Stossel reported, illustrating this statement with footage of actress Meryl Streep. "Sure enough, the apple scare got lots of news coverage," he continued. "Some parents and schools
panicked, throwing apple juice away, banning apples, so the kids ate, what? Maybe Twinkies?" Stossel closed his truncated history by claiming that "government scientists came out with their own report" that claimed that the apples were fine. As Stossel puts it, "Of course, that announcement got less publicity... but eventually the EPA banned [Alar], telling the Associated Press it was responding to widespread public fears."

Stossel's viewers were badly misinformed. First, the EPA was concerned about Alar--and, more importantly, its byproduct UDMH--long before the issue received national attention via a 1989 a Natural Resources Defense Council report (which included the publicity campaign with Meryl Streep). EPA research in 1984 found Alar/UMDH was a possible carcinogen, and a 1987 study calculated a cancer potency estimate (Rachel's Health & Environment Weekly, 1/30/97). Stossel's timeline was also deceptive: the EPA announced its intention to ban Alar on February 1, 1989 (Associated Press, 2/2/89). That's three weeks before the 60 Minutes report (2/26/89) that generated the "widespread public fears" Stossel says forced the EPA to act. Further, a 1993 study by the National Academy of Sciences confirmed that Alar posed a threat to children that government regulators were not addressing properly (LA Times, 7/1/93).

Stories that put environmentalism in a bad light seem irresistible to Stossel. According to a number of reports from the Washington Times, government biologists planted lynx fur in a national forest in order to manipulate the Endangered Species Act (see Extral, 6-7/02). As Stossel explained, people are often afraid of the "government's environmental police," since "finding a threatened species can set in motion a series of motions that can wreck your life if you're a rancher or farmer." (That's a wildly exaggerated scenario---and Stossel is conflating "threatened" species with "endangered.") Stossel went on: "That didn't happen here because it turned out the government's biologists faked the test. The lynx hair sent to the lab came from a lynx... miles away from where the biologists claim they found the hair."

In reality, biologists had sent the lab samples of known Canadian lynx and bobcat hair to check whether the testing process could accurately identify them. What's more, the samples could not have been used to falsify the presence of lynx, because the actual source of the fur was plainly noted in the researchers' lab books, which are the official record of the study. Contrary to Stossel's notion that the scientists were "caught" sending in control samples, the Seattle Times reported (12/30/01) that "several told their supervisors about it, and one notified the lab itself." All of this was available to Stossel months before his report, but the factually inaccurate segment made it on the air.

Reining in regulators

Viewers who watch Stossel know that he's generally dismissive of government regulators and "bureaucrats," but sometimes he takes it to an unusual extreme. Consider his description of the Food and Drug Administration (8/12/94): "Every time the FDA announces approval of a new wonder drug that'll save, say, 17,000 lives a year, it means that thousands died while the bureaucracy was deciding what to do."

One of Stossel's prime examples was the Sensor Pad, a medical device that supposedly would help detect breast lumps (8/12/94). According to Stossel's report, the device was subjected to endless bureaucratic stalling in this country--but not in Canada, where "they approved this in less than 60 days." In fact, as the Washington Post reported (2/22/95), the device has never been approved in Canada. Mary Jane Bell of Canada's Medical Services Bureau explained to the Post that the device was banned in Canada until the company supplied data proving its effectiveness.

Another Stossel horror story about government regulations causing serious damage was a report on California wildfires (11/19/93). Stossel reported that the Endangered Species Act prevented homeowners from creating firebreaks: "These people believe they could have protected their property, but the government wouldn't let them because of a rat."

But an investigation by the General Accounting Office released in July 1994 doesn't support Stossel's argument, concluding that the destruction of the homes did not relate to the Endangered Species Act's protection of the kangaroo rat, noting that it was legal to cut brush without disturbing the squirrel-like rodent's underground burrows. The report also found that "county officials and other fire officials believe that weed abatement by any means would have made little difference in whether or not a home was destroyed in the California fire," noting that the fire, whipped by 80-mile-per-hour winds, jumped over two highways and a canal. The Columbia Journalism Review (5-6/95) reported that Stossel found the GAO report "less than conclusive," quoting him as saying, "this is the accounting firm for the organization that passed the law [i.e., the U.S. Congress].... There seemed to be enough holes in that report that eventually led me to say, 'We didn't go overboard on that story.'"

Stossel also skewed a story on Title IX, the landmark law passed in 1972 that attempts to create equal opportunities for female students. To Stossel, it's another regulation pushed by the "equality
police," since "under Title IX, the ratio of female athletes is supposed to match the ratio of female students." But Title IX does not require proportional participation by male and female students in athletics; since 1979, schools have had the options of showing a history of providing nondiscriminatory opportunities, or demonstrating that the school provides reasonable accommodations relative to the level of interest among students (New York Times, 2/1/03; US Department of Education, Office Of Civil Rights, 1/16/96).

Faulty logic

Even when Stossel's facts are in order, the arguments he constructs using them often display peculiar logic. Stossel's "Is Greed Good?" special featured an experiment where a group of people sit around a bowl of money. The people can take all the money they want, but the bowl is refilled only if it isn't emptied. At the beginning of the experiment, all the cash is quickly and greedily grabbed, ending the game. The players learn to cooperate, each taking a limited amount at any one time so the bowl gets refilled, and everyone has more. Stossel's conclusion from this: "They're just as greedy, but now they're cooperating and making more. That's just how business works." Businesses refrain from making as much money as they can so that there will always be enough for everyone? Now that would be a scoop.

In a report on sex differences, Stossel pointed out that "boys play with action figures," illustrating this claim with footage of a boy playing with a Power Ranger toy. By contrast, Stossel said, "girls play with dolls"--accompanying this observation with a shot of a girl...playing with a Power Ranger.

Stossel's rebuttal to a statement from Sen. John McCain advocating campaign finance reform was to increase the flow of money into the political process: "This year, the candidates and parties will spend less on all American elections than we spend on yogurt or bowling. We spend three times as much on amusement parks. Aren't elections more important than this?" But campaign finance advocates aren't just concerned about how much campaigns spend--they worry about how much they receive from those who wish to influence legislation. One could just as plausibly argue that bribes to politicians are not a big deal because they constitute a small percentage of GDP.

Badgering the witnesses

Stossel's treatment of sources varies greatly depending on whether or not they agree with him. His "question" to an OSHA consultant (1/21/00): "Your critics say you're a bunch of clueless busybodies trying to micromanage everybody's life." In a segment on New York's welfare-to-work program (3/9/98), Stossel tells workfare participants that "you didn't get a real job on your own. Everybody says this is a great program." As if to prove that work was plentiful, he proceeded to show them the help-wanted ads.

Or consider Stossel's retort to Linda Greer of the Natural Resources Defense Council, referring to the group's criticism of the chemical Alar (4/21/94): "Isn't it possible you killed people by making apples more expensive?" Interviewing a lawyer who focuses on violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (11/8/02), Stossel suggested that he was really just running a shakedown racket: "What would you call it if I came up to you in a parking lot and said, 'Give me money or I'll smash your car?'" "You're a scaremonger," he scolded genetic engineering critic Jeremy Rifkin (6/29/01). "Why should we listen to you?"

When guests push Stossel's line, however, he even lets their inaccuracies pass. In a part of his "Is America No. 1?" special (9/19/99) dedicated to the wonders of Hong Kong's free-market success, one of Stossel's favored sources claims that Hong Kong is "the only government in the world that makes a surplus, a big surplus." In fact, 11 countries were achieving the very same feat in 1998--including the U.S., which at the time had been running a federal budget surplus for more than a year--major news that seemed to have escaped Stossel's notice.

Stossel's reporting has found allies in the corporate world, as industry is eager to help him out. Holly Glass of the Health Industry Manufacturers Association told the Washington Post that her group "supplied a great deal of background information" to Stossel's staff for a report on government regulation (Washington Post, 12/15/94).

Though he once remarked that he carefully awaits scientific consensus on a subject ("But the quiet scientists who are respected by their peers, when they agree on something for a year or two, I start to believe"--Good Morning America, 1/7/97) one favorite guest is science writer Michael Fumento. Since Fumento wrote his book The Myth of Heterosexual AIDS in 1990, millions of people around the world have died from heterosexually transmitted HIV.

Free market myths

Above all, Stossel's reports are often directed toward advancing free markets and attacking most forms of government regulation. While his claims sometime rest on dubious statistical evidence, at other times his comments are simply incredibly broad: for example, "Economists say regulations make a
country a little poorer” (4/21/94).

When Stossel did a one-hour special on government regulation and waste (1/27/01), topics then in the headlines like California's deregulation-induced energy crisis were off-limits. While private energy companies extracted billions from the state's residents, citizens in California towns with publicly owned utilities were largely unaffected by the rolling blackouts and soaring rates that had crippled the rest of the state. Instead, Stossel stuck to urging more unrestrained market solutions, making statements like: "Look at the sky. Even over an airport, there's lots of room. Why can't they fly more planes in this empty space?"

Even when free market capitalism appears to fail, it vindicates Stossel's position. ABC co-host John Miller made this observation about the Enron debacle (5/24/02): "You're always saying there should be totally free enterprise, limited regulation, doesn't a story like that cry out for tough government regulations of these corporations?" Stossel's offered this Pollyanna-like response: "Everybody's bashing capitalism over Enron. I think this is an example of how the market works. The fact that it's big news shows how seldom this happens. In a multi-trillion-dollar economy, you're going to have some bad companies. But they got caught. They're not doing it anymore."

It's that government intervention that really gets to Stossel: "Governments, because they're monopolies, just tend not to do things very well. I thought we learned that watching the fall of the Soviet bloc, but apparently not." Once, ABC anchor John Miller (7/19/02) asked Stossel a straight-forward question: "Has government ever, in the history of time, done something more effectively than a private outfit?" Stossel's response: "Not to my knowledge."

As Stossel once put it (1/9/97), "One good thing about science is that in the long run, the truth usually comes out." Unfortunately, the same is not true of Stossel's curious brand of journalism.

**ACTION ALERT: Stossel Tampers with the Facts**

Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting

[This press release is posted on the Fairness & Accuracy & Reporting's website: http://www.fair.org/activism/stossel-tampering.html]

July 17, 2001

John Stossel plays by a different set of rules than other journalists, as demonstrated most recently by "Tampering with Nature," a one-hour special that aired on ABC on June 29.

Taking advantage of the unusual leeway the network gives him, ABC's favorite free-market zealot used the special to attack environmentalists, who are caricatured as "preachers of doom and gloom" whose extreme anti-technology views would have us all "running around naked, hungry for food, maybe killing a rabbit with a rock, then dying young, probably before age 40." As is often the case, Stossel's reporting relied on biased sources, twisted facts and the exclusion of information that might conflict with his thesis.

Central to Stossel's argument is that schools are overrun with green propaganda, leaving him to wonder: "Is this education or environmental boot camp?" To hear Stossel and his carefully chosen guests tell it, kids are being brainwashed when in fact there's little reason to worry about the environment.

Deforestation, for example, is a non-issue, according to one of Stossel's main sources, Patrick Moore, a former director of Greenpeace who now works for the timber industry. Moore explains that "the forest cover in the United States today is about the same as it was in 1920." Stossel chimies in, "I don’t read that in the Greenpeace fundraiser," suggesting that groups like Greenpeace are part of a "huge industry" that profits by manufacturing a crisis.

It’s true that total U.S. forest cover has been roughly stable over the last century. But taking total acreage as the sole indicator of environmental well-being is a simplistic approach. It discounts, for example, that the U.S. has logged most of its old-growth forests, which are crucial to biodiversity. Deforestation is a global crisis with global impact-- most of the forestry work done by Greenpeace, for instance, focuses not on the relatively well-protected U.S., but on Brazil, Canada and other areas where forest loss threatens the climate, endangered species and indigenous peoples. The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organization finds that deforestation is running about 22 million acres per year, an estimate many environmental groups say is too low, since it counts new tree plantations the same way as older forests (Environmental News Service, 3/12/01).

And are you worried about pollution? Then you're no better than those brainwashed
schoolchildren: "Why don't they know the facts? The EPA says over the past 30 years, the air has been getting cleaner.... Every major pollutant the government measures is decreasing."

Stossel's implication that EPA data shows environmental improvement across the board is clearly incorrect. In fact, the EPA's website states that "total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions"-- which include carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulfur hexafluoride-- have risen significantly over the last several years, to 11.2 percent above 1990 baseline (as of 1998), and that emissions per person in the U.S. "have increased about 3.4 percent between 1990 and 1997."

These emissions certainly qualify as "major pollutants" in terms of their environmental impact.

Stossel’s discussion of global warming was highly selective in the information it presented. Instead of reporting the increasingly strong scientific consensus on global warming, Stossel chose to highlight the views of so-called "skeptics," giving center stage to three dissenters from among the 2,000 scientists of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which recently released a report stating that global temperatures are rising almost twice as fast as previously thought.

To back up the skeptics' claims, Stossel presents some deceptive evidence: "You may have heard that 1,600 scientists signed a letter warning of 'devastating consequences.' But I bet you hadn't heard that 17,000 scientists signed a petition saying there's 'no convincing evidence' that greenhouse gases will disrupt the Earth's climate."

The implication is that 10 times as many scientists question global warming. What Stossel doesn't note is that while the first petition was circulated by a group well-respected in the scientific community, the second petition has been famously discredited.

The first, smaller petition came from the Union of Concerned Scientists and its signatories included 110 Nobel laureates, including 104 of the 178 living Nobel Prize winners in the sciences, along with 60 U.S. National Medal of Science winners. The latter petition was a project of the George C. Marshall Institute, whose chair, Frederick Seitz, is also affiliated with the Global Climate Coalition (an industry group calling itself the "voice for business in the global warming debate"), in conjunction with the Oregon Institute for Science and Medicine, a lesser-known group whose leader, wrote columnist Molly Ivins, is a biochemist who "specializes in home schooling and building nuclear shelters" (Los Angeles Times, 8/17/98).

Though OISM's signatories did include reputable scientists, it also included dentists, nutritionists and others with no expertise in climatology; the only requirement for signing on was a bachelor's degree in science. In fact, OISM's screening process was so lax that for a time the list also included a number of gag names added by environmentalists, including Ginger Spice and Michael J. Fox. The OISM petition also came under fire for being deceptively packaged: The petition was accompanied by an article purporting to debunk global warming that was formatted to look as though it had been published in the journal of the respected National Academy of Sciences. The resemblance was so close that the NAS issued a public statement that the OISM petition "does not reflect the conclusions of expert reports of the Academy."

None of this controversy was mentioned in Stossel's report.

Stossel also cites an Energy Department study that "says if we try to reduce global warming by restricting emissions, gas prices will go up 50 percent. Electricity 80 percent." Stossel doesn't say exactly what study he's citing, but the numbers are most likely from the Energy Information Administration, which supplies data for the Energy Department.

In October of 1998, the EIA predicted that if the Kyoto Protocol were implemented, electricity prices might rise anywhere from 20 percent to 86 percent by 2010, while gasoline prices might rise 11 percent to 53 percent. But the report also predicted that prices would decline "as energy markets adjust and more efficient, new technologies become available and gradually penetrate the market." The report also cautioned: "The amount prices must rise is uncertain.... Forecasting technological change and public response to it under various pricing scenarios is an inexact science." It becomes even more inexact when Stossel picks the numbers he likes best out of a broad range.

During the program, absurd contentions from the guests Stossel favors pass without comment: "The average person hears the temperature has changed a half degree," says Richard Lindzen of MIT. "So what? Changes more than that while they wait for the street light to change." It's obvious that local temperatures have a wide range, yet even small changes in average global temperatures can have profound effects (Los Angeles Times, 7/13/01). Stossel lets this sophistry pass, but activists he doesn't agree with are not treated so kindly. "You're a scaremonger," he scolded genetic engineering critic Jeremy Rifkin, "Why should we listen to you?"

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the piece was Stossel's use of children. ABC had filmed interviews with schoolchildren from Santa Monica, California. The children's parents originally signed consent forms, but later withdrew them, citing concerns over Stossel's leading questions, and the fact that Stossel's participation had not been mentioned until the last minute.

Stossel's strategy was to get the students to make inaccurate statements about the environment,
then blame the environmentalist propaganda that is taught in the schools. The tactic is demeaning and absurd; one could imagine Stossel quizzing students on spelling or math, and explaining incorrect answers as the result of a propaganda campaign. Stossel doesn't mention the fact that actual propaganda-- paid for by industries bent on improving their environmental image -- is increasingly used in place of materials designed by educators in America's classrooms (USA Today, 6/23/98).

In the end, Stossel took a fair amount of criticism for his manipulative tactics, and ABC forced him to pull the original interviews from the broadcast. One can't say he learned from the incident, though: He merely interviewed a different set of children to achieve the same results.

It's hard to imagine another journalist getting away with what Stossel does. It's ironic that a report on the evils of "propaganda" relied so heavily on misinformation and selective omissions-- tried and true propaganda techniques-- to prove its points.

ACTION ALERT: ABC News gives up on accuracy? Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting

[http://www.fair.org/activism/stossel-america.html]

Sept. 28, 1999

On September 19, ABC broadcast a one-hour news special titled "Is America # One?" by ABC News correspondent John Stossel. By comparing the economies of Hong Kong, the United States and India, Stossel attempts to show that laissez-faire economic policy is "what makes a country work well for its people." The program was filled with so many factual inaccuracies, Limbaughesque distortions and unsubstantiated claims that it calls into question whether ABC News applied any sort of journalistic standards to the broadcast.

The following is just a sampling of some of Stossel's erroneous claims:

One of Stossel's main sources on Hong Kong claims that Hong Kong is "the only government in the world that makes a surplus, a big surplus."

As anyone who pays attention to Washington politics knows, the U.S. government has been running a federal budget surplus for more than a year; it amounted to $70 billion last year. Other countries with budget surpluses last year included the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway and Sweden.

Another major Stossel source, Dinesh D'Souza of the American Enterprise Institute, claims that compared to other countries, the United States is "a very mobile society in which lots of people who start out at the bottom can find a place at least in the middle, and some will rise to the top."

D'Souza is identified as an "author and research scholar at the American Enterprise Institute." But viewers are not told that D'Souza is neither an economist nor a writer who has ever specialized in economics.

In fact, a 1996 study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) compared earnings mobility in eight countries. Measuring mobility by how often workers in the bottom fifth of earnings ended up in the upper three-fifths, the United States came in last. The country that came in first was Denmark, a nation with an elaborate social welfare system.

Stossel says at one point that the alternative to a "free society" is "stagnation, and often poverty. Consider China, now mired in Third world poverty. They were once the leader of the world."

Actually, China's economy is anything but "stagnant." As the Treasury Department's Lawrence Summers said in a speech last year, "China has been the fastest growing economy in history since [economic] reform began in 1980." While China has adopted some aspects of market economics, a large proportion
of its business firms are still owned by the government.

*In order to refute the only on-camera source who is given significant time to disagree with his thesis—progressive talkshow host Jim Hightower—Stossel claims that "the Federal Reserve's wage data that's often cited doesn't count things like commissions salespeople make, retirement contributions, medical insurance. When you include them, average American compensation's risen 20 percent."*

This statement contains multiple inaccuracies. First, the Federal Reserve does not collect wage data. The "often cited" wage data Stossel apparently has in mind—showing that wages for ordinary workers have fallen—come from the Labor Department's Bureau of Labor Statistics. The data Stossel cites purporting to show that compensation has "risen 20 percent"—he does not say since when—most likely come from the Commerce Department's National Income and Product Accounts (NIPA).

The NIPA data measure the total amount of compensation—including payroll taxes, health, pension, and other non-wage benefits—earned in the economy as a whole. While that figure can be divided by the total number of workers to obtain a statistical average, this cannot be used as a gauge of ordinary worker's compensation, since the average is inflated by very high salaries and benefits for a small number of top-paid workers.

Stossel is "confusing what happens to the typical worker and an overall average," explains economist Dean Baker, senior research fellow at the Preamble Center. "Suppose Bill Gates got his billions of dollars as wage income. That would raise the average. But obviously that doesn't help the typical worker."

A median value for hourly workers' compensation—the wages and benefits received by workers at the 50th percentile—is a much more accurate gauge of what "the average American" earns, and can be estimated by combining data from the BLS and the NIPA. By this estimate, inflation-adjusted median hourly compensation fell from $13.66 in 1989 to $13.08 in 1997, a decline of 4.2 percent. This is actually a steeper decline than for wages alone over the same period.

*In one of the program's most dishonest moments, Stossel misrepresents the views of University of Texas economist James Galbraith to bolster one of his points.*

Stossel reports that European economies are damaged by laws that guarantee things like paid parental leaves and long vacations. "Many economists who once argued that we could learn from Europe, like James Galbraith, have now changed their minds," says Stossel.

This comment is followed by a soundbite from an interview with Professor James Galbraith, a prominent liberal economist. In the soundbite, Galbraith says: "There might be a moment for the Europeans to learn from us, rather than for us to be studying them."

But Stossel took Galbraith's words out of context, making it appear as if he agreed with Stossel's views. "My point is quite different from the one Stossel makes in the lead-in," Galbraith told FAIR. He explained that he had actually told Stossel that "Europe could, in short, benefit from adopting some of the continent-wide transfer mechanisms, such as Social Security, that we have long enjoyed in the United States."

In fact, Galbraith recently co-drafted an economists' statement opposing plans by the German government to cut social spending. It declared:

"As American economists and social scientists, we oppose the plans recently announced by the German government to restructure and deregulate the German economy along lines alleged to be 'the American model.'... Germany is today in the grip of an ideology of free markets, deregulation and privatization that originated here. But as that ideology was the source of American failures in the 1980s, and not of our recent successes, many Americans have abandoned it."

Far from espousing Stossel's view that European countries would benefit from adopting American-style free-market policies, Professor Galbraith has long been publicly outspoken in opposing it—yet ABC viewers would have no way of knowing that.
Stossel claims that poor Americans enjoy the same access to medical care as the wealthy:

"Our system does sometimes fail poor people, but the truth is that when someone is denied care, it makes headlines because it's so unusual. Most of the time, even the poorest person going to the emergency room gets the same high-tech, cutting edge treatment that lures foreign leaders like Jordan's King Hussein to American hospitals."

"It's simply not true that people can get access to care," counters Steffie Woolhandler, associate professor of medicine at Harvard Medical School, and co-founder Physicians for a National Health Program. "According to a federal survey, there were 945,000 people in a single year who needed and couldn't get emergency care in this country." The same survey, conducted in 1987 by the Department of Health and Human Services, found that almost two-thirds of those giving a reason for not obtaining medical care cited "high costs or lack of insurance" (American Journal of Public Health, 3/1995).

Given that 43 million Americans are uninsured, Woolhandler told FAIR, we shouldn't be surprised at these numbers. "We have a system that denies healthcare to millions and millions of people every year. These stories don't make the headlines."

In one of the most startling scenes in the broadcast, Stossel travels to a food pantry in the South Bronx run by a local nun. He interrogates the people lined up to receive food about whether they own VCRs or microwaves.

Stossel asserts: "No one says some Americans aren't suffering, but poverty in America is nothing compared to the misery and hunger you see in India, and most of the world. These people in the South Bronx aren't here because they've been going without food. They come because the food is free."

In fact, the Census Bureau's 1995 Food Security survey classified 13.8 percent of Americans as either hungry or "food insecure." Food insecurity is defined as having a "limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods or limited or uncertain ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways." (For example, 81 percent of respondents in households classified as "food insecure" said that sometimes in the past 12 months the food they bought "just didn't last" and they "didn't have money to get more.")

Stossel has long been a passionate believer in free-market economics; in 1994, he told the Oregonian newspaper (10/26/94): "Markets are magical and the best protectors of the consumer. It is my job to explain the beauties of the free market." "Is America # One?" makes it clear that Stossel does indeed think it's his job to promote an ideology, and that he is willing to sacrifice factual accuracy, misrepresent sources and abandon other journalistic standards to achieve that goal.

ABC News, apparently, is willing to make that same sacrifice.