

REPORTING ON YUGOSLAVIA

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Most articles about Yugoslavia are carried across wire services. And what interest might these agencies have in biased reporting out of Yugoslavia? Probably none, but the names of their correspondents might explain the bias.

The AP (Associated Press) correspondent in Belgrade — the capital of both Serbia and Yugoslavia — is Dusan Stojanovic.

The UPI (United Press International) correspondent is Nesho Djuric. You need a subscription to a computer service that hooks up with these agencies to find this out.

To someone familiar with Slavic names, both bylines could hardly be more Serbian. And their articles are most certainly slanted if not totally biased.

One might argue that being journalists, they wouldn't compromise their integrity on the basis of their nationality. Perhaps that is the case in Canada, where you would be equally comfortable reading articles about Quebec by John Downing or Luc Perrault.

However, the press in Belgrade are scandalously biased. You don't have to take our word for it: the Serbs themselves were so fed up with how their own local politics were dealt with in the press that they organized massive rallies and paralysed Belgrade for almost a week.

If you are searching for the truth, you should take everything you think you know about Yugoslavia and forget it. Consider the following 'facts' which regularly appear in the press:

- The basic problem is Serbs



Yugoslavian government tanks break through a barricade in Slovenia in July of this year. Yugoslavia has been in turmoil for most of the century. With Croatia and Serbia declaring independence in June, the situation has come to a head.

against Croats. Wrong. Ask any Slovene, Macedonian, Albanian, Muslim or Hungarian what their problem is and they will all tell you they have problems with the Serbian government — particularly the present one. It is led by Slobodan Milosevic, a communist who has stirred Serbian nationalism into a frenzy in order to hold onto power.

- There are half a million Serbs in

Croatia who don't want to live in Croatia for fear of persecution and want to join Serbia. Wrong. Of the 500,000 Serbs who live in Croatia, most are scattered around the larger towns and cities. Many live in the so-called "Krajina." This area has a majority of Serbs but is by no means ethnically pure. It has proclaimed itself part of Serbia but only accounts for 120,000 Serbs.

- Serbs fear Croatian nationalism. Wrong. Slovenes, Croats, Muslims, Macedonians and others fear Serbian nationalism.

Newspaper reports will not tell you the real goals of Milosevic's government.

It was in the streets of Belgrade that Milosevic was swept to power with his strident nationalism. Since his rise to power, Serbia has:

- Revoked the autonomous province status of Vojvodina and Kosovo while retaining their vote in the Yugoslav Presidency.

- making Serbia dominate that institution.
- Brutally oppressed the Albanians of Kosovo who account for 90% of the population in that province.
- Waged a war of state-supported terrorism in Croatia.
- Created armed gangs of terrorists to destabilize the fragile democracies in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

All of this is done in the name of Greater Serbia, a country which would incorporate most of today's Yugoslavia so that all Serbs could live in one country. They use the pretext of a threatened minority to justify this land grab.

All Serbs in one country? Threatened minority? *Serbia Über Alles?* Leading Serbian newspapers write in all seriousness that Germany and Italy are supporting Croatian and Slovenian independence because of a secret scenario to create the Fourth Reich. What sort of mentality is behind this?

What sort of mentality prevails when Vojislav Seselj — a Serb who boasts he organized the massacre of 12 Croatian policemen — is elected to Serbia's parliament?

This mentality cannot be changed overnight. It is also unlikely anything will be resolved by peaceful and democratic means — not unless Serbs realize there are large parts of Yugoslavia that are not, never were and never will be Serbia.

The sooner this happens, the better for all concerned. But between now and then it will be a very difficult time for all of the peoples who live in the sorry state known as Yugoslavia.

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10 Critiquing the critics

Rethinking Thelma and Louise

by Ira Nayman

I missed the *US News and World Report* article denouncing *Thelma and Louise*, but I did manage to see an episode of *Crossfire* devoted to the film.

Thelma and Louise clearly hit a nerve. But while this film about a pair of women who go on a weekend fishing trip and end up being hunted by the police for a crime spree is by no means perfect, it is not as bad as its current detractors make it out to be.

This criticism has come mainly from male political commentators and pundits; film critics have generally reacted favourably.

There are two specific complaints about *Thelma and Louise*: the film does not have any sympathetic male characters and it is too violent. These complaints are not supported by the film, and do not consider the history of the medium.



Louise (Susan Sarandon) talks to her boyfriend (Michael Madsen) in *Thelma and Louise*. A lot of the current criticism of the film is sexist, failing to consider the ways Hollywood has traditionally portrayed sex roles.

analysis

There are a lot of unsympathetic male characters in *Thelma and Louise*, from the guy Thelma (Geena Davis) meets in a bar who ends up trying to rape her to a sweet young hitchhiker who robs banks — and, eventually, the two women.

However, there are at least two redeemable men: the boyfriend of Louise (Susan Sarandon), who tracks her down to propose to her, and sympathetic cop who tries to help them.

Two sympathetic male characters contrasted by a dozen jerks may not seem like much, but it is more than women are frequently allowed. How many films have portrayed women as brainless bimboes or selfless wives and mothers, ruling out other possibilities?

If the problem is negative stereotyping, we should recognize that female characters have been given far less autonomy, far fewer human characteristics or choices, than male characters.

As for the violence: there is one murder, an attempted rape, a bank robbery and an exploding tanker truck. There is more violence in a single minute of *Terminator 2* than in all of *Thelma and Louise*. (And note that the criticism of violence centres on murder or destruction of property, not on rape.)

One *Crossfire* guest claimed that the ending, in which Thelma and Louise drive off a cliff rather than be captured, was "nihilistic." This is a misinterpretation: the ending is an affirmation of Thelma and Louise's friendship (even in death).

To view it as "nihilistic" you would also have to interpret the scene on which it was based in the same way: the final scene in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*. This hasn't happened, nor is it likely to.

There is a double standard here: male friendships are encouraged in films, female friendships are discouraged; violence wielded by a man makes him a hero, violence wielded by a woman makes her unfeminine. These are sexist assumptions, unworthy of valid criticism.

Some men are threatened by *Thelma and Louise*. Strong female friendships scare insecure men; violent women are threatening because they challenge women's subservient roles. This fear is the basis of much of the criticism.

Thelma and Louise is a brilliant film. Don't believe the hype.



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