

IT IS THE MEDIA THAT CAN'T SEEM TO SHOOT STRAIGHT

Have you ever seen anything to match the White House press corps' dither over the recent hunting accident involving Vice President Dick Cheney?

Cheney accidentally put some birdshot in a lawyer buddy instead of a defenseless quail, and the media didn't find out about it until the next day. To observe their reaction, you would think we were witnessing the beginning of World War III, when in fact it was more like the Gang Who Couldn't Shoot Straight. To put it kindly, the media went berserk. Their questions were nothing short of brilliant. One reporter-cum-brain-surgeon asked a White House spokesman, "Would this be much more serious if the man had died?" (No, dipstick, it would be much more serious if he were abducted by aliens.)

As usual, my friend Bill Stewart, a Great American from St. Simons, put the much-ado-about-little in proper perspective. Stewart says it's not like the vice president committed a crime. He shot a lawyer, for Pete's sake. That's a public service. There are too many lawyers anyway. Nobody gets excited when we thin the deer herds. What's the difference?

The media will tell you they got testy because they were protecting our right to know. Bull butter. The media must think we are dumb as a rock. They are making a big deal of the story because they despise the Bush administration and take great delight giggling them every chance they get. They don't seem to understand that most of us find it ironic that they have chosen not to compare Cheney's slow response to popping a hunter in a quail field with Ted Kennedy driving Mary Jo Kopechne off the Chappaquiddick Bridge. At least Cheney summoned medical help before he confessed. Fat Albert didn't even do that. Maybe that is why so many of you have written me to say that you still would rather go hunting with Dick Cheney than ride with Ted Kennedy.

If the media are serious about our right to know, then publish the cartoons that ran in a Danish newspaper poking fun at the prophet Mohammed and show us what has inflamed (pardon the pun) Muslims around the world. Isn't that a little more substantive a subject than badly directed birdshot? Is there a double standard at work here? The American media will cluck approvingly over so-called works of art that depict the crucifix in urine or the Virgin Mary covered in excrement, even though that worthless junk greatly offends Christians. They say they are defending the sacred tenet of free expression. The truth is they know they can get away with dissing Christians because we won't do anything about it. But make fun of Mohammed and you'll get your building burned down, printing presses and all. (Muslims love to burn stuff. They'd burn a turnip patch, given half a chance.) By the way, the cartoons can be found on the Internet. Maybe Muslims will burn down the Internet. If so, somebody had better let Al Gore know. The Internet is his baby.

While we are on the subject of the media upholding our right to know, how about WSB-TV in Atlanta? For years, one of the worst-kept secrets in town was an ongoing affair between one of the station's reporters and then-Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell. WSB adopted a see-no-evil approach, even though the affair raised serious questions about the station's integrity. Now the matter has been made public in Campbell's federal corruption trial currently under way in Atlanta. The station's response? They say they aren't going to talk about it. Doesn't the public have the right to know if WSB-TV's coverage of Atlanta City Hall was compromised by the affair? Evidently not. Which brings up an interesting question: Why hasn't some self-righteous media group sanctioned the station for a serious breach of journalistic ethics? Or do the media live by a different set of rules than we mortals?

The press corps' reaction to the vice president's hunting adventure has less to do with our right to know and more to do with bad shooting. In my not-so-humble opinion, the media just can't seem to shoot straight with the American public.