

# Left Turn: How Media Bias Distorts the American Mind

Author: Tim Groseclose

Publisher: St. Martin's Press

Hard Cover: \$26.99, 292 pages

America's true political center can be found by examining the state of Kansas, Salt Lake County, Utah, and NASCAR fans.

Many liberals may have just blanched at that thought, but this is the argument Tim Groseclose makes in "Left Turn: How Media Bias Distorts the American Mind." Groseclose argues that a liberal media bias distorts the average American's political viewpoint and tilts the political field to the left. He also claims conservative news organizations such as Fox News actually present a centrist point of view.

Before dismissing these statements out of hand, one should read Groseclose's book. He has the academic credentials to make his claims (he's a professor of political science and economics at UCLA) and most of his work on this subject has been published in respected academic journals.

Groseclose's book is an indictment of the news media as we know it, claiming that a liberal bias not only exists but tilts the political argument so far to the left that the center of the political spectrum is also tilted heavily to the left.

He grounds his book on studies he conducted with Jeff Milyo. In these studies, Groseclose and Milyo used a gauge of how lawmakers vote on certain issues to define whether they are conservative or liberal. This becomes the lawmakers' political quotient. Groseclose and Milyo followed by scouring U.S.

newspapers and graded news stories as if they were political speeches. Finally, they did a content analysis on the number of times each media outlet referred to left-leaning or right-leaning political think tanks. The findings, based on these particular criteria, point to a liberal bias in media.

Arguments have been made disputing Groseclose's methods and the effectiveness of those methods, but those arguments only add to the reader's enjoyment of this book. While explaining the methods behind his findings, Groseclose wrote a book that happily denounces the liberal media. His positions are well known for those who question if media are biased and try to examine media bias in any form. The first point questions journalists. Groseclose cites studies that state that most journalists vote democratic. He continues by writing that these journalists are often surrounded by friends who have the same political agenda they have and therefore, without any actual malice, report on stories that fit their personal set of beliefs.

The author makes this point by citing an example of a story by the Los Angeles Time

s that discussed the dropping numbers of African-American-freshmen enrolling at UCLA. Groseclose explained that much of the story's information came from sources that would give a particular point of view while ignoring statistics that showed the overall population of African-American students was rising. Groseclose claims this wasn't outright bias; rather, that it was bias by omission. The reporter found the story she was looking for and stopped digging at that point, therefore missing a better story.

Groseclose explains how omission is a major form of media bias. Groseclose says journalists often ignore stories conservatives would find important while concentrating on stories liberals would find important. The selection of stories tilts the overall conversation to the left. Add to

that the preference of the media to quote liberal think tanks ahead of conservative think tanks and, if quoting a conservative think tank, labeling the organization as conservative, Groseclose makes a convincing argument for a liberal media bias.

The author conducts interviews in Salt Lake County, Utah, to give the reader an idea of where the “true center” of the U.S. political spectrum actually sits, in his opinion. The argument that a liberal journalist placed in Salt Lake County would be out of place is easily made in this scenario. Groseclose states that political writers, working in Washington, D.C., or New York or Los Angeles have no clue about how the average citizen in Salt Lake County thinks about specific issues, such as gun control or serving in the U.S. military.

Groseclose is a conservative. He quickly announces his personal beliefs in the book and stands by them. But it’s hard to read this book without thinking of Eric Alterman’s “What Liberal Media?” a book written from the point of view that media actually leans to the right. Placing both of these books together, one can see that despite the methods (Groseclose uses quantitative methods to prove his point, Alterman uses qualitative methods) the personal beliefs of the authors shine through their books. Both authors make similar claims about media, both rely on their data and both use personal anecdotes to explain their points. But the points are polar opposites.

One thing is certain: Groseclose writes an entertaining book. A liberal may read it and disagree with Groseclose’s methods and dismiss his claims, while a conservative may read it and agree completely. Both will be entertained. Both may gain a better insight into how they view the media. That alone may make the book worth reading.