

A Few Questions for the Top Editor at the New York Times

Dean Baquet, the executive editor of the New York Times, was on CNN recently, interviewed by Brian Stelter, the host of the network's media show, "Reliable Sources." If they gave out Pulitzer Prizes for softball interviews, Stelter would have won a whole bunch of them by now.

Stelter's weekly routine involves interviewing fellow liberal journalists almost all of whom share his views on whatever the topic of the week is – and the topic of the week is almost always Donald Trump and Fox News. Stelter and his guests don't like either.

Brian Stelter may be a nice guy who loves his family, but no one will confuse him with an unbiased journalist who pushes hard against people with views he endorses.

So when he interviewed Baquet he tossed his usual softballs and the editor of the Times hit them over the fence.

What is the cumulative effect of President Trump's attacks on the media, Stelter wanted to know.

"It's bad, it hurts the media," Baquet said. "I think the president missed the part of high school civics, where the First Amendment was explained and where the role of a free and independent press was explained."

Then Stelter asked, is it out of control?

"It's out of control and his advisors should tell him to stop," Baquet replied.

Stelter noted that the Times earned more than \$1 billion dollars last year and has over 2.5 million "digital only" subscribers. How much is that the Trump effect?

“Some of it is, Baquet said. “People understand right now that there’s a need for an aggressive, independent press to cover a government that right now is in more turmoil than it’s been in a generation.”

I’m not taking issue with Dean Baquet’s answers. I agree with a lot of what he said. Despite the fact that a lot of journalists flat out detest Donald Trump, the president gives his media critics all the ammunition they need to take shots at him. The fact is, the president puts out far more false and misleading information – fake news – on a daily basis than any reporter does.

Despite that, Brian Stelter could have used the occasion to ask some questions the editor of the Times doesn’t usually get from his liberal compatriots. Here are a few I came up with:

Do you think diversity is important in America’s newsrooms? Why?

What about diversity of opinion? Do you think you have enough of that kind of diversity at the Times?

Do you think that a newsroom populated overwhelmingly by liberal journalists poses no problems with bias, subconscious or otherwise?

Would you be okay with a newsroom overwhelmingly populated by *conservative* journalists?

Do you believe, as many of your critics do, that there’s a liberal bias at the Times and in the media in general?

You’ve called President Trump a liar on Page One of your paper. When Barack Obama told the American people they could keep their doctor and their health care plans if they so desired, you didn’t call him a liar despite the fact that his statements were untrue. Why not? If you don’t think he lied, do you think he was so unaware of what was in his signature

piece of legislation that he simply made an honest mistake? If you don't think he was dishonest, do you think – at least in this one area – he was incompetent?

Is this a fair statement: If a journalist in your newsroom has slightly to the right political views – say she thinks abortion is morally wrong – she'll stick out from the crowd. But if a Times journalist has a wide variety of liberal views he or she will fit right in?

You've been a frequent critic of Fox News. Do you think Fox is any more biased than CNN or MSNBC?

You allow your top correspondents to appear on MSNBC's "Morning Joe" program, where the host constantly bashes the president, often in disrespectful ways. Do you think that's a proper forum for your supposedly objective journalists who rarely, if ever, take issue with the host, Joe Scarborough? Can you understand how Scarborough's biases might rub off on your journalists?

A few days after Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, Charlie Cooke and Stuart Rothenberg, two well-respected Washington-based political reporters, appeared at a conference where Cook said the following: "Let's face it, is there a Democratic and liberal bias in the media? Of course there is. ... I think you can say that the media had a finger, more than a finger, on the scale on the Democratic side." And Rothenberg added this: "I agree completely. I'm sure they (journalists) preferred Obama. They liked Obama. They're Democrats. Obama got better treatment."

Neither Cook nor Rothenberg is a right-wing journalist. So, do you agree with what they said – and if not, why not?

There's a tendency for journalists to circle the wagons when they're hit with criticism. Do you think journalists are introspective enough? Is *any* criticism of how you cover the news legitimate? Can you give us a few examples of what you're

doing wrong, beyond getting a fact wrong from time to time.

Dean Baquet is likely to go on television again – and again he's likely to pick a friendly forum, like Brian Stelter's show on CNN. Maybe next time Stelter can at least pretend to be an aggressive and independent journalist and ask some tough questions that hold the editor of the New York Times accountable – the kind of tough questions Dean Baquet says he expects his reporters to ask just about everybody else.