

Why Media Bias Matters

✘ As you may know, Bill O'Reilly doesn't have much faith in what passes for the mainstream media. The other night, in a conversation with me on The Factor, he said this:

"Folks know that the media is dishonest, that the media now is not in the business to report the news anymore. They're there to advance an ideological agenda. So, if the folks know it, all the polls say they know it, that means that the press is not going to have any real influence on the elections this time around." Then he asked what I thought.

I said even liberals know the press has an agenda, that it takes sides, and that while coverage favoring President Obama might influence less sophisticated voters, the influence would be minor and would not affect the outcome of the election.

That prompted a blog from somebody named Erik Wemple who writes under the banner of the Washington Post. "So if the impact of media bias is so trivial, why do these guys [O'Reilly and me] harp on it each week?" he asked.

You might think that someone who writes for an important news organization like the Washington Post would understand why media bias is important. Alas, he doesn't.

First, Bill and I don't "harp" on the subject of media bias. We discuss it. A small point, perhaps, but not to me. Second, I have never said that media bias is "trivial." That's how Wemple characterizes it hoping we'll drop the subject and move on to something less threatening. Don't hold your breath, Erik.

Here's why media bias is important, even though it may not affect the next – or the last, or possibly any – presidential election: In a free country we have to have a free press. Everybody knows that. But you can't have a free country

forever if you don't also have a *fair* press.

In a free country, people depend on the media for their information about government and other powerful institutions. If the press sounds the alarm about some danger, people have to pay attention. But if they have lost confidence in the press – because of its biases – then there's a good chance we'll ignore the warning. And that could be dangerous.

While I was writing *A Slobbering Love Affair*, my 2009 book about the media's crush on Barack Obama, I talked to political analyst Pat Caddell, and asked for his thoughts about the mainstream media.

They were more biased than ever, he said, before launching into a bit of history to put the current mess into perspective. "There is one institution in America which has no checks and balances," he told me. "And that is the press. And there was a reason for that. It wasn't that the Founding Fathers loved the press. It was because the press was supposed to protect the country. *That's* why Jefferson said, 'I would much rather have newspapers without a government than a government without newspapers.'

"But [when the media] leave the ramparts and become a partisan outrider for one party or the other or one candidate or the other; essentially [deciding] who should be president and who should not be president; what truth people should know and what truth they should not know; then what they become, what they constitute, is a threat to democracy."

Imagine, Caddell told me, that one day a demagogue comes along and decides to run for president. Imagine that he "gets up at the start of his campaign and says, 'I want you to see the press. They are the enemy of the American people. They will do everything they can to stop me because they want to stop *you*.' And the American people will believe it. What if this is the most dangerous man that ever came along? Nobody will

care what the press says.”

That, Erik Wemple of the Washington Post, is why bias in the media matters.

NYT: At It Again

✘ I try not to read the opinion pages of the New York Times because when I do I come away from the experience feeling lousy. I remember when the Times was a great newspaper, when the columnists, whose politics I may not have agreed with, were smart and made me think.

The other day I did what I should not have done and came upon perhaps the shallowest piece I have ever read in the Times. Given how the paper has been in decline in recent decades, that’s saying a lot.

The op-ed was by the Times’ own Brent Staples, a black man who sees the world through a prism of race. The headline over the piece read: “Young, Black Male, And Stalked by Bias.”

Here’s how it began: “The door to the subway train slides open, revealing three tall, young black men, crowding the entrance, with hooded sweatshirts pulled up over downward-turned faces; boxer shorts billowing out of over-large, low-slung jeans; and sneakers with the laces untied.

“Your response to the look – and to this trio on the subway – depends in part on the context, like the time of day, but especially how you feel young, male blackness.”

Actually, that’s not true. My response to the look doesn’t depend on how I feel about black teenagers. It depends on how I feel about *anybody* who looks like a thug. Besides, given

the epidemic of black-on-black crime, a black kid getting on the train would also be worried if the door slides open and he sees three young black kids in saggy pants and hoodies. But let's give Mr. Staples the benefit of the doubt. Let's assume white people do have a built in *concern* when we see black teenagers on the street late at night, or on the subway. Why don't we have that same concern – fear is the more precise word – when we see a bunch of young Hassidic Jews hanging around? Could it be because there aren't a lot of violent Hassidic Jews out there – and there are a disproportionate number of black kids involved in street crime?

“If it unsettles you – as it does many people – you never get beyond the first impression,” the column goes on. “But those of us who are not reflexively uncomfortable with blackness can discern the clues and tell who these kids are. They may be tall, but their hormonally pockmarked faces, narrow hips and the cartoon-patterned underwear show that they are probably 15 years old, at most. The grimy black book bags, barely visible against the black hoodies, make them students on the way to school.”

Oops, I didn't notice the “barely visible” book bags. And, geez, it never occurred to me that since they were probably only 15 years old, they couldn't possibly be up to no good. Guess I'm just a white bigot.

That's not sarcasm. It's Staples' main point –that if black kids make you feel uncomfortable you must be a racist, even if you don't know it. Does Staples understand that wearing your pants with your underwear showing is how black kids pay homage to black criminals? In prison you're not allowed to wear a belt. That's why their pants are falling down and their underwear is showing.

“Very few Americans make a conscious decision to subscribe to racist views,” Staples graciously tells us, before getting to the mandatory “but ...” “But the toxic connotations that the

culture has associated with blackness have been embedded in thought, language and social convention for hundreds of years. This makes it easy for people to see the world through a profoundly bigoted lens without being aware that they are doing so.”

For a writer, Staples is profoundly devoid of introspection. Yes, some people “see the world through a profoundly bigoted lens” and don’t know it – and Brent Staples apparently is one of them.

Imagine if the door to the subway train slides open and we see, not three black teenagers in faux prison garb, but three young nuns, all black. Or we see three young black men in suits and ties. Or, somehow, we see Kobe, LaBron and Carmello riding the subway. No one would feel threatened by their “blackness.” We feel threatened by the three kids with hoodies and drooping pants not because we’re racists, but because we’re realists: they look like criminals.

Brent Staples fancies himself an expert on race because he’s black. This is why he feels safe in writing nonsense like this: “Society’s message to black boys – ‘we fear you and view you as dangerous’ – is constantly reinforced. Boys who are seduced by this version of themselves end up on a fast track to prison and the graveyard.”

So whitey is not only a bigot, conscious or otherwise, but is also responsible for turning good black kids into gangsters simply because they are “seduced” by the image bigoted white people have of them. If only we saw them in a different light – a better, less bigoted light – they would have turned out to be productive citizens. That’s called wishful thinking.

The reason so many people – *black and white* – “fear you and view you as dangerous” is because a disproportionate number of young black kids either are dangerous or, at absolute least, just like to look that way, to frighten anyone they can. If

the majority of black kids who don't commit crimes get tainted by the others, is that really the result of racism – or are we just calculating the odds and arriving at not-so-unreasonable conclusions?

But why is Brent Staples devoting a column to this subject at this particular time? Trayvon Martin, that's why. "By the time he went on neighborhood watch patrol with his 9-millimeter piston and spied Trayvon Martin, Mr. Zimmerman saw not a teenager with candy, but a collection of preconceptions: the black as burglar, the black as drug addict, the black 'up to no good.' And he was determined not to let this one get away."

On this point, Roger Kimball, who writes at PJ Media, takes Staples' column and runs it through the shredder:

"Question: how does Brent Staples know what George Zimmerman saw or thought? He doesn't. He is just making it up. And the more we know about the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the murkier the episode seems. The man whom the *Times* branded a "white Hispanic" turns out to have been a conscientious good citizen who donated much time to public good works, including tutoring young black kids for free. In his hysterical campaign against the sin of un- or semi-conscious racism, Brent Staples liberally deploys insidious racialism to make a scapegoat of a man he knows nothing about. 'Young, Black, Male, and Stalked by Bias' is all of a piece with the *Times's* other reporting on race: whites are guilty until proven innocent, at which point they are still guilty of being white, but blacks get every benefit of every doubt, up to and including being employed by the paper's editorial page not for merit but for skin color. It's a case of the not-so-soft bigotry of racialist expectations. Brent Staples is indeed 'stalked by bias,' but it turns out that it's his own bias, underwritten partly by reflexive racialism, partly by stupidity."

What Brent Staples doesn't seem to understand is that it isn't

white racism that is stalking young black men. It's black dysfunction. It's 15-year old girls having babies without ever having husbands. It's men who are fathers, but only biologically. In the entire recorded history of our planet, there has never been a greater voluntary abandonment of children than there is now by black men in America. More than 70 percent of black kids grow up without fathers in the house.

It's a short but all too predictable leap from fatherlessness to hoodies and baggie pants and menacing demeanors and worse. That's what Brent Staples ought to be worried about.

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The Responsibility of the Media to Debunk The Buffett Rule

Very rarely does something on television prompt me to literally stand up and cheer, especially when it comes to a news program. Yet, that's exactly what I found myself doing Tuesday night when watching a panel discussion on FOX News' *Special Report*. The topic was President Obama's continued endorsement of what he calls *The Buffett Rule*. The Buffett Rule is term that was coined by the president last year as a way of defining his desire to increase taxes on *the rich* as an answer to deficit reduction, and promote a sense of *fairness* in our tax system. It got its name from avid Obama supporter and ultra-successful businessman, Warren Buffett who has

helped the president promote the concept.

The moment that got me fired up was when regular panelist Steve Hayes voiced his disgust over the media's complacency with the notion that The Buffett Rule is a legitimate solution.

"Don't reporters have a job to do here?" he asked. "Isn't it the job of the media to put this in perspective?" He went on to accurately explain that over one year, The Buffett Rule would raise \$4 billion in increased tax revenue for the federal government. That is roughly the same amount of money that the U.S. government accumulates in debt in a **single day**. He continued by saying, "It's not a plan. There's nothing serious about it."

He's of course right. The Buffett Rule is an absolute joke. It might as well be named after Jimmy Buffett, rather than Warren, because its only purpose is to get the electorate drunk and *wasting away in Margaritaville* so they won't have a clue as to what's going on with the American economy.

For the past seven months, the President of the United States has traveled throughout the country touting a plan for deficit reduction that would fund the federal government for only ONE DAY each year. That's absolutely pathetic. He has stoked class envy within our culture, created public unrest that became the *Occupy* movement, and vilified *the rich* all under the premise that squeezing more money out of our wealthiest citizens would somehow fix our economic problems. The reality is that it would do no such thing.

Hayes' frustration mirrors that of my own, and it's about time someone made the point as bluntly as he did. I would be willing to bet that not a single national news network, aside from FOX News, will point out the numbers that he did. That's a serious problem. The media has an ethical duty to scrutinize the rhetoric that comes from our president, especially on a

topic as important as the debt crisis. Yet, they've been MIA on The Buffett Rule this entire time, concentrating their attention on Buffett's secretary's tax rate instead of how it would affect our country.

By making a conscious decision not to debunk the president's deficit reduction claims, the media has portrayed The Buffett Rule as a legitimate, alternate vision to the bold and sound entitlement reform proposals introduced into legislation by Republicans. Thus, what should be one of the most serious national debates in our history has once again been reduced to a battle of bumper-sticker slogans – the type of battle that President Obama rarely loses. It's that sort of unchallenged power that has made his class warfare message so successful.

It is absolutely dire that the public understands just how important the national debt issue is because it not only affects each and every one of us, but also our children... and *their* children. The media can't make the public care about it if they don't want to, but they have an obligation to treat the issue with the respect it deserves. Otherwise, how is the media any different than glorified press secretaries for the administration?

The Smartest Man in the World Should Go Back to School

☒ One day in grammar school, the nun told us that we would have a test the following day. Anyone who couldn't recite a particular spelling rule had to write it 50 times. Despite having studied all the spelling rules the night before, the next day I flubbed mine. So, I went home and wrote the three-

liner "'i' before 'e' except after 'c' or when sounding like 'a' as in neighbor and weigh" fifty times. We couldn't "cut and paste" back then but I'm a really good speller today.

Somewhere along the line, President Obama, touted as the smartest President we've ever known, must have been absent when government was taught in school. He just hasn't grasp the notion that we have three equal branches of government in this country – executive, legislative and judicial.

Not only did he insult the Justices of the Supreme Court during the State of the Union Address back in 2010, but now he's warning them not to overturn Obamacare and had the audacity to say that it would be "an unprecedented, extraordinary step" if the Court overturned "a law that was passed by a strong majority of a democratically elected Congress."

The President, aptly called "The Anointed One" by Sean Hannity (who I seldom watch), and in this particular instance shows the appropriateness of the self-important moniker, quite frankly, doesn't know what he's talking about. As the former President of the Harvard Law Review, he should know better.

So, what exactly does he think the Supreme Court does? It's up to the Supreme Court to decide whether any law is constitutional. And what difference does it make if the entire body of Congress unanimously passed a law? If it's not constitutional, it's not constitutional. Period. It's not up to the executive or legislative branches to make that decision. It's up to the judicial branch.

Following these ridiculous comments from our President, a three-judge panel of the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals required the Department of Justice to submit a homework assignment consisting of a three-page, single-spaced letter on whether the Executive Branch believes that courts can strike down laws that are found to be unconstitutional. I love this slap on

the DOJ's wrist. It's absolutely priceless and reminiscent of my late-night assignment some 50 years ago.

For how long now have we heard about former Vice President Dan Quayle's spelling gaffes, President Bush's mispronunciation of "nuclear" and former Vice Presidential nominee, Sarah Palin's reading habits or lack thereof.

Yet, when Mr. Obama thinks there are 57 states, or that the United States built the "intercontinental railroad," or says stupid stuff like "When I meet with world leaders, what's striking – whether it's in Europe or here in Asia..." (when he's actually in Hawaii), or claims that 10,000 people died during tornadoes in Kansas when, in fact, only 12 died, he gets a pass from the über-liberal media.

People who want to become citizens of this country have to take a test and must learn about the three branches of government and our political system. If I were Empress, I'd require people who want to vote to take a test as well. I'd also require our government officials to take a similar test – in public – along with their Oath of Office.

With just seven months away, I'm hoping for good news on November 6th and that President Obama will have to start looking for a job. I'm going to remain optimistic and suggest to Mr. Obama that he start filling out applications now for remedial classes starting on January 21, 2013, to hone up on his basic knowledge so when he goes on the lecture circuit and is paid mucho bucks, he won't look as foolish as he does now.

I don't get it, but if you do, God bless you.

Trayvon Martin and Media Hypocrisy

- ✘ President Obama called it a “tragedy,” and he was right. “If I had a son, he’d look like Trayvon.”

The president, of course, was talking about the death of Trayvon Martin, the 17-year old black teenager armed with nothing more than a pack of candy and an iced tea who was shot and killed in Sanford, Florida by a 28-year old neighborhood watch volunteer.

The president never spoke directly about race. He never said, not in so many words anyway, that Trayvon was shot because he was black or that his death was the result of racism. Others were not so careful.

At a rally in Florida, Al Sharpton demanded justice. “We are tired of going to jail for nothing and others going home for something,” Sharpton told the crowd. “[George] Zimmerman should have been arrested that night ... you cannot defend yourself against a pack of Skittles and iced tea. Don’t talk to us like we’re stupid! Don’t talk to us like we’re ignorant! We love our children like you love yours. Lock him up!”

Jesse Jackson also weighed in, telling the Los Angeles Times that there was a mistaken belief that racial problems in America went away with the election of our first African American president. “There was this feeling that we were kind of beyond racism,” he said. “That’s not true. His victory has triggered tremendous backlash.”

According to the LA Times, Jackson predicted that the protests would continue to multiply and that the number of protestors would grow until Zimmerman is arrested.

It is understandable why so many Americans would demand

justice for Trayvon Martin. But the hypocrisy and the high profile sanctimony of the oh-so-concerned media and the civil rights establishment is downright galling.

Let's not be naïve: If Trayvon Martin had been shot that night by another black teenager there would be have been nothing from president Obama, no nationally televised demonstrations, no demands for justice by prominent civil rights leaders, and nobody outside his immediate circle of family and friends would even know his name.

We know about Trayvon Martin only because the man who shot him looks white. Actually, Zimmerman's mother is Peruvian, which makes him half Hispanic, a fact you might not have known if you get your news from the usual places. That would only detract from the storyline: black kid shot by overzealous (and probably racist) white vigilante. For what it's worth, the New York Times refers to him as a "white Hispanic," a politically correct description to make sure we know Mr. Zimmerman is a white man – and not "a person of color." You think the Times would call him a "*white* Hispanic" if he had won a Nobel Prize for curing cancer?

And this explains why there are no rallies and no national outcry over Delric Waymon Miller IV. If you just said, "Who?" you are not alone. It's a safe bet that not one in a million Americans has the vaguest clue as to who Delric Waymon Miller IV is.

Delric was a 9-month old baby – a 9-month old *African American baby* – who was sleeping on a couch at home in Detroit a few weeks ago, when in the early morning hours, someone fired 37 shots from an AK-47 into the house. One shot killed Delric Waymon Miller IV.

Delric's 19-year old mother said to get away from the gunfire she grabbed her baby and took him into the basement. That's when she saw the blood. The baby wouldn't wake up, she said.

Police think the shooting may have been an act of retaliation stemming from a fight between rival gangs a few days earlier at a bar.

So of course there would be no national outcry, no comments from the president, no rallies led by Al Sharpton demanding justice for Delric, no pieties from Jesse Jackson about how "blacks are under attack" in America. It's a safe bet the shooter was black. This was just one more case of black on black crime, the kind of story that gets ink in the local papers but that's about it.

Hundreds of young black men are shot and killed in this country every year. In almost all the cases, the shooter is also black. Try to name one of those dead black men. Just one.

Journalists who work for the national news networks, or major American newspapers with a national reach, don't spend a lot of time shining a spotlight on dysfunctional behavior in parts of black America. Stories about such things in black neighborhoods, imposed on black people by black people, would be tantamount to airing dirty laundry in front of the whole country. And that is something liberal journalists who are proud of their good racial manners (along with their friends in the civil rights establishment) do not want to do.

President Obama said we need some national "soul searching" in the wake of the tragic death of young Trayvon Martin. Looking inward is a good thing. So let's have that soul searching. And while we're at it, let's ask ourselves why the death of a young black man in Florida means so much more to Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton, and so many other concerned Americans than does the death of a baby in Detroit who was murdered in his sleep.

Could it be because one shooter had light skin and the other dark?