

ABC Lets Newt's Ex Unload... Then Advises Us to Take Her 'With a Grain of Salt'

☒ Thursday morning, it was announced that ABC News' Brian Ross conducted an interview last week with Newt Gingrich's ex-wife, Marianne Gingrich. Marianne was the second wife of the former Speaker of the House. The two had a well-publicized, messy divorce after Newt began an affair with his current wife, Callista, in the mid 1990s. Marianne has been reported to still hold bitter resentment toward Newt, and her self-described reasoning for agreeing to the interview was to warn voters that her ex-husband lacks the "moral character" to be president.

The timing of the interview has been called into question by media critics because the planned airing will be less than 48 hours before the South Carolina Republican Primary. Gingrich is currently the leader in that state, if current public opinion polls are correct. ABC News' decision certainly raises questions about journalistic ethics and whether it's appropriate to air that type of interview so soon before a crucial vote that will most likely decide the political future of the affected candidate.

Now, I'll go ahead and lay my cards out on the table: I'm not an expert in journalistic ethics. My background is in software technology, not Journalism. While I feel that I have a generally firm grasp of whether or not the media is being fair when it comes to the reporting of certain stories, this timing issue is above my paygrade. I would defer to the expertise of the owner of this site for a more substantive analysis. I'm sure Mr. Goldberg will weigh in on this topic sometime in the near future.

Contraception Fixation

✘ In last Saturday's GOP presidential debate, ABC News commentator George Stephanopoulos asked Mitt Romney an unusual question. He wanted to know if the former Massachusetts governor believed that states had the right to ban the use of contraception. When Romney voiced his opinion that the question was both odd and irrelevant since no states or candidates were interested in banning contraception, Stephanopoulos was persistent in trying to get the former Massachusetts governor to answer it. His repeated attempts prompted audible groans from the audience. In the end, Romney essentially denied Stephanopoulos whatever response he was hoping to evoke.

Now, it's pretty safe to say that the question was not posed due to genuine public interest in the topic. In fact, I would very much doubt that any of the candidates have fielded such a question while talking to voters. So, one might be wondering what Stephanopoulos was trying to get at. To me, it was fairly obvious. He was trying to get Romney's contraception views on record, and he was doing it under the guise of states' rights so it wouldn't sound as obviously partisan. If Romney hadn't slapped down the question, I'm sure it would have been asked of the other candidates as well. Why does George care, or think anyone else cares? Well, he most likely doesn't. But putting forth such a question plays perfectly into a political strategy that the Democratic party found success in during the 2010 elections.

I wrote an entire column on this brainchild back in August, known to Democratic strategists as "The Colorado Model". The gist of the strategy is to highlight the personal, social beliefs of a rival candidate, form a narrative that the candidate plans on implementing those beliefs into policy if elected, and then promote that narrative with a concentrated, relentless media attack campaign on how that candidate is "too

extreme”.

The example I used was the U.S. Senatorial race here in Colorado between incumbent Michael Bennet (D) and challenger Ken Buck (R). Heading into the 2010 campaign, the political environment was looking just as good for conservatives here as it was throughout the rest of the country, thanks to the Tea Party uprising. But the tide began to turn once the Bennet campaign and outside groups focused their efforts almost entirely on the notion that Buck was “too extreme”. They did this by running an almost endless barrage of commercials that cited his personal beliefs on gay marriage, abortion exceptions, and most notably... **contraception**. Buck never ran on any of those issues, yet they became the focus of the campaign. By election day, few were talking about Bennet’s support of Obamacare and rest of the administration’s unpopular policies. Instead, they were talking about Buck being “too extreme”. This led to a narrow win for Bennet.

To my surprise, Buck actually read my column back in August and contacted me shortly after it had been posted to this site. We had a cordial conversation, and during it, he mentioned that he had actually never expressed an opposition to contraception. I was stunned by that revelation, so I researched it. Sure enough, I couldn’t find a single quote by him that even suggested it. It was apparently something that had merely been inferred by third-party, deductive reasoning and was never substantiated. Yet, it had been a key factor in the race.

With an issue so sensitive, it apparently doesn’t take all that much to transform a mere assertion into an effective weapon... And George Stephanopoulous certainly recognizes that.

From a logical standpoint, I’m somewhat surprised that ABC News even allows Stephanopoulos to moderate Republican debates in the first place. Sure, I get it... He’s no longer a professional political adviser for Bill Clinton and the

Democratic party. He's now the charming commentator we see on television each morning, yucking it up with celebrities and presenting the news of the day. But something tells me that there'd be some serious criticism over the issue of objectivity if ABC News let Karl Rove moderate a Democratic debate. Really, what's the difference? Rove is still politically active, but so is George. The Politico reported in 2009 that Stephanopoulos conducts daily strategy chats with former colleagues Rahm Emanuel (Obama's chief of staff at the time), Paul Begala, and James Carville. If he's helping to shape the messaging of the Democratic party, why is he helping to shape the questioning at Republican debates?

I guess I've got to hand it to the Republican candidates for agreeing to participate in a debate moderated by a seasoned political opponent. It at least brought a little attention to how ideologically-driven the media really is. And that's always welcome.

NBC News, the KKK and the State of Journalism

✘ By now you probably have heard about the MSNBC drive-by aimed at Mitt Romney; the one that said he used the same slogan on the campaign trail as the Ku Klux Klan used to use.

Well, not really.

MSNBC got the "story" from a liberal blog which claimed that Romney had used the term "keep America American" during a campaign speech. The blog said he did it twice, once last year and then against this month. The blog then said, correctly, that "Keep America American" was a phrase used by

the Ku Klux Klan back in the 1920s.

Get it? Mitt Romney, a frontrunner for the GOP nomination for president, spouts the same hatred as the racists in the KKK.

What Romney actual said was "Keep America America" on both occasions, but frankly it doesn't matter all that much. Let's say he did use the same term as the Klan used: Are we supposed to really think he did it on purpose? Why would he do that – because he wants to be associated with the Ku Klux Klan?

You would have to be nuts to believe that. So then, how can something this irresponsible happen at a cable news network run by the once iconic NBC News.

Corruption of this type almost always starts at the top. Management at MSNBC has set the tone, which pretty much comes down to this: Progressive and liberal Democrats = good; conservative and Republican = bad.

In that atmosphere, some chucklehead anchor and his equally brainless producer thought it was okay to smear a front-running candidate for president; he's a Republican, after all. Of course, they'd never do this to a prominent liberal Democrat. Not simply because it would be morally and journalistically wrong, but also because it doesn't fit the MSNBC business model.

MSNBC management has apologized, calling the smear "irresponsible and incendiary" and said that it "showed an appalling lack of judgment."

True enough, but make no mistake: MSNBC management created the atmosphere in which this "irresponsible and incendiary" smear was allowed to happen – because they're the ones who over the years have "showed an appalling lack of judgment."

NBC News has announced that it has formed a series of partnerships between its local stations and several non-profit news organizations.

“The partnerships will in some cases allow the stations to cover more news and conduct more investigations without adding more staff directly,” according to the New York Times.

One of the non-profits NBC has aligned itself with is an outfit called Pro Publica, which the Times simply described as, “the acclaimed investigative journalism nonprofit organization.”

Well, yes – and no. Despite the fact that Pro Publica has won two Pulitzer Prizes, it isn't simply a journalist organization; it has a political agenda – a distinctly liberal one which is funded by liberal money bags. On its Web site, Pro Publica explains its mission this way:

“ProPublica is an independent, non-profit newsroom that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. Our work focuses exclusively on truly important stories, stories with ‘moral force.’ We do this by producing journalism that shines a light on exploitation of the weak by the strong and on the failures of those with power to vindicate the trust placed in them.”

This is a variation on an old journalism theme – that our role is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted.

No. That may be the work of priests and ministers and rabbis, but not of journalists.

Pro Publica may do outstanding reporting but only when it fits its liberal agenda. Don't hold your breath waiting for Pro Publica to go after progressives and liberal Democrats – unless, perhaps, if they're not progressive enough.

In a way semi-news organizations like Pro Publica are like

semi-media watchdog groups like the Media Research Center. I say “semi-“ because while the MRC does great work in exposing liberal bias in the media, it goes deaf, dumb and blind when it comes to conservative bias. Fox News may legitimately have MRC guests on the air commenting on liberal bias, but it should never go into business with the Media Research Center. MRC is not made up of journalists. It’s made up of conservative activists.

And NBC News shouldn’t have gone into business with left-wing activists, no matter how many Pulitzers they may win for stories about the “exploitation of the weak by the strong”

I know that in this hyper-partisan media age in which we live, it sounds corny to say journalists should go after the truth, whether it helps or hurts Democrats or Republicans, liberals or conservatives; that journalists should never have an agenda. It may sound corny, but it’s true.

Bias

✘ In July 2000 I quit CBS News where I had worked for 28 years. A year and a half later – 10 years ago this very month – my first book came out. **Bias** was about liberal bias in the mainstream news media and it caused quite a stir. Despite the fact that it got more than a few crummy reviews – mainly from journalists (big surprise, there) and other liberals, **Bias** became a New York Times #1 bestseller, demonstrating how out of touch journalists were with so many Middle Americans who embraced the book. The Times, to my surprise, gave my book a good review and the Wall Street Journal did too. There were others, including the one that follows, written by someone who’s been in the news quite a bit

lately: Newt Gingrich. On the 10th anniversary of the book's release, I thought I'd share what he wrote with you.

Newt Gingrich Reviews Bernard Goldberg's 'Bias'

Bias By Bernard Goldberg Regnery. 232 pp. \$27.95

Allowing me to review a book about bias in the news media almost seems unfair. After all, I was portrayed as Scrooge on the cover of Time magazine just before Christmas 1994. They portrayed me holding Tiny Tim's broken crutch. The headline read: "How Mean Will Gingrich's America Be to the Poor?" (You could tell it was unbiased because there was a question mark.)

Not to be outdone, Newsweek decided that I more resembled a Dr. Seuss figure, the cover exclaiming, "The Gingrich that stole Christmas." All this before I had served a single day as speaker of the House.

Bernard Goldberg's memoir-exposé-essay is a very revealing portrait of the television side of the news. It's a good read, and Goldberg is a good storyteller. It's clear he is angry with CBS News in general and Dan Rather in particular ("The Dan even speaks his own secret language, which around CBS is known as Dan-ish. . . . In Dan-ish, 'it's all my fault' means 'it's all your fault . . ."). The book is worth its price if only to enjoy the sheer viciousness of the payback. They got Goldberg, and now he is getting them. Anyone who has ever gotten mad over what they perceive as liberal bias in the media will find some satisfaction in this part of the book.

Goldberg, a 28-year CBS correspondent who left the network last year, has done a service by telling insider stories out of school. He describes the bias inherent in ensuring, on the one hand, that minorities do not look bad and, on the other, not showing too many minorities, because doing so might hurt ratings. But he is at his strongest in outlining the

sensitivity of the media toward criticism directed at it. An industry that treasures whistleblowers from any other trade, isolates and seeks to expel any such in its own business (which is what happened to Goldberg).

The book makes a strong case that liberal media bias led to a remarkable increase in reporting on homelessness under Presidents Reagan and Bush, followed by its magical disappearance under President Clinton and its sudden (within weeks) reappearance under President George W. Bush.

Goldberg also cites Ben Wattenberg's observation that 59 percent of reporters thought the "Contract with America" was an "election year gimmick," while only 3 percent thought it was "serious." That might have been fair during the election. But even after 70 percent of the Contract was enacted into law, the media continued to report that it had been abandoned. So, despite the first comprehensive welfare reform in 68 years, the first tax cuts in 17 years, the first increase in defense spending in more than a decade, the first four consecutive balanced budgets since the 1920s, we still had not, according to media observations, accomplished anything.

Goldberg quotes Peter Jennings on the 1994 election results: "Some thoughts on those angry voters. Ask parents of any two-year-old and they can tell you about those temper tantrums. . . . Imagine a nation full of uncontrolled two-year-old rage. The voters had a temper tantrum last week." Now there's an impartial analysis of an election in which nine million more Americans voted Republican than in 1990 (the largest one-party off-year increase in American history). Jennings was at least open in his contempt for what we were doing. The hard thing to deal with in so many of his colleagues is their pretense of professionalism.

One of the news channels or networks ought to give Goldberg a half hour every week to explore bias in the media. It would be a lively program. If he were as aggressive and risk-taking on

air as he is in this book, it would be a very provocative show.

Did the Media Play Fair with Herman Cain?

✘ So Herman Cain is finally out. He left the race insisting he's innocent, that he didn't do any of those things he was accused of. Absent a confession some time down the road, or some improbable piece of evidence popping up, we'll never know for sure if he did what those women say he did. That's fine with me since I don't need to know, and frankly, I don't want to know.

A more important question, for me anyway, involves the media. Did Herman Cain get fair treatment from journalists? The answer is yes. And no.

Here's the yes part: As much as Cain's supporters might wish the media simply ignored the stories, how could they? Here's a guy running for president, doing very well in the polls, and facing all these allegations involving sex. That's news.

Yes, it's true that once upon a time there was a kind of gentleman's agreement between journalists and politicians whereby reporters would pretend they didn't know what they knew when the subject involved sex and infidelity. JFK comes to mind. But that was a long time ago. And imagine if the media did ignore the Cain story and he somehow got the GOP nomination. What if the Obama campaign went public with the allegations right before Election Day? That's the kind of October surprise that would probably sink Cain, or any other candidate. He'd be finished and his supporters would be

screaming about how liberal reporters brought their guy down ...
by keeping the story under wraps.

Here's the no part: Conservatives are right when they complain about a double standard. Anthony Weiner aside, the media simply salivate more when they're going after a conservative Republican than a liberal Democrat. The media didn't want to have anything to do with the John Edwards story, until they couldn't ignore it any longer. And they even ignored, for as long as they could, all sorts of sexual allegations against Bill Clinton.

But Herman Cain was different from Bill Clinton. With Clinton it was all about sex. Cain's real crime, as far as a lot of liberals in and out of the media are concerned, is that he is a black man who had the audacity to call himself a conservative Republican. That, to a lot of liberals, is the kind of crime they cannot ignore and will not forgive.

Herman Cain always struck me as a very nice guy. I like him. But I don't believe him. In the end he didn't have a media problem. He had a women problem.