

Fox-o-phobia

Even though some of the founding fathers like Thomas Jefferson didn't much like the press, they gave the Fourth Estate special Constitutional privileges in order for information to pass to the folks. The founders well understood that a republic must have honest discourse so that voters are kept well informed. Without facts at their disposal, voters are simply blind.

As with most other institutions, the press has had problems over the years with corruption, and now those difficulties are becoming a direct threat to a very important check on political power in America. Let me give you a stark illustration of media dishonesty.

After last week's election results rolled in, some on the left became distraught and went after Fox News big time. Of course, we are used to the growing problem of Fox-o-phobia: An irrational fear of the Fox News Channel. On election night, FNC won the national ratings race, even defeating the networks' news operations, which is incredible because cable channels are much harder to access than single-digit network channels.

Immediately after the votes were counted, the incoming fire began. *Washington Post* columnist Dana Milbank wrote that Fox News held "a victory party" for Republicans on the air. Milbank then stated, "To be fair and balanced, Fox brought in a nominal Democrat, pollster Doug Schoen."

A nominal Democrat?

Well, that is flat-out false. FNC had seven Democrats on the air that night, and I believe Geraldine Ferraro and Joe Trippi might be surprised to see themselves described as "nominal."

So why did Milbank mislead his readers, and how does he get

away with it?

We put the second question to Fred Hiatt, Milbank's editor at the *Post*. After a few hours of deliberation, he told us he didn't think Milbank implied only one Democrat was booked on FNC's election coverage. Either Fred is having trouble with the English language, or he really doesn't care. I'm betting the latter. Neither Fred nor Milbank would come on my program to explain themselves.

As to why the columnist wants to mislead readers, it's simple. He despises Fox News and wants to spread the loathing. But that's lazy. There are plenty of things to criticize about any national news organization, especially one broadcasting 24 hours a day. Milbank simply wanted to vent and he didn't care about being accurate. He cared about being hostile and bitter.

There is nothing anyone can do about dishonest journalism if standards are nonexistent inside media operations. The government has no power over us, thanks to Tom Jeff and Jimmy Madison. We in the press are supposed to be noble enough to police ourselves.

Even in a nominal way.