

It's News to Us

The changing of the guard at NBC and CBS News is more a media event than a people event. Even though there is some sentimentality attached to the departures of Tom Brokaw and Dan Rather, few of us have emotion invested in them simply because our lives are so frenetic. Long gone are the days when guys like Walter Cronkite and Chet Huntley had an honored place in millions of American homes. That time in America featured an early family dinner and a ritual of national news viewing. Talk about Jurassic Park!

Another factor that has eroded the power of TV news is the deep suspicion among many Americans that the press is not looking out for them. While there is some paranoia in this area, there is also some truth to the notion that what you get with TV news is not always "the way it is," to quote Cronkite.

Many of the news decision-makers today were children of the anti-war, anti-establishment 1960's. Their perceptions were formed in those free-wheeling, anti-war years and core liberal philosophies were ingrained. So, now, we have a bunch of baby boomer journalists imparting their view of life to a nation that, often, does not share the 60's sensibility. Remember, survey's showed that about 80% of the media favored John Kerry for President. The divide between the press and the everyday folks is enormous.

There is no question that the daily headline service provided by the big three networks is valuable. But it is a random, often timid, reportage. The intense culture war in America is often ignored or presented in a one-sided manner. Even network news supporters would have to admit that the presentations are extremely politically correct. For example, the joke in the industry is that the only time you hear a pro-life point of view is when some nut blows up an abortion clinic.

Thus, traditional and conservative Americans often feel they are underserved by national news services which pander to the elite and see the world from a Manhattan or Georgetown point-of-view. Folks in Tupelo have figured out their values don't matter in Rockefeller Center.

So, the guard is changing, and the more traditional Fox News Channel is the chief beneficiary. That, of course, has caused enormous fear and loathing among the media establishment. In one of his last interviews before stepping down, Mr. Brokaw made it a point to say that the network news still dominates in the ratings. He pointed out that "Bill O'Reilly maybe gets 2-1/2 or 3 million viewers a night."

Well, my total audience last month doubled Brokaw's estimate, but that's not really the point. Fox News continues its dramatic rise as our competitors fall, because it makes room for the traditionalist point of view and provides provocative analysis that is lacking in the network operations.

In this age of spin, deception and defamation, honest analysis is a must, even if one disagrees with the analyst. Most Americans realize the danger this country is facing both inside and outside our borders. Confronting that danger in a straightforward way will attract an audience. Doing a politically correct dance no longer will.

And that's really the way it is.