

Standards and Double Standards at MSNBC

☒ So here we are in a brand new week and Mark Halperin, a senior political analyst at Time magazine and a regular contributor on MSNBC, is still suspended for calling President Obama a “dick” on “Morning Joe.”

Never mind that Halperin thought he was on a seven-second delay and that his remark would never be heard by the public. Never mind, too, that he immediately apologized, on the air. The White House press secretary called MSNBC to complain and, poof, Halperin was gone. Suspended indefinitely.

MSNBC issued a statement saying, “Mark Halperin’s comments this morning were completely inappropriate and unacceptable. We apologize to the President, The White House and all of our viewers. We strive for a high level of discourse and comments like these have no place on our air.”

Really? When did MSNBC start to care about what is and what is not appropriate when it comes to commenting on a sitting president of the United States? And when did the network start to strive for a high level of discourse?

I offer up two words to show how self-serving and disingenuous the MSNBC statement is: Keith. Olbermann.

Perhaps the MSNBC suits missed the show when Olbermann, talking about then President Bush, said, “You’re a fascist! Get them to print you a T-shirt with fascist on it!”

Maybe they also missed the one when Olbermann said President Bush was guilty of “murderous deceit” and then, working himself up into a frenzy, looked into the camera and yelled at the president to “Shut the hell up.”

✘ Or how about the time this popped up on the screen while Olbermann was ranting about President Bush: “Pathological presidential liar or an idiot in chief?”

Call me cynical, but I’m guessing they didn’t miss any of it. They just didn’t care, since bashing W appeals to their audience, which consists (even now) of folks who foam at the mouth at the mere mention of George W. Bush’s name.

Halperin’s use of a mildly vulgar word aimed at President Obama was wrong. And arguably he deserved a slap on the wrist, nothing more, given his overall civility on the air and his immediate apology – and especially given the fact that Joe Scarborough, the show’s host, egged Halperin on, assuring him that there was indeed a fail-safe delay.

But an indefinite suspension that may very well lead to a permanent dismissal? It looks like MSNBC executives caved after that call from the White House press office. Or maybe they were just pandering to their Obama-adoring audience. Or probably both.

MSNBC views a single naughty word we don’t use in polite company as “completely inappropriate and unacceptable” but manages to look the other way when it’s (former) number one “star” calls George W. Bush a “fascist,” says he’s guilty of “murderous decit,” tells him to “shut the hell up” and then wonders if Mr. Bush, a sitting president at the time, is a “pathological liar” or an “idiot.”

Why do I think the word used to describe Mr. Obama would be better used to describe the folks who run MSNBC, who for years let Keith Olbermann get away with hate-filled rants for just one reason – ratings, a commodity that has always been in short supply over there. I suspect they would have allowed Olbermann to call President Bush a rapist and a child molestor, or just about anything else that would satisfy their tiny band of Bush haters.

I have often thought that television news executives in general would run their own mother over with a bus if it somehow would help ratings. Nothing the brass at MSNBC has done has made me think differently. Not even their relief when Olbermann and MSNBC (under new corporate management) decided to break off their dysfunctional relationship. By that point, Olbermann was making Howard Beale, the screwy anchor in the movie "Network" look sane.

One more thing: another MSNBC contributor, Ronald Reagan, Jr once went on the air and said that President Bush's belief that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, even when others said there were none, was "not just spin. That's dementia."

No suspension for that either, indefinite or otherwise.

It's good to know that at MSNBC they have integrity and high standards, that they consider certain comments "innappropriate and unaccpetable," and that they "strive for a high level of discourse."

It would be wrong if I said, What a bunch of dicks they have running that network. So I won't.

