

End of an Era: Fox News Cancels Red Eye



This week, Fox News announced the cancellation of its 3 a.m. program, *Red Eye*. As a big fan of the show, especially in its early days, I'm sad to see it go.

I was introduced to the program in 2008, probably in the same way many eventual viewers were. One night, I fell asleep in front of the television. When I awoke, I was groggily drawn into a bizarre world of sharp-witted political tomfoolery, lengthy animal videos, talking makeshift props, masochistic treatment of "repulsive" sidekicks, and jaw-dropping tales of house boys locked in basements.

Cable news would never be the same.

This satirical, take-no-prisoners show bore Fox News's logo and featured a nightly discussion panel, but its format was unlike anything anyone had ever seen, not just from the network but anywhere.

Filmed on a set that might have been modeled after a janitor's closet (in the early days anyway), Red Eye savagely lampooned pillars of our politics-heavy news culture, taking on everything from rank partisanship and political correctness to the physical attractiveness of news-anchors (there was a "leg chair" at the panel table reserved almost exclusively for female guests).

Red Eye premiered in 2007 to zero marketing effort put forth by FNC (something that remained the case for years). Thus, the hefty task of expanding the audience beyond channel-surfing insomniacs and citizens of the "tiny island nation of Hawaii" (where the show aired in prime time) fell squarely on the shoulders of the show's three pioneers: Greg Gutfeld, Bill Schulz, and Andy Levy.

Gutfeld, the show's host, had made a few appearances on Fox News programs prior to Red Eye, but his talents weren't fully recognized until he was granted his own platform from which to shine. And shine he did.

His conservative/libertarian views were fresh and frank – well outside the stale boundaries of manufactured talking-points. But it was the presentation of those views that grabbed people's attention. His monologues were accompanied by odd Internet videos, cheap prop comedy, obscure pop-culture references, and eye-opening innuendo that often ventured into the perverse. Some of the commentary was so irreverent and downright shocking that one had to wonder if the higher-ups at Fox were even aware of what was being aired on their network in the wee hours of the morning.

Regardless of the answer, Gutfeld's shtick was unmistakably entertaining, passionate, and – yes – smart. And I'm willing to bet that his charming adolescence made some of the celebrity interviews he conducted on the show (whether it be with a movie star or Gwar front-man, Oderus Urungus) among the interviewees' all-time favorites.

The show's second banana, Bill Schulz, was uproariously funny in his role as Gutfeld's liberal, self-loathing whipping-boy. Often accused of harboring outlandish viewpoints, struggling with personal hygiene, and concealing his true gender, Schulz was called upon nightly to answer for various leftist atrocities. And he always managed to do so with a satirical matter-of-factness that was nothing short of brilliant.

"TV's Andy Levy," Red Eye's dry-humored libertarian (and accused cat aficionado), was perfect as the show's half-time ombudsman, correcting the factual inaccuracies (often willful) of both his colleagues and the guests. Levy's commonsense insight, in a show that routinely strayed into slapstick, helped keep things grounded.

The program seemed to pride itself in bringing on unconventional (and not always familiar) guests – a hodgepodge of comedians, musicians, writers, political figures, and Fox News personalities. More often than not, they were pretty interesting folks – independent thinkers whose views didn't quite fit into a box labeled 'R' or 'D'. Rather than partisan mudslinging, the panel discussions were like candid, laughter-prone conversations among a wildly diverse group of friends (that's not to say that the exchanges never got heated).

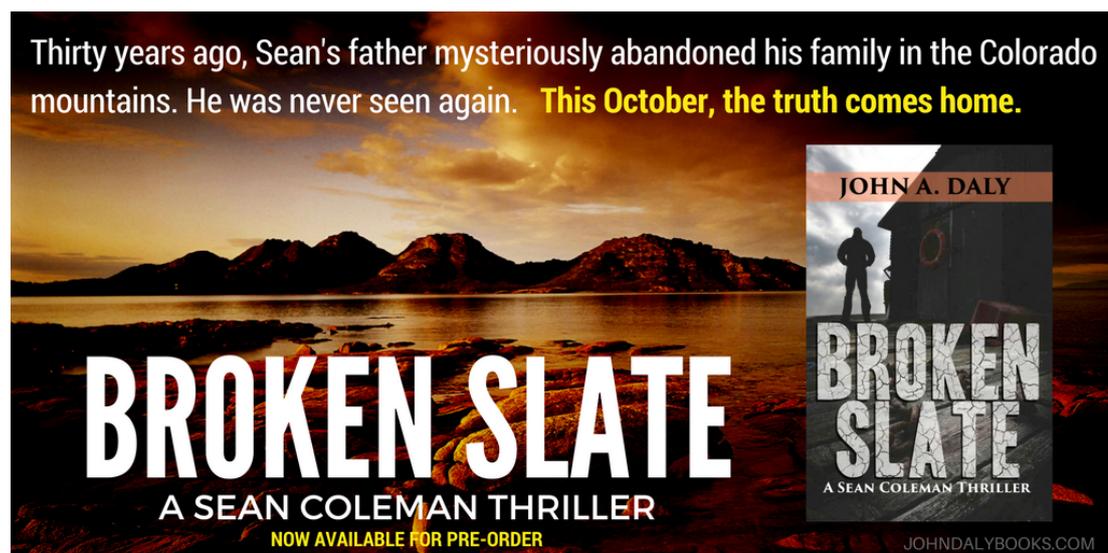
With that diversity came a fun, youthful vibe, and I still find myself keeping up with a number of people the show first introduced me to. I even ended up befriending a couple.

A few years back, at its ratings peak, Red Eye was drawing a larger audience than a number of prime-time shows on both CNN and MSNBC. The success was remarkable considering its time-slot, and it was also well-deserved. It's not easy, after all, to make people laugh out loud – especially stuffy political types. But the Red Eye guys managed to pull it off quite regularly, and they did so through a lot of hard work and creativity.

The show, of course, went through some changes over time. Schulz departed from the network in 2013, and was eventually replaced with Joanne Nosuchinsky. Two years later, Gutfeld (who was already co-hosting *The Five*) left to start work on his weekend show (*The Greg Gutfeld Show*). Tom Shillue took over Red Eye's hosting duties (with Levy switching over to a more prominent on-air role). Shillue kept much of the original format while re-shaping other elements to better suit his own brand of comedy.

As of this time, it's unclear as to exactly why the show was cancelled, but I can say with confidence that the cable news world is worse off for it. Red Eye was an institution worth preserving, especially in these increasingly humorless political times. The laughs and clever insight the show provided for ten years will be deeply missed.

P.S. If you never had a chance to check out the early years of the show, here's a good YouTube playlist of some highlights that a fan put together. Also, since Red Eye will close out the week, I'd recommend DVR'ing it through Friday night. I'm betting some classic segments will be re-aired.



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