

Good Thing Liberal Bias in the Media is a Myth

Editor's Note: From time to time over the course of the year, I'm going to publish columns about how journalism has changed since my first book about liberal media bias came out. This is my latest installment.

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It's been 20 years since I published my book *Bias*, about liberal bias in the mainstream media. Because I'd spent nearly thirty years as a CBS correspondent, and wrote about what I'd personally seen and heard, the book caused quite a stir. It was a big best seller, and over and over I heard the same thing from people who'd read it: that it confirmed what they already knew from reading mainstream newspapers and watching network newscasts — but were glad that an insider was confirming their take on the subject.

Predictably, liberal journalists were not among its fans. Almost every one repeated the mantra that the whole notion of liberal bias was a fiction, an outrage, a right-wing concoction.

Over the years since, many of the bias deniers have fallen silent. After all, there is only so much even the most arrogant media heavyweight can say in the face of overwhelming and incontrovertible evidence.

So I was surprised to recently learn that Chuck Todd, host of NBC's *Meet the Press*, is still at it.

Now, I should say right here that I once met Chuck at an airport and he seemed like a nice guy. Nor does he strike me, and I say this sincerely, as a fool. So I will give him the benefit of the doubt and conclude that he can't really believe

what he's saying – that he can't be serious when he says that liberal bias A) doesn't exist B) never did and C) is a malicious trope invented by Republicans. But who knows, I'm not a mind reader; maybe he does believe it. Or, maybe, like a press secretary who must stand straight-faced and defend an obviously disastrous policy blunder, he's just taking one for the home team.

After all, mainstream journalism may not be great for the country, as it continues to sow misunderstanding and ill feeling, but it has been very good for Chuck and his friends.

Specifically, what Todd said in a recent interview was that journalists did not defend themselves and their integrity vigorously enough. "We should have fought back better in the mainstream media," he said. "We shouldn't [have] accepted the premise that there was liberal bias. We ended up in this both-sides trope. We bought into the idea that, oh my God, we're perceived as having a liberal bias."

Hey, Chuck, one is tempted to reply: There's a reason mainstream journalists are "perceived as having a liberal bias." It's because the mainstream journalists have a liberal bias.

But, again, that would be presuming he expected to be taken seriously. And the fact is, it's hard to believe *anybody* with a pulse, let alone a big name reporter, actually still thinks the American news media play fair. The American people sure don't. A recent Gallup poll found that only 21 percent of the public has confidence in newspapers and even fewer – 16 percent – trust TV news. That's just about the same percentage that believe the U.S. is controlled by Satan worshippers.

Still, in a country of 330 million, (not counting those newly arrived across the Southern border) that makes more than fifty million souls still inclined to believe what they hear from the likes of Jim Acosta. So for their benefit (and possibly

Chuck Todd's), a quick recap:

In fact, let's start with the way journalists are playing down the mess on our Southern border – the one brought on by Joe Biden, who practically sent engraved invitations to everybody in Central America inviting them to come to the United States.

While we're on the subject, it is apparently also of little news value that the president at times seems to have trouble finishing a sentence without babbling incoherently.

Of course, what's newsworthy can quickly change, according to circumstances. For a long time anyone who suggested the Wuhan virus might've come out of a lab in that city was a conspiracy-mongering right-wing nut who had to be censored – with *The New York Times* leading the charge. Now that the Wuhan lab story can no longer help Donald Trump, a writer in *The Times* wonders, wide-eyed, “Did the Coronavirus Come From a Lab?”

In fact, to really see just how “unbiased” journalists are, let's take a stroll down memory lane and contrast how they're treating Joe Biden with the way they treated You-Know-Who.

Never mind what you think of Trump – personally, I've got big problems with him – but does anyone outside the Satan worshipping community (and possibly Chuck Todd) honestly believe *The Times* gave him a fair shake?

No need even to go through the particulars, you can pick up pretty much any copy of the Gray Lady from the moment Trump went down the escalator to...well, actually *today*, and it hits you in the face. Case in point: On May 19, 2019, the paper claimed that Donald Trump had run an “unabashedly racist campaign” – harsh, to be sure, but editorial writers are entitled to their opinions, right? Except, wait, this wasn't an editorial, it was presented in a page one story by two of the paper's top political reporters, Jonathan Martin and Alexander Burns, as indisputable fact.

Indeed, in *The Times* it was simply a given that Donald Trump, his policies, and his supporters were racist, misogynistic and generally hateful.

The New York Times, needless to say, is journalism's equivalent of the Holy Bible. So completely does it set the agenda for what other news organizations cover that – trust me, as a correspondent at CBS News for 28 years – if *The Times* went on strike in the morning, CBS wouldn't have known what to put on the air that evening.

Little wonder that after just Trump's first 100 days in office, a Harvard University study found *The Times'* coverage was 87 percent negative.

By the way, that was topped by NBC's 93 percent negative coverage. But since NBC has Chuck Todd, that means the study was wrong, and the coverage was scrupulously objective.

Nor was Trump even allowed to defend himself. CNN attack dog Acosta might have been speaking for the entire White House press corps when he "reported," after watching Trump respond to media attacks, that the president "was ranting and raving for the better part of the last hour."

Then, again, as Chuck says, the problem is all perception. Like, for instance, the story from *Time* that went viral the day Trump took office, saying he'd removed a bust Martin Luther King from the Oval Office. It turned out the bust hadn't been moved at all, it's just that a Secret Service agent was standing in front of it, so *Time's* guy perceived it wasn't there.

Obviously, there's no such thing as liberal bias in the news. Imagine how bad it would be if there were.

Bias in the News: Blame it on Their Zip Code

✘ For years, journalists have bristled at allegations of liberal bias in the news. “If you think we have a bias,” some of them would say, “that only proves one thing: that you’re the one with the bias.” When my book *Bias* came out at the end of 2001 –despite a surprisingly good review in the New York Times – so-called mainstream reporters generally denounced the book. “Liberal bias?” they asked incredulously. “What liberal bias?” A few even called me a “traitor” for supposedly turning on my colleagues, which is kind of funny since these are people who won’t call a real traitor ... a traitor.

Well, now we have Chuck Todd, political director and chief White House correspondent at NBC News, breaking ranks (sort of) with his fellow journalists. In an interview with Politico, Todd says, “To me, the ideological bias in the media really hasn’t been there in a long time. But what is there that people mistake for ideological bias is geographic bias. It’s seeing everything through the lens of New York and Washington.”

Not really, but it’s good that Chuck Todd at least seems to be acknowledging that there was, once upon a time an ideological bias in the mainstream media. To say it “hasn’t been there in a long time,” acknowledges that it was there, once. This is something a lot of journalists would never admit.

To Chuck Todd, bias in the news simply stems from too many elite journalists living in too few places, Manhattan and DC. But what Chuck Todd doesn’t quite seem to understand is that

geography influences culture and culture influences ideology. People on the Upper West Side of Manhattan don't see Obamacare, for example, the same way people in Alabama see it. That's not because of geography. It's because of ideology. Or to put it another way, there are a lot more liberals on the Upper West Side than there are in Montgomery.

Todd is hard on political journalists, but only up to a point, and makes sure we understand that they're not slanting the news in favor of liberals because they themselves are liberals. The reason, he says, has a lot more to do with zip codes than party affiliations.

"I think sometimes there are too many people who cover politics that don't understand the grassroots of the Republican Party," he correctly tells Politico. And why don't they understand? Because they cover America from a safe distance, embedded in the nation's two media capitals – Washington and New York. "Part of what animates them [political journalists] is if [Middle Americans are] pushing it, I'm against it. But also that we don't understand their day-to-day lives. That we don't respect the fact that they go to church twice a week. That when we look down our noses upon Wal-Mart, they see it as the only place to shop."

Let's see if I have this right: The sophisticates in Manhattan and Georgetown don't like anything that the hayseeds who live in Middle America like. If the unwashed in Flyover Country are for it, the elites in New York and DC are against it. That, Chuck, is not a geographical bias. It's the same old bias conservatives have been complaining about for years. It's a bias based on the reporter's ideology, the journalist's *liberal* ideology.

By blaming it all on geography, Chuck Todd, intentionally or not, tries to take the edge off of the problem. If it's only geographical, it speaks only to a blind spot. It says, "Hey, we live in a bubble, that's why we're biased. And it has

nothing to do with our politics.” Yes, they do live in a bubble, but make no mistake: inside that bubble journalists don’t simply share the same geography – they share the same ideology. They’re almost all liberals inside the bubble who share the same values, and believe those values are moderate, mainstream and reasonable while conservative values are extreme and dangerous.

“Too many people mistake ideological bias for what really is a matter of geography,” is how he ends his interview with Politico.

Sorry, Chuck, but you’re the one who is making a mistake. If almost all the media elites live in Washington and New York and are liberal, is the problem that they live in Washington and New York or that they’re liberal? If there were more conservatives in the ranks of elite journalists – editors, producers, anchors – it wouldn’t matter if they all lived on the same block.

But let’s give Chuck Todd some credit for even bringing up the subject of bias in the news. Halley’s Comet flashing across the sky over the USA is a more commonplace event than a mainstream reporter admitting any kind of bias. Still, it’s too bad, since he’s in charge of political coverage at NBC News, that Todd forgot to tell Politico about how supposedly objective journalists fell madly in love with Barack Obama four years ago and decided they would not settle for being eyewitnesses to history. The election was too important. This time, they felt, they had to they help shape history. So they put on their short skirts to go along with their pompoms and shamelessly became cheerleaders for Mr. Obama – and will probably do it again once the Republicans pick their nominee. That kind of journalistic bias has very little to do with geography and whole bunch to do with ideology.

So, one cheer for Chuck.