

Politically Journalism

Correct

- ✘ The subject on CNN's "Reliable Sources" was Ebola, or more precisely how the media have been covering the story.

The show's host, Brian Stelter, formerly of the New York Times, was talking about the best coverage on television and the worst. And no surprise, since Stelter often sees things through a liberal lens, he found a particular reference on Fox to be especially troubling.

Andrea Tantaros, a regular on the Fox show "Outnumbered," said something that got Stelter and his guest, PBS science reporter Miles O'Brien, in a huff. Tantaros was talking about possible Ebola carriers coming to the United States from parts of Africa where the disease is rampant.

"In these countries they do not believe in traditional medical care," she said. "So someone could get off a flight and seek treatment from a witch doctor who practices Santeria. This is a bigger fear. We're hoping they come to the hospitals in the U.S., but they might not!"

Stelter ran a video clip of those remarks to get O'Brien's reaction. Here's how the exchange went:

Stelter: Miles, not much to say here, but witch doctor?

O'Brien: Well, I mean, we could digress into what motivated that and perhaps the racial component of all this, the arrogance, the First World versus Third World statements and implications of just that. It's offensive on several levels and it reflects, frankly, a level of ignorance, which we should not allow in our media and in our discourse.

Where to begin?

First, O'Brien is right about ignorance – except he's the one displaying it. Even though he's a reporter who specializes in science issues and was brought on to talk about Ebola, he doesn't seem to know, or won't admit, that Tantaros was raising a real issue. A British Red Cross worker, for instance, who had been treating people with Ebola in West Africa, has said that some Africans "believe the disease is a punishment, or a result of witchcraft."

It could be a stretch to wonder if Ebola-infected Africans here might seek witch doctors, but Tantaros's general point is essential to understanding the epidemic.

Why does he raise the possibility that Tantaros is a racist? Because she uttered the words "witch doctor"? What about the Red Cross worker who brought up the word "witchcraft"? Is she a racist, too?

And what does he mean when he says there are certain things "which we should not allow in our media and in our discourse"? Is he suggesting that only politically correct language be allowed in our news coverage and in our conversations? And who does O'Brien want to determine what's acceptable and what isn't?

There's a name for this. It's called liberal authoritarianism.

After raising the possibility of racism, O'Brien tut-tuts about Tantaros's supposed arrogance and how she crossed another red line in the (unspecified but apparently unacceptable) things she said in her "First World versus the Third World statements" and their "implications."

I understand that this may disturb some on the left, but here are a few implications about how the First World and the Third World are very different places – and how one of them is a lot better than the other.

It's the First World that comes up with drugs to fight Ebola,

hoping to save lives in places like Africa. The Third World doesn't.

It's the First World that fights AIDS with cutting edge drugs. The Third World doesn't.

It was scientists in the First World who came up with vaccines for polio.

It is doctors and researchers in the First World who are trying to find a cure for cancer.

It's creative people in the First World who invent all sorts of things that make all our lives better. There's not a lot of technological invention going on in the Third World.

Those are just a few of the "implications" that liberals, in and out of the media, don't like to talk about. And we all know why – but that's something *none of us* are supposed to talk about – not out loud anyway.

The Third World is populated by people of color (to use that awkward phrase.) This doesn't mean that white people are better human beings than anyone else. It doesn't mean more First World people will make it to heaven than those in the Third World. It doesn't mean that white people are more noble or loyal or decent. It doesn't mean that if Third World kids had the same advantages as kids who live in American suburbs they wouldn't do just as well – who knows, maybe better.

But it does mean that those in the First World are doing more for the planet than are those in the rest of the world. And this is something many liberals cannot bring themselves to acknowledge. And if any of us do ... we're insensitive at best, racist at worst.

Liberals don't like the suggestions that parts of Africa are backward places. That also sounds racist to them. But parts of Africa *are* backward places. What should we call it when some

Africans think you get Ebola from witchcraft? Backwards sound like a reasonable word to me.

The British Red Cross official explained how “in one tragic case [in Sierra Leone] a family brought three bodies home that had been prepared for burial by the Ministry of Health. They opened one of the body bags to check that no body parts had been removed: all the family now have Ebola.”

Tragic yes. But it is what some people in backward places do.

Miles O'Brien may think certain ideas and concepts should not be allowed “in our media and in our discourse” because they are “ignorant” and “arrogant.” But what he and Brian Stelter, who never challenged O'Brien's shaky observations, don't quite understand is how their liberalism both affects and *infects* their journalism.

Introspection has never been a strong suit of liberal journalists.