

Fish Don't Know He's Wet – And Other Observations About Liberal Journalism

I've long believed that the problem with liberal journalists isn't so much that they're inherently bad people, just that they're delusional and that they lack introspection. Though, for the record, some are very bad people.

While they can spot a conservative a mile away, they don't really think they're liberal so much as ... *reasonable*. They correctly think conservatives are right of center but they see themselves as ... *middle of the road*.

Their values, they believe, aren't all that liberal, if they're even liberal at all. They're just *decent* values that decent people would adhere to.

And so they have 20-20 eyesight when it comes to spotting conservative bias in the news but need a guide dog and a cane when it comes to seeing their own shortcomings.

There's an old hip line that applies here: Fish don't know he's wet.

Wet is normal to fish; liberal values are simply normal to liberal journalists.

Which brings us to Margaret Sullivan, the Washington Post's media columnist who recently called Fox News "an American plague."

The problem with Fox, as Ms. Sullivan sees it, is that it was rotten at its inception and has only gotten worse over the years. Fox, she writes, "started out with bad intentions in 1996 and has swiftly devolved into what often amounts to a propaganda network for a dishonest president and his allies."

Bad intentions? Like presenting a different worldview than the kind you get in just about every mainstream liberal newsroom? Like allowing voices to be heard that were shut out of liberal news outlets? How horrible!

This comes on the heels of a long New Yorker piece that runs under the headline, "The Making of the Fox News White House." When Donald Trump became president, the argument goes, Fox became his handy megaphone.

The New Yorker story quotes the Washington *Post* columnist Jennifer Rubin, who it describes as "a conservative Never Trumper," who "used to appear on the network, but wouldn't do so now."

Ms. Rubin tells the New Yorker that "Fox was begun as a good-faith effort to counter bias, but it's morphed into something that is not even news. It's simply a mouthpiece for the President, repeating what the President says, no matter how false or contradictory."

A lot of this is true. Fox opinion shows have fallen madly in love with the president, which pleases Fox's pro-Trump audience, and don't even pretend to be about fair and balanced journalism.

So, I don't have a problem with thoughtful journalists taking shots at Fox when their aim is on target.

At about the same time I published a column in this space about why I no longer work at Fox – the main point being that I believed Fox would accept criticism of the president from liberals, but didn't want conservatives (like me) bad mouthing the president. Fox viewers, like those at CNN and MSNBC, I wrote, want their biases validated – not challenged.

No, my problem isn't with legitimate criticism of Fox, though I believe the plague analogy is an early sign of Trump Derangement Syndrome on the part of Ms. Sullivan.

My problem is I don't see thoughtful analysis about the train wrecks that are CNN and MSNBC – or a once respected newsmagazine like Newsweek that repeatedly deified President Obama. One Newsweek cover showed Mr. Obama with a halo. Another proclaiming him as “The Second Coming.” A third featuring the president with the headline, “God of All Things.”

If this weren't about the holiest of the holy I'd tell Newsweek to get a room.

As for President Trump: Newsweek ran a cover depicting the president slouching in a recliner, a bag of fast food resting on one leg, chips on the other leg, a TV remote in his hand as he drowsily gazes in the direction of a television set. The headline: Lazy Boy.

Media bias? What media bias?

It's one thing to be critical of the president – he deserves a lot of what he gets – but it's quite another to be on a non-stop anti-Trump crusade because that's what your audience demands. And make no mistake: This is about money. Whether it's Newsweek, the New York Times or CNN and MSNBC or Fox opinion shows, they're all pandering to the audience. They feed their audience the red meat it craves, enticing the partisans to come back for more.

I know writers, not necessarily conservative by the way, who could write long thoughtful pieces shredding CNN and MSNBC just as Jane Mayer's piece in the New Yorker shredded Fox.

I know writers who might call CNN and MSNBC an “American plague” because they've become home of perpetual anti-Trump liberal outrage. If you need proof that Trump Derangement is a real malady just tune into one of these channels, almost any time of the day or night.

Here's where things get ironic. They may hate Donald Trump

but they understand that he's good for business, that he's crucial to the bottom line. A New York Times magazine piece that came out a few months after his election, contained this line: "Had Trump lost the election, CNN would probably have returned to its previously scheduled struggle for survival." You could make a similar case for MSNBC.

Surely, there are interesting behind the scenes stories to be told about those two cable outfits, if only some honest journalist wanted to pull back the curtain; stories about how their loathing of this president at times is downright irrational – as was the case with a lot of "news" and opinion regarding President Trump's supposed collusion with the Kremlin.

But where would these stories be published? Not in the New Yorker, which devoted 11,000 words to the Fox story. Not in Vanity Fair or Esquire, either.

And it's not only because those publications are liberal in their worldview. It's because, as I say, they think the left-wing anti-Trump stuff pumped out at CNN and MSNBC isn't really liberal anti-Trump rancor. They think it's simply ... *The Truth!*

Fox has done a lot to bring on the barrage it's now facing. A lot of their wounds are self-inflicted. "At crucial times," Margaret Sullivan writes in her Washington Post column, Fox News "does not observe basic standards of journalistic practice"

She's right. But too often neither do the others which she and her liberal compatriots don't seem to care about – or even notice

Why should they? Fish don't know he's wet.