

Lawrence O'Donnell's Fight Challenge Belongs in a Time Capsule

✘ With such a glaring lack of integrity that we witness from the news outlets each and every day, it's sometimes hard to hold out hope that things will ever change for the better. The national polls continue to reveal that the media is no longer trusted by a strong majority of Americans, yet we rarely witness any significant effort from the media establishment to clean up their act. Surely, there have to be influential people within the profession who both recognize the seriousness of the problem, and are willing to help fix it. There have to be people who believe that restoring public trust is important.

After all, one could argue that there is no more significant role in a free, democratic society than that of the media. They're the ones who we rely on to keep us informed, and help us make decisions that effect not only ourselves and our families, but also our country. Being a member of the media *should* be something to be proud of. Speaking 'truth to power' *should* be a noble cause.

Yet, we don't find a lot evidence to suggest that the mainstream news media outlets in this country value their responsibility the way they should. Biases that used to come in the form of selective reporting and subtle commentary under the guise of hard news have morphed into blatant, ideological advocacy.

I'm optimistic though. Whether it happens through attrition of the establishment media players, or perhaps some *come to God* recognition of the core of their failings, I have to believe that some semblance of media integrity will one day be

restored in this country.

If that time ever comes, perhaps decades from now, I'd love to see the expressions on the faces of young journalism students whose professors open the old media archives to reveal to them just how crazy things got back at the turn of the century. The overt partisanship, the blatant double-standards, the glaring omissions of important news stories... I think they'll one day be looked at as an eerie spectacle, similar to how today's generation views the old, black and white public service films that taught people to *duck and cover* in the event of a nuclear explosion.

One of the videos I'd love for those students to watch is Lawrence O'Donnell's recent fight challenge toward Tagg Romney, son of Republican presidential candidate, Mitt Romney. I think it sums up the media's era of insanity quite well. We've become used to stinging criticism and the occasional unhinged rant on cable news, but I can't remember ever seeing a member of the news media so obsessed with defending a politician that they actually wanted to throw down fisticuffs with someone who spoke negatively of them.

The debacle was nothing short of bizarre, with O'Donnell verbally taunting Tagg while putting forth his best effort to promote a childish *tough-guy* persona, complete with silly hand gestures. I must admit that I laughed at its absurdity, but there's nothing funny about a grown man, billed as a media professional, behaving this way.

The kicker was the reason for O'Donnell's apparent outrage. He took exception to tongue-in-cheek comments Tagg Romney made on a local radio station when asked how he feels when he hears President Obama essentially call his father a liar.

"You know... Jump out of your seat and you want to rush down to the debate stage and take a swing at him," he replied with a laugh. "But you know you can't do that because, well, first

because there's a lot of Secret Service between you and him, but also because this is the nature of the process."

Yes, *that* is what brought O'Donnell out swinging.

Now, I realize that O'Donnell is a commentator and not a news reporter. He's not necessarily bound by the same set of journalistic ethics that we expect from those merely conveying the news. However, his name is a marquee brand of a national news organization. He represents a large cable news network. For such a person to actually go as far as to challenge a presidential candidate's son to a fist-fight, on a nationally broadcast program, is nothing short of appalling.

Yet, the display really didn't receive all that much attention. That's disturbing in itself, because it shows a media tolerance for internal behavior resembling that of a mental breakdown. The news media standards are so incredibly low right now that this type of thing is actually deemed acceptable. Just a few years ago, even when George W. Bush was the president, and reactionary derangement of his presidency ran rampant, something like this would have been grounds for firing. Today, it's just dismissed as passionate punditry.

It's examples like this that demonstrate a disturbing lack of news media self-awareness in the year 2012. Though more and more insiders are slowly speaking out about the problem of media debasement, it's clear we've got a ways to go.

I hope I'm right, in that this era will be looked back on with shame and mockery by future generations of journalists. Of course, the *truly* scary thought is that I'm wrong.