

Did the Dems Get the Media Game Wrong?¹

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*“It may not be good for America, but it's damn good for CBS. The money's rolling in and this is fun ... this is going to be a very good year for us. Sorry. It's a terrible thing to say. But, bring it on, Donald..Keep going.”
Les Moonves, former president of CBS, February 2016*

Forget the press as the defender of Truth, Justice and the American way. For Moonves, and other media leaders, Trump is good for business and damn the consequences.

As a former journalist, I cherished the media's constitutive role in a liberal democracy. Yet today, that role is sadly stunted by social media, the wild west of “news” dissemination, and Fox News, our own Tokyo Rose, resulting in citizens choosing from a cafeteria of distorted information.

When President Biden, the opposite of Trump, was elected, we expected the mainstream media to right the ship. But critics say it's not happening. For example, Washington Post columnist Dana Milbank accused Politico of being “unrelenting negative” and pointed to diction such as “Biden dithers...” and “The Case for why Biden is screwed.” Milbank commissioned a survey to compare Trump's and Biden's coverage during their first 11 months in office and said the findings were proof that “My colleagues in the media are serving as accessories to the murder of democracy.”

Regardless of whether one agrees with Millbank, there are some basic realities that Democrats must face to win the media war.

One. There's a big difference between a negative subject and negative treatment of a subject. If a newspaper homes in on a high unemployment rate, that's a story about a negative subject. If that same paper elevates the story to front-page, over-the-fold news more times than that topic usually gets, that's bias, especially when it's run independently of any economic framework.

Two. The media are businesses and exist to make a profit. Dean Obeidallah, a liberal anchor on MSNBC, argued “Too often, Democrats make the dangerous mistake of viewing the media as an ally...the corporate media is not our friend. It's also not our enemy. It's simply a vessel to make billions of dollars in profits.”

Obeidallah charged that the Democrats haven't fought back against coverage such as Jeff Greenfield's Politico story claiming the Democrats were in disarray prior to signing of the bipartisan infrastructure bill, “when in reality, it was a small percentage of Democrats” in opposition.

“Biden and the Democrats have turned the economy around and enacted policies that are helping millions of Americans...Democrats need to craft messages that will get traction in the major media landscape. Drama sells, democracy does not.” The Republicans surely bring the drama. Donald Trump, and his merry band of idiots, have been the Hurricane Sandy, the school shootings, and the O.J. Simpson trial of daily news.

¹ [*The Delray Democrat*](#), January 2022, page 3.

Three, and perhaps the most significant. Some of the media treat Biden's honest and transparent struggles to govern as morally equivalent to Trump's degenerate, deliberate undermining of our democracy. There is no comparison of the people left behind after our military withdrawal from Afghanistan to Trump's caging migrant children and separating them from their families. In a December 6 interview on CNN, Milbank said the media "gave the same or even more negative coverage to Biden in the last four months than when Trump was trying to overthrow democracy."

Before we can save Democracy, we must save Truth. As New York University journalism professor Jay Rosen said via Twitter: "Journalists...have to become more actively pro-democracy."

And from the White House down to the state and local leaders, Democrats must become more actively pro-Democratic, with a muscular, aggressive battle to win control of our own narrative, whatever it takes.