

Commentary

Contentions

Mainstream Media's Pose of Fairness is the Real Poison in American Journalism

Jonathan S. Tobin | [@tobincommentary](#) 05.06.2012 - 10:50 AM

The *New York Times*' former reputation as the nation's objective newspaper of record was always a façade that covered up a persistent liberal bias that skewed its coverage of both politics and the world. But during the eight years that Bill Keller served as executive editor, the *Times* accelerated its descent into the partisan and hyper-liberal biased reporting and unbalanced opinion pages that we now take for granted as the paper's calling card. Keller's liberal prejudices were never a secret while he was the paper's editor and in his current guise as a weekly opinion columnist, the last veil has dropped. But even now, he can't seem to give up the pose of being the professional journalist who is too busy getting the story right to inject his politics into the copy.

This is the principal conceit of [his latest column](#) in which he commits the unpardonable sin of trying to shoot a fish in a barrel and missing. By taking aim at Rupert Murdoch — the easiest target in the world this week — Keller only manages to call more attention to his own partisanship and hypocrisy. His point is that Murdoch's creation Fox News and its conservative bias is "America's poison," and claims that for all of its flaws, the mainstream media is still far more fair and balanced than the network that uses that phrase to describe itself. But the idea that Fox is any more biased than the *Times*, let alone NBC, CNN or NPR — the examples he cites of other more objective outlets — is absurd.

The only evidence he gives for what he considers the obvious superiority of the non-Fox liberal media is that the *Times Sunday Magazine* once published an even-handed profile of Rush Limbaugh by Zev Chafets. He says such a fair-minded piece about Nancy Pelosi would never have run on Fox. He also thinks it is terrible that Fox News head Roger Ailes didn't cooperate with a liberal trying to write his biography and that it takes a dim view of employees who leak material in order to embarrass the company.

The problem with this argument is that the Chafets profile is merely the exception that proves the rule at the *Times*. While there are occasional instances of fairness, they merely highlight the paper's typical unfairness to anyone or any group that it opposes. The comparison is also ridiculous because most of Fox's programming is the moral equivalent to the *Times*' editorial and op-ed pages. There the analogy between the two is almost exact. Liberal voices are a distinct minority on Fox but no more so than genuine conservatives at the *Times*.

If anything, a comparison of the airtime that Fox devotes to straight news coverage to the *Times*' news pages is actually quite flattering to the former. While Fox's news hounds may not be perfectly objective one wonders if they have ever committed any journalistic sin so blatant as the *Times*' decision just this past Friday [to run a front page news feature on racism](#) directed at President Obama in Ohio whose only possible point was to try to rally liberals around the incumbent lest hate triumph. Nor can I recall Fox's news operation ever doing anything as despicable or lacking in ethics as Keller's decision to publish a major expose of John McCain's personal life at the height of the 2008 presidential campaign [that lacked any proof of the wrongdoing the piece insinuated](#).

Even after all these years, Keller and other liberals still don't understand why Fox is popular. Along with conservative talk radio, it was created to balance the obvious bias of a mainstream media that pretended it had no bias. Audiences despise the pretense and appreciate Fox's straightforward point of view. That's why, as I wrote this past week, CNN, whose dishonesty about its liberal bias is as obvious as that of the *Times*, is the loser in the cable rating wars.

No one should fault Keller for his liberalism. It is his pretense of fairness that is galling. His claims about Fox's faults can be just as easily directed at the *Times*. The real poison at the heart of American journalism isn't Fox, it's the mainstream media's false front of objectivity.

Topics: [Bill Keller](#), [Fox News](#), [liberal media bias](#), [New York Times](#), [Rupert Murdoch](#)