

A Media Beyond Caricature

By Victor Davis Hanson

CBS's iconic *60 Minutes* has had plenty of scandals and embarrassments in its long 57-year history, most notably the fake-but-accurate Dan Rather mess. Yet never has it found itself in greater disrepute than in 2024.



Donald Trump, for good reason, recently declined to join *60 Minutes* for its traditional election-year in-depth interviews of the two presidential candidates. Why?

Last time he consented in 2020, anchor and interviewer Leslie Stahl attacked Trump's accurate assertion that the Hunter Biden laptop (then in the possession of the FBI) was authentic—and authentically damning to Joe Biden's presidential candidacy.

Stahl falsely claimed the laptop "can't be verified." She further incorrectly asserted, "So this story about Hunter and his laptop, some repair shop found it; the source is Steve Bannon and Rudy Giuliani." The *New York Post*, in fact, reported the story. The FBI did not deny it.

Yet old Twitter and Facebook, under collaborating FBI tutelage and pressure, suppressed dissemination of the truth. Joe Biden's then-advisor and now Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in conjunction with former interim CIA Director

Michael Morrel, helped round up “51 former intelligence authorities” (among them Leon Panetta and both John Brennan and James Clapper, who had admitted previously of lying under oath to Congress) to claim falsely that the laptop had all the hallmarks of a Russian information gambit to warp the election.

Joe Biden used the “expert” consensus to further lie in the last Biden-Trump debate that the laptop was cooked up by the Russians. And neither CBS, the “intelligence authorities,” nor any of the Bidens have ever since apologized.

More recently, CBS got caught selectively editing the *60 Minutes* interview with Kamala Harris, cutting and pasting an incoherent Harris response to lessen her embarrassing word salad. And in a subsequent interview with House Speaker Mike Johnson, the network once again edited and pruned his answers, but in contrast, on this occasion, to make him seem far less persuasive.

In yet another current CBS interview with author Ta-Nehisi Coates, network host Tony Dokoupil honestly questioned Coates about his new, one-sided, anti-Israeli book *The Message*. The result was that the left-wing icon Coates was almost immediately revealed to be abjectly ignorant of the Middle East, unapologetically biased, and completely uninterested in any viewpoint other than his own partisan prejudices.

Yet what followed proved yet another network embarrassment. An internal CBS division with the eerie Orwellian title of “CBS News Race and Culture Unit” attacked Dokoupil for not providing “context” for Coates’s self-condemnatory and embarrassing interview. The subtext was that CBS, under pressure from woke zealots, simply disowned Dokoupil and sought to subject him to correct thought training. His apparent crime was not insisting on different—softball—journalistic standards for woke black authors like Coates. In other words, CBS blamed Dokoupil for

revealing Coates to be a fool on the air.

The network further diminished its eroding reputation yet again through the unprofessional conduct of recent moderators Norah O'Donnell and Margaret Brennan during the J.D. Vance/Tim Walz vice presidential debate.

After the earlier ABC-sponsored debate between presidential candidates Donald Trump and Kamala Harris, in which the moderators became partisan fact-checkers (and often wrongly so) of Trump alone and drilled him on follow-up questions in a way not accorded Harris, CBS promised not to repeat such a network embarrassment. So, it pledged *not* to fact-check the two vice presidential candidates and instead to present a "fair" moderation of the event.

Instead, the CBS moderators were even more patently one-sided than the prior disastrous ABC performance. The two broke their own pre-debate rules by indeed fact-checking. But, even worse, they fact-checked Vance alone. And, once again, did so erroneously in a way that only exposed their unprofessional partiality.

Given the prior ABC debate sham, CBS was supposedly determined not to turn off the public with more moderator partisan distortions. Instead, the network proved that if it was a question of further eroding its professional brand or helping elect the Harris/Walz progressive ticket, then CBS would predictably choose to jettison its reputation to further the progressive cause.

Just as CBS is no longer the network television standard, so too has the current generation of partisans done their best to sully the *New York Times*. Within just a few days, the *Times* embarrassed itself in ways similar to the partisanship so toxic at CBS.

The *Times* just published an op-ed, "65 Doctors, Nurses and Paramedics: What We Saw in Gaza." What followed were

testimonials from medical officials and doctors in Gaza with truly harrowing stories of Israel's collateral damage and the shooting of civilians, accompanied by X-ray photos of small children with IDF bullets allegedly lodged in their bodies and heads.

But even if one was not aware of the fables promulgated by Hamas and the history of propagandistic attacks on Israel, and even if there was no corroboration of how the victims died and under what conditions, a novice might have sensed that something was not quite right with the evidentiary X-rays.

Experts pointed out that the embedded bullets in the scans appeared pristine, without any fragmentation after entering skulls or midriff sections. There were no apparent entry and exit wounds on the images—suggesting either that it was unlikely the bullets came from IDF-issued high-velocity weapons or that the X-rays might simply have been rephotographed with IDF bullets placed beneath them. In any case, the *New York Times* did not cite any expert outside reviewer to authenticate the scans.

Recently, the *New York Times* again rushed to partisan judgment to persuade the public that current charges of abject plagiarism by presidential candidate Vice President Harris were baseless. Accusations arose that Harris and her coauthor in a past book on crime had plagiarized a number of sources multiple times.

Yet the *Times* claimed the copying was minor and did not rise to the level of actionable plagiarism. It “proved” this by quoting a plagiarism “expert,” Jonathan Bailey, who, it implied, had consulted all the alleged plagiarism passages.

But once the public saw just a few of the passages in question, almost immediately it concluded otherwise: that Harris and her co-author were indeed plagiarists. That forced Bailey, the original *Times* expert, to reconsider his initial

opinion: “At the time, I was unaware of a full dossier with additional allegations, which led some to accuse the *New York Times* of withholding that information from me. However, the article clearly stated that it was my ‘initial reaction’ to those allegations, not a complete analysis.”

Bailey then concluded that Harris had indeed committed plagiarism but not “maliciously” so. Once again, the *Times* had not verified its assertions before publication, and once again it had erred on the side of its known partisanship.

The *Times* and CBS are just a small example of current once-prestige outlets—such as ABC (cf. its moderators during the Harris-Trump presidential debate) and NPR (that just retracted its scurrilous charges against journalist Rich Lowry)—who have consistently abused the public’s trust for the partisan benefit of progressives or their causes.

In sum, the trust and prestige that took prior generations of journalists decades to earn have been thrown away in just a few years by incompetents and partisans—on the ancient, flawed principle that the supposedly superior moral ends justify any means necessary to achieve them.

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