

Activist journalism in the age of Trump

The media never seemed to care when Obama's weak foreign policy enabled Russia's takeover of Crimea and entrenchment in Syria.

by Matthew Hausman



Donald Trump's relationship with the media has become increasingly hostile as many journalists have aligned themselves with the anti-Trump "resistance" and sacrificed professional objectivity in the process. The president uses the term "fake news" to delegitimize the press and play to his base, while members of the mainstream media accuse him of criticizing them unfairly. Not all news is false, but it is not unreasonable to question when dubious stories are "fake" or merely slanted, whether there is a difference, and whether Mr. Trump bears any responsibility for instigating journalistic backlash. These are fair questions that demand honest responses, not rote denials by reporters who claim to

be objective but cannot credibly refute the existence of bias, or who hysterically claim that Trump's criticisms threaten their rights under the First Amendment.

Journalists should make it their business to report on the doings of government, and the press is protected for that very reason by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which states: "Congress shall make no law ... abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." But with great rights comes great responsibility, and the media's responsibility is to be a nonpartisan watchdog of government. The Constitution does not delineate the press's functions, but it does provide essential protections to enable journalists to report on government without interference. The founding fathers envisioned a press free of regulation because politicians and elected officials could not be expected to report on themselves objectively.

The Constitution's protections also apply to editorial opinions that are critical of government. However, journalists should maintain a bright line between fact and opinion to report truth as it is, not as they would like it to be. Unfortunately, journalists today are frequently blinded by ideological loyalties that undercut their neutrality; and news reports are often skewed to put this president in a negative light by ignoring his economic and foreign policy successes, offering political diatribes as objective analysis, and, yes, sometimes reporting false claims as news without adequate (or sometimes any) fact checking...

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