

Monday, May 10, 2004

## EDITORIAL

# Unscrupulous journalists betray public

Los Angeles Times Executive Editor John Carroll delivered a scathing critique of modern "pseudo-journalism" at the School of Journalism and Communication's annual Ruhl Lecture last week. The words were inspiring — at least for journalists who want to root out and destroy the trend — and frightening at the same time.

Probably the most important and uplifting aspect of Carroll's speech was his dedication to and fierce defense of the American public that many newspaper reporters and editors display across America, although those who buy into the "liberal media" myth will disagree. Carroll's primary examples of such dedication were current events at The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times.

Specifically, Carroll pointed out that The New York Times staff members, who were already disgruntled about what they viewed as a bureaucratic management style, demanded accountability at the highest levels when Jayson Blair was exposed for his fabrications and dirty journalistic tactics.

Carroll even criticized his own paper to demonstrate what he saw as many journalists' strong desire to support traditional journalistic goals of accurately informing the public. Before Carroll was editor, a scandal raged at the Los Angeles Times when it was revealed that the paper, which had monetary interests in the newly constructed Staples Center, was involved in secret deals to cover the arena in exchange for advertising.

Again, the staff demanded accountability, and 300 staff members signed a letter calling for an internal investigation.

While these two unfortunate events may paint a bleak picture of ethics at America's most prestigious newspapers, the simple fact that the staffs of these newsrooms put journalistic credibility above business and profits is the saving grace.

But much of Carroll's lecture was focused on "pseudo-journalists," and he called out what he views as a tendency among many other media outlets, namely Fox News Channel, to mislead the public.

To this end, Carroll used two specific examples to expose the trend. The first was a study showing that at least 80 percent of Fox News Channel's viewers believed at least one of the following misconceptions: That weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq, that a connection between al-Qaida and Iraq had been found or that the war in Iraq was widely supported around the world. He added that the number was 57 percent lower for those who received news primarily from public news broadcasting.

The second example was a blatant demonstration of the bias that Fox News Channel commentator Bill O'Reilly uses to accomplish the "gotcha!" spirit of his show, and subsequently draws in viewers who are not interested in real news. Carroll described an incident in November 2003 when O'Reilly attacked the Los Angeles Times for exposing then-California governor candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger's history of sexual harassment. On the show, O'Reilly said "Do you think the L.A. Times sent a squad of reporters to Arkansas to investigate Bill Clinton's problems with women? No, it did not."

Carroll pointed out that O'Reilly's critique was not only off-base but completely inaccurate; The Los Angeles Times printed a 4,000-word exclusive on Dec. 21, 1993 about Clinton's "troopergate" sex scandal.

Evidently, as Carroll jokingly noted, Fox News Channel employees don't have access to computers, or they may have been able to do a Lexis-Nexis search. O'Reilly never apologized or acknowledged his error.

Sadly, most who shared O'Reilly's view were more concerned about whether the newspaper had an agenda than the reality that the potential new governor had a history of harassment. Carroll responded to these enraged people in an editorial, writing, "At the risk of offending still more readers, I'll say that if you're put off by investigative reporting, this probably won't be the right newspaper for you in the years to come."

So if the "news" produced by these Fox-like pseudo-journalists is so unethical and deceptive, why does it attract such large audiences? Carroll said today's viewers and readers are so angry about one thing or another that the adversarial system of media works to draw them in to the circus. And that makes sense, especially if you look at the weekly Nielsen Media Research ratings: Bill O'Reilly and Hannity and Colmes all consistently rotate to make the top two. The only problem is these talking heads don't do news; they do controversy, fear and the worst kind of tabloid journalism imaginable.

And ultimately, the public is the sucker.

## JOHN KERRY'S SECRET DECISION MAKING PROCESS...



Eric Layton Illustration

# Can I get you anything else?

Even after you break the law, it's still on your side. I always think people who are too self-centered to follow the law should just be kicked off the island. Unfortunately in the United States, we not only keep these people around, we cater to them.

You can find a great example of this in Oregon right now, with the installation of flat-panel television screens in the Oregon State Correctional Institution. I'm glad to hear that we're making conditions better in our prisons for felons, because no matter how many laws one breaks, a man should always have the right to watch television in his own room. Give me a break. If you compare an inmate's television-viewing situation to that of an "elite" living situation, such as a sorority, you may be surprised to find out who often has the better setup: Inmates. Maybe sororities could get their chapter headquarters to spring for flat-panels in every room if they started to stab each other in the necks with pencils while arguing during viewings of "The OC" or "The Bachelor." It seems to have worked well for inmates!

Guards claim that prisoners are under much better behavior now that they aren't gathered in large groups to watch television. Several times, inmates were sent to the emergency room after fights broke out concerning what channel to watch. Personal televisions now prevent these fights from occurring. It seems like the logic that most people learned in kindergarten could have worked just as well: If you can't behave yourself while watching television, then no television for you.



Marissa Jones  
Cry me a river

But the program isn't promoting bad behavior. In fact, the inmate must have a good behavior record in order to receive the flat-panel installation, and it's not free. The going rate for a 7-inch flat panel television at the Oregon State Correctional Institution is \$300. Corrections officials are quick to point out that the televisions aren't being bought with taxpayers' money, but through a no-cash incentive program in which inmates are paid for their prison jobs. As a taxpayer, I felt a lot better after hearing this. I mean, I am really glad they use their "hard-earned" money to pay for their entertainment, but I have a better idea: How about they start using it to pay for their room and board, which the taxpayers do fund?

Another group of lawbreakers this country continues catering to is illegal immigrants. Our sister state to the south, California, had the great idea to give driver's licenses to illegal immigrants last year. Fortunately, the new governor "terminated" this law upon his arrival. Unfortunately, California wasn't the first state to come up

with this brilliant concept. In fact, it was the fifteenth.

But now a new state wants to join the pack: Florida. Jeb Bush seems to grasp the concept of "illegal," yet he still supports the law. The governor commented, "We shouldn't allow them to come into the country to begin with." And this is the point where every argument should end. Illegal immigrants have broken the law by entering the country without going through the immigration process. By allowing them to stay, the government undermines all of those who put in the effort to legally obtain their citizenship. Jeb continued his comment by saying, "But once they're here, what do you do?" Hmm ... maybe send them back? The answer is definitely not to make rules to condone their illegal behavior.

"Do you basically say that they're lepers to society? That they don't exist?" Jeb asks. "A policy that ignores them is a policy of denial." And a policy that acknowledges their rights in a country they have entered illegally is a policy of stupidity. Why on earth would you give a legal document to an illegal citizen?

Many believe that licensing illegal immigrants will make the roads safer. Sen. Rudy Garcia, R-Fla., made the argument that these people often drive children to school or themselves to work without a license. By doing this, they are endangering their life and the lives of others, because they may not know the rules of the road.

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## ONLINE POLL

Each week, the Emerald publishes the results of the previous poll and the coming week's poll question. Visit <http://www.dailyemerald.com> to vote.

### Last question:

Squirrel fishing?!

Results: 123 votes.

- **Awesome!!**  
52.0 percent or 64 votes.
- **Happy squirrels!!**  
16.2 percent or 20 votes.

- **Cruel!!**  
12.2 percent or 15 votes.

- **Stupid!!**  
9.8 percent or 12 votes.

- **What is that?!**  
9.8 percent or 12 votes.

**This week:** What do you think

of the Atkins diet?

### Choices:

It's great ... It works!  
 It's awful ... and unhealthy;  
 It's nothing more than a moneymaking scheme;  
 It's better than exercise!