
Subject: Where is the Media going?

Posted by [Mark L](#) on Thu, 25 Feb 2021 00:33:17 GMT

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Someone sent me this. Not sure who the guy is. A lot of knowledgeable journalists are going it alone and getting off the networks. Also for whatever it is worth I have never watched Fox News. all I know about it is that it is conservative. Also a lot of the links in the original column won't cut and paste so they're not included.

I think I have mentioned before that Francis Schaefer concluded in his book "How should we then live" that there would be a left or right wing dictator in America. I could see that beginning under the last administration and accelerating under this one. Jesus said when you see the day coming "look up". So I'm going to look up.

I Can't Stand Fox News, But Censoring It Might Be The Dumbest Idea Ever

How will the latest campaign against "misinformation" backfire for the country? Let's count the ways

Matt Taibbi Feb 23

Two and a half years ago, when Alex Jones of Infowars was kicked off a series of tech platforms in a clearly coordinated decision, I knew this was not going to be an isolated thing.

Given that people like Connecticut Senator Chris Murphy were saying the ouster of Jones was just a "good first step," it seemed obvious the tactic was not going to be confined to a few actors. But corporate media critics insisted the precedent would not be applied more broadly.

"I don't think we are going to be seeing big tech take action against Fox News... any time soon," commented CNN's Oliver Darcy.

Darcy was wrong. Just a few years later, calls to ban Fox are not only common, they're intensifying, with media voices from Brian Stelter on CNN to MSNBC analyst Anand Giridharadas to former Media Matters critic Eric Boehlert to Washington Post columnists Max Boot and Margaret Sullivan all on board.

The movement crested this week with a letter from California House Democrats Anna Eshoo and Jerry McNerney, written to the CEOs of cable providers like Comcast, AT&T, Verizon, Cox, and Dish. They demanded to know if those providers are "planning to continue carrying Fox News,

Newsmax, and OANN... beyond any contract renewal date" and "if so, why?"

The news comes in advance of Wednesday's House Energy and Commerce Committee hearing on "traditional media's role in promoting disinformation and extremism."

This sequence of events is ominous because a similar matched set of hearings and interrogations back in 2017 -- when Senators like Mazie Hirono at a Judiciary Committee hearing demanded that platforms like Google and Facebook come up with a "mission statement" to prevent the "foment of discord" -- accelerated the "content moderation" movement that now sees those same platforms regularly act as de facto political censors.

Sequences like this -- government "requests" of speech reduction, made to companies subject to federal regulation -- make the content moderation decisions of private firms a serious First Amendment issue. Censorship advocates may think this is purely a private affair, in which the only speech rights that matter are those of companies like Twitter and Google, but any honest person should be able to see this for what it is.

In the last go-around, Virginia Senator Mark Warner prepared a lengthy white paper called "Potential Policy Proposals for Regulation of Social Media and Technology Firms," that among other things considered making the tech giants more susceptible to tort claims, as well as beefing up FTC authority over the firms. This was the sword raised over the head of Silicon Valley as it considered whether or not it had a duty to implement those Senatorial demands for plans to prevent the "foment of discord."

The line to potential government action isn't quite as direct this time, but it's notable that Blair Levin, the former chief of staff of the F.C.C. under Bill Clinton, said that this week's hearings could serve as a first step to what the New York Times called "meaningful action."

"You have to establish a factual record," Levin said of this week's hearings, "and then try to figure out: What are the appropriate roles for the government in changing that dynamic?"

Press freedoms have been in steep decline for a while. Barack Obama's record targeting of whistleblower sources (and in some cases, journalists themselves) using the Espionage Act was a first serious sign, followed by Donald Trump's prosecution of Julian Assange. We progressed to a particularly dangerous new stage in recent years, with oligopolistic tech companies, urged on by politicians, engaging in anticompetitive agreements to suppress political voices on both the left and the right.

The so-called media reporters at major organizations like CNN and the New York Times have mostly either been silent or have played cheerleading roles during the most eyebrow-raising

recent developments: the decision by Facebook and Twitter to block access to a pre-election New York Post story about Hunter Biden, the stunning exercise in monopoly influence by Amazon and Apple in swallowing up the "free speech" platform Parler, the banning of Socialist Worker Party accounts in England and the U.S., and the shutdown of livestream capability by alternative media outlets (and the removal of celebrated footage shot from the Capitol riot by people like Status Coup videographer Jon Farina), a story that amazingly only got major play at... Fox News.

All of these stories share the same theme: small, unelected groups of private executives making sweeping decisions about speech, cheered on by Democratic Party politicians. If it proceeds to its logical conclusion, it poses a much more serious problem for society than even Fox News at its worst.

The campaign against Fox is being framed as part of an effort to combat what Eshoo and McNerney characterize as "misinformation, disinformation, conspiracy theories, and lies." There are so many problems with this point of view, it's hard to know where to start.

For one thing, complainants rarely make an effort to distinguish between opinions they find obnoxious, and actual lies or errors. This blurring of lines between "misinformation" or "disinformation," and reporting that simply has political effects deemed deleterious by Democrats and their pals in media, has been going on since 2016, when for instance the leaked-but-true Podesta and DNC emails were regularly described as elements of a "misinformation campaign."

It was the same with the Hunter Biden story last autumn, where there was no evidence that any of the material was false, but newspapers regularly described it as reading "suspiciously like disinformation" or a "misinformation test for social media."

Take a look, for instance, at the timeline of "Fox News misinformation in 2020," put out by Media Matters, a media-criticism agency founded by notorious once-Republican, now-Democratic Party attack dog David Brock. Here are some things listed as "misinformation," a word that in almost every dictionary carries a connotation of "false" or "incorrect" communication. These are verbatim entries from December, 2020:

-- A Fox "straight news" program mentioned Benghazi more than the over 3,100 people who died from the pandemic the day before. [Outnumbered Overtime, 12/10/20]

-- Laura Ingraham encourages viewers to gather for the holidays. [The Ingraham Angle, 12/16/20]

-- Fox & Friends goes full War on Christmas, after over 2,600 Americans died from the pandemic the day before. [Fox & Friends, 12/9/20]

-- Dana Perino: Biden should show "a little bit of grace and gratitude" to Trump for COVID-19 vaccines. [The Daily Briefing, 12/8/20]

These are political, not factual complaints, as is Sullivan's beef that Tucker Carlson "tries to sow doubt about the prevalence of white supremacy," or that Sean Hannity likes to "blast Biden as 'cognitively struggling.'" As to that last point, news features wondering about Donald Trump's mental fitness were myriad for four years (hell, even I wrote one), as were "Trump with tiny wang" cartoons, and "Trump touchingly gay with Putin" jokes. Confusing that which you find politically offensive with actually erroneous or deceptive reporting has become so common, even media professionals don't seem to care about the difference anymore.

Fox absolutely does drift into outright deceptions, though it hardly has a monopoly on this behavior (more on that in a moment). But being the gigantic money-obsessed enterprise that it is, it still tends to steer clear of the worst kinds of offenses in this business, i.e. actionable lies.

It was amazing to see the Washington Post media critic Sullivan argue in favor of extraordinary measures to remove or boycott Fox by citing the fact that the network was considering a promotion for Maria Bartiromo, who was "among those... recently forced under threat of a lawsuit to air a video that debunked repeated false claims on her show that corrupt voting software had given millions of Trump votes to Biden."

Sullivan glossed over this episode, which was actually evidence against the need to take these channels down. Before the New Year, a cease-and-desist letter from Dominion Voting Systems went out to Fox, the Epoch Times, OAN, Newsmax, and others, demanding an end to evidence-free claims about their company. It worked, as even OAN retreated, and Newsmax, tail between its legs, broadcast a two-minute statement to "clarify" that it had no evidence for claims of election fraud made against the companies Dominion and Smartmatic.

This is exactly how the existing system is supposed to work, in a legal framework that still makes the cost of broadcasting provable deceptions prohibitive to deep-pocketed companies like Fox. Libel and defamation laws are imperfect, but effective. If the massive Fox audience were driven further underground, that tool would no longer be worth much.

However, those gunning for the removal of Fox, Newsmax, and other outlets are clearly not interested in getting there by way of the law. They want to take advantage of the hyper-concentration of power among media distributors -- the tech giants like Apple and Amazon that can zap a massively successful app like Parler overnight, and the confederation of cable carriers like Comcast, AT&T, and Verizon that hold dominion over broadcast networks.

We have to ask politicians like Eshoo and critics like Sullivan and Boot: where exactly do they want massive conservative audiences to go, if Fox is removed from the air? By any rational standard, having them watch Fox is way down the list of worst-case scenarios.

Take the example of Carlson and Trump lawyer Sidney Powell. Carlson asked for proof of election

theft last year, and "she never sent us any evidence, despite a lot of polite requests." Trump voters mostly don't read the Washington Post or watch CNN, but they do watch Carlson, which made that segment significant, just as the following sizzle-reel of Fox personalities trying to convince viewers the election story was over was significant.

Sullivan went so far as to post this in her piece decrying Fox -- would she prefer that a station with even less appetite for challenging its viewers rose in its place?

The unspoken subtext to all of these efforts is a hope that those enormous conservative audiences eventually won't be able to go anywhere at all. The Internet, it is hoped, will gradually be cleansed of their "misinformation" agents, and red-staters will either watch CNN or suck eggs. The information distribution business is now sufficiently concentrated that it's possible to imagine a fully politically homogenous news landscape. That's the clear endgame, and the reason letting Fox go to the guillotine is a serious mistake.

It's no accident that this campaign to go after Fox comes at the end of a very long and painful process of kneecapping the alternative press in America, one that benefited the biggest corporate actors every step of the way.

The introduction of the Internet destroyed the commercial formula of local newspapers, among other things by undercutting the revenue base long provided by classified ads. Marshall McLuhan wrote all the way back in 1964 that "classified ads (and stock-market quotations) are the bedrock of the press. Should an alternative source of easy access to such diverse daily information be found, the press will fold."

He was right. According to PEN, in the fifteen years between 2004 and 2019, 1,800 newspapers closed, and the news media, most of it local, lost \$35 billion in revenue, and roughly 47% of its staff. Roughly 1,300 communities in this country have no newspapers now, a dynamic that more and more forces people to look to regional or national news sources for information.

Having severely undercut the ability of alternative media outlets to survive -- just look at the preposterous YouTube restrictions of independent videographers like Farina and Ford Fischer -- audiences are herded into ever-larger informational pens. Within those pens, the trend in recent years has accelerated toward ideological homogeneity, so that most people are getting their information from one of two ecosystems, conservative or "liberal" (which is really more like "neoliberal"). I warned four years ago where this was headed:

The model going forward will likely involve Republican media covering Democratic corruption and Democratic media covering Republican corruption. This setup just doesn't work.

The reason it doesn't work is that CNN, the Washington Post, MSNBC, the New York Times, the Boston Globe, and NPR do not act like competitors in this sort of landscape. In a binary setup,

they don't police each other's mistakes, any more than Fox and the Daily Caller do.

Even forgetting about the appalling free speech issues involved, if you take Fox, Newsmax, and OANN off the air, who will check the work of the remaining CNNs of the world? CNN's own media reporter, who is at the head of the line calling for Fox to be removed? Because the undeniable fact about the last four years, in particular, is that as bad as Fox often is -- and I've found its cynical cheering of mask rebellion in particular almost viscerally off-putting -- the so-called "reputable" press has of late been just as bad if not worse, from a factual point of view.

From calling Carter Page a foreign agent to raising massive fusses about an absurd and disproven Alfa-Bank-Trump secret server story to erroneous coverage of the Covington High School fiasco to rampant lying about the source of the "pee tape" story to putting Michael Avenatti on live TV to make dubious rape accusations to doing exactly what Fox is accused of doing, perhaps at a smaller scale but still -- raising questions about the legitimacy of Donald Trump's election -- the last four years have shown that Fox does not have a monopoly on "misinformation," not by a long shot. The Russiagate stupidity alone marks the whole business with a failing grade for the whole era, especially as it caused news outlets to openly align with political actors.

Just to take one example, virtually every "reputable" news agency incorrectly denounced the so-called "Nunes memo" detailing FISA abuse by the FBI, written in February 2018 by Republican congressman Devin Nunes. The Washington Post called it a "joke" and a "sham," while another of its editorialists said Trump's release of it was "his most unethical act since firing [James] Comey." New York Magazine, bravely defending the honor of the FBI, wrote, "FBI Director Opposes Release of False Nunes Memo." Bloomberg: "FBI Has Grave Concerns About Nunes Memo." CBS quoted Nancy Pelosi's warning that release of this "fake" and "distorted" intelligence might cause a "constitutional crisis," and called for Nunes to be removed as a Committee Chair.

In the end, the report by Justice Inspector General Michael Horowitz ratified virtually every assertion about FBI misdeeds in the Nunes memo. Who covered this? A few random independents like me, but mainly, big conservative outlets like Fox News:

When congressional testimony of figures like former deputy FBI director Andrew McCabe was declassified, and we found out that the FBI as far back as August, 2016 had dropped George Papadopoulos as an investigative target because the evidence "didn't particularly indicate... that he was interacting with the Russians," who covered that key information about the ostensible origin of the Trump-Russia probe?

Not the papers that hyped to the sky the story of Papadopoulos as a conduit to Russian spies. No, these stories appeared in the fine print of The Wall Street Journal and in the work by figures like, of all people, Sean Hannity. The pattern is firm: when the Times or CNN screws up, you look for the real correction at Real Clear Investigations or Fox, and vice versa. Removing one side from the scene will leave the other with a monopoly on error.

When original Fox programming architect Roger Ailes died a few years ago, I criticized the "Christopher Columbus of hate" for helping invent the toxic media culture that had long been tearing the country apart. Ailes made a fortune innovating a programming strategy based upon a "factory-like production of news stories that spoke to Americans' worst fantasies about each other," realizing "the more scared and hate-filled we are, the more advertising dollars come pouring in."

His version of Fox stoked the divisive effect with an endless barrage of stories mainly designed to terrify older, conservative audiences, who were told over and over -- in between ad blocs, of course -- that the America they remembered was under attack, by everyone from campus lesbians to al-Qaeda.

This looked like the corporate news media version of ripping off the elderly with telemarketed magazine subscriptions, and I wanted no part of it, which is one reason I never appeared on the channel despite regular invitations. It's also why in *Hate Inc.*, I described Fox as the clear progenitor of the division-for-profit model of modern commercial media.

Circumstances have come all the way around. Incredibly, Fox News may soon be the last line of defense against an all-out assault on the heterogeneous free press as an institution, and people like me, who've despised the channel their whole lives, now find themselves in the unenviable position of having to defend the "Fair and Balanced" channel as a matter of self-preservation.

The local and alternative presses are already dying, and tech platforms have already successfully asserted their rights to censor. All that remains is to topple a behemoth like Fox as a show of strength, leaving an untouchable Soviet-style club of Chuck Todds and Jennifer Rubins and Max Boots in charge of disseminating an approved, top-down version of reality. Are you excited yet?

Imagine the reaction! Do the Eshoos of the world think Fox viewers would just shrug off the L, and find ways to warm up to Rachel Maddow, Chris Hayes, and Joy Reid? To the many Fox-haters out there: imagine a world in which you're told, by an unelected bund of cable distributors, that you have to get used to watching Tucker and Sean. Would you take that lying down? Or would you lose your mind with rage, and reach for something sharp? How does anyone think this is going to end well?