

CORY WILSON

# Abdicating freedom

*"Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe." — Abraham Lincoln*

The First Amendment guarantees that "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press . . ." A free press is foundational to many of our other freedoms.

Congress may not need to worry with a law abridging freedom of the press. That freedom is being willingly ceded by the very media that are supposed to be its most vigorous practitioners.

In 1992, 90% of the DC press corps voted for Clinton over Bush. Their worldview remains vastly more left-leaning than the public's. Anytime one ideological view is so overwhelmingly represented, of course that slants coverage.

Perhaps in days past, the slant was more unintended. Now, the mainstream media are not even bashful about it. The legacy media have largely abdicated their vital function of speaking truth to power. Democrats get a free pass; Republicans get "accountability"; Tea Partiers get mocked.

The short-term implications of the media's dive into the liberal tank are more obvious. The long-term, more frightening.

The mainstream media seem to be actively rigging the 2012 election. Rather than reporting news, the media are "shaping" facts to guide the public to vote as they "should."

There are many blatant

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examples of tampering with news to fit a leftist "narrative." There was Dan Rather's 2004 "gotcha" about George W. Bush's National Guard service (which relied on documents created by word processing software, which did not exist in 1973 when W. was in the Guard). In 2008, an adoring media left unquestioned parts of Barack Obama's past that would have been scrutinized for a conservative candidate.

As we gaze upon the wreckage of the Obama Presidency, some more balanced vetting might have been helpful. But instead of accountability, what we have gotten is largely white-wash and attacks on Republicans. MSNBC has been caught twice doctoring footage of Mitt Romney to change the context of what he actually said to make him look out of touch or inept.

But it isn't just MSNBC, which hardly passes for a network. For weeks, polls have been almost fraudulently depicted to prove beyond any doubt that Obama has already won. Despite oversampling of Democrats and Romney winning Independents in those same polls, the media have relentlessly pushed the line that Romney's

done.

Why hasn't the story been about Obama's underperformance? Under 50% as an incumbent usually means that the incumbent is in big trouble. Crickets chirp.

The real-time reaction to the first debate tells it all: Stunned journalists who could not believe how badly Obama's liberalism was routed by a presidential Romney. They did not report the story as much as they made Obama's points for him. When the unemployment rate dropped to 7.8%, the media eagerly changed the subject. For one month out of 44, the rate ticked below 8%. Interpretation: Obama's policies successful! (Forget that Obama promised unemployment under 5.5% by now, and that many indicators, including actual labor force numbers, point to a slowing economy.)

Longer term, a press that is reduced to serving as a discredited arm of the Democrat Party undermines democracy.

Yet that is what is perceived to be happening. A September Gallup poll found that 60% of respondents—an all-time high—had "little or no trust in the mass media to report the news fully, accurately, and fairly." In a Pew poll, the New York Times' "believability" dropped 13 points from 2004 to only 49%.

People are increasingly filtering news to validate their own views. The "free" press is contributing to our polarization. If

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the public tunes out, how will the public stay informed?

Democratic pollster Pat Caddell says that the media have crossed a "dangerous" line and are now sitting on stories and distorting facts to support the government (well, Obama). Think about the coverage on Libya, Afghanistan, and Fast and Furious. Would these scandals be ignored if the President was a Republican, or named

Bush?

Journalist Charles Kurault of Sunday morning fame said, "The one thing that's worse than hearing about all that violence and all that bad news on television is not being permitted to hear it."

James Madison (who wrote the First Amendment) was more explicit: "A people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with power

which knowledge gives. A popular government without popular information or the means of acquiring it is but a prologue to a farce or a tragedy, or perhaps both."

You won't hear that on NBC.

*Cory T. Wilson of Madison is an attorney with the firm of Heidelberg Steinberger Colmer & Burrow. To contact Cory, email [cory@corywilson.ms](mailto:cory@corywilson.ms).*