The Media Have Always Been Biased

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It is wrong to believe that the mainstream media strive for objectivity or that they have ever attained it. American history demonstrates that the press has always been partisan and deeply involved in politics. The media have always provided a platform for specific biases. What should be more feared than bias and competition is the appearance of objectivity—faux fairness—that conceals real motivations and commitments.

By now, readers of Big Journalism are more than familiar with the liberal media’s exercise in conspiracy, collusion, and confusion that was the JournoList. [JournoList was a private Google Group moderated by blogger and columnist Ezra Klein. In 2010 the group was deleted after a series of controversial emails were leaked, resulting in accusations of collusion between liberal and progressive politicians and the political press.]

For most on the political right, the leaked emails being exposed by Tucker Carlson and his DailyCaller website serve as proof that the Mainstream Media has jumped the shark, compromising its traditional credibility and betraying a deep, passionate left-wing bias beneath what was supposed to be objective journalism.

Jeremy D. Boreing, “JournoList, Shame of a Nation: Ripping the Veil from ‘Objectivity’ to Reveal the Partisan Hacks Beneath,” Big Journalism, August 2, 2010. Copyright © 2010 by the author. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.
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But while all of that is certainly true, I believe it is based on a flawed premise. Specifically, that the Mainstream Media has ever been—or even should have ever been—credible and objective.

The historic reality is that media in America has always been a tool of partisans. During the years preceding the American Revolution, the revolutionary founders used the pages of the emergent colonial newspapers to rally support for their petitions against the crown. In fact, newspapers were perhaps the most powerful tools in moving public opinion in favor of independence, both through publication of stories hostile to British intentions, or editorial tracts promoting revolution.

A Tool for Partisans

The most famous man in America at the time of the Revolution was Benjamin Franklin, [whose] own paper, the Pennsylvania Gazette, carried America’s first political cartoon—JOIN OR DIE—penned by Franklin himself. Of course, Franklin was also a Founding Father of the nation with a seat in both the Continental Congress, and on the more exclusive sub-committee that drafted the Declaration of Independence. Certainly the Gazette, then, lacked objectivity, if not credibility.

When, after the war, the first Congress under the new Constitution passed the First Amendment, securing freedom of the press in the new nation, it was not a fair, unbiased press they were defending but the gritty, partisan, error (if not patently fabrication)-prone press of the Revolution.

While this sort of manipulative, partisan press may sound radical and inappropriate to modern Americans, the truth is, it has always been this way.

When the second President of the United States signed the Sedition Act, granting the federal government the power to