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Actually, It's About Ethics in Journalism

May 22, 2020 admin Politics 0



AP featured image

Chris Cuomo/Andrew Cuomo

Several years ago, a movement centered around some game developers and how they get such positive press when their games aren't actually that good. There were accusations of developers sleeping their way to good reviews, but likewise there were allegations of sexism and misogyny. The whole thing became muddled in the vicious attacks coming from both sides that did not deal with the core issue.

The core issue itself actually became a meme. The line "Actually, it's about ethics in journalism" was a reflection of how the movement was supposed to have started, but was eventually used sarcastically by the other side to indicate that the argument on journalism ethics was merely a straw man.

The idea that ethics in journalism should receive more attention, though, is something we need to revisit.

At this point, it is clear that we are dealing with two Americas. The first America is you and me, the American citizens who do not live in the Acela corridor or New York. We are a diverse group, with diverse beliefs and the ability to live day to day making decisions for ourselves and thinking freely.

This America is where over 90% of Americans truly live. We have our lives, our beliefs, and we can disagree without being toxic. The second America, however, only sees the rest of us through the lens of that major urban, northeast context. This America is led predominantly by the national press and the politicians it loves to prop up.



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The problem with this America is that it is incapable of understanding what the other America experiences. It cannot understand, for example, why some people in our America would support Donald Trump. It cannot understand why some Americans would be ready to go to work or to a bar or to a beach when there is a pandemic going on. The media's America views things through the lens of the elite in New York City.

So, when a website like Mediaite runs a story about conservatives being appalled that CNN host Chris Cuomo would tease his brother, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo, on the former's cable news show, it is hard to respond with anything other than pointing out what journalism ethics actually are.

That piece opens with a stellar lede:

CNN's Chris Cuomo and New York Governor Andrew Cuomo drew a great deal of criticism for what conservatives viewed as an unserious discussion between the two on the coronavirus pandemic.

I would really like to know what about a giant cotton swab being used by Chris Cuomo as a prop to tease his brother anything other than unserious. What about this does the Mediaite writer think is newsworthy?

At most media outlets around the country, you would not be allowed to interview your own family for a story in the best of times. No matter what, you are biased. The objectivity a journalist is supposed to have does not exist when you are interviewing family.

But, these are not the best of times. The guest in question is the governor of a state that performed worse than any other state in the country when it came to handling the COVID-19 pandemic. That governor's policies directly led to thousands of elderly Americans dying in their nursing homes, and we still don't fully know the extent of that particular aspect of the crisis.

What makes this worse is that Governor Cuomo is really not appearing on any other cable news show. He is strictly appearing on the show of his younger brother, who is providing nothing but cover for him. While cute moments of levity are fine, the fact of the matter is that Andrew Cuomo is one of the biggest newsmakers in this crisis, and not in a good way. Someone who is not his brother should be questioning him.

CNN, like any news outlet, has a code of ethics — the basic moral rules of journalism, essentially, and prior to this moment in history, you would never see this type of thing happening. But what you have now is a network that is pretty much flipped to "Defend Democrats, Attack Orange Man" all the time. There is no time to hold a powerful Democrat accountable for his absolutely abysmal performance in this pandemic when Donald Trump is joking about sending reporters to space in a rocket.

CNN and its defenders cannot see why other people might be appalled by this journalistic nepotism. They choose to believe that it is simply another partisan attack and blind themselves to the fact that it is straight-up unethical for any journalist to treat their family to special coverage the way Chris Cuomo is treating Andrew Cuomo.

It's not partisan. It is an absolute threat to journalism, and CNN should really do better.



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