



wire services
bias

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DISCUSSION & REVIEW QUESTIONS:

- Towards the beginning of the video, Ms. Miller shares with us that in the 1950's, "Most journalists were committed to producing "objective" journalism – fact-based stories independent of the government and of political parties. A reporter's job was to report, not offer opinion or advocate. Presented with the facts, it was up to readers to make their own judgments about news events." Why do you think that reporters are not held accountable for 'objective' journalism anymore? Do you think that consumers of reporting are still capable of making their own judgments about news events? Why or why not?
- Later in the video Ms. Miller points out that, "The Internet as a news source has obvious pluses and minuses. On the plus side is that information is spread widely and instantly. The minuses have to do with the fact that the quality of reporting varies dramatically. It's not easy to separate the wheat from the chaff." What do you think Ms. Miller means by 'separate the wheat from the chaff?' Why is quality in reporting so important? Who might it be important to?
- Ms. Miller further explains that, "...many sites, including mainstream sites, have abandoned traditional journalistic practices and standards in search of more and more "eyeballs." Objectivity, once the gold standard of reporting, is now often seen as old-fashioned, a ratings loser. When success is measured mainly in terms of "clicks," the outrageous beats the sober just about every time." If reporters insert personal opinion into their stories, how can the stories, and those reporting them, be trusted to be not be deceitful? Why do you think that the measure for success in journalism has changed? Do you agree with the new metrics for success in journalism? Why or why not?
- Ms. Miller then states that, "Inserting opinion, even in the middle of a news story, is a way in which journalists can distinguish themselves. And in mainstream media outlets, those opinions overwhelmingly tend to be liberal. This might not be so bad if journalists acknowledged their bias. But they almost never do." Why do you think that reporters are compelled to 'distinguish' themselves? Reporters used to be a kind of 'check' on government officials and actions by objectively criticizing what the government did- regardless of that government's political affiliation. With objective reporting having now been replaced by journalistic activism and advocacy for progressivism, how might this loss of government accountability affect our country?
- Towards the end of the video, Ms. Miller concludes that, "The obvious liberal bias has only served to push conservative readers to those sources that cater to conservative themes – further polarizing the media landscape... [and that] A decline in reporting standards, a decline in revenue and increase in bias have made many wary of the people who provide them with their news. A certain amount of skepticism is a healthy thing, but a thriving democracy depends on a dynamic and free press." What do you think are the short and long-term consequences of 'polarizing the media landscape?' Why do you think that a free press is so critical to a thriving democracy?

EXTEND THE LEARNING:

CASE STUDY: HB2

INSTRUCTIONS: Read the article “A Flagrant Case of Media Bias: A Case Study,” then answer the questions that follow.

- What was NC Family looking to do when examining all of the stories regarding HB2 on the N&O website? What were the findings of the NC Family staff regarding the reporting on HB2 on N&O? What was the low point of N&O’s coverage of HB2? What do the authors of the article suggest possible motivations for N&O’s ridiculously biased coverage could be?
- Why do you think that N&O slanted their ‘reporting’ so heavily? Do you think that N&O’s coverage was deceitful? Why or why not?
- Do you think that reporting news events with such a heavy liberal bias is disrespectful to news consumers? Why or why not? Ms. Miller laments in the video that, “According to Gallup, even as recently as 2000 a majority of Americans trusted the press; by 2015 it had fallen to 40%; and lower than that, 36%, among those 18 to 49. It’s hard to see how this decline will be reversed.” Can you think of a way that Americans can ever trust the press again, or that journalism can ever return to objectivity again? Explain.



QUIZ

CAN YOU TRUST THE PRESS?

1. In the 1950s the reporters job was _____.
 - a. to provide a liberal or conservative slant
 - b. to advocate for special interest groups
 - c. to report
 - d. to offer opinions

2. In 2003, there were roughly 100,000 bloggers. Only a few years later there were an estimated _____.
 - a. 1 million
 - b. 15 million
 - c. 17 million
 - d. 27 million

3. A minus of the Internet being a news source is _____.
 - a. the quality of reporting varies dramatically
 - b. the standards of reporting are unrealistically high
 - c. information is only accessible by the well-connected
 - d. There are only positive aspects of the Internet being a news source.

4. Reporters who identify as Democrats outnumber those who identify as Republicans by 4 to 1.
 - a. True
 - b. False

5. Which of the following has made many wary of the people who provide them with their news?
 - a. A decline in reporting standards.
 - b. A decline in revenue.
 - c. An increase in bias.
 - d. All of the above.



QUIZ - ANSWER KEY

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A Flagrant Case of Media Bias: A Case Study

NC Family Staff | July 6, 2016 | SHARE:



For months now, stories about House Bill 2 have dominated *The News & Observer* in Raleigh. According to an analysis conducted by NC Family staff, the newspaper published 161 stories and nearly 94,000 words during the first 35 days after HB2 was passed into law on March 23, 2016. That's an average of more than four stories and 2,400 words per day! This amount of coverage for a single action by the NC General Assembly in itself is astonishing, but **more astounding was the amount of bias we discovered.**

To those of us who support the law, it appeared that most of the coverage in *The News & Observer* (*N&O*) portrayed the law as hateful, radical and unpopular. But was that simply our perception, or the truth? We decided to take a closer look. We examined all of the stories posted on the *N&O* website during that time period in an attempt to quantify whether this bias actually existed. When we looked at the results, **we were amazed at the extent of the bias and the obvious lack of any attempt to portray both sides of this complex and emotional issue.**

Our Findings

Our simple content analysis found that **79% of all *N&O* coverage during the first month following passage of HB2 illustrated a strong anti-HB2 sentiment. A meager 21% portrayed pro-HB2 sentiment.**

But of course, fairness is not all about word count. So, we identified and searched for three key facts or clarifications that *N&O* reporters could have included to more fully explain why people support HB2. **Out of a total of 93,960 words, only 1.7% (1,613 words) were devoted to these important facts!** (Please see [Our Methods & Findings](#).)

This is more astounding when you consider that there is widespread support of HB2 in North Carolina, particularly regarding the bathroom provision. Since the passage of HB2, there have been at least seven reputable polls released to the public. These all illustrated a North Carolina that is divided on the issue. Of these seven polls:

- NONE show a majority of North Carolinians opposing HB2.
- Five out of the seven show that at least a strong percentage, if not an outright majority, approves of the bathroom and locker room provision in HB2.

These numbers clearly illustrate that North Carolina remains divided, with widespread opinions on both sides.

A Tale of Two Rallies

This slanted reporting was most clearly present on Monday, April 25. The General Assembly had just convened for the 2016 Short Session of the Legislature. That day featured two rallies: one in support of HB2 and one in opposition. HB2 supporters numbered in the 2,000-3,000 range as illustrated by aerial photography. Anti-HB2 protestors totaled fewer than 1,000. This was not fairly or accurately reported by the *N&O*. On the contrary, *N&O* stories promoted—even celebrated—the outcry to repeal HB2, featuring videos, pictures, and stories about the rally and related activity in opposition to HB2, with very little attempt to provide coverage about pro-HB2 attendees or activities. The *N&O* only had one story that featured the thousands of citizens from all across the state who came to Raleigh on a workday to show their support and thankfulness for the measure. The *N&O* headline read, “Hundreds rally near NC Legislative Building to support HB2.” The picture that accompanied the story clearly shows thousands. Another story that day featured an extensive description of all the activities of those opposed to HB2 and included only one sentence about support, which said, “A rally earlier in the day on the opposite side of the building, on Halifax Mall, drew a large crowd of HB2 supporters.” This pattern is repeated in most of the *N&O* coverage of HB2; it was quite common to have nothing or simply one line that mentioned supporters within a long, descriptive article on anti-HB2 activities.

A real low point on the *N&O*’s coverage of HB2 was the story, “Raleigh’s Lake Boone Chicken blasts HB2,” featuring a stuffed chicken that sits on a rock outside a home in Raleigh. This 400-word story, complete with two pictures, demonstrates the lengths to which the *N&O* staff went to find new, creative ways to blast HB2. If only they had put a little bit of their creative juices to work to find and interview just a few of the reasonable and respectable people who support HB2.

On a related note, NC Family received quite a few requests from foreign journalists hoping to find and interview people who support HB2. “It’s easy to find the ones who oppose it,” we were recently told. We tell these reporters that the HB2 supporters are out there; the polls clearly show they are. However, they have been so vilified and mocked by the anti-HB2 forces and the media, that most have taken to quietly contacting their representatives and the governor, encouraging them to stay the course. **The news media, as illustrated by this case study of the *N&O*, has been complicit in the silencing of people who hold a view that differs from their own.**

Exploring Possible Motivations

If support/opposition remains divided on HB2, why has the *N&O* refused to report it that way? Let’s explore a few possibilities.

- The *N&O* has morphed into a partisan political blog competing against independent journalists/bloggers in a crowded market. It has abandoned even the facade of being a trustworthy community newspaper, designed to educate citizens and serve as a platform to discuss tough issues.
- **It values ratings and profit over the concern and interests of our local community.** Despite what many people think, the *N&O* is not a locally owned newspaper and hasn’t been since 1995. It is owned by the California-based McClatchy Company, which also owns *The Charlotte Observer* and 10 “community” newspapers in and around the Capital City, including Cary, Chapel Hill, Durham, Garner, and Clayton. As with all newspapers these days, times are tough. The *N&O* has reduced its professional staff by more than 50% over the past 8 years and recently sold its valuable downtown Raleigh property and moved operations to Garner.
- **It’s politically motivated.** That the *N&O* “leans left” has been a common complaint by conservative lawmakers and citizens for years. This could simply be yet another example of the *N&O* advocating for a left-leaning agenda.
- **The *N&O* is caught up in the rush** of the national media to condemn HB2 and to advocate for a “powerless” minority. Ironically, they have instead sided with powerful multinational corporations and the influential entertainment industry. This is not the first time the *N&O* has jumped on the national media bandwagon and ignored their responsibility to thoroughly investigate both sides and bring a voice of reason. “They start to quiver with a thrill when something like this happens,”

said *New York Times* Public Editor Dan Okrent in reference to a similar situation regarding the Duke Lacrosse case in Durham ten years ago.

- **They don't understand the pro-HB2 perspective.** Many of the writers might not know anyone who vocally supports HB2. They might truly believe that segregating bathrooms based solely on biological sex is morally wrong. This could lead to the characterization of those who support HB2 as morally corrupt and ignorant people.

According to the polling results, unless North Carolina is made up of a majority of ignorant and hateful people, **there are actually quite a few intelligent and compassionate people who support HB2. Those people deserve to have their voices and opinions presented.** It is the job of our community journalists to find and present those stories—particularly if their point of view is being underrepresented. The *N&O* failed in their responsibility to fairly present both sides of this contentious issue, and our state's reputation is the poorer for it.

Update: A poll [commissioned by the Civitas Institute in June](#) shows that North Carolinians recognize the clear media bias found in our content analysis. When likely voters were asked what best reflects their views regarding the accuracy and balance of North Carolina news media coverage surrounding House Bill 2, only 38 percent answered accurate and balanced compared to 50 percent that considered it not accurate and balanced. Specifically in the Triangle, only 14 percent considered the media coverage as very accurate and balanced compared to 33 percent that believed the coverage was not at all accurate or balanced.