

# JournoList: Isolated case or the tip of the iceberg?

Some of the liberal reporters in the JournoList online discussion group suggested that political biases should shape news coverage. Is the principle of journalistic impartiality disappearing?



A screen shot of 'The Daily Caller' website on Thursday, which has published more of the 'Journolist' entries on the state of journalism today.

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Atlanta —

Reporters fantasizing about ramming conservatives through plate glass windows or gleefully watching Rush Limbaugh perish: Welcome to the wild and woolly new world of journalism courtesy of the JournoList.

A conservative website, the Daily Caller, has begun publishing some of the 25,000 entries by 400 left-leaning journalists who were a part of the online community known as JournoList. In these entries, reporters and media types debate the news of the day, often in intemperate and unguarded terms – like now-former Washington Post reporter David Weigel's suggestion that conservative webmeister Matt Drudge "set himself on fire."

Another suggested that members of the group label some Barack Obama as critics racists in their reporting.

It is possible, perhaps probable, that the fedora-coiffed journalists of old might have entertained similar thoughts about political characters of the day. But JournoList raises the question of how thoroughly the tone and character of the no-holds-barred blogosphere are reshaping the mainstream media.

While it is not clear that the JournoList exchanges influenced coverage, they parroted the snarky language of the blogosphere as well as its pandering to political biases – in some cases, suggesting that those biases should be reflected in news coverage.

The Washington Post has already accepted the resignation of Mr. Weigel, who had been assigned to report on the conservative movement in America. But some media critics wonder if the Weigel case points to something larger.

"The big question for news organizations is to figure out how institutionalized [these views have become]," says Jim Campbell, a political scientist at the State University of New York in Buffalo. "Is the Post, for example, going to move beyond firing this

one guy and look to see whether others have done the same thing? Are they going to throw Woodward and Bernstein at their own newsroom? I kind of doubt it."

## How the media respond

So far, news organizations like the Post and National Public Radio, whose journalists took part in the list and have been quoted by the Daily Caller, are staying mostly mum about the scoop. The Post – which is at the center of the JournoList debacle because the list was run by Post reporter Ezra Klein – has declined comment, citing it as a "personnel matter."

Mr. Klein wrote in the Post Wednesday that JournoList journalists were simply wrestling with questions of how to deal with the new world of partisan online and cable media.

"How do you handle organizations like the Daily Caller that sell themselves as news outlets but 'are taking advantage of an older Progressive era concept of disinterestedness and objectivity to peddle partisan coverage?' " Klein writes.

"If I had thought there was some deep and dark conspiracy to protect [Obama], I can guarantee you I would've been a bit more selective" in who was accepted into the forum, Klein adds.

## Stepping over old lines

Yet the most controversial figure admitted to JournoList, the Washington Independent's Spencer Ackerman, makes few claims to disinterestedness and objectivity.

Mr. Ackerman suggested that colleagues divert attention from the Rev. Jeremiah Wright controversy that dogged then-candidate Obama's campaign in 2008 by calling certain conservative figures racists.

Ackerman fits the profile of the media's new breed of "blogger/journalists" who write partisan-leaning blogs under the imprimatur of old-school mastheads. One of Ackerman's blogs is called "Attackerman," and he said in a recent interview that "passion is looked down upon in general in journalism, simply because it's a bourgeois institution. If I come across as unprofessional, oh well."

For conservatives like former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, Ackerman's words are a gift. "It's encouraging for commonsense conservatives who are frustrated with media cover-ups and biases to see truth revealed," she wrote on her Facebook page

Yet media experts warn against casting the mainstream media as a monolithic unit.

"You can't just talk about 'the media' in this case," says Mike Hoyt, editor of the Columbia Journalism Review. "There are all kinds of reporters, and some of them are progressives and liberals and some of them aren't."

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