

Dear NBC Affiliate Owner,

At Conservative War Chest we are old enough to remember Chet Huntley and David Brinkley providing a master class in TV reporting and political coverage. “The Huntley-Brinkley Report,” though, was only one of the more visible effects of a broader professional culture established by veteran journalist and news chief Reuven Frank and personified over the years by reporters like Sander Vanocur, Robert McNeil, James Polk and Lisa Myers. Another important part of NBC’s journalistic ethos was the encouragement of reporting on government corruption and cover-ups – no matter the party identification of the officials accused of wrongdoing.

That admirable ethos is carried on today by many NBC affiliates through local news departments that try to hold to the standards that once made NBC’s network news a respected name in journalism. Precisely because those standards still matter to many of you and because the integrity of American journalism is gravely threatened we write to you today.

## I. A CRISIS IN AMERICAN JOURNALISM

### PURPOSE OF LETTER, BACKGROUND

Before addressing the question of the role we hope you will take in restoring journalism's professional and ethical standards, please permit a word of background. In the recent election Conservative War Chest ran TV spots alleging that for ideological or commercial reasons corporate officials at America's elite news organizations were discouraging, altering or suppressing their own reporters work if that work didn't fit a news narrative these executives favored.

Accordingly, in one advertisement that received national exposure, we talked about "the suits in the suites" who have "little understanding of journalism ethics or tradition" and "want to be partisan players and don't want to talk truth to power." They were responsible, we claimed, for the "corruption of American journalism."

Such charges can of course be easily dismissed as standard fare from the right – the sort of media criticism to be expected from groups like our own. Yet because you are closer to the real America than those who occupy the corporate offices of most major news organizations (and this is especially so with Comcast and NBC) we think you will not be surprised to learn the claim in our advertisement resonated with the public ... a resonance that has to do with the shockingly low estimations Americans tell public opinion pollsters they have of the

news media. Indeed, a recent Gallup [poll](#) found 60 percent of Americans did not express confidence in the media's ability to report "the news fully, accurately, and fairly."<sup>1</sup>

Because we believe you understand the seriousness of America's discontent with news organizations, we are also hopeful that we can persuade you that the network of which you are such an integral and conspicuous part is an important reason for the present crisis of American journalism.

### **CLIPS: A SELF EVIDENT CASE**

Substantiating the allegation that *NBC News* poses a threat to journalistic integrity is no great challenge. A vivid and powerful dossier of self-indictment is found in compilations of NBC daily news coverage by watchdog websites like the Media Research Center and Breitbart Big Journalism – websites that while hardly unbiased are, we believe, reliable in their research.

One particularly representative example is NBC's coverage of America's most recent major political event.

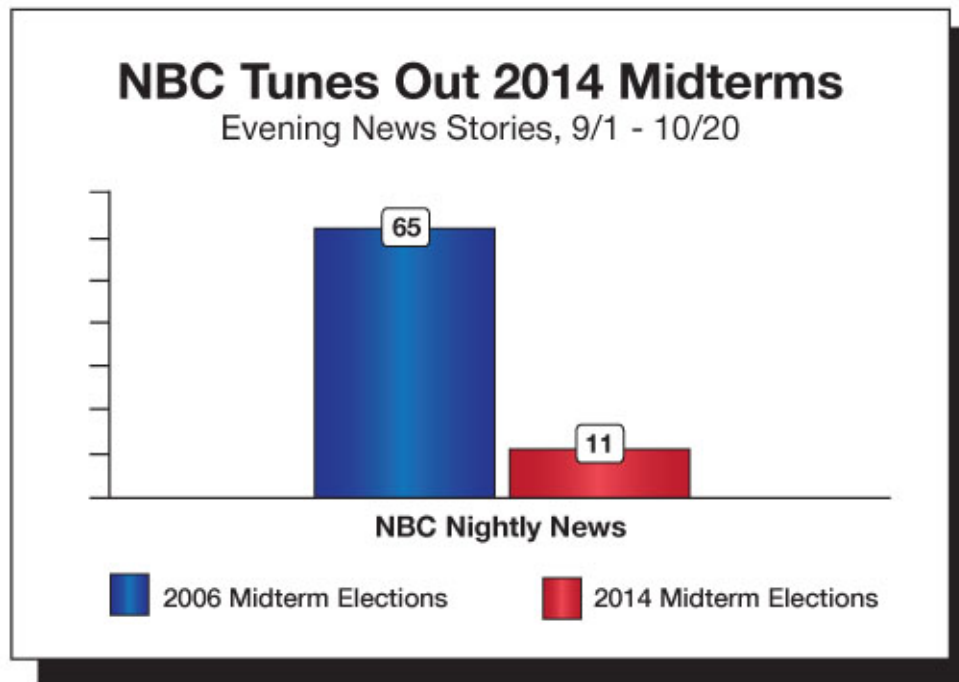
### **ELECTION 2014**

Surely very little about the November 4<sup>th</sup> midterm elections reminded you of prior election nights with NBC. To begin with, the optics were markedly bizarre – the awkwardness of Tom Brokaw's cell phone going off during live returns or

former NBC stars Katie Couric and David Gregory – both with multi-million dollar golden parachutes paid out of your network fees – reduced to broadcasting election coverage, along with an a cappella singing group from a bar on Capitol Hill over the Internet.

So distracting, yes. But such moments also speak to a larger problem evidenced in a similarly eerie yet quite substantive way by NBC’s website – for the five days leading up to November 4<sup>th</sup> the site had more stories on the civil unrest in Burkina Faso than on the American midterm elections.<sup>2</sup>

And the problem wasn’t only the website. The chart below compares NBC’s 2014 coverage with the last comparable midterm (six years into an administration). As you can see, NBC’s news coverage of the election campaign was just a variation of the problem seen with the website’s Burkina Faso fixation. In 2006, “NBC Nightly News” aired 65 midterm stories, but in 2014 “NBC Nightly News” aired only 11 – an 83 percent decline in coverage between Sept. 1 and Oct. 20 of each midterm election.<sup>3</sup>



You can see the enormous imbalance. We hope to show you the reason for it.

**SPARKS OF INTEREST: WHEN 2014 BECAME NEWSWORTHY AT NBC**

Interestingly enough, finding the reason for this extraordinary imbalance and why, comparatively speaking, the 2014 election became something of a non-event for NBC is best done by taking note of the several occasions when the network *did* show a heightened interest in campaign developments.

NBC Political Director Chuck Todd’s interest in the campaign took a lively turn last summer, for example. In singling out a legal action by Congressional Republicans against the Obama Administration, the host of “Meet The Press”

thought he spotted a development that might swing the election to the Democrats in an appearance on MSNBC's "The Daily Rundown."

"If November comes and goes and Democrats hold the Senate and break even in the House, I think we're going to look back at the month of July as the month Republicans lost their shot at the Senate," Mr. Todd said. "For months Democrats have been dying to have something to run on for themselves, but now they have it – a lawsuit that fires up their base and one more example of Republicans struggling to govern."<sup>4</sup>

GOP candidates though went on rising in the polls so the alleged Republican obstructionism did not pan out as Mr. Todd foresaw. But, by September, Mr. Todd's interest had spiked again. This time the stimulus and "news" were polls showing Kansas Gov. Sam Brownback running behind his Democratic opponent.

"Could Republicans now become the victims of a new anti anti-tax fever" was the provocative and dramatically delivered question with which Mr. Todd began the Sept. 21, 2014, "Meet the Press" broadcast as an on-screen headline also blared "Anti Anti-Tax Cut Fever."<sup>5</sup> This was preceded by a video clip of a disapproving Kansan saying about Gov. Brownback's tax policies: "It's been a train wreck."

Mr. Todd saw the potential for big news here – Gov. Brownback's problem was part of a national trend.

“If he loses re-election, he’s going to essentially have lost because he cut taxes too much. Okay? That’s really become a referendum. Is there a point – what happens to the Republicans’ economic philosophy of cut taxes if he does lose?”<sup>6</sup>

The task of defending the tax cuts on the show fell to Rep. Paul Ryan, but the overall effect of “Meet the Press” that day was clear enough. NBC’s lead political show had elevated to national attention – and in a way far more effective than any Democratic candidate’s speeches or DNC TV spots – a hitherto largely unnoticed issue: GOP tax cutting as a “train wreck” and as a threat to the whole party’s credibility.

Choosing to lead “Meet The Press,” NBC’s flagship Sunday political show, with a governor’s race in Kansas during a year when control of the U.S. Senate was at stake may have seemed a reach. But, again, Mr. Todd could not have been more emphatic about the national even historical significance of Gov. Brownback’s imminent political demise and the implications for the Republican Party as a whole.

But if Mr. Todd was trying to provide Democrats with a new formation for their campaign playbook the attempt failed. Just like the GOP obstructionism charge Mr. Todd highlighted in August as a possible key to a Democratic resurgence, the Brownback political death spiral also didn’t materialize. The governor eventually won reelection by a comfortable four points.

**“LATE SURGE,” “SURPRISINGLY CLOSE ELECTION,” “NO WAVE,”  
“BORDERING ... ON A WAVE” – NBC WORKS WITH WHAT IT GETS**

As polls continued to show a Republican advantage enthusiasm at NBC for election coverage continued to falter. This changed, however, on the eve of the election as NBC’s political director and host of “Meet The Press” made a surprising prediction on “NBC Nightly News”: Mr. Todd told the nation he had spied “a late surge of Democratic enthusiasm” that was turning the election into a “surprisingly close contest.”<sup>7</sup>

Like his prior predictions of good news for Democrats, this pre-election forecast was unfounded. (And surely only a cynic would note that it did provide, however, a much-needed morale boost and last-minute help to Democratic election-day turnout.)

On election night, far from acknowledging his earlier mistaken projection however, Mr. Todd seemed quite reluctant to make adjustments, at least for a while. As returns suggesting an historic election poured in, he could only manage “It’s a good Republican night.” But, as he also told NBC viewers, “it’s not a wave.”<sup>8</sup>

As the night wore on and the voters gave Republicans a mandate on governing at nearly all levels of government that they had not had since the 1920s, Mr. Todd did revise his view. Though only grudgingly. The results meant that NBC was “*bordering* on calling this a wave election,” he said.<sup>9</sup>



## **NBC’S REAL TROUBLE WITH THE 2014 MIDTERMS: FITTING EVENTS INTO A STANDING POLITICAL NARRATIVE**

Aside from predicting a Democratic “late surge” and “a surprisingly close election,” Mr. Todd joined “NBC Nightly News” anchor Brian Williams in blaming Democratic Party problems not so much on authentic anti-Obama sentiment but on amorphous-sounding phenomena like “voter anger” and an “anti-incumbent mood.” Mr. Todd especially singled out Republicans “using the president as a political piñata.”<sup>10</sup>

Although the worn “piñata” cliché was hardly inspired phrase-making, its use did suggest that Republican complaints about the Obama Administration were similarly pedestrian in nature – not very high-minded complaints and grievances by an opposition party against an incumbent administration in an election-year.

And Mr. Todd was hardly alone in all this. On election night, one of NBC’s most prominent correspondents, Andrea Mitchell, said criticisms of the Obama Administration amounted to “a scare tactic by the Republican opponents of Democratic incumbents, who tried to focus on ISIS and Ebola in the scariest, most non-factual ways, to take the eye off the real issues.”<sup>11</sup>

Mr. Todd’s statements, then, as well as those of others like Mr. Williams and Ms. Mitchell, suggested the underlying reason for NBC’s lack of attention to the midterm election was its failure to conform to a pre-existing perspective. Mr.

Todd's not-so-subtle piñata-belittling of legitimate anti-Obama sentiment, after all, along with comments about voter anger and moodiness, showed him taking a tact similar to the one taken in August and September when he had seen GOP ineptitude or tax cut policy as potential election-year turning points. The pattern becomes clear: Just as NBC kept looking for good news for President Obama and his party, the network had an aversion to covering the mid-term election whenever it appeared to be shaping up as a negative referendum on the Obama Administration.

## **NOT JUST THE 2014 ELECTION**

But missing a story like the 2014 midterm because of a predetermined perspective on the Obama Administration was not a first-time event at NBC News. Indeed, we believe the sweep and scope of such stories is considerable ~~and willful~~.

Over the past few years, for example, NBC viewers haven't been overburdened with references to a steadily mounting number of Obama Administration scandals with shorthand terms like "Fast and Furious," "IRS," "Benghazi," "VA," and "Secret Service." Nor were viewers subjected to excessive in-depth reporting of these events. In addition they were hardly barraged with stories about the many rebukes of the administration for its illegal actions by U.S. courts, such as 20 unanimous rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court.<sup>12</sup>

In foreign policy news too, NBC also avoided emphasis on suddenly erased “redlines,” malfunctioning “resets” and a surprisingly formidable “jayvee team,” as well as debacles like Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the collapse of Iraq, Middle Eastern chaos and new threats to Israel. (A cynic might speculate here on what NBC’s response might have been if any of these events occurred under, say, a Republican president, toward whom it was not predisposed. We recall here NBC’s relentless quest for truth and vigorous pursuit of the public’s right to know in covering Abu Ghraib, Hurricane Katrina, the claims – most of them false – of Richard Clarke before the 9/11 Commission and the contrived “Valerie Plame” controversy.)

Finally, NBC did not really report President’s Obama’s spectacular fall in approval ratings and explore its tie to his promises to the American people about Obamacare. So, NBC repeatedly ignored the central story of this presidency: President Obama, having told U.S. families they could keep their insurance plans, their doctor and achieve savings of as much as \$2,500 a year, seemed to have a crossed that line with the American public incumbent presidents sometimes cross, a line usually marked by approval ratings in the low 40s or high 30s. This is a line generally considered designating a “failed” presidency and a point-of-no-return from which a president cannot recover public trust.

The pattern here of stories left unreported or underreported again suggests that unless events conform to a preferred NBC news narrative they are not really news.

This pattern about all things Obama began early at NBC.

## **THE OBAMA NARRATIVE: AN EARLY INVESTMENT**

We invite you to review a handful of early quotes and clips from the official face and voice of “NBC Nightly News” – Brian Williams on the subject of Barack Obama.

*Brian Williams, Jan. 7, 2008 interview with Sen. Barack Obama:* “On the bus ride along the snowy road to Lebanon, New Hampshire, I showed him [Obama] this week’s *Newsweek*, hot off the presses. [To Obama] How does this feel, of all the honors that have come your way, all the publicity? ... Who does it make you think of? Is there, is there a loved one?”

*Brian Williams, July 24, 2008, interview with Sen. Obama:* “When an American politician comes to Berlin, we’ve had some iconic utterances in the past. We’ve had ‘*Ich bin ein.*’ We’ve had, ‘Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall’ ... Is the phraseology that you would like remembered: ‘People of Berlin, people of the world, this is our moment, this is our time’?”

*Brian Williams, Nov. 5, 2008:* “This nation woke up this morning changed. As one columnist put it, America matured in 2008 by choosing Barack Obama.”

*Brian Williams, on CBS Late Show with David Letterman, Jan. 26, 2009:*

“For a public event, it was absolutely stunning. People with tears in their eyes, Dave, people lining up, and this is something I just can't wrap my arms around, to buy merchandise with any depiction – this is a guy we just elected president. It's not a rock star or an athlete or an actor. This is our president. To see people, whatever your politics, that excited about our new chief executive after a line of what the ordinary voter would maybe describe as bad choices or choices of evils, for years, generations, it is unbelievable to me.”

*Brian Williams, interview with President Obama, MSNBC, June, 2009:*

“About this president. The very idea of this man, this product of Kenya and Kansas by way of Hawaii and Asia, as our 44th president is still so very new. And he is so different from all the men who've gone before him. People react strongly to this president

We've seen people moved to tears after just the briefest encounter with him ... Now it is First Family time and time for us to say goodnight. Mr. President that's your elevator. Thank you sir, have a good evening." (Mr. Williams then bows).

*Brian Williams, interview with the president on Aug. 29, 2010: "Finally, I'm hoping to find you in a reflective mood on a cloudy day. We're the first to speak to you coming off your summer vacation. How does it re-charge you? What do you think about? What do you see? What do you read about? How are you thinking about your job these days?"*

Is it fair to say in some of these clips Mr. Williams sounds, well, overenthusiastic, maybe even gushy?

We think so. But if you find those characterizations inaccurate or overdone we would ask this: Can you imagine any of Mr. Williams' predecessors at NBC making such an unprofessional display about a candidate or a sitting president?

We don't think so.

Mr. Williams' early views of Barrack Obama were only set-up for what was to come.

## **ASSISTING THE INCUMBENT – HEADING OFF EARLY OPPONENTS**

In the early stages of the Tea Party protests against Obama Administration policies, NBC's Political Director Chuck Todd said:

“There's been some grassroots conservatives who have organized so-called Tea Parties around the country, hoping the historical reference will help galvanize Americans against the president's economic policies. But, I tell you, the idea hasn't really caught on.”<sup>13</sup>

Regardless of how you feel about the Tea Party, as a matter of objective reporting, “the idea” was big news. And it certainly did “catch on.” In the first year of the Obama Administration, hundreds of thousands of politically inactive Americans reacted negatively to administration claims that a trillion-dollar stimulus would lead to economic good times and objected vociferously, as well as to Obama's plan to nationalize U.S. health care. From seemingly nowhere they became a new and powerful political force, staging marches on Washington, deposing long-standing incumbents in Republican primaries and running strong and sometimes winning races against prominent Democrats. Not since Barry Goldwater's and Gene McCarthy's uprisings in the '60s had America's political establishment faced such a powerful grassroots insurgency.

So, having dismissed any real Tea Party trouble for President Obama and the political establishment with the same uncanny predictive powers that one day would allow him to foresee a “surprisingly close” 2014 election due to a late

Democratic “surge,” Mr. Todd again showed how the weight of NBC’s own intensely held political perspective compelled it to miss a major news story. Even NBC News, however, had to take notice after the Tea Party organized a massive march on Washington. In rolling out what seemed a sort of network fallback position on the Tea Party, Brian Williams told Americans who these new protestors really were.

“ . . . Signs and images at last weekend's big Tea Party march in Washington and at other recent events have featured racial and other violent themes, and President Carter today said he is extremely worried by it.”<sup>14</sup>

So the Tea Party is racist and violent because Mr. Carter said so?”

Besides untrue, unfair and just plain nasty – two of the boldest falsehoods ever spoken by an American news anchor – Mr. Williams’ trumpeting of President Jimmy Carter as the nation’s conscience on race baiting added a sad and ironic note to the decline in standards and ethics at *NBC News*. So shallow is the network’s political memory it can not even recall President Carter in the 1980 presidential campaign sparking outrage in many editorial quarters, including a blistering editorial in *The Washington Post*, for reverting to Carter’s history (starting as a state senator in Georgia) of using race to savage opponents late in campaigns. Blithely unaware of all that and that President Carter in October of 1980 had to go on network TV and apologize to the nation for his race-baiting, Mr. Williams also didn’t seem to know the first reporter at a presidential press



conference to challenge Mr. Carter's compulsive habit of hypocrisy on race was NBC reporter Lisa Myers.

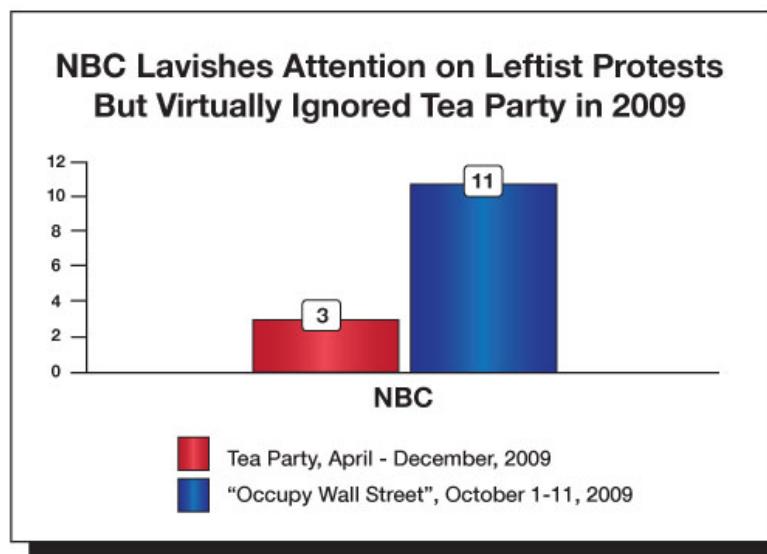
Times have changed though at NBC. Ms. Myers, among others, is gone. So too, apparently, is a sense of decency about the seriousness of racial issues and much else.

### **AN INSTRUCTIVE CONTRAST: NBC ON THE OCCUPY MOVEMENT**

The contrast between NBC's coverage of the Tea Party and the Occupy Wall Street movements provides a revealing follow-up.

Compared to the Tea Party the Occupy movement did not have extensive grassroots support or a capacity to affect the political process. Yet the Occupy movement and its left-of-center demonstrations got dramatically different treatment from NBC.

Here is another [chart](#) you many find instructive.<sup>15</sup>



NBC also obliged Occupy by declining to report in any serious way on the movement's quite visibly viscous characterizations of its political targets, its displays of anger and its plague of criminal assaults in the parks it illegally occupied.

**A NEWS DEPARTMENT THAT REFUSES TO REPORT ON ADMINISTRATION CORRUPTION BECAUSE OF A FAVORABLE BIAS IS ONE THING. BUT A NEWS DEPARTMENT THAT HELPS THAT ADMINISTRATION COVER-UPS IS ANOTHER CASE ALTOGETHER**

We can cite three examples:

*Example One—the IRS.* In May 2013, the Treasury Department Inspector General for Tax Administration issued a report documenting successful attempts of Internal Revenue Service (IRS) officials denying First Amendment rights to political dissenters. IRS officials then preemptively released this information and attributed the wrongdoing to “rogue agents” in its “Cincinnati office.” Lois Lerner, then-Director of the IRS’s Exempt Organizations, declined to cooperate with a Congressional investigation by taking the Fifth Amendment when asked about her role and any contacts with the White House. She was found in contempt of Congress.

Newly appointed IRS Commissioner John Koskinen, in an appearance before a congressional committee that seemed almost comical in its defiance and

ineptitude, subsequently claimed under oath that tens of thousands of IRS e-mails, including Ms. Lerner's, were irretrievably lost. At the insistence of the Congress and the courts computer experts recovered approximately 30,000 of the irretrievably lost e-mails. In the meantime, Attorney General Holder also refused to appoint a special counsel to look into the pattern of wrongdoing and public falsehoods by IRS officials or examine the extent of any potential Obama White House involvement. Instead Mr. Holder kept the investigation in-house by turning it over to a Justice Department lawyer who was also an Obama campaign contributor. President Obama – even as his own Justice Department and the FBI are just getting underway with an investigation – told the American people the IRS scandal shows “not a smidgen of corruption.”

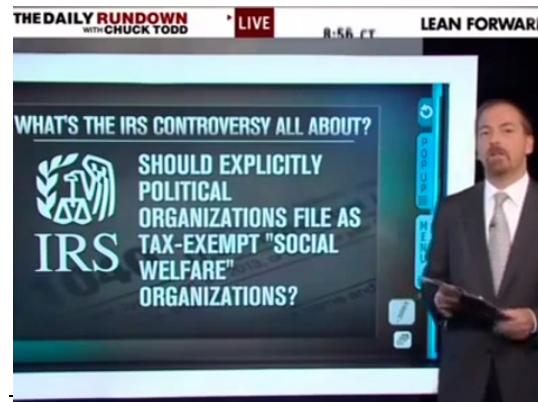
As a font of illicit activity and cover-ups, the IRS scandal featured a set of events that certainly should have invited any national news organization's reporting and investigation. Yet, while arguably a scandal beyond the Nixon Administration's wildest imaginings, it still failed to excite any serious reportorial or investigative interest at NBC News.

NBC did come up with one unusual angle on the story though. And, once again, Mr. Todd was out front. We invite you to watch a clip of Mr. Todd's MSNBC show “My Take” on MSNBC's “The Daily Rundown.”

Click [here to watch](#) Mr. Todd's segment.

We also draw your attention to a column about Mr. Todd's segment. Headlined "Chuck Todd's Nixonian Defense of the IRS," the column is by John Nolte, editor of Breitbart's Big Journalism. While hardly a neutral observer, Mr. Nolte is, we think, an accurate reporter and a keen analyst. (Indeed, he had a lead role in the recent exposure of the bogus *Rolling Stone*-fraternity rape story.)

Nolte wrote in his 6/26/14 piece:



"NBC Senior White House Correspondent Chuck Todd's Nixonian defense of the IRS earlier this week was so intellectually dishonest and filled with lies of omission, regardless of your political beliefs, no intellectually honest person can watch without marveling at the mendacity.

"In a mere 90 seconds during a segment called 'My Take' on his MSNBC show 'The Daily Rundown,' Todd used his admittedly impressive political

and analytical skills to mislead his audience into believing the IRS scandal is something it's not.

“Let's start at the beginning, with Todd's statement that ‘the question [of the IRS scandal] at hand is whether explicit political groups should be filing for status as social welfare groups.’

“That's just not true.

“The ‘question at hand’ is not what the law is. The question at hand is how the law – whether you agree with it or not – was selectively used and applied by our government to grant one side protection under the law and harass the other side seeking that same protection.

“Furthermore, not once does Todd bother to inform the viewer that conservative political groups were the ones singled out, harassed, and paralyzed (with endless red tape in the form of audits, intrusive questions, stalls, and paperwork) by their own government in the run-up to a presidential [election] year.

“Not once does Todd inform his viewers that a number of Democrat lawmakers asked the IRS to single out conservative groups in this fashion.

“Todd does say that both conservative and liberal groups have complained about being singled out, but that’s just Todd mealy-mouthing around the truth.

“By saying what other people say, Todd dodges having to inform his viewers that the facts are quite simple: Conservative groups were singled out for harassment by the IRS and therefore – whether you agree with the law or not – the “question at hand” is how high does the corruption go that allowed this to happen?

“Todd then asks a rhetorical question: Are there any ‘real victims’ in the IRS scandal. And the answer he’s obviously attempting to convey to his audience is a big fat no.

“Again this is a lie of omission. It is not a subjective opinion that when the federal government, especially in the form of the IRS, clamps down on one political group over another, the victim is not just our free and fair

democracy, it is every person and group singled out to a point where their civil right of free expression was suppressed.

“This, however, is where Todd crosses a line that I have yet to see anyone – including his colleagues at MSNBC – cross:

“This scandal is not black and white since, frankly, two wrongs do not make a right.

“Apparently, in Todd’s mind there are no victims because everyone is a bad faith player.

“Except ... they’re not.

“Todd might not like the rule that allows political groups to file under a certain status, but there is nothing WRONG or even close to WRONG with following the law by filing papers with your government in accordance with the law to receive a legal status that legions of your counterparts on the left side of the aisle have been granted.

“What is WRONG and criminal and un-American is The People’s own government abusing its power in ways Nixon never dreamed of to harass, attack, intimidate, and paralyze the voices of everyday people following the rules in order to have an equal voice in their democracy.

“What is also WRONG is a media (not just Todd) so warped and frustrated by the idea of everyday, right-of-center Americans competing with them for a voice in the political debate, that they abandon the honored trust of being democracies watchdogs to instead assume the Nixonian posture of protecting – not just power, but poisoned and corrupted power.

“All things being the same, if gay and/or black and/or any left-wing group had been singled out by the IRS in this fashion, Todd and the media would not be attempting to shift the focus of the scandal to the validity of a law as opposed to where it belongs: on a powerful government giving left-wing groups selective protection under that law while using bureaucratic water torture to tie the hands of conservative groups seeking those same protections.”

*Example Two—Benghazi.* The facts of the Benghazi controversy are as follows: In the midst of the 2012 presidential campaign, President Obama



repeatedly told audiences how his administration had suppressed terrorism around the globe. Then terrorists staged a devastating attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi on the anniversary of 9/11 killing four Americans including U.S. Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens. The administration then told the American people for five straight days that the Benghazi attack in Libya was not the work of terrorists, but a spontaneous, mob reaction to an American-made You Tube video that had offended Muslim sensibilities.

Congressional hearings established (and a memoir from former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta later confirmed) that in the first hours U.S. intelligence and Defense Department officials were telling the administration that the attack was terrorist-related, and that the administration engaged in a series of hurriedly devised yet elaborate plans to not only keep this information from the public and Congress, but actually concoct a bogus story about the anti-Islamic video.

Again, NBC missed the story – showing little interest in the trail of conference calls, emails, hastily called meetings and staged public appearances that should have excited all the reportorial and investigative instincts of any news organization committed to holding public officials accountable and upholding the public's right to know.

But the network also gravely compounded that mistake by seeking to portray attempts to find the truth as mere partisan positioning.

Consider NBC's Cover Up Assistance – NBC's Political Director again took the lead. On "Meet The Press" Chuck Todd asked U.S. Sen. Jeff Flake, a Republican from Arizona:

"Is it time for the Republicans to drop the Benghazi conspiracy theories?"<sup>16</sup>

The phrase "conspiracy theory" suggests, of course, that anyone seeing a problem in the administration's behavior probably hails from the land of grassy knolls and tinfoil hats. The Benghazi scandal does not interest Mr. Todd. What does interest him is a variation of his determination to attribute allegations of any administration troubles to Republican "piñata" making. This was possibly the most elaborate attempt at a foreign policy cover-up by an administration since the Gulf of Tonkin incident. Again, all Mr. Todd could see was self-interested Republican attempts to create a political issue with "conspiracy theories."

*Example Three—the surveillance of reporters and Mr. Holder's testimony.*

Reporters from The Associated Press to Fox News were subjected to Department of Justice surveillance over leaked government information. Some of these activities were personally signed off on by Attorney General Eric Holder. Before the surveillance became known Mr. Holder was asked under oath before Congress whether the Justice Department was considering investigating or prosecuting any members of the media for espionage. Mr. Holder answers:

“With regard to potential prosecution of the press for the disclosure of material – this is not something I’ve ever been involved in, heard of, or would think would be wise policy.”<sup>17</sup>

Later, the Department of Justice admitted that Holder had personally approved the application for the search warrant for Fox reporter James Rosen’s Gmail account. Indeed the Department states that after “extensive deliberations,” the “highest levels” of leadership at the Department had “discussions” and approved of the filing of an application for a search warrant that specifically represented to the court that a reporter had “potential criminal liability in this matter.”<sup>18</sup>

So though Eric Holder testified he had not been “involved in” or even “heard of” any “potential prosecution of the press,” the Justice Department was forced to clearly and specifically contradict him.

Other news organizations saw the significance. A *Dallas Morning News* editorial in June, 4, 2013, found that “Eric Holder’s Authority Crumbles Amid Contradictions.”

And, once again, NBC did not just miss the story here.

*NBC Cover Up Assistance* – In the most revealing take on NBC’s view of the surveillance scandal and the Attorney General’s perjury problem, Mr. Todd made extended remarks on Mr. Holder when he announced his resignation. He not only failed to mention Mr. Holder’s invasion of reporter’s rights and alleged

perjury, but cast aspersions on Republicans who questioned Mr. Holder before Congress.

Mr. Todd said:

“And he's [Holder] been an enormous important ally to the president in a way that I think people don't understand. Eric Holder took a lot of the slings and arrows at him from Republicans in Congress that were essentially intended for the president ... He probably got more vicious questioning sometimes from committee hearings than we'd seen many attorney generals get ...”<sup>19</sup>

Mr. Todd then asserted how “non-political” Mr. Holder was:

“But what's interesting about him, he's a very non-political person. And I think people used to mistakenly think that this guy was this long-time political operative who happened to be an attorney general. That's not him at all. In fact, that used to get him in some hot water with some of the president's own political aides who sometimes felt that Eric Holder wasn't thinking about the politics of an issue ... Those type of issues where he'd get heat inside the White House because they felt he wasn't political enough. And yet, to the outside world, he'd get criticized, say from Republicans on

Capitol Hill, because they thought, ‘Oh, he's being too much – too political.’

The guy wasn't political at all and in many ways just ended up being the point person to attract a lot of – a lot of attacks.”<sup>20</sup>

So there we have it. Mr. Todd’s gift for Orwellian inversions leads him to tell the American public that Mr. Holder drew a lot of attacks from Republicans because he was so “non-political.”

A final note on the Holder-perjury issue: CWC asked in one of our television commercials during the recent campaign this single question:

*“Did you ever think the day would come when major news organizations wouldn’t really report on an Attorney General of the United States perjuring himself before Congress when asked about government surveillance of reporters – a surveillance exposed as one of the gravest assaults on First Amendment rights in American history?”<sup>21</sup>*

We ask it again.

## **A SUMMARY POINT ABOUT NBC NEWS**

Since the beginning of Barack Obama’s national rise, NBC appears to have had an established news narrative about him, one that saw Mr. Obama leading a

steady march by the forces of liberalism and progressivism to a lasting political ascendancy.

Thus, news that does not fit this predetermined political narrative about the Obama Administration and, by extension, liberal Democrats, is not seen as news. So too, conservative dissenters or Republican officeholders are ignored to the extent possible and if that became untenable (because they were picking up national support) their criticisms were portrayed as low-minded partisan “piñata”-making or “scare tactics” or “conspiracy theories.” In the case of a truly nationwide movement like the Tea Party, they are slandered with utterly unsubstantiated and false – ferociously false – imputations of racism and violence-advocacy. (On this latter point, this article is particularly instructive.)

NBC, then, consistently misses the story and fails to cover the news. But beyond what amounts to a news blackout on the weaknesses and vulnerabilities of the Obama Administration, NBC also goes to a place that for a news organization is a more ominous and a far worse place to be – not just failing to cover government scandals, but helping to cover them up and even cheerlead on behalf of those who stonewall – and stonewall for what one day may be seen as the most lawless and scandal-ridden administration in modern U.S. history.

## **II. THE SOURCE OF THE PROBLEM**

## **MR. WILLIAMS AND MR. TODD ARE NOT THE ISSUE – AND NOT EVEN THE NBC NEWS CULTURE IS THE ISSUE**

In decades past NBC hosts and anchors (whatever their personal political views were) had a rectitude as news professionals about their public role, keeping away from being too critical on air of conservatives or Republicans as well as wary of appearing too sympathetic to liberals and Democrats. And they most certainly never wanted to run the risk of being seen as helpful to cover ups of corruption.

Mr. Williams and Mr. Todd obviously lack such restraint. In one sense that is unsurprising. Mr. Williams, before he became anchor, had modest journalistic achievements, and, so far as we know, those of Mr. Todd's are even less auspicious. This is unsurprising since before his current position he had worked on the 1992 presidential campaign of Sen. Tom Harkin, a liberal Democrat, and edited a political newsletter. Having never covered, then, cops, courts and foreign wars, Mr. Todd is not likely to be taken for a grizzled news veteran but for what he is – a political activist with access to network TV.

The fact, however, that both Mr. Williams and Mr. Todd are preeminent faces and voices of *NBC News* obviously raises the larger question of a news culture of which they are a part, one that, given the cumulative weight of the evidence presented in the prior pages, can be called professionally unhealthy. Indeed, NBC's news culture seems to be one that no news organization can ever

allow itself to be – parochial and closed off. In plainly reflecting all sorts of diversity except the political views and cultural sentiments of a majority of the American public (opinion polls show a basically conservative electorate), NBC news seems as parochial as any left-of-center activist group or political Super PAC.

Again, it is worth noting that even beyond this closed-shop aspect and NBC's refusal to give conservative views a fair hearing, there is a more ominous dimension. This is not only a systematic failure to report and investigate most instances of government corruption when it involves the incumbent administration or liberal Democrats, but the active development of “puff piece” defenses of administration officials or agencies accused of wrongdoing.

### **BREAKING THE PATTERN: FEROCITY ABOUT ALLEGED WRONGDOING, AS LONG AS IT INVOLVES CONSERVATIVES OR REPUBLICANS**

In sharp contrast to NBC's tendency to under-report corruption allegations against Obama Administration officials or attribute them to Republican “piñata” – making and “scare tactics” and “conspiracy theories,” the network can show an enormous appetite for any sort of allegation against prominent Republicans and, sometimes, not-so prominent ones.

We cite two recent examples.



1) Last year, NBC did extensive investigative reports on “Bridgegate” involving allegations against Republican New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie. This involved a lead story on “The Nightly News.” This supposed “scandal” story appeared at a time when Gov. Christie was a potential front-runner for the Republican 2016 presidential nomination, while left-of-center and Democratic Party operatives were doing considerable research on the Bridgegate allegations.

Thus, before a national audience and at great length NBC News reported allegations Gov. Christie may have deliberately shut traffic lanes on the George Washington Bridge as a form of retaliation against a city official who had declined to support his re-election bid. The *NBC News* reports – which were never properly “sourced” and had a prepackaged feel– severely, if temporarily, damaged Gov. Christie’s reputation and standing in the polls. Later a probe by an outside counsel concluded Christie had no knowledge of the lane shutdowns – just as he had claimed at the time. At this writing, it appears that investigators are preparing to conclude that Gov. Christie had no knowledge of lane shutdowns, just as he claimed at the time. Whatever the final verdict may be, not a few media observers noted the contrast between NBC spending so much air time on the “Bridgegate” scandal and the paltry 5 seconds – yes 5 seconds – it gave the IRS scandal. In all, television news had 44 times the coverage of “Bridgegate” than in six months of reporting on the IRS scandal.<sup>22</sup>

2) In early December 2014, NBC's "Today" and "Nightly News" spent over six minutes of its national news broadcast reporting on a brief, unfortunate Facebook post by a Republican Capitol Hill staffer, one of thousands, about the apparel of the Obama daughters.<sup>23</sup> Again, not a few people noted a network news department that has declined to do any serious reporting about the IRS, Benghazi or Holder-perjury scandals spent an inordinate amount of time trying to suggest – and not so subtly – that Republicans were politically targeting children of the First Family.

What is intriguing about both stories is their almost comical shakiness as national news items and how coincidentally – or perhaps not so coincidentally – they appeared while being heavily pushed by high-level Democratic Party operatives in Washington. And while we are reluctant to suggest Mr. Williams and his show's producers are taking secret daily orders from a clandestine underground bunker operated by Valerie Jarrett and John Podesta – we do note that journalistic ethics demands that if stories come from partisan, self-interested parties, the network has an obligation to disclose that to viewers.

A note is also appropriate here on two further aspects of these events. Gov. Andrew Cuomo of New York – also mentioned as a Democratic Party presidential hopeful – has faced allegations of a far more serious nature than those directed at Gov. Christie. According to a *New York Times* story the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District is investigating charges that Gov. Cuomo interfered with and

shuttered his own anti-corruption Moreland Commission.<sup>24</sup> It goes without saying the “Nightly News” did not give a fraction of the attention to this matter that it gave to Bridgegate.

Similarly, the political assaults on family members of prominent Republicans – we think here of the savagery directed against former Gov. Sarah Palin’s children – has never interested NBC News.

Obviously, specific incidents like these may only be remembered by conservatives or Republicans. Indeed, some Republicans can still vividly recall the extraordinary coverage over several days just before the 2006 midterm election – an election NBC apparently thought worth covering because polls showed Democrats possibly making gains – in which NBC replayed constantly an allegation about a Republican congressman sending inappropriate e-mails and text messages to a former congressional page. From Sept. 28 to Oct. 10 alone, NBC covered the Mark Foley scandal 56 times, 20 times on “Nightly News” and 36 times on “Today.” What goes without saying is that NBC News has never given a fraction of this sort of coverage to the many scandals involving Democratic members of Congress. And that is not to mention its refusal to report on or investigate any of the major scandals of the Obama Administration.

Here is the problem for NBC when it is engaged in such unbalanced coverage. Over the long run this unfairness makes an impression not just on

Republicans, but on a general public that over time does gain a broad sense of a network doing special pleading for one side and against another.

Having crossed the wrong side of that line long ago, NBC is only beginning to feel the consequences. Unlike the leadership of NBC News, most Americans have an innate sense of fair play and that means not just the weakening, but the collapse, of public trust that any news organization needs to survive.

### **SOME NBC REPORTERS, EDITORS AND PRODUCERS ARE TRYING TO DO THEIR JOB**

Despite all the obstacles to doing their jobs professionally – and here we come to one of the most important statements we make in this letter – NBC has reporters, editors and producers who are trying to be ethical and professional and do honest work. Clearly, however, the NBC news culture has established a set of implicit news norms and restrictions whose influence honest reporters will feel.

So, the good guys in the NBC newsroom are not empowered. But, if reform is to be accomplished, noting their presence, their existence, is important. Equally essential is noting the limitations they must work under, especially the hostility they will encounter in trying to do stories that might embarrass individuals or institutions that NBC's leadership seeks to protect.

**SO WHILE NBC NEWS CULTURE IS A PROBLEM IT IS NOT THE REAL ISSUE. A LARGER, MORE TOXIC CORPORATE CULTURE IS.**

## **SO RATHER THAN BLAME “THE TALENT,” BLAME “THE SUITS IN THE SUITES”**

Mr. Todd and Mr. Williams would not feel empowered – they would not say what they do nor would they be in the positions they hold – without the strongest corporate backing and support.

In addition, understanding why NBC News has a non-diverse, parochial newsroom where the best practices of journalism are moribund means understanding that explicitly or implicitly that culture is the creation of executives who have two motivations. Their first motivation is an ideological attachment to a liberal, counter-cultural agenda that makes them deeply prejudiced against political conservatives, Tea Party activists and scripturally oriented Christians. Their second motivation is an anxiousness to gain commercial and legal favors from an incumbent administration.

We think the weight of the evidence we present sustains these assertions.

## **THE BEGINNING OF CORPORATE INTERFERENCE IN NEWS**

Before addressing the real source of this errant corporate culture and its embrace of hard-edged ideology, its Saul Alinsky-style journalism, and favor-seeking from an incumbent administration – an earlier event under GE’s ownership should be mentioned as a starting point for the degeneration of the professional

ethos at NBC. In 2009, General Electric CEO Jeffrey Immelt and NBC Universal President Jeff Zucker called some of CNBC's on-air talent to a secret meeting that one attendee found "really creepy" to scold them for "Obama bashing."<sup>25</sup>

In an earlier time, a corporate boss like Immelt calling together news officials and admonishing them about unfairness to the administration would have been seen for what it was – an unseemly attempt by a CEO seeking favors from government officials to pressure journalists for a desired political or corporate end. Such interference in the news process would once have been thought a scandal. Sadly though, there was little enough in the way of repercussions at the time and, of course, it worked. GE got more than a few favors from the Obama Administration. Its success in doing so, however, set up a terrible precedent, giving NBC News a strong push on the way to the corruption of its journalistic standards and ethics.

## **AFTER IMMELT**

Mr. Immelt, though, was just a businessman, not an angry ideologue. If he did set a bad example, he still cannot be blamed for an already impaired professional culture that grew only worse under Comcast/NBC/Universal.

No better illustration of this difference exists than the ascendancy, prominence and, indeed, dominance at NBC News of one particular “suit in the suites.”

## **NBC NEWS AND MSNBC NEWS: IS THERE A DIFFERENCE?**

A respected journalist, Michael Wolff, wrote a piece in a liberal newspaper, *USA Today*, with the headline: “MSNBC Loses Election.”<sup>26</sup> Mr. Wolff writes about MSNBC as the “voice of Obama’s ... remaking of the nation.” (Chuck Todd himself concedes in his new book that MSNBC and its hosts are essentially “allies” of the Obama Administration.) Of MSNBC President Phil Griffin, Wolff writes: “A poor political operative, Griffin has painted himself into a corner like political parties so often do, losing the base, and yet without the philosophical wherewithal to appeal to a larger group.”<sup>27</sup>

Mr. Wolff is wrong on one point. Mr. Griffin is not “a poor political operative.” Admittedly, without any real background or training in the profession, news is not Mr. Griffin’s vocation. Indeed, as you may already be aware, he denigrates the idea of journalism, saying he thinks it needs to be “rethought” especially with regard to television news.

But if not much when it comes to journalism, Mr. Griffin is good at politics, at least of the corporate variety. As a driving force at both MSNBC and NBC News he has largely accomplished what he set out to do.

## **MSNBC AS A STEADY SOURCE OF POLITICAL HATE SPEECH – THE WORST PERSONAL SMEARS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE**

Mr. Griffin began achieving his objectives by bringing the spiteful and maladjusted Keith Olbermann to his channel. After that, there has been no turning back from the waves of ugly invective directed at conservatives and Republicans.

A representative report of MSNBC's assaults on the personal reputations of conservatives or Republicans would be far too long to include in the text of this letter. We would like to take note of just a few of these attacks.

They fall into three categories.

First is the direct personal attack, but with a misogynistic focus. MSNBC host, Ed Schultz, for example, called conservative commentator Laura Ingraham a "right wing slut" and asked of former Senator Joseph Lieberman's wife, who is a lobbyist, "does the word 'whore' apply?"<sup>28</sup>

And then Martin Bashir, in attacking Gov. Palin, said someone should defecate (not his exact word) in her mouth.

In this last case, although most of the country was repulsed by Mr. Bashir's ugly assault, it took 19 days for NBC to get Mr. Bashir to resign.<sup>29</sup> And that happened only after MSNBC – having broken ties with actor Alec Baldwin over some anti-gay remarks he had angrily directed at a street photographer – faced



criticism for doing nothing about the comments by one of its hosts on air about Gov. Palin.

At this time, Mr. Griffin issued a revealing statement, one, in fact, that *The Huffington Post* characterized as a “tribute” to Mr. Bashir:

“Martin Bashir resigned today, effective immediately. I understand his decision and I thank him for three great years with MSNBC. Martin is a good man and respected colleague – we wish him only the best.”<sup>30</sup>

Though conservative women are a special target at MSNBC, the smears are hardly confined to them. And this begins with a second and broader, more comprehensive form of political smear, one that is endlessly repeated against conservatives and Republicans. Led by *Hardball* host Chris Matthews, MSNBC constantly accuses Republicans and critics of the Obama Administration of racism. Once again, the list of such charges by many MSNBC hosts against the Republicans – the Romney campaign caused the “niggerization” of the campaign, or adopted KKK themes from the 1920s, or congressional Republicans are “racists” for opposing the minimum wage hike – is astonishing for its persistence and viciousness.<sup>31</sup> Again the examples are too many for inclusion here.

The third set of smears cover a wider variety of falsehoods and a different sort of vitriol than the racist charge. Chris Matthews characterized a 2014 Republican electoral victory as a “victory for the haters.” He also got nasty about

a North Carolina Republican Senate candidate on Hardball: “What’s worse: Thom Tillis, or Ebola?” He has compared Senator Ted Cruz 31 times to Sen. Joseph McCarthy. In this sort of abuse he is joined by Joe Scarborough, who has called Senator Ted Cruz “lying,” “ignorant,” “carnival barker,” “train wreck,” and a “clown.”<sup>32</sup>

Chris Hayes of “All In” said it was “an indicator of moral depravity” to advocate traditional marriage.<sup>33</sup> Alex Wagner, host of “Now,” featured a guest who said Republicans such as U.S. House Speaker John Boehner, who decline to back Democratic climate-change legislation, “are ignorant and crazy or simply appealing to ignorant and crazy people.”<sup>34</sup>

MSNBC’s Keith Olbermann and Eugene Robinson both blamed Sarah Palin for the shooting of former Rep. Gabrielle Giffords by a deranged gunman. Though by contrast with other MSNBC hosts, Mika Brzezinski takes it easy on Gov. Palin by only calling her “a multimillion-dollar moron selling a message.”

A note should be made that no MSNBC campaign of defamation is worse than that evidenced in the network’s obsession with Gov. Palin. A remarkable obsession, in view of her record. In an effort to fight corruption, Mrs. Palin was elected her hometown mayor and then became governor to carry on the same fight against even powerful members of her own party. As a vice presidential nominee she gave a rousing, memorable speech at the Republican convention and, as polls showed, boosted the Republican ticket in the early weeks of September. Later, she

also bested then-Senator Joe Biden in the vice-presidential debate. Yet all of this meant little to NBC-MSNBC, which often celebrates achievements by women in politics. This is because Gov. Palin has other qualities that excite liberal resentment and hatred: She is a conservative, a scriptural Christian, has a happy family life and looked a whole lot better – this was no small thing – than anybody else on TV.

We note here that like MSNBC, the MSN website – surely one of the most left-wing, countercultural pages on the Internet – never misses a chance for a hostile Palin story. All this reflects one of the ugliest vendettas in American politics and a display of malice that reveals, as is usual in such cases, much about those who are behind it.

**THE GRIFFIN APPROACH: FACING INTENSE CRITICISM, APOLOGIZE IF ABSOLUTELY REQUIRED AND EVEN GO AS FAR AS DISMISSING A SHOW HOST. BUT THEN HIRE SOMEONE ELSE EQUALLY WILLING TO SMEAR CONSERVATIVES, REPUBLICANS, TEA PARTY ACTIVISTS OR SCRIPTURAL CHRISTIANS. PHIL GRIFFIN AS TV’S SAUL ALINSKY – MAINTAINING THE MSNBC CULTURE AND PRESERVING THE POLITICAL ATTACK MACHINE**

MSNBC is Mr. Griffin’s creation, a place where smears and expressions of hatred for conservatives and Republicans have been routine practice.

As Mr. Matthews said with admiration and delight about Mr. Griffin, “He is my boss. He tells me what to do.” And, as any number of visitors to the set of *Hardball* have remarked, he and Mr. Griffin are often on the phone during breaks.

Let us be clear, then: We believe no contemporary organization has done more to institutionalize the political smear and destroy civil discourse than MSNBC. MSNBC could not have possibly established the record it has of political smears and detraction without the approval and, indeed, strong encouragement of its head. Mr. Griffin is deeply angry at conservative views and cultural values and is determined to weaken both while smearing those who advocate those views and values. Accordingly, as a hard-eyed ideologue and political hater, he is anxious to single out any new or effective conservative, attack their character and reputation and intimidate them into silence.

The facts are these, Mr. Griffin is committed to defamation and assaulting the good names and reputations of others – those with whom he has had political or religious differences.

### **THE SHARPTON HIRING – LOWERING THE LEVEL OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND AFFORDING LEGITIMACY TO EXTREMISTS**

One of Mr. Griffin's latest hires is the Reverend Al Sharpton. And Mr. Griffin emphatically defends his choice. Mr. Griffin says he is not going to refuse to put Al Sharpton on the air because of what he said or did "20 years ago."<sup>35</sup>

Mr. Griffin's suggestion that Rev. Sharpton is a different public presence since his involvement in the Tawana Brawley case is, of course, a falsehood almost astonishing in its boldness. Al Sharpton's squalid public record – his financial

irregularities, race-baiting, slanders of individuals and groups, not to mention his recent statements and actions during the Ferguson, Missouri, demonstrations – speak for themselves. (We invite you to read more about Mr. Griffin’s hiring of Sharpton [in this \*American Thinker\* article](#) from 6/24/13).

And in case you have forgotten Mr. Sharpton’s extremist actions and questionable personal history, [here is a video from commentator Andrew Klavan](#) that recounts “Reverend Al’s” public record. Like any Klavan YouTube post, the commentary is colorful and entertaining. It is, however, also deadly accurate.

More recently, Al Sharpton stands accused of corporate shakedowns by the National Legal and Policy Center. We invite you to read the opening paragraphs of an insightful Jan. 4, 2015, *New York Post* piece, “How Sharpton Gets Paid to Not Cry ‘Racism’ at Corporations.”

“Want to influence a casino bid? Polish your corporate image? Not be labeled a racist? Then you need to pay Al Sharpton. For more than a decade, corporations have shelled out thousands of dollars in donations and consulting fees to Sharpton’s National Action Network. What they get in return is the reverend’s supposed sway in the black community or, more often, his silence.”

We want to acknowledge, however, that some in the media have suggested that the decision to hire Al Sharpton as one of the faces of Comcast/NBC/Universal was hardly just Mr. Griffin's decision. For example, consider the facts reported by columnist Laura Washington in *The Chicago Sun-Times* (8/29/11):

“An interesting side-pocket shot: The reputed coziness between Sharpton and the White House. With Princeton rabble-rouser Cornell West, PBS host Tavis Smiley and the Congressional Black Caucus regularly sniping at Obama, the White House needs a water carrier of color. Sharpton is poised to fill the bill.

“I am sure it was just a coincidence that Obama stopped by the Martha's Vineyard digs of Comcast CEO Brian Roberts a couple of days before the Sharpton deal was announced. (Comcast is the parent company of MSNBC).”

Moreover, this *Huffington Post* story about Sharpton's replacement of Cenk Uygur presents an interesting perspective about how MSNBC also protects the president from criticism from the left.



“[Cenk] Uygur [left MSNBC very publicly last week](#), claiming that the network implied to him that his anti-Washington ‘tone’ was not in keeping with the ‘establishment’ bent that MSNBC was trying to cultivate. MSNBC has strongly denied the claims, insisting that it was just giving Uygur television style tips.

“Speaking to a slightly skeptical Howard Kurtz, Uygur repeated his charges. Kurtz said that Uygur seemed not to have any direct evidence that MSNBC was caving to political pressure by admonishing him. Uygur replied that he didn't know who the ‘people in Washington’ that MSNBC Phil Griffin said had a problem with him were. Then, he turned to Sharpton.

“‘A friend of mine just suggested that I watch the ‘60 Minutes’ piece from a couple of months ago on Al Sharpton,’ he said. ‘And I found that to be very

curious because Lesley Stahl said there, and here I have the quote for you:  
‘Sharpton says he has decided not to criticize the president about anything.’  
So the guy who was criticizing the president is out, even though he had  
really good ratings, and the guy who has decided not to criticize the  
president about anything is in. That's interesting.’”

The *Huffington Post* piece went on to add:

“Sharpton has indeed been a loyal and steadfast ally of Obama's, and has  
vocally defended him against criticism from other prominent black leaders.  
Most memorably, he had a [scorching debate](#) with Prof. Cornel West about  
Obama back in April. The setting for that argument? MSNBC.”<sup>36</sup>

We will comment later on the problems raised by President's Obama's visit  
to CEO Roberts' home and any possible ties to the Sharpton hiring, as well as  
other signs of Comcast coziness with the government. Whether or not the merger  
approval process becomes eventually a subject of congressional inquiries, these  
signs do at the very least raise important questions for Comcast stockholders.

### **STRATEGY: BLUR TO THE POINT OF ERASING ANY DISTINCTION BETWEEN NBC AND MSNBC**

The lack of distinction between NBC and MSNBC is clear – correspondents  
appear all the time on both channels, so there is no wall of separation.



Indeed, the face of NBC News, Brian Williams, is now appearing at Al Sharpton events making friendly references to “Reverend Al.” Surely it is fair to ask: Is it even possible to imagine a David Brinkley or, for that matter, any of Mr. Williams’ other predecessors behaving in this manner?

Yet nothing about blurring to the point of extinction any real difference between NBC and MSNBC should really surprise. Mr. Griffin has said he believes MSNBC is the future of broadcast journalism and he has gone a long way toward achieving that objective.

**THOUGH MSNBC IS A RATINGS DISASTER THE GRIFFIN METHOD – IN YOUR FACE – ALLOWS HIM TO SURVIVE**

Mr. Griffin is certainly a political success if also uniquely responsible for a business and commercial disaster. (In this he is like his mentor, Jeff Zucker, whose former reign at NBC drove the once-leading network into the ratings basement as noted in [Maureen Dowd’s famous \*New Times\* column](#) on the subject).

Mr. Griffin, then, is not the first corporate operative responsible for a failing division to understand that he can compensate with an aggressive in-your-face style that keeps others on the defensive and unfocused on his own spectacular lack of television or journalistic success. Vulnerable to the charge MSNBC is about political activism and smears rather than viewers or journalism, Mr. Griffin attacks the very idea of journalism itself.

## **JOURNALISM IS A DATED CONCEPT—THE FORMAL REJECTION OF JOURNALISTIC STANDARDS**

Intimidating real journalists at NBC or any executives who might want to stand up for professional standards, Mr. Griffin comes on strong. As you can see in this article, he questions journalism as a profession, saying it has to be “rethought” and he doesn’t “care” about its practitioners.

Consider Mr. Griffin’s quote in *The Tampa Bay Times*, (2/14/12) “Does It Matter If Journalists Don't Get The Top Jobs At Cable Newschannels?” Mr. Griffin said: “This whole concept of journalist has to be rethought. I’m sorry, I don't care about journalists ... I want fair minded, smart people who understand the world, who can interpret it and if they're journalists, great. This notion that somehow you have to have done something to earn so-called journalist credentials? Stop. Stop ... I think it's unfair.”

## **THE USE OF THE FIG LEAF (PAYCHECK) CONSERVATIVE**

Mr. Griffin knows the value of having a conservative talk show host he can trot out for photo ops and point to when affiliate owners or others ask questions about MSNBC’s one-sidedness.

So Joe Scarborough of *Morning Joe* is allowed – even encouraged sometimes when MSNBC is feeling some heat – to do a rightist rant or two.

Accordingly, Mr. Scarborough has earned the enmity of many conservative journalists and activists who know how important “the fig leaf” conservative or, if you prefer, “paycheck” conservative is to the left. Because Mr. Scarborough, who has a big contract and knows, like Mr. Matthews, who his boss is, he is there for the liberals and MSNBC when they need a conservative voice to endorse their views on the Trayvon Martin case (recall that Scarborough branded “George Zimmerman as a “murderer”),<sup>37</sup> or tell Republicans at a critical moment they must endorse sweeping gun control legislation or attack Israel (and dance away from it) or call Ferguson “South Africa” or organize segment after segment assaulting Sen. Ted Cruz as a “Joe McCarthy” because he is gaining national attention. (Though to be fair, Scarborough was not alone; other fig leaf conservatives like *The New York Times*’ columnist David Brooks got in on the Cruz attacks and had, simultaneously, the comparison to Joe McCarthy spring to mind that other MSNBC hosts like Chris Matthews were using. Or, perhaps, they all received the same phone call from that clandestine bunker operated by the administration’s political targeters.)

Nor is Mr. Scarborough above showing the Obama Administration his heart is in the right place, like the time for example he joined his co-host Mika Brzezinski on a trip to the White House in order to bring Valerie Jarrett a bouquet of flowers.<sup>38</sup>

Yes, he actually did that.

Mr. Scarborough thinks highly of Ms. Jarrett, but not so much of another woman in politics. Yes, he shares the MSNBC obsession with Gov. Palin. As Jeffrey Lord of *The American Spectator* notes about Scarborough's comments on one occasion: "... the ex-Florida Republican Congressman and professed centrist attacks Palin's personal life, mothering skills, professional abilities, and politics."

While Mr. Scarborough's entire record of usefulness to the MSNBC attack machine is too extensive to include here, Mr. Lord's watchful and sometimes amusing reporting on the subject can be easily accessed at *The American Spectator*.

### **III. OBSERVATIONS**

#### **WHAT CONSERVATIVES NOW KNOW AND WHAT REPUBLICANS SHOULD KNOW: COMCAST/NBC/UNIVERSAL IS THE REAL OPPOSITION PARTY**

To summarize: Under the mantra of "news," Comcast/NBC/Universal not only steadily produces and pays for what amounts to millions and millions of nightly advertising against conservatives, but also subsidizes a failing television channel that carries on a frontal assault – often employing the worst smears ever heard in American public life – on the reputations of those who hold to conservative political or cultural views, or who are independents with effective critiques of the administration.

Indeed, with its capacity to sponsor nightly multi-million dollar attack ads, we are not sure what the right formulation really is: Is Comcast/NBC/Universal a left-of-center Super PAC for extreme liberal Democrats? Or are the extreme liberals who now run the Democratic Party the political arm of Comcast/NBC/Universal?

In either case, the reality must be faced – Comcast/NBC/Universal seeks the political oblivion of conservatives and Republicans.

Thus, conservatives and Republicans hoping to elect a president and maintain control of Congress in the campaign of 2016 must first wage the campaign of 2015. And that campaign is not just about identifying Comcast/NBC/Universal in the public mind for what it is – the nation’s most powerful and even militant left-of-center political force, but forcing Comcast/NBC/Universal to publicly admit this.

Comcast/NBC/Universal has a First Amendment right to do exactly as it does with its company. What it is doesn’t have a right to do is falsely claim that it is just a news organization or a non-political commercial enterprise.

**HAVING ESTABLISHED NBC AND MSNBC AS MILITANT, LEFT-OF-CENTER OUTLETS, COMCAST NOW SEEKS TO POLITICIZE SPORTS, STRENGTHEN TELEMUNDO’S ANTI-CONSERVATIVE BIAS, SUPPORT “JOURNALIST” FOUNDER EZRA KLEIN WITH \$10 MILLION, AND COMPLETE A TIME WARNER MERGER THAT WILL GIVE THEM CONTROL OF CABLE TO 66 PERCENT OF HOMES**

Despite mounting criticism, Comcast/NBC/Universal is clearly doubling down on its attack on conservative political and cultural views. Mr. Griffin has announced he is soon going to launch a series of Internet shows – as part of the left’s effort to politicize every aspect of American life – that will extend its liberal focus to sports.<sup>39</sup> The new show can be counted on, of course, to smear athletes or sports commentators who hold to conservative political views and traditional values. Similarly, Telemundo’s corporate leadership continues to be outspoken in its attacks on Republicans – a bias also reflected in its news programming. And Comcast’s newest favorite is Ezra Klein, whose sponsorship of the notorious “JournoList” identifies him as someone whose priority is political activism and not journalism.<sup>40</sup> And, of course, Comcast’s proposed merger with Time Warner is an attempt to further not only its commercial hegemony, but its political agenda. And to that end it spent \$12 million on Washington lobbyists in 2014 alone, not including what Comcast spent in the final three months of the year.<sup>41</sup>

**ACCEPTING COMCAST’S INVITATION – WE CALL FOR FULL MOBILIZATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE MOVEMENT, THE TEA PARTY AND THE REPUBLICAN PARTY. END COMCAST HEGEMONY**

Clearly then Comcast/NBC/Universal have invited conservatives to a political brawl. And conservatives need to publicly accept this challenge and then see who wins the campaign of 2015.

Thus, conservatives should embrace this opportunity to show a commercial and political mega-giant that the truth and the support of the American people far outweigh entrenched power and massive amounts of money.

A further word on this. The rise of conservatism is arguably the principal development in American politics over the last 60 years. And a brief review of how that happened is in order here. Growing out of the anti-communist movement of the late 40's and 50's, it became under the leadership of William F. Buckley Jr. and Barry Goldwater an intellectual and political force to be reckoned with, gaining enormous public presence and eventually taking over one of the major parties. In the 1970s the rise of a youthful New Right and then the Reagan Revolution marked its maturation. In the 1990s conservatives then won control of the U.S. House of Representatives and eventually the entire Congress. Since then the strength of that movement – however much that fact is hidden from or ignored by leadership of Comcast/NBC/Universal – continues to grow both politically and intellectually.

But conservatives are at a disadvantage. Most of the people in the conservative movement are civil and not only incapable of the kind of attacks and smears that Comcast/NBC/Universal routinely sponsors, but are somewhat disbelieving that any organization is capable of this sort of calculated malice.

What the leadership and board members of Comcast/NBC/Universal need to know is that conservatives are no longer disbelieving. We get it. We intend to

demonstrate to Comcast/NBC/Universal that we have not thrived for six decades – we have not come all this way – just to cede our national and, indeed, global victories for the cause of freedom to a group of grasping corporate operatives seeking commercial and political power. So, the focus of the conservative movement needs to be not on the politicized and partisan faces of NBC or the hired slanderers at MSNBC – criticizing them just makes them more important than they are – but on the corporate “suits in the suites” who are the truly culpable parties.

Hence, we hope Mr. Roberts had a pleasant visit with the President of the United States when he stopped by his home. But he and his colleagues should also know that in the form of public messages, like this letter, they will be getting less pleasant coverage from the conservative movement.

#### **AFFILIATE OWNERS’ INTERESTS**

They are elsewhere. But not entirely so. You, too, should seek to reform NBC News. Please permit us to make some recommendations.

#### **IV. RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **DEMAND THE APPOINTMENT OF A NEWS PROFESSIONAL**



Put a real journalist in charge of NBC News. A news professional who will bring in “talent” with serious journalistic qualifications and insist that NBC stop missing stories or quit covering up administration scandals ... and someone who will know how to laugh Mr. Griffin out of the room when he does his apology-aggression oscillation or when he argues journalism is outdated.

### **MAKE SURE REPORTERS ARE ENCOURAGED AGAIN**

Permit reporters to do their work. It’s that simple.

### **GET SOME DIVERSITY IN THE NEWSROOM. HIRE ACCOMPLISHED JOURNALISTS WITH CONSERVATIVE INCLINATIONS**

Institutions do not like disruptive change and its leaders particularly dislike being made uncomfortable by having those around who might disagree with their political or cultural outlook. So you may have to push on this.

But NBC can never properly or fairly present the conservative point of view unless it has reporters in the newsroom who understand that point of view and will at crucial moments argue vigorously for its inclusion in newscasts.

### **APPOINT A PANEL OF EXPERIENCED JOURNALISTS TO INVESTIGATE WHETHER NBC HAS FULLY INFORMED VIEWERS ABOUT THE VESTED INTERESTS OF THEIR SOURCES OR EVEN ACTED IN COLLUSION WITH DEMOCRATIC PARTY OPERATIVES – THE BRIDGEGATE AND OBAMA CHILDREN STORY RAISE SUCH “SOURCING” QUESTIONS**

Because Bridgegate and Obama children stories are not the only instances that raise these questions, a few inquiries in the newsroom would probably bring some important information from the honest journalists there who are disturbed by the ties between NBC leadership and administration officials and left-of-center activists.

### **DOCTORED INTERVIEWS AND TAPES – ASK THE PANEL TO TAKE A CLOSE LOOK AND ISSUE A PUBLIC REPORT**

As you know, NBC did manage to shock even its defenders in the journalism world with its famous doctoring of the audiotape in the Trayvon Martin case. NBC ran the doctored 911 tape of Martin’s accused slayer, George Zimmerman, supposedly saying this:

“This guy looks like he’s up to no good. He looks black.”

The tape actually recorded this:

Zimmerman: “This guy looks like he’s up to no good. Or he’s on drugs or something. It’s raining and he’s just walking around, looking about.”

Dispatcher: “OK, and this guy – is he black, white or Hispanic?”

Zimmerman: “He looks black.”<sup>42</sup>

NBC’s scissors made a big difference, of course. NBC News eventually admitted its error but never apologized on air.

It has been reported that NBC conducted an internal investigation and that several people were fired. No explanation was forthcoming, however, about how this occurred and who was responsible – and how high did the misconduct go?

Moreover, this is not the first time NBC has been accused of doctoring tapes. At least two other incidents have occurred. One took place in the final year of the Bush Administration.<sup>43</sup> In May of 2008, NBC purposefully edited an interview with President George W. Bush in hopes of trying to make it seem as though the president was taking a political shot at Democratic presidential nominee and then-Senator Barack Obama over appeasement policy and Iran. More recently, during the 2012 presidential election, MSNBC’s Andrea Mitchell attempted to make, as she called it, Romney’s “supermarket scanner moment,” a reference to then-President George H.W. Bush’s 1992 reelection campaign incident, as she played a heavily edited clip of Mitt Romney at a rally talking about the difference between the public and private sector and using convenience store WaWa as an example. Mitchell was forced to play a longer clip the following day, but did not apologize.<sup>44</sup>

So the Zimmerman incident did not happen in a vacuum. Is there a culture of doctoring tapes and interviews at NBC? The question is an important one.

Along with plagiarism, such doctoring of tapes or interview responses are seen as primal offenses in journalism – and offenses usually punished with dismissals at news organizations that understand the need for professionalism and ethics. The proposed panel needs to look into all of this and report publicly.

## **SPECIAL COUNSEL**

In view of its many other interactions with federal and state governments, and particularly its efforts to gain regulatory approval of various mergers, Comcast/NBC/Universal – as the highly politicized and partisan entity that it is – might give consideration to appointing an outside counsel to review its pattern of contacts with public officials, especially those in the Obama Administration. The special counsel might come up with important information and also suggest a series of ethical guidelines.

In any case, should a congressional inquiry into Comcast merger activities ever commence, Mr. Roberts might want to have on record a statement about the nature of his past conversations with President Obama or other administration officials. Such a statement might help, for example, deal with questions already being asked in the media about MSNBC's award of a show and lucrative contract to the extremist, the Rev. Al Sharpton.

## **BE PREPARED FOR MR. GRIFFIN'S ATTACK AND APOLOGY OSCILLATION**

In opposing change, Phil Griffin can be counted to come on strong – with both profuse apologies and in-your-face aggression. He will also mobilize his friends in the administration and on the left to strongly lobby against any change.

## **ALSO BE PREPARED TO SEE CONSERVATIVES BRIEFLY TREATED WELL. EXPECT TO HEAR ABOUT CONSERVATIVE WRITERS OR ACTIVISTS SUDDENLY BEING SIGNED TO CONTRACTS**

We hope the conservatives likely to be hired will do as well as Chelsea Clinton and her \$600,000, or at least as well as whatever Mr. Matthews is paid for routinely smearing Republicans as racists.

Please bear in mind the fairness won't last long.

Though we do admit we hope those of our fellow-conservatives who are suddenly embraced by NBC will keep in mind the reasons for their good fortune and send along a contribution to Conservative War Chest.

And, of course, there will be some conservatives or Republican officeholders who after unexpected invitations to appear on "Meet The Press" will be tempted to say extravagantly nice things about Messrs. Todd and Williams or even attempt conciliatory words about Mr. Griffin. Before doing so, we hope they will reflect on the real reason for their sudden popularity at NBC and will just settle for the airtime – taking the "quid" without the "pro quo."

## **ASK COMCAST TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE RANGE OF THEIR LIBERAL, COUNTERCULTURAL AGENDA**

NBC Affiliate owners should be aware they are not just dealing with businessmen or corporate officials. You should know that liberals like those at the top of Comcast/NBC/Universal tend to be Cromwellian bores with a desire for power over the lives of others. Accordingly, they seek to politicize every endeavor from sports to culture to entertainment. Comcast/NBC/Universal has shown all these tendencies – whether it’s a Republican Senator on the “Tonight Show” getting cross-examined on GOP intolerance, or Bob Costas doing his gun-control sermonettes, or NFL pre-game shows discussing going “green” to fight global warming, or entertainment programming that aggressively seeks to label as bigots Baptists, Catholics and other scriptural Christians who disagree with Comcast/NBC/Universal’s leadership on social issues.

Bear in mind, then, the integrity of the news department can never be fully restored until and unless NBC’s network leadership acknowledges the pervasiveness of its liberal bias and countercultural agenda.

**YOU’RE GOING TO NEED HELP**

We request you let us run our ads on your stations asking support for efforts by NBC affiliates to reform Comcast/NBC/Universal. We can help mobilize public support.

Sincerely, Conservative War Chest

Michael Flynn, spokesmen

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