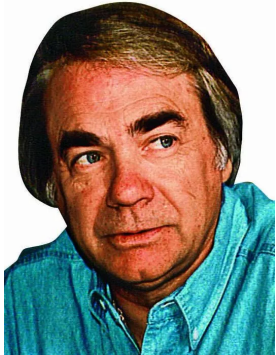


GOLDEN: CNN reporter's clash with adviser black mark for media

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The most fundamental rule in journalism is a straightforward and relatively simple one: Don't become a part of the story. CNN's White House correspondent Jim Acosta cut class the day that lesson was imparted.

His protracted argument with White House senior policy adviser Stephen Miller over the Trump administration's plan to revise immigration policy was an embarrassment to himself, his colleagues, his network and reinforced the perception that the media is no longer an independent broker and purveyor of news, but a group of opinionated, smarmy individuals intent on expressing their own biases.

Acosta repeatedly interrupted Miller in mid-answer while lecturing him on the benefits of immigration and the contributions to American society that immigrants provided.

Miller stood his ground and attempted to turn the discussion back to the administration's proposal, but Acosta persisted in arguing his personal point of view rather than presenting insightful and intelligent questions to draw out detailed responses.

At one point, he engaged in a senseless soliloquy on the Emma Lazarus poem affixed to the base of the pedestal upon which the Statue of Liberty rests and accused the president of violating the spirit expressed in the writing.

He clearly relished the attention he attracted, shattering the non-involvement admonition in favor of becoming not only a part of the story he was sent to cover, but in playing a central role in it.

The daily White House press briefings have, in the Trump era, become must-see TV with audience ratings sometimes exceeding those of daytime soap operas.

Clashes are inevitable in the often overheated atmosphere involving reporters who are mining for information and administration spokespersons who are equally as committed to managing it.

Recently departed press secretary Sean Spicer was pummeled with regularity as he stood behind the podium and attempted — often painfully — to explain his boss's latest tweet.

In his initial briefing two days after the president was inaugurated, Spicer set an adversarial tone with his insistence that Trump's swearing in was witnessed by the largest crowd in history and that the media had undertaken a deliberate campaign of distortion and what later was termed "fake news."

The relationship between the administration rapidly deteriorated as Trump himself drove almost daily a "fake news" narrative and White House adviser Steve Bannon offered the loony assertion that the press was "an enemy of the people."

Even in such a hostile environment, it is crucial for the media to maintain a high degree of professionalism, to understand its proper role as a witness to events — not a participant in them — and to convey what they've learned in a fair and objective manner.

The late syndicated columnist Pete Lisagor once described his role and those of his peers, this way: "We walk down the middle of the street and shoot the windows out on both sides."

Actions like Acosta's undermine that goal and serve only to feed public distrust that it can rely on what it reads and hears.

Acosta knowingly and deliberately injected himself into the story, doing a disservice to his viewers and further harming the image and reputation of the media.

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