

CNN's Double-Standards on Debates

For decades, mainstream U.S. news outlets have bent over backwards to appease conservatives and avoid the stigma “liberal media,” but there has been no similar accommodation for progressives, as Jeff Cohen notes about CNN’s handling of the upcoming Democratic debate.

By Jeff Cohen

At the CNN-sponsored Republican Party debate last month at the Reagan presidential library, one of the three panelists CNN selected to question the candidates was conservative radio host Hugh Hewitt, affiliated with the proudly right-wing Salem Radio Network. But at Tuesday’s upcoming Democratic Party debate, CNN is not planning to include a single progressive advocate among its panel of four questioners.

It’s clear that who gets to pose questions has impact on the tenor of the debate. For example, Hewitt used September’s Republican debate to declare that President Obama’s “knees buckled” over Syria and that every Republican candidate was “more qualified than” Hillary Clinton. Hewitt pressed Jeb Bush from the right over his comment about making sure guns are not in the hands of the mentally ill: “Where does it go from what you said last week, how far into people’s lives to take guns away from them?”



Along with Hewitt, the panel at CNN’s GOP debate was composed of two journalists CNN presents as neutral or objective: CNN anchor Jake Tapper and CNN correspondent Dana Bash. (Hewitt’s appearance was reportedly part of [an agreement](#) by which CNN and the right-wing Salem Media company are teaming up on three GOP presidential debates.)

At CNN’s upcoming Democratic debate, the panel is to be composed of four journalists CNN presents as neutral: CNN’s Bash and three CNN anchors (Anderson Cooper, Don Lemon, and Juan Carlos Lopez of CNN en Espanol.) Glaringly missing from this proposed lineup is an unabashed progressive advocate.

There are many qualified journalists for this seat – from respected progressive media institutions that haven’t taken sides in the Democratic primaries (like

The Nation or Mother Jones, to name just two).

Today, the online activism group RootsAction.org (which I cofounded) launched a [one-sentence petition to CNN](#): “For the sake of basic fairness and balance, you should add to your panel an unapologetic progressive for Tuesday’s debate.”

Jeff Cohen is cofounder of RootsAction.org, founder of the media watch group [FAIR](#), and director of the [Park Center for Independent Media](#) at Ithaca College.

Collateral Damage/Stuff Happens

President George W. Bush (and his successor Barack Obama) have lamented “collateral damage” in Afghanistan and Iraq and Jeb Bush shrugs off a domestic mass shooting as “stuff happens” but the tragedies have a common denominator: glorification of war and cultural acceptance of violence, writes David Marks.

By David Marks

Barack Obama responded to the shootings at a community college in Oregon last week by saying that people had “become numb to this” and that “we are the only advanced country on earth that sees these kinds of mass shootings every few months.” His frustration was directed at the lack of gun control, and although greatly reduced access to weaponry is relevant and warranted, it is arguably not the only intervention needed to reduce these repetitive acts of violence.

Relentless news about mass shootings at home along with hostilities abroad blind us to the overt relationship between events in the headlines. There is little effort in any realm considering how U.S. international actions are related to the increasing number of mass murders in the United States, but the connection became more apparent last week.

Missed by most news media, the synchronicity of events provides insight into this correlation. For example, the New York Times reported, “U.S. Is Blamed After Bombs Hit Afghan Hospital,” saying the military has conceded the attack might have been “collateral damage.” On the same front page there was a story, “Killers Fit a Profile, but So Do Many Others.” This analysis of the psychology of shooters concludes, “With many of the killers, the signs are of anger and disappointment and solitude.”

Public responses to each event have been focused on explaining their individual

causes, although the relevance of these stories is uncomplicated; our country is so immersed in violence, we fail to recognize a simple association. Although seemingly disparate, reports of war abroad and mass killings at home describe disturbing acts engendered by the same forces.

It has been reported that the perpetrator of last week's shooting in Oregon was a frustrated young man obsessed by guns, turned away by the U.S. Army after one month of basic training. His profile contains other factors indicating instability, but this analysis glosses over his rejection by the military.

Although only a small percentage of the population actually serves, all young men are primed for the military. Our culture glorifies fighting its enemies in many ways. Video games and much of film and television present violence as the unavoidable consequence of conflict. We are a nation where military service, including the strong possibility of killing others or of sacrificing one's life, is deemed a noble cause. We not only support our troops, we support war and violence.

And by extension, because we encourage our youth to see military action as inevitable, we are primed to accept "collateral damage" as a tragic necessity. Whether glorified in the name of democracy, defense or nationalism, violence always has a price.

The mass murderer in Oregon had been declared unfit for military service, other mass killers who never served imagined themselves as powerful and heroic; and there are those murderers who served and vented frustration when their reality had been crushed in some way. All of their violence was born within a militaristic culture.

The economic forces that interpret the Second Amendment to their gain, ensure availability of weapons for the misdirected souls we have engendered. With a range of weapons available, and having practiced since childhood, frustrated outcasts kill their victims as if they were on a video screen.

These men are undoubtedly unbalanced, but the cause of their loss of equilibrium is traceable to values they were given as children. The killers of innocent people in schools, hospitals and the workplace self-justify their actions based on what they've inherited; like all men, and many women, who accept the dictates of our society, they are primed to accept or inflict violence. The original mandate included a nationalism they have for the most part rejected, but they were overtly taught that killing is a viable way of resolving conflict.

It is no leap to see the conflicts of the individual played out internationally.

President Obama's remarks about our numbness to the shootings could be applied

to events in Afghanistan. We are also numbed by news in every arena where the United States intervenes with its military.

The President knows that we are also the only advanced country on earth expending the greatest part of its wealth on violent activities aimed at enforcing our world view. As Commander-in-Chief, when the military uses the term “collateral damage,” he accepts it as inevitable. He also recognizes the tragedy in Oregon as something more than an aberration, and should consider that those events might also be “collateral damage.” They are self-inflicted wounds.

Domestically, it is harder for pundits and politicians to explain the increasing level of violence. Although Jeb Bush, by including the term “stuff happens” in his response to the Oregon shootings, gave us further understanding of the connectedness of events.

“Stuff happens” is a domestic translation for what the military refers to as “collateral damage.”

Both terms minimize the tragic death of innocents, justifying brutality and murder as an outcome of some greater plan and policy; both reveal the similarity in how we are asked to process and accept the inevitable. The words, whenever used, however subtle, embrace violence – and the begetting of more violence – as an absolute norm.

David Marks is a veteran documentary filmmaker and investigative reporter. His work includes films for the BBC and PBS Frontline.
