

The Outrage Industry: Political Opinion Media and the New Incivility

By Jeffrey M. Berry, Sarah Sobieraj

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In early 2012, conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh claimed that Sandra Fluke, a Georgetown University law student who advocated for insurance coverage of contraceptives, "wants to be paid to have sex." Over the next few days, Limbaugh attacked Fluke personally, often in crude terms, while a powerful backlash grew, led by organizations such as the National Organization for Women. But perhaps what was most notable about the incident was that it wasn't unusual. From Limbaugh's venomous attacks on Fluke to liberal radio host Mike Malloy's suggestion that Bill O'Reilly "drink a vat of poison... and choke to death," over-the-top discourse in today's political opinion media is pervasive.

Anyone who observes the skyrocketing number of incendiary political opinion shows on television and radio might conclude that political vitriol on the airwaves is fueled by the increasingly partisan American political system. But in *The Outrage Industry* Jeffrey M. Berry and Sarah Sobieraj show how the proliferation of outrage-the provocative, hyperbolic style of commentary delivered by hosts like Ed Schultz, Bill O'Reilly, and Sean Hannity- says more about regulatory, technological, and cultural changes, than it does about our political inclinations.

Berry and Sobieraj tackle the mechanics of outrage rhetoric, exploring its various forms such as mockery, emotional display, fear mongering, audience flattery, and conspiracy theories. They then investigate the impact of outrage rhetoric-which stigmatizes cooperation and brands collaboration and compromise as weak-on a contemporary political landscape that features frequent straight-party voting in Congress. Outrage tactics have also facilitated the growth of the Tea Party, a movement which appeals to older, white conservatives and has dragged the GOP farther away from the demographically significant moderates whose favor it should be courting. Finally, *The Outrage Industry* examines how these shows sour our own political lives, exacerbating anxieties about political talk and collaboration in our own communities. Drawing from a rich base of evidence, this book forces all of us to consider the negative consequences that flow from our increasingly hyper-partisan political media.

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Editorial Review

Review

"In politics, reason persuades but emotion motivates. This outstanding book offers a fine contribution to our understanding of how and why this form of communication achieves both goals."
--*The US Army War College Quarterly, Parameters*

"Jeffrey Berry and Sarah Sobieraj have written an important book about a phenomenon that has been a major contributor to partisan conflict and gridlock in Washington in recent years-the development of an increasingly hyperbolic, emotional and negative style of media commentary. *The Outrage Industry* will be must reading for anyone who wants to understand why our political system is so dysfunctional."
--Alan Abramowitz, Alben W. Barkley Professor of Political Science, Emory University

"Amidst a changing media landscape, we are fortunate to have Berry and Sobieraj as guides, mapping the terrain of an expanding media genre. This rich and compelling analysis of the production and consumption of outrage media is sure to inspire much-needed discussion about the politics of today's news media and stimulate new research on this powerful but understudied genre. *The Outrage Industry* is essential reading for media scholars and students, and for all those concerned about the future of journalism in the United States."
--William Hoynes, Professor of Sociology and former Director of Media Studies, Vassar College

"*The Outrage Industry* provides a thorough, revealing look behind the scenes of today's angry rhetoric and the networks and systems that make it tick. The book is admirably empirical, thorough, and nuanced, and it should be required reading for those trying to understand our political landscape, how we got here, and the role of media in building and reproducing political identities."
--Andrew Perrin, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

About the Author

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Sarah Sobieraj is Associate Professor of Sociology at Tufts University.

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