



Lou Dobbs, the new Hispanic journalist Is the line between activism and objectivity blurred?

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The Floridian Ballroom of the Greater Fort Lauderdale/Broward County Convention Center was packed last Friday at noon. There, the so-called Great American Immigration Debate took place.

More than 2,000 Hispanic journalists watched how the vociferous CNN anchor Lou Dobbs crushed his opponents with his anti-immigrant point of view.

Former Mexican foreign minister Jorge Castañeda and New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson were no match for the "Broken Borders" architect.

"The president says we can't deport people. The fact is that we can," Dobbs said, in reference to the destiny of the 12 million undocumented immigrants who reside in the US.

Neither Castañeda nor Richardson could suitably answer his rhetoric, while a polite PBS newscaster, Ray Suarez, asked the audience to "keep emotions well mannered."

Dobbs left smiling from a room filled with individuals who have close relatives caught in the middle of the immigration dispute.

But my surprise came later, during the induction of Maria Elena Salinas, the Univision Network anchor, into the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) Hall of Fame. Saturday night, on the ceremony's gigantic TV screen, the name of Dobbs appeared in golden letters. He was among a limited group of people who paid to become a lifetime member of NAHJ.

Two decades ago, I was one of the founding members of that organization. I know that the description of the NAHJ mission includes the phrase: "to foster and promote a fair treatment of Hispanics by the media."

Dobbs is one of the worst examples of "promoting fair treatment" of Latinos on the airwaves. The news commentator has referred to Mexican immigrants in the US as an "army of invaders." Known as much for his personal opinions as for his anchoring, he takes licenses that many other cable news network broadcasters don't have.

"Our standards and practices guidelines prevent our employees from taking a stand on controversial issues," said Christopher Crommett, senior vice president of CNN en Español, in an interview with IPS News Service about the May 1 Latino rallies.

"It's a living, breathing effort. Things come up almost daily that we discuss and ask ourselves, "How can we cover this in the best traditions of CNN?" explained Crommett, who supervises 130 staff employees and a worldwide network of approximately 50 Spanish-speaking reporters.

The question is why the Spanish-language side of CNN must maintain journalistic objectivity in its coverage of immigration while Mr. Dobbs is not required to do so.

I believe the networks have opened a window for the Hispanic community to ask for news programming that presents the other perspective on this controversial issue.

In Charlotte, the same request should be made to local radio outlets. The leading talk radio format station, WBT 1110, has only anti-immigrant voices. One of its personalities is Rush Limbaugh, the national syndicated hard-line conservative broadcaster.

Locally, Keith Larson and Jason Lewis preach the same raucous speech as Dobbs. They have not asked themselves: "When is the line between activism and objectivity blurred?"

People in the mainstream of the society deserve to know the other side of the immigration debate.

The general public must be informed that the matter goes beyond the term "illegal."

The debate has to be unlocked from the right-wing viewpoint. Tolerance must prevail. After all, Dobbs is a new member of NAJH.

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