

"It's the truth, stupid. That's Brock, Rabin-Havt, and Media Matters' message and it's a pretty darn good one." —James Carville

THE
FOX
EFFECT



**HOW ROGER AILES
TURNED A NETWORK INTO
A PROPAGANDA MACHINE**

DAVID BROCK, ARI RABIN-HAVT, AND

**MEDIAMATTERS
FOR AMERICA**

*David Brock, Ari Rabin-Havt,
and Media Matters for America*

The Fox Effect

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into a Propaganda Machine*

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and Media Matters for America**



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Introduction:

Not Necessarily the News

It is their M.O. to undermine the administration and to undermine Democrats. They're propaganda outfit but they call themselves news.

—a former Fox employ

On August 2, 2009, on board the “Six-Star Luxury Liner” *Crystal Serenity*, somewhere in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, Fox News’s Washington, D.C., managing editor, Bill Sammon, rose to address supporters of Hillsdale College, a conservative institution located just over one hundred miles west of Detroit. His audience had paid between \$11,800 and \$37,600 per couple to listen to an all-star lineup of conservative journalists and scholars as they traveled from Venice to Athens, via Istanbul. Sammon was the featured speaker. He began with some joking remarks, speculating that conservative political consultant Mary Matalin, who was on board the ship simply on vacation, might have “mischievously arranged” to have her husband, liberal James Carville, along to “save his ideological soul.” Then Sammon made a startling admission:

You know, speaking of mischief, last year, candidate Barack Obama stood on a sidewalk in Toledo, Ohio, and first let it slip to Joe the Plumber that he wanted to, quote, “spread the wealth around.” At that time, I have to admit that I went on TV, on Fox News, and publicly engaged in what I guess was some rather mischievous speculation about whether Barack Obama really advocated socialism, a premise that privately I found rather far-fetched.¹

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July 28 - August 9, 2009

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WASHINGTON DEPUTY MANAGING
EDITOR, FOX NEWS

VICTOR DAVIS HANSON
CLASSICIST AND MILITARY HISTORIAN
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AUTHOR, *ATATÜRK: THE BIOGRAPHY OF THE
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At the time Sammon made these “mischievous speculations,” he was Fox News’s Washington deputy managing editor, and it was his job to oversee the reporting of the news on one of our country’s major cable networks. Yet here, in front of a friendly audience, on a luxury cruise an ocean away from the United States, he was candidly, nonchalantly admitting to consciously misrepresenting the ideology of a presidential candidate to Fox’s audience days before an election.

E-mails we obtained from that time, written by Sammon and a Fox producer, show that the calculated smear against Obama was not an on-air slip but part of a coordinated campaign of deception. Not only had Sammon personally appeared on the network to make these charges against Barack Obama, but he had also sent an e-mail to journalists who worked for him, encouraging them to cover the Democratic candidate’s “racial obsessions” and supposed connections to Marxism.

From: Sammon, Bill

Sent: Monday, October 27, 2008 1:02 PM

To: 069-Politics; 169-SPECIAL REPORT;

030-Root (FoxNews.Com)

Subject: fyi: Obama’s references to socialism, liberalism, Marxism and Marxists in his autobiography, “Dreams from My Father.” Plus a couple of his many self-described “racial obsessions” ...

- “To avoid being mistaken for a sellout, I chose my friends carefully. The more politically active were the black students. The foreign students. The Chicanos. **The Marxist professors** and structural feminists.” (Obama writing about his time at Occidental College in “Dreams.”)
- After his sophomore year, Obama transferred to Columbia University. He lived on Manhattan’s Upper East Side, venturing to the East Village for “**the socialist conferences I sometimes attended** at Cooper Union,” he recalled, adding: “Much of what I absorbed from the sixties was

filtered through my mother, who to the end of her life would proudly proclaim herself a **unreconstructed liberal.**”

- After graduating from Columbia in 1983, Obama spent a year working for a consulting firm and then went to work for “a Ralph Nader offshoot” in Harlem. “In search of some inspiration, went to hear Kwame Toure, formerly Stokely Carmichael of SNCC and Black Panther fame speak at Columbia. At the entrance to the auditorium, two women, one black, one Asian, were **selling Marxist literature.**”
During this period, according to Obama, he began a serious romantic relationship.
- **“There was a woman in New York that I loved. She was white,”** Obama wrote in “Dreams” “We saw each other for almost a year. On the weekends, mostly. Sometimes in her apartment, sometimes in mine. You know how you can fall into your own private world? Just two people, hidden and warm. Your own language. Your own customs.” But Obama said their relationship was doomed by the racial difference. “I pushed her away,” he recalled. **“The emotion between the races could never be pure; even love was tarnished by the desire to find in the other some element that was missing from ourselves. Whether we sought out our demons or salvation, the other race would always remain just that: menacing, alien, and apart.”**
- In June 1985, Obama was interviewed in New York by Marty Kaufman, a community organizer from Chicago. Obama recalled: **“There was something about him that made me wary. A little too sure of himself, maybe. And white.”**²

Less than ninety minutes later, Sammon was on Fox engaging in “mischievous speculation” claiming Barack Obama “was drawn to Marxists, and he was drawn to liberals, and he was drawn to socialists by his own admission as a young man.”³

The next morning, Sammon appeared on the network’s morning show, *Fox & Friends*, to reiterate his “far-fetched” theory about Obama’s Marxism and racial obsessions. Memos from the show’s producers reveal that the entire third segment was built around his e-mail.

From: Cunningham, Jennifer

To: 044—Web Show Producers; 064—Desk Assignment; 069—Politics; 081- Radio; 081—DC Booking; 100—Media Relations; 162—Promos; Brown, David; Glick, Alexis; Magee, Kevin; Moody, John; Scott, Suzanne; Shine, Bill; Tammero, Michael; Wallace, Jay

Sent: Mon Oct 27 18:17:41 2008

Subject: FOX & FRIENDS GUESTS FOR TUESDAY OCTOBER. 28—EXACTLY 1 WEEK BEFORE ELECTION DAY

FOX & FRIENDS GUESTS FOR TUESDAY OCTOBER. 28—EXACTLY 1 WEEK BEFORE ELECTION DAY

5:59 (A-BLOCK) COLD OPEN // QUICK TEASE// News HEADLINES // TALKING POINTS WX BUMP OUT TO TEASE_____

6:15 (B-BLOCK)—2 STORIES AMANDA CARPENTER—DEMS PLAYBOOK SHOWS DIRTY TACTICS ((DC BUREAU))_____

6:22 (C-BLOCK)—2 STORIES ((ANCHOR)) & BILL SAMMON—FYI: OBAMA’S REFERENCES TO SOCIALISM, LIBERALISM, MARXISM AND MARXISTS IN HIS

AUTOBIOGRAPHY, “DREAMS FROM MY FATHER.”

PLUS A COUPLE OF HIS MANY SELF-DESCRIBED

“RACIAL OBSESSIONS”... ((FOX DC)) >>

BDAY IN TEASE_____4

As Sammon spoke, the chyron, the graphic appearing on the lower section of the screen, read: “The Real Barack Obama; Aligned W/ Marxists, Socialists”; “Obama’s Radical Past; Close Friends W/ Marxist”; “Obama’s Chosen Friends; Marxist Profs & Structural Feminists”; and “Obama’s Racial Divide; ‘Emotion B/W Races Never Be Pure.’”⁵

That same day Sammon published a piece claiming that “Obama laughs off charges of socialism. [but] Obama himself acknowledges that he was drawn to socialists and even Marxists as a college student.”⁶



It was a peculiar amount of attention to give to a story Sammon didn’t really believe, particularly since the information involved was neither new nor particularly newsworthy—the contemporary political relevance of Obama’s candid account of his early years as described in *Dreams from My Father* (which had been published in 1995) had already been thoroughly covered by the press, including by Sammon himself in a book published earlier that year. Why, a week before Election Day, were years-old, out-of-context quotes suddenly being treated as a major, breaking story on “fair and balanced” Fox News?

When criticized for such on-air behavior, Fox News and its defenders will often assert that the network maintains a firewall between its news and opinion programming similar to that between a newspaper’s front page and its opinion section. But as a “news” executive, Bill Sammon clearly crossed this line, as veteran journalist Marc Sandalow, a former bureau chief at the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s Washington office, points out. “[Sammon] is overseeing the news operation,” he said in an interview with *Media Matters*. “For news gatherers, credibility is everything. You should never deceive viewers or readers.”⁷

After his e-mails were revealed in 2011, Sammon defended his actions to *The Daily Beast*’s Howard Kurtz, who wrote of the affair:

Sammon says his reference to “mischievous speculation” was “my probably inartful way saying, ‘Can you believe how far this thing has come?’” The socialism question indeed “struck me as a far-fetched idea” in 2008. “I considered it kind of a remarkable notion that we would even be having the conversation.” He doesn’t regret repeatedly raising it on the air because Sammon says, “it was a main point of discussion on all the channels, in all the media”—and by 2009 he was “astonished by how the needle had moved.”⁸

But a review of the media coverage at the time shows that Fox and Sammon, far from responding to a media narrative, were the driving force behind the reporting of Barack Obama’s supposed attraction to socialism. Two weeks before sending his memo to producers, Sammon appeared on Fox’s afternoon news program *The Live Desk* to discuss how Barack Obama’s comment to Joe the Plumber, an Ohio man, who became a conservative movement fixture after confronting the future president at a campaign stop—that “when you spread the wealth around, it’s good for everybody”⁹—was “tantamount to socialism.”¹⁰ A few days later Sammon was on Greta Van Susteren’s show discussing the same topic, and later that week on *Fox & Friends*, he again reported on the political ramifications of Obama’s supposed links to socialism.

Other journalists are not so willing to accept Sammon’s explanation to Kurtz. “I don’t think deception is ever acceptable in journalism,” John Walcott, McClatchy’s Washington bureau chief during the 2008 election, remarked of the Fox executive’s conduct. “I think there are times when we don’t say everything we’ve learned for reasons of personal security and national security. But outright deception, saying something that you know to be untrue or have no basis for believing is true, is not journalism, it is propaganda.”¹¹

Sammon’s transgressions at the tail end of the 2008 election only marked the beginning of a large transition at the network, one that would see Fox News change from a network that provided a conservative outlook on the news to an active and unapologetic mouthpiece for the Republican Party.

Media Matters for America, our organization, produces thousands of pieces of research a year focused on correcting conservative misinformation in the media. Our efforts to squelch such lies and distortions initially were distributed over a wide range of news sources—various conservative websites, radio programs, and television shows. But in early 2009, we noticed a marked increase in politically motivated misinformation coming from Fox News. Our attention was thus drawn increasingly to that channel—not only because they were serial violators of responsible journalism but because their influence and reach within the media and with the public at large as the most watched cable news network made it even more important to counteract their distortions of the truth. In early 2009, for instance, approximately 33 percent of our work focused on Fox News and its affiliates; in 2010, that number rose to 44 percent. By the beginning of 2011 we were spending more than 54 percent of our time focused on the network. This was not intentional; it was a matter of responding to this growing trend: the vast majority of the lies, smears, and distortions from conservative media flowed from or through Fox News.

We live in a cynical time, when words like “fair” and “balanced” are used as slogans to sell content that is anything but. When the words of lobbyists and the politicians they support are given equal weight with the consensus of scientific experts, by journalists who think a news story is a competition between opposing narratives rather than a judicious search for truth. Reporters often ask why they should trust Media Matters any more than Fox, given that both are ideological institutions. But this is precisely our point: Media Matters makes no claim of being neutral; we proudly wear our progressive ideology on our sleeve. We make decisions about the issues we focus on and the lies we debunk, just as newspapers choose what stories to cover. But our research and reporting stick to the facts and a

painstakingly documented. Fox, on the other hand, claims to be a “fair and balanced” news network while brazenly broadcasting demonstrable lies and distortions, always with a conservative spin.

It is critical that the media, Democrats, opinion makers of all stripes, and the public at large understand what Fox News is. Too many reporters and commentators have continued to treat Fox as a news organization. By doing so, they enable the network to conduct a political campaign under the guise of a media outlet, influencing the outcome of legislative debates and elections.

It is all the more important to keep an eye on Fox because the rhetoric the network wields as a political weapon is filled with violent imagery and demonization. This is never a good practice, particularly at a time of economic instability, when social unrest and passions are high. Fox News personalities, unfortunately, have a habit of portraying their ideological opponents in outrageous negative ways. In the past few years its hosts have, among other things, compared President Obama to members of Congress, and progressive leaders to Nazis and genocidal dictators such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Mao Zedong, and have referred to the president as a racist. Glenn Beck, one of Fox News’s most popular personalities from 2009 to 2011, even simulated the assassination of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi on air by miming giving her a glass of poisoned wine, without any repercussions from network management. It’s all harmless amusement until an unbalanced individual is riled up to perform an unspeakable act against a public official who has been reduced by media images into a two-dimensional, cardboard-cutout villain. The history of the United States—both early and recent—includes many examples of the unintended horrors that can result from this type of relentless and careless demonization.

Then there is the deliberate spread of misinformation. Polls consistently find Fox News viewers among the most ignorant on a variety of issues. For example, NBC News’s online publication *First Read* reported in April 2009 that “72% of self-identified FOX News viewers believe the health-care plan will give coverage to illegal immigrants, 79% of them say it will lead to a government takeover, 69% think that it will use taxpayer dollars to pay for abortions, and 75% believe that it will allow the government to make decisions about when to stop providing care for the elderly.”¹² As *First Read* pointed out, this was “rampant misinformation” that large numbers of Fox News viewers believed.

Following the 2010 election, the University of Maryland released a study finding that Fox News viewers were the most misinformed audience of any major news network. Compared with those who never watch Fox, frequent viewers of the network were:

- Thirty-one percentage points more likely to agree that “most economists have estimated that the health care law will worsen the deficit.” In fact, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said just the opposite: that health care reform would actually decrease the deficit.
- Thirty-one points more likely to agree that “it is not clear that Obama was born in the United States.” In fact, the birther claims had been repeatedly debunked during the 2008 election by numerous nonpartisan and even Republican sources, including former Hawaii governor Linda Lingle.
- Thirty points more likely to agree that “most scientists do not agree that climate change is occurring.” In fact, there is broad scientific consensus that not only is climate change occurring but human activity is the cause.
- Fourteen points more likely to agree that “the stimulus legislation did not include any tax cuts for workers.” The nonpartisan PolitiFact.com noted that the stimulus bill provided tax cuts to 95 percent of workers.
- Fourteen points more likely to agree that “their own income taxes have gone up.” Most Fox viewers could have confirmed this to be false by looking at their own tax return.

- Thirteen points more likely to agree that “the auto bailout only occurred under Obama.” In fact, ~~had begun under George W. Bush.~~
- Twelve points more likely to agree that “most economists estimate the stimulus caused job losses.”¹³ *USA Today* reported with a banner headline in August 2010, “Economists Agree Stimulus Created Nearly 3 Million Jobs.”¹⁴

When confronted with this study, Michael Clemente, Fox’s senior vice president for news, reacted in a telling way. Instead of expressing concern about Fox’s apparent failure to inform their viewers, arguing with the substance or methodology of the study, Clemente attacked the messenger sarcastically impugning the reputation of the University of Maryland. Acting more like a political attack dog than a major media executive, Clemente told *The New York Times*, “The latest Princeton Review ranked the University of Maryland among the top schools for having ‘Students Who Study the Least’ and being the ‘Best Party School,’ ” adding, “Given these fine academic distinctions, we regard the study with the same level of veracity it was ‘researched’ with.”¹⁵

But this was hardly the first time Fox’s viewers had been revealed to be conspicuously misinformed. In 2003, the Program on International Policy Attitudes conducted “a series of national polls between January and September.” The results, as reported by *The San Diego Union Tribune* found:

- “A majority of Americans (52 percent) believed evidence was found linking Iraq to September 11.”
- “A large minority (35 percent) believed weapons of mass destruction were found in Iraq.”
- “A majority (56 percent) believed most world opinion supported the war.”
- “Fox led the list for those with at least one misperception (80 percent). It also led for those holding all three—45 percent, compared with 12 percent to 15 percent for the other networks.”¹⁶

Misinformation has consequences, especially in a democracy. “In general, you end up with citizens who are acting on bad information when they carry out their civic duties,” says Kelly McBride, an expert on media ethics at the Poynter Institute, speaking about the media in general. “It affects the governing of a nation. It inspires people to make their voting decisions on fear or lies.”¹⁷

And the network’s partisan misinformation has not been limited to the dry facts of reporting on political or legislative issues—some of the consequences of its poorly vetted and politically motivated investigations have unjustly and seriously damaged lives and careers. In the past few years Fox News has been involved in several high-profile attacks on progressive leaders, such as White House Special Advisor for Green Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Van Jones; Assistant Deputy Secretary of Education Kevin Jennings; and Agriculture Department official Shirley Sherrod; as well as progressive organizations such as ACORN and Planned Parenthood. While it is completely appropriate for a news organization to investigate malfeasance by political appointees and major groups, instead of seeking to get to the bottom of these stories, Fox based its work on distortion, smears, and heavily edited video, often used out of context. These “news” stories had little to no journalistic value and were aired simply to harm progressives. Too often, these efforts were successful.

When discussing the problems of Fox, media watchers often get into conversations about bias. However, bias is not Fox News's core defect; nor is it what separates the network from CNN, MSNBC, or any other major news source. Nor is its main problem that it promotes tabloid journalism. Fox, rather, is something unprecedented in the United States: a news business that is willing to put politics above all else. While Rupert Murdoch, CEO of Fox's parent company, News Corp, is driven mostly by his bottom line, the management of Fox News, led by Roger Ailes, takes an active role in shaping the politics of the country and is willing to use Fox News's enormous platform to do so. Murdoch's discomfort with Fox News, while denied in on-the-record settings, has been widely reported. In his biography of the mogul, Michael Wolff describes a Murdoch who despises some of his most popular on-air talent, such as Bill O'Reilly, and whose politics, tough to pin down, can occasionally flirt with liberalism. "In steady, constantly discomfiting ways," Wolff writes, "Murdoch shares the feelings about Fox News regularly reflected in the general liberal apoplexy."¹⁸

Fox News began with a simple concept: build a network based on the triumph of conservative talk radio. This model was successful at the tail end of the Clinton administration and was even better suited to cheerlead for George W. Bush. In less than a decade, Fox News president Roger Ailes created for Rupert Murdoch a network with a built-in audience driven by its conservative ideology.

From the start, Fox had a profound effect on its viewers. In 2007, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* published a study looking at differences between populations that received Fox News and those that did not. The authors found "a significant effect of exposure to Fox News on voting":

Towns with Fox News have a 0.4 to 0.7 percentage point higher Republican vote share in the 2000 presidential elections, compared to the 1996 elections. A vote shift of this magnitude is likely to have been decisive in the 2000 elections. We also find an effect on vote share in Senate elections, which Fox News did not cover, suggesting that the Fox News impact extends to general political beliefs. Finally, we find evidence that Fox News increased turnout to the polls. Based on this evidence and on micro level audience data, we estimate that exposure to Fox News induced a substantial percentage of the non-Republican viewers to vote for the Republican party, 3 to 8 percent according to the more inclusive audience measure, and 11 to 28 percent according to the more restrictive measure.¹⁹

While the network already was having a significant impact, Fox began a transition in 2008. With conservatives out of power, no longer would it be merely a cheerleader for the conservative movement and the Republican Party. Now the network would wag the elephant, transforming itself from a news and opinion outlet into the leading communications, fund-raising, and mobilizing arm of the Republican Party. Or, as David Frum, then a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute and former George W. Bush speechwriter, told ABC News's Terry Moran, "Republicans originally thought that Fox worked for us and now we're discovering we work for Fox. And that the balance here has been completely reversed."²⁰

The interview in which Frum made this comment followed a post on his blog, *Frum Forum*, in which he declared, after the passage of Barack Obama's health care plan, "Conservatives and Republicans today suffered their most crushing legislative defeat since the 1960s."²¹ Frum placed the blame for this defeat squarely at the feet of one faction of his party: "There were leaders who knew better, who would have liked to deal. But they were trapped. Conservative talkers on Fox and talk radio had whipped the Republican voting base into such a frenzy that deal-making was rendered impossible." Frum continued, "How do you negotiate with somebody who wants to murder your grandmother? Or—more exactly—with somebody whom your voters have been persuaded to believe

wants to murder their grandmother?"²²

Part I

Attack and Destroy

Chapter 1

Roger's Rise

Let's face it, there are three things that the media are interested in: pictures, mistakes, and attacks.

—Roger Ailes

In 1968, at the beginning of his second presidential campaign, Richard Nixon stopped by the nationally syndicated variety program *The Mike Douglas Show* to make a guest appearance. So that he wouldn't have to share the green room with a burlesque performer named "Little Egypt," Nixon waited before his spot in the office of the show's twenty-seven-year-old executive producer. There, Nixon, who had famously lost the first televised presidential debate to John F. Kennedy eight years earlier, bemoaned campaigning in the TV age. "It's a shame a man has to use gimmicks like this to get elected," he said.¹

Nixon might have been a former vice president on his way to his second Republican nomination, but in that makeshift green room of *The Mike Douglas Show*, he was not top dog. That young producer, a man named Roger Ailes, turned to the future president and said, "Television is not a gimmick, and if you think it is, you'll lose again."²

Impressed, Nixon hired Ailes as his campaign media adviser. In this role, he managed Nixon's television strategy, which included the production of the candidate's "Man in the Arena" appearance during which Nixon took questions from "citizen" panels in front of vetted studio audiences. Today, Ailes downplays his role in the '68 campaign, claiming, "People think I was involved in politics. I had no politics with Nixon. I was a television producer. Now *The New York Times* likes to make it like I was in charge of Southern strategy or something. I was in charge of back-lighting. Cameras. But I always saw a way to daylight."³

However, speaking to *The Washington Post* in 1972, Ailes described a much more involved role within the campaign. "I did (Nixon's) regional shows, television spots and that sort of thing. The whole 'man in the arena' concept was mine. Thirteen hours of live programming," said Ailes. "I produced and directed a one-hour rally from Madison Square Garden on the ABC network and then I produced and directed the four hours live from NBC the night before the election. I did all his live and tape stuff, the commercials per se."⁴

With his limited campaign experience, Roger Ailes had already gained an understanding of several fundamental truths that would drive not only future political campaigns, but also the future success of Fox News. Prior to the Nixon campaign, Ailes's experience on *The Mike Douglas Show* had taught him that, in the age of mass media, production value matters as much as, if not more than, substance or even truth. "I don't go out purposely and try and fool voters," said Ailes. "Sure, I know certain techniques: such as a press release that looks like a newscast. So you use it because you want your man to win."⁵

Working for Nixon in 1968, Ailes had his first opportunity to use these lessons and his ample media talent to subtly (and occasionally not-so-subtly) play on people's prejudices and fears in order to win

their support for his candidate. Reporter Joe McGinniss witnessed Roger Ailes's manipulation of race first-hand during that Nixon campaign. In his book *The Selling of the President*, McGinniss recounts an exchange he had with Ailes during the process of casting a "Man in the Arena" appearance in Philadelphia. Ailes's first job was to find a diverse set of constituents for Nixon to interact with, fostering a realistic exchange for viewers on TV, while at the same time creating an environment where Nixon would thrive. In Philadelphia, he managed to recruit "an Italian lawyer from Pittsburgh, a liberal housewife from the Main Line, and a Young Republican from the Wharton School of Business."

But Ailes still had seats to fill. "Now we need a newsman," he told McGinniss. McGinniss suggested "the name of an articulate political reporter from the *Evening Bulletin* in Philadelphia." Ailes was excited and asked McGinniss to call him. However, the recommended reporter was African American, which gave Ailes pause. "Oh, shit," he told McGinniss, "we can't have two. Even in Philadelphia. Wait a minute—call him, and if he'll do it we can drop the self-help guy." The newsman turned out not to be available for the event.

Joe McGinniss had an additional suggestion for Ailes's panel, a psychiatrist he knew who was "the head of a group that brought Vietnamese children wounded in the war to the United States for treatment and artificial limbs."⁶ After booking the man, Ailes learned that Nixon hated psychiatrists and would not even appear in the same room as one. He also said the Nixon campaign wanted "to go easy on Jews for a while"—the psychiatrist in question being Jewish. "I guess Nixon's tired of saying 'balance of power' about the goddamn Middle East." Ailes called up and canceled, but now had an extra spot on the panel.

"You know what I'd like?" Ailes later told McGinniss. "As long as we've got this extra spot open. A good, mean, Wallaceite cab driver. Wouldn't that be great? Some guy to sit there and say, 'Alright, mac, what about these niggers?'"⁷

In a perfectly choreographed moment, according to Rick Perlstein's *Nixonland*, the candidate "could abhor the uncivility of the words, while endorsing a 'moderate' version of the opinion."⁸ On the streets of Philadelphia, Ailes found his man, a cab driver named Frank Kornsey, who "was not really for Wallace, but he wasn't against him either."⁹

Kornsey ended up asking Nixon what he would do about North Korea's capture of the USS *Pueblo* spy ship, to which Nixon gave a rehearsed answer. Earlier in the program Nixon had been forced to answer an unfriendly question about the Vietnam War. While Frank Kornsey did not fill the role Ailes originally prescribed, his softball question still served a purpose.

Roger Ailes grew up in a working-class household in Warren, Ohio, where his father was the foreman of the Packard Electric plant. He suffered from hemophilia, which played a large role in his childhood. According to Ailes, his parents "always would drive me to school and sometimes I[d] have to sit on a pillow in class because I'd have hematomas in my leg. And I couldn't go out for play periods sometimes, and that was bad."¹⁰

His parents' fears were justified—one seemingly minor incident almost turned fatal:

The worst thing I ever had, which almost killed me, is I cut my lip and hurt my tongue. I cut through my tongue by jumping off a garage. I didn't hurt my legs, but I cut my tongue. I bit my tongue. They didn't think I was going to make it. They couldn't stop it—it was really bad. I was seven or eight, somewhere in there. And I was in the bed, I heard the doctor say— I wasn't sure what it meant, but I heard him say, "We really can't do anything." I thought, Oh shit. My dad grabbed me out of the bed, in the sheets—he had a guy with him, a lodge buddy. And the

grabbed me and put me in a car, took me downstairs, threw me in the back seat ... And remember the guys that used to come up, Frank La-something and Dirty Neck Watson, guys that worked for my dad who were giving me direct transfusions from their arms to my arm. This was 1946, '47, '48, something around there. And they were scrubbing these guys down. They were filthy, they were just filthy guys. They all worked for my dad—it was maintenance work—anybody who had a type O positive, my dad would bring them up and they [would] hook me up to them. And I remember lying in the bed and they put it in me and they put it in Dirty Neck Watson and he dumped some blood down, and they'd go to the next guy. "Well, son, you have a lot of blue-collar blood in you, never forget that," my father said after I got through it, and I never have. A lot of what we do at Fox is blue-collar stuff.¹¹

Ailes attended Ohio University in Athens because, in his words, "they told me I could drink." While he was away at school, his parents divorced. This came as a shock to Ailes, who recounted, "I went back, the house was sold, all my stuff was gone. I never found my stamp collection."¹³ Ailes stayed at a friend's house; his mother moved to California, and his father fell into a deep depression.

Only twenty-one years old, Ailes took a job with *The Mike Douglas Show* at a Cleveland television station. Five years later, he was the executive producer and the show had grown from a local hit to being seen by "6,000,000 housewives in 171 cities."¹⁴

After Nixon was elected with Ailes's help, conservatives set out to build an ideological infrastructure that would help them dominate political debate for decades. Institutions such as the Heritage Foundation popped up in Washington, D.C., funded by millionaires such as Richard Mellon Scaife and Joseph Coors.

For the moment, Roger Ailes stuck around Nixon land, serving as an adviser to the White House and the Republican National Committee. Ailes also launched a consulting company, REA Productions, which worked for numerous Republican campaigns. In February 1971, bragging about his work, Ailes sent a note to White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman, telling him, "I worked my tail off but big and large I think we were pretty successful."¹⁵ To his note he attached congratulatory letters from senators, congressmen, governors, and state party chairmen.

Ailes was not universally liked in the Nixon White House. After an appearance by Ailes on a CBS morning news show in March 1970, Press Secretary Ron Ziegler wrote a memo to Haldeman noting that "too close a public association between Ailes and the President could lead to problems,"¹⁶ due to the media consultant's ties to candidates in Republican primaries.

In May 1970, the Republican National Committee ended Ailes's contract, citing "severe budgetary problems."¹⁷ However, in 1971, Ailes was granted an office in the Executive Office Building right next to the White House for use during "consultation visits to the White House."¹⁸ In a letter sent in June 1971, H. R. Haldeman congratulated him on his "new political trouble shooter role."¹⁹

When Ailes was fired from the Nixon White House, Haldeman was given talking points that he claimed, "We have not been able to build the relationship between you and the president which we had hoped to see. It is no one's fault."²⁰ The memo also suggested Ailes could be involved in the creation of a "TV series with a pro-administration plot"²¹ or a talk show starring Attorney General John Mitchell's wife.

Throughout his tenure in the Nixon administration, Ailes fought to convince his colleagues of the power of television. In November 1968, while Nixon was president-elect, Ailes wrote a "Confidential Report" that began by stating, "Television will play a major role in the Presidency of Richard M. Nixon." He continued, "When it is necessary to run for re-election, it will be the public's composition

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