

*The Roger Ailes Memorial Show: Fair and Balanced*

July 6 – August 4, 2017

Opening reception: July 6, 6 – 8 PM



yours mine & ours is pleased to present *The Roger Ailes Memorial Show: Fair and Balanced*, a group exhibition with:

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The Estate of David Wojnarowicz

Roger Ailes's Dream Was My Nightmare  
By Monica Lewinsky

This is not another obituary for Roger Ailes, who died last week 10 months after being ousted at Fox News. It is, I hope, instead an obituary for the culture he purveyed — a culture that affected me profoundly and personally.

Just two years after Rupert Murdoch appointed Mr. Ailes to head the new cable news network, my relationship with President Bill Clinton became public. Mr. Ailes, a former Republican political operative, took the story of the affair and the trial that followed and made certain his anchors hammered it ceaselessly, 24 hours a day.

It worked like magic: The story hooked viewers and made them Fox loyalists. For the past 15 years, Fox News has been the No. 1 news station; last year the network made about \$2.3 billion.

Some experts have noted that viewers found Fox for the first time because of the crisis. John Moody, a Fox executive editor, reflected on that period: “The Lewinsky saga put us on the news map.” As he put it in another interview: “Monica was a news channel’s dream come true.”

Their dream was my nightmare. My character, my looks and my life were picked apart mercilessly. Truth and fiction mixed at random in the service of higher ratings. My family and I huddled at home, worried about my going to jail — I was the original target of Kenneth Starr’s investigation, threatened with 27 years for having been accused of signing a false affidavit and other alleged crimes — or worse, me taking my own life. Meantime, Mr. Ailes huddled with his employees at Fox News, dictating a lineup of talking heads to best exploit this personal and national tragedy.

For myriad reasons — information gathering, boredom (I couldn’t leave my home without being trailed by paparazzi) and a touch of masochism — I watched the news around the clock. On Fox, it seemed, no rumor was too unsubstantiated, no innuendo too vile and no accusation too abhorrent.

Let’s not pretend that Fox News was the only network to cover this story in the gutter. Mr. Ailes’s station may have pioneered this new style of television reportage, but the other cable news channels didn’t hesitate to join the race to the bottom. In fact, in late 1998, when Keith Olbermann briefly left MSNBC, he expressed disgust with the frequent Lewinsky coverage.

Just as television news was devolving into a modern coliseum, the internet came along and compounded this culture of shame and vitriol. Remember: The story of my affair was not broken by The Washington Post, The New York Times or the networks, but online by the Drudge Report. The comments on television and online were excruciating. I ceased being a three-dimensional person. Instead I became a whore, a bimbo, a slut and worse. Just days after the story broke, Fox asked its viewers to vote on this pressing question: Is Monica Lewinsky an “average girl” or a “young tramp looking for thrills”?

Our world — of cyberbullying and chyrons, trolls and tweets — was forged in 1998. It is, as the historian Nicolaus Mills has put it, a “culture of humiliation,” in which those who prey on the vulnerable in the service of clicks and ratings are handsomely rewarded.

As the past year has revealed, thanks to brave women like Gretchen Carlson and Megyn Kelly, it is clear that at Fox, this culture of exploitation wasn’t limited to the screen. The irony of Mr. Ailes’s career at Fox — that he harnessed a sex scandal to build a cable juggernaut and then was brought down by his own — was not lost on anyone who has been paying attention.

There are some positive signs that the younger generation at Fox — James and Lachlan Murdoch — seem to want to change the culture Mr. Ailes created. Last week Bob Beckel, a Fox pundit who made a racist remark to an African-American Fox employee, was dismissed. Would this have happened in the Ailes era?

Although I imagine the desire by the Murdoch brothers to present a clean record to the European Commission reviewing their proposed takeover of Sky News played a role in their thinking, the Murdochs deserve praise for their part in the decision to fire Bill O’Reilly, whose show brought in \$100 million a year in ad revenue but who harassed and bullied women he worked with. I hope the Murdochs understand that Americans will no longer tolerate a corporate culture that views hate and harassment as part of running a successful news business.

None of this is to say that we shouldn’t have a credible conservative point of view in our media — quite the opposite. If we’ve learned nothing else from the 2016 presidential election, it’s that we must find a way to foster robust and healthy discussion and debate. Our news channels should be just such places.

So, farewell to the age of Ailes. The late Fox chief pledged Americans fair and balanced news. Maybe now we’ll get it.

*The New York Times*, May 22, 2017