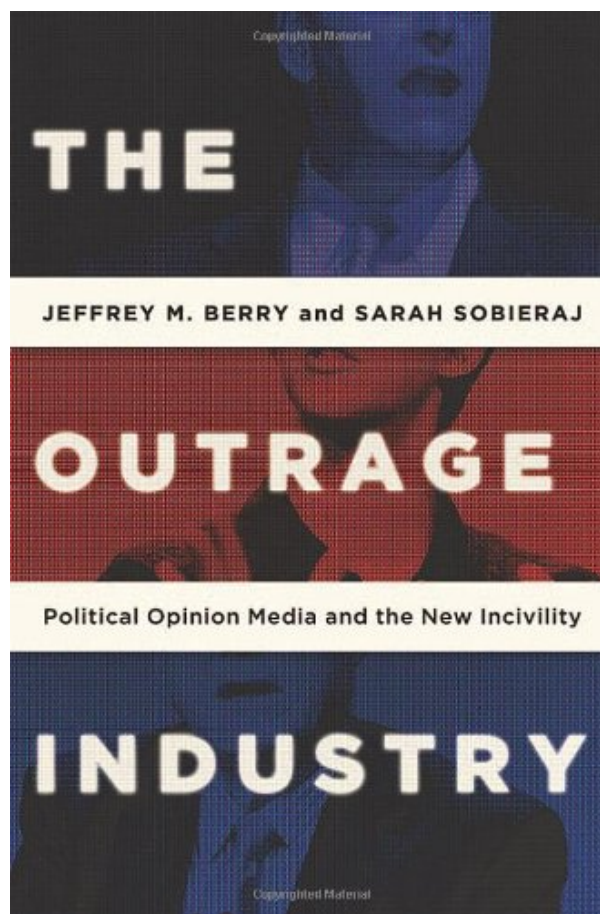
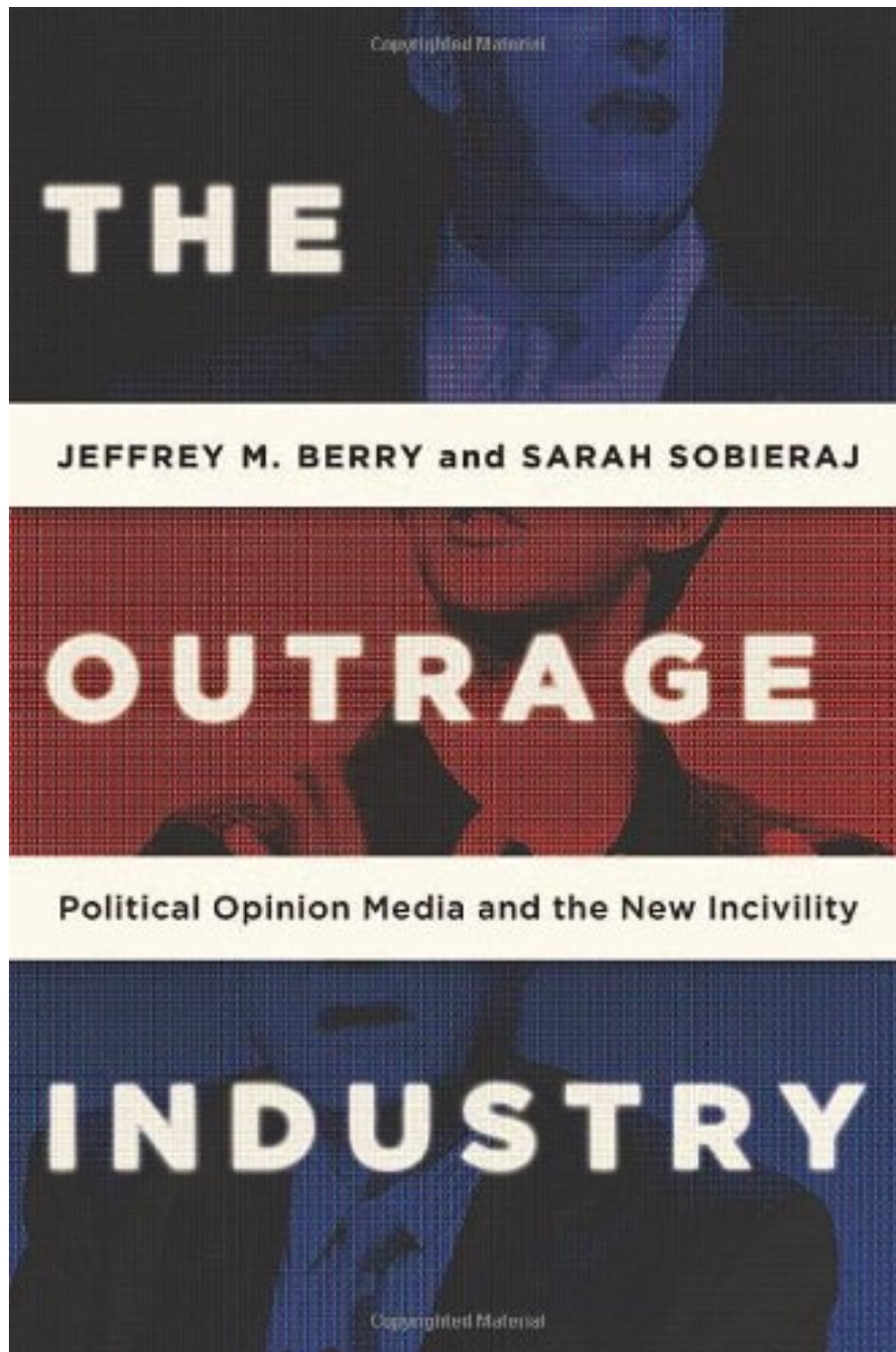


**THE OUTRAGE INDUSTRY: POLITICAL
OPINION MEDIA AND THE NEW
INCIVILITY BY JEFFREY M. BERRY, SARAH
SOBIERAJ**



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Review

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"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."

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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.

- Sales Rank: #213155 in Books
- Published on: 2014-01-07
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 6.50" h x 1.00" w x 9.30" l, 1.10 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 288 pages

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11 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

An eye-opening read

By Eric

This book sets out to make three arguments:

- That political opinion media contains more manufactured outrage than before, which could be characterized as the "new incivility;"
- That the increase in outrage doesn't reflect polarization among audiences, per se, so much as structural changes in the media industry driven by technological and regulatory developments; and
- That outrage has some positive effects but on the whole has a pernicious effect on the way government functions.

I think the book is largely successful. The authors make a good case that a) outrage as a pervasive feature of our political media is relatively new, and b) it has mostly to do with media companies figuring out how to make money in a rapidly changing environment. The takeaway, for me, has been to be much more vigilant to when authors or media hosts employ outrage techniques, and to be skeptical. While conservative readers may feel like the authors are unduly focused on conservative outlets like Rush Limbaugh and Fox News, I'd say on balance the authors go out of their way to be even-handed, despite the relative paucity of liberal outrage outlets (which the authors explain convincingly, incidentally, by reference to structural factors).

There are a few places, albeit relatively minor ones, where I think the authors miss the mark. First, the

authors oddly make repeated reference to the shooting of former Rep. Gabby Giffords in the context of discussing the outrage industry. To my knowledge, the overwhelming consensus on that event is that it was driven by the untreated mental illness of an individual, rather than having anything to do with politics per se. Second, for reasons I cannot fathom, the authors lump the National Review together with outlets like NPR as examples of non-outrage-based media outlets. I'm sorry, but on the authors' own definition of outrage, the National Review--whatever it may have once been under Wm. F. Buckley--is an outrage outlet, full stop. A better example of a sober-minded source of opinion on the right would be something like The American Conservative, for instance.

Overall, I highly recommend this book to anyone who struggles to understand why political opinion media is as a rule so vitriolic and over-the-top. Speaking for myself, this book has profoundly changed the way I approach such media, and generally has led me to conclude that much of it is actually, ultimately, pretty silly.

12 of 14 people found the following review helpful.

An Excellent Analysis

By Mary Bell Lockhart

This is an excellent, more scientific and sociological analysis of "shock" radio, TV and blogging, on almost exclusively the conservative side of our political spectrum. Read this, then do more research into the history to find answers to some of the questions they raise. For example, at one point they ask why shockers like Rush Limbaugh have such a large audience. Reading the history we find that they have large audiences precisely because they are being pushed onto us while alternatives have been eliminated. Radio networks have been bought by conservatives to put especially Limbaugh out there everywhere someone tunes in a radio. At one point in the book the authors say, "It is almost as if outrage media were designed by legislators for their own means." Historically that's exactly what happened! For example Fox News (sic) grew directly out of proposals submitted to President Nixon for a "GOP TV" by the same people who developed Fox. And as soon as the Tea Party raised it's head it was taken over, manipulated, shaped, funded and promoted by the GOP and Fox News. Read about the strategy of debating called the "Gish Gallop" and you will see that method applied in "outrage media" today - talk a mile a minute, talk over others, change the subject repeatedly, demonize and devalue your opponent. There are some liberal media figures lumped in, perhaps for balance, but the authors may miss the point that when liberals have engaged in outrage it almost always is in response to outrage from the right. Ask what purpose the GOP has in the outrage and the answer is, as usual, "follow the money." They need supporters to vote for them and actively campaign so that GOP public policy will favor corporations, big banks, Wall Street and polluting industries. They can't campaign on that agenda, so they use outrage to garner support. The authors have exactly the right prescription for this malady, however. It's not restriction of outrage that will work best (the First Amendment is vitally important) but the addition of more alternatives, more media challenging directly the misrepresentation and ugliness of outrage.

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful.

The Outrage Industry is the Future

By Noah Cross

This a wonderful book. The title refers to a rapidly growing segment of the media primarily on cable TV, talk radio, and Internet blogs which uses several elements (such as name-calling, mockery, and exaggeration) to appeal to a hyper-partisan audience. Much of the source material for the book comes from content analyses of many of these information sources as well as interviews with news industry experts and Tea Party leaders. Berry and Sobieraj identify 13 key elements of outrage rhetoric and show that these features are much more common today than in the past, contributing to the coarsening of political discourse.

One of the most interesting parts of the book documents the business side of outrage media. The outrage media has grown in response to clearly defined economic incentives, as well as technological, regulatory and

political changes in the United States. Berry and Sobieraj also report on the connection outrage media hosts develop with their audience. They make an important point that outrage media provide their audience a safe place for political discussion, where they feel respected and respectable. Of course, they all get respectable if they last long enough. Berry and Sobieraj make a convincing case that outrage media is having a profound effect on American politics. Most importantly, they demonstrate that at the right time and the right place the outrage industry is capable of almost anything.

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