

OPINION: The problem is O'Reilly -- not Hernandez

Contributed by Carolyn Barta
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Bill O'Reilly Some of you may have noticed a shootout underway between FOX News's Bill O'Reilly and the DMN's new columnist Macarena Hernandez. Check out her column today.

Hernandez riled O'Reilly earlier in the week with a column that mentioned Tifton, Ga., residents objecting after the town's mayor, Paul Johnson, flew a Mexican flag as an expression of sorrow for six Mexican farm workers murdered in Georgia. She asked, in her column:

Were the complainers angrier about the red, white and green Mexican flag fluttering in the Georgia air than they were about the horrific murders? Do they watch Fox's The O'Reilly Factor, where the anchor and the callers constantly point to the southern border as the birth of all America's ills? (Sample comment: "Each one of those people is a biological weapon.")

She continued: It is one thing to want to secure the borders and another to preach hate, to talk of human beings as ailments. Taken literally, such rhetoric gives criminals like those in southern Georgia license to kill; it gives others permission to look the other way. In this heightened anti-immigrant climate, what Mr. Johnson did was not only a welcome gesture, but a brave one, too.

O'Reilly took umbrage, as only O'Reilly can do. He vilified Hernandez, the Dallas Morning News and its publisher, James Maroney (sic), in his "Talking Points" memo of Oct. 19.

He noted that he's been on record time and again as sympathizing with Mexican workers, and then showed a video clip as "the proof that Macarena Hernandez is a liar." He goes on to say that Ms. Hernandez suggested that "we encourage murder without checking anything out. Talk about promoting hate."

O'Reilly accuses Hernandez of going "far beyond the limits of responsible journalism."

Excuse me, but much of the problem in journalism (and politics) today can be attributed to guys like O'Reilly who use TV and radio for their shout-fests and to incite people to action against not what they know but about what they hear on the air from a particular talking head or talk show host.

Hernandez mentions in today's column receiving "thousands of e-mails" after O'Reilly posted the DMN e-mail address, so his followers could "tell the Dallas Morning News exactly what you think."

"American journalism is deteriorating quickly," O'Reilly says, and "there are few standards anymore," to wit: "Left-wing ideologues like Ms. Hernandez, who has a master's degree from California Berkeley, are running wild with hateful invectives..."

Again, excuse me. With the proliferation of talk radio, shout TV and the blogosphere, newspapers offer one of the few places where there still are standards in journalism. Where you still can find "fair and balanced";

A commentary on the op-ed page, such as that by Hernandez (who also graduated from Baylor University before she went to Berkeley), is supposed to have an opinion. That's what distinguishes it from news stories. But as a former editor of the DMN Viewpoints page, I know that the paper has always sought to publish opposite viewpoints that would provide the kind of balance that would allow readers to form their own opinions.

O'Reilly's venom is just that...malicious, spiteful and reflective of the kind of poison that is causing the deterioration of journalism.