

Ways of seeing

In the end, as consumers (of products and of media), we see things the way we want to see them. If anything has become clear with this presidential campaign, is that voters (consumers) see what they want to see, and so does the media. There is no such thing as lack of bias. Everyone knows Fox News hangs to the right, and in their eyes, McCain won the debate last night. CNN is considerably more liberal, although they throw in two Republican strategists to their panel for a mix, and they say Obama won. My personal view is that neither candidate did well and that the town hall format was a mess.

It continues to shock me just how different people see the same thing differently. Where some people see patriotism (Sarah Palin speaking about America) other people see racism (her saying that Obama is un-American). If you do a search for Sarah Palin's racist remarks on Google, you will find an AP story about this, along with a great many blogs decrying this. I found a blog today that claims, erroneously, that Obama is a Muslim. And so the social media and the mainstream media can really serve to muddle the facts. Of course, we are seeing an upsurge in "fact checking" from organizations such as Factchecker.org. But where are those "facts" coming from? Which facts are we choosing to check?

I think that as consumers of media, we need to acknowledge what we are looking for and we need to question the motivation of media outlets. Remember too that media is paid for by advertising dollars and ultimately, that makes the most difference. Remember a few years ago that when Ellen DeGeneres was on the sitcom Ellen and she came out, some groups threatened to boycott the advertisers that advertised on that show? It works the other way too...some advertisers won't advertise on one channel because of bias. And more importantly, some commentators will not interview somebody because they disagree. For instance, Campbell Brown of CNN had

a spat with the McCain campaign that led to McCain canceling his appearance on Larry King Live.

Now more than ever we need to understand that what we see is not the whole story. As consumers, we need to find out what the story is and our best chance in the political season at least, is to read each candidate's position papers (via web or campaign) and to watch the debates and perhaps skip the "analysis." In the end we need to develop our own way of seeing. And the media needs to be more transparent about why they see what they see.