



Written by [Brian Koenig](#) on May 16, 2012

Obama Blames Media For “Sensationalizing” Negative Press

President Obama honed in on the media Monday during his commencement address at Barnard College, [railing against](#) the “steady stream of sensationalism and scandal” that typically drive up ratings. Using the “sensationalized” media as a campaign talking point, the President attempted to patch up a barrage of negative press that has debased the “hope” and “change” catchwords of his 2008 campaign.



During his [speech](#) at the all-women’s college, Obama warned the graduating class that their future careers may sometimes appear dim, but that the media is often to blame for relaying a deceitful social and economic outlook:

And while opportunities for women have grown exponentially over the last 30 years, as young people — in many ways — you have it even tougher than we did. This recession has been more brutal. The job losses steeper. Politics seems nastier. Congress more gridlocked than ever. Some folks in the financial world have not exactly been model corporate citizens. Faith in our institutions has never been lower.

No wonder that faith in our institutions has never been lower, particularly when good news doesn’t get the same kind of ratings as bad news anymore. Every day you receive a steady stream of sensationalism and scandal and stories with a message that suggest change isn’t possible; that you can’t make a difference; that you won’t be able to close that gap between life as it is and life as you want it to be.

Indeed, the President’s assertion that negative press largely overshadows positive press — as the former often generates higher media ratings — may hold some validity. But analysts have asked if Obama himself is not guilty of feeding such news. The death of Trayvon Martin, for example, has been showered with a hailstorm of bad press, as lawmakers, advocacy groups, and even black supremacist groups have railed against, and sometimes even threatened, those who have questioned George Zimmerman’s guilt.

The New Black Panther Party called for a \$10,000 bounty on Zimmerman’s head, while well-known Hollywood director Spike Lee encouraged vandalism on Zimmerman’s home by posting what he — wrongly, as it turned out — thought was his address on Twitter. All things considered, the Trayvon Martin story has been overwhelmingly negative, and while the events have been highly “sensationalized,” Obama helped stoke the fire.

“[A]ll of us have to do some soul-searching to figure out how does something like this happen,” he [commented](#) shortly after the controversy unfolded. “[M]y main message is to the parents of Trayvon Martin. You know, if I had a son, he’d look like Trayvon.” The controversy quickly turned racial, prompting many critics to question why Obama intruded into a contentious issue that, at the time, was grounded not on fact, but solely on media speculation.



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All in all, the President has hurled himself into the media spotlight, and has often used negative press in an attempt to gain an advantage over his political adversaries, especially over GOP presidential rival Mitt Romney. For instance, the Obama reelection campaign capitalized on the issue of job outsourcing earlier this month, releasing an [ad](#) that blasted Romney for “shipp[ing] American jobs to places like Mexico and China” when he was head of Bain Capital.

Furthermore, Obama just released a [TV ad](#) that exploits Romney’s controversial record at Bain Capital, which the media has helped sensationalize as a massive scandal. Again, the President attempted to make hay on the tale by painting his presidential foe as a ruthless capitalist who terminated countless jobs and forced the investment firm into bankruptcy.

However, Obama’s address on Monday also replayed his traditional inspirational-themed campaign sermon, as he attempted to reignite his 2008 pitch of “hope, change, and a better future”:

My job today is to tell you don’t believe it. Because as tough as things have been, I am convinced you are tougher. I’ve seen your passion and I’ve seen your service. I’ve seen you engage and I’ve seen you turn out in record numbers. I’ve heard your voices amplified by creativity and a digital fluency that those of us in older generations can barely comprehend. I’ve seen a generation eager, impatient even, to step into the rushing waters of history and change its course.

And that defiant, can-do spirit is what runs through the veins of American history. It’s the lifeblood of all our progress. And it is that spirit which we need your generation to embrace and rekindle right now.

Presenting a positive economic outlook to young American voters can’t hurt. But while the President’s assault on the media may appear sincere, critics have asserted that he ought to look in the mirror before assailing the “scandalous” stories that he himself has helped “sensationalize.”

Photo: President Barack Obama arrives to deliver the commencement address to graduates at all-female Barnard College, on the campus of Columbia University, accompanied by Barnard

President Debora L. Spar, in New York, May 14, 2012: AP Images



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