

The Sports Television Personality

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Whether you follow sports or not, with one contentious tweet calling President Donald J. Trump “a white supremacist” Jemele Hill inadvertently became a household name. At the time in 2017, Hill was an anchor for the network’s omnipresent highlight show, *SportsCenter*. Hill’s tweet calls attention to a variety of ethical issues the network has had as it pertains to its journalists who fail to censor their political beliefs on their social media. For many who believe that athletes and reporters “should just stick to sports” that is very difficult in these times. It begs the question at what point do you have to check your humanity at the door to become a journalist? Hill obviously took issue with that and to ESPN’s credit they found her a more appropriate position as a correspondent and writer for *The Undefeated*, the network’s web site that analyzes the intersection between race, sports, and culture.

I do have issues with calling Hill a celebrity. It’s true after the Trump tweets she probably became a household name to people who never heard of her before, but I just cringe when I hear the term celebrity intermixed with journalists. Hill may have one million followers on twitter, but she still worked as a journalist for reputable newspapers such as the *Detroit Free Press* and *The Raleigh News & Observer*, before being employed by ESPN. The network employs the usage of the television personality adding to the blurring of the lines between sports and entertainment. Sports is often seen as not as serious journalism for not having to employ the same standards as hard news journalists, but fully displaying one’s biases in reporting can have an impact on the credibility of an organization and on the profession of journalism as whole. When one calls the President of the United States a white supremacist, as a journalist it would be better to display evidence to that fact if one is not authoring an opinion piece.

When Hill made her tweets about the president I would like to say this advanced the topic of race in this country, but given how partisan everything is these days, it probably just made most people more adamant about what side they were on. Hill probably thinks her tweets were just her opinion, but given she was an anchor at the time it was seen as the views of the network and affected its credibility. There is a cumulative effect when some journalists in an organization are seen only for their political views and it becomes inadvertently the brand of the network. It leads to a lack of trust and ultimately to the downfall of the media organization and the media in general.

The media today compete with a burgeoning assortment of web products, instantaneous reporting of information, and so reporters feel they have to make a name for themselves in some fashion. Twitter affords them that vehicle and Hill took advantage of that. However, it can also lead to an ethical quagmire for journalists who are told not to reveal their biases. Whether she was reporting or not the audience now know what she thinks and given how much anthem protest coverage there was at the time

that is a problem. To the general public what these sports personalities are tweeting is a reflection of the tenets of that employer and not just to the reporter itself.

Granted, ESPN was basically the first to cultivate a sports personality and profit off of them. These broadcasters created witty catch phrases, put their personalities on display, and became household names. How we watch and consume sports was forever changed because of it.