

## **Stand up for Jorge Ramos: A free democracy depends on a free press**

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The lapdog American press just got schooled in what it means to be a journalist by the legendary anchor from Univision, the largest Spanish-language broadcast television network in the U.S.

If you don't know Jorge Ramos, he's been called the Spanish-language Walter Cronkite,<sup>1</sup> and he does what American journalists rarely do anymore: he asks tough questions of people in power. When politicians try to change the subject, he holds them accountable and shows the world what they really think. He's a well respected, world-famous journalist with a huge audience in the United States.

Asking questions of the powerful was exactly what got him in trouble at a recent press conference in Iowa on the presidential campaign trail. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump refused to answer a question from Ramos about immigration, and told him to "go back to Univision."<sup>2</sup> (Later, a Trump supporter elaborated on the phrase adopting an even uglier tone, telling Ramos to "go back to your country.")<sup>3</sup> When Ramos persisted with his questioning, Trump motioned for a security guard who then forcibly ejected Ramos from the press conference.

Dozens of members of the national press covering campaigning in Iowa were seated on folding chairs in neat rows. Not one of them rose to object or walked out in protest. They chose to prioritize their access to a hyped-up, sensationalist media spectacle over preserving the integrity of their own profession. They chose stenography over real journalism, and they need to be called out.

### **Ask the presidential campaign press corps: Are you journalists or are you just stenographers?**

Outrageously, in the wake of this brazen action, it's been Ramos who has been questioned by media entertainers like Joe Scarborough who have called out Ramos for the incident, not Trump.<sup>4</sup> Often confused for members of the press, television personalities like Scarborough have far more in common with reality television star Trump than with a journalist like Ramos. Ramos himself addressed his critics, declaring, "As journalists....I think we have to take a stand when it comes to racism, discrimination, corruption, public lies, dictatorships and human rights."<sup>5</sup>

The American founders knew that a free press is essential to democracy. Thomas Jefferson famously declared, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter."<sup>6</sup> When the leading Republican presidential candidate, who also happens to be a billionaire, can silence one of the country's foremost journalists, and other journalists simply sit by and watch, the existence of a free press is in doubt, and our democracy is put in peril.

The irony is that the only reason Trump is running for president is that it affords him an opportunity to get in front of the television cameras and on the front page of newspapers on a daily basis. The press have the ultimate power when it comes to Donald Trump – they could simply refuse to cover him and deny him the exposure he so craves.

Two reporters in the briefing used their questions to ask Trump about the ejection of Ramos. Ramos was eventually let back into the press conference and allowed to ask a question but the damage had been done.

Glenn Greenwald nailed it when he wrote<sup>7</sup>:

What Ramos did here was pure journalism in its classic and most noble expression: He aggressively confronted a politician wielding a significant amount of power over some pretty horrible things that the politician is doing and saying. As usual when someone commits a real act of journalism aimed at the most powerful in the U.S., those leading the charge against him are other journalists, who so tellingly regard actual journalism as a gauche and irreverent crime against those who wield the greatest power and thus merit the greatest deference.

Even though Ramos was allowed back and was able to ask questions, the message was clear. Trump wants a lapdog press acting as stenographers for his exhibitionism, and anyone committing journalism is subject to removal.

We need to ask the national reporters covering the presidential campaigns to think about whether they want to be lapdogs or attack dogs, stenographers or journalists. We know what Jorge Ramos is. They need to say what they are going to be.

### **Ask the presidential campaign press corps: Are you journalists?**

- 1 Christine Mai-Duc, "In taking on Jorge Ramos, Donald Trump may have tussled with the wrong media star", The Los Angeles Times, August 25, 2015.
  - 2 Joy Y. Wang, "Trump to anchor Jorge Ramos: 'Go back to Univision'", MSNBC, August 25, 2015.
  - 3 Michael Rosen, "Donald Trump supporter to Jorge Ramos: 'Get out of my country'" Fusion, August 26, 2015.
  - 4 Tommy Christopher, "Morning Joe Crew Absolutely Wrong to Slam Jorge Ramos for Doing His Job", Mediaite.com, August 26, 2015.
  - 5 Bradford Richardson, "Univision anchor: Trump behaved like a dictator", The Hill, August 26, 2015.
  - 6 Caroline Little, "Democracy depends on a free press ", The Miami Herald, September 16, 2013.
- Glenn Greenwald, "Jorge Ramos Commits Journalism, Gets Immediately Attacked by Journalists", The Intercept, August 26, 2015