

May 18, 2014

Charles Krauthammer says some tweets are better than others. When the administration tweets on Ukraine it is nothing but "preening."

Mass schoolgirl kidnapping in Nigeria — to tweet or not to tweet? Is hashtagging one's indignation about some outrage abroad an exercise in moral narcissism or a worthy new way of standing up to bad guys?

The answer seems rather simple. It depends on whether you have the power to do something about the outrage in question. If you do, as in the case of the Obama administration watching Russia's slow-motion dismemberment of Ukraine, it's simply embarrassing when the State Department spokeswoman tweets the hashtag #UnitedForUkraine.

That is nothing but preening, a visual recapitulation of her boss's rhetorical fatuousness when he sternly warns that if the rape of this U.S. friend continues, we are prepared to consider standing together with the "international community" to decry such indecorous behavior — or some such.

When a superpower, with multiple means at its disposal, reverts to rhetorical emptiness and hashtag activism, it has betrayed both its impotence and indifference. But if you're an individual citizen without power, if you lack access to media, drones or special forces, then hashtagging your solidarity with the aggrieved is a fine gesture and perhaps even more. ...

Peter Wehner says our foreign policy is now farce. Kerry said something that could have been in The Onion.

According to the Washington Post

'Secretary of State John F. Kerry said Thursday that he has seen "raw data" indicating that the Syrian government has used chlorine gas as a chemical weapon in a "number of instances" in recent months.

"There will be consequences" if evidence of new chemical use is confirmed, Kerry said, but "we're not going to pin ourselves down to a precise date, time, manner of action."

Speaking after a meeting here of the Syrian opposition's principal international backers, he also said they had agreed to expand humanitarian, diplomatic and military aid to the rebels.

"I'm not going to discuss what specific weapons or what country may ... be providing or not providing" the arms, he said. "I will say that out of today's meeting, every facet of what can be done is going to be ramped up. Every facet."

We have now reached the farcical stage in the Obama presidency. ...

Now we get to look at the NY Times/Abramson kerfuffle. Jonathan Tobin is first. *Love it or hate it, the New York Times remains one of the principal institutions of American journalism. So when its executive editor is abruptly and publicly fired with none of the usual platitudes or polite white lies about the victim deciding to explore other opportunities or spend more time with their families and with the process not dragged out to ensure a smooth and seemingly orderly transition, it is big news in the world of journalism. But the decision of Times publisher Arthur “Pinch” Sulzberger Jr. to “oust”—to use the word used by the newspaper in the headline of its own story about the firing—Jill Abramson seems more like a public hanging than a routine replacement of a top editor. Abramson is a deeply repellent figure in many ways, but her treatment is shocking not because it might be undeserved but because it is highly unusual for someone at this level to walk the plank in such a manner. ...*

The New Yorker says Abramson had lawyered up after discovering her pay was less than males who preceded her.

At the annual City University Journalism School dinner, on Monday, Dean Baquet, the managing editor of the New York Times, was seated with Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., the paper’s publisher. At the time, I did not give a moment’s thought to why Jill Abramson, the paper’s executive editor, was not at their table. Then, at 2:36 P.M. on Wednesday, an announcement from the Times hit my e-mail, saying that Baquet would replace Abramson, less than three years after she was appointed the first woman in the top job. Baquet will be the first African-American to lead the Times.

Fellow-journalists and others scrambled to find out what had happened. Sulzberger had fired Abramson, and he did not try to hide that. In a speech to the newsroom on Wednesday afternoon, he said, “I chose to appoint a new leader of our newsroom because I believe that new leadership will improve some aspects ...” Abramson chose not to attend the announcement, and not to pretend that she had volunteered to step down.

As with any such upheaval, there’s a history behind it. Several weeks ago, I’m told, Abramson discovered that her pay and her pension benefits as both executive editor and, before that, as managing editor were considerably less than the pay and pension benefits of Bill Keller, the male editor whom she replaced in both jobs. ...

Kevin Williamson posts.

... A few thoughts: The first is that I would not be at all surprised if Ms. Abramson’s compensation were less than she expected compared to what her predecessors had earned. Though my own experience as a newspaper editor has been considerably less rarefied than hers, I do recall that some years ago I was offered a job as editor of a daily newspaper at a salary that was less than half of what a previous, long-serving editor had earned. Declining margins have put a great deal of pressure on executive compensation at media companies. The phenomenon no doubt is more extreme outside the lofty heights of the New York Times, but the dynamic probably is the same throughout the industry. I suspect that if I were to return to an editor’s position comparable to any I have held in the past, I would be paid less not only in real terms but in absolute terms than I was. The numbers are just sort of ugly.

As for her allegedly condescending management habits, I have never had any dealings with Ms. Abramson, but such dealings as I have had with the New York Times suggest to me very strongly that condescending is the house style. ...

Lots of knives are out. Here's [WaPo's Erik Wemple](#).

In accepting his new job as executive editor of the New York Times after the ouster of Jill Abramson, Dean Baquet told his colleagues:

"It is humbling to be asked to lead the only newsroom in the country that is actually better than it was a generation ago, a newsroom that approaches the world with wonder and ambition every day."

How clever to mix the word "humbling" into an affirmation of such bare arrogance.

To disassemble Baquet's statement requires a look at what a "generation" means. One definition reads, "the number of years that usually pass between the birth of a person and the birth of that person's children." For some folks, that could be as few as 20 years and perhaps much more. Let's just place it at 30 years, meaning that Baquet is saying that the New York Times is the only newsroom that is better than it was in 1984.

That means Baquet dissed not only the late A.M. Rosenthal, who served as executive editor of the New York Times from 1977 to 1986, but all manner of rival news organizations, including the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and so on.

Jill Abramson has the most suffocating affectation of a voice. [Here's a video](#).

Washington Post

[The sound and the fury — and the tweet](#)

by Charles Krauthammer

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When a superpower, with multiple means at its disposal, reverts to rhetorical emptiness and hashtag activism, it has betrayed both its impotence and indifference. But if you're an individual citizen without power, if you lack access to media, drones or special forces, then hashtagging your solidarity with the aggrieved is a fine gesture and perhaps even more.

The mass tweet is, after all, just the cyber equivalent of the mass petition. And people don't sneer at petitions. Historically, they've been a way for individuals, famous or anonymous, to make their views known and, by weight of number, influence authorities who, in democratic societies, might respond to such expressions of popular sentiment.

The hashtag campaign for the Nigerian girls — [originated in Nigeria](#) by Nigerians — was meant to do exactly that: [pressure the Nigerian government](#) to respond more seriously to the kidnapping. It has already had this effect. And attention from abroad has helped magnify the pressure.

As always, however, we tend to romanticize the power of the tweet. For a while, Twitter (and other social media) was [seen as a game-changer](#) that would empower the masses and invert the age-old relationship between the ruler and ruled.

This is mostly rubbish. Yes, the tweet improves upon the mass petition because tweets contain an instant return address that allows for mass mobilization. People can be summoned to gather together somewhere — Tahrir Square, for example.

At which point, alas, the age-old dynamics of power take hold. If the tyrant, brandishing guns and tanks, is cruel and determined enough, your tweets will mean nothing. Try it at Tahrir or Tiananmen, in Damascus or Tehran. They will shoot and torture you, then maybe even let you keep your precious smartphone.

[Michelle Obama's tweeting #BringBackOurGirls](#) for the nearly 300 schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorists poses an interesting case of the semi-official tweet. This was no exercise in vanity. She does advise the man who does deploy the forces and who in this case provided serious concrete support — [intelligence, reconnaissance, on-the-ground advisers](#) — to help fight the evil.

What was peculiar about her tweet, however, was its uniqueness: It's the first time she's expressed herself so personally and publicly about a foreign crisis. And she was nicely candid about the reason: "[In these girls, Barack and I see our own daughters.](#)"

The identity of the victims here — young, black and female — undoubtedly helps explain the worldwide reaction. Two months earlier, [Boko Haram had raided a Christian school](#) and, after segregating the boys, brutally murdered 59 of them. That elicited no hashtag campaign against Boko Haram. Nor was there any through the [previous years of Boko Haram depredations](#) — razing Christian churches, burning schools, killing infidels of all ages.

Nonetheless, selective outrage is not necessarily hypocrisy. There are a million good causes in the world, and one cannot be devoted to all of them. People naturally gravitate to those closest to their heart. Thus last week's unlikely sight: [a group of congresswomen](#) holding a news conference demanding immediate U.S. action — [including the possible use of drones](#) — against Boko Haram.

These were members, like Sheila Jackson Lee, not heretofore known for hawkish anti-jihadist sentiments. No matter. People find their own causes. Their sincerity is to be credited and their commitment welcomed.

The American post-9/11 response to murderous jihadism has often been characterized, not least by our own president, as both excessive and morally suspect. There is a palpable weariness with the entire enterprise. Good, therefore, that new constituencies for whom jihadism and imposed Shariah law ranked low among their urgent concerns should now be awakening to the principal barbarism of our time.

Trending now (once again): anti-jihadism, a.k.a. the War on Terror.

Contentions

[The Obama Presidency Descends Into Farce](#)

by Peter Wehner

According to the [Washington Post](#)

Secretary of State John F. Kerry said Thursday that he has seen “raw data” indicating that the Syrian government has used chlorine gas as a chemical weapon in a “number of instances” in recent months.

“There will be consequences” if evidence of new chemical use is confirmed, Kerry said, but “we’re not going to pin ourselves down to a precise date, time, manner of action.”

Speaking after a meeting here of the Syrian opposition’s principal international backers, he also said they had agreed to expand humanitarian, diplomatic and military aid to the rebels.

“I’m not going to discuss what specific weapons or what country may ... be providing or not providing” the arms, he said. “I will say that out of today’s meeting, every facet of what can be done is going to be ramped up. Every facet.”

We have now reached the farcical stage in the Obama presidency.

Does Secretary Kerry understand how much of a joke it is for him to threaten “consequences” if evidence of new chemical weapons by the Assad regime turns out to be true? Given the Obama administration’s track record on Syria – with “red lines” drawn and erased, with its refusal to arm opposition groups early on, with agreeing to negotiations that have empowered the Syrian regime – it is better that Mr. Kerry keep his mouth shut than to speak and provoke ridicule.

The president and his secretary of state’s words long ago were emptied of meaning. So please, for your sake and ours, give up on the bluster. It only makes a shameful situation worse.

Contentions

Judge the Times the Way It Judges Others

by Jonathan S. Tobin

Love it or hate it, the *New York Times* remains one of the principal institutions of American journalism. So when its executive editor is abruptly and publicly fired with none of the usual platitudes or polite white lies about the victim deciding to explore other opportunities or spend more time with their families and with the process not dragged out to ensure a smooth and seemingly orderly transition, it is big news in the world of journalism. But the decision of *Times* publisher Arthur “Pinch” Sulzberger Jr. to “oust”—to use the word used by the newspaper in [the headline of its own story about the firing](#)—Jill Abramson seems more like a public hanging than a routine replacement of a top editor. Abramson is a deeply repellent figure in many ways, but her treatment is shocking not because it might be undeserved but because it is highly unusual for someone at this level to walk the plank in such a manner.

Let’s admit that most of us speculating about what caused this to happen don’t know all the details. But while there is an element to this story for other journalists that seems like a car wreck that we know we should turn away from but can’t help staring at, what we have learned about what preceded Sulzberger’s decision is highly suspicious. If, [as Ken Auletta informs us in the New Yorker](#), Abramson made some loud complaints to her boss about not getting paid as much as her predecessor Bill Keller, then the paper has a lot of explaining to do about the decision. The implications of the public statements about Abramson’s successor Dean Baquet—in which he gave her a backhanded compliment about teaching him “the value of great ambition” and then followed it by praising another former colleague for teaching about how “great editors can be humane editors”—lead observers to the obvious conclusion that he and his audience of *Times* staffers thought she was a horror.

But this piling on Abramson will naturally lead others to wonder whether this new sensitivity about her obnoxiousness is an attempt to distract us from the real reason she was fired. Were this kind of thing going on anywhere else, it’s easy to imagine the *New York Times* editorial page speculating about whether what we are watching is just another instance of an old boys club closing ranks against a “bossy”—to use a term that some feminists are now saying is a key indicator of sexism—female who annoyed the powerful men around her. And that is the most important point to be made about this episode.

That may be unfair to Sulzberger, Baquet, and the rest of the *Times* firing squad. Moreover, I think even those who are most critical of the *Times*’s liberal bias and increasing propensity for slipshod journalism and dumbing down of standards should try to resist the temptation of wallowing in *schaudenfraude* at Abramson’s downfall. But I do think it is entirely fair for the rest of us to judge the *Times*’s behavior the way it judges everyone else.

There may well have been good reasons why Abramson was not paid as much as Keller that had nothing to do with sexism. Perhaps Sulzberger belatedly realized that having an editor that was not as “humane” as Baquet implied she should have been was a big mistake that needed to be rectified as soon as possible. Abramson may have been considered a great journalist by many of her liberal admirers who shared her belief that reading the *Times* should be considered a religious rite. But a close look at her career—which was jump-started by her participation in the lynching of Clarence Thomas by reporting and a subsequent book written with Jane Mayer—does not justify that conclusion.

But the same newspaper that has regularly treated far less evidence of sexism as enough to justify public crucifixions of less powerful institutions than the *Times* should now be put under the same scrutiny. Any other place that couldn't tolerate a powerful and highly regarded woman because of her "brusque manner," or who sought to influence hiring decisions that was the purview of the publisher and made untimely demands about being paid the same as the boys, would be assumed to be a bastion of chauvinism deserving of the kind of obloquy that only the *Times* can dish out with slanted news stories and pontificating editorials.

It is a terrible thing to see any veteran journalist get turned out on the street in this kind of manner and I don't think anyone—except perhaps for Thomas—would be justified in exulting about what has happened to Abramson. But for the *Times* itself, I have no compassion or sympathy. The *Times* deserves to be judged and condemned as the classic example of liberal hypocrisy.

New Yorker

Why Jill Abramson Was Fired

by Ken Auletta



At the annual City University Journalism School dinner, on Monday, Dean Baquet, the managing editor of the New York *Times*, was seated with Arthur Sulzberger, Jr., the paper's publisher. At the time, I did not give a moment's thought to why Jill Abramson, the paper's executive editor, was not at their table. Then, at 2:36 P.M. on Wednesday, an announcement from the *Times* hit my e-mail, saying that Baquet would replace Abramson, less than three years after she was

appointed the first woman in the top job. Baquet will be the first African-American to lead the *Times*.

Fellow-journalists and others scrambled to find out what had happened. Sulzberger had fired Abramson, and he did not try to hide that. In a speech to the newsroom on Wednesday afternoon, he said, "I chose to appoint a new leader of our newsroom because I believe that new leadership will improve some aspects ..." Abramson chose not to attend the announcement, and not to pretend that she had volunteered to step down.

As with any such upheaval, there's a history behind it. Several weeks ago, I'm told, Abramson discovered that her pay and her pension benefits as both executive editor and, before that, as managing editor were considerably less than the pay and pension benefits of Bill Keller, the male editor whom she replaced in both jobs. "She confronted the top brass," one close associate said, and this may have fed into the management's narrative that she was "pushy," a characterization that, for many, has an inescapably gendered aspect. Sulzberger is known to believe that the *Times*, as a financially beleaguered newspaper, needed to retreat on some of its generous pay and pension benefits; Abramson, who spent much of her career at the *Wall Street Journal*, had been at the *Times* for far fewer years than Keller, which accounted for some of the pension disparity. Eileen Murphy, a spokeswoman for the *Times*, said that Jill Abramson's total compensation as executive editor "was directly comparable to Bill Keller's"—though it was not actually the same. I was also told by another friend of Abramson's that the pay gap with Keller was only closed after she complained. But, to women at an institution that was once sued by its female employees for discriminatory practices, the question brings up ugly memories. Whether Abramson was right or wrong, both sides were left unhappy. A third associate told me, "She found out that a former deputy managing editor"—a man—"made more money than she did" while she was managing editor. "She had a lawyer make polite inquiries about the pay and pension disparities, which set them off."

Sulzberger's frustration with Abramson was growing. She had already clashed with the company's C.E.O., Mark Thompson, over native advertising and the perceived intrusion of the business side into the newsroom. Publicly, Thompson and Abramson denied that there was any tension between them, as Sulzberger today declared that there was no church-state—that is, business-editorial—conflict at the *Times*. A politician who made such implausible claims might merit a front-page story in the *Times*. The two men and Abramson clearly did not get along.

A third issue surfaced, too: Abramson was pushing to hire a deputy managing editor to oversee the digital side of the *Times*. She believed that she had the support of Sulzberger and Thompson to recruit this deputy, and her supporters say that the plan was for the person in this position to report to Baquet. Baquet is a popular and respected figure in the newsroom, and he had appeared, for the most part, to get along with Abramson. (I was told, however, that, at a recent dinner with Sulzberger, Baquet said he found her hard to work with.) He is also someone whom Sulzberger passed over when he chose Abramson. But Baquet apparently felt that he hadn't been consulted, and, according to two sources, expressed his concerns to Sulzberger. He had also reportedly been approached by Bloomberg about a job there. (Baquet has not yet responded to a request for comment; neither has Abramson.)

In a reflection of the fractious relationship that Baquet and others had with Abramson, the *Times* [reported](#) that Baquet, speaking to the newsroom after his appointment, "praised Ms. Abramson for teaching him 'the value of great ambition' and then added that John Carroll, whom he worked for at The Los Angeles Times, 'told me that great editors can also be humane editors.'"

These issues seemed to congeal for Sulzberger and Thompson. The reason Sulzberger originally hesitated to appoint Abramson as executive editor was a worry about her sometimes brusque manner. As I wrote in my [Profile of Abramson](#), others in the newsroom, including some women, had the same concern. But, although there are always complaints about the *Times*' supposed "liberal" bias, or its preoccupation with certain stories, Abramson got high marks for the investigative stories that she championed. At a time when Bloomberg News pulled the plug on an investigation of corruption and the princelings in China, Abramson pushed the *Times* to do more, even after her reporters came under pressure in China. Even though she thought she was politely asking about the pay discrepancy and about the role of the business side, and that she had a green light from management to hire a deputy to Baquet, the decision to terminate her was made. Sulzberger met with her last Friday, and reportedly told her that it was time to make "a change."

National Review

[Sanctimonious Times](#)

The Grey Lady gets her comeuppance.

by Kevin Williamson

The clash of liberal pieties over the firing of *New York Times* executive editor Jill Abramson is wonderfully amusing. Feminists complain that her treatment is typical of the mistreatment women face in high-level management jobs, while others cheer the fact that her replacement, Dean Bacquet, is the paper's first black executive editor. There is some dispute over the question of Ms. Abramson's compensation relative to her male predecessor, and about whether she was penalized for her management style, described as "condescending" by one critic, in a way that a male editor would not have been.

A few thoughts: The first is that I would not be at all surprised if Ms. Abramson's compensation were less than she expected compared to what her predecessors had earned. Though my own experience as a newspaper editor has been considerably less rarefied than hers, I do recall that some years ago I was offered a job as editor of a daily newspaper at a salary that was less than half of what a previous, long-serving editor had earned. Declining margins have put a great deal of pressure on executive compensation at media companies. The phenomenon no doubt is more extreme outside the lofty heights of the *New York Times*, but the dynamic probably is the same throughout the industry. I suspect that if I were to return to an editor's position comparable to any I have held in the past, I would be paid less not only in real terms but in absolute terms than I was. The numbers are just sort of ugly.

As for her allegedly condescending management habits, I have never had any dealings with Ms. Abramson, but such dealings as I have had with the *New York Times* suggest to me very strongly that *condescending* is the house style. But newspapers in general are hilariously mismanaged. I could write a Harvard case study on my experience with the Journal Register Company. As a young newspaper editor some years back, I observed with horror and fascination as our management attempted to solve the "problem" of an advertising salesman who was too good at his job. Advertising salesmen typically are paid modest salaries and substantial commissions, and a young man we had hired in his first sales job turned out to be an absolute animal, stacking up commissions so quickly that he was on pace to out-earn the head of the advertising department his first year on the job, which was regarded as unseemly. The

budget committee, apparently unaware of how commissions work, was scandalized at the line item representing his compensation, failing to appreciate that this outflow was the result of an enormous, unexpected inflow of revenue. When I pointed out that if his commissions amounted to \$5 million a year then we could probably let the rest of the department go, I was invited to go back to minding my commas. The eventual bankruptcy surprised no one.

The mascot-type thinking at work in the *Times* story — Ms. Abramson is not an editor but a female editor, Mr. Bacquet is not an editor but a black editor — is distasteful, but typical of the way the business operates. Newspapers are managed by a collection of overly emotional people from the newsroom, business-school types who neither know nor care how newspapers actually work, and a fair number of gentlemen who inherited the business from their fathers. Mr. Bacquet is a highly regarded reporter, and a winner of the Pulitzer prize for investigative work, but he also served as the editor of the *Los Angeles Times*, which seems to me as much a disqualification as a qualification for advancement, given that he failed to stop that scandalously incompetent newspaper's descent from mediocrity. Los Angeles is a fascinating city, but its newspaper reads like it belongs to a town of 100,000. (It does have lovely typography, though.) But to anybody who has followed his career, his ascent seems almost preordained. In either case, I wish him the best of luck.

We conservatives like to beat up on the *New York Times*, and it gives us many, many reasons to do so, not least its sanctimony, which is on unfortunate display during this episode. But cities and countries need newspapers, and we criticize the *Times* as much for what it fails to do as for the offenses it gives. I only wish that the paper were as excited about its intellectual standards as it is about the genital configuration of its editor.

Washington Post

[In one sentence, a heap of New York Times arrogance](#)

by Erik Wemple



Newly departed New York Times executive editor Jill Abramson, center, with former executive editor Bill Keller at right and Abramson's replacement as executive editor, Dean Baquet, at left.

In accepting his new job as executive editor of the New York Times after the ouster of Jill Abramson, Dean Baquet told his colleagues:

It is humbling to be asked to lead the only newsroom in the country that is actually better than it was a generation ago, a newsroom that approaches the world with wonder and ambition every day.

How clever to mix the word “humbling” into an affirmation of such bare arrogance.

To disassemble Baquet’s statement requires a look at what a “generation” means. One definition reads, “the number of years that usually pass between the birth of a person and the birth of that person’s children.” For some folks, that could be as few as 20 years and perhaps much more. Let’s just place it at 30 years, meaning that Baquet is saying that the New York Times is the only newsroom that is better than it was in 1984.

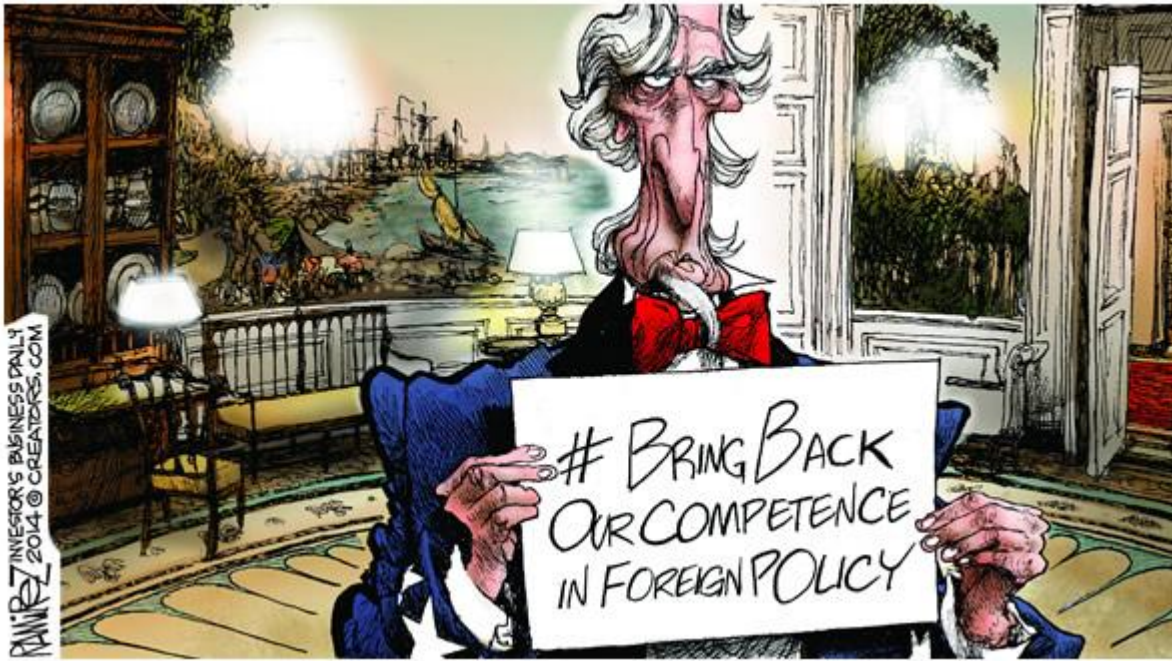
That means Baquet dissed not only the late A.M. Rosenthal, who served as executive editor of the New York Times from 1977 to 1986, but all manner of rival news organizations, including the Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post and so on. Not to mention newsrooms that compete in other media, such as radio and television. In 1984, CNN was four years old. Could it have nailed the MH370 story if it had happened in the mid-’80s?

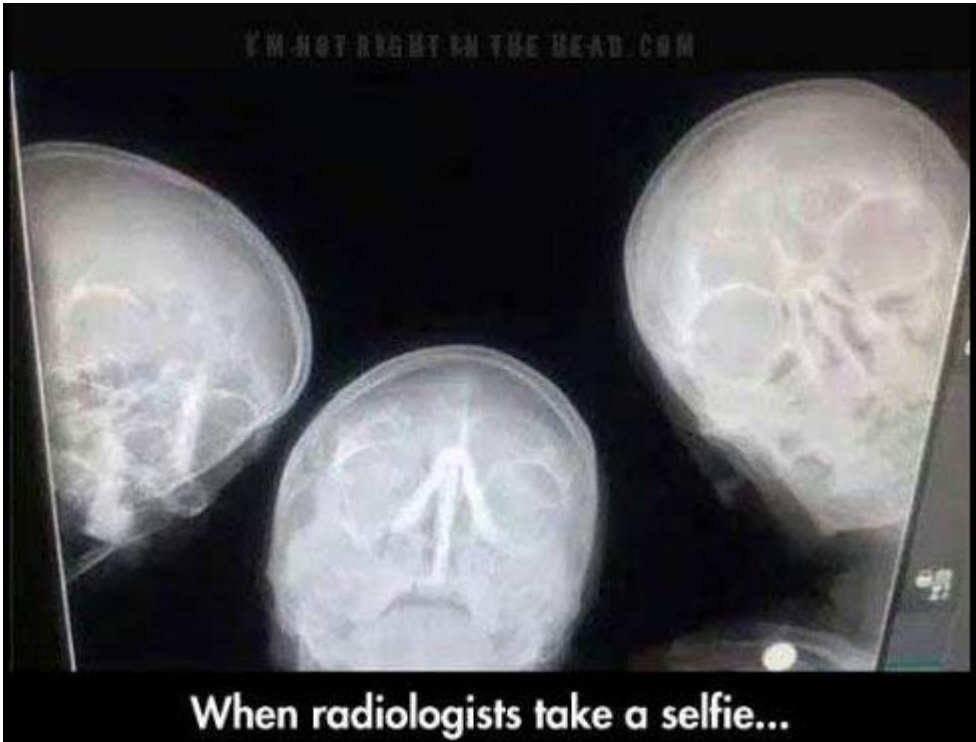
Silly questions, perhaps. But silly, too, was Baquet’s boast, a signal that with the changing of another guard at the New York Times, there will be continuity in terms of institutional self-regard.

Surely, Baquet’s boast references the hard times that have visited newspapers and other media properties over the past decade. What he apparently doesn’t recognize is that the rise of the Internet and the hollowing-out of traditional business models have forced newsrooms to innovate, to work harder, to get more from their resources, to declare a presence on various platforms. Many, many newsrooms in the country are better than they were a generation ago, as Baquet will discover in his new job. That doesn’t even consider all those news outlets that didn’t exist a generation ago.

At a newspaper famous for its smart editing, it’s a wonder that Baquet’s assertion wasn’t changed to read, simply:

It is humbling to be asked to lead a newsroom that’s always striving to get better, a newsroom that approaches the world with wonder and ambition every day.







It exists after all! Now where's my paddle?