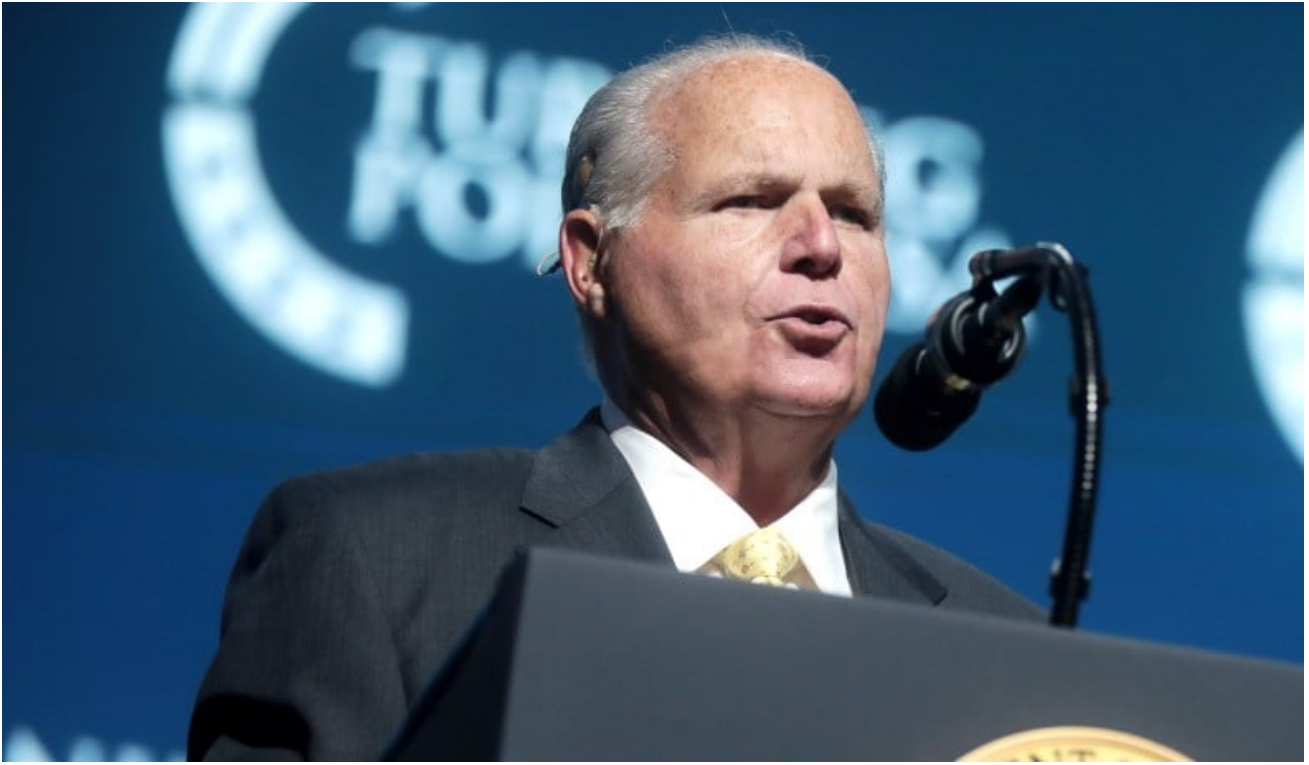


Limbaugh and His Detractors

by Conrad Black



The [Rush Limbaugh](#) was. Anyone who knew him knows how personally gracious he was, modest and lacking in bombast and vitriol, even when discussing political figures with whom he differed sharply. He was, uniquely, no more impolite about political opponents privately than he was publicly. He was a man from modest socioeconomic origins in Cape Girardeau, Mo., and both his talk-radio format and his blend of popular songs and other entertainment with current events was ingenious and witty. His success, which gave him as many as 25 million listeners every weekday, was entirely the product of his own imagination applied to his observations of listener habits and market demographics. One would have hoped that since he was such an uplifting story of self-made personal success based on perception and hard work, his political opponents would allow him the dignity of dying in peace.

From the moment his death was announced on his regular program by his widow last week, his opponents descended from all the

media like the massed crows of Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. He was a hardball partisan of a kind the Left is entirely familiar and comfortable with, since that is a flattering description of most of their chief spokespeople and standard-bearers, though none have been nearly as successful as Rush. This incandescent envy must be a significant part of their malice. The greatest depths were plumbed by former U.S. senator Al Franken (D., Minn.) in the *New York Daily News* on February 18. This seems to be a new and uncommonly tasteless artifact of the current anti-Trump playbook – to turn obsequies and obituaries into occasions on which the normal expectation and practice of comparatively respectful treatment of the recent dead is exploited in order to smear them with as much muck as possible.

This process works both ways, as was demonstrated in the odious, elongated festival of Trump-bashing conducted under the guise of the funeral of Senator John McCain. The funeral lasted half an hour longer than the funeral of a pope, in order to accommodate the Trump-hate-filled remarks of President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama. Neither of them had unlimited use for the deceased, only the pseudo-sportsmanlike regard that politicians have for politicians they have defeated, but both were happy to transform the funeral of a formidable politician and brave war veteran, at McCain's own invitation, into a vehement diatribe against the incumbent president (in the presence of the vice president, several cabinet members, and the president's daughter and son-in-law). It was unworthy for a man of McCain's stature, but he wished it on himself and it did Trump no damage.

Al Franken was a professional comedian, and like many entertainers, he imagined that this equipped him to be a

successful politician and legislator. He helped develop the Democratic playbook for winning delayed-result elections (which they carried to perfection in November) by narrowly defeating Senator Norm Coleman in a razor-thin, months-late finish in 2008. He was an unremarkable senator, but on the revelation that he had once, while on a tour to entertain members of the armed forces overseas, jokingly placed his hands above the ample bosom of a comely, sleeping, female fellow entertainer (he neither touched nor awakened her), he was unceremoniously dumped by the Democratic congressional leadership, and on a few words from the hierarchs, he resigned. It was such a spineless capitulation to the hypocrites in the Democratic leadership that Franken practically forfeited his right to criticize a political opponent. He has since required therapy to assist him in assimilating the premature and unjustified end of his political career. I wrote at the time that he should have replied to those calling for his resignation in words inappropriate to a family-oriented column like this one, and I had considerable sympathy for him until last week (though not much respect for his fighting spirit).

In his piece, Franken objected that President Trump had given Rush Limbaugh the Presidential Medal of Freedom, because previous honorees included César Chávez and Martin Luther King. The fact that Rush was one of the most astoundingly successful people in the entire history of the American media was beside the point. Franken stated that Limbaugh "created right wing talk radio," which is true, but not the whole truth: he created a public forum unlike any that ever existed before in the United States. He wrote that Rush was a racist because he said that Jesse Jackson looked like "all composite pictures of wanted criminals." He should have said "many," but he was not in fact racist at all. Franken's proof of Rush's homophobia was the admittedly offensive playing of the song "I'll Never Love This Way Again" after referring to the death of a gay man from AIDS 31 years ago. Rush was on-air 15 hours

a week for 40 years, and he made mistakes of judgment and often oversimplified, but he was a model of equivocation compared to a common-or-garden Trump-hater. He was not a homophobe any more than Franken is a misogynist sex maniac, as his party's congressional leaders implied. Franken's "proof" that Rush was sexist (which he wasn't) was that he mocked Sandra Fluke's demand that the Roman Catholic-affiliated Georgetown University pay for the cost of her contraceptives.

The facts that Rush had his doubts about the death of assistant Clinton White House counsel Vince Foster's being left for a week to the park police; was skeptical about global warming (which has now retreated into "climate change"); took the birther nonsense about Obama seriously; and correctly stated that the Democrats were fomenting panic about COVID-19 for political reasons, and that the presidential electoral results in November were in fact questionable in several key swing states – all of this is represented as hard proof of Rush Limbaugh's status as a drooling, rabid conspiracy theorist. Franken falsely accused Limbaugh of likening the January 6 violence to the American Revolution; Rush's real complaint was the silence of the Democrats through the long summer of violence across America in 2020. If he ever referred to Chelsea Clinton as "the White House dog," that was outrageous and out of character, though similar to commonplace remarks by Democrats about the Trump family. Franken even extends his anger to the late Roger Ailes, founder of Fox News, and the proprietor Rupert Murdoch, though Murdoch had nothing to do with Limbaugh. Poor traumatized Al Franken thinks Rush, Newsmax, Breitbart, and Fox News have turned half of America into reactionary lunatics. He overlooks the tedious and inconvenient fact that 95 percent of the national political media and 100 percent of the social media are sewers of self-righteous, woke, totalitarian Trump-hate.

Al Franken published a book in 1995 entitled "Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot and Other Observations." He should have changed the name and made it an autobiography.

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