

ESPN's Stephen Smith entitled to his opinions (Opinion)

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July 31, 2014

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CNN —

After football player Ray Rice was caught on video dragging his unconscious fiancee out of an elevator, his attorney called the incident a "very minor physical altercation." Where I'm from, when one combatant in a fight gets knocked out, that is no longer "minor."

Once the incident made the news, it was inevitable that there would be a "minor" kerfuffle over the story. I am not interested in discussing the incident itself. What I am interested in discussing is how this incident shows us that when emotional issues are involved, fair debate and discussion get knocked out, too.



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ESPN commentator Stephen A. Smith was nowhere near the elevator that day, but he just got knocked out by a chorus of voices and a spineless employer. When Smith commented on the issue, he clearly stated his position that Rice was dead wrong and deserved punishment. Without excusing it, Smith gave his opinion that, in general, when there is violence, sometimes it might be worth asking questions about provocation. He made it clear that there should never be violence, especially by a man against a woman.

For even suggesting that there could be provocation before a fight, Smith is now off the air. Mind you, Smith never tried to justify Rice's actions. Once the outcry began, Smith rushed to apologize.

I don't believe that Smith owed anyone an apology. If you listen to his entire statement, he said nothing to suggest that Rice's now-wife, Janay, "had it coming," nor did he make any excuses for Rice's behavior. The only offense he committed was that he blathered so incoherently that he made it hard to see how he managed to get a TV show in the first place.

So, if ESPN wants to take him off the air and replace him with a better commentator, I'm all for it. But I'm disgusted at the rancorous, politically correct swarm that descended upon Smith, and the spineless reaction of the management at ESPN.

And once the swarm gets into "beast mode," there is no recovery.

Why? Plain and simple: sexism.

Recall that a few months ago, [Solange Knowles attacked Jay-Z](#). When that happened, the feminist site Jezebel [had this take](#): "The real tea isn't the fight itself, but what could have possibly gone down between the two to make Solange kick her sister's husband in the balls." In other words, "if she hit him, he must have done something to have it coming." And this was not an outlier view.

Nobody's outrage meter spiked there. No, it was "funny."

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I'm not defending Ray Rice. But there's definitely a "sit down and shut up" double standard among those who seek to promote one side of this issue – and this is less about Smith's comments being inappropriate. The gleeful rush to call for Smith's head is far more inappropriate.



Yes, there's a difference between a physically huge NFL player beating up his fiancée and a wisp of a woman kicking Jay-Z in the crotch. But what's really going on here?

What's really going on here is that one side of the debate wants to make it impermissible for the other to speak. At all.

Take this in the context of how gender issues are presented when there are voices that dare to deviate from the feminist narrative.

Here's an example: Recently, there was a conference in Detroit for the "A Voice For Men" blog and its readers. That controversial website has the audacity to question certain issues from a man's perspective. As a result, according to news reports, this political meeting was the target of threats of violence that, in any other context, would have been called "terrorism."

Organizers said the conference moved from the hotel where it was to be held. Did you hear about that? It didn't get very much press coverage. Nobody called for a candlelight vigil. Could you imagine if this had been the annual meeting of the National Organization for Women?

Perhaps Smith is a complete ignoramus. Or, perhaps he was misunderstood. And next to that, we must concede that there was very little criticism of those who said that Jay-Z must have done something to provoke violence against him. There was no real outcry when A Voice For Men was the victim of what would be called "terroristic threats" if it was any other viewpoint.

Listen to comedian Bill Burr. In a routine, he discusses the statement "there's no reason to hit a woman." He's doing comedy, but he makes a really cogent point – perhaps there is no justification for it, but why is it so taboo to ask about what happened before the violence?

"When you say there's no reason, that kills any sort of examination as to how two people ended up at that place. If you say there's no reason, you cut out the build-up, you're just left with the act. How are you going to solve it if you don't figure it out?" he said.

"You can only ask questions about what the guy did, you can never ask about the woman, why is that?"

Why, indeed? Maybe Burr was on to something?

Neither Burr, nor I, want to defend Rice beating up his fiancée. I'm appalled that Rice only got a two-game suspension.

But I'm just as appalled that free discourse has become such a victim of the politically correct police that nobody can even ask a question, or raise any other viewpoint except to fall over themselves with condemnation.

Well, nobody except Bill Burr.

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