

Looking Beyond Headlines to Outsmart the Propagandists

The trial of officer Derek Chauvin came up in a conversation I had with a friend this weekend. “Yeah, I really haven’t been able to follow it much, but I did see a few headlines,” was the essence of my friend’s comments on the issue. He then noted that the little he had seen made him think Chauvin’s prospects weren’t all that bright.

“Oh, really?” I asked. “I got a different idea.”

Curious, my friend questioned me about what I had heard, so I began sharing with him the various testimonies I had watched and the new facts of the case I learned through that viewing. Furthermore, I shared some of the daily [synopses of the trial](#) as broken down by attorney Andrew Branca on *Legal Insurrection*.

Interestingly, the resumption of the trial this week found [Branca making the same observation](#) as my friend and I did, namely, that the tidbits of the trial making the sensational headlines tell a vastly different story than the one really playing out. This has become a “common pattern in this case,” Branca observes, noting:

The (carefully prepared?) state’s witness is carefully questioned by the state to illicit headline worthy quotes, but it’s ultimately revealed on cross-examination that those quoted opinions were based on extremely limited information, lacked context of the full circumstances, and were gutted on cross-examination as a result.

Yet the general public does not realize they are receiving a very narrow view of the case from the media. This pattern of only reporting one side of the story is dangerous, Branca notes, because while the jury will hear both sides and be able

to make a well-informed opinion, the public will not:

The public, especially the public willing to riot, loot, and arson (arson must be a verb by now, right?), is however hearing only the narrative of guilt in this case. That means that anything other than a guilty verdict can only come as a complete shock to their sense of justice, and therefore a complete justification of any terror they wish to bring to bear to the public generally.

Branca suggests that this will leave the media with some of the blame should riots ensue if Chauvin is acquitted.

But this isn't the only time we've seen this type of story play out. Just the other day [60 Minutes aired a story about Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis](#), alleging underhanded dealings with Publix for vaccine distribution efforts in the state. The *60 Minutes* segment, however, eliminated much of DeSantis's fact-based answer, making for a much more incriminating story, a situation for which both Democratic officials and the Publix company called the longstanding news program to task.

These examples are clear instances of propaganda. Political philosopher Richard Weaver outlined this form of propaganda in his 1948 book, [Ideas Have Consequences](#), only at that time he framed this propaganda as the work of public relations offices which seek to puff their corporate heads:

More institutions of every kind are coming to feel that they cannot permit an unrestricted access to news about themselves. What they do is simply set up an office of publicity in which writers skilled in propaganda prepare the kinds of stories those institutions wish to see circulated. Inevitably this organization serves at the same time as an office of censorship, de-emphasizing, or withholding entirely, news which would be damaging to prestige. It is easy, of course, to disguise such an office as a facility created to keep the public better informed, but this does not alter the fact that

where interpretation counts, control of source is decisive.

We see this same type of work being done today, only this time, the PR puffing is accomplished by the media on behalf of progressive, “woke” organizations such as Black Lives Matter, or ideas such as critical race theory, or policies relating to defunding the police. If the media can act “as an office of censorship, de-emphasizing, or withholding entirely, news which would be damaging to [the] prestige” of these various favored “woke” theories, ideas, and courses of action under the guise of “keep[ing] the public better informed,” then how can we maneuver our way through life, making sure we know the truth and are not just being taken in by propaganda? Weaver supplies the answer in a separate essay entitled “[A Responsible Rhetoric](#).”

“[C]loping with propaganda requires a wide-spread critical intelligence,” writes Weaver. Sadly, such intelligence is acquired from a good education system, which, Weaver admitted, was not that great even in the mid-20th century in which he penned those words. To remedy this poor education system and the citizenry’s subsequently poor intelligence, Weaver says we must teach “responsible rhetoric.”

Responsible rhetoric, as I conceive it, is a rhetoric responsible primarily to the truth. It measures the degree of validity in a statement, and it is aware of the sources of controlling that it employs. As such, it is distinct from propaganda, which is a distortion of the truth for selfish purposes.

Instances of propaganda are likely to increase in frequency going forward. If we want to avoid being taken in by propaganda, then we must become individuals who dig beyond headlines in order to hear the real story and discern the truth.

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