

The Passy Press[®]

Letters to the Editor

From: Richard Collier <collier.rt@undisclosed.com>
To: Nick Gardiner <enpg@thepassypress.com>
Sent: 29 December 2017 at 00:19:07 CET
Subject: Peter Barnet Essay, October 2017

Dear Sir:

The origin of what's now known as fake news is not that difficult. Follow this sequence as you will find its source and evolution:

A reporter writes a story that's news. It consumes only eleven column inches. The editor has a need for thirty. So the basic story - likely quite true - becomes embellished in two ways, First, background, perhaps from a earlier piece covering similar news that does nothing more than repeat what's been read before. That consumes another ten column inches. The second - and here's the rub - is that another ten column inches are devoted not to news or background but something entirely "new": interpretation of that news. With interpretation comes bias, spin and other forms that take the piece from straight "news" to something entirely different, an opinion piece masquerading as "news". Over time, particularly in the heavily-biased major urban dailies, the interpretation becomes larger than the story and background and soon the entire newsroom is not writing news but opinion and bias.

This simple exercise, begun and mastered in the print media, of course has spread across the media spectrum and so finding only the simple true story of any modestly complex event that legitimately originated as "news" becomes more difficult. And, I gather, in the social media space (I don't "do" any social media.), the fact-based news item - and background - is all but lost and in its place one finds all spin, opinion, hearsay and all other categories than make up "fake news".

In its early days, major network TV and radio (remember that?) news outlets prided themselves on giving only news and, when appropriate, a bit of background/context. At this they excelled, so much so that Walter Cronkite became the "most trusted" man in America with Huntley/Brinkley close behind. And Bill Paley was lauded for running a news operation that rigorously kept separated fact from opinion. Over time, as these icons retired, they were replaced with the first of the "spinners", Dan Rather most notably, to the point where he eventually lost his job as a result of what might charitably be called "spin" but actually was early "fake news".

So there you have it. The major dailies dish out "fake news" every day by corrupting their original mission with whatever cause they deem it necessary for the American people to be subjected to. These, and many academics and bureaucrats, are the ones

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that "know what's best" for America (or Boston, or New Hampshire, and so forth) and its residents. They would have the nanny state - with them, of course, the nanny - and if things continue, they may get it.

So, bottom line, I stand with those who say it's up to each individual to take the time and make the effort to read/listen critically, take time to reflect and explore and avoid those who prosper only by virtue of instant reaction and counter punch, as far off the mark as it may be.

Sincerely,

Richard Collier