

From Diversity To Advocacy Journalism

Coloring the News: How Crusading for Diversity Has Corrupted American Journalism

William McGowan

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Reviewed by John Attarian

For decades conservatives have complained unavailingly of liberal bias in the media. *Coloring the News*, by veteran journalist and Manhattan Institute fellow William McGowan, powerfully supports this charge, revealing that journalism in regarding “diversity issues” — race, feminism, homosexuality, affirmative action and immigration — consistently sacrifices truth and fairness to political correctness.

McGowan traces this to a campaign to open up journalism to minorities and minority perspectives. A self-proclaimed “pragmatist” committed to fairness and intellectual honesty, he calls this a “worthy, overdue, and historically necessary effort.” However, a decade of observing the diversity drive’s consequences led him to conclude that it is harming both journalism and America’s civic culture.

To promote diversity, major newspapers, magazines, and news organizations use hiring and quotas and have created beats and columns for minorities and homosexuals. Many senior editors’ pay and promotions are tied to minority hiring and promotions. Style guides abound to ensure politically correct copy devoid of offensive words and stereotypes. Some papers monitor their pages for quantity of minority coverage.

And coverage of diversity issues became biased and untrustworthy. Throughout McGowan's wealth of specific examples, the same pattern recurs. Initial coverage of an incident or topic compromises truth "to filter out realities that might undercut the cause." Opposition to affirmative action, gay marriage, immigration, and so on is either not covered, or presented unfavorably. When politically incorrect truth emerges later, it is covered minimally or not at all.

Thus, the media often do not report the race of criminals. The purported wave of church burnings in 1996 was uncritically taken as evidence of still-virulent white racism. When it emerged that there was no pattern of racist burnings, and that more white churches than black ones were burned in January 1995-May 1997, some papers such as the *New York Times* buried it.

The press uncritically accepted the pro-abortion lobby's false assertion that few such abortions are performed. Even when Ron Fitzsimmons of the National League of Abortion Providers admitted that he had lied in declaring these abortions rare, the press dodged the "clear implication" that the abortion lobby was being untruthful. While homosexual Matthew Shepard's murder received 3,007 stories in the first month alone, the abduction, abuse and murder of 13-year-old Jesse Dirkhising by two homosexuals got only 46 stories in the first month. Trial coverage was similarly lopsided. Investigating the disparity, McGowan received evasive answers. "No one admitted the obvious: that the Dirkhising story was too hot to handle" because it spotlighted gay pedophilia and threatened to demolish "the gays-as-victims script which had attained the status of holy writ in the media."

The press slights or ignores evidence of affirmative action's drawbacks. When Washington, D.C.'s police department lowered hiring standards and minimized criminal background checks in 1989 and 1990 to increase minority hiring, former criminals became Washington policemen. The *Washington Post's* coverage omitted the link between minority recruitment goals, lowered standards, and corruption. Similarly, coverage of affirmative action in college admissions ignores the massive remedial efforts and high minority dropout rates at elite schools.

Mainstream media have been reluctant to tackle immigrant crime, bilingual education's negative consequences, and Hispanic illegitimacy. Voodoo, Santeria animal sacrifice, and other immigrant practices receive respectful treatment.

So newsroom diversity turns out to be "skin deep." A publisher interested in "real diversity," McGowan rightly argues, would hire, say, a pro-life woman or born-again Christian. But his research has convinced him that "these viewpoints, and others considered retrograde, are systematically excluded from today's newsroom." The push to hire women and minorities, who are more liberal than white men, merely strengthen journalism's liberal bent.

Subordinating critical judgment and truth-seeking to self-righteous liberal ideology has undermined media credibility, alienated many Americans, insulated liberalism from any need for self-criticism, and reinforced negative opinions of minorities. Worst of all, McGowan writes, the diversity crusade has oversimplified complicated realities and weakened the “spirit of public cooperation and trust” needed for multiethnic and multiracial societies. “A sound public discourse requires the press to be an enemy of political demagoguery, not a vehicle for it.”

Coloring the News does have grave weaknesses. McGowan hardly supports his assertions of the media’s past “pernicious stereotypes” of homosexuals and “sins of racial, ethnic and cultural exclusion.” He apparently fears that the diversity drive will be self-defeating—revealing that he is less “pragmatist” than liberal. And his complaints are startlingly naïve. “Instead of fostering detached, neutral reporting and analysis, the diversity mandate has given us advocacy.” What did he think was going to happen? Given liberalism’s axiom that institutions should change society, its decades-long trashing of whites, males, and traditional sexual mores, and its anointing of blacks, women, and homosexuals as victims, it was inevitable that aggressively recruiting from among the ranks of these aggrieved “victims” would reinforce the mass media’s image as an advocate of both multiculturalism and egalitarianism. McGowan is clueless to simultaneously endorse diversity and bemoan its predictable consequences.

Nevertheless, McGowan does furnish valuable intellectual ammunition for conservatives. His sympathy with diversity and his restrained tone make it difficult for doctrinaire liberals to dismiss him as a jaundiced spear-carrier for the right. Unfortunately, McGowan’s sympathetic nod toward the concept of “diversity” suggests that he genuinely fails to connect the dots and identify the crux of the dilemma that he has shed so much light on: the enshrinement of a minority-victimization agenda to the forefront of the news media. Truth will eventually triumph over falsehoods, and *Coloring the News*, while stumbling blindly onto the truth, is still a useful contribution in exposing the obvious double-standards involved in promoting (in some cases) or silencing (in other instances) minority-entrenched issues and interests.

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