

Fake News, Fake Anguish, Fake Debates? You Decide



(Even When It's Real, Radio, TV News and Debates Are Also Shams)

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So episode two of the multi-channel sham TV series mischaracterized as Democratic debates is history. And again a direct line between the president of the United States and the cable networks has been proven: Donald Trump says that every negative story about him is Fake News. As for the cable networks promoting their spectacles as debates: Also Fake News. After the first debate, Joe Biden was entirely correct when he said there's not much you can say in 30 to 60 seconds. And the CNN debate was corroborative evidence of what the former vice-president said, as candidates were continuously cut short by the moderators.

President Donald J Trump is the master of Fake News. He makes comments about happenings that really are Fake News. And he

derides true negative stories about him as Fake News. One would not be wrong to assume that this pseudo patriotic draft dodger learned from the Fake News statements made by another liar – Adolph Hitler. *(Sometime when I listen to Trump's remarks I think he's representing the party of George Lincoln Rockwell instead of Abraham Lincoln. Not that I'm saying that Trump is a Nazi, even though he speaks Grade A Nazi fluently. But he does seem to admire tyrants and has many of their traits. And he is a population divider and is largely responsible for furthering the antagonism between different segments of our society.)* Trump's act is not new: Convince the populace that the present government is corrupt and that only he can save the country from destruction. *(With a White Horse in the barn?)*

A check of past president's remarks shows that all president's lie, mostly to advance their agendas. But Trump takes it many miles further. He lies not only to advance his agenda but to cause citizens to distrust immigrants, as well as defenders of our freedoms, like the FBI, intelligence and other governmental services and the courts. *(It's as if all the evils of mankind have escaped from Pandora's Box and found a home in Trump's mouth.)* To his supporters Trump is a demigod. To me he's a demagogue.

Trump is not the only disseminator of Fake News. Pay attention to the "hard news" reports on electronic media – radio and television – and you'll see what I mean, as the producers and reporters strive to make listeners and viewers believe that they are reporting it first, accurately and completely. *(Or maybe they are not trying to deceive their audiences. There's a good case to be made that they really aren't knowledgeable about what they report.)*

A recent radio news report that caught my attention while eating breakfast on July 9 concerned New York Met's slugger Pete Alonso's beneficent charitable gesture. It made me put down my morning coffee and take to the computer, because as a

journalist during the era when accuracy and completeness was a must for every story, more important than "getting it first," it disturbed me. (*It also disturbs my wife, when I consistently point out the inaccuracies and omissions on cable news networks' political reporting. That means I upset her quite frequently.*)

The radio reporter on WCBS said that ESPN reported Alonso would donate 10 percent of his home run derby winnings to charities, giving the impression that it was new reporting. It wasn't. No where during the different airing of Alonso's accomplishment that I heard during different news cycles were the words saying that Alonso said he would do that several days prior to his winning the derby. Often, I also hear news reported on this station that has been reported a few days earlier on other sites, like the New York Times and Wall Street Journal, giving the impression that what the listener is hearing is new. (*At least they don't claim every report is "Breaking News" as their cable TV kin does.*)

WCBS radio billboards itself as "More Than Just The Headlines." Maybe at one time. But not today. Not since they became a quasi sports station and began carrying programming from financial advisors trying to get your business. More accurately, the station should billboard itself as "Not the entire story and not the latest news."

But except for fanatics and people whose livelihood is associated with sports, the Alonso report was a minor blip in accurate reporting. Not so when the subject is political reporting.

As readers of my media columns know, I am not a fan of the political news delivered on the cable TV channels. I mentioned the report on WCBS radio to show how accurate and detailed reporting has largely disappeared on the electronic media and that people have to read major newspaper to get the entire story.

Too often it should be obvious to political junkies who watch the cable TV networks that reporters really don't know the details of what they are reporting. Weasel words like 'bad optics,' "wave election," and "playing to his base" are used by pundits and reporters instead of new detailed reporting. And when the reporters race down the hall to get a sound bite from a congressperson, they excitedly report what was said without putting the remarks in context. (*Terrible reporting; good for sneaker companies.*)

A prime example of the above is the overblown coverage that early on was given to a very junior congresswoman with a very limited following – Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who, with three other congresswomen, (two of whom, Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib, have made overtly anti-Semitic remarks that were whitewashed by the shameful Democratic leadership) have demonstrated media smarts. Thus far they have done more to ensure a second term for Trump than the entire Republican National Committee. It is cable news' insatiable appetite for yellow journalism that has vaulted AOC from being a minor congresswoman to a media star, comparable to the destructive politics of Donald Trump.

(In a huge July 13-14 article, the Wall Street Journal reported that Britain's Labour Party is now in crisis because of anti-Semitic sentiment in its ranks. At one time, Labour could count on the bulk of Jewish votes; now 85.6% of Jews think it condones anti-Semitism. The same could happen here to the Democratic Party if anti-Semitic sentiment in the party isn't strongly condemned by its leaders. Jewish voters were not always a sure vote for Democrats. From 1860 until the election of President Franklin Roosevelt in 1932, Jews voted for Republican presidential candidates.)

What makes what AOC says more newsworthy than others in Congress is not the substance of her comments, which are inflammatory and separatist, rather than unifying. It's cable news' appetite for making every ripple in the ocean seem like

a tsunami in order to stir the pot and gain audience. (*And they usually succeed in doing so to the detriment of the American political system.*) AOC's "caucus" of four has as much support among Democrats in Congress as Rep. Justin Amash has among Republican House members. (*I've been politically left of the Democratic National Committee on many issues, even before I was old enough to vote. But if AOC and her "schismists" are the future of the party, count me out. Full Disclosure: I'm a registered independent who usually votes, but not always, Democratic.*)

What personally irks me about the cable coverage given to AOC and her three congresswomen is that they are always referred to as "the progressives," intimating that every other member of the Democratic caucus is moderate to conservative. Ridiculous and misleading. But that is to be expected from cable TV political reporting.

What the above has to do with the Democratic debates is everything. If not for the insatiable appetites of the cable channels to make every pebble seem like the Rocky Mountains, AOC and her band's remarks and the comments by the presidential hopefuls on the debate stages wouldn't even make the front page of many newspapers. (*Nor they should. They're nothing but pre-rehearsed sound bites that have no relevancy to what the winning candidate will say on the campaign trail.*)

During the first sound-bite NBC News debate in June, Sen. Kamala Harris borrowed the deck of cards from AOC and attacked front-runner Joe Biden for saying publicly that in order to get meaningful legislation years ago he worked with members of the Senate, (whose philosophy he disagreed with). The remarks of Ms. Harris, Sen. Cory Booker and AOC remind me of someone saying, "If you don't do it my way, I'm going to take my ball and go home." But the home isn't theirs. In this case, the "home" is the White House, and Donald Trump is likely to renew the lease for an additional four years because of their actions. (*AOC, in particular, implies that anyone who*

disagrees with her is a racist, which in itself is a racist outlook on life. Of course, AOC, Harris and Booker don't directly accuse individuals, like Biden and Nancy Pelosi, of being racists. Instead they tar them by innuendo.)

As a political junkie, whose first job in public relations was with a political PR firm, where I worked on local, statewide and national campaigns, including the presidential level, I've seen the Harris, Booker and AOC act before. It's reminiscent of the 1950s GOP performances starring Sen. Joe McCarthy, who accused individuals of being a Communist without specifically naming them as Communists and without proof to back up his allegations.

What has largely been under reported is that recently AOC has been sued twice in federal court for blocking negative comments about her political positions from her tweeter account, even though she uses it for policy statements. A federal appeals panel ruled against President Trump for the same reason, saying doing so violated the Constitution. *(It appears that the president and AOC have a few things in common: Thin skin, a limited view of free speech and disagreeing with George Orwell's quote, "If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear." But AOC and Trump seem to believe that free speech only applies to speech they say or agree with.*

After listening to comments from the president and the congresswoman, it's my opinion that Trump has a racist, White Supremacy agenda and AOC has a People of Color agenda, along with Harris and Booker. What's needed are political leaders who advocate a What's Good for All Americans agenda, regardless of race or ethnicity.

Sen. Harris' pre-rehearsed performance during the first debate is a prime example why I say the debates are shams. Instead of cutting her off and reminding her that the candidates were supposed to discuss current issues, the moderators let her

supposedly anguished attack on Biden go on uninterrupted. Good television. Bad for viewers who wanted to learn about the candidates position on current issues.

The performances by Harris and Booker, during and after the first debate, and the comments by AOC and her minuscule band of followers in Congress, make me wonder if they forgot who the enemy is. It's not Joe Biden or Nancy Pelosi. It's Donald Trump. *(Or maybe their quest for power is more important to them than who wins in 2020. I've long believed that some cable TV talent that is violently anti-Trump in their commentary secretly wishes he wins reelection, which would give them another four years of tailor made commentary. I wonder if AOC would rather burn the House down and see the present Democratic leadership fall victims to a Trump victory so she can lead a coup)*

Trump won the presidency in 2016 because of the economic instability (and racist sentiment?) in three normally Democratic states. After the June debate, his approval margin has increased because the debaters largely ignored bread and butter topics and instead agreed with the far left agenda of its party that is driven by four novice media savvy congresswomen. The presidential hopefuls seemed to forget that there is more to America than illegal immigrant rights.

Was the July 30 and 31 so-called debate on CNN any better than NBC's June sound-bite telecast of presidential wannabes? Maybe for CNN, but not for the good of the Democratic Party or political discourse in general.

Instead of coming together and forming a strategy to defeat Trump, the ego-driven participants still seemingly haven't learned the basics of a successful presidential political campaign. Instead of each performing as if they were the only person who can save the country, Democrats should become more pragmatic and accept the reality that only winners have the ability to create change. And that when selecting a

presidential candidate, electability should be the only consideration. *(That's why while my heart belongs to Liz, the pragmatic side of my brain at this moment belongs to Joe)*

Ever since the NBC debate, Sens. Harris and Booker have **been treating Biden as if he is a pinata, trying to bust it open and have the nomination fall from his polling lead into their laps. In the second debate, they were joined by Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, Julian Castro and Mayor Bill de Blasio.** Their continuing attacks on a much improved Biden made President Trump the clear winner of this debate.

There were two major problems with the CNN format: 1), All the leading contenders for the nomination were not on the same stage, and 2), whenever the candidates started to mix it up and truly began debating each other, the moderators yelled, the equivalent of "the bell has sounded, go to your corner." *(Also, during the debates, CNN kept dividing the candidates into "progressives" and "moderates," as does MSNBC and other news outlets, even after one of the CNN-designated "moderates" said he was a "progressive," proving that the CNN storyline was set in cement no matter what the candidates said. A more accurate candidate description would be to deep six the word "moderate" and replace it with "pragmatist.")*

In the days before political correctness became the norm in courteous American society, there was a joke about a Polish circular firing squad. That's what both debates were like: Democratic candidates firing at each other. *(Full disclosure: I'm of Polish heritage and the joke doesn't offend me. Maybe that's because I am against censorship, including the language censorship of political correctness. That doesn't mean I approve of the use of gutter language or language that demeans others. It means I believe in the first amendment to the Constitution.)*

As if cable already hasn't reduced intelligent political coverage to the first grade level, CNN treated their TV

debates as if they were a sporting event, holding a draw (on July 18) to determine which candidates will face off against each other. The production was more complicated than a Rube Goldberg cartoon, the difference being that Goldberg purposely contrived his cartoons to be overcomplicated, ridiculous and convoluted. *(The draw would have been better suited for ESPN. Not only is cable TV responsible for the decline of significant political discussions, CNN has made the candidates appear as pawns in a TV game.)* But CNN accomplished a near miracle with its **salmagundi: It made Fox News seem respectable.**

On the afternoons of the two-headed debates, CNN thought an insert of the debate venue or showing the candidates walking through the venue was newsworthy. It reminded me of cable's coverage of O.J. Simpson's white Bronco car chase in 2014, which continued for more than an hour without any true news value.

The hypocrisy of all the cable channels political reporting was made evident on Don Lemon's July 18 CNN program. Lemon acknowledged that if not for the cable channels' reporting of Trump's racist comments at rallies, they would not get substantial coverage. Lemon said, we struggle with what to cover because we know we're playing into Trump's campaign strategy. But nevertheless the cable channels cover the local rallies and disseminate it nationally and discuss it on their talk shows for one reason, in my opinion: Trump's remarks hype ratings. The cable networks said they would change how they cover Trump's tweets and rallies after his 2016 election. They haven't. *(Maybe they're Waiting for Godot to tell them what to do.)*

A major shortcoming of all cable political analysis is that everyone on a panel must have something to say, even if their comments are rubbish and were repetitions of what were just said by other panelists. During and after Robert S. Mueller's congressional testimony on July 24, instead of highlighting

how the former special counsel continuously refuted Trump's Fake News version of the investigation, which made page one headlines in major pubs like the New York Times and Wall Street Journal, many TV pundits instead highlighted how Mueller's demeanor had changed over the years, as if that was more important than what he said. *(Is the new cable standard of what is important limited to people who come on like John Wayne in one of his Marine movie roles? What has not changed over the years are the shortcomings of cable political reporting.)*

The thing that got me to put fingers to keyboard to write this column was: 1- the WCBS Radio report; 2- the alleged and mislabeled Democratic debates and 3- the questions asked to the candidates during the June and July made for TV shows. *(Any resemblance to these made for TV shows and actual debates are entirely specious).*

As any good novice reporter knows there is a crucial element missing from the TV political shows – follow-up questions to guests, and they were also largely missing from the June and July debates. *(The lack of follow-up questions from TV political reporters – whether hosts, anchors, or the “run after the congressperson” staffers to get a sound bite – are a stain on journalism.)*

Thus far, the questioning of candidates during the two debates has been less than stellar. I expect similar lame questions to be asked on September 12 and 13, when the next inappropriately-named Democratic debates are on ABC News and Univision.

There are several [PR](#) strategies in between the lines of this article that I have always followed and recommend:

- When crafting sports marketing programs never use a star of the moment like Pete Alonso was for several days after the all-star game. By the time your program is

completed and approved by your client Alonso will have been interviewed and reported on so frequently that whatever he would say would be considered stale news by many target media outlets. *(Instead, I would use an athlete known for charitable work, with the proviso that the person has been out of the media spotlight for several years, making the person "fresh news." I would have this individual talk about Alonso's charitable gift but quickly transition to the unknown charitable work of other athletes. This would provide a new approach to the Alonso story and also make it much more than a sports story.)*

- When crafting a program, never base it on what you have heard being covered on TV or radio, or what has been printed in newspapers. Chances are that account groups at other agencies are doing the same, and if their programs are more creative, newsworthy and launched first, the chance of you receiving significant news coverage will be greatly diminished.
- When crafting a program, always do original research. Never base it on what you have seen on TV news shows or read in prints pubs. Too often what is reported is just the tip of the ice burg. Even worse, many reports are wrong. *(On TV, especially, wrong facts are hardly ever acknowledged and corrected. I remember it being done and explained why it happened just once, many years ago by Megan Kelly on Fox News.)*

With so many research tools available only a search engine away, there is no excuse for factual mistakes by PR people. As for the mistakes by TV political reporters, it is to be expected. After all, when there is "Breaking News" every few seconds there's little time to check on the facts. Right?



About the Author: Arthur Solomon, a former journalist, was a senior VP/senior counselor at Burson-Marsteller, and was responsible for restructuring, managing and playing key roles in some of the most significant national and international sports and non-sports programs. He also traveled internationally as a media adviser to high-ranking government officials. He now is a frequent contributor to public relations publications, consults on public relations projects and is on the Seoul Peace Prize nominating committee. He can be reached at [arthursolomon4pr \(at\) juno.com](mailto:arthursolomon4pr@juno.com) or artsolomon4pr@optimum.net.