



Analyzing the Power and Responsibility of Media Makers in the Technology Classroom

Curriculum Unit 19.01.09
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Overview

In the past, broadcasting and movie making were attainable only to a few affluent individuals or large corporations. With the rise of inexpensive, and compact, digital media equipment, coupled with social media, the common man can now 'speak' to and influence others across the globe. With that power comes responsibility. The overall goal of this unit is to help students develop their own closely-held digital media code of ethics. This unit will be done over the course of ten classroom periods at the beginning of the first course in the sequence of three for movie production. This first course is called Digital Media Movie Making. In this unit students will study the use of media to manipulate people; followed by the power of media to call people to action; then the potential for calls-to-action based on social and/or digital media to have unintended consequences. The students will then reflect on which types of societal consequences for posting digital media would be unacceptable to them. Armed with this knowledge they will create personal standards that will empower them to steer clear of undesired outcomes.

Background and Rationale

I teach Digital Media Movie Making, Broadcasting, and Computer Animation in an urban magnet school that contains around 400 students. Our school has a number of teachers that are social activists. Issues facing the New Haven Connecticut community are frequent subjects for our classes. Our students are encouraged to use their voice to change the world for the better. The camera, communication, and storytelling techniques that they learn in my class increase the volume of their voice, that is, the probability that their media will be seen by a large audience. If this were to happen, it could transform their lives in a very positive or very negative way.

Our students are voracious consumers and purveyors of digital media. Nearly all the students have a smartphone and nearly all publish frequently on Snapchat and/or Instagram. Further, there are a few that publish frequently on their You-Tube channel. Some of the students express hopes of going viral and getting

the hits and then getting the following that will make them rich. Students record and share nearly every event that happens in the school: every fight, argument, others clowning around, dancing or singing. It seems to be an instinctive reaction, that when students see something interesting about to happen, they pull out their phones and start filming. It is conceivable that one day one of my students could film something that captures the attention of people across the country.

Media can go viral simply because it triggers powerful emotions. Sometimes these emotions can constitute a 'call for action': that is, a feeling generated by the movie that makes others want to do something, whether or not the filmmaker intended to motivate people to act. In fact it is my mission as a teacher of Digital Movie Making and Broadcasting to help my students learn to make videos that are interesting enough to be shared by people beyond the student's social network. This unit will help students to think through the ethical concerns and potential long-term consequences of sharing or not sharing their videos. It is the state mandated ethics portion of their curriculum. We will examine why the democratization of media power out of the hands of big corporations into the hands of the common man necessitates that individuals assume some responsibility for the intended and unintended consequences of their calls to action.

In the past, journalists had strong incentives to uphold ethical standards; their livelihood and professional reputation were on the line with each report. With the common man as journalist the threat of losing one's job or professional shame no longer looms large as potential consequences for unethical uses of media. We will ponder the question: what does accountability look like for the unaffiliated reporter? What would make common people police themselves so that they feel the need to post and share only balanced and responsible media projects? In the culminating lesson of the unit, students will develop their own ethical code to guide their future work but even more importantly, students will determine why upholding their own ethical principles matters to them.

Leading up to and preparing for this culminating lesson, we will examine the ethical concerns of some of the most important media-driven events in history. We will start out with an analysis of the film *Birth of a Nation* and the violence and terror that it spurred in the early 20th century. We will examine its emotion-evoking cinematography that led to the rebirth and upswell of public support for an organization that had been deemed by the US government to be a terrorist group, the Klu Klux Klan.

The students will then undertake their own case studies of more recent media inspired events.

Part 1: Propaganda

Media has the power to inspire people to take action whether the information is true or false. In this section we will review the use of media toward desired ends and the consequences of those calls to action. The definition of propaganda according to MerriamWebsterDictionary.com is, the spreading of ideas, information, or rumor for the purpose of helping or injuring an institution, a cause, or a person.¹

The Michigan University Research Guides describes the essential differences between propaganda and scholarship or objective news as follows: "A step beyond bias, propaganda actively seeks to influence through the use of deception. Scholarship (and objective news reporting) is created with virtuous ideals for truth. There is a difference between presenting a point of view and deliberately using psychological techniques to

shape opinion.”² Propagandists often combine true information with falsehoods in a way that it’s difficult to tell where one begins and the other ends. In the first lesson we will look very closely at one of the most ingenious uses of propaganda to rewrite history in the minds of its viewers. We will examine the real world consequences and the moral ramifications of the work as a group.

Birth of a Nation: A propaganda-containing movie that was made so well as to change the course of American history.

Starting in 1865 and ending in approximately 1877, the reconstruction was a period of time in which the federal government carried out programs to reintegrate the seceded states back into the Union. In 1868, the 14th amendment to the Constitution laid out the ground rules for creating a unified society within which every person born in America is a citizen. It stated, “No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.”

The Klan was organized in 1866. It used intimidation, violence, and murder as tactics to keep blacks from voting and to prevent whites from voting for members of the Republican Party. Ultimately, the federal government outlawed the Ku Klux Klan. In 1871, the Ku Klux Klan Act was signed by Grant. It allowed for prosecution of Klan members for their violent acts. Grant sent troops and marshals in to the south to round up Klansmen. The Klan was nearly destroyed.

By 1873, the US was in an economic downturn and people lost interest in creating a safe and equitable South and 1874, the Democrats won control of the House of Representatives. The efforts toward reconstruction came to a halt.

In 1875, David Wark (DW) Griffith was born to a Confederate Soldier and to a mother who had made uniforms for the Ku Klux Klan. He was one of many Southerners who accepted the propaganda of the Dunning school of thought, which held that Reconstruction enforced black supremacy and that black leadership was inherently corrupt. DW Griffith ultimately became revered as the most ingenious American filmmakers of all time. To this day, aspiring filmmakers in college study excerpts of his films. His beautifully and skillfully crafted propaganda movie reshaped Americans opinions on reconstruction and led the way for the Klan to be reborn in the same year as its release.

Thomas P. Doherty, professor of American Studies, describes the persuasive power of *Birth of a Nation* even for viewers who seem unlikely to feel its power: “...the power of Griffith’s art can still transport viewers to places they do not want to be. An African American colleague who regularly teaches the film told me about a black student who came up to him after a screening to marvel: ‘Wow, that film really works. At the end, I was rooting for the Klan.’”³

The movie mixes both historical events and distortions of history to create narrative that under reconstruction the blacks almost took over and that they used their power to cheat, steal and rape white women. Blacks are portrayed as subhuman creatures who if left un-oppressed would destroy American society due to their ignorance, greed, and lust. The heroes of the story are the Klan and in the movie they use extreme violence to save the South from horrors of Black Supremacy. The movie ignited the deeply rooted fears of many and many heard the call to action. Within the decade after the movie the Klan transformed itself from being a defunct organization to having around three million members.⁴ Members of the organization became

emboldened and they marched publicly without reprisal. The movie was screened at the White House. Shortly thereafter, the US government under Woodrow Wilson, unjustly demoted or froze the salary of many black workers and purged itself of blacks in leadership positions under the policy of “federal segregation.”⁵

The movie also led to widespread acceptance of violence against Black citizens. “Scholars reported a rise in lynchings by white vigilantes due to the depiction of African American men as rapists.”⁶ At the time of reconstruction and during slavery the rape of black women was far more common than the reverse.⁷

The goal in presenting the story of *Birth of a Nation* is to show the power of negative propaganda. This nation has never known true equal treatment of its black citizens. In 1915, DW Griffith preyed upon historical amnesia and painted a picture of black equality that was horrifying. It created such a fear of black equality that many whites felt the need to increase the inequality that existed.

George Lucas wrote these profound words to be spoken by the character Yoda in *The Phantom Menace*: “Fear is the path to the dark side. Fear leads to anger. Anger leads to hate. Hate leads to suffering.”⁸ The ultimate effect of this movie was to drum up enough fear so as to gain the support of white Americans for reversing the hard earned gains of black people at the beginning of the 20th century. Many of the disparities evident today in education, income, housing, and life expectancy are a result of policies written during this era. This portion of the unit will help my students to call out such destructive propaganda so as to prevent suffering.

Please see the Classroom Activities section for the Lesson plan for part 1.

Part 2: Student research on the power of media: three case studies

Students will then choose from one of three historical events to research and understand why the call to action in each instance, was so widely felt and responded to. They are all provided with an article to provide background information on their chosen event. (These articles can be found in the lesson plans in the appendix.) After reading, all students who chose the same event will work together to make a presentation to the class. As a team the students will lead the class through an analysis of the moral and ethical concerns surrounding the event.

Research Option 1: The LA Uprising

On March 30, 1991, George Holiday filmed a video that would rivet the attention of our nation and change the history of Las Angeles. In 1991 video cameras were not as widespread as they are today. Cameras of the time were analog not digital, large in size, and inconvenient to carry around. People typically only hired a cameraman or carried a camera to special occasions.

The video filmed that day inspired an uprising that led to the loss of over 50 lives and property damage that is estimated at 1 billion dollars with one thousand buildings destroyed.⁹ Over 6000 people were arrested for looting or arson. Ultimately, 9800 California National Guard Troops were called in.¹⁰ The event was The LA Uprising.

The video was of the beating of Rodney King, a motorist who fled from the police in his car and was chased by

them. Once they stopped him and got him on the ground, the video shows policemen hitting him with batons 56 times. Because of the beating, Rodney King suffered 11 fractures and multiple other injuries including brain damage.

The video was turned in to the local television station KTLA the next day. Ultimately, it reached a national audience. It immediately inspired the hope and horror of Black America as it was the first videotaped evidence of police brutality directed against an African American that was seen widely. Prior to this video, the larger society generally dismissed the complaints of African-Americans, ignoring their physical and emotional scars, repeatedly accepting the version of the story told by police as absolute truth.

African Americans across the country trusted that in the face of this piece of irrefutable video evidence, the courts would convict the officers. Because of this there was not much protest at the time that the video was initially released.

The call to activism was not felt until a year later when the hope of Black America was dashed. On April 29, 1992, in spite of visual evidence, the court acquitted the four officers that carried out the beating. Within three hours protesters filled the streets of LA.

Research Option 2: The Arab Spring

On December 18, 2010 a video was filmed that caused an explosion in social media which ultimately led to the overthrow of authoritarian governments in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya. It inspired events that led up to civil war in Egypt, Yemen and Syria. It inspired rebellions in Bahrain, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Palestine, Kuwait, Morocco, Oman, and Sudan. The historical video shows Mohamed Bouazizi setting himself on fire at the local government office in his hometown, Sidi Bouzid. His final words were "How do you expect me to make a living?"¹¹

This story begins on December 17, 2010. Mohamed Bouazizi, a fruit vendor who had an unlicensed fruit cart, was stopped by a policewoman who, in addition to demanding a fine, overturned his fruit cart and confiscated the scales that he used to weigh the fruit. Further, the policewoman allegedly slapped him in the face, spit in his face, and insulted his dead father. The culminating act in this assault on Bouazizi's dignity was chillingly similar to that of the United States Courts to the beating of Rodney King: callous indifference. On December 18, 2010 Bouazizi went to complain to local municipal officials about his treatment and to request the return of his fruit scales and they refused to see him. He is quoted as having said "'If you don't see me, I'll burn myself."¹⁰ Within one hour after officials refused to see him, he returned to the government building poured fuel over himself and set himself on fire.

The video was spread across Tunisia and later that day there was a protest in Sidi Bouzid. The videos from this protest were spread by social media throughout the Middle East, sparking other protests that were also shared by social media. After ten days of protests across Tunisia, President Zine el Abidine Ben Ali visited Sid Bouzid to quell the unrest. The protests continued and on January 14, 2011, less than a month after the protests began, Zine el Abidine Ben Ali fled the country. On October 23, 2011, Tunisia held its first democratic elections.

After seeing the successes in Tunisia, protests spread to many other Arab nations. Unfortunately, most of these other protests were not as successful as Tunisia's.

An article in the Huffington Post states: "In retrospect, little good came from the Arab Spring. In those

countries where the U.S. and its allies intervened, Libya and Syria, and to a lesser extent Yemen, brutal regimes were either replaced by even more brutal regimes, or existing regimes became even harsher or gave way to complete political chaos. Those countries that avoided political chaos did so by and large by making cosmetic changes while clamping down even harder on popular unrest. Ultimately, the Arab Spring did not solve the crisis of governmental legitimacy that plagues the Middle East, it simply resulted in just enough additional repression to defer the inevitable explosion to a later date.”¹²

The lesson plan in the Classroom Activities Section includes a reading and questions to answer. Students will weigh the benefits and collateral damage of these revolutions.

Research Option 3: Pizzagate

Pizzagate is a social media propaganda campaign that influenced an election and caused shots to be fired. One example of the power of social media to promote propaganda is Pizzagate. This conspiracy theory had maximum impact because it entered the mainstream Internet just nine days before the 2016 presidential elections.

Pizzagate began as rumor in early 2016 that was circulated on the dark web and then entered the mainstream web, becoming one of the most talked about stories in the days before the 2016 election.

The rumor holds that a powerful group of Democrats ran a child sex trafficking ring that operated out of Washington DC area restaurants and businesses. The most noted location commented about was the Comet Ping Pong Pizzeria, hence the name Pizzagate. Some of the rumors said that there Hillary Clinton participated in orgies with children and her campaign manager John Podesta carried out satanic rituals.

As in most cases of propaganda, aspects of the story contain some tidbits of reality.

In the fall of 2016, Democratic Congressman Anthony Weiner was under investigation for sexting with underage girls. His wife Huma Abedin was at the time Hillary Clinton’s vice campaign chairperson. The NYC police did indeed conduct an investigation of Anthony Weiner’s emails. Some emails were found that were related to Hillary Clinton’s violation of government policy while she was secretary of state. It is true that her campaign manager, John Podesta’s emails were leaked to the public in November 2016. What evolved from these truths was enough to cast doubt on Hillary Clinton’s reputation just before the election.

Skimpy connections were made by propagandists and spread in the conservative media. For example: “Twitter users begin posting results of searches of the WikiLeaks leaked emails from Clinton campaign chief John Podesta, including speculation that phrases such as ‘pizza’ refer to young girls, ‘cheese pizza’ to pedophiles, ‘ice cream’ to male prostitutes and ‘hotdog stand in Hawaii’ to sex trafficking.”¹³ These lines are the media that constituted the call to action.

October 28th 2016, ten days before the election James Comey announced that he was re-investigating the Hillary Clinton and he was reopening the investigation into Hillary Clinton’s emails.

October 29, 2016 Carmen Katz tweeted that the New York Police Department were investigating the Clintons for involvement in an international child enslavement and sex ring.

On November 2, just six days before the election, in an interview of private investigator and webcast host Douglas Hagmann claimed on the online channel, Infowars to have a source related to the New York police

department that claims that Anthony Weiner's emails held evidence that Hillary Clinton participated in events where sex acts were performed on minors. Infowars is one of the biggest conspiracy theory outlets online. The Infowars website boasts 7.7 million unique visitors per month.

There were some in Trump's campaign who followed and utilized this information to the benefit of his campaign. A popular chant during the campaign was "lock her up." This chant may have taken on a life beyond the email scandal to become related to the rumors surrounding this smear campaign. Michael Flynn, who was slated by Trump to be the national security advisor, shared propaganda in November 2016, to his then 106,000 followers about Hillary Clinton's involvement in a sex ring and her campaign manager John Podesta's involvement in a satanic ritual where he drank human bodily fluids. One such tweet was posted four days before the election.

"U decide - NYPD Blows Whistle on New Hillary Emails: Money Laundering, Sex Crimes w Children, etc...MUST READ! <https://t.co/O0bVJT3QDr>

— General Flynn (@GenFlynn).¹⁴ According to informatics researcher Fillipio Menczer, tweets related to Pizzagate would be retweeted around the internet more than 1.4 million times by over 250,000 accounts during its first five weeks.

Fillipio Menczer's research also found evidence that some of these re-tweeters were probably web-bots because there were dozens of accounts that retweeted the information more than 900 times per day. Menczer found that as many as 22% of these re-tweets were later deleted.

Consequences of this social media campaign:

The owner of the Comet Ping Pong Pizzeria received hundreds of death threats. On December 4th 2016, a heavily armed private citizen, Edgar Welch, drove from his home in North Carolina to Washington DC to investigate the claims that there was a child sex ring operating out of the restaurant. In the presence of customers, including children, Welch fired his AK-15 semiautomatic rifle three times inside of the restaurant.

The full impact of the Pizzagate conspiracy theory on the 2016 election is unknown. However, according to a Washington Post article "More than a third of American adults said the so-called Pizzagate accusations involving Mrs. Clinton's staff were 'probably' or 'definitely' true, as did nearly half of registered Republicans, according to pollsters."¹⁵

Part 3: Bias in Reporting and Interviewing

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines confirmation bias as "the tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with one's existing beliefs."¹⁶ This phenomenon is seen in people of all races. Journalists both professional and unaffiliated have a special obligation to examine their beliefs because it will impact how they report a story. Beliefs can affect the wording used or the images that represent events. How events are described, can then, in turn, color the audience's perception of the event.

The total number of white Americans is larger than the number of black Americans on welfare.¹⁷ However, when stories about social welfare programs are shown the people, both pictured and interviewed, tend

overwhelmingly to be people of color. Similar problems persist when reporting about crime, immigration, and other subjects. This phenomenon may be a manifestation of reporter's confirmation bias, in that reporters may seek to photograph and interview individuals who fit their personal stereotypes.

Bias can also be manifested in the stories reporters choose to follow and those that they ignore. For instance, when a terrorist act occurs, if the perpetrator is Islamic the story receives 3.57 times the amount of coverage than if the act were committed by a non Islamic person.¹⁸ This can lead to a mistaken public perception that most terrorism in the US is committed by Muslims. The general perception stands in stark contrast to the truth. According to the Anti Defamation Leagues' report on extremist killings in the USA, in 2018, the perpetrator of every single extremist murder had had ties to a right-wing extremist group at some point in their lives.¹⁹

A consequence of biased reporting that stereotypes terrorists as Islamic, is American support for irrational policies. Many of the immigration policies that president Trump tried to put in place with the goal of thwarting terrorism were misplaced. The policies could have harmed many individuals, families, industries, and institutions and led to a false sense of security. Most Americans did nothing to protest these misguided policies. There was not the groundswell of protest that there would have been had those who actually commit the majority of the atrocities been targeted for punitive policies.

Part Four: Draft Your Own Code of Ethics

The complete lesson is in the Classroom Activities Section. The students will be guided through a number of scenarios so that they determine what level of collateral damage they can accept as consequences of their work. They will then write a code of ethics that will allow them to prevent consequences that they find unacceptable.

The final activity is for the student to compare and contrast the code of ethics that they have created, to that of the Society of Professional Journalists.²⁰

Classroom Activities

Please note that I have created shortened links to the article to make it easier for students to locate the online articles.

Lesson Plan 1 Propaganda

Bell Activity Do Now: Look up and write the definition of propaganda.

Watch the following two short movies about propaganda being used in a relatively harmless fashion.

<https://tinyurl.com/The-Propaganda-Campaign21> Shows propaganda used to promote patriotic acts during a

war.

<https://tinyurl.com/The-Power-of-Propaganda22> Shows the tools of propaganda that are used in advertising.

Assignment 1: Navigate to the following guide from the University of Michigan entitled "Fake News," Lies and Propaganda: How to Sort Fact from Fiction, "<https://tinyurl.com/Indicators-of-Propaganda23>

In the middle of the page there is a chart that lists Indicators of Scholarship vs Indicators of Propaganda.

Look through your social media for an article or video that you believe may contain propaganda. Use the criteria from the movie or the webpage to explain which tool of propaganda is being used.

How could the media creator have avoided injecting their biases into the media?

Lesson 2: Propaganda in *Birth of a Nation*

Students should read the following article about the movie: <https://tinyurl.com/BON-Reading24>

The class will be shown segments of Birth of a Nation. Time points are communicated as numerically follows: hours: minutes: seconds.

The suggested time points below are from The Kino Restored Edition of the movie.²⁵

The teacher should watch the whole movie so that they may summarize what happened between the time points.

The class should watch the segment 0:00:00-0:10:00 to determine how people are characterized.

Which techniques does the movie use to communicate that Southern whites were kind and civilized? Which techniques does the movie use to communicate that white women were virtuous, innocent and precious? Why are most of the pets seen in the segment baby animals not full grown ones?

At 0:06:29 - 0:06:44 a series of events occurs where two children fall off of a wagon then they are spanked. What is the purpose of this scene in the movie?

Compare and contrast the treatment of the children to the treatment of animals in the movie.

The teacher may need to explain some of the intervening events in the movie before the next set of movie segments are shown.

Please watch the following movie segments:

1:30:00 - 1:40:00 1:45:00 - 1:47:00 2:12:00 - 2:17:00

Please answer the following questions:

Which techniques does the movie use to communicate that blacks are lustful? Which techniques does the movie use to communicate that blacks are ignorant? Which techniques does the movie use to communicate that blacks are evil? Which techniques does the movie use to communicate that violence against black is acceptable?

Please view signed title cards at: 0:01:02, 0:23:22, 1:57:40, 1:13:31, 1:23:06, 1:58:00.

Earlier in this unit, you learned that repetition is a useful technique for the promotion of propaganda. The above title cards use the words historical or historical facsimile several times. Do you think that D.W. Griffith was trying to make the audience believe or feel that the film was a dramatized documentary not a work of fiction? Please explain your answer.

What emotions do you think Birth of a Nation evoked in 1915? Why do these feelings make the audience want to take action?

Read the following article: <https://tinyurl.com/y2j5gzt26>.

How might society have been different if the movie had given an accurate version of history? If the truth about reconstruction were told in the movie, do you believe it would have been as popular or memorable? Would the cinematic techniques be viewed as phenomenal when the theme of the media speaks against the dominant society's prejudices?

Activity

Pick a partner. Use a cell phone to film around 15 seconds of them answering the following question twice: Where were you at 8:00 pm last night? In one of the clips capture them in a way that looks like they are a respectable person, telling the truth. In the other shot use your camera in such a way to make them look like they are evil and lying.

Lesson Plan 3 The Power of Media Case Studies

Activity: Groups of students will have one 88-minute block class period to research one of the above topics. They will then prepare a presentation including 1-3 slides about the facts surrounding the event or movement. In the following class period each group will then facilitate a class-wide discussion which answers the following questions.

Option 1) Each student researching the LA Riots must read the following article plus find an additional one to read: <https://tinyurl.com/LA-Uprising-Reading27>

Option 2) Each student researching The Arab Spring must read the following article plus find an additional one to read: <https://tinyurl.com/Arab-Spring-Reading28>

Option 3) Each student researching Pizzagate must read the following article plus find an additional one to read: <https://tinyurl.com/Pizzagate-Reading29>

Each Group must prepare a presentation about their chosen event which educates others on the following questions:

Describe or show the piece of media was the call to action. (Please take into consideration that some students may be sensitized to violence trauma so may not be able to watch the footage)

Evaluate what the propagating viewers were feeling when they shared or discussed the event.

What feelings and impulses were they acting on and what emotions were they trying to arouse in others? What

did the movement achieve? What was the ultimate cost of the movement? This may include loss of lives, arrests, and property damage. What are the ethical concerns surrounding the event or movement? For example if the deeds of the person or group for whom the activists are supporting are questionable how does it affect the validity of the movement?

Each person in the presenting group must answer the following questions at the conclusion of the presentation:

Consider the loss of lives and the loss of stability caused by the activism. Also consider the following quote from Frederick Douglass "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."³⁰ Explain why you would or would not share the media if you were the person that controlled the media that was the call to action.

What is your take home lesson from this event?

Lesson Plan 4 Bias in Media Coverage

Reading assignment read <https://tinyurl.com/Serwer-Article31>

You will have the power to shape public perception by your choice of what to cover and how you cover it. Given that we all have biases, what steps could you take present information in an objective manner? Do you feel that it is your responsibility to be objective, even if you are not famous and making media is not your primary job?

When is acceptable to take a position in a media piece?

Different demographic groups have a different willingness to talk about their issues. For instance people of certain religions may not want to talk about sexual issues, and whites may be less willing than others to discuss poverty. When you need to interview individuals that are impacted by a problem, what steps can you take to show a sample of people who are representative of those impacted by the problem? Is it your responsibility to do so as an independent media maker?

Should you, who have no financial stake in journalism, take care to present balanced stories when even the major companies do not? Why or Why not? Some things you may want to consider in your answer are your reputation, your future employability, the potential societal consequences of your media's call to action.

Lesson Plan 5: Draft your Code of Ethics

Judge the following consequences of sharing a news story and determine which of the scenario presented has negative consequences that outweigh the positive ones.

Scenario 1

You've filmed a truthful and poignant video that causes 10,000 local people to come out to protest. The chants and hash-tags from the protest go viral and discussion of your cause is trending around the world and it causes society to recognize and care about the injustice. You know that the injustice will continue, unabated, unless the people come out to demand change. You also know that there will be individuals that suffer harmful consequences of your call to action. There was no permit issued for your protest.

If you could know in advance that 100 people were charged with misdemeanor trespassing. Would you post the video? If you could know in advance that all of the people caught at the location by police (~1000) would be charged with misdemeanors would you share the video? If you could know in advance that 100 people got felony charges because they went on to loot at the end of the protest, would you share the video? If you could know in advance that ten local businesses would be destroyed during the protest, would you share the video? If you could know in advance that 50 people got felony charges for engaging with police as they were being unjustly arrested would you share the video? If you could know in advance that a protester broke their leg at the event, would you share the video? If you could know in advance that an extremist at the rally got so carried away by what was said they stalked and then shot the perpetrator of the injustice, would you share the movie? If you could know in advance that an extremist at the rally got so carried away by what was said they stalked and then killed the perpetrator of the injustice, would you share the movie? If you could know in advance that an extremist counter-protester would injure one of your protestors would you share the video? If you could know in advance that an extremist counter-protester would kill one of your protestors would you share the video?

Scenario 2

You are reporting on a new drug that prevents transmission of the HIV virus. Both heterosexual and homosexual couples use the drug. You want to provide first hand testimonials on the impact of the drug on people's lives. If you can't locate heterosexual people who are interviewed on camera, how will you proceed?

Judging from the level of collateral damage that you are willing to accept for the positive change that you seek, write out the rules that you will need to stay true to yourself.

Part 2 Compare and contrast your standards

Please compare and contrast the code of ethics of the society of professional journalists to that which you have created. Are there any you want to add? Does their code of ethics have any rules you deem unnecessary? Please explain your answers. It can be found at the following link:

<https://tinyurl.com/y2jxsn3e32>

Resources

Aisch, Gregor, Jon Huang, and Cecilia Kang, "Dissecting the #PizzaGate Conspiracy Theories," *New York Times*, December 10, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/12/10/business/media/pizzagate.html> This article contains information about the Pizzagate conspiracy theory.

Allen, Damien "Why Do Jedi Turn to the Dark Side?," *Slate*, last modified on April 8, 2016, <https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/04/why-do-jedi-turn-to-the-dark-side.html> This article identifies the source of a movie quote.

Anti-Defamation League Editors, "Right-Wing Extremism Linked to Every 2018 Extremist Murder in the U.S., ADL Finds" *Anti-Defamation League*, January 23, 2019, <https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/right-wing-extremism-linked-to-every-2018-extremist-murder-in-the-us-adl-finds> Explains the data on who is committing terrorist acts in the USA.

Bender, Bryan and Hanna, Andrew. "Flynn Under Fire for Fake News," *Politico*, December 5, 2016, <https://www.politico.com/story/2016/12/michael-flynn-conspiracy-pizzeria-trump-232227> An article about Michael Flynn's involvement in propagating the Pizzagate conspiracy theory.

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Appendix on Implementing District Standards

This unit is intended for students embarking on a sequence of three digital media production courses: Digital Media Movie Making, Broadcasting, and Animation. Because these are electives, the district doesn't have a formal curriculum for the courses. Many of the teachers in my district refer to the 2015 edition of the Connecticut Career and Technical Education Performance Standards & Competencies to develop their curriculum.

According to this document, literacy and numeracy are to be considered competencies in each of the Career and Technical education courses.

"Since the enactment of the Carl D. Perkins reauthorization legislation of 1998, all states have been required to integrate academic learning into CTE courses. Hence, our Connecticut CTE courses in secondary schools have become an enhancement for academic achievement."³³

In this unit students are called upon to read and analyze at least five documents.

Lesson one: Part 1 requires the students to read a web page posted by the University of Michigan Library entitled: "Fake News," Lies and Propaganda: How to Sort Fact from Fiction". They then apply the information by analyzing news stories. In lesson 1: Part 2 students read and answer questions on an article explaining the significance of *Birth of a Nation* as a movie plus an article that speculates on how America would be different if Reconstruction had not failed. In Lesson 2, students will read an article that was supplied by the teacher describing a media related event and then they will read an article of their own choosing on the same topic.

They will then lead a discussion using the information gleaned from the articles. In Lesson 3, the students will read an article on media bias, and answer questions about it. In the culminating lesson students will write their own code of ethics and then read, the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics then compare and contrast the two. The ultimate goal of the unit is to learn about ethics however the manner in which the students achieve this goal is through reading. These readings are all intended to help students to figure out both the legal and moral ethical concerns of making and sharing media. This is a key competency according to the 2015 standards. Students should be able to "Define and describe the legal concerns of copyrights, ethics, releases, and royalties."³⁴ The unit is designed to focus on ethics by helping students to understand the power of media and to decide what it means to them handle their power responsibly.

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