

The Pulitzer Prize rewards witch-hunting and state propaganda

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On Monday, Pulitzer administrator Dana Canedy named the recipients of the 2018 Pulitzer Prize. Speaking from Columbia University in New York City, Canedy announced that the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* jointly won the award in the category of “National Reporting” for their “deeply sourced, relentless” coverage of “Russian interference in the presidential election.”

The *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* won the prize for “Public Service” for their reporting on Harvey Weinstein and the #MeToo campaign, which, according to the Pulitzer Prize Board, spurred a “national reckoning” that “exposed powerful and wealthy sexual predators” worldwide.

The promotion of the anti-Russia campaign by the *Times* and the *Post* and the role of the *Times* and the *New Yorker* in the #MeToo campaign exemplify not journalistic integrity, but its opposite: the effacement of the boundary between objective journalism and propaganda.

The media’s role in the anti-Russia campaign has been defined by the totally uncritical manner in which reporters at the *Times* and *Post* repeat and amplify the claims of various military and intelligence officials and politicians.

The articles cited in the Pulitzer announcement as proof of their “deeply sourced” reporting are not the product of journalistic investigation and fact-finding. They follow a similar pattern: statements from the intelligence agencies—often leaks from unnamed sources—are presented as fact. The newspapers take the talking points they have been fed, repackage them for mass consumption, and present the result to the public as “news.”

Allegations of Russian “trolls” influencing political opinion, Russian hackers publishing compromising documents about Hillary Clinton, and Russian agents blackmailing Trump himself with tapes of adulterous escapades in Moscow hotel rooms appear in the *Times*

and *Post*, then filter into the cycle of television news, serving as the axis around which official American politics orbits.

There is no attempt to present serious evidence to back up the allegations. Evidence that contradicts the official narrative is buried or totally ignored. News articles are editorialized in order to produce an effect dictated by unspoken political motives.

All political developments are presented within the framework of a previously agreed-upon subtext: Russia is a menace and adversary of the United States. Any attempt to question the official story is dismissed as “conspiracy theory” or “fake news.” Through this dishonest method, the *Times* and *Post* seek to shift public opinion behind the ruling class’s efforts to prosecute its military and economic interests abroad.

This is not journalism, it is propaganda.

It is a primary responsibility of genuine journalists to question the truthfulness of the official state narrative and expose the political implications of its claims. The principle that journalists are independent of and in confrontation with the government gave rise to the conception of the press as the “Fourth Estate.”

It was this principle that guided the Pulitzer-winning reporters on the *New York Times* who, under the threat of indictment, exposed the criminality of the Nixon administration, as well as preceding ones, both Democratic and Republican, by publishing the Pentagon Papers. For this, the *Times* won a Pulitzer in 1972. Similarly, the *Washington Post* was awarded a Pulitzer in 1973 for its exposés in the Watergate scandal.

The 2017 Academy Award-nominated film *The Post*, starring Tom Hanks and Meryl Streep, portrays the fight by journalists to expose, by publishing the Pentagon Papers, how the government lied about US intervention in Vietnam. Were the *Post* or the *Times* to come across similar material today, it is a virtual certainty that they

would suppress it. The film version of the lead-up to the publication of this material—which the government claimed constituted “state secrets”—would have ended as soon as the government asked the *Post* to withhold publication.

That is precisely what the *Post* and *Times* did when Edward Snowden approached them with evidence of mass NSA surveillance in 2013. The newspapers refused to publish his revelations, forcing him to turn to the British *Guardian*. The *Times* functions by the credo of its executive editor, Bill Keller, who said, “Freedom of the press includes freedom not to publish, and that is a freedom we exercise with some regularity.”

The Pulitzer Prize to the *Times* and the *New Yorker* for their promotion of the #MeToo campaign is equally foul.

This McCarthyite-style witch hunt was launched with the 2017 “exposure” of film producer Harvey Weinstein by the *New Yorker’s* Ronan Farrow. Since then, the press, spearheaded by the *Times*, has played the role of inciting mob violence in ruining the careers of artists, actors and public figures based for the most part on sheer allegations.

This has been carried out with a degree of subjectivity and zealotry that makes objective reporting impossible. Writers like Farrow, who has long been involved in efforts to ruin the career of his father, Woody Allen, over unproven allegations of sexual assault, do not disclose their personal motivations.

The press coverage of the #MeToo campaign has denied the accused any meaningful right to respond to the allegations against them and vilified anyone who questions the veracity of the claims. Efforts are made to present innocent activity—requests for dates, consensual encounters—as equal to rape or sexual assault.

The *Times* and the *New Yorker* have transformed themselves into gossip mills, catering to the emotionally driven and backward mood for vengeance that has taken root among the supporters of identity politics in the upper-middle class. The *Times’* sensational campaign has increased subscriptions and substantially boosted the company’s stock value.

This #MeToo movement has unstated political motivations that are never disclosed. Like the anti-Russia campaign, it is advanced by sections of the ruling elite to achieve their own reactionary objectives.

The Democratic Party has developed the campaign to boost its efforts to impose an official framework through which popular opposition to Trump can express itself. The purpose of the Democratic Party’s interventions since Trump’s election has been to divert social opposition and

channel it along reactionary lines—above all, behind a foreign policy agenda of expanding US military aggression in Syria and escalating the confrontation with Russia.

In line with this, it seeks to consolidate support for a militarist foreign policy among the upper-middle class layers that form the broader base of the Democratic Party by feeding this layer’s obsessive focus on racial and gender politics. The promotion of the #MeToo hysteria serves to obscure the basic class issues motivating the opposition of workers and youth to Trump, counter growing anti-capitalist sentiment, and sow divisions within the working class.

The attempt to whip up a witch-hunt atmosphere is also intended to undercut democratic consciousness and support for basic principles of due process, and facilitate broader attacks on democratic rights.

The *Times* and the *Post* are extreme manifestations of a general process. In the US, the corporate-controlled print media and the network and cable news outlets are not a source of information, but mechanisms through which the financial oligarchy manipulates public opinion. The same applies throughout the world.

In April 2017, the *World Socialist Web Site* exposed the fact that Google had systematically used its algorithms to reduce search traffic to the WSWS and a number of other left-wing and anti-war web sites. This revelation, expanded in a series of articles and statements over the following months, received international attention and even an article in the *New York Times* on September 26, 2017.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is the target of censorship by the state and tech companies such as Google and Facebook precisely because it challenges the state narrative and exposes the lies and propaganda used by the ruling class to justify war, state repression and social counterrevolution.



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