



The EMISSARY

*The official publication of North American
Model United Nations 2024.*

NAMUN 2024



THE EMISSARY

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THE
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Meet the Staff

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Selia Sanchez

Selia Sanchez (she/her) is a third-year student studying political science and international relations. In her free time, Selia likes reading, going on runs, and watching movies. With an interest in writing, particularly journalism, Selia is excited to bring The Emissary to NAMUN 2024!

SENIOR COPY
EDITOR



Nandini Shrotriya

Nandini Shrotriya (she/her) is a second-year student doing a double major in art history and women and gender studies! She can speak four languages and during her free time, she enjoys reading, painting and watching various films.

SENIOR GRAPHIC
DESIGNER



Amelia Hui

Amelia Hui (she/her) is a first-year student hoping to double major in International Relations and Peace, Conflict, and Justice. Her MUN journey started in high school and informed her decision to pursue a career in international law and policy. She tries to integrate her interests in art and graphic design with her academic pursuits whenever possible.

CO-DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNICATIONS
AND DESIGN



Aminah Qureshi

Aminah is in her final year as a Political Science Specialist. She has been involved with MUN for many years now, and her greatest memory of it is probably traveling to conferences all across Europe in high school. She is super excited to guide the creative vision of NAMUN 2024, and work with an amazing team to create a wonderful conference!

CO-DIRECTOR OF
COMMUNICATIONS
AND DESIGN



Claire Wong

Claire is a fourth-year student at the University of Toronto majoring in Art History and double minoring in GIS and Visual Studies. As a Co-Director of Communications & Design, she hopes to keep NAMUN's presence fresh, fun, and indicative of what the NAMUN experience is like as well as how the people of NAMUN contribute to that.

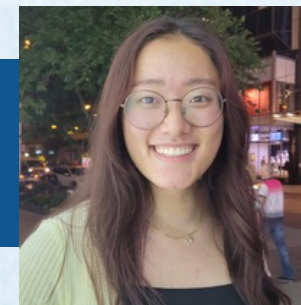
COMMUNICATION
AND DESIGN
COORDINATOR



Jessica Wan

Jessica Wan (she/her) is a second year student studying Political Science and Criminology & Sociolegal Studies at the University of Toronto. She had a wonderful time at NAMUN 2023 as a crisis analyst and decided to return to NAMUN to join the C&D branch! In her free time you can find her starting drawings that will never be finished, and going to cafes around Toronto with friends.

COMMUNICATION
AND DESIGN
COORDINATOR



Jennifer Sunny

PHOTOGRAPHER



Hannah Wei-Ai Ly

Hannah Wei-Ai Ly (she/her) is a first year student studying in the Rotman Commerce program. She has been a part of MUN in high school as a delegate and moderator. In her free time, she enjoys playing badminton, baking, singing, and solving puzzles.

PHOTOGRAPHER



Khalid Kamaruldzaman

Khalid Kamaruldzaman is a fourth year student studying economics and public policy. Last year, Khalid got his scuba diving license and his hobbies include street photography around the city!

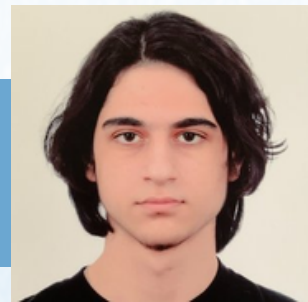
GRAPHIC DESIGNER



Amareena Saleh-Singh

Amareena Saleh (she/her) is a third year student doing a double major in Public Policy and Political Science with a minor in Women and Gender Studies. She recently got involved in MUN and is excited to work as a graphic designer NAMUN. In her free time, she likes to read and collect blind box figures!

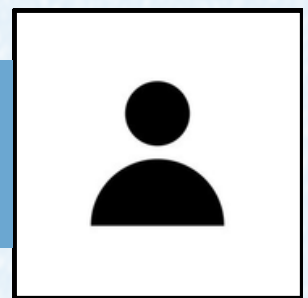
GRAPHIC DESIGNER



Barad Kiai

Hello, I am Barad. I am a second year student with a passion for politics, policy, and economics. I express this passion through my academic studies in economics and international relations, partaking in U of T extracurriculars, and personal projects such as short stories and picture books.

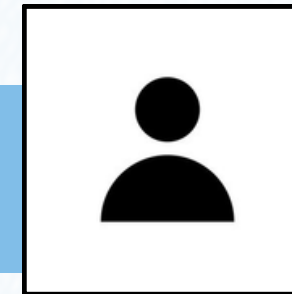
GRAPHIC DESIGNER



Erica Naito Li

Hi my name is Erica! I am a third-year student studying Ethics Society and Law, Political Science, and Bioethics! My MUN journey started in university, and although I am new, I am looking forward to working together with everyone at NAMUN!

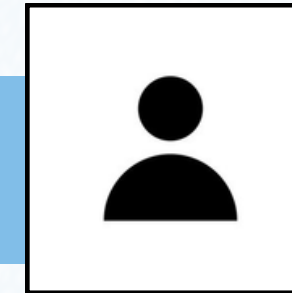
JOURNALIST



Shaafi Alam

I'm Shaafi (he/him), a fourth-year student majoring in Economics and Political Science, and I will be one of your journalists for this year's edition of the Emissary. I am obsessed with movies (please ask for my letterboxd), politics, and fun conversation. I'm looking forward to meeting you all during the conference!

JOURNALIST



Jevan Konyar

Jevan is a third-year student in both the Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilization and Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology at U of T. His research interests coalesce around the history of the late Ottoman Empire and around the modern history of philosophy, but he maintains an interest in Eurasian geopolitics.

JOURNALIST



Isabelle Li

Isabelle Li (she/her) is a third year student, double majoring in Economics and Mathematics at UofT. She really enjoys cooking and her favorite sport is surfing. With a passion for reading and writing, she's very excited to be a part of NAMUN this year.

JOURNALIST



Moksha Mueller

Hi, my name is Moksha (she/her) and I'm a first-year student! I am very passionate about sports, music, writing, literature and art, which leads to my decision to hopefully major in English and minor in Book & Media Studies. Having been in MUN since the beginning of high school has allowed me to experiment with how my hobbies integrate with the conferences, which led to my eventual love for the subjects discussed. I now love writing and editing for magazines affiliated with MUN conferences and aim to do them when possible!





A Letter from the Editor-In-Chief

When we started brainstorming ideas for this year's magazine, we had no idea where to begin. Past editions of The Emissary have tackled a number of widespread issues, from domestic policies to international conflicts.

This year, something that stood out was the theme of transparency. When discussing what we wanted our magazine to look like, we began to ask questions related to the role of openness and accountability in the international system. Are states transparent in their policies and campaigns? How do biases inhibit state accountability? How is censorship increasingly impacting education? To what extent should journalists ensure transparency when reporting on international crises?

While I've never participated in Model UN, we aimed to create a magazine that would serve as an intermediary between the fields of political science, international relations, and creative writing. Given our staff's diverse backgrounds, from art history to economics, we've incorporated a range of different ideas and perspectives rooted in themes of transparency.

I'm grateful to have worked with such a talented team in putting together this publication. Thank you to the journalists, graphic designers, and communication and design team for your time, insights, and creativity. Your hard work and dedication has brought our ideas to life.

To our readers, thank you for exploring these issues with us. We hope you enjoy our magazine, as much as we enjoyed making it.

Selia Sanchez
Editor-in-Chief

Automating Bias: AI in Governance, a Trojan Horse for Systemic Discrimination

BY JEVAN KONYAR

The use of computer programs to algorithmically aid in criminal justice decisions has been pervasive across the English-speaking world since the 1990s. One software commonly used in the United States is the Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanctions (COMPAS). One of the many entirely unnecessary acronyms to come out of the twin military- and prison-industrial complexes, COMPAS has featured heavily in the news over the past decade as the poster-child for the apparent systemic bias that factors into the outputs these programs generate.

As something used by the courts and law enforcement, COMPAS, which has been saddled with machine learning (ML) features over the years, was initially designed as a tool to help judges assess the risk posed by a convict and decide upon appropriate sentencing. Keyword: help. COMPAS was never intended to do the sentencing, nor was it to be taken as evidence to support a judge's decision, as has increasingly been done in recent years. It's a case of accidental automation, one where human confusion, enthusiasm, or dare I say, laziness, has led to the near-total reliance upon something only designed to be used as a tool.

COMPAS algorithmically evaluates factors like socioeconomic background, criminal history, and quite disturbingly, things like the degree to which someone has an archetypal "criminal personality" to score a convict's potential for recidivism. In theory, the software should help guide, but not determine, sentencing as well as later decisions surrounding parole. Yet, COMPAS has demonstrated a tendency to overestimate the dangers posed by Black offenders or offenders of a lower socioeconomic status and underestimate the risks associated with white offenders or offenders of a higher socioeconomic status.

COMPAS is not alone — the UK employs a similar system, Oasys, to help quantify a convict's risk to society, producing a number that can be used to help determine their eligibility for parole, alternative rehabilitation, and even factor into immigration cases. Canada itself is no stranger to this technology: COMPAS is owned by a conglomerate traded on the Toronto Stock Exchange, and Canadian judicial services make use of a set of predictive tools that fall within the Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (LS/CMI). This tool contains metrics designed to standardize risk assessment and adjust it based on factors like gender.

The use of ML in these systems has often been labelled as "AI." While ML programs like COMPAS and Oasys, differ from large language models, such as ChatGPT, they both pose a similar dilemma: the automation of bias. The fact of the matter is that as harrowing as these Minority Report-esque instruments are, to begin with, they also serve to further entrench prejudices all too common in the criminal justice system.

To contend with large amounts of data, the ML tools generally employed by governments rely on certain reductionist assumptions about the world: as a consequence, predictive algorithms like COMPAS or Oasys see numbers, which in the context of crime only reflects the outcome of historical and social conditions, rather than their causes. Bureaucracy of any sort will naturally have to deal with this shortcoming — when constructing institutions to govern millions, the idiosyncrasies of a select few and histories of power dynamics aren't factored into ML software. Moreover, any computer program, effective as it may be at performing its intended task, lacks the capacity to consider the implicit particularities of unique cases. Unlike human beings, who maintain a special versatility and flexibility — despite what interactions with airport staff may indicate — computer programs lack the capacity for criticality.

In short, things like COMPAS are not trained to consider the sociological factors that influence behaviour, nor are they equipped to suggest solutions. As a result, their use en masse runs the risk of perpetuating institutionalized bias: while harsh penalization may not always be the most effective way to deter recidivism — and almost certainly won't aid in an offender's rehabilitation — ML models employed to aid in sentencing and parole decisions only look to patterns catalyzed by these largely flawed approaches, and in turn, only suggest solutions that perpetuate them. Efficiency and standardization are, for the most part, at odds with nuance.

Beyond North America, other countries have other plans for AI. In some Gulf Cooperation Council-member countries, the possibility of using AI to detect job fraud and tax evasion has policy-makers salivating. Again, we see AI tools put to use as investigators, which necessarily involves operating on certain assumptions normally mediated by our inherent ability to think like human beings. In any of the growing number of these cases, we're allowing something with very little awareness of the intricacies of human social life to make decisions that we don't trust most people with — while not executive, the choices made by ML software inform decision makers, like judges, whose word is final.

State actors around the world, fully committed to a prophetic belief in the transformative power of AI, have engaged one another in a free-for-all arms race to shove these new tools into every nook and cranny of the institutions that make up their bureaucracies. Governments have been quick to, often clumsily, make use of these deceptively crude programs. In doing so, they've often far overestimated their utility and even more severely underestimated the dire consequences of their shortcomings.



Tung. "Room furniture courtroom chair". AI generated Image.
Rawpixel.<https://www.rawpixel.com/image/12088854/image-background-cartoon-light>

As demonstrated by COMPAS and Oasys' inherent systemic biases as well as the chokehold the Western world holds over private-sector AI development, machine learning is far from a great equalizer with the power to deliver us from the -phobias and -isms that plague governance everywhere. Rather, by uncritically slotting them in across the board, governments only mask an unyielding ossification of their existing systemic prejudices now to be propagated by these machines. To replace or complement humans with machines is not to do away with the injustices accumulated over history, but rather, to amplify them, institutionalizing them further. The cold, mechanical indifference of algorithms is often taken as a sign of impartiality when in reality, it only masks the biases of human agents behind a disguise of scientific objectivity. The tools eagerly pounced upon by judicial systems today serve to automate bigotry, in the process, making it far more insidious — this is, regrettably, a trend unlikely to halt or even slow the mad scramble to use AI in every level of governance.

It's important to note that this is not something that can be hardwired out of predictive algorithms through a kind of awareness or sensitivity to the nuances of history and social reality. I'll be the first to admit that it would be naive to assume the possibility of equipping the general public — let alone policymakers and tech developers — with the necessary critical techniques to counteract the drawbacks of semi-automated criminal justice. Ultimately, while this lacks an easy solution — and in any case, not one I'd be equipped to suggest — this is something to be aware of.

We find ourselves in a grey area when it comes to AI development: while it's clear that we're on the eve of something revolutionary — the impact of which will be felt over the coming years, decades, and perhaps centuries — we have yet to catch a glimpse of the full array of consequences in store for us.

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Self-Sponsored Deception: Greenwashing as a Global Phenomenon

BY SHAAFI ALAM

Activism is undoubtedly important. The collaboration of vast numbers of people towards a common goal is capable of manipulating both disposition and behaviour, so much so that it can influence policy decisions beyond municipalities, reaching across the international system.

Historically, social mobilization has been imperative in changing policies to 'better' society; the Civil Rights movement in the U.S., for instance, eventually shifted policy to end legitimized racial segregation. Likewise, the looming threats of global warming and climate change were met by networks of interest groups advocating for cooperative measures to combat a collective threat to the planet. These movements contributed to the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015, representing global solidarity and a commitment for nations to be accountable for tackling climate change.

Yet, threats against environmental protection seem to have only gotten worse. As of 2022, the UN reported that climate change is happening at rates greater than previously predicted, leaving the most vulnerable to face its impacts: rising sea levels, droughts, and heat waves continue to harm ecosystems and populations across the globe. Despite activists continuing their attempts to hold governments and corporations accountable for upkeeping sustainability goals, harmful industrial practices remain unparalleled in their expansion and waste, with local and international institutions seemingly turning a blind eye to their contributions to environmental damage.

As important as activism is, the good we collectively opt for and the impact of this mobilization is ultimately formed and perceived at the mercy of human desire and error. That is, as a society, we pick and choose which factors are important enough for us to rally against and act according to what we feel is appropriate. Performative activism — the public-facing advocacy of social change done merely for social approval — has been a rising concern in recent years and has been met with social outcry of its own. With global inequalities surging with no apparent reprieve, those holding power and wealth can choose to enjoy minimal trade-offs for their ventures simply by claiming to be environmentally conscious.

Of the many tactics corporations and institutions use to manipulate and quell social change, greenwashing is perhaps the most notable. Defined as an organization falsely marketing its products as environmentally friendly, greenwashing permeates through the international system and survives through the legitimacy it's granted by corporation's practices.

Companies and countries are currently under more scrutiny than ever to at least seem environmentally conscious; public awareness, social media, and cultural changes are encouraging consumers to ensure that their products are "green." As a result, producers in numerous industries respond by offering more environmentally friendly products — paper straws, zero-emission items, and cruelty-free options, for instance — which would both keep the producers' profits rising and appease socially concerned consumers. Greenwashing, however, occurs when these two goals do not intersect. Pleasing stakeholders means bringing in revenue, and cutting costs for this goal often entails less environmentally conscious decision-making.

Likewise, in order to appease their constituents and survive incumbencies, world leaders and institutions may need to signal improvements in environmentally conscious acts without losing the economic gain that comes from supporting large-scale industrialization within their borders. In both cases, a polluting party would effectively provide an illusion of greener practices while maintaining its environmental degradation.

CONTEMPORARY GREENWASHING

Currently, the Amazon rainforest is being destroyed at rates not seen since 2006 due to massive deforestation initiatives in Brazil that contribute to the nation's expanding agriculture and logging industries. Former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro's government has personally overseen the deforestation of a staggering 13.2 thousand square kilometers of the region. Though industrialization and deforestation in Brazil contribute greatly to the country's GDP and the strength of its international competitiveness, their consequences on Brazil's habitats and people are undeniable.

The country's Indigenous Peoples and economically vulnerable remain those who face the brunt of environmental destruction by losing their homes and livelihoods, consequently leading to mass displacement. Moreover, massive-scale deforestation generally contributes to the excess of carbon within the Earth's atmosphere — contributing to global warming.

The increasing awareness and global outrage over the Amazon's degradation only gave Bolsonaro and Brazilian deforesters subtler paths to greenwash. An example of this is Brazil's 'green-bond' market, which gave European and non-European bank stakeholders cheap access to 'green' funding, which is meant to serve as an industrial investment framework for environmentally friendly practices. It's important to note that this same funding has been tied to industries allegedly partaking in land-grabbing and the maintenance of harsh labour conditions, many of whom hail from Brazil's poor and Indigenous populations.

Adding to the legitimacy of these practices — which protect these industries from scrutiny by governing bodies — is Bolsonaro's own greenwashing. The former president took the stage at the 2021 COP26 Conference and attested that Brazil's green practices remain ever-active and fruitful, claiming that deforesting industries are held accountable and under regulations to adopt green practices — claims that are evidently not true.

Apple, one of the world's leading tech giants, is also no stranger to greenwashing practices. Apart from the numerous controversies regarding the ethicality of its overseas labour practices and processing of raw materials in other parts of the globe, a recent development is the firm's commitment to producing 'carbon-neutral' products, beginning with the release of the new Apple Watch. In writing, this seemed like a step in the right direction, but consumer groups and sustainability experts called out Apple on the vague nature of this commitment and discovered that 'carbon neutrality' is determined using green 'carbon credits' rather than actual measured tonnes of emissions. Apple uses carbon credits as alleged offsets to the energy usage occurring from device consumption; these credits would, in theory, be used to finance reforestation and environmental protection schemes. However, many were quick to notice that claims of Apple's green practices may be misleading, as the use of these credits and their observed results are subject to the whim of Apple higher-ups and management.

Moreover, a study found that 40 corporations employing similar carbon credit schemes reported vastly inaccurate carbon credit values and only marginally reduced their emissions when compared to the changes they had promised. Given the massive legroom this offers Apple in garnering public approval and maintaining its emissions to keep profit flowing, concerned groups across the planet were quick to call this instance out as a blatant display of greenwashing.

Additionally, like the case of Bolsonaro and the Amazon, governments seem to be doing little to prevent this from occurring and are implementing the same shield of vagueness to protect themselves from culpability. Just two months ago, the Canadian government introduced a slew of plans to amend federal competition laws to prevent greenwashing practices and cartel formations — cartels being groups of firms engaging in schemes that reduce competition and support maximizing profits — similar to Apple's 'carbon neutrality' framework, these amendments rely on the 'adequacy' of misleading claims by firms. Often, these measurements are ill-defined and subject to the interpretations of the firms themselves.

The cases do not end there. Household names such as Starbucks, Volkswagen and Nestlé have all been found to be complicit in greenwashing — with their practices being tolerated by the leaders and institutions that ought to be holding them accountable. Not unlike in Brazil, numerous state and institutional leaders have vested interests to either protect their own stakes in firms or appease their superiors in protecting their countries' assets.

Compared to overall large-scale environmental degradation, greenwashing of this sort entails various unique consequences that demand concise remedies. Greenwashing acts as an illusory veil to allow for more environmental decay to occur while encouraging ignorance toward those who perpetrate this decay.

Products marked as green may still pollute, and ethical sourcing may not truly be ethical — yet consumers, feeling as though they have done enough by consuming a seemingly green product, may not be inclined to act further. Eventually, social activism and the framework of movements fighting against climate change becomes diluted and weakened; these movements lose credibility fighting against corporations and institutions that have legitimacy behind their practices in the form of falsified or misleading reports of environmental consciousness.



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PREVENTING GREENWASHING

The solutions to these issues are simple, but far from easy. Accountability from corporations and culpable institutions comes from stringent regulatory measures, involvement of third parties for thorough investigations of alleged environmental degradation and greenwashing, and enforced corporate transparency. All of these routes would discourage the practice of greenwashing by introducing strict consequences for those engaging in it. However, as they need to be institutionally concrete, they are also at the mercy of those in power willing and able to permeate these changes — through local and global economic systems.



Demonstrators protest during the UN Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Scotland, Britain, November 3, 2021. REUTERS.

Educating consumers, on the other hand, could present a more robust albeit slower path to remedy greenwashing. Expanding awareness about the signs of greenwashing — as well as continuing comprehensive and accurate education regarding the dangers of climate change — could do well to stunt the demand for corporations enough to where they would lose income from engaging in the misleading practice.

Ultimately, the nuances of global economic relations, partisan political frameworks, the influencing power of wealth, and contesting political views on climate change interact to form global environmental protection policy. Calls for accountability and regulation need to be cohesive, sustainable, and accessible, especially for those most affected by environmental decay, and by extension, greenwashing itself.

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The rise of “wokeness” and its effects on censorship

BY MOKSHA MUELLER

The term “woke” has become increasingly divisive. Defined as a mindset which acknowledges “racial discrimination in society and other forms of oppression and injustice,” for some, the word has developed a negative connotation. Wokeness has been frequently associated with media that tackles issues of gender, sexuality, and race, upsetting those who believe those social categories shouldn’t be broadcasted. The growth of wokeness in recent years has thus prompted debate and discussions of what should and shouldn’t be portrayed to the public in our movies, books, and education.

CHANGING CURRICULA

Recently, the rise of book banning has caused much debate. According to Pen America, book bans have increased by 33% in U.S. public schools over the last year, resulting in educational censorship, an issue that has become rampant in the United States.

The arguments against teaching “woke” subjects vary from concerns that classes on race and sexuality remove focus from more important subjects, like math or science, to a simple dislike of any topics associated with wokeness.

In 2022, the infamous “Parental Rights in Education Bill,” informally known as the “Don’t Say Gay Bill,” was implemented in the United States imposing several restrictive laws on the subjects that could be taught in Floridian schools. As the bill expanded in 2023, it included a prohibition on teachings of sexual orientation and gender identity from pre-k to eighth grade, as well as a limitation on reproductive health education up to the twelfth grade.

The laws have already had severe implications as safe spaces for LGBTQ+ students have begun to diminish and some teachers have been punished for incidents related to sexuality and gender identity in the classroom.

In one instance, Floridian teacher Jenna Barbee showed a Disney animation to her class which had a short segment of one boy expressing his crush on another boy. The short segment resulted in her being investigated for indoctrination.

Other incidents involve teachers getting fired for attempting to press against the ban. Summer Boismier, an English Oklahoman teacher, had put a QR code so her students could find the online versions of the banned books instead of the real copies. This resulted in her getting fired for sharing books that were banned by the law.

Alongside the signing of the bill, there is also an extensive list of books which are and aren’t allowed to be shown or distributed in a classroom. The list of requirements includes well-known literature, including *The Handmaid’s Tale* by Margaret Atwood and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. Due to the extent of the bill, many teachers have expressed that they would rather all their books be hidden than have to refer to the checklist for every one of them. Ultimately, the law results in a downfall of literature exposure to the children and thus imposing a limit on their education.

Scholastic, a leading publishing company, while condemning the rising ban on most pieces of literature, has also moved all the seemingly controversial books to one page so that schools could decide whether they would include the page in the first place. In some cases, parents are required to sign permission slips for their children to attend book fairs where companies, such as Scholastic, sell their products.

LIMITS ON CRITICAL RACE THEORY

The “Stop Woke Act,” also known as the “Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees Act,” is another oppressive bill which suppresses free speech on race and Critical Race Theory in Florida. Written in terribly vague wording, the bill “provides that subjecting individuals to specified concepts under certain circumstances constitutes discrimination based on race, color, sex, or national origin.”

Florida governor Ron DeSantis, who signed the bill, asserts that the law aims to prevent psychological distress or anguish felt by the students at the mercy of the knowledge being shared. Due to the vagueness of the state’s bills, school districts have reported the removal of over 170 books from schools across the state, all of them related to race. This ambiguity leads to educators taking extra precautions in the books they do provide to avoid any career repercussions. While the bill doesn’t claim to promote the erasure of racism in the United States, it is erasing the history of race and how racial inequality remains embedded in the country.

INTERNATIONAL CENSORSHIP

Other countries such as Russia, China, Hungary, and Australia have all endured some form of censorship, mainly in the form of book banning. In Hungary, Master’s and Doctorate degrees in Gender Studies have been forbidden, and all LGBTQ+ books have been sealed and wrapped so they aren’t able to “promote homosexuality.” This resembles book-selling laws in Russia which forbid LGBTQ+ books from being sold in bookshops, labelling the literature as “propaganda.” In both countries’ these laws aim to ensure that material covering LGBTQ+ issues won’t “influence” the minds of people.

China has also had a long-running censorship problem, mainly stemming from political concerns. In China, some university professors fear saying anything and avoid breaching sensitive topics; self-censoring is then being used in academic fields to avoid fates that could harm professors and their careers.

In 2021, the Australian Senate voted against Critical Race Theory and its inclusion in the Australian education curriculum. This means students aren't able to fully understand the history of racism and the roots of how it grew in Australia.

FIGHTING FOR AND AGAINST CENSORSHIP

The result of the rise in anger against “woke” education has sparked protests throughout the United States and Canada. In September 2023, a far-right organization conducted a rally in Queen’s Park, protesting LGBTQ+-inclusive education. Other rallies have been held throughout North America in public parks, in front of schools, and office buildings. In the United States, some rallies even turn violent, as numerous in Los Angeles did, with fights breaking out, offensive terms being yelled out, and harsh comments being thrown. However, many groups continue to gather near the protests and rallies, fighting for continuous freedom of speech and the right to learn about these important topics. Alongside the protests, quieter action is happening within schools and among library staff, where many educators are quitting in retaliation to the bans and limitations to curriculum.

As other states join to help the protests against banning books, digital books are still available, allowing librarians to continue to provide online access to these books. Recently, librarian Linda Johnson founded Books UnBanned, a program where anyone between the ages of 13 to 21 is allowed to access banned books in Brooklyn by requesting a digital library card.

The issue of educational censorship and the growing rise of banned books affect schooling and the education being attained. As tensions increase over “woke” subjects taught in schools, certain states see a continuous rise of banned books as more and more parents fight for the opposite. This raises questions of freedom of expression and speech as schools can no longer educate children on a wide range of topics, and teachers are increasingly at risk of being fired. As these ideas of censorship contradict with basic freedoms, tensions in the United States will continue to increase, and in turn, affect the rest of the world.

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Navigating the Ethics of Reporting on International Crises

BY ISABELLE LI

Trigger warning: This article mentions death.



Janetsky, M. (2020, August 16). How the pandemic is throwing international reporting into crisis. Poynter. <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2020/how-the-pandemic-is-throwing-international-reporting-into-crisis/>

The media plays a significant role in linking international crises to worldwide audiences in times of global instability. Such a task is laden with ethical considerations, requiring a balance between the circulation of accurate information and the suffering of affected groups. The media's ability to shape these crises has a tremendous impact on public opinion, policy choices, and the effects directly suffered by those involved. Journalists therefore play a crucial role in ensuring their stories are not only well-informed, but also exhibit empathy and virtue.

THE ROLE OF BIAS IN REPORTING

The complex field of international crisis reporting is heavily influenced by personal biases. In some instances of crisis reporting, journalists can invoke graphic and evocative imagery to gain more of an audience. This tactic is rooted in the vividness effect which refers to the idea that vivid imagery has a greater influence on decision-making compared to non-vivid information. This cognitive bias can change how foreign crises are covered, prioritized, and dealt with. Crises that are presented vividly can enable audiences to see them as more important than others, even if this isn't the case. Sensationalizing certain crises for views renders other issues less visible or relevant.

The privacy of victims and affected groups should never be sacrificed by journalists who must maintain sensitivity to avoid further victimization. Through exaggerated descriptions of crises, journalists risk spreading stereotypes against entire regions or groups of people. For instance, if the media reports consistently depict a country through the lens of conflict and turmoil, emphasizing only negative aspects, it may foster a stereotype that all individuals from that region are inherently associated with violence or instability. This overgeneralization ignores the varied cultures, different opinions, and the tenacity of the people living in a given country, perpetuating biases that inhibit a more nuanced understanding of their lives and experiences.

HOW FAR IS TOO FAR?

Journalists' efforts to produce transparent, truthful journalism are essential in building trust in the media and reducing incidents involving bias. In the demanding press world, where seeking coverage of global crises persistently comes into conflict with ethical considerations, many news sources use disturbing images and photographs to dominate headlines. Distributing these materials raises many ethical questions. According to journalist Hillary Leung, the fierce competition in the media industry is highlighted, revealing a tendency for sensationalism to override sensitivity and accuracy. Leung pointed out that this reveals a bigger problem that writers face: they have to find a way to get people's attention while upholding journalistic standards.

In 1993, South African photojournalist Kevin Carter captured a Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph depicting a vulture approaching a malnourished child in Sudan during a famine. The photo sparked ethical concerns and debates about the boundaries of photojournalism, as critics questioned the impact on the subjects' dignity and the responsibilities of journalists documenting humanitarian crises.

Similarly, in September 2015, a photographer took a photo of a child refugee who had died by drowning while trying to reach an island. This photographer's actions also raise questions of journalistic ethics. Can we say that these photographs provide an accurate depiction of the harsh realities of war and poverty? Or is there something in them which tantamounts to a secondary trauma for their viewers?

Beyond these instances of sensationalism, it is important to consider the long-term impacts on both the individuals involved and the audience consuming the content. While disturbing imagery can show the severity of certain issues, continuous exposure to graphic and distressing images risks causing desensitization over time. People may lose some of the initial emotional effects when they are exposed to graphic images of human suffering or crisis circumstances on a regular basis. The sheer amount of such imagery may cause the audience to become indifferent. People may grow less sensitive to the seriousness of the problems these pictures portray, creating a coping strategy that protects them from further emotional distress.

There's a complex relationship between genuine awareness and positive change versus potential exploitation of tragedy for increased viewership. In their search for interesting stories, journalists have to be careful not to compromise the ethics of their work by sacrificing sensitivity. Those who consume news media also have a responsibility in recognizing the line between staying informed and endorsing sensationalistic practices. As the limits of responsible journalism are pushed further, a nuanced conversation on how far is too far is needed to uphold ethical standards.

In the information age, the mass media has more power than ever. It shapes how people think about politics, the economy, and society by choosing what news to show. The basic rules of news reporting stress objectivity, honesty, and accuracy. As the media industry continues to evolve, thoughtful considerations are imperative in ensuring that journalism remains a source for informing, rather than exploiting, the public.

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