

Story Laundering: Fusion GPS, Fake News, Russians and Reporters

The media's real business is 'story laundering'.

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Daniel Greenfield, a Shillman Journalism Fellow at the Freedom Center, is an investigative journalist and writer focusing on the radical left and Islamic terrorism.

"The average reporter we talk to is 27 years old, and their only reporting experience consists of being around political campaigns," [Ben Rhodes gloated](#). "That's a sea change. They literally know nothing."

Rhodes, the White House's "Obama whisperer", was explaining how he had pulled the wool over the media's eyes on the Iran Deal to a journalist. The media responded to the story by attacking the journalist who reported it, not Rhodes for viewing them as easily manipulated useful idiots.

The media knew that it knew nothing. And it didn't care. It just didn't want outsiders to know it.

What ties together the debate about Russian collusion, fake news and Fusion GPS is the implosion of the media. What were the professional reporters doing while Rhodes was manipulating the 27-year-olds? They were working at places like Fusion GPS and 'story laundering' narratives to the kiddies.

The media markets its investigative journalism chops even as investigative journalism no longer fits into its business model. Companies like Fusion GPS and political manipulators like Ben Rhodes step into the vacuum by covertly providing them with the core product. Much of the media is really in the business of 'story laundering' by rewriting talking points, smears and hit pieces from organizations like Fusion GPS.

The readers get talking points served to them without ever knowing who actually produced them. The forensic examination of the Trump dossier answered some of these questions. Hillary Clinton hired Fusion GPS. Fusion GPS hired a British former intelligence officer. And he got his material from, among other sources, a Russian intelligence officer. And they passed the material to the media and the FBI.

It took a great deal of effort, including a congressional subpoena, a national scandal and the threat of impeachment, to peel back the workings of the media and expose how the dossier sausage got made. Most packaged media stories never receive this level of scrutiny. And the media is quick to indignantly defend its lack of transparency and reliance on anonymous sources in its Trump hit pieces.

But what the current controversy really reveals is the decline and fall of the media.

The media has outsourced story generation to the shadowy underworld that produced the Trump dossier. Much as [NPR outsourced its coverage of the Iran Deal](#) to Ploughshares and the Iran Lobby in exchange for \$100K. This isn't bias in the conventional sense. It's native advertising all the way. The media 'rents' space to outside interests. It rewrites their stories in the house style and runs them.

Sometimes, like NPR, there's a financial arrangement. Other times the media gets stories that it lacks the resources and the time to generate on its own. Or access. And sometimes it's just a political alliance.

The media is trying to cash in on the institutional legacy of the corporations that bear the old names, but have no functional resemblance to what the news business used to be. Today's media isn't in the news business. Its outlets report the news only to the degree that they have to. And when they do, they rely on viral stories or rewriting an original report. The media's real business is serving as a clearinghouse for narratives. These clearinghouses operate out of major urban power centers. They know next to nothing about much of the country. And they don't care. It's why they didn't see Trump's victory coming.

Trump doesn't just outrage the media politically. He's a threat to their business model. The media's new business is political gatekeeping as the intermediary between political interests and the public. If you want to give Iran a blank check to develop its nukes, touch off a panic over the environment or make anthem protests into a trend, you go to the media. And then your business deal with Iran, your solar panel investments or your hijacked family foundation pushing black nationalist chic will thrive.

The existence of President Trump undermines the media's gatekeeping powers. He is a living reminder that the media's power is limited. That's why he has become the media's number one target.

The internet is the media's other problem. Gatekeeping was easier when broadcasting was expensive and hard. The media used Trump's victory to corral Facebook and Google, the big search and social media companies,

into letting them serve as the gatekeepers of online news under the guise of fighting fake news. But the media's fake news crusade is entirely a consequence of its own corruption.

The public turned to alternative news, both real and fake, because it doesn't trust the media. And the Trump dossier case is more evidence that the media can't be trusted. Everything from satire sites to Russian influence operations thrive in the alternative media space because there is no longer a consensus about truth or ethics. And it's the media that destroyed truth and ethics in journalism.

As the media moved from biased reporting to political gatekeeping, it sharply narrowed the range of permissible opinions. Every story became an 'ad' for one cause or another. Fewer stories existed for their own sake. Instead each story promoted a political or cultural agenda. Even if a story was not overtly political, a political 'advertisement' of some kind had to be slipped in there somehow.

Most people didn't realize that they were reading, watching and hearing a bunch of non-stop political ads disguised in a thousand different styles from reporting ("Gun Violence Strikes Again in American City) to explainers ("10 Things You Need to Know About Gun Violence"), but they found the product stifling and artificial. When everything is an ad, then nothing feels real.

The Russians were perfectly adapted to enter this space because the media had become 'Russian'. It was a collective propaganda organ with close links to the government blasting identical content from its interchangeable outlets. As in Russia, the public instinctively distrusted the media. Different became authentic. The more different, the more authentic.

And instead of trying to regain public trust, the media decided to censor the internet.

The media wasn't prepared for there to be a debate about the meaning of 'fake news'. It wants the power to define what 'news' and 'fake news' are.

This is not the agenda of an institution dedicated to public service, but of a cartel whose entire identity is tied up with total control over a product.

The product isn't news. It's narrative.

The media is a narrative cartel. Forget the five Ws of journalism, who, what, where, when and why. It isn't interested in what happened. It wants to make certain things happen. And when you want to make things happen, you're no longer an observer. You're not the fifth estate. You're one of the first two.

And so the media is in a power struggle with the White House not, as it pretends, over access, transparency or truth, but over policy. And it's acting as a proxy in this power struggle for assorted interests, some named and some nameless, as it did with Hillary's anti-Trump dossier.

The media is no longer a journalistic institution. It's a political institution. It's a component of a political infrastructure of unelected officials, bureaucracies and institutions that controls our government.

Fake news, Fusion GPS, internet censorship and all the rest are symptoms of this overriding problem.

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