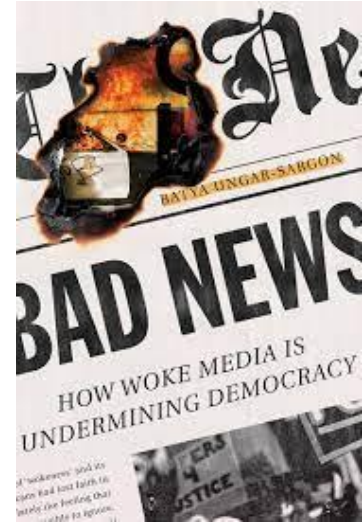


**Wokism in the Media = Moral Panic over  
Race**

a review of

# **Bad News: How Woke Media is Undermining Democracy**

By Batya Ungar-Sargon (2021)



This outstanding book really takes the media to task for grossly exaggerating the issue of race in the US, avoiding issues of class: “It is quite simply a displacement exercise – instead of experiencing economic guilt about rising inequality and their status among America’s elite, members of the news media .... have come to believe that the only inequality that matters is racial inequality; the only guilt that matters is white guilt, the kind you can do absolutely nothing to fix” (p 5).

Ungar-Sargon also traces the history of journalism in the US, focusing on the bygone working class roots of the popular press: “Once a blue-collar trade, journalism has become something akin to an impenetrable caste...What journalists have done with that power ... is to wage a cultural battle that enhances their own economic interests against a ... struggling working class” (p 6).

She describes how all this is propelled by a business model that “encourages building a niche audience” rather than a mass audience (p 8). Thus, ironically, “a meritocratic elite who see themselves as *liberal* have helped perpetuate historic levels of inequality” (p 9). But the conservative media also serves corporate interests: “it serves working-class viewers” by focusing on cultural issues that rile them up rather than serve their economic interests.

The goal of this media “is not to win cultural battles but to take offense, conspicuously, vocally, even flamboyantly. Indignation is the great aesthetic principle of backlash culture” (p 10). This occurred after Bill Clinton caved-in to corporate interests, leaving conservative media to find a new battle plan. Likewise on the Left “the woke cultural war has arrived to respond to what should have been good news: Americans have gotten radically less racist by every measure we have” (p 11) but the liberal news media is pushing “a cultural war rather than real solutions” and the ludicrous idea “of America as a white-supremacist state” (p 12).

Later Ungar-Sargon also explores the roots in academia of this media hype around racism, specifically critical race theory. This is “the woke worldview” that “manufactures fake dissent to prevent real dissent” (p 13). That is, it promotes diversity among elites rather than working class power and “the use of racism as a cudgel to protect class interests” (p 16). “It is the working-class culture, one that values family, place, and faith over careers and resumes and credentials, that we have excised from the public square” (p 17).

She also lays out the history of how all this came about, back into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, especially how Joseph Pulitzer created a popular press (*World*) that outflanked the elite press (*New York Times*). More recently the digital revolution led to “immense pressure to confirm the biases of a publication’s readership”. Meanwhile “aggregate stories from other major news organizations” (p 102) mean that “many digital media jobs involve little journalism at all” (p 103). Journalists are even encouraged to create their own “personal brand”, with the result that “journalism today is a strange mixture of prestige and desperation”, with “journalists increasingly focused on themselves” (p 106).

Then came Trump: His “antics in the 2015 campaign were catnip for a failing media industry” (p 119). That is, “hating Trump was just good business” (p 120), while “what the media, sequestered in the most pro-Clinton districts in America, could not fathom, was that there were

many, many Americans for whom Trump felt the better option” (p 121). Now that journalism is “emotions driven” (= ‘motivated reasoning’), and looking for easy alternative explanations, their story became “Tump’s voters were all racists” (p 129), despite the fact that many people of color voted for him, a percentage which increased from 2016 to 2020.

Much of the current research on racism is “deeply flawed and steeped in prejudicial study design and confirmation bias” (p 133), missing the fact that “even the most diehard Trump fans ... would prefer a hypothetical Trump politician with more respect for liberal democracy” (p 134). The liberal media has also falsely equated opposition to open borders with racism, failing to note that “A Harvard CAPS-Harris poll found that 85% of black Americans want less immigration” (p 138). In fact, there is a long history where the affluent support more immigration (so they can be served by cheap labor) while working class people want less (so they can earn better wages).

Contrary to the message of the liberal media, “Republicans have been at the forefront of criminal justice reform” (p 151) and “it is cities that Democrats have ruled for decades ... where the worst outcomes for black lives persist”. In tandem “it was white liberals ... whom researchers found have a tendency to dumb down their language when speaking to black people” not conservatives (p 153). And how many white liberals know that “black women earn slightly more than comparably endowed white women ... and are also more likely to go to college than white men from similar backgrounds”. Indeed, “Iranian, Turkish, and Asian women all out-earned white men” (p 155).

Thus Ungar-Sargon lays out the data that, contrary to the liberal media’s “moral panic about racism”, “there is nothing short of a full-on consensus for the first time in American history about the importance of racial equality” (p 155). So why all the fuss? Here she picks up on the Critical Theory coming out of academia: “It’s a point of view that sees domination and oppression in every human interaction”, going back to

Marx's analysis of class and that "For postmodern thinkers, the narratives we accept as making up our history are not based on true events, but simply serve as justifications for power" (p 157). The result is a reversal of actual history: "The founding of this country, which you thought was a symbol of equality and liberty" becomes "its opposite – slavery, torture, theft, and oppression" (p 159).

"Like the postmodernists, critical race theorists [the woke] do not believe in equality" (p 160). And "it's not the oppressed minorities who have bought into this paradigm ... It's white liberals" (p 161). For example, the percent of whites who knew a racist rose from 45% to 64% while for blacks it declined from 50% to 42% from 2006 to 2015 (p 163). Thus the cultural war has become a "war around race", led by the woke, who don't actually do anything about it except "feel guilty".

A consequence of this "moral panic" has been the abandonment of objectivity by many journalists. Meanwhile the New York Times, the focal point for woke media, only got the readership of 12% of black Democrats in 2019, with Fox News at 36%, while urban black papers had "precious few articles on the dangers of white supremacy" (p 196). Dissident black writers include John McWhorter, Glenn Loury, Coleman Hughes, Shelby Steele, Thomas Williams, Kmele Foster, and Chloe Valdary, with Williams arguing that "there is sublimated racism in wokeness" and Foster refusing to "identify as black" (p 202).

As to the real victims: "If the working classes have been the greatest victims of the media's moral panic, the Jews have been a close second" since they have been branded as "white" by many critical race theorists, hence "oppressors" despite their long history as racial targets (p 221). The failure to address black-on-black crime and police brutality is another such story, with the overt discrimination against poor whites every bit as bad as against blacks historically (Nancy Isenberg). Meanwhile the entire focus of the woke is to find a few to raise out of the working class, leaving the vast majority without dignity, often

struggling or dependent on “welfare” rather than thriving with good union jobs.

So why not have a big national debate about all this? Well, Ungar-Sargon says, “the Left today is allergic to debate, enforcing its values and views through a moral panic and calling any who dissent racist, transphobic, or misogynistic” (p 250).