

Shocking Case of Academic Censorship

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✓ Fact Checked

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Propaganda is an organized attempt to get large numbers of people to think or do something — or not think or do something. It's not like classical rhetoric, which is about persuasion through argument, but rather a means of sub-rational manipulation
- For the past two decades, professor Mark Crispin Miller has taught a course on propaganda at New York University, in the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development
- In September 2020 after urging his students to look into the scientific rationale for the mask mandates, to assess the truthfulness of the propaganda drive promoting them, he was subject to an administrative "review" for that and other alleged crimes
- Miller is suing 19 of his department colleagues for libel after they signed a letter to the school dean demanding that "review" of Miller's conduct, falsely accusing him of "explicit" hate speech, mounting "attacks on students" "advocating for an unsafe learning environment" and discouraging his class from wearing masks
- Miller's case shows that the infringement of academic freedom is inimical to independent thinking and free inquiry. Without such freedom, higher education is more than likely to teach students only to believe what they are told by state and corporate powers, which means not educating them at all — a failure damaging to them and catastrophic for democracy

In this interview, professor Mark Crispin Miller, Ph.D., provides us with a startling example of a crackdown on academic freedom, with dire implications for free speech in

America today. Ironically, it was his teaching students how to question propaganda, and to resist it, that brought on the curtailment of his academic freedom, after over 20 years of teaching that important subject at New York University.

His experience at NYU in the fall of 2020 culminated in his suing 19 of his department colleagues for libel — a case that has become a major flashpoint in the larger struggle to defend free speech and academic freedom, not just in the United States, but throughout the West today. Miller explained how he had come to teach the study of the media, and propaganda in particular:

"I had learned, as an English major, how to read literary texts closely and carefully to discover their hidden depths ... and I discovered to my delight that you could do that with great movies as well. The more closely you watch them, and the more times you watch them, the more you see in them.

I then began to notice that TV commercials were also extremely subtle. As propaganda messages, they were really very carefully done so that they would appeal to you on both a conscious and an unconscious level. So, I started writing about those, and then about political rhetoric.

I started writing more and more about the media, and I was favoring magazines for [a] public readership ... I wanted to reach more than just an academic audience from the beginning. And I quickly felt the urgency of alerting people to what the media was doing ...

By the '90s, it had become a crisis, as a handful of transnational corporations were controlling most of the content that everybody was absorbing, news and entertainment alike, and it was getting worse and worse. So, I started to become an activist for media reform. I wrote a great deal on this and lectured about it very widely.

This is through the '90s — and you can see how successful I was. The Telecom[munications] bill of 1996, signed by Bill Clinton, set the seal on the creation of a media monolith, The Media Trust, which had already started in earnest under Reagan. Now, it was really getting serious.

Fast forward to 2001 ... I shifted my interest from media concentration to the urgent need for voting reform, because it was becoming ever clearer that the outcome of our elections does not necessarily reflect the will of the electorate ... As you can see, my interests were becoming more and more taboo."

The Rise of State-Corrupted Corporate Media

Signs of trouble emerged in 2005, when Miller published the book "Fooled Again: The Real Case for Electoral Reform." Miller and his publisher had hoped the book would open the door to nationwide discussion of the need for radical reform of the election system, but to their surprise, the book was instantly "blacklisted" by the corporate media. No one would review it.

"I even hired my own publicist," Miller says. "This is the woman who is the publicist for Paul Krugman and Bob Herbert. She came in full of piss and vinegar, [saying] 'We're going to really make this [book] famous.' And she'd never encountered such resistance. She couldn't get anywhere."

Oddly, it was the LEFT press — for which he had often written — that now labeled Miller a "conspiracy theorist" — a stigma that's stuck with him ever since. The slander drove him to investigate more deeply. "I asked myself, when did this become a thing?" he says. "When did 'conspiracy theory' come to spring from everybody's lips?"

Miller went to the archives of The New York Times, The Washington Post and Time magazine, searching for the terms "conspiracy theory" and "conspiracy theorist." Up until 1967, "conspiracy theory" was used only from time to time in various ways, while the term "conspiracy theorist" was never used.

From 1967 onward, however, "conspiracy theory" was used with increasing frequency. Why? Because, in early 1967, the CIA sent a memo — No. 1035-96 — to all its station chiefs worldwide, instructing them to use their media assets to attack the works of Mark Lane, Edward Jay Epstein and other investigators who were questioning the Warren Report for its ludicrous assertion that "lone gunman" Lee Harvey Oswald was solely responsible for the assassination of President Kennedy.

The memo advised the use of certain lines of attack — what we today call “talking points” — to help discredit those dissenting voices. One was that “If there was a conspiracy that big, somebody would have talked by now” — a dismissive claim that’s still in use today, especially concerning 9/11. Another tactic the agency advised was to associate the “conspiracy theories” with communist subversion, thereby casting wholly reasonable inquiry as a threat to the “free world.”

“This raises a profoundly important issue about democracy in general,” Miller says, “as to whether it’s possible when you have the media, the press, covertly manipulated by the state. And, it is part of this hidden history of America that ... we all need to understand if we want to get a clear sense of what’s happening now.”

As Miller started advocating for media reform, he was hired by the late Neil Postman to teach at the NYU.

“He hired me in part because he wanted another public intellectual on the faculty ... who was critical of the media. He shared my view that the whole purpose of media study should be to help inform people generally about the urgent need for a properly functioning democratic media system,” Miller says.

“I used to feel that media literacy should be taught in every high school and college. I still believe that, but I now realize that a key component of that curriculum has to be propaganda study. It’s crucial.”

Over the years, NYU’s media studies department ballooned and shifted direction, becoming more diffuse, more theoretically inclined and more fixated on the pieties of “social justice” — a phrase that Miller points out has been appropriated to mean something other than what it used to mean. Indeed, the “social justice” issue has a great deal to do with the censorship — the “canceling” — of professor Miller.

COVID Propaganda

While it acquaints his students with the history of modern propaganda — its birth in World War I, its use by the Bolsheviks and by the Nazis — Miller's course on propaganda is primarily concerned with teaching students to perceive and analyze propaganda in real time, or to look back at very recent propaganda drives.

This is not an easy thing to do, he warns his students, since, while it's easy to spot propaganda that you disagree with, it can be very difficult to recognize it as propaganda when it tells you something that you want to hear, and want to think is true.

"That's the most effective propaganda," Miller says. "It works best when you don't see it for what it is. You think it's news. You think it's entertainment. You think it's information. You think it's expertise. So, you will agree with it. Someone else out there is spewing disinformation, but you're getting the real thing."

So, it's hard to study propaganda, because you must make an effort to pull back and be as impartial as possible. Read comprehensively, do all the research you can [on] all sides of that issue. See what the propaganda has blacked out. See what the propaganda has stigmatized as fake, as hoax, as junk science, and look at it objectively."

What's hard is that you have to move out of your comfort zone. Sometimes you discover that a thing you'd fervently believed for years was false, or half true. I've had this experience myself many, many times."

Miller made these points at the first "meeting" (via Zoom) of his propaganda course in September 2020, noting that such a thorough and impartial propaganda study can be difficult, not just because it makes you question your own views. Such a study can also pose a social challenge, as your discoveries may come as a shock to those around you — friends, roommates, family, even other of your teachers, who've never looked into the matter for themselves.

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think or do something. It's not like classical rhetoric, which is about persuasion through argument. It's a kind of sub-rational manipulation. ~ Professor Mark Crispin Miller”

What Is Propaganda?

“The COVID crisis has been driven by a number of propaganda themes,” Miller says. However, the word “propaganda” does not automatically mean that the information is false or malign. Propaganda can be true and used for benevolent ends. Public service ads encouraging you not to smoke, for example, are a form of propaganda.

The problem with propaganda is that it's inherently biased and one-sided, which can become outright dangerous if the other side is censored. This is particularly so when it comes to medicine and health, and the censoring of COVID-19 treatment information and the potential **hazards of the COVID vaccines** is a perfect example of this.

“Propaganda is an organized attempt to get large numbers of people to think or do something – or not think or do something. That's really all it is. That's an informal definition but it's a good one,” Miller says.

“It's not like classical rhetoric, which is about persuasion through argument. [Propaganda] is a kind of sub-rational manipulation. It's been with us for a long time, but the rise of the digital world, our absorption into the digital universe, has radically intensified this kind of effort and made it successful beyond the wildest dreams of [Nazi minister of propaganda] Dr. [Joseph] Goebbels or [profession public relations pioneer] Edward Bernays.

This incredible technological sophistication enables them, first of all, to move people at the deepest level. It also enables them to suppress dissidents with remarkable efficiency, spotting the word 'vaccine' in a post and then blocking it.

At the same time, it gives them an astonishing advantage when it comes to surveillance of every single one of us ... It is going to require a tremendous amount of skill and sophistication on our part, to organize under that watchful eye."

Academic Censorship

One topic Miller suggested studying in that first meeting of his propaganda course last fall, was the **mask mandates**. Miller made it clear that he was NOT telling the students not to wear masks, but that this would be a purely intellectual exercise.

Such study (which was not an assignment, but only a suggestion) would consist of reading through the scientific literature on masking: specifically, all the randomized, controlled studies of masking and the use of respirators in hospital settings — studies finding that those face coverings do NOT prevent transmission of respiratory viruses; and, as well, the several recent studies finding otherwise.

He also offered tips on how non-scientists can assess new scientific studies: by looking at reviews by other scientists, and by noting the university where a given study was conducted, and to see if it has any financial ties to Big Pharma and/or the Gates Foundation, as such a partnership may have influenced the researchers there.

The following week, a student who missed that introductory talk (she had joined the class late) was present when the subject of masks came up again, and she was so enraged by Miller's emphasis on the importance of those prior studies (whose consensus had been echoed by the CDC until early April 2020, and by the WHO until early June 2020), that she took to Twitter, accusing him of endangering the students' health, and of posting on his website (News from Underground) material "from far-right and conspiracy sites" — and demanding that NYU fire him.

"I was kind of floored by this," Miller says. "This has never happened to me before. It was unpleasant, but it was her First Amendment right to express herself on Twitter, so that per se was not such a big deal. However, what happened immediately after that is not acceptable."

The department chair, without consulting with Miller, responded to the student's tweet with his thanks, adding: "We as a department have made this a priority, and discussing next steps." The next day, Carlo Ciotoli, the doctor who advises the NYU on its stringent COVID rules, and Jack Knott, the dean of Steinhardt, emailed Miller's students, without putting him on copy, hinting that he'd given them "dangerous misinformation."

They also provided them with "authoritative public health guidance" — i.e., links to studies recommended by the CDC, finding that masks are effective against transmission of COVID-19. Thus, they told the students to believe those newer studies that Miller had already recommended, whereas he encouraged them to make up their own minds.

Shortly after that, the department chair asked Miller to cancel next semester's propaganda course, "for the good of the department," on the pretext that Miller's film course would attract more students, so that he should teach TWO sections of that course. (Both courses admit 24 students.) Miller agreed, as the chair has that prerogative, but he did so under protest; and, he couldn't let the matter go.

"I mean, I'm teaching a propaganda course, and look what happened," Miller says. "So, with the help of some friends, including Mickey Huff, who runs Project Censored, I wrote a petition¹ that people can find at Change.org. The only 'ask' in that petition is that NYU respect my academic freedom and set a good example for other schools.

But I did it in the name of all those professors, doctors, scientists, activists, journalists and whistleblowers who have been gagged or persecuted for their dissidence, not just over this last year, when it's reached a kind of crisis point, but really for decades. It's been going on for far too long, initially on the fringes, but now it's happening all over the place."

'Slanderous Lunacy'

A month after the student attacked Miller on Twitter, he received an email from the dean, informing him that he was ordering a review of Miller's conduct at the request of 25 of his department colleagues, whose letter to him was attached.

"I thought I'd seen everything," Miller says. "[The letter] starts by saying, 'We believe in academic freedom.' The email from the dean and doctor also started saying 'We believe in academic freedom,' so I've learned that when somebody comes up and says, 'I believe in academic freedom,' you need to brace yourself because there's a big buck coming. And that's what happened with this letter from my colleagues.

'We believe in academic freedom, BUT, as the faculty handbook points out, if a colleague's behavior is sufficiently heinous, it can obviate his or her academic freedom. And we believe that's the case with Professor Miller,' it read.

Now, I think what the faculty handbook is referring to is if a professor tries to rape a student or uses lynch mob language against minority students or something like that. They put me in that category. Why? First of all, they said I discouraged students from wearing masks, and even intimidated those who were wearing masks, which is false to the point of insanity.

It was a Zoom class. I've never heard of a student wearing a mask on Zoom, although maybe that will be mandatory at some point. But my mask heresy was the least of it. They went on to charge me with 'explicit hate speech,' launching 'attacks on students and others in our community,' assailing my students with 'non-evidence-based' arguments or theories, 'advocating for an unsafe learning environment,' [and] 'micro-aggressions and aggressions.'

I read this with increasing wonderment. If they had decided to craft a description of a professor completely antithetical to the way I teach, they couldn't have done a better job. This was slanderous lunacy. They basically picked up where that student left off."

Libel Suit Underway

In a Zoom "meeting," Knott informed Miller that he had ordered the review at the behest of NYU's lawyers, who told him that he must — a revelation that Miller finds significant, there being, in fact, no legal grounds for that review.

Soon afterward, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a nonprofit dedicated to protecting academic freedom, sent Andrew Hamilton, NYU's president, a detailed letter going through the case law, demonstrating clearly that the dean's review is illegitimate, and that the president should intervene, and quash. He did not reply.

Knott told Miller that the "review" would end with the semester — i.e., by mid-December 2020. Yet, seven months after it was ordered, Miller still has not heard anything about that putative "review" — which may have been put on hold, or quietly called off, because of what Miller did about his colleagues' letter.

"After I talked to the dean, I went through the letter they wrote with a fine-tooth comb and crafted a cordial point-by-point rebuttal. I asked for a retraction and an apology, and they ignored it. A week later, I sent it again. I said, 'Please, by November 20th I'd like you to retract this and apologize.' Nothing.

So, I decided I had no choice. I certainly wasn't going to let this go. It was outrageous, and represents, inside the academy, the kind of persecution and suppression that we see going on worldwide, throughout so-called democracies. So, I decided I had to sue them for libel."

Support Free Speech Rights and Academic Freedom

At the time of this interview, Miller was waiting for the judge to rule on the defendants' motion to dismiss the case. All of the documents relating to this case can be found on Miller's website, MarkCrispinMiller.com.² If you want to make a donation to help fund Miller's legal case, you can do so on his [GoFundMe](#) page.³

"I'm trying to raise \$100,000," he says, "because I expect this to be a protracted and costly fight with depositions. The money goes directly into an escrow account that my lawyer manages, so I'm not profiting off this personally. Nor am I only doing it on my own behalf, as with the petition.

They have hurt me greatly. Not only professionally, within the institution and beyond, because word of this has traveled, but also physically, because the

stress of that ordeal has really slowed my recovery from Lyme disease, which I've been battling for 10 years.

I became so ill from this that I ended up in the ER at NYU, in January. So, I am on medical leave this semester. I've just been working on my health and telling my story, so that I can prevail in the court of public opinion. But it isn't just about me, my health, my career. It really is about all of us.

It's about you, it's about Bobby Kennedy, Sucharit Bhakdi and John Ioannidis. It's about the Frontline Doctors and the signers of the Great Barrington Declaration. It's about what appears to be a majority of expert opinion on some level, while the medical establishment, like the academy and the media, is utterly corrupt.

There are a lot of people of conscience, doctors who observe their Hippocratic oath, professors who believe in trying to teach the truth, journalists who have no place to publish because they're actually trying to report the other side of a narrative that is increasingly preposterous and lethal. It's for all of us because, as many have observed, once free speech goes, and with it, academic freedom, that's the whole ballgame. That's the end.

If we can't even talk about what's happening, if we end up being accused of conspiracy theory – which is now openly equated with domestic terrorism – if we're accused of hate speech (which is out of the social justice playbook), and if we're accused of dangerous misinformation about the virus, which has been happening all year, if we encounter any of those three responses to our attempts to tell the truth, then we are vilified and marginalized.

And my colleagues managed to hit me with all three in that letter. They accuse me of conspiracy theory, they accuse me of hate speech and they accuse me of doing the students harm by discouraging them from wearing masks.

All false. All I did was urge my class to read through all the literature on masks and make up their own minds as an example of the kind of thing they should do with all these narratives.”

Beyond infringing on freedom of speech, Miller's case shows how censorship ultimately ends up chilling independent thinking and curbing your freedom of inquiry — the freedom to ask questions and ponder an issue or problem from multiple angles.

And, without the ability to think freely and express one's thoughts, life itself becomes more or less meaningless as well as dangerous, while higher education becomes nothing more than training for compliance, as students are each trained to "do what you're told," as Dr. Anthony Fauci put it so gleefully November 12, 2020.

Big Lies Are Protected by Public Incredulity

To learn more about Miller's case, visit markcrispinmiller.com. Miller also publishes a daily newsletter of banned news that you can sign up for. In closing, Miller notes:

"I believe that what's happening now is the culmination of a quiet history of eugenics in the West that starts at the beginning of the 20th century — a movement that was forced underground by the Holocaust, because that was a big embarrassment, and [that] reemerged in the early '50s as a movement for population control.

People don't want to understand this. They want to see Bill Gates as a benign figure, as a kind of Father Teresa bringing happiness and health ... They don't want to know that his father was an intimate of the Rockefellers and sat on the Board of Planned Parenthood, not because he was a feminist, but because he really did believe ... that abortion is one tool for getting rid of the unfit.

There is a eugenic discourse now being floated on the op-ed page in The New York Times where Dr. Ezekiel Emanuel writes that we shouldn't expect to live past 75.

He treats it kind of half-jokingly, but if you then look at the toll that this crisis has taken on the elderly — in particular what's happened in the nursing homes in California, New York, Michigan, Washington and North Carolina, as well as in Canada, Britain and Sweden.

They housed COVID patients in nursing homes. This has the look of what Dr. Vernon Coleman has called eldercide, but nobody wants to think that's what's going on. Marshall McLuhan said, 'Little lies don't need to be protected. But the big lies are protected by public incredulity.' That is to say, 'Come on, you're crazy, they wouldn't do that.'

It's easier to call people 'conspiracy theorists' than it is to face the likelihood, or even the remote possibility, that what we're saying is true. There are many 'conspiracy theories' that over the decades have turned out to be completely true. So, we have to make sure people know it through every means available. And now it's quite urgent."

Sources and References

- ¹ [Change.org, Academic Freedom Petition](#)
- ² [MarkCrispinMiller.com MCM's Libel Lawsuit](#)
- ³ [Gofundme.com Help Mark Crispin Miller Sue for Libel](#)