

Beyond the Network News: Progressive Sources for the News You and Your Students Won't See on Fox or CNN

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In the summer of 2003, the University of Maryland's Program on International Policy Attitudes (PIPA) and Knowledge Networks (Kull, 2003) conducted a study to measure U.S. citizens' knowledge about key details of the U.S. invasion of Iraq and how this knowledge affected their attitudes about the invasion. What they found was astounding.

Based on seven nationwide polls, PIPA and Knowledge Networks uncovered widespread misperceptions about the very information President Bush and his administration used to justify the attack. For example, they found that 48% of respondents incorrectly believed that the U.S. had evidence of direct links between Iraq and al Qaeda, 22% wrongly believed that the U.S. found weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, and 25% falsely believed that international public opinion favored the invasion. According to the report, "... 60% had at least one of these unambiguous misperceptions, and only 30% had no misperceptions" (Kull, 2003). In other words, a majority of the U.S. population had been misinformed, not only by the Bush administration, but by their news sources.

The impact of these misperceptions were, and continue to be, devastating: Among those with none of the misperceptions listed above, only 23% support the war. Among those with one of these misperceptions, 53% support the war—rising to 78% for two of the misperceptions and to 86% for those with all three. Among those with none of the misperceptions, a majority said that going to war was the wrong decision. (Kull, 2003, p. 11)

In a follow-up to this survey, PIPA and Knowledge Networks studied the prevalence of these misperceptions based on respondents' primary news sources. The size of perceptual disparities based on one's news source was awe-inducing. They found, for example, that while only 20% of people who identified Fox News as their primary news source had none of the three misperceptions described above, 77% of those who relied on PBS/NPR had none of the three. Other networks fell somewhere in between. Listed from the highest to the lowest incidence

of misperception among viewers, these included CBS, ABC, NBC, and CNN (Kull, 2003).

What does this mean for multicultural educators? We have long fought for diversity in the curriculum, equitable representation in text books, and the inclusion of student voices in the learning process. These are important fights. But they are doomed to result only in tokenism if we do not incorporate the skills of critical thinking into the consideration of various voices. Do we discuss with our students (or even among ourselves) the impact conglomeration among big media companies, such as whose voices may be thusly squeezed out of public political discourse?—or about the same process occurring in publishing houses and how that affects the most popular textbooks?

During this era, particularly in the U.S., of widespread conservatism, we must look beyond the most mainstream news sources so that we stay informed. We must push back against misinformation campaigns aimed at socializing us and our students to buy into corporate interests or to understand patriotism as blindly aligning with the status quo.

One way to stay informed is to turn our attention away from the mainstream networks and toward online news sources that are not controlled by corporate interests, but that, instead, are run by grassroots journalists and organizations committed to social justice. These sources make public the stories and struggles left un- or under-reported by Fox News, CBS, ABC, NBC, and CNN. They challenge us to think more deeply, more complexly, more broadly about the world around us. Because most do not rely on newsstand sales to stay afloat, they have no stake in self-censoring, they hand no power to advertisers, and they do not shy away from discomforting their readers.

In addition, these sources can be great curricular and pedagogical tools. Ask students to compare how, for example, Fox News covers a Bush press conference differently from *CounterPunch*, a prominent progressive online newsletter. Engage them in a critical dialogue about the dangers of the endless string of mergers among media and publishing companies today. (You can even ask the youngest students: *What would happen if all the books and movies were made by one person?*)

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I've helped you begin this process by providing a directory of some of the most user-friendly, most progressive, mostly non-corporate online news sources. I do not mean for this to be a complete list—just a collection of sources to which I was referred or that I found in my own search for deeper understanding of the world around me.

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Advocate.com
<http://www.advocate.com/>

One of the many projects developed by Planet Out, *Advocate.com* is a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (and, of course, advocate and ally) news site. The site includes stories on a variety of topics including entertainment and humor as well as political commentary and health news.

AlterNet
<http://www.alternet.org/>

Alternet, a news magazine, was developed to counter the growing impact of radical conservative media. Its aim “is to inspire citizen action and advocacy on the environment, human rights and civil liberties, social justice, media, and health care issues,” which it does both by offering original commentary and essays and by making progressive commentary from other news sources more visible. Regular columnists include Sean Gonsalvo and Earl Ofari Hutchinson.

The Black Commentator
<http://www.blackcommentator.com>

Identifying its core audience as “African-Americans and their allies in the struggle for social and economic justice,” *The Black Commentator* offers powerful commentary on and analysis of the complexity of social,

cultural, and political issues that inform social movements. A particularly powerful section of *Commentator* is a collection of “think pieces,” short commentaries that would be powerful contributions to course or workshop readings.

Common Dreams News Center
<http://www.commondreams.org>

Common Dreams is “a national non-profit citizens’ organization working to bring progressive Americans together to promote progressive visions for America’s future.” It’s online project, the *News Center*, highlights breaking news from a progressive perspective.

CounterPunch
<http://www.counterpunch.com>

Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair co-edit this biweekly U.S. newsletter and its companion Web site. The content of *CounterPunch* is largely progressive political commentary—commentary that transcends the “good Democrat, bad Republican” dichotomy by taking aim at any policy, policy-maker, or too-comfortable consciousness that conserves the status quo. As they proudly admit, they support “muckraking with a radical attitude.”

FAIR
<http://www.fair.org>

FAIR (Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting) is a media watchdog comprised of journalists and activists that tracks media bias and censorship. Their Web site houses articles uncovering media bias and spin. FAIR also hosts “CounterSpin,” a weekly radio show.

Global Information Network
<http://globalinfo.org>

This network distributes Developing World News Services including analysis, breaking news, and news features. By amassing and distributing this information, the network hopes to answer important questions: “What do events and trends in Europe or the United States mean for developing countries? How do decisions made in board rooms in New York or Hamburg affect peasants in South Africa or slum dwellers in India?”

Human Rights Watch
<http://www.hrw.org>

Human Rights Watch is an international organization that conducts “fact-finding investigations into human rights abuses in all regions of the world.” These investigations along with related reports and commentaries can be found on the organization’s Web site. Issues covered by the organization include AIDS and human rights, children’s rights, corporations and human rights, lesbian and gay rights, racism and human rights, and women’s rights. The site is available in multiple languages.

Independent Media Center (IndyMedia)
<http://www.indymedia.org/en/index.shtml>

This collective of journalists and independent media organizations provides a “democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth.” The site and its content are available in eight languages.

Information Clearinghouse
<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info>

This online news source was designed to highlight unreported or under-reported news stories—especially those related to U.S. foreign policy. The founder of the site, known only as “Tom,” scours news sources to bring attention to the stories and circumstances that don’t make their way onto CNN or Fox News.

Pacifica Network
<http://pacificanetwork.org/radio>

The Pacifica Network, founded by the Pacifica Foundation in 1949 as an alternative to commercial radio, includes a collection of radio stations committed to “peace and justice through communication between all races, nationalities, and cultures.” Many of these stations, including its five sister stations, are accessible via the Internet through the Pacifica Network Web site.

Peace Afrika
<http://allafrica.com/peaceafrika>

Sponsored by AllAfrica, this site is an online networking space for people working to build peace in Africa. *Peace Afrika* also offers related articles from various African news sources and links to peace and justice organizations.

rabble.ca
<http://www.rabble.ca>

“Built on the efforts of progressive journalists, writers, artists, and activists across” Canada, *rabble.ca* publishes news stories, commentary, and interviews by some of the foremost progressive voices in the country.

Socialist Alternative: News and Analysis
<http://socialistalternative.org/news>

Socialist Alternative is an international organization “fighting against exploitation and injustices people face every day.” Membership includes union activists, social justice activists, student activists, and others committed to uncovering the capitalist interests of “the two parties of big business.” The News and Analysis section of the organization’s Web site contains powerful, complex commentary of current events from a socialist, anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-sexist, anti-heterosexist frame of reference.

Truthout
<http://www.truthout.com>

Truthout was built following the 2000 U.S. presidential elections—an online repository of news and commentaries that uncover the untold and shed some truth on the current events, especially those ignored by the mainstream media. Primary issues covered include the environment, labor, health, and women’s issues.

Women’s eNews
<http://www.womensenews.org>

Women’s eNews employs freelance writers all over the world to provide commentaries on events and policy affecting women. The site is available in both Arabic and English. The highlight of *eNews* is the “Uncovering Gender” column—wonderful political commentary on hot topics of the day.

ZNet
<http://www.zmag.org/weluser.htm>

This community Web site for the progressively minded seconds as a virtual library of news and commentary. In addition to a stream of new articles, *ZNet* houses an archive of essays by Noam Chomsky, a directory of themed resources, and a series of “Watches” ranging from activism to disability rights to life after capital.

Reference

Kull, S. (2003). *Misperceptions, the media and the Iraq war*. Menlo Park, CA: Knowledge Networks.



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