

OPINION

Let's talk about 'media' distortions

THE FINE PRINT

BY PAT MALACH

Here at Fantasyland University, it's become a vague pastime to blame the evil, capitalist media for the world's problems.

Just ask the "informed" students on campus and they'll tell you: "The media has totally distorted the whole Rodney King thing."

But if you actually make time to sift through the facts, it doesn't take long to discover most of the distortions concerning the protests and violence at the Federal Building have been perpetrated by the folks who are ranting against the press.

Close scrutiny of the claims made by the professional campus ralliers leads to one rational conclusion: For most of these people, reality is a pesky nuisance that gets in the way of their ideologies.

Fantasy: Assistant U.S. Attorney Deborah Dealy-Browning had a press conference where she said she was going to seek five-to-10-year sentences for those accused of kicking in windows at the Eugene Federal Building.

Reality: In an interview with KVAL-TV that aired May 5, Dealy-Browning was reported as having said a charge of destruction of federal property could lead to a maximum sentence of 10 years plus a \$250,000 fine. In the next breath the reporter attributed Dealy-Browning with saying it was unlikely that anyone in the Eugene incident would receive more than five years.

Dealy-Browning then told the interviewer that the "government is entitled to seek an upward departure (from sentencing guidelines) and ask the court to give the full 10 years."

The operative words here being "going to" (which denotes certainty) and "could" (which denotes possibility). Given the heated emotional climate surrounding the issue, it's understandable how people could have misinterpreted the distinction between what she said was possible, and what she said was definitely going to happen.

What is not excusable is that for days after both *The Register-Guard* and the *Emerald* reported that the accused would face no more than six to 10 months, or 10 to 16 months, allegedly responsible and knowledgeable people, including a University philosophy professor, continued to use the fictitious five-to-10-year figures. Who is trying to manipulate whom here?

Fantasy: The media has actually sold raw news footage to the FBI in order to help them with their investigation.

Reality: None of the local media, either print or broadcast, have sold "raw" news footage to federal authorities. The day after the violence at the Federal Building, the FBI subpoenaed KVAL and KEZI for footage of the incident. In keeping with the stations' policies for any person who asks, the FBI was allowed to view video footage that had already been broadcast.

The subpoena also required copies of the footage. The sta-

tions complied with the subpoena and charged the FBI a \$25 dubbing fee for making copies of footage that had already been broadcast.

After being subpoenaed, *The Register-Guard* allowed the FBI to purchase a copy of the front-page photo it had already printed in the paper. This is in keeping with the paper's policy of selling, to anyone who asks, prints of any photo the paper has previously published. Managing Editor Patrick Yack said the paper has a strict policy of fighting all subpoenas for reporters' notes, negatives, drawings, etc.

Reality: Locally, the media ignored the "peaceful" nature of the campus rally that preceded the assault on the Federal Building. They have also ignored the decision by law school graduate George Fields to protest the verdict by not participating in the graduation ceremony.

Reality: Stories in both the *Emerald* and *The Register-Guard* definitely reported on people doing \$27,000 worth of damage to the Federal Building. It doesn't happen that often. For some strange reason, both publications thought it was news.

However, both papers also reported extensively on what was done and said at the campus rally that same day. The rally was mentioned in the second paragraph of *The Register-Guard's* story and in the first paragraph of the *Emerald's*.

About two-thirds of the local paper's story was devoted to speakers at the campus rally. It also mentioned the courageous decision by Fields to skip his graduation ceremony. In the *Emerald's* article, 17 out of 24 paragraphs were devoted to speakers on campus. Fields' decision was also reported in the May 13 issue of the *Emerald* — the same day a speaker on campus said Fields' legitimate protest was being ignored by the paper.

One indication of why these absolutely inaccurate statements can be made in good faith is summed up by one speaker. When the woman's claim that the media weren't covering these issues was disputed by someone in the crowd, she responded, "Uh, uh, I checked all the channels!" Hmmm, ever heard of READING?

It's also interesting that these people blame the media for shifting coverage onto the violence that has followed the jury's decision. This conveniently allows them to release themselves of any personal responsibility in the matter. Because, you know, if they hadn't gone out and kicked the windows in in the first place, the media wouldn't be reporting on it, would they?

Fantasy supreme: The federal government is investigating the vandalism in order to persecute innocent students who just wanted to practice their constitutional right to protest.

Reality: This theory presents just a few problems.

First of all, if this is an attempt to intimidate protesters, why hasn't the FBI arrested all 350 people who were there rather than just the people they believe broke the law?

Secondly, if the FBI is inves-

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tigating this simply to intimidate protesters and not because it's a federal crime, it would logically follow that I can go down to the Federal Building tonight and kick in windows just for the hell of it, and because I'm not protesting anything, I won't be prosecuted.

Last of all, if what you're trying to say is that you can commit crimes under constitutional protection as long as you're protesting something, does that mean I can go out and shoot George Bush tomorrow without being held responsible because I was only practicing my God-given right to protest his elitist policies?

Justice would best be served if the judge sentencing these students remembers that they were expressing a rage we were all feeling. But to suggest they should not be held accountable for their action is just plain fantasy.

All of the aforementioned distorted claims of media distortion keep pointing me back to a prophetic line from a 1980 Dire Straits song, "When you point your fingers cause your plan fell through, you got three more fingers pointing back at you."

Pat Malach is managing editor of the *Emerald*.

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