My Media Diet in the Age of Trump, by Carolyn Moxley Rouse

Wednesday, November 9th, 2016 I stopped watching or listening to the news. For me that meant that I stopped watching the "liberal" shows on MSNBC and the "liberal" radio programs on National Public Radio (NPR). For years I had obsessed over these shows. I am not a political scientist, I am an anthropologist, so I relied on those shows to inform me about events, legislation, and election polling. On November 8th I was convinced by the experts that Hillary Clinton would win the presidency. After Trump was elected I realized I had binged on junk. So I went on a news media diet.

I should have known that Trump would win. Just months before the election I had been studying white declining life expectancies in rural California and my poor and working-class informants were telling me that Trump was going to win. My anthropological research was far more accurate about what was going on in the United States than the on-air pundits I had come to trust.

Dieting was difficult at first. NPR was my constant companion during my walk to work and I relied on MSNBC for more news analysis. Stopping was very hard. But within two weeks I discovered an alternative universe of information. I discovered podcasts such as "Slow Burn" about Watergate, "Reveal" produced by The Center for Investigative Reporting, and "S-Town" which features a character not unlike my primary informant in white rural California. And I continued to read the *New York Times* (NYT) and *The New Yorker*. Importantly, my goal was not to be ignorant. What I wanted to get away from was television and radio personalities trying to make me feel a certain way about the news. Reading made it easier for me to form my own opinions and choose stories that mattered most to me.

I also reread Alexis de Tocqueville's two volume *Democracy in America*, Hannah Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* and Sindre Bangstad's *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia.* Texts like these, among others I teach with, have been far more informative about this new age of authoritarianism than what I came to call the "fast news." Fast news for me is the reporting of significant, on-going events before there is clarity. Almost daily reporting of Trump's "collusion" with the Russians was fast news. Read Arendt and you will know that Trump is too feckless. A good authoritarian leader needs significant state violence, often deployed

bureaucratically. Trumps incompetence means he needs surrogates, but he can't seem to retain surrogates because he is so erratic.

Good long-term investigative journalism is what I call "slow news."

What bothered me about the liberal news was not that it was fake, as Trump repeats. What bothered me was that liberal journalists could not seem to wrap their heads around the fact that all news is framed, not just the opinion pieces. Even the choice of what to report or not determines what consumers consider important. So, in the runup to the 2020 presidential election, I see the New York Times making the same mistakes that did in 2016. Examples include, 1. Falsely equating candidates by comparing things that are not comparable in the interest of seeming "fair and balanced." In the 2016 election I remember NPR reporting back-to-back the problems with the Trump Foundation (now dissolved by court order) and the Clinton Foundation (which has saved countless lives). In the minds of the listeners, both foundations were equally corrupt. 2. Reporting people's opinions about candidates as truth, without interrogating how a source's bias produce these so-called truths. Because gender and racial bias impact opinions, reputable news organizations should try to stay away from opinion polling and take care when reporting even a source's opinion as fact. Finally, 3. News organizations refusing to acknowledge how much advertising dollars drive so much of their content and framing.

I recognize that around the world journalists and journalism are both under threat, one physical the other financial. That is why I continue to subscribe to *The New Yorker* and *The New York Times*. I treasure slow news and consider an educated populous necessary for democracies to work.

When I made this pledge almost two and half years ago to stop watching and listening to the news, I thought I would return after Trump was out of office. At this point, I like my media diet. I do not always know how to pronounce the names of the foreign leaders I read about in the paper. What is different now is I have more time to read old and new texts that teach me more about what is going on than the daily news cycle. And now I take my informants much more seriously. It turns out they may be better equipped to analyze Trumplandia than the so-called experts.