
The New York Times' 'powerful' front page listing Covid-19 victims is weepy piece of emotional browbeating

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24/05/2020



The New York Times' editors are busy congratulating themselves for publishing the names of a thousand Covid-19 deaths and calling it journalism. Why has the nation's paper of record abandoned reporting for misery-mongering?

New Yorkers woke up on Sunday to find the sun shining, and fewer people dying of the coronavirus than at any point since mid-March. However, they remain locked at home under Governor Andrew Cuomo's orders, and as the total death count in the US inched near 100,000, their morning newspaper reminded them they have nothing to feel good about.

The New York Times chose to mark the 100,000 death milestone by replacing its front page (and the following 11 pages too) with a list of 1,000 of these deaths, along with a one-line description of the deceased.

"They were not simply names on a list, they were us," the front page reads, describing the deaths as an "incalculable loss." After this solemn declaration, the paper then put the names on a list, and calculated the loss.

And, because mainstream media loves nothing more than fellating itself, the Times ran a 'behind-the-scenes' story explaining how and why its editors put the list together (spoiler alert: they had a group of graduate interns trawl obituary pages in local newspapers).

"The death of one man is a tragedy; the death of millions is a statistic," reads a quote attributed to Joseph Stalin by the Washington Post. The Soviet dictator never said that, and the idea is simply not true, as anyone who's ever visited Auschwitz or the Cambodian Killing Fields will tell you. Yet at what point did it become the job of the media to distill this mass tragedy into the most syrupy of emotional elixirs?

The last time the NYT swapped news for a simple list of dead Americans was in the bleak aftermath of the 9/11 attacks (this was years before the paper attributed these 2,996 deaths to "airplanes" that "took aim" at the twin

towers, with no mention of Al-Qaeda terrorists).

Since then, mass tragedy has struck the US with depressing regularity. Between 46,000 and 95,000 Americans died of influenza in the winter of 2017–2018. More than 67,000 died of an overdose in 2018, the majority from Fentanyl, a deadly synthetic opioid. More than 15,000 were murdered with a firearm last year, while 1.4 million Americans tried to kill themselves in 2018. Nearly 50,000 were successful.

Yet these human beings didn't get the front-page treatment. The issues were reported, sure, with gun violence in particular getting round-the-clock coverage, accompanied by op-eds demanding the government step in and confiscate firearms. However, no lists were published, and journalism – albeit biased – still took precedence over pure emotional heroin.

So, why now? Why are Covid-19 deaths tragedies and the loss of West Virginians to the needle mere statistics?

One guess is that describing the slow petering out of the virus won't shift any copies. After all, "if it bleeds, it leads," as New York Magazine's Eric Pooley quipped in 1989.

Another possibility is that the New York Times and its ilk have spent months telling readers that the coronavirus would be a civilization-ending apocalypse. Such an emotionally dripping front page validates these claims.

"The Sky is Falling," a headline published in March read. This could be "the Big One," it blared in February. "The Coronavirus Goes Global," it hollered, predicting a loss of life on par with World War II. The best-case scenario foreseen by the Times was that "everybody gets sick."

Pooley's aphorism rang true. The worst media alarmism sold the most copies, at least according to one report that tracked social media engagement throughout the crisis.

Yet here we are in May, with the weather balmy, talk across the US turning to reopening the economy and all 50 states lifting restrictions on this Memorial Day weekend. The tragedy of recent months is undeniable, but so, too, is the fact that, by all metrics, things are improving in America.

Honor the dead, but remember: the New York Times is selling you misery for misery's sake.
