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Just the facts Ma'am (and hopefully avoid the cancel culture)

By Steve Bakke  August 12, 2020

*Joe Friday of the 50s
TV show "Dragnet"*



*"Just the facts, Ma'am.
Just the facts."*

Facts are good. Double-checking those facts is good too. But once you set out to do so, be complete, fair and balanced. Otherwise somebody will start checking on the fact checker. Unless, of course, something gets in the way of that goal.

Take a look at a recent "Fact Check" by Linda Qui of the New York Times, variously titled similar to: "Barr repeats Trump falsehoods in congressional testimony." At least one of Ms. Qui's several corrections met the "misleading" label she assigned to AG Barr. But as I'll point out later in this article, the forces of political correctness may influence otherwise sincere "fact checkers."

Qui took exception to Barr's comment that "According to statistics compiled by the Washington Post, the number of unarmed Black men killed by police so far this year is eight. The number of unarmed white men killed by police over the same period is 11. And the overall numbers of police shootings has been decreasing."

Even though the facts are accurate, Qui asserts that the "claim that more white Americans are killed by police" is misleading. She correctly points out that "factoring in population size, Black Americans are killed by police at more than twice the rate as white Americans." A similar comparison also applies to unarmed blacks.

By stopping there, Ms. Qui left the clear impression that there is racial bias in police use of potentially lethal force, and that the existence of bias is uncontested. It's unhelpful in this time of extreme racial turmoil to leave it right there because there's more to learn about racial motivation when police officers are considering deadly force.

Consider this 2016 Harvard study – "*An Empirical Analysis of Racial Differences in Police Use of Force*" by Roland G. Fryer, Jr. It expressed the following conclusion: "On the most extreme use of force – officer involved shootings – we find no racial differences in either the raw data or when contextual factors are taken into account." There's much more to that study but that conclusion stands on its own by adding to the proper context for this "fact check" case study.

More recently, in 2019, we heard from NPR that “a new peer-reviewed study of fatal police shootings says that white officers are not more likely to shoot and kill suspects.” These findings were published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences by its authors, psychology professors Joseph Cesario of Michigan State and David Johnson of the University of Maryland. They expressed the following: “We found that the race of the officer doesn’t matter when it comes to predicting whether black or white citizens are shot.”

Now, for the rest of the story. This is where it gets complicated.

As expected, there was significant push-back against both studies, even though the conclusions have withstood scrutiny fairly well. Michigan State’s Graduate Employees Union apparently has a zero-tolerance policy for anything conflicting with Black Lives Matter policies, assertions and priorities. Significant non-academic interest and use of this study threatened the University’s standing with other BLM supporters. Reacting to significant pressure, the authors of the Michigan State study have withdrawn it to avoid further negative publicity and subtle criticism from within liberal academic ranks. Nevertheless, they publicly stand behind their original conclusions.

Another Michigan State researcher and professor, Stephen Hsu, resigned after receiving pressure for commenting on and supporting this research. Here’s his reaction: “The victory of the Twitter mob will likely have a chilling effect on academic freedom on campus.”

We’ve created a dreadful situation for the continued health of intellectual honesty in our society. This example clearly shows the destructive power of intolerant political correctness. People are afraid to offer their opinions.

Perhaps the author of the fact check I used to introduce these comments, Linda Qui, omitted the full context of the issue for fear of retaliation. Or maybe the study’s premature withdrawal was a convenient excuse for not mentioning it.

My friends, we’re witnessing the cancel culture at work.