

# The New York Times' self-inflicted fiasco



BY KATHLEEN PARKER  
Washington Post Writers Group

When the New York Times' leadership recently apologized to the paper's staff for running an op-ed by Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., the enemies of "fake news" high-fived and Free Speech collapsed from embarrassment.

Heaven forbid an opinion on a newspaper's op-ed page should offend someone. It's one thing to disagree on the merits of an opinion; it's quite another to have published an opinion column, then criticized the column and then made a senior personnel decision in part because the column was published.

The Times' editorial page editor James Bennet, once a potential executive editor candidate, resigned over what should have been a blip on the continuum of lessons learned. This unnecessary spectacle

isn't only disappointing but portends the gradual shrinking of the free marketplace of ideas.

Rather than defending a U.S. senator's right to speak his mind, the Times bowed to outrage — an overindulged emotion in the age of safe spaces and trigger warnings. So many Times' staffers were appalled by Cotton's op-ed endorsing military intervention to quell unrest that they, in part, succeeded in pressuring the paper into issuing an apology and then making a change in its editorial leadership. And on a related note,

the top editor at the Philadelphia Inquirer also resigned over the weekend for a headline that read, "Buildings Matter, Too."

It is important to note that the events of the year have many people, including those in the media, on edge. An impeachment, a pandemic and then disturbing incidents of police brutality and worse have Americans upset, their emotions frayed, and people of color in particular feel worried about the safety of their families.

Cotton's essential argument was that an "overwhelming show of force" was needed as the protests unfolded and that President Trump should invoke the 200-year-old Insurrection Act to "restore order to our streets." Bad idea, Tom. See how easy that was? I

for one am glad to know what's inside Cotton's cerebral cavity.

The angry staffers also claimed that the op-ed was inflammatory and "contained assertions debunked as misinformation by the Times' own reporting." They pointed to Cotton's claim that Antifa, a self-described anti-fascist movement opposed to the far right that can seem sort of fascist in its disruptive tactics, was behind the unrest.

The piece should have been more carefully edited to make it clear that the evidence behind Cotton's claim about Antifa's role is not very convincing. While his piece was far from perfect, Cotton tried to draw a distinction between violent actors and peaceful protesters.

Bennet's mistake was

in not reading the Cotton op-ed before running it, to which he has admitted. He likely assumed it had been sufficiently vetted by other editors who have said they fact-checked and approved it. Bennet's deputy editor James Dao tweeted that he "oversaw the acceptance and review" of the op-ed. He has moved to another position in the newsroom.

It is probably telling that the Cotton protest largely took place on Twitter, where it was sure to gain momentum. It doesn't take much courage to join a gang and cancel an opinion — or ruin a career. It does take great courage to stand alone against a tide of pitchfork-wielding Twitter tyrants and defend a free exchange of ideas, even if some of them are bad.

# WHO fumbles its message on COVID-19

Star Tribune Editorial Board  
(Minneapolis)

Don't shrug off your risk of COVID-19, especially if you've been in large crowds or other high-risk settings recently, simply because no symptoms were apparent in those nearby. This is an important public health message, one that needs amplifying after a World Health Organization communications fumble earlier this week.

On Monday, WHO epidemiologist Dr. Maria Van Kerkhove generated controversy when she responded to a question at one of WHO's routine news conferences. Her answer lacked clarity and context. Reports afterward misleadingly summarized that transmission by asymptomatic people is "very rare." Coverage also wrongly suggested that this was a new WHO position.

Medical experts responded with alarm and disbelief because the agency appeared to ignore accumulating research about COVID-19's transmission by people before they develop symptoms. Some social media users quickly jumped to this simplistic conclusion: Since only those with COVID-19 symptoms are contagious, sick people can just stay home and no one else needs to worry about contracting it.

If only it were that easy. "WHO says asymptomatic transmission of COVID is very rare. Just ignore this. It is not true," Mayo Clinic Dr. Vincent Rajkumar posted on Twitter.

In an interview with an editorial writer, renowned infectious disease expert Michael Osterholm also expressed concerns about the WHO statement and underscored the continued importance of social distancing. In addition, he said that the WHO effectively "walked back" its statement

Tuesday morning.

The organization live-streamed a follow-up question-and-answer session with Van Kerkhove and another scientist, Dr. Michael Ryan, an Irish surgeon who heads the WHO's emergency programs. Van Kerkhove swiftly clarified that people without symptoms can transmit the virus and that models show it plays a significant role in fueling COVID-19 transmission, though further study is needed.

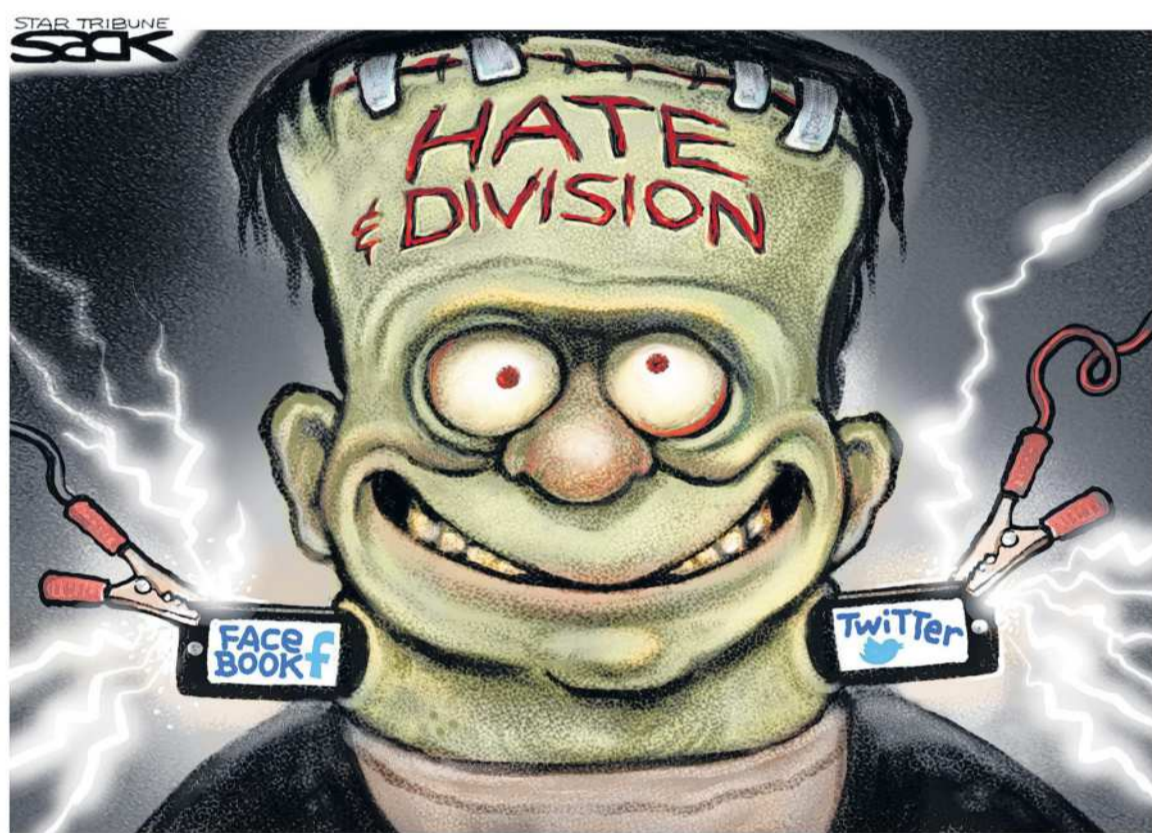
Ryan pointed out that the Monday "statement" by Van Kerkhove was only a response to a reporter's question. It did not represent an institutional shift in policy.

Much of the confusion appears rooted in what Van Kerkhove originally meant by "asymptomatic." Some people infected do not develop any symptoms. It's not clear how unusual this is. Others may be "pre-symptomatic," meaning they're infected and later develop symptoms. Van Kerkhove did not adequately distinguish between those groups in her original remarks.

A small yet growing body of research has documented spread by presymptomatic individuals. An April 15 study in the prestigious journal *Nature* estimated that "44% ... of secondary cases were infected during the index cases' presymptomatic stage." The researchers call for mitigation measures reflecting this.

Testing and social distancing remain vital. The Twin Cities were the epicenter of the George Floyd protests. State health officials recommend participants get tested for COVID-19, preferably five to seven days after exposure even if they don't feel sick.

Said Osterholm: "This is not a time to let down our guard."



# Safety comes first for NC chicken industry

BY BOB FORD AND MIKE BROWN

Across North Carolina, our country and the world, COVID-19 has made us more aware of the essential service our food system provides. Fortunately, the chicken industry has a track record of innovating to meet the public's needs while protecting their community of employees, no matter the challenge.

As we continue navigating recent cases in the state's chicken plants, our top priority is ensuring the safety and well-being of essential workers who are keeping the country supplied with chicken.

North Carolina's chicken producers and employees are showing great resilience by taking charge to guarantee America's number one protein reaches our local grocery aisles. That starts with keeping our most important asset — our employees — safe.

The fact is that chicken plant managers in Lumber Bridge, Kinston, Monroe, Goldsboro, Sanford, Rockingham, Rose Hill, Wilkesboro and all over the state

wake up every single morning and the first thing they ask themselves is, "Are we doing everything in our power to take real actions within our facilities to protect our employees from this virus?"

Committed to protecting every employee, the industry is carefully following CDC, OSHA and USDA guidelines and maintains constant contact with local health officials.

Further, chicken companies are implementing additional measures to keep workers safe. Among numerous others actions, companies are applying increased cleaning and sanitation of plants, temperature checks before entering the facility, social distancing measures, installing plastic dividers between work stations, issuing masks, face shields and other personal protective equipment, hazard pay, and encouraging at-risk or sick employees to stay home, with pay. Our companies openly communicate information about COVID-19 to employees, often in multiple languages, and have protocols for identifying any

employee that may have been in contact with a COVID-19 co-worker.

It is crucial to maintain the health and welfare of the people working tirelessly to produce and deliver our food so we can continue to support local communities and supply nutritious meals to families across the country.

"well-financed activists, lawyers and other groups are trying to take advantage of this situation and incite fear and panic among our workforce."

Unfortunately, well-financed activists, lawyers and other groups are trying to take advantage of this situation and incite fear and panic among our workforce that does little to help us accomplish our mission. These groups are using COVID-19 as a bridge to advance their agenda of taking down modern livestock agriculture.

Chicken plants also support North Carolina's farmers who depend on chicken companies to process and distribute the birds they raise. Shutting down a plant is debilitating for farmers' businesses. Unfortunately, drops in processing capacity have already impacted farmers in the state.

Because of this, the National Chicken Council and North Carolina

Poultry Federation have been and will continue to advocate for funds in any next federal aid package for growers who have experienced fewer flocks, reduced placements or increased downtime due to COVID-19. Unfortunately, chicken growers to date have been left on the sidelines.

In solidarity with their local and regional communities, chicken companies are donating millions of dollars and millions of pounds of chicken to food banks, soup kitchens, local health care facilities, police and fire stations. If you visit a community near a chicken plant in the coming days, you may likely find a company selling reduced price chicken directly from their trucks.

While these efforts may not drive attention-getting headlines or make their way into sensationalized media stories, know that North Carolina's chicken producers are doing everything they can to keep our workers healthy and safe, and keep America fed — in that order.

We are going to get through this together — as a community — one meal at a time.

Bob Ford is executive director of the NC Poultry Federation and Mike Brown is president of the National Chicken Council.