

In Defense of Thought and Speech: A Reflection on Criticisms Leveled Against Scholars at New York University

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

Let no one say — without a vigorous challenge — that the so-called ‘new normal’ is not profoundly ab-normal, absurd, hideous, and intolerable. That conscious and concerned men and women of the world’s self-perceived beacon of freedom, liberty, and civil rights backed by the Rule of Law (we might suppose), are not being roundly castigated and marginalized for exercising the foremost important freedom. Speech and thought, by close association, are now under a sustained and coordinated attack from saboteurs in Reagan’s [Shining City upon a Hill](#). The nation’s schools and universities have been infiltrated by advocates of an ideology so pervasive, powerful and alluring that all who come under its spell are at risk of being rendered docile automatons emptied of any faculty of reason.

Consider New York University, a citadel of liberalism and progressive thought in the heart of a metropolis known globally for its liberal policies. All pretense of progressive thought, speech, and policymaking are now crumbling, and the guiding (neo)liberal agenda is being shown for what it is. This is nothing new. Fascism is friendly only to those who acquiesce to its demands. The academy has been captured and soon too will the Republic as the trend continues. In a world where all organic and inorganic things are forced into the neoliberal meat grinder for packing, distribution, and sale, any speech act perceived to threaten this new order will be marked for marginalization. Where they fail to offer clear market value for this new political economy, speech and thought that depart from received neoliberal wisdom will be cancelled.

A world-renowned scholar and public intellectual of the first rank, Mark Crispin Miller is the latest notable figure caught in the crosshairs of the cult of cancel culture at NYU. As [Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication](#), Miller is under attack for doing what academics are supposed to do — present alternative views and evidence that sets young and inquiring minds on the path of critical studies. A peculiar post-9/11 passion for money, power, and control has, however, seemingly rendered respect for science and empirical evidence passé and contemptible. In a course titled [Mass Persuasion and Propaganda](#), Miller surveys the history of propaganda from modern to contemporary society and expounds the danger of leaving this power in the hands of the few to frame and manage the objective world, manipulate the masses, inculcate ‘correct’ beliefs and behaviors, and mobilize populations to blind action. As a result of Miller’s efforts to broaden awareness of these issues, calls, lodged by a single disgruntled student, have risen that he be relieved of his position.

Open enquiry is now strictly taboo among adherents of the prevailing cancel culture. The times they are changin’, and the lot of us are being conditioned, too, by mainstream media,

culture, and communication, to adopt the scripts of the new order outlining how to behave properly, and to accept its claims that we are living in the “new normal.” This new normal is a time and place that grants no open forum to independent thought, to critical inquiry, to physical science and social science unswayed by the corrupting influences of big money keen to surveil and commodify our social, political, economic, biological, and religious existence.

Professor Miller, along with countless other academics, researchers, and journalists around the world, are under threat for encouraging their students and fellow citizens to engage with the alternative perspectives on this current crisis. Since the full picture of such a pressing issue as Covid-19 is unlikely to appear in corporate mainstream sources, citizens keenly aware of manifold media deceptions — past and present — are forced to turn to independent expert source material. This is the crime Miller is accused of — encouraging budding scholars to take hold of and contemplate the wider story surrounding this latest global deception. It is clear that Miller and a growing number of conscientious citizens across the world recognize the threat that restricted fields of discourse can pose to human and civil rights, agency, and the sovereignty of human beings and nations.

Indeed, like other academics concerned about the absence of objective truth in reporting, Miller’s approach reflects attempts in a conference of “top epidemiologists, economists, and journalists,” who gathered from October 1-4 “to discuss the global emergency created by the unprecedented use of state compulsion.” Their [Great Barrington Declaration](#) is a product of “infectious disease epidemiologists and public health scientists” who “have grave concerns about the damaging physical and mental health impacts of the prevailing COVID-19 policies, and recommend an approach we call Focused Protection.”

Great Barrington Declaration

As infectious disease epidemiologists and public health scientists we have grave concerns about the damaging physical and mental health impacts of the prevailing COVID-19 policies, and recommend an approach we call Focused Protection.

READ THE
DECLARATION

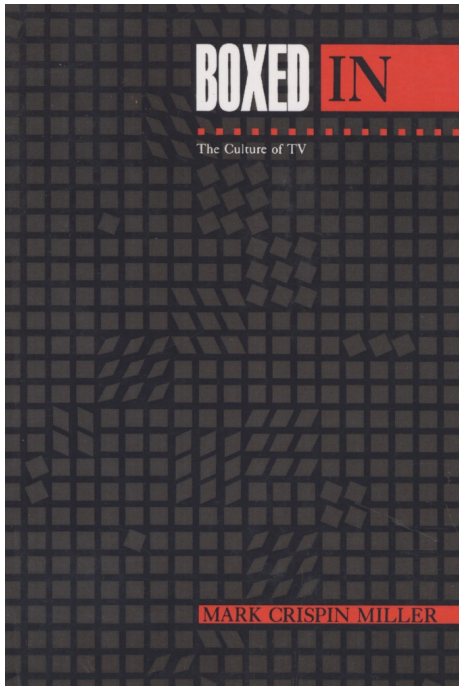
SIGN THE
DECLARATION

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СРПСКИ	БЪЛГАРСКИ	SUOMI	FØROYSKT
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[Screenshot from GBD](#)

Sadly, although the conference was a noble effort by professionals to address the damaging effects of corporate-state coercion on the masses, the Great Barrington Declaration also appears to tacitly accept as inevitable the global march toward a great [techno-feudal dystopia](#). By failing to confront the other outstanding social issues, the Declaration implicitly normalizes corporate-state sponsored predation, the profit-motive guiding policy for the [ever-increasing number of childhood vaccinations](#), the widespread reliance upon the [inappropriate](#) and [faulty PCR test](#), the practice of constraining the freedoms of perfectly healthy people, and of [banishing the elderly](#) to solitary nursing home confinement.

The Declaration fails to acknowledge the huge influence that tax-exempt foundations, masquerading as charities, wield over global health policies emanating from such institutions as the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It fails to address the potential inherent within Big Tech and Big Data contact tracing applications to usurp the constitutional rights of citizens. It fails to confront the Orwellian [biometric health passports](#) proposed to herd populations, manage movement, and to [control the major gates of access to education, work, food, and housing](#). The Declaration fails to address the damage that [mandated masks](#) do to the [physical](#) and mental health of perfectly healthy people and the social and communal bonds they maintain.



As a graduate student in the early 1990s contending with duties in the regular Army and the post-traumatic stress of a recent deployment in a preemptive invasion of Panama, I was invited to engage with Professor Miller's collection, [*Boxed In: The Culture of TV*](#) (Northwestern University Press, 1988). Among its many illuminating essays are key lessons for students and citizens concerning the unwarranted influence of mass media to inculcate values and behaviors that free and fully-informed people would very likely find revolting. Like my comrades, I learned the hard way, from experience, that the mediated world we encounter in TV, radio, and the press is merely a representation of the power of the invisible hand of the market.

While stationed in Panama, in the years leading up to the invasion, I noticed the television and print media retooling of General Manuel Noriega's public persona. As President George H.W. Bush's PR campaign against Noriega unfolded, more overt signs of a looming international crisis began emerging as well. Picking through magazines at the PX on Corozal, I noticed how the February, 1988 cover of *Newsweek* would confirm the reasons for recasting Noriega in a negative light. The rendering had become explicit. Corporate journalism framed an image of the general's face on the cover with the headline: "Drugs, Money and Death: The Sordid Story of Panama's Outlaw Dictator." A scowl and look of suspicion expressed in his pockmarked face, shaded slightly by the brim of his cap, reinforced the connotations of each word in the headline. *Time* followed *Newsweek* in March with an equally emotive cover. A cropped portrait of the general's scarred face, his dark eyes gazing into space, serious and aloof and across his forehead: "The Drug Thugs: Panama's Noriega proves they're a law unto themselves." Since public awareness of Noriega's working relationship with Bush [had already been well established for years prior](#), the advertising and telegraphing of impending state belligerence became all the more obvious.

In *Boxed In*, Miller observes that, "Like propaganda generally, advertising must...pervade the atmosphere; for it wants, paradoxically, to startle its beholders without really being noticed by them. Its aim is to jolt us, not 'into thinking', as a Brechtian formulation, but specifically away from thought, into a quasi-automatic action" (1988, p. 11). Nowhere was this mass media attempt to jolt the public into quasi-automatic action more evident than in

Bush's curtain call for *Just Cause*. Not too many months after the invasion of Panama, I began preparing my bags for a possible deployment to Saudi Arabia for Operation Desert Shield/Storm.

After Saddam Hussein's annexation of Kuwait in early August 1990, the mainstream demonization of the Iraqi leader moved into high gear.

My own memories of the [mayhem and corpses](#) in Panama City began reemerging in early August during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, mediated now by CNN piped into my workplace. *Newsweek* arrived too with its cover story shortly thereafter — its front page adorned with a mugshot of a menacing Hussein and a headline questioning whether he could be stopped. Image and text demanded audience members prepare for "The War of the Future," as my colleagues and I tried to prepare our minds to grasp the reasons behind the sudden rush to conflict. American mainstream media stoked passions throughout the summer, yet failed to move public opinion to favor invasion. In response to this failure, October saw [Nayirah, a 15-year-old Kuwaiti school girl](#), offer her testimonial evidence of the savage Iraqi forces leaving babies in Kuwaiti hospitals to die on a cold floor. Incubators, we were told, were evidently so central to the success of invading Iraqi hordes that Kuwaiti newborns had to be dispossessed of them.

The effect of Nayirah's testimony on American public opinion was "quasi-automatic" as outrage against Hussein's savagery erupted across the nation. Advertising, as Miller cites a Coca-Cola executive, "is message assimilation — the respondent must be shown to behave in some way that proves they have come to accept the message, not merely received it" (1988, p. 11). Some years later, after American bombs, missiles, and cannon fire produced the necessary destruction — the corpses of several thousand Iraqis and the compliance of Saddam Hussein — we learned that Hill & Knowlton, [an American PR firm](#), had been employed to develop a marketing strategy for the invasion. The script given to Nayirah (in actuality, the daughter of the Kuwait Ambassador to the US), the expert stage direction, and her live performance on TV could not have been more deserving of an Academy Award.

Miller notes that good advertising is, in effect, a Pavlovian project that requires audiences not to be confronted head-on and in an alien context since a direct and vivid approach might awaken us from the receptive trance that ads put us in and cause us to meditate on their deeper meanings (1988, p. 11). The ad must totally envelope the audience and, like a Broadway play, make it one with the story. Awareness of this devious PR campaign that saw no difference between higher corporate profits and higher body counts in war made recurring nightmares of Panama all the more vivid. An effective ad campaign to capture the public mind must come down on everybody like the scents of spring, 'as though through the air they breath, and as naturally'; for, once isolated and deliberately interpreted, an ad will betray not only the devices that may enable it to work, but certain larger truths about the system that requires it, and that (therefore) require you not think about it. (Miller, 1988, p. 11)

The same strategies used against the US population in this Pavlovian project to foment wars against people and nations, are bound to reveal themselves in this present war against pathogens. In his course on propaganda and mass persuasion, Professor Miller's intellectual exercise threatens to awaken students to the manner in which the mainstream Covid-19 narratives are effectively "isolated and deliberately interpreted," and allow analysis of the wider story that might reveal "larger truths about the system" that the leading myth-makers urge us "not to think about."

In many ways, Miller's analysis throughout *Boxed In* reveals an ironic situation for his critics who have boxed themselves into a safe space showing no way out of this self-imposed mental dungeon. Sign the [petition](#) in support of Professor Miller, and help free from their self-imposed darkness the ideologues who are acting to set limits on thought and speech.

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