Fighting Disinformation: Another Noble Experiment?

David Beaver (The University of Texas at Austin)
Jason Stanley (Yale University)

1

Plan

- A noble experiment
- Good Systems
- Supply and demand
- Psych 101
- Fact check this!
- Closing thoughts

2

A noble experiment

3

ALL MERCHANDISE ADVERTISED IN THE TRIBUNE IS GUARANTEED

New York Tribune

First to Last—the Truth: News · Editorials · Advertisements

WEATHER
Partly cloudy to-day and to-morrow; slowly rising temperature; moderate variable winds.
Full Report on Page 3

Vol. LXVII No. 22,965 (Copyright 1917, The Tribune Assn) TUESDAY, DECEMBER 18, 1917 ONE CENT In Greater New York | TWO CENTS Within Connecting Distance | THREE CENTS Elsewhere

Kuehlmann on Way to Join Peace Parley

German Foreign Minister Reported Proceeding to Brest-Litovsk

Bolsheviki Beaten In Odessa Fighting

Sailors Divide Forces, and Many Are Killed; Kaledine Not Captured

AMSTERDAM, Dec. 17.—Dr. Richard von Kuehlmann, the German Foreign Secretary, says a Berlin dispatch, is proceeding to Brest-Litovsk during the course of the week to take part in peace negotiations with Russia.

[Also Correspondence]

LONDON, Dec. 17.—The conclusion of an armistice between the Central Powers and Russia is likely to prove as severe a blow to Russia as to the Entente. The armistice probably will last well into the spring, as no one in Russia at present is going to take the responsibility of recommencing hostilities, and will be ended only by the conclusion of a separate peace or by the end of the war.

But one thing is certain—Russia is largely quite of a factor in these negotiations at Brest-Litovsk than she was at the beginning of them. Russia has lost now ambition, and that is to conclude peace in order that her own country may be saved for the time being from the horrors of internal strife, from which Russia will be free at present.

Russia wants part of the Ukraine, which will prevent that province from agreeing to any terms about these men, and Russia could proceed at it from the ocean of battle, also enable her to withdraw troops which would be given a rest.

It is felt here that there is still about as much chance of a separate peace being concluded in eight days as there was before it is said believed that Germany could make terms satisfactory to the Bolsheviki. It is, of course, possible that Germany may be willing to make such a peace as they could make with the present Russian leaders. If this were such a peace and Russia at once withdrew from the war, then Germany would be free to proceed to conquest.

Bolsheviki Beaten By Ukrainians in Odessa Street Battle

LONDON, Dec. 17.—The Petrograd Bolshevik Wireless, according to a Reuter dispatch from the Russian capital, has received a telegram to the effect that the Maximalist troops in Odessa attacked the quarter where the Ukrainians are in force, and that a battle ensued, in which the Maximalists were defeated with heavy losses.

Hertling Declares Just Peace With Britain Impossible

German Chancellor Asserts Speech of Lloyd George Has Made Idea Useless

AMSTERDAM, Dec. 17.—The Imperial German Chancellor, Count von Hertling, declared in an interview that the speech of the British Prime Minister before the members of Gray's Inn is the British Cabinet's answer to the Pope's note and shows that the British government, under the Lloyd George leadership is completely insensible to the idea of a just peace by understanding.

On the occasion alluded to, Premier Lloyd George said, among other things:

"It is because I am firmly convinced that despite some awkward events, despite discouraging appearances, we are making steady progress toward the goal, that I would repeat peace overtures with Prussia at the very moment when the Prussian military caste is faced with bankruptcy as a forecast of the great trial with which my colleagues and I propose to deal next year.

"It also made the now widely quoted epigram: 'There is no halfway house between victory and defeat.'"

Draft Wins In Canada By Big Majority

Borden and Union Government Returned for Three More Years

French Votes Go to Laurier

Soldiers' Ballots Expected to Swell Vote for the Premier

OTTAWA, Dec. 17.—The Union government has been returned, and exemption confirmed by the Canadian domestic vote.

Early returns received from all over Canada indicate that the government of Sir Robert Borden has been elected to administer Canadian affairs for another five years, and that Sir Wilfrid Laurier is as definitely defeated as in the reciprocity election of 1911.

Returns indicate that the French portion of Canada has gone heavily for Sir Wilfrid Laurier and English constituencies have returned men who will support the Union government measures and maintain Premier Borden in office.

The vote has been very heavy everywhere, and the majorities are very large. The soldier vote, which will not be ascertained for some days, will increase the already heavy majorities of government members and will likely increase the number of government supporters elected.

The official returns announced shortly before midnight showed that with 118 members elected the Unionists had won 56 seats and the Opposition 87.

The Premiers of Quebec, outside of the City of Montreal, went absolutely for the Union candidates, and the leaders of the earlier being Opposition, Gouin, Government, L. A.

The three supporters of the Borden administration elected are C. J. Doherty, Minister of Justice, sitting representing St. Anne's Division of Montreal; C. J. Ballantyne, Minister of Marine, and Hon. Frederick Debartzch Monk, for Jacques Cartier Division of Montreal. These three constituencies contain a large English speaking vote. Wherever the French vote was polled it went heavily against the Union candidates were overwhelming.

Sir David Hunself was returned for Quebec seat. Two ministers, Colonel P. E. Blondin, Postmaster General, now on military service abroad, who ran in Champlain and Laurier-Dorchester, and Hon. C. C. Ballantyne, the portfolio of Minister of Naval Services, were defeated in each of the constituencies in which they ran. Speaking generally, the Union vote in the province of Quebec has been overwhelmingly defeated in Quebec but Armand Lavergne, the Nationalist, who ran in Montmagny, is the only Nationalist member leading him by a good majority.

Germans Raid British Convoy, Sink 11 Ships

British Destroyer and Four Mine Sweepers Lost With Six Merchantmen

Second Warship Hit In North Sea Attack

Vessels Prepared Only for Submarines; Investigation Begun

LONDON, Dec. 17.—One British and five neutral merchantmen, a British destroyer and four mine sweepers have been sunk in the North Sea by German naval forces.

The losses were the result of an attack on a convoy bound from Scotland to Norway, Sir Eric Geddes, First Lord of the Admiralty, announced to-day. The total tonnage of the lost merchantmen was 8,000.

Eighty-eight Scandinavians, two of whom are known, and 39 Britishers were rescued by four British destroyers, one of which, the Partridge, sighting, which has hastened to the scene. Other survivors reached Norway in boats.

Convoy Sank.

The merchant vessels were being convoyed by the destroyers Partridge and Turbulent. The Partridge was rammed and sunk by the Turbulent.

Thomas J. Macnamara, financial secretary to the Admiralty, also announced in Commons that two unarmed merchant vessels and a trawler were sunk in the North Sea by a raider.

Mr. McNamara's information was given in reply to a question by Robert T. W. Houston, Unionist member, who asked regarding an attack by "a German surface raider on destroyers."

Mr. McNamara added that another trawler had been damaged, and that two men had been killed on the two ships.

Replying to a question why there had not been an Admiralty announcement on the subject, Mr. McNamara said that the Admiralty did not have all information on the subject at its disposal.

Sir Eric Geddes, in continuing his account of the attack upon the convoy, said that the circumstances so far as available were that the Partridge sighted four enemy destroyers, eight miles away, at 2:30 A. M. Sunday. She engaged them, while the convoy was fired. The Partridge was hit heavily. She sank, but not before she had destroyed one and the rest. The Partridge was steered at the waterline and her engines were disabled, but eventually she was brought safely to port. Sir Eric said that the Admiralty was making the air reconnaissance and fast armed trawlers.

The entire crew of the trawler Lord Cavan was rescued in one of its own boats. The casualties on the Partridge were one officer and three men killed and two wounded seriously. Lieutenant Commander Bell, in charge of the bridge, the first said, was incomplete, but a report from Kiel told of the taking there of five officers and twenty-one men from the Partridge and of one

House Adopts Prohibition Amendment by 282 to 128

Measure Goes to Conference—Period for Ratification Is Only Difference

Parties Evenly Divided on Vote

141 Democrats and 137 Republicans Join Independents to Vote "Yes"

WASHINGTON, Dec. 17.—Nationwide prohibition was in the House today, and only the adjustment of a slight difference in resolutions between the House and Senate now stands in the way of submitting to the State Legislatures the amendment to the Federal Constitution forbidding the manufacture, sale or importation of intoxicating liquor for beverage purposes in the United States or its territories.

The vote in the House, taken after a day of debate before crowded galleries, was 282 to 128, with the parties dividing almost evenly.

The margin for prohibition was just eight votes more than the necessary two-thirds of the membership of the House required for adoption and twenty-six more than two-thirds of those voting.

Bryan Congratulated

Both wets and dry had been predicting victory all day, and it was not until the last few names had been called that the anti-prohibition forces conceded their defeat. When Speaker Clarke announced the result the visitors were joined by the galleries in such a demonstration as is rarely permitted in the House. Former Secretary Bryan, an interested spectator nearly all day, appeared on the floor and joined in receiving congratulations with Representative Webb, of North Carolina, who had led the fight.

The resolution adopted by the House is identical with that passed by the Senate last August, except that it gives to each State a period of seven years in which to ratify the amendment. Senator Sheppard, author of the resolution, predicted tonight that the Senate would accept the amendment tomorrow. He said he had assurances that the seven-year period would be approved and that he did not believe a roll call necessary.

The President's approval is not re-

Powder Supply Low; U. S. Just Begins to Prepare

Hoover Visits Wilson After

4

New York Tribune

House Adopts Prohibition Amendment by 282 to 128

First to Last — the Truth: News · Editorials · Advertisements

Powder Supply Low; U. S. Just Begins to Prepare

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5

"Our country has deliberately undertaken a great social and economic experiment, noble in motive and far-reaching in purpose."

Herbert Hoover, letter to Senator W. H. Borah
23 February 1928

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The President's approval is not required and the state legislatures may act as soon as they please. Speaker Clark and Vice President Marshall and Speaker Clark have been attached to the resolution.

"It will be submitted to-morrow as a Christmas present to the American

Powder Supply Low; U. S. Just Begins to Prepare

Senate Inquiry Reveals America No Better Off Than in April—"Too Much Red Tape," Says General Crozier, in Explanation

Hoover Visits Wilson After Senate Rebuke

Fails to Get Permission to

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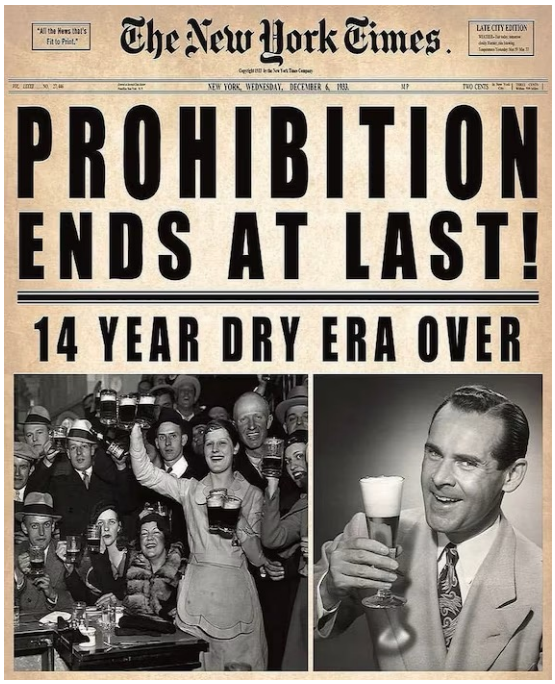

"All the News That's Fit to Print."

The New York Times.

LATE CITY EDITION

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 1933.

TWO CENTS

PROHIBITION ENDS AT LAST!

14 YEAR DRY ERA OVER

7

'A Noble Experiment' Held Distorted Phrase

Since his 1928 campaign against Gov. Alfred E. Smith, Mr. Hoover had been taunted with having called Prohibition "a noble experiment." The expression became part of American political folklore and the public mind attributed it to the former President.

In his memoirs, Mr. Hoover wrote:

"This phrase, 'a great social experiment, noble in motive' was distorted into 'a noble experiment,' which of course was not at all what I had said or intended to say.

In the campaign, Mr. Hoover said alcohol was one of the curses of the human race. He opposed repeal, and believed that state enforcement of prohibition would be more effective than enforcement by Federal authorities.

NYT, 10/21/1964

8

A new social experiment?

What if we could fact check the entire web, all social and traditional media, and perhaps everything everyone ever said to you on a phone call or in a zoom meeting?

Wouldn't it be great to be able to filter out every false claim?

9

Good Systems

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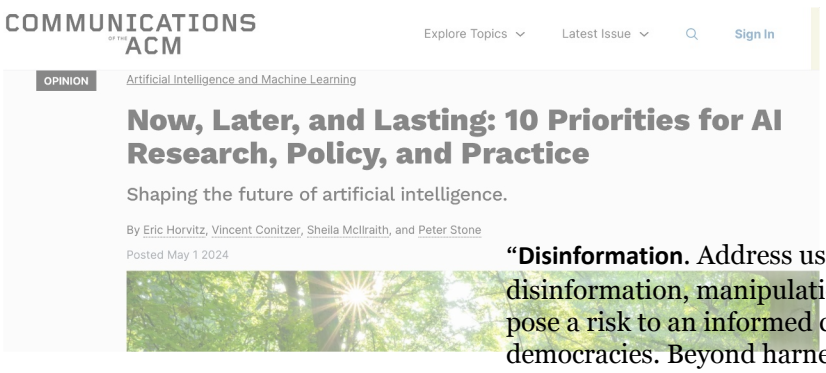

"**Disinformation**. Address uses of AI by malicious actors for disinformation, manipulation, and impersonation, which pose a risk to an informed citizenry and to the fabric of our democracies. Beyond harnessing promising technical and sociotechnical strategies built on content provenance, watermarking, and fingerprinting, investigate new laws, regulations, and enforcement to combat these threats while protecting civil liberties. The goal is to safeguard the integrity of information and communication against malevolent repurposing of widely available AI methods to deceive and persuade."

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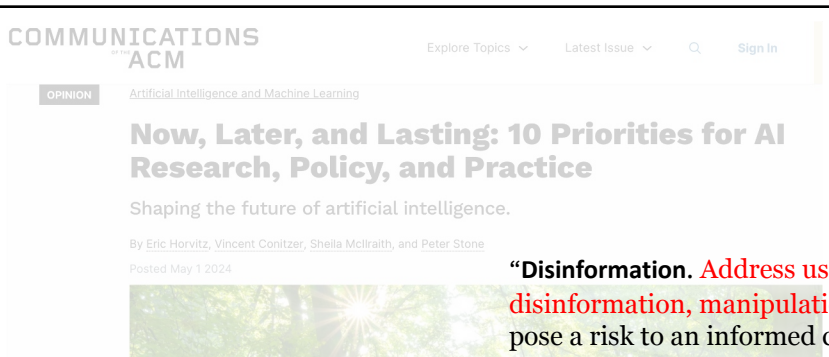

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GOOD SYSTEMS

Ethical AI at UT Austin

How can we ensure that AI is beneficial — not detrimental — to humanity? What unintended consequences are we overlooking by developing technology that can be manipulated and misused?

> It is ethically irresponsible to focus only on what AI can do. We believe it is equally important to ask what it should (and should not) do.

Our goal is to better understand what changes new technologies will bring, predict how those changes will unfold, and mitigate the harms or unintended consequences they could cause while still leveraging the benefits AI provides.

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Moderating Social Media Discourse for a Healthy Democracy

Dr. Josephine Lukito, Kathryn Kazanas, Bin Chen

Policy Brief, Published October 26, 2022
Designing Responsible AI Technologies to Curb Disinformation Project

To address this problem space, we advocate for the following solutions:

1. ***Algorithmic governance & transparency***: Internet Service Providers should be more transparent with users about content moderation policies and algorithms, and clarify users' basic rights on the platform.
2. ***Flagging recommendations***: We advocate a more effective, efficient and comprehensive flagging system through a combined strategy of content- and user-based approaches.
3. ***Multiplatform collaboration***: Fighting harmful online content requires a collaborative effort among policy makers, civil society groups, researchers, and different platforms.
4. ***Long-term considerations***: Building a regular and prolonged tracking system is essential to make anti-misinformation efforts more efficient and effective, especially in complex scenarios.

14

Supply and demand

15

A toxicity metaphor

- Disinformation is a pollutant or disease.
- Our information space is being contaminated.
- The toxicity of disinformation sickens the public and harms democracy.

- ➢ Innoculate the public & provide them with “masks”!
- ➢ Clean the air!
- ➢ Penalize or eliminate the polluters!

16

An addiction metaphor

- People are addicted to disinformation.
- Disinformation creators and traffickers are giving people what they want.
- The epidemic of disinformation addiction stems from underlying conditions: socioeconomic distress, voicelessness, alienation.

- ~~Provide the public with masks~~
- ~~Clean the air~~
- ~~Eliminate the polluters~~

17

Why is there a thirst for disinformation?

18

Why is there a thirst for disinformation?

- There isn't.

19

Psych 101

20

~~Psych 101~~ PSY 301

21

The problem with ideal humans

- An enlightenment approach suggests that man is a rational animal, a curious and open-minded seeker of truth.
- A century of psychology suggests otherwise.
- We have blindspots to our own irrationality, and form beliefs according to emotional and social need.
- When experiencing extreme cognitive dissonance, the emotional tail wags the reasoning dog.
- People facing dissonance seek social connection, information and ideas that cohere.
- People resist painful inferences and show confirmation bias.

➢ *When suffering, you seek, listen to and accept only what helps you*.

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The social side

- Individual psychology does not suffice to understand the dynamics of disinformation addiction.
- Festinger's classic studies of cults, and more recent social psychology build on an important tradition of socio-anthroplogical work (Gustave Le Bon, Gabriel Tarde, Durkheim)
- We deal with dissonance by strengthening ties to an in-group, and "explaining" problems to be created by out-groups.

➢ Groups turn inward, developing their own practices, their own languages, and their own "facts."

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Why is there a thirst for disinformation?

- There isn't.
- There is a thirst for social connection and convenient truths.

24

Why is there a thirst for disinformation?

- There isn't.
- There is a thirst for social connection and convenient truths.
- Both social media companies and politicians greedily exploit these *Us-them* tendencies.

25

Fact check this!

26

Symbolism Will Be Their Downfall

Their need for symbolism will be their downfall.
Follow the Owl & Y head around the world.
Identify and list.
They don't hide it.
They don't fear you.
You are sheep to them.
You are feeders.
Godfather III.

- Qdrop 11/21/2017

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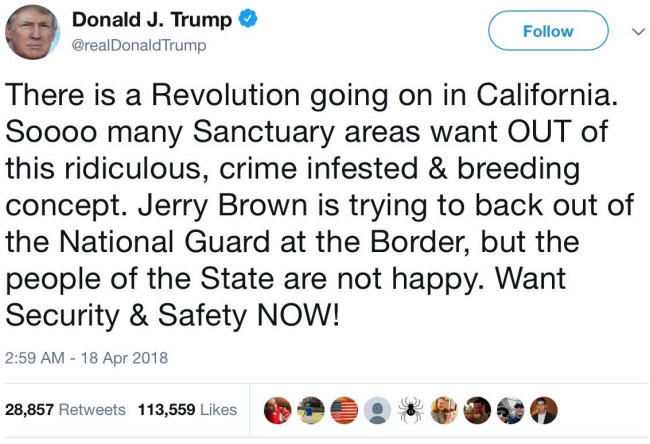

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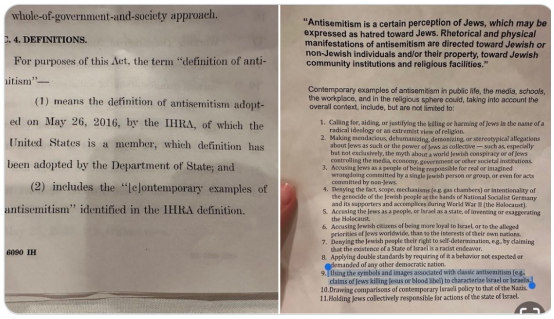
Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene🇺🇸
@RepMTG

Antisemitism is wrong, but I will not be voting for the Antisemitism Awareness Act of 2023 (H.R. 6090) today that could convict Christians of antisemitism for believing the Gospel that says Jesus was handed over to Herod to be crucified by the Jews.

Read the bill text and contemporary examples of antisemitism like #9.



whole-of-government-and-society approach.

SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.

For purposes of this Act, the term "definition of antisemitism"—

(1) means the definition of antisemitism adopted on May 26, 2016, by the IHRA, of which the United States is a member, which definition has been adopted by the Department of State; and

(2) includes the "[c]ontemporary examples of antisemitism" identified in the IHRA definition.

6090 IH

"Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."

Contemporary examples of antisemitism in public life, the media, schools, the workplace, and in the religious sphere could, taking into account the overall context, include, but are not limited to:

1. Calling for, aiding, or justifying the killing or harming of Jews in the name of a radical ideology or an extremist view of religion.
2. Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as such or the power of Jews as collective — such as, especially but not exclusively, the myth about a world Jewish conspiracy or of Jews controlling the media, economy, government or other societal institutions.
3. Accusing Jews as a people of being responsible for real or imagined wrongdoing committed by a single Jewish person or group, or even for acts committed by non-Jews.
4. Denying the fact, scope, mechanisms (e.g. gas chambers) or intentionality of the genocide of the Jewish people at the hands of National Socialist Germany and its supporters and accomplices during World War II (the Holocaust).
5. Accusing the Jews as a people, or Israel as a state, of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.
6. Accusing Jewish citizens of being more loyal to Israel, or to the alleged priorities of Jews worldwide, than to the interests of their own nations.
7. Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
8. Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
9. Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
10. Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.
11. Holding Jews collectively responsible for actions of the state of Israel.

Last edited 2:38 PM · May 1, 2024 · **820.8K** Views

2K 2.7K 7.2K 548

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WASHINGTON, May 25 (Reuters) - U.S. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, a firebrand ally of former President Donald Trump, was broadly denounced by her fellow Republicans on Tuesday for likening COVID-19 masks and vaccinations to the Nazi Holocaust against the Jews.

30

"Your conduct is in violation of Penal Code Sections 42.01 Disorderly Conduct, 42.02 Riot, 42.03 Obstructing a Highway or other passageway, 30.05 Criminal Trespass. I command you in the name of the University of Texas Police Department to disperse, and if you do not, you shall be arrested for Violation of Penal code Section 42.01 Disorderly Conduct, 42.02 Riot, 42.03 Obstructing a Highway or other passageway, 30.05 Criminal Trespass."

- UTPD, 4/29/2024, Message to UT community

31

"I'm thankful we live in a country where free expression is a fiercely protected Constitutional right. I'm grateful that our campus has seen 13 pro-Palestinian events take place during the past several months largely without incident — plus another one today. I am grateful that everyone is safe after yesterday, we continue to hold in-person classes, and that today's events followed our long-standing campus standards for allowed demonstrations. And I'm grateful to work in a place where people with different points of view come together to try to solve hard problems."

- Pres. Jay Hartzell, 4/25/2024

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We will continue to safeguard the free speech and assembly rights of everyone on our campus, while we protect our University and students, who are preparing for their final exams.

Sincerely,
Internal Communications

- message to UT community, 4/30/2024

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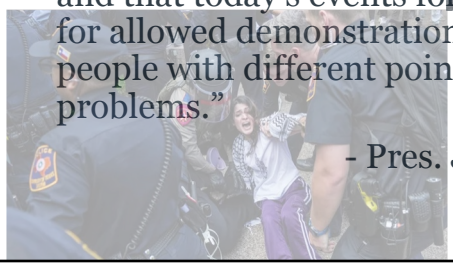

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Images: Austin American-Statesman 4/24/2024

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POLICE

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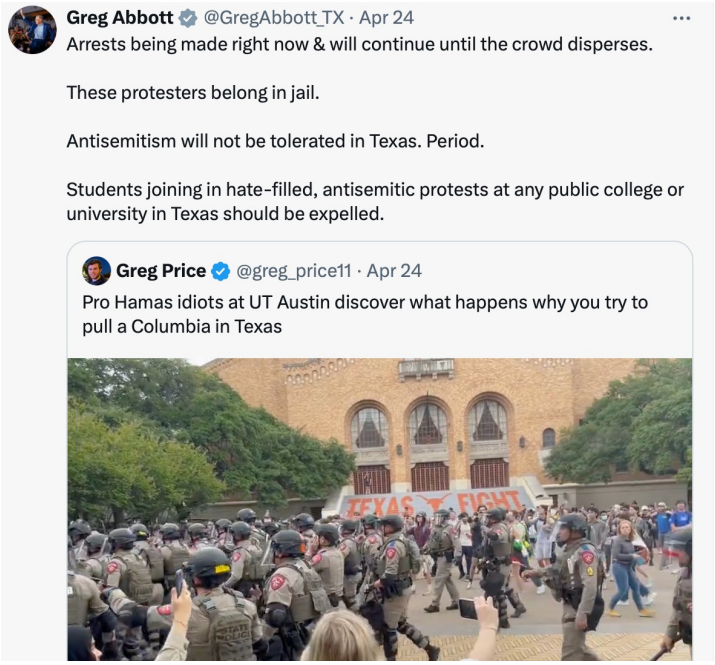
Greg Abbott @GregAbbott_TX · Apr 24
Arrests being made right now & will continue until the crowd disperses.
These protesters belong in jail.
Antisemitism will not be tolerated in Texas. Period.
Students joining in hate-filled, antisemitic protests at any public college or university in Texas should be expelled.
Greg Price @greg_price11 · Apr 24
Pro Hamas idiots at UT Austin discover what happens why you try to pull a Columbia in Texas

36

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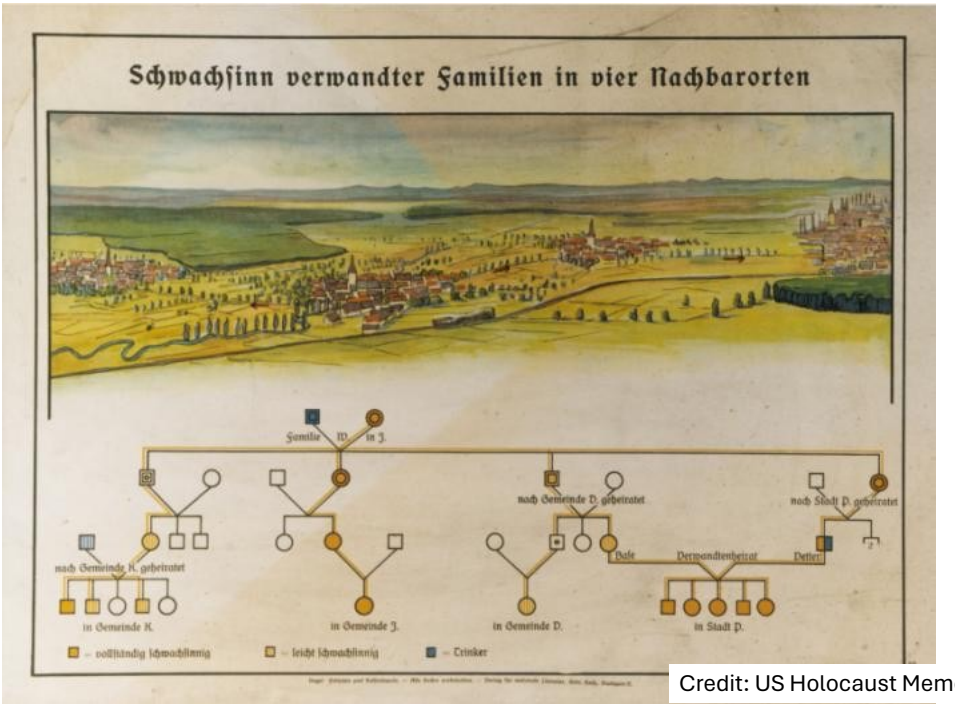

Credit: US Holocaust Memorial Museum

38

Closing thoughts

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Concerns with tools for detecting disinformation:

- Propaganda is a jigsaw of emotional appeal, social differentiation and selective reporting. Disinformation is a small part of that puzzle and removing it would change little.
- People seek convenient facts and won't use tools that seem to censor what they approve of.
- People in power like to spread their own "truths" and will avoid tools they don't like.
- Worse, they will subvert those tools by basing them on their own version of ground truth.

40

Conclusion

- The goal of building "good systems" is worthy, but we need to be very careful in determining *who* they are good for.
- Anything we would collectively agree is an improvement in our information spaces must depend on a collective will to improve them.
- Psychology, social dynamics, economic and political incentives are at present aligned in favor of disinformation and not against it.
- Disinformation is not just a matter of supply, but also demand.
- Building "good systems" to clean up the information space while ignoring this is potentially just another ***noble experiment***.

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- Building "good systems" to clean up the information space while ignoring this is potentially just another ***noble experiment***.
- Final worry: claims of neutrality are always assertions of power.

42