

A bomb detonates at the 2013 Boston Marathon. Reporters rush to the scene to make sense of the chaos. They report the facts- at least one person is dead, the Tsarnaev brothers are responsible, and they are motivated by radical Islam. And then, the lead dries up. The manhunt stalls, but the news is 24/7. So what does cable cover, when the chaos dies down? Fox reports on what the cops who are conducting the manhunt are eating. An MSNBC anchor reads out from the suspects' Facebook page the lyrics of a song by Eminem. CNN claims that the suspect is in custody, when in fact, one is not. All the while, Americans are glued to their TV screens.

The days of Walter Cronkite and honest news are long past. You often hear that we live in a country divided. This time, it is divided not by latitude, but along bandwidth. FOX, CNN, MSNBC: whatever their origin story, these corporations exist to make money. The news you watch now will continue to tell you what you want to hear. The biggest threat to our democracy isn't fake news, it's fast news. What's the only way to stop a train with no brakes? Jump off. My fellow Americans, to save truth as we know it, we must boycott cable news.

To convince you of the necessity of this action, which I contend is quite easy, I will demonstrate two points. First, I will assure you of the harm of cable news, and how it is profit-driven and duty-blind. Then, I will show you how cable, rather ingeniously, sucks you into a wormhole of news at least 10 seconds longer than is normal. But first let's make sure we are all on the same page and define cable news.

What is cable news? Personally, I had no idea what that meant until I started researching this speech. Cable news consists of 3 channels: FOX news, CNN, and MSNBC. The former is known for being conservative, and the latter two are liberal. They differ from broadcast news such as ABC, CBS, and NBC, which cost nothing for the consumer, are relatively devoid of hardliners, and report for 3 hours of the day. This last bit is crucial. Cable channels broadcast news on a 24-hour cycle. What becomes the most reported-on story? Filler. The underlying premise of these companies is that there is never not news. This premise creates dangerous perceptions in our culture.

To see what's wrong with cable news, let's time travel to an interesting case study.

Crossfire was a "debate" show on CNN in the early 2000s that pitted a pointedly conservative host against a pointedly liberal one, who were sometimes at odds, sometimes ganging up to bombard the controversial guest they invited to the show. Do you think this sounds like a reliable platform for respectful political discourse, representing the peak of Western civilization? Right. Well, in a 2004 episode, they made the mistake of inviting a professional clown.

Jon Stewart, then-host of the Daily Show, immediately takes control of the debate by pleading with the hosts to "stop fighting" because their program is "hurting America." Stewart then proceeds to use the Crossfire platform to attack itself—in a rhetorical takedown I like to call "Friendlyfire". Stewart attacks vacuous cable news shows such as Crossfire for performing "theater when [it] should be doing debate" and upholds these supposed journalists' civic duty

in serving America. In 14 minutes of satirical glee Stewart exposes the hypocrisy and hate-mongering of the program and similar cable shows in the US, always ending on the note that “you’re hurting America”. Before Crossfire could air its next episode, the series was cancelled. For anyone paying close attention, Stewart had taught a masterclass in political satire. Because wrapped up in Jon Stewart’s cheeky delivery was a dead-serious message.

The cable debate programs of today are draining to watch. They are like Crossfire in nature, powering a machine of outrage secretly embedded in the bedrock of American culture. They don’t invite well-spoken academics with a handle on the issues, but those who are loud and confrontational, and of questionable credentials. A cable news network will even report on the way another cable news network reports on the news. And despite it all, the corporations profit. It’s like a tank of sharks tearing each other apart and regenerating only to be bigger, meanwhile the paying spectators are told they’re watching Nature Channel.

The Pew Research Center states that while broadcast news organizations strive to break even and succeed at doing so, cable news corporations like Fox and CNN always report profits. Let’s look at how a cable news network like Fox makes money. Every time you flick on the channel to Fox news, Fox gets a cut of the check. Fox makes more money the longer you stay tuned in. So Fox hijacks your attention to juice their ratings with Breaking News alerts and creates a never-ending narrative. Cable news networks have tattooed a thick “Breaking News” banner onto every television screen in America. Don’t mistake it, cable is a business first. And they know exactly what they are doing.

Cable news exploits a deeply human evolutionary urge to pay attention to the sensational. This urge is what Nobel Prize laureate Daniel Kahneman refers to as our brain’s System 1. (SCREAM, maybe drop the mic, as an illustrative example). Did you notice how attentive you are? That is your System 1 responding to a salient stimulus. Your heart rate increased, your pupils dilated, and crucially, you aren’t thinking as rationally. You aren’t yourself right now. Half of you are considering fight, the other half flight. I kindly ask that you choose neither. Now that the salient stimulus or evolutionary threat is gone, you are hopefully back in your System 2. System 2 is the more calm and rational system in your brain. It allows you think critically to what I am saying, questioning every logical inconsistency I make. Hopefully, you have noticed none in this speech. This is you at are best, brightest, and most bipartisan. Now, what does this *not* remind you of?

Our country is in one big fight. The only way to end a fight, other than one side beating the other unconscious, is to come to an agreement. Before you can come to an agreement, you have to agree on the facts. The left-right split on cable has ruptured facts by the very nature of what it reports and what it doesn’t. It seems like the situation is hopeless. However, despite this all, I have hope.

I believe that we are actually starting to see the use of our System 2 go up in America, at least for us GenZ-ers. I believe that the return of certain internet mobile news such as BuzzFeed, the New York Times, and even Facebook will activate our System 2 Don’t get me wrong, these platforms have their own demons that require exorcism: privacy leakage, Russian trolls, and

pop ups, to name a few! But the Gen Z generation will have one distinct advantage. We have much more control over the timing and exposure of these internet sources. Instead of passive viewers, we will be careful readers. Our brains naturally try harder to extract text, and the ability to read and digest news at one's own rate is a breakthrough for journalism, or perhaps a fortunate return to form.

There is one fact I'm glossing over. The median age of the cable news viewer is 63. I'm not going to pretend like the audience I am speaking to watches a ton of cable news. But you know who does? Your parents. I want you to change the habits of your parents, and your grandparents. Talk to them. Tell them their box of cable, that is constantly breaking anyways, costs \$85 a month. That is more than \$1000 a year. Talk to them and propose them a way to save the family money. Without them realizing it, you will have saved something much more valuable. You will have saved the integrity of their System 2. You have saved their human strength to consume balanced news and engage in potent dialogue. I tell you this so that you can foment a revolution in your parent's and grandparent's generation, and so that you can avoid ever getting sucked into the selective outrage machine that is cable news.

After leaving his much popular show in 2010, Larry King commented that "There's no more news." Cable is killing the news. Join me in cutting the cord.

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