

Mike McCabe: Bleeding is news. Healing should be too.

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I was trained as a journalist and in my life's work I've dealt regularly with news reporters and editors for well over 30 years. For longer than that, I've heard people complain bitterly about supposed media bias. In recent years the complaints have intensified and grown ugly, threatening the legitimacy of journalism. Today, in this age of alternative facts, when what's reported doesn't match one's own preconceived notions, it's dismissed as fake news and the reporters are branded as enemies of the people.

Funny how those on the right can so plainly see a clear liberal bias and those on the left are equally certain corporate control of the media produces an obvious conservative slant to the news. In my experience and from my vantage point, there is media bias. But it's not liberal or conservative. It's a bias in favor of conflict.

There's an old saying in the news business that if it bleeds it leads. If a hundred planes—or a thousand—land safely at the airport, that's not news. But it's news when one crashes.

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Crashing is news, arriving home safe and sound is not. Bleeding is news, healing is not. That's the media bias I see.

Case in point: Some high school students in Baraboo were photographed last November making a Nazi salute and the image went viral and made national and even international news. Many harshly condemned Baraboo. Many labeled the entire community racist. That too was news. When all the cameras were turned off

and the last microphone was packed away, Baraboo was left to pick up the pieces.

What has happened in Baraboo since last November hasn't been treated as news but should be. Masood Akhtar, a Muslim American from India who started the group We Are Many-United Against Hate, was not among those standing on courthouse steps in front of cameras ridiculing all of Baraboo. Akhtar chose instead to quietly go to Baraboo and reach out to local leaders there to see if he could help organize a community-wide response.

To Baraboo's credit, the community didn't just circle the wagons and try to ride out the storm. Nor did the people there stage a one-day response and then wash their hands of the whole affair. Akhtar has repeatedly traveled to Baraboo to plan actions with the school district administrator, high school principal, mayor and other community leaders. Two other leaders of We Are Many-United Against Hate—one a former white supremacist organizer and the other an ex-police officer whose father was killed in the mass shooting at the Sikh temple in Oak Creek in 2012—made powerful joint presentations as part of a series of events aimed at promoting understanding, healing, reconciliation and redemption.

To this day, nearly a year after that shameful photo was taken, actions are still being planned and carried out in Baraboo. Within the last week or so, Akhtar was there again meeting with local leaders.

Bleeding is news. Healing should be too.

— Mike McCabe is the executive director of We Are Many-United Against Hate, a nonpartisan organization of common people, urban and rural, spiritual and secular, seeking equal protection for all, united against hate, bigotry and racism. The group's website is united-against-hate.org.