

HONOR CODE

Partisan Bias and its Influence on the Portrayal of Senator Feinstein

On the afternoon of Friday, February 23rd 2019, Dianne Feinstein, a Democratic senator from California, experienced an unfortunate encounter with a group of school students in her office. The students, ranging from seven to sixteen years of age, visited Feinstein's office to ask for her support of the Green New Deal. Feinstein, however, instead expressed her doubt in the Green New Deal and went on to censure the students and their "it's my way or the highway" discourse, and assuring them she "knows what [she] is doing," and "was just elected by almost a million-vote plurality (<https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-hard-lessons-of-dianne-feinsteins-encounter-with-the-young-green-new-deal-activists-video>). The exchange was captured on video by activists with Sunrise movement, and soon went viral. News coverage of the event soon followed, and although not immediately apparent, bias along partisan lines was clearly at work within the headlines of the news stories.

Through the use of wordplay, left-leaning news sources diminished the magnitude and severity of the event. This in turn paints Feinstein, a Democrat, and her actions in a far kinder, more favorable light. For example, multiple liberal publications integrated puns into their headlines. *CNN*'s headline: "Dianne Feinstein's climate change discussion with school children gets heated," uses the word 'heated' to play off of the warming temperatures brought about by climate change. *The New York Times*' headline, which writes "Dianne Feinstein Lectures Children Who Want Green New Deal" plays off the involvement of children by labeling Feinstein's conduct a "lecture". This

play-on-words significantly mollifies the story, going as far as portraying Feinstein in favorable light by alluding to her as a teacher. In addition to the use of puns, liberal sources also utilized alliteration to bring a lighter tone to the news story. *New York Magazine* plays with the 'f' sound in its headline: "Dianne Feinstein Fumbles in Meeting With Young Climate Activists Over Green New Deal." Again, the alliteration alleviates seriousness from the story, painting Feinstein as a senator who made a little mistake rather than a major blunder. Thus, through the use of word play, including puns and alliteration, liberal publications diminished the magnitude and severity of Feinstein's confrontation with the school children. This in turn demonstrates a bias favoring Feinstein and her behavior, perhaps more so than the senator should have deserved.

In contrast to the bias present within liberal publications, the bias prevalent within right-leaning publications painted Feinstein in a comparatively much more negative light. Through the use of animalization and confrontation, conservative news sources not only placed immense blame on Senator Feinstein, but also degraded her character to one of violence and heartlessness. Fox News wrote: "Feinstein snarls at group of schoolkids who come to talk to her about Green New Deal." The diction of 'snarl' alludes Feinstein to a vicious animal. Specifically, it compares her to a dog, thus animalizing her behavior and character. Animalization, or the "mapping of animal attributes onto humans," bring about the collective memory of animals, which in turn "acquires qualities of instinctive aggressiveness, inclination towards uncontrollable violence, as well as lack of any scruples or moral principles," (Molek-Kozakowska,

2014). Thus, by animalizing Feinstein and her behavior, *Fox News* magnifies the severity of the event and cast the senator in a highly unfavorable light.

Conservative publications also utilized confrontation to degrade Feinstein's character, thus instituting bias. In a majority of the conservative-leaning publications, the headlines featured Senator Feinstein as the active subject. They then followed Feinstein's name with a confrontational, and often combative or violent verb. "Bluntly dismiss," (The Blaze) "confront" (The Hill) and "argues" (USA Today) were commonly used verbs throughout headlines published by moderate and conservative news sources. This use of confrontation firstly garners significantly more attention from the reader than more pacified language. In a time where more and more news-readers are consuming news by browsing headlines, it makes sense why news sources exploit every opportunity within stories to write confrontational language that increases the likelihood of catching a reader's attention. In addition to the desire to garner attention, however, the use of confrontation also highlights the bias moderate and conservative publications tended to have regarding the Feinstein story. These headlines, by placing Feinstein as the active subject carrying out an often combative verb, passively place blame on Feinstein. They prompt the reader to then associate Feinstein character with belligerence and aggression, especially towards kids. This narrative conflates Feinstein's behavior to be that of a dangerous or hateful person. Thus, these headlines are a reflection of conservative's inherent partisan bias against the Democratic Senator, and both consciously and subconsciously persuade their readers

Headlines for Senator Feinstein on Saturday Feb. 23rd as of 10 am

CNN: Dianne Feinstein's climate change discussion with school children gets heated

NYT: Dianne Feinstein Lectures Children Who Want Green New Deal, Portraying It as
Untenable

Fox News: Feinstein snarls at group of schoolkids who come to talk to her about Green
New Deal

LA Times: Sen. Dianne Feinstein squares off with children in Green New Deal debate
captured on video

USA Today: Feinstein argues with kids on climate change bill

Huffington Post: Video Shows Dianne Feinstein Dismissing Kids Asking About Green
New Deal

BuzzFeed News: These Kids Demanded Senator Feinstein Support The Green New
Deal But Got A Very Blunt Rebuttal Instead

The Guardian: 'You didn't vote for me': Senator Dianne Feinstein responds to young
green activists

NY Magazine: Dianne Feinstein Fumbles in Meeting With Young Climate Activists Over
Green New Deal

The Hill: Kids confront Feinstein over Green New Deal

The Week: Dianne Feinstein clashes with school children, telling them the Green New
Deal is 'not a good resolution'

NBC News: Grilled by children, Feinstein tries to teach lesson in politics

CBS News: Sen. Dianne Feinstein tells youth climate change activists "I know what I'm doing"

Bloomberg: Feinstein Unveils Green Deal Alternative After Kid Confrontation

The Blaze: WATCH: Sen. Dianne Feinstein bluntly dismisses kids pushing Green New Deal: 'I know what I'm doing'