



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on June 15, 2021

## NYT Admits Babylon Bee Is Satire, Not Far-right Misinformation

The Babylon Bee is in fact a satirical site and not a “far-right misinformation” outlet that “feuded” with Facebook and fact-checkers, the *New York Times* has finally conceded after being threatened with a defamation lawsuit.

It took some time for the *Times* to admit that [the Babylon Bee](#) just publishes jokes. It’s no different from the *Onion* or the *New Yorker’s* Andy Borowitz, except that, unlike the former, its jokes are tailored to a right-leaning audience, and, unlike the latter, its jokes are actually funny. For some reason, members of the mainstream media hate this.



Back in 2019, the *Times* [said](#) the Babylon Bee “weaponized humor to help spread falsehoods online.” The warning of misinformation being disguised as satire came after decades of reporters and news commentators fawning over the likes of Jon Stewart, Samantha Bee, Stephen Colbert, and other “comedians” and the popular sketch-comedy series *Saturday Night Live* that routinely makes fun of conservatives, often in a vulgar manner.

In a separate article, the *Times* [stated](#) that “Laughter may be effective medicine for these trying times.” Presumably, it only works if one makes fun of conservatives.

On March 19, the *Times* published an [article](#) dedicated to Facebook censorship titled “For Political Cartoonists, the Irony Was That Facebook Didn’t Recognize Irony,” authored by *Times* tech reporter Mike “Rat King” Isaac. It described the *Bee* as a “far-right misinformation site” that sometimes trafficked in fake news disguised as satire to avoid censorship from Big Tech.

Isaac implied in his article that, according to “misinformation researchers,” “Facebook has had trouble identifying the slipperiest and subtlest of political content: satire. While satire and irony are common in everyday speech, the company’s artificial intelligence systems — and even its human moderators — can have difficulty distinguishing them. That’s because such discourse relies on nuance, implication, exaggeration and parody to make a point.”

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After an initial complaint from Babylon Bee owner Seth Dillon, the *Times* edited the article on March 22 to say that the Bee, “a right-leaning satirical site, has feuded with Facebook and the fact-checking site Snopes over whether the site published misinformation or satire.” That, too, was inaccurate.

“The update is every bit as damaging (and false) as the original,” Dillon [tweeted](#) at the time, and explained that Snopes has actually retracted their insinuation about the *Bee’s* motives, and even created a whole new label for satire. Snopes has also discontinued its fact-checking partnership with



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Facebook.

Fox News first reported that Dillon was [considering](#) legal action after the *Times* accused the popular site of peddling fake news “under the guise of satire” and referred to it as a “misinformation” site.

Dillon took to Twitter on Monday with [an update](#) after the *Times* e-mailed his attorney Friday that it would remove the false claims. The correction dated June 10 — of which the *Times* notified the Bee on Friday — now says the earlier version of the article “imprecisely” referred to the “right-leaning satirical website,” and that Facebook and Snopes have since dropped the claims the Bee ever trafficked in misinformation.

The partial retraction is a victory of sorts for the satirical outlet, but the original *Times* story remains up, even though it had offered the Bee as the sole example of “far-right misinformation” allegedly giving benevolent social-media censors headaches.

The Bee has often found itself a target of heavy-handed response by Big Tech and “fact-checkers” to its jokes. In September 2020, *USA Today* [“fact-checked”](#) the Bee’s [story](#) titled “Ninth Circuit Court Overturns Death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg,” only to conclude it was satire.

On at least two occasions, however, social-media crackdowns followed the *Times*’ attacks on the Bee. In April, as Dillon and his team fought against the defamatory claim in Isaac’s article, Facebook demonetized the Bee’s page for “promoting crime” in a [post](#) that makes fun of the “peaceful protesters.”

A similar situation happened in October 2020. Just four days after the *Times* [accused](#) the Bee of being a site that “capitalizes on confusion” and has a “habit of skirting the line between misinformation and satire,” Facebook [demonetized](#) the Bee’s page for “inciting violence” in a story titled “Senator Hirono Demands ACB [Amy Coney Barrett] Be Weighed Against a Duck To See if She Is a Witch,” lampooning Senator Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) with a witch-hunting joke from a cult classic “Monty Python and the Holy Grail.”

The *Babylon Bee*, a Christian satirical website that launched in 2016, now boasts roughly [17 million](#) monthly page views. It describes itself as “fake news you can trust.” For the *Times* and other newsrooms of equal size and influence, the success and reach of the conservative comedy group represent a real problem for the health of American democracy. Satire, you see, is dangerous because people cannot be trusted to know what is real and what is fiction. Moreover, an object of laughter cannot be feared, and when people are not scared, they are not so easily controlled.



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