

Australia's ABC's Colonel Blimp: Why Kim Williams Misunderstands Joe Rogan

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The position of a state broadcaster, one funded directly by taxpayers from a particular country, places it in a delicate position. The risk of alignment with the views of the day, as dictated by one class over another; the danger that one political position will somehow find more air than another, is ever present. The pursuit of objectivity can itself become a distorting dogma.

Like its counterpart in the United Kingdom, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation can count itself lucky to be given a place of such dominance in the media market. None of that gimmickry to boost subscriber numbers. No need for annual, or half-yearly fund drives.

Why, then, did the ABC chairman, **Kim Williams**, do it? And by doing it, this involved attacking US-based podcaster **Joe Rogan** in an address to the National Press Club in Canberra, a foolish, bumbling excursion into the realms of broadcasting and podcasting the ABC might do well to learn from.

In the question session, when [asked](#) about the influence of Rogan (“the world’s most influential podcaster”, sighs the ABC journalist), Williams shows little interest in analysis. Rather than understanding the scope of his appeal, one that drew Donald Trump to the microphone in a meandering conversational epic of waffle and disclosure lasting three hours, he “personally” found “it deeply repulsive, and to think that someone has such remarkable power in the United States is something that I look at in disbelief.” He further felt a sense of “dismay that this can be a source of public entertainment when it’s really treating the public as plunder for purposes that are really quite malevolent.”



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Australian Broadcasting Corporation boss Kim Williams launches an unhinged tirade against Joe Rogan (@joerogan):

"People like Mr. Rogan prey on people's vulnerabilities. They prey on fear. They prey on anxiety."

"I personally find it deeply repulsive, and to think that someone has such remarkable power in the United States is something that I look at in disbelief."

"I'm also absolutely in dismay that this can be a source of public entertainment when it's really treating the public as plunder for purposes that are really quite malevolent."



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Williams makes a point of juxtaposing the weak, impressionable consumer of news – one who will evidently be set straight by the likes of his network – and those of Rogan and his tribe of entrepreneurial podcasting fantasists who “prey on all the elements that contribute to uncertainty in society”, suggesting that “conspiracy outcomes” are merely “a normal part of social narrative”.

It is worth noting here that Williams is a former chief executive of an organisation that loved (and still loves) preying on anxieties, testing the waters of fear, and pushing absurdly demagogic narratives in boosting readership and subscriptions. That most unscrupulous outfit is a certain News Corp, its imperishable tycoon Rupert Murdoch still clinging to the pulpit with savage commitment.

Once Williams crossed the commercial river to become ABC chair, he had something of a peace-loving conversion, all part of a festival of inclusivity that has proven tedious and meretricious. The public broadcaster, [he said](#) in June this year, should become a “national campfire” to enable a greater understanding of Australia’s diverse communities.

It did not take long for the Williams show of snark to make its way to Rogan Land and his defenders, notably Elon Musk, who spent time with Rogan in the lead-up to November’s US presidential election spruiking the credentials of Trump. Showing how Williams had exposed his flank, and that of the organisation he leads, the tech oligarch, relevantly the director of X Corp (formerly Twitter), was bound to say something given his ongoing skirmishes with Australian regulators and lawmakers in their efforts to regulate access to social media.

From such infantilising bureaucrats as **eSafety Commissioner Julie Inman Grant** to the spluttering Williams who bemoans the “Joe Rogan effect”, Musk is being given, rather remarkably, a whitewash of respectability. Their efforts to protect Australians from any prospect of being offended, mentally corrupted, unduly influenced and one might even say being excited, is of such an order as to beggar belief. With little imagination, Musk [retorted](#) with boring predictability: “From the head of Australian government-funded media, their Pravda.”

Williams remains [truly dumbfounded](#) by this.

“You make a comment in response to a legitimate question from a journalist, you answer it concisely and give an honest answer in terms of what your own perception of what [Rogan] is and suddenly I get this huge pile-on from people in the most aggressive way”.

Accusations include having “a warped outlook on the world”, being “an embarrassment” and showing signs of being “unhinged”. Ignorance would be the better distillation here.

There is something to be said about Williams being hermetic to media forms that have prevented him from getting to the national campfire he championed. He speaks of communities and users as vague constructions rather than accessible groups. He also ignores, for instance, that Rogan was [open to allowing](#) Trump’s opponent, the Democrat contender, Kamala Harris, to come onto his program conducted in his Texas podcast studio during the campaign. This offer was eventually withdrawn given the conditions Harris, ever terrified by unscripted formats and lengthy interviews, demanded Rogan follow. The strategists and handlers had to have their say, and for their role and for Harris’s caution, she paid a price.

For a man with a News Corp pedigree and one no doubt familiar with the Murdoch Empire’s creepy techniques of influence and seduction [exercised over the electorates](#) and political processes of other countries – the United States, the UK and Australia immediately come to mind – Williams has shown himself the media iteration of a bamboozled, charmless Colonel Blimp.

Williams might best focus on the problems at his own broadcaster, the organisation the Australians call Auntie. It boasts, constantly, that it is the place where “news” can be found, but more importantly, “news you can trust”. But the current iteration of news remains bland, benign and pitifully regulated. It is clear what the talking points are when it comes to reporting on such areas of the world as the Middle East. Killings by the Israeli Defence

Forces, even if they do involve the liquidation of whole buildings and villagers, are never massacres but measures of overzealous self-defence. Hamas and Hezbollah, being Israel's adversaries, are always prefaced as indulgent terrorists. The list goes on, and, it would seem, the problems Williams is facing.

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