

# The Fake News Epidemic

## And Its Perilous Trajectory

Timothy Zebell



*What is “fake news?” | Is the label fair? | What does it mean for our nation?*

*Are there spiritual implications to the fake news debate?*

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# Introduction

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***Disclaimer:** Despite this book's extensive focus on President Trump, it is not the author's purpose to defend or exonerate the current administration. The intent is to highlight examples of fabricated news and to consider their consequences.*

Once heralded as the objective bastion of truth and the common man's advocate, America's most prominent news outlets are today accused of serving as "lap dogs of the deep state" and a "propaganda arm of the left".<sup>1</sup> Nearly half of all Americans have a negative view of the news media, and only 44% say they can think of a news source that reports the news objectively.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, 66% of Americans say news outlets do not do a good job of separating fact from opinion.<sup>3</sup>

Today's news coverage often appears to be unbalanced and narrative-driven. To illustrate this, *Media Research Center* reports that, in CNN's cable news coverage on March 7, 2018, 149 minutes were devoted to allegations against President Trump by porn-star Stormy Daniels (Stephanie Clifford), and 86 minutes were devoted to other Trump controversies while only 44.5 minutes were devoted to all other news.<sup>4</sup> According to a *Media Research Center* study of the evening newscasts for ABC, CBS, and NBC, 90% of the coverage of President Trump has been negative (excluding neutral comments).<sup>5, 6</sup> An example of this could be seen when the White House released the details of an immigration plan intended as a compromise with Democrats that would legalize 1.8 million illegal immigrants in exchange for \$25 billion toward building a Mexican border wall. CNN dedicated 11 times more coverage to possible Trump scandals that had already received excessive coverage. These

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<sup>1</sup> Ryun, "The Mainstream Media - The Lap Dogs of the Deep State and Propaganda Arm of the Left."

<sup>2</sup> "American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy."

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Houck, "Category Five Stormy: CNN Primetime Spends 149 Minutes Ogling Stormy Daniels Scandal."

<sup>5</sup> Noyes, "2017: The Year the News Media Went to War Against a President."

<sup>6</sup> Noyes, "The Media Get Trumped: President's Poll Improve Despite 90% Negative Coverage."

included the possibility that Trump colluded with Russia to steal the election, the discrediting of text messages exchanged between Peter Strzok and Lisa Page, and allegations made by Stormy Daniels.<sup>7</sup>

Consistently, some stories receive far more coverage than their counterparts:

- In the wake of the Parkland, Florida school shooting, ABC, CBS, and NBC presented 11 times more sound bites from anti-gun activists than gun rights advocates. Likewise, they aired 69 stories and nine interviews featuring the anti-gun efforts of Parkland students without any mention given to students from the same high school who have openly championed the Second Amendment.<sup>8</sup>
- FBI director Andrew McCabe made misleading comments in a formal interview with the Inspector General, and National Security Advisor Michael Flynn lied to the FBI. An analysis of the first eight hours of coverage for both individuals reveals that MSNBC devoted 18 times more coverage to Michael Flynn than to Andrew McCabe.<sup>9</sup>
- FBI director Andrew McCabe resigned just ahead of an indicting Inspector General's report that included a referral for criminal charges against McCabe. Nevertheless, ABC, CBS, and NBC assigned six times more blame to President Trump than to the pending IG report in their speculation surrounding McCabe's resignation.<sup>10</sup>
- House Speaker Paul Ryan (R-WI) was accused of being out of touch because of a tweet referencing a woman who said she was pleasantly surprised that the tax cuts provided her an extra \$1.50 per week, allowing her to afford a Costco membership. This received 74 times more coverage by CNN and MSNBC than their coverage of House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's (D-CA) comments that the tax cut is only offering American workers crumbs, despite an immediate wave of bonuses and increased wages attributed to the tax cut. MSNBC only provided 17 seconds to Pelosi's comment in a week's worth of coverage.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, reporters habitually render judgment and employ misleading and weighted language, seemingly intended to promote a predetermined narrative. As an example, consider a report by CNN anchor Don Lemon:<sup>12</sup>

“

President Trump threw himself a party today. Threw himself a party—after nobody else would come. In a classic example of taking his ball and going home, the president escalated his fight with the NFL by scrapping a planned White House visit by the Super Bowl champion Philadelphia Eagles after he learned an embarrassingly small number of

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<sup>7</sup> Houck, “Bread Crumbs: CNN Dedicates 11 Times More Coverage to Trump Scandals than Immigration Plan.”

<sup>8</sup> Dickens, “Nets: Parkland Anti-Gun Activists Overwhelm Gun Rights Advocates by 11 to 1.”

<sup>9</sup> D’Agostino, “MSNBC Gave Flynn’s Lie 18 Times More Coverage than McCabe’s.”

<sup>10</sup> Fondacaro, “Nets Downplay Role of IG Report in McCabe Resignation, 6x More Trump Blame.”

<sup>11</sup> Dickens, “CNN/MSNBC Cover Paul Ryan’s \$1.50 Tweet 74x More than Pelosi’s ‘Crumbs.’”

<sup>12</sup> CNN, “Lemon: Trump Threw Himself a Party, Because No One Would Come.”

players and coaches would actually attend. ... So the White House calls all of this a political stunt, and they are absolutely right. This is a political stunt, but not by the Philadelphia Eagles; by the President of the United States. ... This was absolutely a political stunt—a political stunt by the president. A source close to the White House tells CNN that Trump plans to continue to pound the NFL anthem issue through the midterms. Continuing to trash players—mostly black players—for their protest over police abuse against people of color.

Increasingly, the most trusted names in news are relying upon anonymous sources, unverified leaks of classified material, and rumors while news anchors spend countless hours speculating rather than reporting. Furthermore, sensational, scandalous, and titillating stories regularly push aside legitimate news. CNN has been particularly prone to this:

- With the release of former FBI director James Comey’s book, and more than a year after the media published the unverified allegations that Donald Trump hired prostitutes to pee on a bed used by President Barack Obama, CNN broadcasts referenced this allegation 77 separate times over the course of five days.<sup>13</sup>
- Obsessing over allegations that President Trump referred to African nations as “sh \* \* hole” countries in a private meeting, CNN used the term 195 times in just the first of several days of reporting. (This does not include times the word appeared in the chyron on the bottom of the screen or when the host wrote the word on a whiteboard.) Don Lemon’s show, *CNN Tonight*, used the term 22 times in the 10 p.m. hour alone.<sup>14</sup>
- CNN devoted 41 minutes on March 10, 2018 to porn-star Stormy Daniels’ performance at a Florida strip club, even sending one of their correspondents, Nick Valencia.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, reporter Hadas Gold published a 1,500+ word expose on Daniels, her career, and her efforts to “Make Adult Great Again.”<sup>16</sup>
- Over the course of 10 days, Stormy Daniels’ lawyer, Michael Avenatti, was interviewed 147 times on broadcast and cable news shows. Seventy-four of those interviews were with CNN.<sup>17</sup>

Additionally, prominent news outlets have created entire narratives from decontextualized comments and reported as legitimate news pure conjecture. President Trump responded to a sheriff’s concerns that she is unable even to inform ICE about MS-13 gang members unless they reach a certain threshold by calling them “animals.” In response, *The New York Times* wrote, “President Trump lashed out at undocumented immigrants during a White House meeting ... branding such people ‘animals.’”<sup>18</sup> Likewise, *The New York Daily News* ran the headline, “These

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<sup>13</sup> D’Agostino, “Yellow Journalism: CNN Spouts Off about ‘Pee Tapes’ 77 Times in Five Days.”

<sup>14</sup> Graham, “CNN Leaps Into the Toilet: Network Aired 195 Uses of ‘Sh \* \* hole’ on Friday.”

<sup>15</sup> Houck, “Stormy Saturday: CNN Spends 41 Minutes Salaciously Recapping Stormy Daniels’ Strip Club Show.”

<sup>16</sup> Gold, “For Stormy, Controversy Blows up into a Club Scene Bonanza.”

<sup>17</sup> D’Agostino, “UPDATE: Porn Star Lawyer Interviewed 147 Times in 10 Weeks.”

<sup>18</sup> Davis, “Trump Calls Some Unauthorized Immigrants ‘Animals’ in Rant.”

aren't people. These are animals.' Trump Hurls Pure Hate at Immigrants."<sup>19</sup> And *USA Today* tied President Trump's comments to Adolf Hitler's rhetoric.<sup>20</sup>

Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of reporters legitimizing speculation is the example of First Lady Melania Trump's absence from the public eye for a few weeks. Despite some journalists having seen her days earlier,<sup>21</sup> and despite the knowledge that she was recovering from Kidney surgery, some in the media assumed a conspiracy.<sup>22</sup> CNN devoted several segments to the issue, and in his e-mail newsletter, senior CNN media correspondent Brian Stelter displayed an M.I.A. countdown calendar and reported on the "mystery" of the First Lady being out of sight for 24 days.<sup>23</sup> Likewise, *The New York Times*, and also *Huffington Post* senior politics reporter Laura Bassett, implied that Melania's surgery was suspect.<sup>24</sup> Laura told CNN that the White House is not being honest about the whereabouts of the First Lady,<sup>25</sup> and *Baltimore Sun* reporter David Zurawik suggested to CNN that Melania's reassuring tweets were not sent by Melania but by someone controlling her account.<sup>26</sup>

Furthermore, the senior editor at *The Atlantic* tweeted a theory that the President may have "punched the First Lady in the White House ... then ordered the Secret Service to conceal the assault",<sup>27</sup> and a senior writer at *Rolling Stone* tweeted his suspicion that Melania's absence "could be about concealing abuse" because President Trump is "a man with a history of abusing women, including those to whom he is married."<sup>28</sup> Likewise, *Huffington Post* political and pop culture analyst Andy Ostroy tweeted, "Where is @FLOTUS? And why was she in the hospital so long? Is she sick? Did she have a breakdown? Did @POTUS force her to get plastic surgery? Was the whole thing a scam? This is not a joke. These are legit Q's abt America's First Lady that remain unanswered. #Melania #Trump"<sup>29</sup> However, there was no grand conspiracy, and Melania made a public appearance at a gold star family reception. Yet even then, *The New York Times* cast doubt with the headline "Melania Trump Returns to the Public Eye (Sort Of),"<sup>30</sup> and *The Root* suggested that it was really Melania's body double at the event.<sup>31</sup>

Given these patterns, perhaps it is understandable why a growing segment of the population have embraced the term "fake news" to describe the media. But is this label fair? What do people mean by the term? More importantly, the debate surrounding fake news has spiritual implications for our nation. What are these implications?

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<sup>19</sup> Sommerfeldt, "These Aren't People. These Are Animals."

<sup>20</sup> Hafner, "OnPolitics Today: Trump Calls Undocumented People 'Animals,' Rhetoric with a Dark Past."

<sup>21</sup> Javers, Eamon. Twitter Post, May 30, 2018, 4:36 AM.

<sup>22</sup> Lahren, "Sean Hannity 6/5/18 | Hannity Fox News | June 5, 2018."

<sup>23</sup> Stelter, "Melania M.I.A."

<sup>24</sup> Rogers, "Melania Trump Returns to the Public Eye (Sort Of)."

<sup>25</sup> CNN, "Melania Trump's Absence Continues, Skips Camp David Weekend."

<sup>26</sup> Payton, "8 Times Members of the Media Spread 'Missing Melania' Conspiracy Theories."

<sup>27</sup> Frum, Twitter Post, June 2, 2018, 11:46 AM.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, Twitter Post, June 3, 2018, 4:44 AM.

<sup>29</sup> Ostroy, Twitter Post, May 31, 2018, 5:31 AM.

<sup>30</sup> Rogers, "Melania Trump Returns to the Public Eye (Sort Of)."

<sup>31</sup> Crocket, "Wait, Was That a Melania Trump Look-Alike?"

These are important questions that deserve to be answered. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done because original news stories are regularly altered. Headlines are re-written, URLs are changed, the text is “updated,” and corrections are amended. While this may reduce the risk of spreading false information online, it also removes the evidence—and often the memory of—the media’s pattern of misleading and misrepresenting the news. Furthermore, time has a tendency of erasing the fervor and intensity that often accompanied these reports.

With the exception of chapter 10, we’ll limit our focus to the time between when President Donald Trump announced his candidacy and the president’s fake news awards. Certainly, the year 2018 has been rich with news reports that fall into the category of “fake news,” but we must limit our scope for the sake space. Even within the chosen time frame, we cannot include every example. Instead, we will simply endeavor to consider enough examples to allow us to identify patterns. Ultimately, we may discover that America is facing a fake news epidemic that is leading our nation into extreme peril.



# 1. What is Fake News?

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Having experienced an unprecedented usage increase of 365% since 2016, “fake news” was the *Collins English Dictionary’s* 2017 word of the year.<sup>32</sup> Although officially defined as “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting,”<sup>33</sup> fake news has come to mean many things.

Headlines such as “Death Row Inmate Eats an Entire Bible as His Last Meal” and “Elderly Woman Accused of Training Her 65 Cats to Steal from Neighbors” rank among the top 50 fake news stories of 2017 that were circulated on Facebook, generating approximately 23.5 million shares, reactions, and comments.<sup>34</sup> However, both these headlines come from *World News Daily Report*, a site devoted to writing political satires as if they were official news reports. Other such sites include *The Onion*, *Private Eye*, *The Daily Mash*, *National Report*, and *The Daily Curreant*. Unfortunately, reports from these sites are not propagated solely through social media. Mainstream news outlets have frequently participated in furthering stories originating from these sites. Jack Murtha reports in the *Columbia Journalism Review*:<sup>35</sup>

“

Last fall, *The San Francisco Business Times* erroneously aggregated a fake news piece about Yelp suing the creators of *South Park*.<sup>[\*A][\*B]</sup> Earlier that year, Bloomberg Politics wrote a post based on a bunk article on Nancy Reagan’s endorsement

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<sup>32</sup> “Word of the Year 2017.”

<sup>33</sup> “Fake News.”

<sup>34</sup> Silverman, “These are 50 of the Biggest Fake News Hits on Facebook in 2017.”

<sup>35</sup> Murtha, “How Fake News Sties Frequently Trick Big-Time Journalists.”

<sup>\*A</sup> Hamill, “News Website Falls for Hoax Claim South Park Faced \$10m Lawsuit Despite Including Quotes from a Dolphin.”

<sup>\*B</sup> McDermid, “CORRECTION: Yelp Says \$10 Million Lawsuit Against ‘South Park’ is a Hoax.”

of Hillary Clinton for president.<sup>[\*C]</sup> In 2014, *The New York Times* picked up a fake bit about Kanye West’s love for his own butt.<sup>[\*D][\*E]</sup> In 2013, *The Washington Post* fell for a fake news story by the notorious Daily Currant, which claimed that Sarah Palin had taken a job with Al-Jazeera.<sup>[\*F]</sup> That same year, a bogus story alleging *New York Times* columnist Paul Krugman had filed for bankruptcy wound up on Boston.com—albeit through an automated third-party service that fed content to the site.<sup>[\*G]</sup> Breitbart then aggregated the story.

Assistant professor of communications and media at Merrick College, Melissa Zimdars, has compiled a list of hundreds of websites that regularly publish misleading or intentionally false reports.<sup>36</sup> Many of these sites use names that sound official or are similar to reputable sources, such as bostontribune.com, or cbsnews.com.co. Originally, the term “fake news” was used to denote reports originating from such sources; however, the term evolved in 2016.

Henri Gendreau’s article “The Internet Made ‘Fake News’ a Thing—Then Made it Nothing” in *Wired* provides an outstanding overview of how the term “fake news” changed.<sup>37</sup> Following accusations that editors in Facebook’s trending section were pushing liberal ideology and suppressing conservative news, Facebook replaced its editorial team with an automated system.<sup>38, 39, 40</sup> Three days later, Facebook apologized for trending a story that falsely claimed FOX News anchor Megyn Kelly had been fired for being “a closet liberal who actually wants Hillary to win.”<sup>41</sup>

In October *The Washington Post* ran the headline, “Facebook has Repeatedly Trended Fake News Since Firing its Human Editors,”<sup>42</sup> and *BuzzFeed* reported, “Hyperpartisan political Facebook pages and websites are consistently feeding their millions of followers false or misleading information, according to an analysis by BuzzFeed News.”<sup>43</sup> According to *Wired*, “Buzzfeed’s extensive analysis finds that hyperpartisan Facebook pages most likely to post inaccurate stories received far more shares, likes, and comments than mainstream news pages.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>\*C</sup> Feldman, “Bloomberg Runs, then Pulls Hoax Story about Nancy Reagan Endorsing Hillary.”

<sup>\*D</sup> Wadler, “Fear of Kim Kardashian’s Derrière.”

<sup>\*E</sup> Silverman, “New York Times Column Used Quote from Fake News Site ‘Without Attribution.’”

<sup>\*F</sup> Parker, “Sarah Palin Tries to Stay Relevant.”

<sup>\*G</sup> Weigel, “I Want to Believe.”

<sup>36</sup> Zimdars, “False, Misleading, Clickbait-y, and/or Satirical ‘News’ Sources.”

<sup>37</sup> Gendreau’s, “The Internet Made ‘Fake News’ a Thing—Then Made it Nothing.”

<sup>38</sup> Nunez, “Former Facebook Workers: We Routinely Suppressed Conservative News.”

<sup>39</sup> Herrman, “Inside Facebook’s (Totally Insane, Unintentionally Gigantic, Hyperpartisan) Political-Media Machine.”

<sup>40</sup> Wong, “Facebook is Trying to Get Rid of Bias in Trending News by Getting Rid of Humans.”

<sup>41</sup> Gunaratna, “Facebook Apologized for Promoting False Story on Megyn Kelly in #Trending.”

<sup>42</sup> Dewey, “Facebook has Repeatedly Trended Fake News Since Firing Its Human Editors.”

<sup>43</sup> Silverman, “Hyperpartisan Facebook Pages are Publishing False and Misleading Information at an Alarming Rate.”

<sup>44</sup> Gendreau’s, “The Internet Made ‘Fake News’ a Thing—Then Made it Nothing.”

Following the election of Donald Trump as president, reporters and pundits were desperate for an explanation as to how they could have been so wrong in their predictions. Building upon the recent reports of fake news, Max Read offered an explanation in his article “Donald Trump Won because of Facebook,” writing, “The most obvious way in which Facebook enabled a Trump victory has been its inability (or refusal) to address the problem of hoax or fake news.”<sup>45</sup> Henri Gendreau observes, “Liberals embrace[d] it as an existential threat to democracy while conservatives use[d] it as a joke to tweak liberals looking to blame [Hillary] Clinton’s loss on anything other than their own shortcomings.”<sup>46</sup> And according to Syracuse University professor Jeff Hemsley, “Anger and humor are probably the two big reasons why it spread. I think people were angry about the idea that Facebook could have influenced the election.”<sup>47</sup>

In December, President-elect Donald Trump began responding to fabricated news stories as fake news, beginning with CNN’s claim, “Donald Trump will remain as an executive producer on NBC’s ‘Celebrity Apprentice,’ even while serving as president of the United States.”<sup>48</sup> President-elect Trump tweeted, “Reports by @CNN that I will be working on The Apprentice during my Presidency, even part time, are ridiculous & untrue - FAKE NEWS!”<sup>49</sup> One month later CNN alluded to a compromising dossier,<sup>50</sup> and *BuzzFeed* expounded, writing, “A dossier making explosive — but unverified — allegations that the Russian government has been ‘cultivating, supporting and assisting’ President-elect Donald Trump for years and gained compromising information about him has been circulating among elected officials, intelligence agents, and journalists for weeks.”<sup>51</sup> Once more, President-elect Trump tweeted, “FAKE NEWS - A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT!”<sup>52</sup>

During a press conference the next day, President-elect Trump refused to field a question from CNN reporter Jim Acosta, saying, “Your organization is terrible,” and “Don’t be rude. No, I’m not going to give you a question. You are fake news.”<sup>53</sup> Video of this press conference went viral, and the president officially co-opted the term “fake news.” Soon he began referring to the entire mainstream media as fake news, such as his tweet, “The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC, @CBS, @CNN) is not my enemy, [sic] it is the enemy of the people!”<sup>54</sup>

Today the term “fake news” is meant by some to refer to any news report with which they disagree, by others to refer to dishonest reporting, by others to refer to intentionally distorted or fabricated reports, and by others to refer to news sites that regularly publish misleading or intentionally false reports. Despite the occasional abuse of the term, “fake news” continues to primarily mean,

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<sup>45</sup> Read, “Donald Trump Won because of Facebook.”

<sup>46</sup> Gendreau’s, “The Internet Made ‘Fake News’ a Thing—Then Made it Nothing.”

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Byers, “Donald Trump Will Remain EP on ‘Celebrity Apprentice.’”

<sup>49</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, December 10, 2016, 6:11 AM.

<sup>50</sup> Perez, “Intel Chiefs Presented Trump with Claims of Russian Efforts to Compromise Him.”

<sup>51</sup> Besinger, “These Reports Allege Trump has Deep Ties to Russia.”

<sup>52</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, January 10, 2017, 5:19 PM.

<sup>53</sup> Savransky, “Trump Berates CNN Reporter: ‘You are Fake News.’”

<sup>54</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, February 17, 2017, 1:48 PM.

“deliberately constructed lies, in the form of news articles, meant to mislead the public.”<sup>55</sup> Sometimes these lies are obvious, and other times they are introduced by selective reporting of the facts, conflating facts with opinion, juxtaposing emotional images with the report, or tainting opinion with unidentified sources and speculation.

In 2017 the mainstream media was more interested in pushing the narrative that President Donald Trump is bad for America and should be removed from office than they were about honest reporting. In fact, a Pew Research report found that only 5% of the mainstream media coverage of President Trump was positive in 2017, and they were seven times more likely than right-leaning outlets to directly refute or correct a statement by President Trump or a member of his administration.<sup>56</sup> This biased coverage, combined with the media’s obvious objective, has prompted the president to tweet, “I will be announcing **THE MOST DISHONEST & CORRUPT MEDIA AWARDS OF THE YEAR** on Monday at 5:00 o’clock. Subjects will cover Dishonesty & Bad Reporting in various categories from the Fake News Media. Stay tuned!”<sup>57</sup>

The president believes he has identified a pattern of lying and distortion of the truth by our nation’s most trusted news outlets. Irrespective of the source, and regardless of the motive, deliberately distorting truth to propagate a predetermined narrative only feeds a culture of lies, and this should concern us because [Jeremiah 9:1-9](#) teaches that a culture of lies can invoke God’s judgment upon a nation. Realizing this, we would do well not to dismiss talk about fake news as divisive and irrelevant. Instead, we should welcome it as an opportunity to demand meaningful change from those who serve as the gatekeepers of information.

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<sup>55</sup> Sullivan, “It’s Time to Retire the Tainted Term ‘Fake News.’”

<sup>56</sup> Mitchell, “Covering President Trump in a Polarized Media Environment.”

<sup>57</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, January 2, 2018, 5:05 PM.

## 2. The President's Fake News Awards

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It is no secret that President Trump and the media have an adversarial relationship. According to PBS *News Hour*, “In President Trump’s first year in office, he tweeted about fake news and fake media 174 times. That is an average of once every two days.”<sup>58</sup> And now the President has published his “fake news awards,”—a list of what he believes to be the top 11 fake news stories of 2017.<sup>59</sup>

In November of 2016, the president floated the idea for a fake news award in a tweet, saying, “We should have a contest as to which of the Networks, plus CNN and not including Fox, is the most dishonest, corrupt and/or distorted in its political coverage of your favorite President (me). They are all bad. Winner to receive the FAKE NEWS TROPHY!”<sup>60</sup> Five weeks later, the president tweeted, “I will be announcing THE MOST DISHONEST & CORRUPT MEDIA AWARDS OF THE YEAR on Monday at 5:00 o’clock. Subjects will cover Dishonesty & Bad Reporting in various categories from the Fake News Media. Stay tuned!”<sup>61</sup>

Not surprisingly, these tweets ignited a firestorm of controversy on social media along with derisive news reports and late-night comedy routines. Comedians Trevor Noah,<sup>62</sup> Stephen Colbert, and Samantha Bee<sup>63</sup> published advertisements nominating themselves for the award.<sup>64</sup> Stephen Colbert purchased a “for your consideration” billboard advertisement in Times Square suggesting himself for nine categories, including “Outstanding achievement in parroting George Soros’ talking points,”

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<sup>58</sup> PBS NewsHour, “How do Americans View ‘Fake News’ Today?”

<sup>59</sup> “The Highly-Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards.”

<sup>60</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, November 27, 2017, 6:04 AM.

<sup>61</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, January 2, 2018, 5:05 PM.

<sup>62</sup> Noah, Twitter Post, January 5, 2018, 9:34 AM.

<sup>63</sup> Full Frontal, Twitter Post, January 4, 2018, 6:00 AM.

<sup>64</sup> Carter, “‘Daily Show’ Launches Ad Campaign for Trump’s ‘Dishonest and Corrupt Media Awards.’”

“Fakest Dishonesty,” and “Dishonestest Corruption.”<sup>65, 66</sup> And comedian Jimmy Kimmel referred to the awards as “The Stupid People’s Choice Awards.”<sup>67</sup>

In anticipation of the fake news awards which were rescheduled for January 17,<sup>68</sup> comedian Jimmy Fallon ridiculed the upcoming ceremony by imagining what it might look like,<sup>69</sup> and Stephen Colbert<sup>70</sup> presented “the even fakier awards that President Trump has awarded himself.”<sup>71</sup> Likewise, following the president’s announcements, Jimmy Kimmel featured his father as a fake Wolf Blitzer to accept a fake, fake news award on behalf of CNN.<sup>72</sup> But late night comedians and liberal pundits weren’t the only ones deriding the president’s actions.

The day before the president’s announcements, Senator John McCain (R-AZ) wrote in a *Washington Post* editorial, “[President Trump] has threatened to continue his attempt to discredit the free press by bestowing ‘fake news awards’ upon reporters and news outlets whose coverage he disagrees with. Whether Trump knows it or not, these efforts are being closely watched by foreign leaders who are already using his words as cover as they silence and shutter one of the key pillars of democracy.”<sup>74</sup> Similarly, during a speech on the Senate floor, Senator Jeff Flake (R-AZ) argued that by questioning the validity of news reports, the president is undermining democracy itself. He also said:<sup>75</sup>

“

2017 was a year which saw the truth – objective, empirical, evidence-based truth – more battered and abused than any other in the history of our country, at the hands of the most powerful figure in our government. ... It was the year in which an unrelenting daily assault on the Constitutionally-protected free press was launched by that same White House, an assault that is as unprecedented as it is unwarranted. “The enemy of the people” was how the president of the United States called the free press in 2017. Mr. President, it is a testament to the condition of our democracy that our own president uses words infamously spoken by Joseph Stalin to describe his enemies. It bears note that so fraught with malice was the phrase “enemy of the people,” that even Nikita Khrushchev forbade its use, telling the Soviet Communist Party that the phrase had been introduced by Stalin for the purpose of “annihilating such individuals” who disagreed with the supreme leader. ... When a figure in power reflexively calls any press that doesn’t suit him “fake news,” it

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<sup>65</sup> Park, “Stephen Colbert Posts ‘For Your Consideration’ Ad for Trump’s Fake News Awards.”

<sup>66</sup> “Why Stephen Colbert Would be Honored to Part of Trump’s ‘Fake News Awards.’”

<sup>67</sup> Serjeant, “‘The Fakeys’: Comedians Turn Tables on Trump’s ‘Fake News’ Awards.”

<sup>68</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, January 7, 2018, 12:35 PM.

<sup>69</sup> The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon, “Trump’s Fake News Awards.”

<sup>70</sup> Colbert, Twitter Post, January 3, 2018, 7:58 PM.

<sup>71</sup> The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, “A Full History of Trump’s Fake Awards.”

<sup>72</sup> Jensen, “Jimmy Fallon, Stephen Colbert Ridicule President Trump, His ‘Fake News Awards.’”

<sup>73</sup> Jimmy Kimmel Live, “Wolf Blitzer Accepts Donald Trump’s Fake News Award.”

<sup>74</sup> McCain, “Mr. President, Stop Attacking the Press.”

<sup>75</sup> Los Angeles Times, “Sen. Jeff Flake Criticizes Trump’s Attacks on Press | Los Angeles Times.”

is that person who should be the figure of suspicion, not the press.

Despite Senator Flake's words, President Trump's fake news awards were not focused on restricting the freedom of the press. Instead, the president expressed his views on the subject during a press conference shortly after assuming office, "The press has become so dishonest that if we don't talk about it, we are doing a tremendous disservice to the American people."<sup>76,77</sup> He also told the press, "I don't mind bad stories. I can handle a bad story better than anybody as long as it's true. And, you know, over a course of time, I'll make mistakes, and you'll write badly, and I'm OK with that. But I'm not OK when it is fake. I mean, I watch CNN—it's so much anger and hatred, and just the hatred. I don't watch it anymore ... Again, I don't mind bad stories when it's true."<sup>78</sup>

In the face of overwhelming ridicule, President Trump has endeavored to highlight for the American people how bias and political agendas have resulted in numerous "dishonest, corrupt and/or distorted" news reports by our nation's most trusted guardians of the truth.<sup>79</sup> To accomplish this, the president did not present the awards with a speech or any pageantry that might distract from this objective. Instead, he simply published an article featuring media claims juxtaposed against photographs, tweets, and videos that directly refute the reports.<sup>80</sup> And this was prefaced only by the statement, "2017 was a year of unrelenting bias, unfair news coverage, and even downright fake news. Studies have shown that over 90% of the media's coverage of President Trump is negative. Below are the winners of the 2017 Fake News Awards."<sup>81</sup>

Before we as a nation can demand change, we must first understand what is wrong. Through an unprecedented move, President Trump has endeavored to lead our nation into an understanding of how broken and dishonest our news outlets have become—not for the purpose of suppressing free speech, but for the purpose of restoring what has been lost. This is crucial for the success of our nation because a government by the people requires a population who knows the truth. More importantly, it is important for the success of our nation because [Jeremiah 9:1-9](#) teaches that a culture of lies can invoke God's judgment upon a nation.

It is easy to mock the president and to shift the focus to his deficiencies, but this only enables our nation to continue to ignore the reality that we have increasingly embraced a culture of lies. This is evidenced by how far our guardians of truth—journalists and news reporters—have fallen from their commitment to objectively reporting the facts. Perhaps, through the president's antics, God is granting our nation an opportunity to look in the mirror and resolve to self-correct before God is

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<sup>76</sup> Sky News, "Donald Trump Attacks the Media in Heated News Conference."

<sup>77</sup> Fox News, "President Trump Scolds Media at News Conference."

<sup>78</sup> Sky News, "Donald Trump Attacks the Media in Heated News Conference."

<sup>79</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, November 27, 2017, 6:04 AM.

<sup>80</sup> "The Highly-Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards."

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

compelled to intervene. Perhaps this is an opportunity for us as citizens to demand truth from our respected institutions.



### 3. Fake News Coverage of the Fake News Awards

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“Trump’s ‘Fake News Awards’ were a Huge Flop,” blared a *Washington Post* headline. According to the article, this is because many who tried to access the website where the president’s picks were listed were met with an error message. Also, the *Post* concluded that the president had “no plan,” which resulted in his choosing reports that were not outrageous enough.<sup>82, 83</sup> Additionally, the *Post* fact checkers concluded that the president’s picks are not valid because most of the reporters have subsequently issued corrections, retractions, and apologies.<sup>84</sup>

*The Washington Post*, who ranked fifth among the president’s top picks, is justified in being offended by the president’s antics. However, it is odd that they would choose to respond to the president’s fake news awards with coverage that fits into what could arguably be defined as fake news. Contrary to being a “huge flop,” fake news had been part of the cultural conversation for the past two weeks. Since tweeting on January 2 his intention to announce the winners of the fake news awards, Google searches for “fake news” and “fake news awards” increased exponentially, resulting in it being the most searched topic on the evening of the president’s announcement, according to Google Trends.<sup>85, 86, 87</sup> And the reason people received an error message when accessing GOP.com to view the results was because the website was inundated with enough traffic to crash the site, according the GOP who tweeted, “Tonight, gop.com saw more traffic than ever before. Even though the servers were scaled up, the interest was even greater than anticipated. Traffic is off the charts. Come back soon.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Borchert, “Trump’s ‘Fake News Awards’ were a Huge Flop.”

<sup>83</sup> Farhi, “Trump Opens All the Envelopes Himself at First ‘Fake News Awards.’”

<sup>84</sup> Kessler, “Fact-Checking President Trump’s ‘Fake News Awards.’”

<sup>85</sup> “Fake News,” Google Trends, December 18 – January 16, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> “Fake News Awards,” Google Trends, December 18 – January 16.

<sup>87</sup> “Fake News Awards,” Google Trends, January 11–18.

<sup>88</sup> GOP, Twitter Post, January 17, 2018, 5:35 PM.

If the purpose of the awards, as the president tweeted, was to draw attention to the “dishonest, corrupt and/or distorted” reporting by our nation’s most trusted news services, then the president’s fake news awards must be deemed a success.<sup>89</sup> The prospect of the president’s awards was discussed by everyone from mainstream media outlets to late night comedians, with Trevor Noah,<sup>90</sup> Stephen Colbert,<sup>91</sup> and Samantha Bee<sup>92</sup> endeavoring to outperform one another in advertisements nominating themselves for the award. Stephen Colbert even purchased a “for your consideration” billboard in Times Square suggesting himself for nine self-created categories—a stunt that was widely reported, even by *The Washington Post*.<sup>93, 94</sup> And ordinary individuals across the country engaged in submitting nominations via YouTube, talk radio, and blogs.

Given the hype, the actual presentation of the awards was anticlimactic, but this does not justify labeling the awards a “huge flop.”<sup>95</sup> Rather, this may have been by design. Had the president provided pageantry or a ranting speech, the media could have focused its commentary on whether such behavior is appropriate from a sitting president. Instead, the president chose a path that reframed the question to whether it is appropriate for a sitting president to remind the nation of widely shared news stories about himself which have been proven to be false.

Many of the news outlets chose to entirely ignore the president’s awards. Perhaps this is because the president’s accusations at GOP.com can be readily verified. *The Washington Post* fact check concludes, “To sum up, at least eight of the ‘Fake News’ winners resulted in corrections, with two reports prompting suspensions or resignations. Two of the winners were simply tweets that were quickly corrected and never resulted in news articles. One was an opinion article in which the author later retracted his prediction.” Yet even this is both inaccurate and misleading. One of those tweets—the one about President Trump removing a bust of Martin Luther King Jr. from the Oval Office—did make it into a *TIME* article that has been corrected with the statement, “An earlier version of the story said that a bust of Martin Luther King had been moved. It is still in the Oval Office.”<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the tweets and Paul Kruegman’s editorial were widely shared on social media and referenced by numerous pundits on cable news.

The very fact that some of the mainstream media’s news coverage of President Trump’s fake news awards is itself distorted and misleading emphasizes the president’s underlying point. Our nation’s guardians of truth—journalists and reporters—have forsaken their commitment to objectively report the facts. Truth has become an acceptable casualty for the “greater good” of protecting and promoting select political agendas. However, truth is not relative; it is objective. It is also an attribute of God. This is why God says in [Proverbs 12:22](#), “*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord*”.

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<sup>89</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, November 27, 2017, 6:04 AM.

<sup>90</sup> Noah, Twitter Post, January 5, 2018, 9:34 AM.

<sup>91</sup> “Why Stephen Colbert Would be Honored to Part of Trump’s ‘Fake News Awards.’”

<sup>92</sup> Full Frontal, Twitter Post, January 4, 2018, 6:00 AM.

<sup>93</sup> Park, “Stephen Colbert Posts ‘For Your Consideration’ Ad for Trump’s Fake News Awards.”

<sup>94</sup> Horton, “No Faking It: Colbert Wants One of Trump’s ‘Dishonest’ Media Awards.”

<sup>95</sup> Borchers, “Trump’s ‘Fake News Awards’ were a Huge Flop.”

<sup>96</sup> Miller, “Donald Trump Signed Order to Prepare for Repeal of Obamacare.”

If we as a nation wish to be in a right relationship with God, then we must value and defend the truth. [Psalm 51:6](#) says, “*Behold, you [God] delight in truth*”, and [Psalm 34:13](#) says, “*Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit.*” Until we demand truth from our respected institutions, we have no right to expect God’s blessing. Rather, [Jeremiah 9:1–9](#) teaches that a culture of lies can invoke God’s judgment upon a nation.

We should be deeply troubled that any president has cause to host a fake news award ceremony. It may be tempting to dismiss and to explain away the president’s antics, but doing so only enables our nation to continue to ignore the reality that we have increasingly embraced a culture of lies—a culture that is fostered by distorted and misleading news reports from our nation’s most prominent media outlets.

## 4. An Unexpected Election

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Fewer than half of all Americans can think of a single news source that reports the news objectively, according to the *2017 Gallup/Knight Foundation Survey on Trust, Media, and Democracy*.<sup>97</sup> Today, two-thirds of Americans believe most of the news media does not do a good job of separating fact from fiction, leaving only one-third who hold a positive view of the news media, according to a Harvard Harris poll.<sup>98</sup>

Harvard-Harris co-director Mark Penn notes, “Much of the media is now just another part of the partisan divide in the country with Republicans not trusting the ‘mainstream’ media and Democrats seeing them as reflecting their beliefs.”<sup>99</sup> Consequently, confidence in the media dropped to record lows in the days surrounding the 2016 presidential election, with *Business Insider* reporting, “Just 6 percent of people say they have a lot of confidence in the media”.<sup>100</sup> Furthermore, only 12% of Facebook users and 18% of Twitter users reported having a good deal of trust in the news they read on these platforms.<sup>101</sup>

It turns out the public’s lack of trust was not entirely unfounded. Several key reports of the time were based upon information that was either unverified, misrepresented, or false. In reviewing these reports today, it is easy to forget that they formed the basis for a series of narratives that were relentlessly propagated by pundits and anchors on cable news shows, which in turn fueled social media campaigns and even gave rise to Congressional investigations. Below are some examples from notable news outlets:

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<sup>97</sup> “American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy.”

<sup>98</sup> Easley, “Poll: Majority Says Mainstream Media Publishes Fake News.”

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Feldman, “An Alarming Low Number of Americans Say They Trust the Media.”

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

## HILLARY CLINTON HAS A 98% CHANCE OF WINNING THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

For months the media almost universally predicted a landslide victory for presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, ignoring any polls or data indicating otherwise. According to *Politico*:<sup>102</sup>

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In June, the Washington Post’s Greg Sargent called it “a fantasy.”<sup>[\*H]</sup> In July, Moody’s Analytics suggested that the electoral outcome was a done deal—Clinton would win easily.<sup>[\*I]</sup> In August, one of The POLITICO Caucus’s GOP insiders declared that for Trump to win, “it would take video evidence of a smiling Hillary drowning a litter of puppies while terrorists surrounded her with chants of ‘Death to America.’”<sup>[\*J]</sup> In September, on *With All Due Respect*, 2008 Obama campaign manager David Plouffe broke down why he believed Hillary Clinton had a 100 percent chance of winning.<sup>[\*K]</sup> In October, the editor-in-chief of *GQ*, Jim Nelson, penned an essay titled, “Let’s Face It, Donald Trump Is About to Lose.”<sup>[\*L]</sup> And the day before the election, Larry Sabato’s Crystal Ball prophesied 322 electoral votes for Clinton and 216 for Trump.<sup>[\*M]</sup>

On the heels of such reporting, and just a day before the election, CNN reported, “Hillary Clinton’s odds of winning the presidency rose from 78% last week to 91% Monday before Election Day, according to CNN’s Political Prediction Market.”<sup>103</sup> Likewise, *The Huffington Post* gave Hillary a 98.2% chance of winning, declaring, “Donald Trump has essentially no path to an Electoral College victory.”<sup>104</sup> And *The New York Times* gave Hillary an 85% chance of victory, writing, “A victory by Mr. Trump remains possible: Mrs. Clinton’s chance of losing is about the same as the probability that an N.F.L. kicker misses a 37-yard field goal.”<sup>105</sup> The *Times* even provided a link to several YouTube videos showing N.F.L. kickers successfully making such a field goal.

Despite the media’s confidence, Donald Trump won a decisive victory on November 8, 2016, having won 306 Electoral College votes to Hillary Clinton’s 232 votes.<sup>106, 107</sup> He even won four staunchly

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<sup>102</sup> Arrieta-Kenna, “The Worst Political Predictions of 2016.”

<sup>\*H</sup> Sargent, “Can Trump Ride White Anger into the White House? A New Analysis Suggests It’s a Fantasy.”

<sup>\*I</sup> Needham, “Election Model: Clinton Will Win Easily.”

<sup>\*J</sup> Shepard, “GOP Insiders: Trump Can’t Win.”

<sup>\*K</sup> “David Plouffe on Why Donald Trump Can’t Get to 270.”

<sup>\*L</sup> Nelson, “Hack Trump.”

<sup>\*M</sup> Sabato, “2016 President.”

<sup>103</sup> Kenny, “Political Prediction Market: Clinton’s Odds Rise Again.”

<sup>104</sup> Jackson, “HuffPost Forecasts Hillary Clinton will Win with 323 Electoral Votes.”

<sup>105</sup> Katz, “Who Will Be President?”

<sup>106</sup> “Presidential Results.”

<sup>107</sup> “Presidential Election Results: Donald J. Trump Wins.”

liberal states that had been termed “the blue wall:” Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Minnesota. The last time a Republican candidate had won any of these states was in 1988.<sup>108</sup>

### **ELECTRONIC VOTING MACHINES IN WISCONSIN, MICHIGAN, AND PENNSYLVANIA WERE HACKED TO STEAL VOTES FROM HILLARY CLINTON**

*New York Magazine* reported that “a group of prominent computer scientists and election lawyers” were calling for a recount of votes cast during the 2016 presidential election because they had “found persuasive evidence that results in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania may have been manipulated or hacked.”<sup>109</sup> According to the report, “The academics presented findings showing that in Wisconsin, Clinton received 7 percent fewer votes in counties that relied on electronic-voting machines compared with counties that used optical scanners and paper ballots. Based on this statistical analysis, Clinton may have been denied as many as 30,000 votes; she lost Wisconsin by 27,000.”<sup>110</sup> This report was repeatedly tweeted by journalists, including host of “AM Joy” and MSNBC political analyst Joy Reid,<sup>111</sup> *Politico* cybersecurity reporter Eric Geller,<sup>112</sup> and *Reuters* cybersecurity reporter Dustin Volz.<sup>113</sup>

The next day, *FiveThirtyEight* published an article titled “Demographics, Not Hacking, Explain the Election Results.”<sup>114</sup> The authors wrote, “We’ve looked into the claim — or at least, our best guess of what’s being claimed based on what has been reported — and statistically, it doesn’t check out. There’s no clear evidence that the voting method used in a county — by machine or by paper — had an effect on the vote. Anyone making allegations of a possible massive electoral hack should provide proof, and we can’t find any.”<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, J. Alex Halderman, one of the computer scientists reference in the *New York Magazine* article, wrote at *Medium* that the article “incorrectly describes the reasons manually checking ballots is an essential security safeguard (and includes some incorrect numbers, to boot).”<sup>116</sup> According to *FiveThirtyEight*, “He laid out an argument based not on any specific suspicious vote counts but on evidence that voting machines *could* be hacked, and that using paper ballots as a reference point could help determine if there were hacks.”<sup>117</sup> Halderman wrote, “Examining the physical evidence in these states—even if it finds nothing amiss—will help allay doubt and give voters justified confidence that the results are accurate.”<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Schleifer, “Trump Stomps All Over the Democrats’ Blue Wall.”

<sup>109</sup> Sherman, “Experts Urge Clinton Campaign to Challenge Election Results in 3 Swing States.”

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Reid, Twitter Post, November 22, 2016, 7:51 PM.

<sup>112</sup> Geller, Twitter Post, November 22, 2016, 3:46 PM.

<sup>113</sup> Volz, Twitter Post, November 22, 2016, 3:59 PM.

<sup>114</sup> Bialik, “Demographics, Not Hacking, Explain the Election Results.”

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Halderman, “Want to Know if the Election was Hacked? Look at Ballots.”

<sup>117</sup> Bialik, “Demographics, Not Hacking, Explain the Election Results.”

<sup>118</sup> Halderman, “Want to Know if the Election was Hacked? Look at Ballots.”

## RUSSIAN MISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS HELPED DONALD TRUMP WIN THE ELECTION

Citing a study from the Oxford Internet Institute, media outlets such as CNN insinuated that Donald Trump won the election as a result of Russian misinformation efforts and fake news being shared on Twitter among swing states.<sup>119</sup> *Newsweek* reported, “Twitter users in swing states got more fake news than real news in the days leading up to the 2016 presidential election—and the misinformation helped Donald Trump win, a new study reveals.”<sup>120</sup>

However, this is not what the study reported. The study evaluated the spread of “junk news”—not “fake news.” It lumped together sites featuring “propaganda, and ideologically extreme, hyper-partisan, or conspiratorial political news and information;” Wikileaks; *Russia Today*; and several recognized conservative news outlets, such as *Breitbart*, *Infowars*, and *The Washington Examiner*.<sup>121</sup> However, these conservative organizations fail to meet the study’s own definition of junk news as “content [that] is produced by organizations that do not employ professional journalists”.<sup>122</sup> Journalists from some of these sites even have seats in the White House press pool and contribute original reporting.<sup>123</sup> *The Daily Caller* reports, “Labeling outlets like Breitbart and the Washington Examiner as ‘junk news’ wildly skews the results of the study.”<sup>124</sup>

Moreover, the percentage of Russian sources comprised only 3% of the 20% sub-category “Polarizing and Conspiracy Content,” making it only .6% of the total.<sup>125</sup> And many of these articles came from the openly Russian state-funded websites *Russia Today* and *Sputnik*.<sup>126</sup> This is hardly proof of a Russian conspiracy to influence the presidential election, as many mainstream media outlets insinuated.

## DONALD TRUMP JR. WAS GIVEN AN ADVANCED COPY OF STOLEN WIKILEAKS DOCUMENTS

Touted as a development in the possibility that President Trump colluded with Russia to steal the election, CNN reported that Donald Trump Jr. received a decryption key and web address to stolen Wikileaks documents before they were made public.<sup>127</sup> CNN reported that the e-mail was sent on September 4; however, *The Washington Post* confirmed that the e-mail was actually sent on September 14, a day after Wikileaks made the documents public.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Caruso, “ECLUSIVE: Mainstream Media Reporting about Twitter ‘Fake News’ is 100% False.”

<sup>120</sup> Kwong, “Twitter Users Got More Fake News than Real News Before Trump Won Election.”

<sup>121</sup> Caruso, “ECLUSIVE: Mainstream Media Reporting about Twitter ‘Fake News’ is 100% False.”

<sup>122</sup> Howard, “Social Media, News and Political Information During the US Election: Was Polarizing Content Concentrated in Swing States?”, 2.

<sup>123</sup> Caruso, “ECLUSIVE: Mainstream Media Reporting about Twitter ‘Fake News’ is 100% False.”

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Howard, “Social Media, News and Political Information During the US Election: Was Polarizing Content Concentrated in Swing States?”, 3.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>127</sup> Raju, “Email Pointed Trump Campaign to Wikileaks Documents.”

<sup>128</sup> WikiLeaks, Twitter Post, September 13, 2016, 2:44 PM.

The e-mail says, “Wikileaks has uploaded another (huge 678 mb) archive of files from the DNC”.<sup>129</sup> It was sent by Michael Erickson who was the president of an aviation management company, not a Russian spy.<sup>130</sup> According to Alan Futerfas, a lawyer for Donald Trump Jr., “The email was never read or responded to — and the House Intelligence Committee knows this.”<sup>131</sup> CNN has since corrected the story.<sup>132</sup>

## 17 U.S. INTELLIGENCE AGENCIES AGREE THAT RUSSIA MEDDLED IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

During the third 2016 presidential debate, Hillary Clinton claimed, “We’ve never had a foreign government trying to interfere in our election. We have 17, 17 intelligence agencies, civilian and military who have all concluded that these espionage attacks, these cyber attacks, come from the highest levels of the Kremlin. And they are designed to influence our election.”<sup>133</sup> Fact checks from ABC News,<sup>134</sup> PBS,<sup>135</sup> *The New York Times*,<sup>136</sup> *Politico*,<sup>137</sup> and *Politifact*<sup>138</sup> rated Hillary’s claim as true, with *USA Today* running the headline, “Yes, 17 Intelligence Agencies Really Did Say Russia was Behind Hacking.”<sup>139</sup>

The claim was heavily propagated by many news outlets, and *The New York Times* even reported that all 17 American intelligence agencies had endorsed the assessment.<sup>140</sup> Additionally, many journalists tweeted the claim.<sup>141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146</sup> However, the claim was proven false in January when a Director of National Intelligence report revealed that the assessment was drawn from only three agencies: NSA, CIA, and FBI.<sup>147</sup> This was further corroborated by former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper during his testimony to Congress on May 8, 2017.<sup>148</sup>

During the hearing, James Clapper told Senator Al Franken (D-MN), “Senator, as I pointed out in my statement Senator Franken, it was there were only three agencies that directly involved in this

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<sup>129</sup> Helderman, “Email Pointed Trump Campaign to Wikileaks Documents that were Already Public.”

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Raju, “Email Pointed Trump Campaign to Wikileaks Documents.”

<sup>133</sup> “Full Transcript: Third 2016 Presidential Debate.”

<sup>134</sup> “Presidential Debate Fact-Check: What Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton are Claiming.”

<sup>135</sup> “Read Our Fact Check of the Final Presidential Debate.”

<sup>136</sup> “Fact Checks of the Third Presidential Debate.”

<sup>137</sup> Bennett, “On Russian Hacking Connection, U.S. Isn’t as Sure as Clinton Says it is.”

<sup>138</sup> Carroll, “Hillary Clinton Blames High-Up Russians for WikiLeaks Releases.”

<sup>139</sup> Collins, “Yes, 17 Intelligence Agencies Really did Say Russia was Behind Hacking.”

<sup>140</sup> Rosenberg, “Trump Misleads on Russian Meddling: Why 17 Intelligence Agencies Don’t Need to Agree.”

<sup>141</sup> Riccardi, Twitter Post, December 30, 2016, 1:09 PM.

<sup>142</sup> Eichenwald, Twitter post, December 30, 2016, 9:39 AM.

<sup>143</sup> Griffin, Twitter Post, April 1, 2017, 6:19 AM.

<sup>144</sup> Beard, Twitter Post, May 26, 2017, 6:43 PM.

<sup>145</sup> Jaffy, Twitter Post, May 30, 2017, 4:14 AM.

<sup>146</sup> Bennett, “Katy Tur Tweets False Claim that 17 Intel Agencies Agree on Russian Election Meddling.”

<sup>147</sup> “Background to ‘Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections’: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution.”

<sup>148</sup> “Full Transcript: Sally Yates and James Clapper Testify on Russian Election Interference.”



assessment plus my office.” Senator Franken responded by asking, “But all 17 signed onto that?” Clapper answered, “Well, we didn’t go through that – that process, this was a special situation because of the time limits and my – what I knew to be to who could really contribute to this and the sensitivity of the situation, we decided it was a constant judgment (ph) to restrict it to those three. I’m not aware of anyone who dissented or – or disagreed when it came out.”<sup>149</sup>

*The New York Times* subsequently reported that only three agencies were involved in creating the intelligence report,<sup>150</sup> but the earlier false claim later reappeared in the same paper.<sup>151</sup> Furthermore, Hillary Clinton continued to make the original claim. In an interview with *Recode*, Clinton said, “Read the declassified report by the intelligence community that came out in early January. Seventeen agencies, all in agreement – which I know from my experience as a senator and Secretary of State is hard to get – they concluded with ‘high confidence’ that the Russians ran an extensive information war against my campaign to influence voters in the election.”<sup>152</sup>

On June 22, 2017, *The Associated Press* wrote, “All 17 intelligence agencies have agreed Russia was behind the hack of Democratic email systems and tried to influence the 2016 election to benefit Trump. The findings are at the heart of an investigation into contacts that members of Trump’s campaign team may have had with Russian officials during the campaign and the transition.”<sup>153</sup> Likewise, in an interview with Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), ABC News chief political correspondent George Stephanopoulos told Senator Mike Lee, “And then, on the broader question, the underlying issue of our relationship with Russia and the fact that Russia, according to our 17 intelligence agencies, interfered in our campaign, James Comey was unequivocal on that point.”<sup>154</sup> And CNN White House correspondent Jim Acosta called President Trump’s claim that only three agencies were involved in the report “fake news.” On an episode of “New Day,” Acosta said, “The other thing that was fake news coming from President Trump is he said, ‘Well, I keep hearing it is 17 intelligence agencies who said Russia interfered in the election. I think it is only three or four.’ Where does that number come from? Where does this three or four number come from. My suspicion, Chris and Poppy, is that if we go to the administration, and ask them for this question, I’m not sure we’re going to get an answer, and if we do, it will be off camera.”<sup>155</sup>

However, *Town Hall* reported the claim that 17 intelligence agencies worked on a comprehensive report regarding Russian activities during the election is “the myth that will not die.”<sup>156</sup> *The New York Times* has issued a correction to their reporting, saying, “A White House Memo article on Monday about President Trump’s deflections and denials about Russia referred incorrectly to the source of an intelligence assessment that said Russia orchestrated hacking attacks during last year’s

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<sup>149</sup> “Full Transcript: Sally Yates and James Clapper Testify on Russian Election Interference.”

<sup>150</sup> Shane, Scott. “What Intelligence Agencies Concluded about the Russian Attack on the U.S. Election.”

<sup>151</sup> Haberman, “Trump’s Deflections and Denials on Russia Frustrated Even His Allies.”

<sup>152</sup> Recode, “Full Interview: Hillary Clinton, Former U.S. Secretary of State | Code 2017.”

<sup>153</sup> Salama, “President Trump Appears to Dispute Russian Interference in 2016 Election.”

<sup>154</sup> “‘This Week’ Transcript 6-11-17: Preet Baharara, Jay Sekulow, Sen. Mike Lee, and Sen. Joe Manchin.”

<sup>155</sup> Hains, “CNN’s Acosta to Trump: ‘Fake News’ to Question ‘17 Intel Agencies’ Claim; NYT Correction Proves Trump Right.”

<sup>156</sup> Vespa, “The Myth that 17 Intelligence Agencies were Involved in Russian Interference Analysis Will Not Die.”

presidential election. The assessment was made by four intelligence agencies – the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Security Agency. The assessment was not approved by all 17 organizations in the American intelligence community.”<sup>157</sup> Likewise, *The Associated Press* issued the correction, “In stories published April 6, June 2, June 26 and June 29, The Associated Press reported that all 17 U.S. intelligence agencies have agreed that Russia tried to influence the 2016 election to benefit Donald Trump. That assessment was based on information collected by three agencies – the FBI, CIA and National Security Agency – and published by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, which represents all U.S. intelligence agencies. Not all 17 intelligence agencies were involved in reaching the assessment.”<sup>158</sup>

### **TRUMP WILL NOT CONFRONT VLADIMIR PUTIN ABOUT ELECTION MEDDLING DURING THE G20 SUMMIT**

For a week, CNN cited an anonymous source who said President Trump would not confront Russian President Vladimir Putin about election meddling during the upcoming G20 summit in Hamburg, Germany.<sup>159</sup> However, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who was present at the meeting, told reporters that President Trump opened the conversation with Putin by “raising the concerns of the American people regarding Russian interference in the 2016 election.”<sup>160</sup> Moreover, Tillerson said that President Trump “pressed” Putin on the matter “on more than one occasion.”<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Haberman, “Trump’s Deflections and Denials on Russia Frustrated Even His Allies.”

<sup>158</sup> Hains, “CNN’s Acosta to Trump: ‘Fake News’ to Question ‘17 Intel Agencies’ Claim; NYT Correction Proves Trump Right.”

<sup>159</sup> Wolking, Twitter Post, July 7, 2017, 4:36 PM.

<sup>160</sup> Easley, “Tillerson: Trump Pressed Putin on Election Interference.”

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

## 5. An Intolerant Xenophobe and Racist President

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According to a 2017 Harvard-Harris poll, two-thirds of voters believe there is a lot of fake news in the mainstream media.<sup>162</sup> Likewise, a 2018 Monmouth University poll found that nearly half of all Americans say traditional news media sources intentionally report fake news to further an agenda.<sup>163</sup>

One such agenda appears to be advancing the narrative that President Donald Trump is an intolerant xenophobe and racist. The day after Hillary Clinton conceded defeat, David Remnick, wrote in *The New Yorker*.<sup>164</sup>

“

The election of Donald Trump to the Presidency is nothing less than a tragedy for the American republic, a tragedy for the Constitution, and a triumph for the forces, at home and abroad, of nativism, authoritarianism, misogyny, and racism. Trump’s shocking victory, his ascension to the Presidency, is a sickening event in the history of the United States and liberal democracy. On January 20, 2017, we will bid farewell to the first African-American President—a man of integrity, dignity, and generous spirit—and witness the inauguration of a con who did little to spurn endorsement by forces of xenophobia and white supremacy. It is impossible to react to this moment with anything less than revulsion and profound anxiety.

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<sup>162</sup> Easley, “Poll: Majority Says Mainstream Media Publishes Fake News.”

<sup>163</sup> “‘Fake News’ Threat to Media; Editorial Decisions, Outside Actors at Fault.”

<sup>164</sup> Remnick, David. “An American Tragedy.”

Below are some examples of this narrative from notable news outlets:

### **TRUMP THREATENED TO INVADE MEXICO**

On February 1, 2017, *Yahoo News* published an *Associated Press* report, saying, “President Donald Trump threatened in a phone call with his Mexican counterpart to send U.S. troops to stop ‘bad hombres down there’ unless the Mexican military does more to control them, according to an excerpt of a transcript of the conversation obtained by The Associated Press. ... ‘You aren’t doing enough to stop them. I think your military is scared. Our military isn’t, so I just might send them down to take care of it.’”<sup>165</sup> This article was also published by *The Los Angeles Times*<sup>166</sup> and was tweeted by many journalists.<sup>167, 168, 169, 170</sup> Former speech writer for Barak Obama, Jon Favreau also tweeted, “I’m sorry, did our president just threaten to invade Mexico today?!”<sup>171</sup>

However, both the White House and the Mexican president denied that President Trump had any intentions of invading Mexico. According to a subsequent account by the *Los Angeles Times*, “The Mexican government on Wednesday vehemently denied reports that President Trump threatened to send American soldiers into Mexico during a phone call with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto. Such a threat ‘did not happen during that call,’ said a government statement released on Twitter Wednesday night. ‘I know it with absolute certainty, there was no threat,’ Peña Nieto spokesman Eduardo Sanchez said in a radio interview. ‘The things that have been said are nonsense and a downright lie.’”<sup>172</sup>

### **TRUMP CONSIDERS SENDING 100,000 NATIONAL GUARD TROOPS TO ARREST AND DEPORT ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS**

*The Associated Press* wrote, “The Trump administration considered a proposal to mobilize as many as 100,000 National Guard troops to round up unauthorized immigrants, including millions living nowhere near the Mexico border, according to a draft memo obtained by The Associated Press. ... the draft memo says participating troops would be authorized ‘to perform the functions of an immigration officer in relation to the investigation, apprehension and detention of aliens in the United States.’”<sup>173</sup> This story was also published in *The Los Angeles Times*,<sup>174</sup> *The Boston Globe*,<sup>175</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*,<sup>176</sup> and CBS News.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Salama, “Trump to Mexico: Take Care of ‘Bad Hombres’ or US Might.”

<sup>166</sup> “Trump Reportedly Threatens to Send U.S. Military to Mexico in Call with Mexican President.”

<sup>167</sup> Passantino, Twitter Post, February 1, 2017, 3:35 PM.

<sup>168</sup> Goldmacher, Twitter Post, February 1, 2017, 3:54 PM.

<sup>169</sup> Legum, Twitter Post, February 1, 2017, 5:21 PM.

<sup>170</sup> Zurcher, Twitter Post, February 1, 2017, 5:21 PM.

<sup>171</sup> Favreau, Twitter Post, February 1, 2017, 3:46 PM.

<sup>172</sup> Linthicum, “Mexican Government Says Trump Never Threatened to Send Troops to Mexico.”

<sup>173</sup> Burke, “AP Exclusive: DHS Weighted Nat Guard for Immigration Roundups.”

<sup>174</sup> Burke, “White House Denies Report Trump is Considering Using National Guard Troops for Immigration Roundups.”

<sup>175</sup> Burke, “Trump Reportedly Weighing Use of National Guard.”

<sup>176</sup> Burke, “Trump Administration Weighed Mobilizing National Guard for Immigration Roundups: Memo.”

<sup>177</sup> Burke, “AP: Trump Admin Considers Using 100,000 National Guard Troops for Immigration Raids.”

However, the Department of Homeland Security acting press secretary refuted this report, saying, “The Department is not considering mobilizing the National Guard.”<sup>178</sup> She also said the report’s claim that White House Chief of Staff John Kelly authored the memo is “absolutely incorrect.”<sup>179</sup>

*The Washington Examiner* notes that the draft memo “didn’t specifically suggest nationalizing the National Guard. The draft memo also never used the 100,000 figure cited by the AP”. Furthermore, “the word ‘deportation’ is never used in the memo”, and “there is nothing in the AP report indicating the president was ever aware of any such proposal.”<sup>180, 181</sup> Instead, senior political reporter at *The Washington Post* Aaron Blake tweeted that the draft memo was “a very early, pre-decisional draft that never made it to the Secretary”,<sup>182</sup> and Jamie Dupree adds that “it was never seriously considered.”<sup>183, 184</sup>

### ATTORNEY GENERAL JEFF SESSIONS CALLED ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS FILTH

*Politico* reporter Josh Dawsey took out of context a partial quote from a *Wall Street Journal* article<sup>185</sup> and tweeted that Attorney General Jeff Sessions had called illegal immigrants “filth.”<sup>186</sup> *The Washington Post* writer Daniel Drezner then tweeted, “Filth. He described illegal immigrants as ‘filth.’ Whatever your views on immigration that’s f\*cking embarrassing for a US official to say.”<sup>187</sup> Furthermore, *Daily Kos* writer Gabe Ortíz tweeted, “‘We take our stand against this filth’: Sessions speech goes full-on white nationalist.” Also, co-founder of *Vox* and senior political and economic correspondent Matthew Yglesias tweeted, “In other news, the Attorney General pledged to rid the nation of the “filth” of Latin American immigrants.”<sup>188</sup>

However, Jeff Sessions’ actual statement was, “It is here on this sliver of land, on this border, where we first take our stand.”<sup>189</sup> He never used the word “filth” in his speech, despite the fact that the transcript of his prepared remarks did use the word “filth;” although, the word was never intended to be used in relation to illegal immigrants, as the transcript makes evident:<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Woodruff, “Homeland Security on AP’s National Guard: ‘Absolutely Incorrect.’”

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Adams, “The AP Blew it Big Time on that National Guard Roundup Story.”

<sup>181</sup> Malor, Twitter Post, February 17, 2017, 9:19 AM.

<sup>182</sup> Blake, Twitter Post, February 17, 2017, 9:18 AM.

<sup>183</sup> Dupree, Twitter Post, February 17, 2017, 8:05 AM.

<sup>184</sup> Adams, “The AP Blew it Big Time on that National Guard Roundup Story.”

<sup>185</sup> Viswanatha, “Undocumented Immigrants who Commit Crimes Face Tougher Policy.”

<sup>186</sup> Dawsey, Twitter Post, April 11, 2017, 10:21 AM.

<sup>187</sup> Drezner, Twitter Post, April 11, 2017, 10:30 AM.

<sup>188</sup> Griswold, “Liberal Journalists Falsely Accuse Jeff Sessions of Calling Illegal Immigrants ‘Filth.’”

<sup>189</sup> Garcia, “Did Jeff Sessions Refer to Immigrants as ‘Filth’?”

<sup>190</sup> “Attorney General Jeff Sessions Delivers Remarks Announcing the Department of Justice’s Renewed Commitment to Criminal Immigration Enforcement.”

“ Here, under the Arizona sun, ranchers work the land to make an honest living, and law-abiding citizens seek to provide for their families.

But it is also here, along this border, that transnational gangs like MS-13 and international cartels flood our country with drugs and leave death and violence in their wake. And it is here that criminal aliens and the coyotes and the document-forgers seek to overthrow our system of lawful immigration.

Let’s stop here for a minute. When we talk about MS-13 and the cartels, what do we mean? We mean criminal organizations that turn cities and suburbs into warzones, that rape and kill innocent citizens and who profit by smuggling poison and other human beings across our borders. Depravity and violence are their calling cards, including brutal machete attacks and beheadings.

It is here, on this sliver of land, where we first take our stand against this filth.

Daniel Drezner later tweeted a correction, saying, “Reading Sessions’ prepared remarks I think I over-interpreted his language. Apologies for the quick Twitter trigger.” He also published an apology in *The Washington Post*, writing, “So, full stop, I was wrong, and I apologize to the attorney general for making this mistake. I wish I had caught the error in time to delete the tweet before it went viral. Alas, I did not. Deleting it now seems like I’d be trying to erase my mistake. I did respond with a follow-up tweet, but that is insufficient given all the attention this received.”<sup>191</sup>

## TRANSGENER SUICIDE RATES SPIKED AFTER THE ELECTION OF TRUMP

Transgender suicide rates were said to have spiked following the election of President Donald Trump. The rumor began with a Facebook post by Monica LaFlair who claimed to be in “a couple of Facebook groups for parents who have transgender children.”<sup>192</sup> *The Guardian* writer and *Out* magazine editor-at-large Zach Stafford then tweeted that “at least 8 trans youth have committed suicide in the wake of Trump’s win.”<sup>193</sup> Additionally, *Mic*,<sup>194</sup> *Pink News*,<sup>195</sup> and *BuzzFeed*<sup>196</sup> published stories on the subject, with *BuzzFeed* quoting Nick Adams, director of GLAAD’s Transgender Media Program, “There have been unconfirmed reports that some trans people died

<sup>191</sup> Drezner, “I was Wrong about Jeff Sessions.”

<sup>192</sup> “Monica LaFlair.”

<sup>193</sup> Brown, “Stop Sharing News that Trans Teen Suicides Spiked Post-Election—It’s Not Just Wrong, but Dangerous to LGBT Youth.”

<sup>194</sup> Rodriguez, “Trans Group Reports Suicide Post-Election; LGBTQ Hotline Calls Surge.”

<sup>195</sup> Preston, “Reports Claim ‘At Least 8’ Trans Youth Died by Suicide After Trump’s Win.”

<sup>196</sup> Ghorayshi, “After Trump Win, Suicide Hotlines Flooded with Calls.”

by suicide in the hours following the election, but at this point it is not possible to substantiate those rumors.”<sup>197</sup>

However, Elizabeth Brown investigated the 10 names on a list circulating social media titled “Transgender People Who Killed Themselves Due to Trump Being President.”<sup>198</sup> She reported in *Reason*.<sup>199</sup>

“

[I]n trying to confirm that any of the named people had committed suicide, or even existed, I’ve turned up nothing. Most of their names don’t exist in web search results outside of the numerous shares of this list. ... If the named people exist, they appear to have had no online presence prior to their suicides, even though several of them are described as being prominent activists. They had no Twitter profiles, or marriage records, or White Pages listings, or any of the normal online trails you might expect at least the adults to have. Nor was there any record of any of their existences in Nexis’ national databases for people, press releases, and news stories.

### **TRUMP REMOVED BUST OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. FROM OVAL OFFICE**

On January 20, 2017, *TIME* White House correspondent Zeke Miller wrote that President Trump had returned a bust of Winston Churchill to the Oval Office but had removed the bust of Martin Luther King Jr.<sup>200</sup> Being untrue, the article was corrected, and Miller e-mailed a correction to a large list of White House reporters, saying, “The MLK bust remains in the Oval Office in addition to the Churchill bust per a WH aide. It was apparently obscured by a door and an agent earlier. My sincerest apologies.”<sup>201</sup>

### **TRUMP SLIGHTED THE BLACK COMMUNITY BY BEING THE FIRST TO RENAME BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

President Donald Trump came under fire when he referred to Black History Month as National African-American History Month. In an article titled “Donald Trump: I’ve 86’d Black History Month. It’s Now African American History Month,” *TMZ* chided the president for believing the term “black” to be outdated, writing, “Every U.S. president since 1976 had designated February as

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Thebleupineapple, “Transgender People Who Killed Themselves Due to Trump Being President.”

<sup>199</sup> Brown, “Stop Sharing News that Trans Teen Suicides Spiked Post-Election—It’s Not Just Wrong, but Dangerous to LGBT Youth.”

<sup>200</sup> Miller, “Donald Trump Signed Order to Prepare for Repeal of Obamacare.”

<sup>201</sup> Gibbs, “Note to Our Readers.”

Black History Month”.<sup>202</sup> *BET* then repeated this claim in an article whose banner headline read, “‘Uhhh No Bi \* \* \*’ Donald Trump Changed #BHM to African-American History Month and there aren’t Enough Eye Roll Emojis to Accurately Respond ... but Seriously, what is Going On?”<sup>203</sup> However, *Snopes* reports that President Trump did not officially change the name but “issued a proclamation honoring February 2017 as ‘African-American History Month.’”<sup>204</sup> Also, Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama referred to Black History Month as African-American History Month in at least one of their yearly proclamations.<sup>205</sup> Furthermore, Presidents Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, and Ronald Reagan referred to it as National Afro-American (Black) History Month.<sup>206</sup>

## 6 MEMBERS OF THE PRESIDENT’S ADVISORY COMMISSION RESIGNED BECAUSE TRUMP IS A RACIST

Six members of the President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) resigned when President Trump was inaugurated, and 10 more resigned the next month, stating in a letter, “[W]e can no longer serve a President whose policies aim to create outcomes that are diametrically opposite to our principles, goals, and charge.”<sup>207, 208</sup> The reporting of these resignations insinuated that the president is so racist that, in a shocking turn of events, his advisory team was compelled to resign *en masse*.<sup>209, 210, 211</sup> *The Hill* published a misleading headline, implying that the AAPI members had been appointed by President Trump and concluded its report by writing, “Rep. Judy Chu (D-Calif.) said in a statement that the resignations ‘speak volumes about the depth of opposition to President Trump’s recent actions, especially in the Asian American and Pacific Islander community. ... Their bold and principled stand reminds us that we must continue to reject hateful and discriminatory policies and work to protect the civil rights of all Americans.’”<sup>212</sup>

However, White House press secretary Sean Spicer said during a press conference, “Those members of that council were political appointees of the Obama administration. Their terms were set to expire this year. So it’s not surprising in the sense that they were appointees of Barack Obama. They were going to have their terms expire. ... I don’t think it’s surprising that people who were appointed by Barack Obama to fulfill his agenda suddenly understand that there is a new administration in town and didn’t want to stay on board.”<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> “Donald Trump: I’ve 86’d Black History Month. It’s Now African American History Month.”

<sup>203</sup> “In a Press Release from the White House, the Trump Administration Took it Upon Themselves to Reclaim Black History Month as ‘African-American History Month.’”

<sup>204</sup> Evon, “Did President Trump Rename ‘Black History Month’ to ‘African-American History Month?’”

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> Lee, “10 Resign from President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.”

<sup>208</sup> “Letter to President Trump from 10 Members of the President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.”

<sup>209</sup> Lee, “10 Resign from President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.”

<sup>210</sup> Bellware, “Two-Thirds of the President’s Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Just Resigned.”

<sup>211</sup> Castillo, “16 Quit Commission for Asian American, Pacific Islanders Since Trump’s Election.”

<sup>212</sup> Savransky, “10 Members Resign from Trump Panel on Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders.”

<sup>213</sup> White House Daily Briefing Transcript.



## **TRUMP SIGNED AN EXECUTIVE ORDER BANNING MUSLIMS FROM ENTERING THE U.S.**

President Trump's executive order restricting travel from seven countries was widely reported to be a "Muslim ban."<sup>214, 215, 216</sup> However, the countries selected were based upon the Terrorist Travel Prevention Act<sup>217</sup> which was signed into law by President Barack Obama and later updated by him to include the seven countries listed in President Trump's executive order.<sup>218, 219</sup> According to the bill, these countries are considered to have "repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism".<sup>220</sup> Furthermore, White House press secretary Sean Spicer told ABC's "This Week," "There are 46 other countries that with Muslim populations that are not part of this. And I think that's an important thing to note. So whether you're talking about Algeria, Jordan, Kuwait, Oman or the UAE, there's 46 Muslim majority countries that are not in this seven."<sup>221</sup>

The executive order may have targeted predominantly Muslim countries, but it was neither intended to prevent Muslims from entering the country, nor did it constitute a ban on Muslims.<sup>222</sup> Instead, it was intended to prevent potential terrorists from entering the United States for 90 days by restricting travel—regardless of religious affiliation—from 7 of the 53 countries with predominantly Muslim populations.<sup>223</sup>

## **TRUMP'S TRAVEL BAN WAS BASED UPON WHICH COUNTRIES HE HAD BUSINESS TIES TO**

Following President Trump's executive order restricting travelers from Syria, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, and Libya, *The Washington Post* reported, "The seven nations targeted for new visitation restrictions by President Trump on Friday all have something in common: They are places he does not appear to have any business interests."<sup>224</sup> The article concludes with the words of Kamal Essaheb, director of policy and advocacy for the National Immigration Law Center, "To be blunt, we really don't know what to make of which motives are driving this president's decisions. ... From what we could tell from his campaign and his actions since he became president, what seems to be first and foremost on his mind is his own self-interest and an obsession with his brand."<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> King, "KING: What are Trump's True Motives with the Muslim Ban?"

<sup>215</sup> Lithwick, "Sneak Attack."

<sup>216</sup> Benen, "Defending His Muslim Ban, Trump Remains His Own Worst Enemy."

<sup>217</sup> "H.R. 158 - Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015."

<sup>218</sup> "'This Week' Transcript 1-29-17: Sean Spicer, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Robert Gates."

<sup>219</sup> Loffredo, "Trump Aides: More Nations May be Added to Immigration Ban."

<sup>220</sup> "H.R. 158 - Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015."

<sup>221</sup> "'This Week' Transcript 1-29-17: Sean Spicer, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Robert Gates."

<sup>222</sup> Kertscher, "Is Donald Trump's Executive Order a 'Muslim Ban'?"

<sup>223</sup> "'This Week' Transcript 1-29-17: Sean Spicer, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Robert Gates."

<sup>224</sup> Helderman, "Countries where Trump Does Business are Not Hit by New Travel Restrictions."

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

Similar insinuations were made through the reporting of news outlets such as CNN,<sup>226</sup> *Fortune*,<sup>227</sup> *Bloomberg*,<sup>228</sup> *Newsweek*,<sup>229</sup> and *NPR*,<sup>230</sup> with headlines such as: “Trump’s Muslim Ban is Harmful and Haphazard—but is It also Kleptocratic?” (*Slate*);<sup>231</sup> “President Trump’s Muslim Ban Excludes Countries Linked to His Sprawling Business Empire” (*New York Daily News*);<sup>232</sup> and “Who hasn’t Trump Banned? People from Places where He’s Done Business” (*The New York Times*).<sup>233</sup>

However, White House press secretary Sean Spicer told ABC’s “This Week” that these seven countries were selected based upon existing concerns, saying “[T]he Obama administration put these first and foremost and said that these countries need to have further travel restrictions based on the intelligence that we have.”<sup>234</sup> According to *The Hill*, “In February of 2016, the Obama Administration added Libya, Yemen, and Somalia to a list of ‘countries of concern,’ which placed some restrictions on Visa Waiver Program travel on those who had visited the countries after March 1, 2011. Iran, Syria, Iraq and Sudan were already on the list from the administration’s original law in 2015.”<sup>235</sup> President Trump used this Terrorist Travel Prevention Act as the starting point for his efforts to impose extensive travel restrictions on countries on concern.<sup>236</sup>

### **BANNON AND KELLY FOUGHT OVER WHETHER TRAVEL BAN WAIVERS SHOULD BE GIVEN TO GREEN CARD HOLDERS**

Following the president’s executive order restricting travel between seven countries, *The Washington Post* reported a dramatic confrontation between White House chief strategist Steve Bannon and Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly when Bannon urged Kelly not to issue travel waivers for green card holders.<sup>237, 238</sup> However, White House press secretary Sean Spicer told *The Huffington Post*, “It’s a patently false, made up story.”<sup>239</sup>

*The Washington Post* editorial page editor Fred Hiatt, acknowledged, “I think we got things wrong in this column,”<sup>240</sup> and admitted to not seeking a comment from the White House before publishing the story.<sup>241</sup> *The Post* updated their report with several corrections. Included in the revised article

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<sup>226</sup> Blaine, “How the Trump Administration Chose the 7 Countries in the Immigration Executive Order.”

<sup>227</sup> Hincks, “These Countries with Business Links to Trump aren’t Part of His Immigration Ban.”

<sup>228</sup> Melby, “Trump’s Immigration Ban Excludes Countries with Business Ties.”

<sup>229</sup> Moore, “What’s Behind Donald Trump’s Decision to Include Some Muslim-Majority Countries in the Travel Ban—and Not Others?”

<sup>230</sup> “Countries Listed on Trump’s Refugee Ban Don’t Include Those He has Business Ties with.”

<sup>231</sup> Voorhees, “Trump’s Muslim Ban is Harmful and Haphazard—but is It also Kleptocratic?”

<sup>232</sup> Sommerfeldt, “President Trump’s Muslim Ban Excludes Countries Linked to His Sprawling Business Empire.”

<sup>233</sup> Painter, “Who hasn’t Trump Banned? People from Places where He’s Done Business.”

<sup>234</sup> “‘This Week’ Transcript 1-29-17: Sean Spicer, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Robert Gates.”

<sup>235</sup> Shelbourne, “Spicer: Obama Administration Originally Flagged 7 Countries in Trump’s Order.”

<sup>236</sup> Loffredo, “Trump Aides: More Nations May be Added to Immigration Ban.”

<sup>237</sup> Rogin, “Inside the White House-Cabinet Battle Over Trump’s Immigration Order.”

<sup>238</sup> Calderone, “The Washington Post Walks Back Report of Steve Bannon ‘Confrontation.’”

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> Rogin, “Inside the White House-Cabinet Battle Over Trump’s Immigration Order.”

are Sean Spicer's denial that any meeting between Bannon and Kelly occurred on the reported date and Steve Bannon's denial of the confrontation in an e-mail.<sup>242</sup>

### **FIRST FEMALE MUSLIM-AMERICAN OLYMPIC MEDALIST WAS DETAINED BY TRUMP'S TRAVEL BAN**

Following President Trump's executive order restricting travel between seven predominantly Muslim countries, *PopSugar* interviewed the first female Muslim-American Olympic medalist, Ibtihaj Muhammad, on February 7, 2017. When asked, "Do you know anyone who was directly impacted by Trump's travel ban?" Muhammad answered, "Well, I personally was held at Customs for two hours just a few weeks ago. I don't know why. I can't tell you why it happened to me, but I know that I'm Muslim. I have an Arabic name. And even though I represent Team USA and I have that Olympic hardware, it doesn't change how you look and how people perceive you. Unfortunately, I know that people talk about this having a lot to do with these seven countries in particular, but I think the net is cast a little bit wider than we know. And I'm included in that as a Muslim woman who wears a hijab."<sup>243</sup>

This was widely reported.<sup>244, 245, 246, 247</sup> It produced headlines such as "Olympic Athlete Ibtihaj Muhammad was Detained because of President Trump's Travel Ban" (*Motto*),<sup>248, 249</sup> and "U.S. Olympian Ibtihaj Muhammad being Detained Illustrates Why Trump's Muslim Ban is Not Who We are as Americans" (*New York Daily News*).<sup>250</sup>

However, Muhammad was detained for less than an hour, and it occurred in December of 2016 according to both a customs official<sup>251</sup> and a corrective tweet by Muhammad.<sup>252</sup> Not only is this well before President Trump's January 27, 2017 executive order, it is also before President Trump was inaugurated. Ibtihaj Muhammad's detention occurred during President Barack Obama's administration and was the consequence of a random security check, according to a customs official who told *The Washington Examiner*, "She comes and goes many times. She travels quite

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Miller, "Muslim-American Olympian Ibtihaj Muhammad Says She was Recently Held at US Customs."

<sup>244</sup> Boren, "Olympic Medal Winner Says She was Detained by U.S. Customs."

<sup>245</sup> Worley, "US Olympic Fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad Says She was Detained by Customs for Being Muslim."

<sup>246</sup> Vladimirov, "Muslim-American Olympian Says She was Detained by Customs."

<sup>247</sup> Bryant, "'I was so Sad, Upset and Disheartened': American Muslim Fencer Who Won an Historic Olympic Bronze in Rio Reveals She was Left in TEARS after being Detained for Two Hours at a US Airport."

<sup>248</sup> "Olympic Athlete Ibtihaj Muhammad was Detained because of President Trump's Travel Ban."

<sup>249</sup> Adams, "More Mainstream Media Mess-Ups: The Muslim Olympian 'Detained because of President Trump's Travel Ban' was Detained Under Obama."

<sup>250</sup> Botte, "U.S. Olympian Ibtihaj Muhammad being Detained Illustrates Why Trump's Muslim Ban is Not Who We are as Americans."

<sup>251</sup> Adams, "More Mainstream Media Mess-Ups: The Muslim Olympian 'Detained because of President Trump's Travel Ban' was Detained Under Obama."

<sup>252</sup> Muhammad, Twitter Post, February 11, 2017, 12:56 PM.

extensively. She has never been stopped before. She wasn't targeted. The checks are totally random; random checks that we all might be subject to."<sup>253</sup>

### **WOMAN DIED BEFORE RETURNING HOME BECAUSE OF TRAVEL BAN**

FOX 2, a FOX affiliate station in Detroit, reported, "A local business owner who flew to Iraq to bring his mother back home to the US for medical treatment said she was blocked from returning home under President Trump's ban on immigration and travel from seven predominately Muslim nations. He said that while she was waiting for approval to fly home, she died from an illness."<sup>254</sup> This was widely tweeted and was republished in *The Huffington Post*<sup>255</sup> and the *Independent*.<sup>256</sup> However, FOX 2 later corrected this story, writing, "The leader of a mosque in Dearborn has confirmed to FOX 2 that a man who claimed his mother died in Iraq after being barred from returning to the United States under a ban instituted by President Trump this weekend, lied to FOX 2 about when her death occurred. ... The Imam said she passed away on the Monday, January 22, five days before President Trump instituted the travel ban."<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>253</sup> Adams, "More Mainstream Media Mess-Ups: The Muslim Olympian 'Detained because of President Trump's Travel Ban' was Detained Under Obama."

<sup>254</sup> Lange, "Detroit Family Caught in Iraq Travel Ban, Says Mom Died Waiting to Come Home."

<sup>255</sup> Visser, "Detroit Station: Man Who Blamed Mom's Death on Trump Lied about Date She Died (UPDATE)."

<sup>256</sup> Bulman, "Elderly Woman Dies After Trump's 'Muslim Ban' Stops Her Returning from Iraq for Medical Treatment."

<sup>257</sup> Lange, "Man Who Claimed Mom Died in Iraq after Trump's Travel Ban Lied, Imam Confirms."

## 6. Russian Collusion

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Nothing has encouraged “deliberately constructed lies, in the form of news articles, meant to mislead the public”<sup>258</sup> quite like the prospect of impeaching a sitting president for colluding with a foreign government to steal the presidential election. This is not to say that such collusion is unfounded, but the political stakes have proven to be too great for many to rely upon objective reporting of the known facts. Instead, tidbits of information and unverified rumors have repeatedly been strung together with inuendo and commentary from political pundits to craft news narratives that have repeatedly imploded given time and further information.

Suspicious of collusion between Russia and President Donald Trump have dominated the news cycle for the entirety of President Trump’s administration. Regardless of their motives, many journalists have failed to objectively report from a distance, choosing instead to pass judgment and sometimes even to generate the next story. Coverage of President Trump’s relationship with Russia has been fraught with misrepresentation, insinuation, and even fabrication. Below are some examples from notable news outlets.

### **MICHAEL FLYNN IS PREPARED TO TESTIFY THAT TRUMP DIRECTED HIM TO MAKE CONTACT WITH THE RUSSIANS**

At a time when the stock market was souring, ABC News caused a 350-point drop in the Dow<sup>259</sup> when Brian Ross reported, “Retired Lt. Gen Michael Flynn has promised ‘full cooperation’ in the special counsel’s Russia investigation and, according to a confidant, is prepared to testify that Donald Trump directed him to make contact with the Russians, initially as a way to work together to fight

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<sup>258</sup> Sullivan, “It’s Time to Retire the Tainted Term ‘Fake News.’”

<sup>259</sup> Egan, “Wall Street Rocked by Michael Flynn, Tax Debate.”

ISIS in Syria.”<sup>260</sup> The hosts of ABC’s “The View” later celebrated this report amid audience cheers.<sup>261, 262</sup>

This report came amid allegations that President Trump had colluded with the Russians to steal the presidential election; however, Brian Ross issued a “clarification” noting that the President’s instructions to Flynn were made after he had been elected president. This meant the president had done nothing illegal or even inappropriate. During an episode of “World News Tonight,” Ross said, “[A] clarification tonight on something one of Flynn’s confidants told us and we reported earlier today. He said the president had asked Flynn to contact Russia during the campaign. He’s now clarifying that saying, according to Flynn, candidate Trump asked him during the campaign to find ways to repair relations with Russia and other world hot spots. And then after the election, the president-elect asked him to contact Russia on issues including working together to fight ISIS.”<sup>263</sup>

According to CNN, “ABC’s decision to call its correction a ‘clarification’ prompted immediate criticism. ‘If we want to regain trust in the media, we need to admit our mistakes, especially when as consequential as this. Retract. Correct. Don’t use weasel words to describe it,’ Jonathan Swan of Axios tweeted.”<sup>264</sup> ABC News eventually replaced the wording “clarification” with “correction” and suspended Brian Ross for four weeks.<sup>265, 266, 267</sup>

### **PAUL MANAFORT’S NOTES INDICATE RUSSIA WAS DONATING TO THE REPUBLICAN NATIONAL COMMITTEE**

NBC News broke a story headlined “Manafort Notes from Russian Meet Contain Cryptic Reference to ‘Donations.’”<sup>268</sup> According to the article, former campaign manager Paul Manafort previously failed to disclose notes from a controversial Trump Tower meeting with the Russians during the 2016 campaign in which the word “donations” appears near a reference to the Republican National Committee.<sup>269</sup>

According to *The Daily Caller*, “NBC began walking back the ‘potential bombshell’ almost immediately, issuing a correction the same day noting that the word ‘donation’ didn’t actually appear in the notes, but quoting one source who said the word ‘donor’ was in the notes.”<sup>270</sup> However, *Politico* reports, “The notes do not contain the word ‘donor,’ as NBC News previously reported,” and, “Notes from former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort on a meeting he attended last

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<sup>260</sup> Ross, “Flynn Prepared to Testify that Trump Directed Him to Contact Russians about ISIS, Confidant Says.”

<sup>261</sup> Reason Report, “‘The View’ Hosts Cheer Trump Impeachment Russian Collusion Mueller News.”

<sup>262</sup> Hains, “‘The View’ Celebrates Report that Flynn Will Cooperate with Mueller: ‘Yay!’ ‘Lock Him Up!’”

<sup>263</sup> Darcy, “ABC News Corrects Bombshell Flynn Report.”

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>265</sup> ABC News. Twitter Post. December 1, 2017.

<sup>266</sup> Ross, “Flynn Prepared to Testify that Trump Directed Him to Contact Russians about ISIS, Confidant Says.”

<sup>267</sup> Wang, “ABC Suspends Reporter Brian Ross Over Erroneous Report about Trump.”

<sup>268</sup> Dilanian, “Manafort Notes from Russian Meet Contain Cryptic Reference to ‘Donations.’”

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> Hasson, “Yet Another Anonymously Sourced Trump-Russia Story Falls Apart.”

year with a Russian lobbyist and Donald Trump Jr. are not seen as damaging to the Trump family or campaign officials, according to government officials and others who have looked at the notes.<sup>271</sup>

### **FBI DIRECTOR JAMES COMEY WILL REFUTE TRUMP'S CLAIM THAT HE TOLD TRUMP HE WASN'T UNDER INVESTIGATION**

On June 6, CNN published an article titled "Comey Expected to Refute Trump." Authored by anchor Jake Tapper, chief political analyst Gloria Borger, executive editor Eric Lichtblau, and politics producer Brian Rokus, the article stated, "Trump has made a blanket claim that Comey told him multiple times that he was not under investigation. But one source said Comey is expected to explain to senators that those were much more nuanced conversations from which Trump concluded that he was not under investigation."<sup>272</sup> Gloria Borger later reiterated this claim in an appearance on CNN, saying "Comey is going to dispute the president on this point if he's asked about it by senators, and we have to assume that he will be. He will say he never assured Donald Trump that he was not under investigation, that that would have been improper for him to do so."<sup>273</sup>

However, James Comey's opening statement was released to the press the next day. It contradicted CNN's claims, reading in part, "[P]rior to the January 6 meeting, I discussed with the FBI's leadership team whether I should be prepared to assure President-Elect Trump that we were not investigating him personally. That was true; we did not have an open counter-intelligence case on him. We agreed I should do so if circumstances warranted. During our one-on-one meeting at Trump Tower, based on President Elect Trump's reaction to the briefing and without him directly asking the question, I offered that assurance."<sup>274</sup>

After receiving Comey's prepared statement, CNN changed its original report. The title was changed to read "Comey Unlikely to Judge on Obstruction," and a notice was included, reading, "CORRECTION AND UPDATE: This article was published before Comey released his prepared opening statement. The article and headline have been corrected to reflect that Comey does not directly dispute that Trump was told multiple times he was not under investigation in his prepared testimony released after this story was published."<sup>275</sup>

### **TRUMP FIRED FBI DIRECTOR JAMES COMEY BECAUSE HE ASKED FOR MORE RESOURCES FOR THE RUSSIA INVESTIGATION**

It was widely reported that F.B.I. Director James Comey had asked the Justice Department for "more prosecutors and other personnel to accelerate the bureau's investigation" into Russian interference in the presidential election and Russian ties to President Trump's presidential

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<sup>271</sup> Dawsey, "Notes from Meeting with Russians Said Not to be Damaging to Trump Family."

<sup>272</sup> Durden, "CNN Corrects 'Fake News' Story on Comey-Trump."

<sup>273</sup> Concha, "CNN Issues Correction after Comey Statement Contradicts Reporting."

<sup>274</sup> Comey, "READ: James Comey's Prepared Testimony."

<sup>275</sup> Borger, "Comey Unlikely to Judge on Obstruction."

campaign.<sup>276, 277</sup> This was reported by media outlets such as *The New York Times*,<sup>278</sup> CNN,<sup>279</sup> *The Washington Post*,<sup>280</sup> *Reuters*,<sup>281</sup> NBC News,<sup>282</sup> CBNBC,<sup>283</sup> CBS News,<sup>284</sup> ABC News,<sup>285</sup> FOX News,<sup>286</sup> *Vox*,<sup>287</sup> *Politico*,<sup>288</sup> *The Hill*,<sup>289</sup> *ThinkProgress*,<sup>290</sup> *Business Insider*,<sup>291</sup> *The Chicago Tribune*,<sup>292</sup> and the *Los Angeles Times*,<sup>293</sup> fueling speculation that President Trump may have fired James Comey to prevent him from discovering evidence of his collusion with Russia. *Vox* reported, “The New York Times report doesn’t prove that putting an end to the talk about Russia was definitely Trump’s motive. But the report is *very* suggestive.”<sup>294</sup>

However, these reports were entirely based upon anonymous sources. Department of Justice spokesman Ian Prior said the report was “totally false,”<sup>295</sup> and acting FBI Director Andrew McCabe told the Senate Intelligence Committee while under oath, “I believe we have the adequate resources to do it and I know that we have resourced that investigation adequately.”<sup>296</sup> He also said he was not aware of any request for more resources.<sup>297</sup>

### **TRUMP IS EASING OBAMA SANCTIONS TO ALLOW COMPANIES TO DO BUSINESS WITH RUSSIA’S FSB**

Amid allegations that President Donald Trump had colluded with the Russians to steal the presidential election, NBC News national correspondent Peter Alexander tweeted, “BREAKING: US Treasury Dept easing Obama admin sanctions to allow companies to do transactions with Russia’s FSB, successor org to KGB.”<sup>298</sup> However, this change was planned under the Obama

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<sup>276</sup> Rosenberg, “Days Before Firing, Comey Asked for More Resources for Russian Inquiry.”

<sup>277</sup> Murray, “Sources: James Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Investigation.”

<sup>278</sup> Rosenberg, “Days Before Firing, Comey Asked for More Resources for Russian Inquiry.”

<sup>279</sup> Murray, “Sources: James Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Investigation.”

<sup>280</sup> Parker, “Comey Sought More Resource for Russia Probe Days before He was Fired by President Trump, Officials Say.”

<sup>281</sup> Volz, “Comey had Pushed for More Resources for Russia Probe before Being Fired by Trump: Source.”

<sup>282</sup> Winter, “Comey Asked for More Prosecutor Resources for Russia Probe.”

<sup>283</sup> Wang, “Comey Reportedly Asked for More Resources for Russia Probe; DOJ Calls Reports ‘Totally False.’”

<sup>284</sup> Shabad, “James Comey Asked DOJ for More Resources for Russia Investigation.”

<sup>285</sup> Kutsch, “Comey Asked for More Money, Staffing for Russia Investigation Days before Firing.”

<sup>286</sup> “Comey Wanted More Resources for Russia Probe, Sources Say.”

<sup>287</sup> Lopez, “Report: James Comey Asked for More Resources to Investigate Trump-Russia Ties. Then He Was Fired.”

<sup>288</sup> Karni, “Sources: Comey Told Lawmakers He Wanted More Resources for Russia Probe.”

<sup>289</sup> Savransky, “Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Probe before Firing: Reports.”

<sup>290</sup> Peck, “Comey Asked for More Funds to Support the FBI’s Russia Investigation. Days Later, He was Fired.”

<sup>291</sup> Sheth, “Comey Reportedly Asked the Justice Department for More Resources for the Trump-Russia Probe Days before He was Fired.”

<sup>292</sup> Pace, “Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Investigation in Days before Firing, Officials Say.”

<sup>293</sup> Tanfani, “Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Investigation before He was Fired, Officials Say.”

<sup>294</sup> Lopez, “Report: James Comey Asked for More Resources to Investigate Trump-Russia Ties. Then He Was Fired.”

<sup>295</sup> Cohen, “Justice Department: Report that Comey Asked for More Money for Russia Probe is ‘Totally False.’”

<sup>296</sup> “FBI Has Sufficient Resources for Russia Investigation: McCabe.”

<sup>297</sup> Ibid.

<sup>298</sup> Alexander, Twitter Post, February 2, 2017, 9:13 AM.



administration, as Peter Alexander later tweeted, “NEW: Source familiar w sanctions says it’s a technical fix, planned under Obama, to avoid unintended consequences of cybersanctions.”<sup>299</sup> Nevertheless, reporters levied responsibility against President Trump with the headlines: “Trump Administration Modifies Sanctions Against Russian Intelligence Service” (CNBC);<sup>300</sup> “Trump Administration Relaxes U.S. Sanctions on Russia Imposed Under Obama” (CBS News);<sup>301</sup> and “Trump Administration Tweaks Sanctions Against Russia” *New York Daily News*.<sup>302</sup> *The Chicago Tribune* later reported that this story turned out to be a “nothing-burger.”<sup>303</sup>

## MUELLER SUBPOENAS TRUMP’S DEUTSCHE BANK RECORDS

*Bloomberg* reported that special investigator Robert Mueller had “zeroed in” on President Trump by subpoenaing Deutsche Bank for records related to President Trump and his family.<sup>304, 305</sup> *The Wall Street Journal* reported similarly. However, President Trump’s lawyer responded to the reports in an e-mail, writing, “We have confirmed that the news reports that the Special Counsel had subpoenaed financial records relating to the president are false. No subpoena has been issued or received. We have confirmed this with the bank and other sources.”<sup>306</sup> *Bloomberg* and *The Wall Street Journal* both issued corrections noting that the subpoenaed records instead pertain to people affiliated with President Trump.<sup>307, 308</sup>

## ATTORNEY GENERAL JEFF SESSIONS DID NOT DISCLOSE HIS MEETINGS WITH RUSSIAN OFFICIALS ON HIS SECURITY CLEARANCE FORM

CNN broke the story that when applying for his security clearance, Attorney General Jeff Sessions did not disclose his meetings with Russian officials.<sup>309</sup> This was then widely reported by other media outlets.<sup>310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315</sup> CNN presented this as further evidence of collusion between Russia and the Trump team, writing, “The new information from the Justice Department is the latest example of Sessions failing to disclose contacts he had with Russian officials. He has come under withering criticism from Democrats following revelations that he did not disclose the same contacts with Kislyak during his Senate confirmation hearings earlier this year.”<sup>316</sup> Likewise, ABC News embedded

<sup>299</sup> Alexander, Peter. Twitter Post. February 2, 2017, 9:54 AM.

<sup>300</sup> Pramuk, “Trump Administration Modifies Sanctions Against Russian Intelligence Service.”

<sup>301</sup> Shabad, “Trump Administration Relaxes U.S. Sanctions on Russia Imposed Under Obama.”

<sup>302</sup> Joseph, “Trump Administration Tweaks Sanctions Against Russia.”

<sup>303</sup> “How a Tweak Became a Tempest: Trump, Russia and Sanctions.”

<sup>304</sup> Arons, “Deutsche Bank Records Said to be Subpoenaed by Mueller.”

<sup>305</sup> Strasburg, “Mueller Subpoenas Deutsche Bank Records Related to Trump.”

<sup>306</sup> Arons, “Deutsche Bank Records Said to be Subpoenaed by Mueller.”

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>308</sup> Strasburg, “Mueller Subpoenas Deutsche Bank Records Related to Trump.”

<sup>309</sup> Raju, “First on CNN: AG Sessions did Not Disclose Russia Meetings in Security Clearance Form, DOJ Says.”

<sup>310</sup> Levine, “Sessions did not Disclose Meetings with Russian Ambassador on Security Clearance Forms.”

<sup>311</sup> Levine, “Jeff Sessions Reportedly Failed to List Russian Ambassador Meetings on Security Form.”

<sup>312</sup> Koerner, “Attorney General Jeff Sessions did Not Disclose Russia Meetings on Security Clearance Form.”

<sup>313</sup> “Sessions Failed to Disclose Meetings with Russian Envoy on Security Clearance Form.”

<sup>314</sup> Gerstein, “Sessions’ Background Check Form Omitted Meetings with Russian.”

<sup>315</sup> Horwitz, “Sessions Didn’t Disclose Meetings with Russian Officials on Security Clearance Form.”

<sup>316</sup> Raju, “First on CNN: AG Sessions did Not Disclose Russia Meetings in Security Clearance Form, DOJ Says.”

a video into the article page featuring a “World News Tonight” report by David Muir who said, “*The New York Times* just now reporting that American spies learned last summer that Russian officials were discussing how to influence Donald Trump through his advisors.”<sup>317, 318</sup>

However, Department of Justice (DOJ) spokesman Ian Prior had previously said, “As a United States Senator, the Attorney General met hundreds – if not thousands – of foreign dignitaries and their staff. In filling out the SF-86 form, the Attorney General’s staff consulted with those familiar with the process, as well as the FBI investigator handling the background check, and was instructed not to list meetings with foreign dignitaries and their staff connected with his Senate activities.”<sup>319</sup> Nevertheless, CNN presented a legal expert who refuted the DOJ’s explanation, saying, “My interpretation is that a member of Congress would still have to reveal the appropriate foreign government contacts notwithstanding it was official business.”<sup>320</sup>

Aside from the fact that this “Russian official” was the Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak whom Sessions met in his role as a U.S. Congressman,<sup>321</sup> a subsequent CNN report reveals that Jeff Sessions was correct in his explanation and that he was not attempting to hide his dealings with the Russians. An FBI e-mail reveals that Sessions was told that “he was not required to list foreign government contacts while in official government business unless he developed personal relationships from such contacts.”<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> Levine, “Sessions did not Disclose Meetings with Russian Ambassador on Security Clearance Forms.”

<sup>318</sup> “New Intelligence Information on the Russia Investigation.”

<sup>319</sup> Raju, “First on CNN: AG Sessions did Not Disclose Russia Meetings in Security Clearance Form, DOJ Says.”

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

<sup>322</sup> Perez, “FBI Email: Sessions Wasn’t Required to Disclose Foreign Contacts for Security Clearance.”

## 7. An Inept and Corrupt President

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A common narrative propagated by the news media has been the notion that President Trump is too inept and corrupt to serve as president. *Newsweek* writes, “[A]ccording to the presidential historian Robert Dallek, no American leader has acted with more unadulterated self-interest as Trump. Dallek says that in terms of outright corruption, Trump is worse than both Ulysses S. Grant and Warren G. Harding, presidents who oversaw the most flagrant instances of graft in American political history.”<sup>323</sup>

Articles and comments berating the president’s intelligence, temperament, and ethics have become a regular feature in the media’s reporting. For example, *Quartz* featured an article listing 19 separate insults supposedly levied against President Trump by his close confidants, and it referred to Trump as an idiot seven times.<sup>324</sup> Likewise, David Remnick writes in *The New Yorker*, “That the electorate has, in its plurality, decided to live in Trump’s world of vanity, hate, arrogance, untruth, and recklessness, his disdain for democratic norms, is a fact that will lead, inevitably, to all manner of national decline and suffering.”<sup>325</sup> Below are some additional examples from notable news outlets:

### **TRUMP ASKS JAPAN TO BUILD CARS IN THE U.S. WHEN IT ALREADY DOES**

During President Trump’s visit to Japan, *Slate* ran an article titled “Trump Begg Japanese Automakers to Build Their Cars in America, which They Already Do,” in which they wrote:<sup>326</sup>

Donald Trump is apparently using his trip to Tokyo as yet another opportunity to whine

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<sup>323</sup> Nazaryan, “Trump in Leading the Most Corrupt Administration in U.S. History, One of First-Class Kleptocrats.”

<sup>324</sup> Merelli, Annalisa and Max de Haldevang. “All the Ways Trump’s Closest Confidants Insult His Intelligence.”

<sup>325</sup> Remnick, “An American Tragedy.”

<sup>326</sup> Weissmann, “Trump Begg Japanese Automakers to Build Their Cars in America, which They Already Do.”

“ Donald Trump is apparently using his trip to Tokyo as yet another opportunity to whine about the U.S. trade deficit while raising questions about his familiarity with basic facts about the American economy.

According to Bloomberg, the president of the United States started begging Japan’s car companies to consider making their vehicles on American shores—something they’ve been doing since the 1980s. “Try building your cars in the United States instead of shipping them over. That’s not too much to ask,” Trump said. “Is that rude to ask?”

CNN fact-checked this, declaring, “Trump asks Japan to build cars in the U.S. It already does.” The article quotes professor Stephen Nagy as saying, “Many Japanese cars are made in the U.S. already and this request is not reflective of today’s reality.”<sup>327</sup> However, CNN has subsequently published a correction, saying, “The original version of this article and its headline did not make clear that President Trump had praised Japanese automakers for expanding existing U.S. facilities and for making new investments in the U.S. The article and headline have been updated.”<sup>328</sup>

The context of President Trump’s statement makes it clear that the president was neither begging for Japan to build cars in the United States, nor ignorant of Japan’s U.S. manufacturing plants:<sup>329</sup>

“ When you want to build your auto plants, you will have your approvals almost immediately. When you want to expand your plants, you will have your approvals almost immediately. **And in the room, we have a couple of the great folks from two of the biggest auto companies in the world that are building new plants and doing expansions of other plants.** And you know who you are, and I want to just thank you very much. I want to thank you.

**I also want to recognize the business leaders in the room whose confidence in the United States — they've been creating jobs — you have such confidence in the United States, and you've been creating jobs for our country for a long, long time. Several Japanese automobile industry firms have been really doing a job.** And we love it when you build cars — if you're a Japanese firm, we love it — try building your cars in the United States instead of shipping them over. Is that possible to ask? That's not rude. Is that rude? I

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<sup>327</sup> Shane, “Trump Wants Japan to Build More Cars in the U.S.”

<sup>328</sup> Ibid.

<sup>329</sup> Blake, “Stop Cherry-Picking that Trump Quote about Japanese Cars. It’s Not What You Think.”

Don't think so. (Laughter.) If you could build them. But I must say, Toyota and Mazda – where are you? Are you here, anybody? Toyota? Mazda? I thought so. Oh, I thought that was you. That's big stuff. Congratulations. Come on, let me shake your hand. (Applause.) They're going to invest \$1.6 billion in building a new manufacturing plant, which will create as many as 4,000 new jobs in the United States. Thank you very much. Appreciate it (*emphasis in original*).

## TRUMP OFFENDS JAPANESE BY OVERFEEDING FISH

While visiting Japan, President Trump followed Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's lead in feeding fish. Having matched the prime minister nearly spoonful for spoonful, the president emptied the remaining fish food into the pond after the prime minister dumped his box.<sup>330</sup> Nevertheless, major media reporters chose to convey that the president had made a major cultural *faux pas*.<sup>331, 332</sup>

In a *New York Magazine* article titled "Trump Under Fire for Improper Fish-Feeding Technique," Margaret Hartmann wrote, "Trump became the latest U.S. president to display poor etiquette in Japan on Monday, when feeding the koi carp of Akasaka Palace with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. It is traditional for world leaders to stop and view the fish, and Trump was given a bowl of fish food and invited to join Abe in delicately spooning pellets to the fish. Eventually, Trump lost patience and dumped out the rest of his bowl, making Secretary of State Rex Tillerson chuckle."<sup>333</sup> Likewise, CNN reported "Trump Feeds Fish, Winds Up Pouring Entire Box of Food into Koi Pond" and included an edited video that only showed President Trump emptying his box of fish food.<sup>334</sup>

## TRUMP MAY TRY TO SUPPRESS A REPORT ON CLIMATE CHANGE

*The New York Times* suggested that President Trump may prevent a report titled the "National Climate Assessment" from becoming publicly available because the administration disagrees with the report's conclusions. They wrote, "Scientists say they fear that the Trump administration could change or suppress the report. But those who challenge scientific data on human-caused climate change say they are equally worried that the draft report, as well as the larger National Climate Assessment, will be publicly released."<sup>335</sup> *The Times* even indicated that they were the first to make the public aware of the report. However, a correction was later issued because the report had been publicly available for more than half a year before the article was published.<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>330</sup> Associated Press, "Trump, Abe Dump Fish Food in Tokyo Carp Pool."

<sup>331</sup> Concha, "Media Shows Why it's so Mistrusted After Falsified Trump Fish-Feeding 'Story.'"

<sup>332</sup> Flood, "Anti-Trump Media Makes up Fake Story about Overfeeding Fish at Japanese Koi Pond."

<sup>333</sup> Hartmann, "Trump Under Fire for Improper Fish-Feeding Technique."

<sup>334</sup> Rocha, "Trump Feeds Fish, Winds up Pour Entire Box of Food into Koi Pond."

<sup>335</sup> Friedman, "Scientists Fear Trump will Dismiss Blunt Climate Report."

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid*.

## TRUMP PLACED A GAG ORDER ON FEDERAL AGENCIES, INCLUDING THE EPA

Following President Trump's inauguration, news outlets reported that President Trump had placed a gag order on agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency<sup>337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344</sup> with headlines such as: "Make America Gagged Again" (*Slate*);<sup>345</sup> "Trump Administration Orders Media Blackout at EPA" (*Los Angeles Times*);<sup>346</sup> "Trump Administration Seeks to Muzzle U.S. Agency Employees" (*Reuters*);<sup>347</sup> "EPA Gag Order: Why Donald Trump's Media Blackout is a Threat to the Agency's Core Values" (*Mic*);<sup>348</sup> and "House Dems: Trump's Federal 'Gag Orders' Likely Illegal" (*The Hill*).<sup>349</sup>

CNN reported, "EPA employees have also been instructed not to release press releases, publish blog posts or post anything on social media. It's part of a crackdown by the new administration that seems to be especially felt at the EPA and the Interior Department, leaving some employees 'terrified.'"<sup>350</sup> Furthermore, WXYZ Detroit reporter Kacie Hollins tweeted, "This is a very, very big deal";<sup>351</sup> CBC radio host Raina Douris tweeted "this is incredibly, incredibly dangerous and irresponsible";<sup>352</sup> and WBAL-TV investigative reporter Jayne Miller tweeted, "Transparency is being shut down."<sup>353</sup>

However, *The New York Times* reports, "Longtime employees at three of the agencies ... said such orders were not much different from those delivered by the Obama administration as it shifted policies from the departing White House of George W. Bush. They called reactions to the agency memos overblown."<sup>354</sup>

White House press secretary Sean Spicer denied any specific directive from the president, saying, "There's nothing that comes from the White House."<sup>355</sup> Instead, *Science Magazine* reports, "[A] senior ARS official tells *Science Insider* that it was a poorly worded effort by career officials—not anyone appointed by Trump—to remind employees of a longstanding U.S. Department of

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<sup>337</sup> Biesecker, "Trump Admin Orders EPA Contract Freeze and Media Blackout."

<sup>338</sup> King, "EPA 'Pause' on Public Communications Fuels Wider Alarm about Openness."

<sup>339</sup> Dennis, "Trump Administration Tells EPA to Freeze All Grants, Contracts."

<sup>340</sup> "Trump Admin Institutes Media Blackout for EPA, Suspends Social Media Activity."

<sup>341</sup> Restuccia, "Information Lockdown Hits Trump's Federal Agencies."

<sup>342</sup> Sheppard, "EPA Freezes Grants, Tells Employees Not to Talk about It, Sources Say."

<sup>343</sup> "Trump Admin Orders EPA Media Blackout and Contract Freeze."

<sup>344</sup> Lartey, "Trump Bans Agencies from 'Providing Updates on Social Media or to Reporters.'"

<sup>345</sup> Plait, "Make America Gagged Again."

<sup>346</sup> "Trump Administration Orders Media Blackout at EPA," *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>347</sup> Volcovici, "Trump Administration Seeks to Muzzle U.S. Agency Employees."

<sup>348</sup> Solis, "EPA Gag Order: Why Donald Trump's Media Blackout is a Threat to the Agency's Core Values."

<sup>349</sup> Cama, "House Dems: Trump's Federal 'Gag Orders' Likely Illegal."

<sup>350</sup> Marsh, "Trump Administration Reviewing EPA Website, Curbs Agency Communication."

<sup>351</sup> Hollins, Twitter Post, January 24, 2017, 11:04 AM.

<sup>352</sup> Douris, Twitter Post, January 24, 2017, 1:28 PM.

<sup>353</sup> Miller, Twitter Post, January 24, 2017, 12:14 PM.

<sup>354</sup> Davenport, "Federal Agencies Told to Halt External Communications."

<sup>355</sup> Marsh, "Trump Administration Reviewing EPA Website, Curbs Agency Communication."

Agriculture (USDA) policy on clearing statements that have policy relevance with senior officials before releasing them.”<sup>356</sup> Likewise, *The New York Times* reports, “I’ve lived through many transitions, and I don’t think this is a story,” said a senior E.P.A. career official ... “I don’t think it’s fair to call it a gag order. This is standard practice.”<sup>357</sup> And director of communications for the USDA’s Agricultural Research Service Christopher Bentley told *Scientific American*, “What happened yesterday was a misunderstanding.”<sup>358</sup>

### **TRUMP PURGED ALL MENTION OF CLIMATE CHANGE FROM THE WHITE HOUSE WEBSITE**

*The New York Times* published an article titled “With Trump in Charge, Climate Change References Purged from Website.” According to the article, “Within moments of the inauguration of President Trump, the official White House website on Friday deleted nearly all mentions of climate change. The one exception: Mr. Trump’s vow to eliminate the Obama administration’s climate change policies, which previously had a prominent and detailed web page on whitehouse.gov.”<sup>359</sup>

However, with the change of presidency, comes a full digital turnover of the website WhiteHouse.gov. This is standard routine. As such, there was no targeted purge.

### **TRUMP REQUEST SECURITY CLEARANCES FOR HIS CHILDREN**

CBS News reported, “The Trump team has asked the White House to explore the possibility of getting his children the top-secret security clearances. Logistically, the children would need to be designated by the current White House as national security advisers to their father to receive top secret clearances. However, once Mr. Trump becomes president, he would be able to put in the request himself.”<sup>360</sup> This was widely reported, including NBC News<sup>361</sup> and Rachel Maddow on MSNBC.<sup>362</sup> *Salon* even ran the headline, “Donald Trump’s Trying to Give His Kids Top Secret Security Clearance, Making Sure His Conflicts of Interest are Extra Bold.”<sup>363</sup> However, *USA Today* reported, “Despite reports suggesting the contrary, a transition team official says Donald Trump did not request or begin paperwork to have his children gain top-level security clearance, according to a pool report.”<sup>364</sup>

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<sup>356</sup> Mervis, “Firestorm Over Supposed Gag Order on USDA Scientists was Self-Inflicted Wound, Agency Says.”

<sup>357</sup> Davenport, “Federal Agencies Told to Halt External Communications.”

<sup>358</sup> Maron, “USDA Calls Scientist Gag Order a ‘Misunderstanding.’”

<sup>359</sup> Davenport, “With Trump in Charge, Climate Change References Purged from Website.”

<sup>360</sup> Goldman, “Trump Team Seeks Top-Secret Security Clearances for Trump’s Children.”

<sup>361</sup> Mitchell, “Donald Trump Requests Security Clearance for Son-in-Law Jared Kushner.”

<sup>362</sup> “Trump Queries about Top Secret Security Clearance for His Kids.”

<sup>363</sup> Maloy, “Donald Trump’s Trying to Give His Kids Top Secret Security Clearance, Making Sure His Conflicts of Interest are Extra Bold.”

<sup>364</sup> Ventura, “Trump Didn’t Request Top Secret Clearance for Kids: Official.”

## **TRUMP SAYS HE IS THE ONLY PRESIDENT TO CALL THE FAMILIES OF FALLEN SOLDIERS**

When questioned during a press conference about fallen soldiers in Niger, President Trump compared his choice to call the families of fallen soldiers to the actions of former presidents, saying, “The traditional way, if you look at President Obama and other presidents, most of them didn’t make calls. A lot of them didn’t make calls. I like to call when it’s appropriate, when I think I am able to do it.”<sup>365</sup> When pressed by reporters, President Trump almost immediately added, “President Obama I think probably did sometimes, and maybe sometimes he didn’t. I don’t know. That’s what I was told. Other presidents did not call. They’d write letters. And some presidents didn’t do anything.”<sup>366</sup>

These comments were based upon advice he received from former general John Kelly, President Trump’s chief of staff. In a subsequent press conference, John Kelly recounted the advice he gave the president, saying, “He asked me about previous presidents. And I said, ‘I can tell you that President Obama—who was my Commander-in-Chief when I was on active duty—ah did not call my family. That was not a criticism. That was just to simply say, ‘I don’t believe President Obama called.’ That’s not a negative thing. Ah, I don’t believe President Bush called in all cases. Um, I don’t believe any president—particularly when the casualty rates are very, very high—that presidents call. But I believe they all write.”<sup>367</sup>

Media outlets opted to report the president’s comments as a claim to be the only president to make phone calls to the families of fallen soldiers. *The Associated Press*, reported, “Trump started the storm this week when he claimed that he alone of U.S. presidents had called the families of all slain soldiers.”<sup>368</sup>

## **FIRST LADY OF POLAND REFUSED TO SHAKE TRUMP’S HAND**

When meeting the president of Poland, President Trump stuck out his hand to greet the First Lady of Poland. She chose to first shake Melania’s hand and then firmly shook President Trump’s hand. However, it was widely reported that she refused to shake the president’s hand.<sup>369, 370, 371, 372</sup> *Newsweek* published the headline “Watch Donald Trump Handshake Rejected by Polish First Lady in Hilariously Awkward Exchange,”<sup>373</sup> and *Vanity Fair’s* headline read “The First Lady of Poland Smoothly Avoided Shaking Donald Trump’s Hand.”<sup>374</sup> This led Polish President Andrzej Duda to

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<sup>365</sup> “Trump: Obama Didn’t ‘Often’ Call Families of Fallen Soldiers.”

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>367</sup> ABC News, “White House press briefing: Chief of Staff John Kelly on how military deals with soldier’s death.”

<sup>368</sup> Lemire, “Under Fire, Trump Defends Call to Soldier’s Grieving Family.”

<sup>369</sup> “Poland’s First Lady Ignored the Hell Out of Trump’s Handshake.”

<sup>370</sup> “Polish First Lady Passes Over Trump’s Handshake.”

<sup>371</sup> Kircher, “Poland’s First Lady Expertly Curves a Handshake from Trump.”

<sup>372</sup> Gerretsen, “Donald Trump Tried to Shake the Hand of Poland’s First Lady but She was Having None of It.”

<sup>373</sup> Riotta, “Watch Donald Trump Handshake Rejected by Polish First Lady in Hilariously Awkward Exchange.”

<sup>374</sup> Weaver, “The First Lady of Poland Smoothly Avoided Shaking Donald Trump’s Hand [Updated].”



tweet, “Contrary to some surprising reports my wife did shake hands with Mrs. And Mr. Trump @POTUS after a great visit. Let’s FIGHT FAKE NEWS.”<sup>375</sup>

## TRUMP AND JAPANESE PRIME MINISTER DISCUSSED NATIONAL SECURITY IN PUBLIC AT MAR-A-LAGO

*The Washington Post* reported that President Trump and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe discussed “a national security problem in the open air” at the Mar-a-Lago Club.<sup>376</sup> According to CNN, who first described the scene, “As Mar-a-Lago’s wealthy members looked on from their tables, and with a keyboard player crooning in the background, Trump and Abe’s evening meal quickly morphed into a strategy session, the decision-making on full view to fellow diners, who described it in detail to CNN.”<sup>377</sup> Likewise, *The New York Times* reported, “It was a remarkable display on Mr. Trump’s part of a lack of concern for prying eyes and security awareness.”<sup>378</sup>

Headlines read: “Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago Club has a New Feature: Watch the President Discuss Top Secret Security Issues!” (*Salon*);<sup>379</sup> “Missile Crisis by Candlelight: Donald Trump’s Use of Mar-a-Lago Raises Security Questions” (*The Guardian*);<sup>380</sup> and “Trump Handled North Korea Crisis in Full View of Diners and Waiters at His Private Club” (*ThinkProgress*).<sup>381</sup> According to reports, the President and the prime minister were being informed that North Korea had just launched a ballistic missile over a Japanese island,<sup>382</sup> and this briefing was made in public because there was no secure briefing room in Mar-a-Lago.<sup>383</sup> Moreover, the briefing was done on a candlelit patio, resulting in aides using their cell phones to illuminate the briefing documents.<sup>384</sup>

This led *Vox* to speculate, “So when aides pointed their cellphones at the documents — cellphones that also have built-in cameras — they may have given foreign spies a close-up look at Trump’s briefing materials.”<sup>385</sup> And these reports resulted in a query from the House of Representatives Oversight Committee.<sup>386, 387</sup>

However, the report stems largely from a Facebook post of Mar-a-Lago club member Richard DeAgazio who said he couldn’t hear anything that was being discussed. Instead, he received a text message from a friend asking if he was aware of the North Korean missile test about the same time that he saw the activity surrounding the president’s table. Despite the fact that news of the event was

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<sup>375</sup> Duda, Twitter Post, July 6, 2017, 2:44 PM.

<sup>376</sup> Fahrenthold, “Trump Turns Mar-a-Lago Club Terrace into Open-Air Situation Room.”

<sup>377</sup> Liptak, “At Mar-a-Lago, Trump Tackles Crisis Diplomacy at Close Range.”

<sup>378</sup> Alcindor, “Scenes from Mar-a-Lago as Trump and Abe Get News about North Korea.”

<sup>379</sup> Rozsa, “Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago Club has a New Feature: Watch the President Discuss Top Secret Security Issues!”

<sup>380</sup> Borger, “Missile Crisis by Candlelight: Donald Trump’s Use of Mar-a-Lago Raises Security Questions.”

<sup>381</sup> Rupar, “Trump Handled North Korea Crisis in Full View of Diners and Waiters at His Private Club.”

<sup>382</sup> Lambiet, “Trump, Abe Got North Korea Missile News Amid Mar-a-Lago Crowd.”

<sup>383</sup> Pratte, “Winter White House Hypocrisy.”

<sup>384</sup> Bump, “Trump Ran a Campaign Based on Intelligence Security. That’s Not How He’s Governing.”

<sup>385</sup> Lee, “Why It’s a Bad Idea for Trump Aides to Use Their Phone Flashlights to Read Documents.”

<sup>386</sup> Reilly, “House Oversight Committee Probes Mar-a-Lago Security after North Korea Incident.”

<sup>387</sup> “Trump Handling of Security Information at Mar-a-Lago Queried by House Panel.”

already public and had reached his friend, he assumed that the president must be receiving a briefing on the matter.<sup>388</sup>

Contrary to reports, Mar-a-Lago does have a secure briefing room,<sup>389</sup> and according to White House press secretary Sean Spicer, the president had been briefed on the matter in a Sensitive Compartment Information Facility at Mar-a-Lago before and after the dinner.<sup>390, 391</sup> The president and the prime minister were only “reviewing the logistics for the press conference” because “At the time they had suggested the press conference was going to be at the Hampton Inn, and so they were reviewing it, and the president was basically saying we’re going to have it here.”<sup>392</sup> No classified information was present in the room.<sup>393</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Fahrenthold, “Trump Turns Mar-a-Lago Club Terrace into Open-Air Situation Room.”

<sup>389</sup> Bertrand, “Sean Spicer Addresses Mar-a-Lago Photos, Says Trump was Briefed in Secure Location before Dinner with Abe.”

<sup>390</sup> Saenz, “White House Says Only ‘Logistics,’ Not Classified Info, Discussed at Mar-a-Lago Dinner.”

<sup>391</sup> “Trump Handling of Security Information at Mar-a-Lago Queried by House Panel.”

<sup>392</sup> Saenz, “White House Says Only ‘Logistics,’ Not Classified Info, Discussed at Mar-a-Lago Dinner.”

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*

## 8. An Inept and Corrupt Administration

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Not surprisingly, given the narrative that President Trump is inept and corrupt, those associated with the president are often portrayed as inept and corrupt. Others are said to be at odds with the president, risking all in brazen acts of defiance. *The Atlantic* published an article titled “American Kakistocracy.” The article defines kakistocracy as “government by the worst and most unscrupulous people among us. More broadly, it can mean the most inept and cringeworthy kind of government.”<sup>394</sup> Likewise, *Newsweek* published an analysis titled “Trump is Leading the Most Corrupt Administration in U.S. History, One of First-Class Kleptocrats.” According to the article:<sup>395</sup>

“

[M]any observers believe the swamp has grown into a sinkhole that threatens to swallow the entire Trump administration. The number of White House officials currently facing questions, lawsuits or investigation is astonishing: Trump, being sued for violating the “emoluments clause” of the U.S. Constitution by running his Trump International Hotel in Washington, D.C.; Paul J. Manafort, the second Trump campaign manager, indicted on money laundering charges in late October; Flynn, for undisclosed lobbying work done on behalf of the Turkish government; son-in-law and consigliere Jared Kushner, for failing to disclose \$1 billion in loans tied to his real-estate company; and at least six Cabinet heads being investigated for or asked about exorbitant travel expenses, security details or business dealings.

Below are some examples of this narrative from notable news outlets:

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<sup>394</sup> Ornstein, “American Kakistocracy.”

<sup>395</sup> Nazaryan, “Trump is Leading the Most Corrupt Administration in U.S. History, One of First-Class Kleptocrats.”

## **MELANIA TRUMP AND HER SON BARRON WILL NOT MOVE INTO THE WHITE HOUSE**

*Us Weekly* published an article titled “First Lady Melania Trump May Stay in NYC Permanently and Never Move into the White House.”<sup>396</sup> Embedded in the article was a large photo of the magazine’s current issue with the words “Melania and Donald: Separate Lives” emblazoned across the front page.<sup>397</sup> This rumor began in November of 2016<sup>398, 399</sup> and was widely reported in such outlets as *New York Daily News*,<sup>400</sup> *The New York Post*,<sup>401</sup> *The Daily Beast*,<sup>402</sup> and *Mediaite*.<sup>403</sup> *The Daily Mail* published the headline, “Melania Trump May NEVER Move into the White House and Instead Live in NYC with son Barron as Ivanka and Jared Kushner Begin Performing Traditional First Lady Duties to Help Out,”<sup>404</sup> and CBS News focused on the increased cost of protecting Trump Tower, suggesting “Year-round protection could cost as much as \$180 million.”<sup>405</sup>

However, acting senior advisor to the First Lady Stephanie Wolkoff told CNN, “Mrs. Trump will be moving to DC and settling in to the White House at the end of the school year, splitting her time between New York and DC in the meantime. Mrs. Trump is honored to serve this country and is taking the role and responsibilities of first lady very seriously. It has only been a short time since the inauguration and the first lady is going to go about her role in a pragmatic and thoughtful way that is unique and authentic to her.”<sup>406</sup> And at the end of Barron’s school year on June 11, 2017, Melania and Barron did move into the White House.<sup>407, 408</sup>

## **THE STATE DEPARTMENT’S ENTIRE SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM RESIGNED IN PROTEST OF TRUMP**

As President Donald Trump assumed office, *The Washington Post* published a story insinuating that the State Department’s entire senior management team had “suddenly” and “unexpectedly” resigned in protest of the new president.<sup>409</sup> According to the article, “The entire senior level of management officials resigned Wednesday, part of an ongoing mass exodus of senior Foreign

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<sup>396</sup> “First Lady Melania Trump May Stay in NYC Permanently and Never Move into the White House.”

<sup>397</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>398</sup> Revesz, “Melania and Barron Trump May Not be Moving to the White House.”

<sup>399</sup> Vincent, “Melania and Barron Trump Won’t be Moving to the White House.”

<sup>400</sup> Sblendorio, “Melania Trump May Not Move to Washington as Planned: Report.”

<sup>401</sup> Steinbuch, “Melania Trump Might Not Move to the White House.”

<sup>402</sup> Crocker, “Will Melania Trump Really be an Absent First Lady?”

<sup>403</sup> Durkin, “REPORT: Melania Trump ‘Will Reevaluate’ Plans, May Not End Up Moving Into White House After All.”

<sup>404</sup> Spargo, “Melania Trump May NEVER Move into the White House and Instead Live in NYC with so Barron as Ivanka and Jared Kushner Begin Performing Traditional First Lady Duties to Help Out.”

<sup>405</sup> “First Lady Melania Trump and Son Barron Might Stay in NYC after all, Report Says.”

<sup>406</sup> Bennett, “Whither Melania Trump? 12 Days Without a Public Sighting.”

<sup>407</sup> Andrews, “So Long, Trump Tower. First Lady Melania Trump and Son Barron Move into White House.”

<sup>408</sup> Grisham, Twitter Post, June 11, 2017, 5:32 PM.

<sup>409</sup> Rogan, “The State Department’s Entire Senior Administrative Team Just Resigned.”

Service officers who don't want to stick around for the Trump era."<sup>410</sup> This was tweeted by journalists at ABC News,<sup>411</sup> *The Guardian*,<sup>412</sup> *Wired*,<sup>413</sup> *Bloomberg*,<sup>414</sup> and *Foreign Policy*.<sup>415</sup>

However, acting spokesperson for the State Department, Mark Toner, said in a press release, "As is standard with every transition, the outgoing administration, in coordination with the incoming one, requested all politically appointed officers submit letters of resignation."<sup>416</sup> The president did choose to accept the resignation letters of four officials. In a statement, Mark Toner clarified, "These positions are political appointments, and require the President to nominate and the Senate to confirm them in these roles. They are not career appointments but of limited term."<sup>417</sup> And a senior State Department official said, "Any implication that that these four people quit is wrong. These people are loyal to the secretary, the President and to the State Department. There is just not any attempt here to dis the President. People are not quitting and running away in disgust. This is the White House cleaning house."<sup>418</sup>

### DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL ROD ROSENSTEIN THREATENED TO RESIGN

After FBI Director James Comey was fired, *The Washington Post* reported, "[Deputy Attorney General] Rosenstein threatened to resign after the narrative emerging from the White House on Tuesday evening cast him as a prime mover of the decision to fire Comey and that the president acted only on his recommendation, said the person close to the White House, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter."<sup>419</sup> This was reported by such news outlets as *U.S. News and World Report*,<sup>420</sup> *New York Daily News*,<sup>421</sup> ABC News,<sup>422</sup> and *The Huffington Post*.<sup>423</sup> It was also tweeted by numerous reporters.<sup>424, 425, 426, 427, 428</sup> However, as some of these later updated their reports to reflect, top spokesperson for the Department of Justice, Sarah Flores, called this report "totally false,"<sup>429</sup> saying it "didn't happen."<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>410</sup> Rogan, "The State Department's Entire Senior Administrative Team Just Resigned."

<sup>411</sup> Belot, Twitter Post, January 26, 2017, 1:43 PM.

<sup>412</sup> Walker, Twitter Post, January 26, 2017, 8:22 AM.

<sup>413</sup> Thompson, Twitter Post, January 26, 2017, 8:12 AM.

<sup>414</sup> Baker, Twitter Post, January 26, 2017, 1:50 PM.

<sup>415</sup> McCormick, Twitter Post, January 26, 2017, 12:49 PM.

<sup>416</sup> Allam, Twitter Post, January 26, 2017, 9:56 AM.

<sup>417</sup> Labott, "Trump Administration Asks Top State Department Officials to Leave."

<sup>418</sup> Ibid.

<sup>419</sup> Rucker, "Inside Trump's Anger and Impatience - and His Sudden Decision to Fire Comey."

<sup>420</sup> Neuhauser, "Report: Rosenstein Threatened to Resign after White House Said He was Behind Comey Firing."

<sup>421</sup> Bodner, "Deputy AG Rod Rosenstein Threatened to Resign after White House Pinned Comey's Firing on Him: Report."

<sup>422</sup> Karl, "Deputy AG Rosenstein was on the Verge of Resigning, Upset Over WH Pinning Comey Firing on Him."

<sup>423</sup> Visser, "Deputy Attorney General Reportedly Threatened to Quit Over Comey Backlash."

<sup>424</sup> Hanrahan, Twitter Post, May 10, 2017, 8:29 PM.

<sup>425</sup> Ali, Twitter Post, May 10, 2017, 8:25 PM.

<sup>426</sup> Griffin, Twitter Post, May 10, 2017, 8:30 AM.

<sup>427</sup> Marcus, Twitter Post, May 11, 2017, 5:00 AM.

<sup>428</sup> Hounshell, Twitter Post, May 10, 2017, 8:25 PM.

<sup>429</sup> Neuhauser, "Report: Rosenstein Threatened to Resign after White House Said He was Behind Comey Firing."

<sup>430</sup> Visser, "Deputy Attorney General Reportedly Threatened to Quit Over Comey Backlash."

## **TRUMP'S VOTER FRAUD EXPERT MIGHT HAVE ENGAGED IN VOTER FRAUD**

In an article titled “AP: Trump’s Voter Fraud Expert Registered in 3 States,” the *Associate Press* insinuated that Gregg Phillips was himself participating in voter fraud. Republished in *USA Today*<sup>431</sup> and *The Chicago Tribune*,<sup>432</sup> the article leads with the statement, “A man who President Donald Trump has promoted as an authority on voter fraud was registered to vote in multiple states during the 2016 presidential election, the Associated Press has learned.”<sup>433</sup> Additionally, *The Associated Press* tweeted, “.@AP learns Donald Trump’s voter fraud expert was registered in 3 states during 2016 presidential election. apne.ws/2kllzDz”.<sup>434</sup>

However, Gregg Phillips had lived in Alabama, Texas, and Mississippi—the three states where he was registered to vote. According to the article, “At the time of November’s presidential election, Phillips’ status was “inactive” in Mississippi and suspended in Texas.”<sup>435</sup> Nevertheless, *The Associated Press* followed this acknowledgment with the statement, “Officials in both states told the AP that Phillips could have voted, however, by producing identification and updating his address at the polls.”<sup>436</sup>

## **TRUMP'S AIDES CAN'T FIGURE OUT HOW TO USE THE LIGHT SWITCHES**

Citing anonymous sources, *The New York Times* wrote an article filled with gossip, such as that President Trump’s “Aides confer in the dark because they cannot figure out how to operate the light switches in the cabinet room”, or that “Visitors conclude their meetings and then wander around, testing doorknobs until finding one that leads to an exit.”<sup>437</sup>

However, the White House press secretary told *The Hill*, “That report was so riddled with inaccuracies and lies that they owe the president an apology. There were just literally blatant factual errors and it’s unacceptable to see that kind of reporting or so-called reporting.”<sup>438</sup> Likewise, President Trump tweeted, “The failing @nytimes writes total fiction concerning me. They have gotten it wrong for two years, and now are making up stories & sources!”<sup>439</sup>

## **CHIEF OF STAFF REINCE PRIEBUS IS TOO IGNORANT TO UNDERSTAND BASIC SPORTS METAPHORS**

Following the passage of the American Health Care Act in the House, Capitol Hill reporter for the *The Hill* Molly Hooper tweeted, “.@Reince exiting gop cloakroom tells me: ‘The president stepped

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<sup>431</sup> Burke, “AP: Trump’s Voter Fraud Expert Registered in 3 States,” *USA Today*.

<sup>432</sup> “AP: Trump’s Voter Fraud Expert Registered in 3 States.”

<sup>433</sup> Burke, “AP: Trump’s Voter Fraud Expert Registered in 3 States,” *The Associated Press*.

<sup>434</sup> The Associated Press, Twitter Press, January 30, 2017.

<sup>435</sup> Burke, “AP: Trump’s Voter Fraud Expert Registered in 3 States.”

<sup>436</sup> Ibid.

<sup>437</sup> Thrush, “Trump and Staff Rethink Tactics after Stumbles.”

<sup>438</sup> Fabian, “Spicer: New York Times Owes Trump an Apology.”

<sup>439</sup> Trump, Twitter Post, February 6, 2017, 8:32 AM.

up and helped punt the ball into the end zone.”<sup>440</sup> News outlets such as FOX Sports,<sup>441</sup> *New York Daily News*,<sup>442</sup> *Slate*,<sup>443</sup> *Vice*,<sup>444</sup> and *Mic*<sup>445</sup> were quick to report on Priebus’ inaccurate football analogy. However, Molly Hooper later tweeted, “.@reince said ‘punch’ the ball! Correction! Went back to relisten to audio (for 4th time) and heard the ‘Ch’ apologies sportfans& @Reince.”<sup>446</sup>

### **TRUMP’S SECRETARY OF TREASURY PICK FORECLOSED ON A 90-YEAR-OLD WOMAN OVER A 27 CENT BILL**

*Politico* reported that Steven Mnuchin, President Trump’s pick for Secretary of the Treasury, had overseen a company that foreclosed on a 90-year-old woman after a 27-cent payment error. Having received a bill for \$423.30, the woman sent a check for \$423. The bank sent her another bill for 30 cents, but the woman only sent a second check for 3 cents. Because of this, the bank foreclosed on her house.<sup>447</sup>

This story was repeated in *The Huffington Post*,<sup>448</sup> *New York Daily News*,<sup>449</sup> and *Vanity Fair*,<sup>450</sup> and it was tweeted by journalists such as *The Associated Press*’ David Beard,<sup>451</sup> and *The New York Times*’ Steven Rattner.<sup>452</sup> However, attorney Ted Frank debunked this story when he provided an account from the woman’s lawyers and wrote, “A. Widow was never foreclosed on and never lost her home. B. It wasn’t Mnuchin’s bank that brought the suit.”<sup>453</sup> *Politico* later issued a correction.<sup>454</sup>

### **ANTONY SCARAMUCCI IS BEING INVESTIGATED BY THE SENATE INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE FOR TIES TO RUSSIAN BANKERS**

CNN published an article claiming that the Senate Intelligence Committee was investigating Anthony Scaramucci, a key member of President Trump’s transition team, regarding a meeting he had with Kirill Dmitriev—an executive from the Russian Direct Investment Fund—during the transition.<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Hooper, Twitter Post, May 4, 2017, 11:46 AM.

<sup>441</sup> Traina, “Reince Priebus Just Dropped a Truly Terrible Sports Analogy.”

<sup>442</sup> Silverstein, “Reince Priebus Celebrates Health Care Victory with Terrible Football Analogy.”

<sup>443</sup> Mathis-Lilley, “Reince Priebus’ Football Metaphor was Basically Fine, It Turns Out.”

<sup>444</sup> Gordon, “Reince Priebus Sucks at Sports Metaphors.”

<sup>445</sup> Lutz, “Reince Priebus Celebrates Trumpcare Vote with Incoherent Sportsball Metaphor.”

<sup>446</sup> Hooper, Twitter Post, May 4, 2017, 1:42 PM.

<sup>447</sup> Woellert, “Trump Treasury Pick Made Millions after His Bank Foreclosed on Homeowners.”

<sup>448</sup> Bellware, “Bank Owned by Trump’s Top Treasury Pick Foreclosed on a 90-Year-Old Over 27 Cents.”

<sup>449</sup> Salinger, “Trump Treasury Secretary Pick Steven Mnuchin’s Bank Foreclosed on 90-Year-Old Woman Who Owed 27 Cents.”

<sup>450</sup> Levin, “Foreclosing on a 90-Year-Old Woman Over 27 Cents and Other Heartwarming Tales from Steven Mnuchin’s Days at OneWest.”

<sup>451</sup> Beard, Twitter Post, December 1, 2016, 4:43 AM.

<sup>452</sup> Rattner, Twitter Post, January 19, 2017, 9:11 AM.

<sup>453</sup> Frank, Twitter Post, January 19, 2017, 2:22 PM.

<sup>454</sup> Woellert, “Trump Treasury Pick Made Millions after His Bank Foreclosed on Homeowners.”

<sup>455</sup> Logan, “3 CNN Staffers are Out Over Retracted Russia Investigation Story.”

This story was eventually deleted and then retracted,<sup>456</sup> and the reporter and two editors associated with the story resigned from CNN.<sup>457</sup>

## SECRETARY OF EDUCATION PICK BETSY DEVOS SAYS PUBLIC SCHOOLS NEED GUNS TO PROTECT STUDENTS FROM GRIZZLY BEARS

When Betsy DeVos was President Trump's nominee for Secretary of Education, several media outlets misconstrued her comments about guns in public schools during her Congressional confirmation hearing. They published headlines such as: "Citing Grizzlies, Education Nominee Says States Should Determine School Gun Policies" (CNN);<sup>458</sup> "Guns Could Protect Schools from Grizzly Bears, Trump Education Pick Says" (*BuzzFeed*);<sup>459</sup> "Betsy DeVos Says Guns Shouldn't be Banned in Schools ... because Grizzly Bears" (*Vox*);<sup>460</sup> "Betsy DeVos Says Guns Should be Allowed in Schools. They Might be Needed to Shoot Grizzlies" (*Slate*);<sup>461</sup> "Betsy DeVos: Schools May Need Guns to Fight Off Bears" (*The Daily Beast*);<sup>462</sup> "Betsy DeVos Says Guns in Schools May be Necessary to Protect Students from Grizzly Bears" (*ThinkProgress*).<sup>463</sup>

However, NBC News reports what was actually said:<sup>464</sup>

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Democrat Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, who has been vocal on gun control in the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre, asked DeVos if she thought firearms had any place in or around schools.

"I think that's best left to locales and states to decide," she replied.

Pressed on whether she could say "definitively" if guns shouldn't be in schools, she referred to an earlier remark by Sen. Mike Enzi (R-Wyo.) who mentioned an elementary school in Wapiti, Wyoming, that had erected a fence to protect children from wildlife.

"I think probably there, I would imagine that there's probably a gun in the school to protect from potential grizzlies," DeVos said.

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<sup>456</sup> CNN Politics, Twitter Post, June 23, 8:50 PM.

<sup>457</sup> Logan, "3 CNN Staffers are Out Over Retracted Russia Investigation Story."

<sup>458</sup> Merica, "Citing Grizzlies, Education Nominee Says States Should Determine School Gun Policies."

<sup>459</sup> Dalrymple II, "Guns Could Protect Schools from Grizzly Bears, Trump Education Pick Says."

<sup>460</sup> Stein, "Betsy DeVos Says Guns Shouldn't be Banned in Schools ... because Grizzly Bears."

<sup>461</sup> Hannon, "Betsy DeVos Says Guns Should be Allowed in Schools. They Might be Needed to Shoot Grizzlies."

<sup>462</sup> "Betsy DeVos: Schools May Need Guns to Fight Off Bears."

<sup>463</sup> Quinlan, *ThinkProgress*, "Betsy DeVos Says Guns in Schools May be Necessary to Protect Students from Grizzly Bears."

<sup>464</sup> Jamieson, "Betsy DeVos Cites Grizzly Bears During Guns-in-Schools Debate."



## WOMAN ARRESTED AND PROSECUTED FOR LAUGHING AT ATTORNEY GENERAL PICK JEFF SESSIONS

In May of 2017, *The Huffington Post* reported that police “decided to arrest an activist because she briefly laughed during Attorney General Jeff Sessions’ confirmation hearing”.<sup>465</sup> Also, *Vox* published the headline, “The US Department of Justice is literally prosecuting a woman for laughing at now-Attorney General Jeff Sessions during his Senate confirmation hearing earlier this year.”<sup>466</sup> Similar headlines were published by *The New York Times*,<sup>467</sup> NBC News,<sup>468</sup> *Mother Jones*,<sup>469</sup> and *Vanity Fair*.<sup>470</sup>

However, this woman is an activist and veteran protestor affiliated with Code Pink, named Desiree Fairouz.<sup>471</sup> She “laughed when Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) said that Sessions’ record of ‘treating all Americans equally under the law is clear and well-documented.’”<sup>472</sup> For this, she was charged with “disorderly and disruptive conduct” intended to “impede, disrupt, and disturb the orderly conduct” of Congressional proceedings.<sup>473</sup> More importantly, she caused a scene when officers escorted her from the chamber, earning her a second misdemeanor for “allegedly parading, demonstrating or picketing within a Capitol.”<sup>474</sup> According to the jury foreperson, “She did not get convicted for laughing. It was her actions as she was being asked to leave.”<sup>475</sup>

## REPUBLICANS FIRST FUNDED THE RUSSIAN DOSSIER

CNN falsely promoted the idea that it was a Republican who first paid Fusion GPS for the opposition research against then presidential candidate Donald Trump that came to be known as the “Russian Dossier.” Senior CNN political correspondent Brianna Keilar accepted her guest’s statement, “The fact is that the dossier was compiled as part of opposition research first paid for by Republicans who were opposed to Donald Trump, and then later on by Democrats in the Clinton camp—people associated with the Clinton campaign who wanted to try to bring him down.”<sup>476</sup> Similarly, in an interview between CNN anchor Wolf Biltzer and Congressman Sean Duffy, the chyron at the bottom of the screen read “Who’s the anti-Trump Republican who helped fund Dossier?”<sup>477</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> Reilly, “A Woman is on Trial for Laughing During a Congressional Hearing.”

<sup>466</sup> Lopez, “The US Department of Justice is Literally Prosecuting a Woman for Laughing at Jeff Sessions.”

<sup>467</sup> Mele, “A Code Pink Protester Laughs Over a Trump Nominee and is Convicted.”

<sup>468</sup> Rosenblatt, “Activist Faces Jail Time for Laughing During Sessions Hearing.”

<sup>469</sup> Oh, “Woman Convicted after Laughing During Jeff Sessions’ Confirmation Hearing.”

<sup>470</sup> Nguyen, “A Jury Just Convicted a Woman for Laughing at Jeff Sessions.”

<sup>471</sup> Reilly, “A Woman is on Trial for Laughing During a Congressional Hearing.”

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>474</sup> Adams, “No, a Woman wasn’t Convicted Today Simply for Laughing During Jeff Sessions’ Confirmation Hearing.”

<sup>475</sup> Reilly, “Jury Convicts Woman Who Laughed at Jeff Sessions During Senate Hearing.”

<sup>476</sup> I Bleed Red White and Blue, “CNN Reporter Falsely Claims Republicans Funded Trump-Russia Dossier.”

<sup>477</sup> RepSeanDuffy, “Sean Duffy on Russian Dossier.”

During the Republican presidential primaries, *The Washington Free Beacon* hired Fusion GPS to conduct opposition research on multiple candidates, including Trump.<sup>478</sup> However, it was after this arrangement was dissolved that the Clinton campaign hired the firm in April of 2016 through its lawyer, Mike Elias, and his law firm, Perkins Coie.<sup>479</sup> Then, in June of 2016, Fusion GPS hired former British intelligence officer Christopher Steele and his London-based firm, Orbis Business Intelligence, to investigate Donald Trump's ties to Russia.<sup>480</sup> The Clinton campaign continued to fund Fusion GPS through October 2016, and it was during this time that Christopher Steele compiled the reports that became the "Russian Dossier."<sup>481, 482</sup>

### **IVANKA TRUMP IS ENGAGED IN THE SAME PRACTICES AS THE CLINTON FOUNDATION**

*Wall Street Journal* White House and money in politics reporter Rebecca Ballhaus tweeted, "Saudi Arabia and UAE pledge \$100 million to Ivanka's Women Entrepreneurs Fund, per @carolelee."<sup>483</sup> She then immediately added, "Trump pilloried Clinton for such donations to the Clinton Foundation on the campaign trail."<sup>484</sup> Likewise, CNN national security correspondent Jim Sciutto tweeted, "This is virtually identical to what Trump and others in GOP criticized Clinton Foundation for."<sup>485</sup> And CNN, ABC, and Telemundo contributor Ana Navarro also affirmed this as an "Ivanka Fund."<sup>486</sup>

However, *Wall Street Journal* editor Sohrab Ahmari refuted this claim, tweeting, "No, it's not. It's not 'Ivanka's fund.' Read the story: This is a World Bank initiative that Ivanka is championing."<sup>487</sup> Likewise, NPR reports, "The World Bank fund, which provides technical help and investment funding for women business owners, differs from the Clinton Foundation in some significant ways. While Ivanka Trump proposed the idea along with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, she is not involved with its operation."<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> Continetti, "Fusion GPS and the Washington Free Beacon."

<sup>479</sup> Entous, "Clinton Campaign, DNC Paid for Research that Led to Russia Dossier."

<sup>480</sup> Millar, "In the High Court of Justice Between Aleksey Gubarev; Webzilla B.V.; Webzilla Limited; XBT Holdings S.A and Orbis Business Intelligence Limited; Christophe Steele."

<sup>481</sup> Berger, "Fusion GPS Fallout: DNC, Clinton, FBI Take Heat after Bombshell that Dems Funded Trump Dossier."

<sup>482</sup> Hamburger, "FBI Once Planned to Pay Former British Spy Who Authored Controversial Trump Dossier."

<sup>483</sup> Ballhaus, Twitter Post, May 20, 2017, 9:16 PM.

<sup>484</sup> Ballhaus, Twitter Pos, May 20, 2017, 9:17 PM.

<sup>485</sup> Sciutto, Twitter Post, May 21, 2017, 5:59 AM.

<sup>486</sup> Navarro, Twitter Post, May 21, 2017, 5:54 AM.

<sup>487</sup> Sohrab, Twitter Post, May 21, 2017, 2:25 PM.

<sup>488</sup> Zarroli, "Saudis and the UAE Will Donate \$100 Million to a Fund Inspired by Ivanka Trump."

## 9. Fake News Beyond the President

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President Trump has certainly been at the center of many “fake news” reports, but not all fake news involves the president and his administration. Nevertheless, there is frequently a political or social agenda undergirding such reports. Below are some examples from notable news outlets:

### **ISLAMIC WOMAN MOWED DOWN BY FAR-RIGHT ACTIVISTS**

When a Muslim woman was struck by a car in the Brussels district of Molenbeek, *The Huffington Post*,<sup>489</sup> *Independent*,<sup>490</sup> and *International Business Times*<sup>491</sup> were quick to label it a hate crime perpetrated by far-right-wing activists. This assumption appears to stem from the fact that the incident occurred during an anti-Islamic rally that these outlets referred to as a “far-right rally.” However, the two men driving the car were local Muslims identified in the *Independent’s* correction as Redouane B. and Mohamed B.<sup>492</sup>

### **6 DEAD IN MOSQUE SHOOTING**

Six people were killed and eight wounded when gunmen opened fire during evening prayers in a Quebec City mosque. *The Daily Beast* originally reported the names of the assailants. However, their source was a Reuters parody account on Twitter. They have since corrected the story.<sup>493</sup>

### **THE GOP HEALTH CARE BILL MADE RAPE A PRE-EXISTING CONDITION**

The feminist group Ultraviolet Action tweeted a graphic that claimed the American Health Care Act

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<sup>489</sup> Hopkins, “Muslim Woman Mowed Down at Brussels Anti-Islam Rally in Shocking Incident Caught on Video.”

<sup>490</sup> Staufenberg, “Muslim Woman Run Down During Anti-Islamic Rally in Brussels.”

<sup>491</sup> Porter, “Brussels: Muslim Woman Knocked Down in Molenbeek Hit and Run During Far-Right Protest.”

<sup>492</sup> Staufenberg, “Muslim Woman Run Down During Anti-Islamic Rally in Brussels.”

<sup>493</sup> “6 Dead in Quebec City Mosque Shooting.”

“made being a rape survivor a pre-existing condition”.<sup>494</sup> This claim was propagated by CNN,<sup>495</sup> *New York Magazine*,<sup>496</sup> *The Huffington Post*,<sup>497</sup> and *Mic*.<sup>498</sup> However, *The Washington Post* fact check gave this claim four Pinocchios, writing, “The AHCA does not specifically address or classify rape or sexual assault as a pre-existing condition. It also would not deny coverage to anyone because of a pre-existing condition.”<sup>499</sup> Moreover, “At least 45 states have laws prohibiting health insurance companies from using a woman’s status as a domestic violence survivor to deny coverage, according to the National Women’s Law Center.”<sup>500</sup> Finally, “[I]t takes several leaps of imagination to assume that survivors of rape and sexual assault will face higher premiums as a result of conditions relating to their abuse.”<sup>501</sup>

## **GOP BEER PARTY**

Following the passage of the American Health Care Act, *Vice* reporter Alexandra Jaffe tweeted, “Cases upon cases of beer just rolled into the Capitol on a cart covered in a sheet. Spotted Bud Light peeking out from the sheet.”<sup>502</sup> The story grew as people speculated on Twitter,<sup>503, 504, 505</sup> resulting in *Mic*, among others, running the headline, “Republicans Celebrate Taking Away Americans’ Health Insurance with Cases of Beer.”<sup>506, 507</sup>

However, House Majority Leader Paul Ryan’s spokeswoman denied the claims on Twitter,<sup>508</sup> and the man carting the beers told Alexandra Jaffe that the beers were for a different party. The next day, Jaffe tweeted, “Here are the beers. Asked if they were going to a GOP conference meeting & he said ‘no. different meeting,’ no further details.”<sup>509</sup>

## **RUSSIAN HACKERS PENETRATED THE U.S. ELECTRICAL GRID**

In an article titled “Russian Hackers Penetrate U.S. Electricity Grid Through a Utility in Vermont, U.S. Officials Say,” *The Washington Post* reported, “A code associated with the Russian hacking

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<sup>494</sup> Ultraviolet, Twitter Post, May 4, 2017, 3:56 PM.

<sup>495</sup> Christensen, “Rape and Domestic Violence Could be Pre-Existing Conditions.”

<sup>496</sup> Spellings, “In Trump’s America, Being Sexually Assaulted Could Make Your Health Insurance More Expensive.”

<sup>497</sup> Pearson, “Under the New Health Care Bill, Rape Could be a Pre-Existing Condition.”

<sup>498</sup> Solis, “Under the GOP’s Health Plan, Sexual Assault Could be Considered a Pre-Existing Condition.”

<sup>499</sup> Lee, “Despite Critics’ Claims, the GOP Health Bill Doesn’t Classify Rape or Sexual Assault as a Preexisting Condition.”

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>502</sup> Jaffe, Twitter Post, May 4, 2017, 10:50 AM.

<sup>503</sup> Kohn, Twitter Post, May 4, 2017, 11:28 AM.

<sup>504</sup> Igorvolsky, Twitter Post, May 4, 2017, 10:59 AM.

<sup>505</sup> Devine, Twitter Post, May 4, 2017, 10:58 AM.

<sup>506</sup> Rodriguez, “Reports of Beer Delivery to GOP Health Care Celebration Called into Question.”

<sup>507</sup> Rodriguez, Twitter Post, May 4, 2017, 4:39 PM.

<sup>508</sup> Rodriguez, “Reports of Beer Delivery to GOP Health Care Celebration Called into Question.”

<sup>509</sup> Jaffe, Twitter Post, May 5, 2017, 11:14 AM.

operation dubbed Grizzly Steppe by President Barack Obama’s administration has been detected within the system of a Vermont utility, according to U.S. officials.”<sup>510</sup>

However, the electrical grid was not breached, and the detected malware did not belong to Russian Hackers. Burlington Electric Company issued the statement, “We detected the malware in a single Burlington Electric Department laptop not connected to our organization’s grid systems.”<sup>511</sup> And in an article correcting the original report, *The Washington Post* acknowledged, “The [malware] package, known as Neutrino, does not appear to be connected with Grizzly Steppe, which U.S. officials have identified as the Russian hacking operation.”<sup>512</sup>

This led *Forbes* contributor Kalev Leetaru to write, “From Russian hackers burrowed deep within the US electrical grid, ready to plunge the nation into darkness at the flip of a switch, an hour and a half later the story suddenly became that a single non-grid laptop had a piece of malware on it and that the laptop was not connected to the utility grid in any way.”<sup>513</sup>

### **TERMINALLY ILL MAN KILLED ON BIRTHDAY IN LAS VEGAS SHOOTING**

*People* magazine deleted a heart-wrenching exclusive about Larry Parra, a terminally ill man celebrating his 40<sup>th</sup> birthday who was among the victims of the Las Vegas shooting, after it was discovered that he doesn’t exist.<sup>514</sup> The only source for Caitlin Keating’s article was Jason Rogers, who was identified in the story as Larry Parra’s best friend.<sup>515</sup> In reality, Facebook photographs reveal Larry Parra to likely be Steven Anderson, Jason Rogers’ still living husband.<sup>516</sup>

### **LAS VEGAS SHOOTER’S GIRLFRIEND WAS MARRIED TO 2 MEN AT THE SAME TIME**

In the aftermath of the 2017 Las Vegas shooting, *Newsweek* published the salacious headline, “Paddock’s Girlfriend Used Two Social Security Numbers and was Married to Two Men at the Same Time.” According to the article, “The one person who holds the key to solving the mystery of why the Vegas madman murdered 59 and wounded nearly 600 people was herself a shadowy figure with a convoluted life of her own, featuring two simultaneous husbands, a bankruptcy, two Social Security numbers, multiple addresses in several states and even different ages depending on what

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<sup>510</sup> Eilperin, “Russian Operation Hacked a Vermont Utility, Showing Risk to U.S. Electrical Grid Security, Officials Say.”

<sup>511</sup> Burlington Electric Department, Facebook, December 30, 2016.

<sup>512</sup> Nakashima, “Russian Government Hackers do Not Appear to have Targeted Vermont Utility, Say People Close to Investigation.”

<sup>513</sup> Leetaru, “‘Fake News’ and How the Washington Post Rewrote Its Story on Russian Hacking of the Power Grid.”

<sup>514</sup> Koukoulas, “‘People’ Profiled as Las Vegas Shooting Victim – but His Identity Can’t be Confirmed Anywhere Else.”

<sup>515</sup> Ibid.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid.

state records you review.”<sup>517</sup> However, *Newsweek* later deleted the article and published a retraction, noting that it had mistakenly matched the girlfriend’s record to a second public record of a different person.<sup>518</sup>

## **PULSE NIGHTCLUB SHOOTER USED AN AR-15 RIFLE**

The Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida was among the deadliest mass shootings, killing 49 and injuring 53 others.<sup>519</sup> Naturally, it resurfaced the debate over gun control. Given that one of America’s most popular rifles—the AR-15—has also become the poster-child of assault weapons in this debate, it is significant that several media outlets reported that the shooter’s primary weapon was an AR-15.<sup>520</sup> *The Miami Herald* ran an article titled “Orlando Shooter’s AR-15: Accurate, Lightweight, and there are Millions.”<sup>521</sup> Likewise, *The Washington Post*<sup>522</sup> and *Mic*<sup>523</sup> ran articles detailing the deadly nature of the AR-15 which was identified as the gunman’s weapon. However, the Pulse Nightclub shooter used a Sig Saucer MCX which Orlando police officials first described as an “AR-15-type assault rifle.”<sup>524</sup>

## **HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES VOTED TO REPEAL A LAW THAT PREVENTS MENTALLY ILL FROM BUYING GUNS**

On February 2, 2017, *The Associated Press* tweeted, “BREAKING: House Votes to Roll Back Obama Rule on Background Checks for Gun Ownership.”<sup>525</sup> NPR published the headline “House Votes to Overturn Rule Restricting Gun Sales to the Severely Mentally Ill,”<sup>526</sup> and other news outlets published similar headlines, such as ABC News,<sup>527</sup> *USA Today*,<sup>528</sup> CNN,<sup>529</sup> *Newsweek*,<sup>530</sup> and *The Huffington Post*.<sup>531</sup>

However, the *National Review* reports, “The House did indeed reverse an Obama-era rule yesterday afternoon, but that rule was neither ‘gun-buyers must obtain background checks’ nor ‘the mentally ill are barred from buying guns,’ and the measure was by no means an NRA initiative.”<sup>532</sup> According

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<sup>517</sup> Delkic, “Paddock’s Girlfriend Used Two Social Security Numbers and was Married to Two Men at the Same Time.”

<sup>518</sup> “Retracted: Paddock’s Girlfriend Used Two Social Security Numbers and was Married to Two Men at the Same Time.”

<sup>519</sup> Gibbons-Neff, “The History of the AR-15.”

<sup>520</sup> NRABlog Staff, “Why the AR-15 is America’s Most Popular Rifle.”

<sup>521</sup> Sherman, “Orlando Shooter’s AR-15: Accurate, Lightweight, and there are Millions.”

<sup>522</sup> Gibbons-Neff, “The History of the AR-15.”

<sup>523</sup> Lampen, “A Brief History of the AR-15, the Weapon Behind the Deadliest Shootings in the US.”

<sup>524</sup> Gibbons-Neff, “The Gun the Orlando Shooter Used was a Sig Saucer MCX, Not an AR-15. That Doesn’t Change Much.”

<sup>525</sup> The Associated Press. Twitter Post. February 2, 2017.

<sup>526</sup> Taylor, “House Votes to Overturn Rule Restricting Gun Sales to the Severely Mentally Ill.”

<sup>527</sup> Vitali, “Trump Signs Bill Revoking Obama-Era Gun Checks for People with Mental Illnesses.”

<sup>528</sup> Gaudiano, “House Votes to Strike Rule Banning Guns for Some Deemed Mentally Impaired.”

<sup>529</sup> Barrett, “House Rolls Back Obama Gun Background Check Rule.”

<sup>530</sup> Gorman, “Trump Overturns a Mental Health Regulation on Gun Purchases.”

<sup>531</sup> McAuliff, “Congress Just Repealed Rules to Keep Guns from the Mentally Ill.”

<sup>532</sup> Cooke, “No, the GOP did Not Just Repeal the Background Check System or Give Guns to the Mentally Ill.”

to the American Association of People with Disabilities, the regulation required that the names of those who use a representative to help them manage their Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income due to a mental impairment be forwarded to the National Instant Criminal Background Check System.<sup>533</sup>

Charles Cooke notes in a *National Review* article, “It is a rare day indeed on which the NRA, the GOP, the ACLU, and America’s mental health groups find themselves in agreement on a question of public policy, but when it happens it should at the very least prompt Americans to ask, ‘Why?’ That so many mainstream outlets tried to cheat them of the opportunity does not bode well for the future.” According to Cooke:<sup>534</sup>

“

There were a host of reasons to object to this measure. On separation-of-powers grounds, the prospect of the Social Security Administration playing judge, jury, and executioner is flatly intolerable. On due process grounds, there was nothing to recommend the measure (as the ACLU made abundantly clear in its opposition letter).<sup>[\*N]</sup> On statutory grounds, it seems clear that the SSA was acting *ultra vires*.<sup>[\*O]</sup> And, as political matter, the vacillation of the Obama administration — which insisted simultaneously that “incidents of violence continue to highlight a crisis in America’s mental health system”<sup>[\*P]</sup> and that it was “not attempting to imply a connection between mental illness and a propensity for violence, particularly gun violence”<sup>[\*Q]</sup> — was downright embarrassing.

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<sup>533</sup> Cooke, “No, the GOP did Not Just Repeal the Background Check System or Give Guns to the Mentally Ill.”

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>\*N</sup> ACLU letter, February 1, 2017.

<sup>\*O</sup> Bazelon, Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, letter, January 30, 2017.

<sup>\*P</sup> “FACT SHEET: New Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence and Make Our Communities Safer.”

<sup>\*Q</sup> “Implementation of the NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007.”

## 10. A History of Fake News

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The deliberate misrepresentation of facts in 2016 is not exceptional. It may be tempting to believe that fake news is a new phenomenon, but there is nothing new about fake news. Perhaps the most well-known example of fake news occurred in 1938, following Orson Welles' radio adaptation of *War of the Worlds*. *The Washington Post* reported how two people died from the shock of hearing the fictitious reports about an alien invasion. Likewise, *The New York Times* reported that thirty men and women stormed a police station, and someone in Pittsburgh claimed he had barely prevented his wife from committing suicide in her fear.<sup>535</sup> However, *The New Yorker* writes:<sup>536</sup>

“

This early fake-news panic lives on in legend, but Schwartz is the latest of a number of researchers to argue that it wasn't all it was cracked up to be. As Schwartz tells it, there was no mass hysteria, only small pockets of concern that quickly burned out. ... Schwartz argues that newspapers exaggerated the panic to better control the upstart medium of radio, which was becoming the dominant source of breaking news in the thirties. Newspapers wanted to show that radio was irresponsible and needed guidance from its older, more respectable siblings in the print media, such “guidance” mostly taking the form of lucrative licensing deals and increased ownership of local radio stations.

The media's misrepresentation of the effects of this radio drama was so effective that their false narrative remains widely held as truth some 80 years later. Regardless of the motivation, the news

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<sup>535</sup> Chen, “The Fake-News Fallacy.”

<sup>536</sup> Ibid.



media has a long history of peppering its accounts with fake news.<sup>537</sup> Below are some examples from notable news outlets:

### **JAYSON BLAIR WAS FIRED FOR REPEATEDLY CREATING FAKE NEWS STORIES**

*The New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair was fired after an extensive internal investigation that found him guilty of “frequent acts of journalistic fraud.”<sup>538</sup> According to CNN, Jayson Blair “was quickly promoted through the ranks from intern to the national desk despite a history of corrections, sloppy reporting and lectures from his editors.” Eventually, *The New York Times* discovered that he was repeatedly “making up reports from other cities while writing from his apartment in Brooklyn”, inventing quotes, writing stories based upon photographs, and plagiarizing other news organizations.<sup>539</sup>

### **NBC NEWS ANCHOR BRIAN WILLIAMS’ HELICOPTER WAS HIT BY AN RPG DURING THE IRAQ WAR**

NBC News anchor Brian Williams was discovered to have a pattern of exaggerating and misrepresenting facts.<sup>540</sup> The most notable incident occurred during an episode of “NBC Nightly News” on January 30, 2003 when he announced, “The story actually started with a terrible moment a dozen years back during the invasion of Iraq when the helicopter we were traveling in was forced down by an RPG.”<sup>541, 542</sup> Brian Williams’ recounting of the story varied. Sometimes it was his helicopter that was hit by an RPG, and other times it was the helicopter in front of his.<sup>543</sup> In an interview with Fairfield University student media outlet *New64’s* Emily Fitzmaurice, Williams said, “A few years before that, you go back to Iraq, and I looked down the tube of an RPG that had been fired at us, and it hit the chopper in front of us.”<sup>544, 545</sup>

However, Brian Williams was suspended and then demoted to the role of MSNBC chief anchor when it was discovered that he had fabricated this account.<sup>546</sup> He admitted on February 4, 2015, “I made a mistake in recalling the events of 12 years ago.”<sup>547</sup> According to *Stars and Stripes*:<sup>548</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> Chen, “The Fake-News Fallacy.”

<sup>538</sup> “New York Times: Reporter Routinely Faked Articles.”

<sup>539</sup> Ibid.

<sup>540</sup> “Brian Williams.”

<sup>541</sup> NBC Nightly News with Lester Holt.

<sup>542</sup> Tritten, “NBC’s Brian Williams Recants Iraq Story after Soldiers Protest.”

<sup>543</sup> Ibid.

<sup>544</sup> Thehamchannel, “News64: Brian Williams Interview at Fairfield University.”

<sup>545</sup> Farhi, “NBC’s Brian Williams Steps Away from Anchor Chair Amid Probe.”

<sup>546</sup> Farhi, “At Long Last, Brian Williams is Back – Humbled and Demoted to MSNBC.”

<sup>547</sup> Kurtz, “Brian Williams Lied about His Copter Being Shot, Forced Down in Iraq.”

<sup>548</sup> Tritten, “NBC’s Brian Williams Recants Iraq Story after Soldiers Protest.”

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NBC Nightly News anchor Brian Williams admitted Wednesday he was not aboard a helicopter hit and forced down by RPG fire during the invasion of Iraq in 2003, a false claim that has been repeated by the network for years. ... The admission came after crew members of the 159<sup>th</sup> Aviation Regiment’s Chinook that was hit by two rockets and small arms fire told Stars and Stripes that the NBC anchor was nowhere near that aircraft or two other Chinooks flying in the formation that took fire. Williams arrived in the area about an hour later on another helicopter after the other three had made an emergency landing, the crew members said.

### **A SUSPECT IN THE BOSTON MARATHON BOMBING WAS ARRESTED**

In the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombing, the *National Post* published an *Associated Press* article, saying, “CNN, Fox News Channel and the *Boston Globe* said that a suspect in Monday’s bombing had been arrested. *The Associated Press* said a suspect had been taken into custody. Within an hour, the FBI denied that a suspect had been captured, leading the three news organizations that had reported the arrest to back down from those claims.”<sup>549</sup> Likewise, *The New York Times* reported, “The F.B.I. scolded several news outlets Wednesday for mistakenly reporting that an arrest had been made in the Boston Marathon bombings, and warned that such unverified reporting could have ‘unintended consequences’ for its investigation.”<sup>550</sup>

### **MICHAEL BROWN WAS SHOT BY A POLICE OFFICER AFTER HOLDING HIS HANDS UP AND SAYING, “DON’T SHOOT”**

In the aftermath of the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, MSNBC published an exclusive interview with eyewitness Dorian Johnson. After an emotional recounting of an unprovoked attack by police officer Darren Wilson, MSNBC wrote:<sup>551</sup>

“

“I could see the muscles in his forearm,” Johnson said. “Mike was trying to get away from being choked.”

“They’re not wrestling so much as his arm went from his throat to now clenched on his shirt,” Johnson explained of the scene between Brown and the officer. “It’s like tug of

<sup>549</sup> “‘Here’s the Truth. We Don’t Know’: How False Reports of Boston Bombing Arrest Left Media Outlets Scrambling.”

<sup>550</sup> Carter, “The F.B.I. Criticizes the News Media after Several Mistaken Reports of an Arrest.”

<sup>551</sup> Lee, “Eyewitness to Michael Brown Shooting Recounts His Friend’s Death.”

war. He's trying to pull him in. He's pulling away, that's when I heard, 'I'm gonna shoot you.'"

At that moment, Johnson says he fixed his gaze on the officer to see if he was pulling a stun gun or a real gun. That's when he saw the muzzle of the officer's gun.

"I seen the barrel of the gun pointed at my friend," he said. "He had it pointed at him and said 'I'll shoot,' one more time."

A second later Johnson said he heard the first shot go off.

"I seen the fire come out of the barrel," he said. "I could see so vividly what was going on because I was so close."

Johnson says he was within arm's reach of both Brown and the officer. He looked over at Brown and saw blood pooling through his shirt on the right side of the body.

"The whole time [the officer] was holding my friend until the gun went off," Johnson noted.

Brown and Johnson took off running together. There were three cars lined up along the side of the street. Johnson says he ducked behind the first car, whose two passengers were screaming. Crouching down a bit, he watched Brown run past.

"Keep running, bro!," he said Brown yelled. Then Brown yelled it a second time. Those would be the last words Johnson's friend, "Big Mike," would ever say to him.

Brown made it past the third car. Then, "blam!" the officer took his second shot, striking Brown in the back. At that point, Johnson says Brown stopped, turned with his hands up and said "I don't have a gun, stop shooting!"

By that point, Johnson says the officer and Brown were face-to-face. The officer then fired several more shots. Johnson described watching Brown go from standing with his hands up to crumbling to the ground and curling into a fetal position.

"After seeing my friend get gunned down, my body just ran," he said. He ran to his apartment nearby. Out of breath, shocked and afraid, Johnson says he went into the bathroom and vomited. Then he checked to make sure that he hadn't also been shot.

“Hands up, don’t shoot” became a rallying cry for protestors during the Black Lives Matter Freedom Ride, which was the first in-person national protest by the Black Lives Matter activist movement.<sup>552</sup> Likewise, the hands up gesture became a weapon of protest, with Reverend Al Sharpton instructing African-Americans, “If you’re angry, throw your arms up. If you want justice, throw your arms up. Because that’s the sign Michael was using. He had a surrender sign. That’s the sign you have to deal with. Use the sign he last showed. We want answers why that last sign was not respected.”<sup>553</sup> Several Congressmen even made the hands up gesture on the House floor, with Representative Hakeem Jeffries declaring, “Hands up, don’t shoot. It’s a rallying cry of people all across America who are fed up with police violence. In community, after community, after community, fed up with police violence in Ferguson, in Brooklyn, in Cleveland, in Oakland, in cities and counties and rural communities all across America.”<sup>554</sup>

Despite being widely reported, the “hands up, don’t shoot” account was “built on a lie.”<sup>555</sup> A Department of Justice investigation concluded that the testimony of Dorian Johnson, who had a history of lying to police officers,<sup>556</sup> did not match the forensic evidence and conflicted with other eyewitness testimonies.<sup>557</sup> According to the report, “The autopsy established that Brown did not sustain gunshot wounds to his back. There was no evidence to corroborate that Wilson choked, strangled, or tightly grasped Brown on or around his neck, as described by Witness 101 [Dorian Johnson] in the summary of his account below. There were no bruises, abrasions, hemorrhaging of soft tissues, or any other injuries to the neck, nor was there evidence of petechial hemorrhaging of Brown’s remaining left eye.”<sup>558</sup> And *The Washington Post* reported, “In fact, just about everything said to the media by Witness 101, whom we all know as Dorian Johnson, the friend with Brown that day, was not supported by the evidence and other witness statements.”<sup>559</sup> Instead, Michael Brown attacked officer Wilson and endeavored to wrestle away his gun.<sup>560</sup> Also, according to the report:<sup>561</sup>

“

Brown did not get on the ground or put his hands up in surrender. In fact, Witness 102 told investigators that he knew “for sure that [Brown’s] hands were not above his head.” Rather, Brown made some type of movement similar to pulling his pants up or a shoulder shrug, and then “charged” at Wilson. It was only then that Wilson fired five or six shots

<sup>552</sup> Ruffin, “Black Lives Matter: The Growth of a New Social Justice Movement.”

<sup>553</sup> Pearce, “Protesters Use Hands-Up Gesture Defiantly after Michael Brown Shooting.”

<sup>554</sup> McCalmont, “Lawmakers Make ‘Hands Up’ Gesture on House Floor.”

<sup>555</sup> Capehart, “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot’ was Built on a Lie.”

<sup>556</sup> Zennie, “Revealed: Star Witness in Michael Brown Shooting has Arrest Warrant for Theft and was Busted for Lying to Cops.”

<sup>557</sup> “Department of Justice Report Regarding the Criminal Investigation into the Shooting Death of Michael Brown by Ferguson, Missouri Police Officer Darren Wilson.”

<sup>558</sup> Ibid.

<sup>559</sup> Capehart, “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot’ was Built on a Lie.”

<sup>560</sup> “Department of Justice Report Regarding the Criminal Investigation into the Shooting Death of Michael Brown by Ferguson, Missouri Police Officer Darren Wilson.”

<sup>561</sup> Ibid.

at Brown. Brown paused and appeared to flinch, and Wilson stopped firing. However, Brown charged at Wilson again, and again Wilson fired about three or four rounds until Brown finally collapsed on the ground. Witness 102 was in disbelief that Wilson seemingly kept missing because Brown kept advancing forward. Witness 102 described Brown as a “threat,” moving at a “full charge.” Witness 102 stated that Wilson only fired shots when Brown was coming toward Wilson. It appeared to Witness 102 that Wilson’s life was in jeopardy.

### **8-YEAR-OLD HEROIN ADDICT**

Janet Cooke received a Pulitzer Prize for her *Washington Post* story, “Jimmy’s World,” about an eight-year-old drug addict with aspirations of becoming a drug dealer. According to the report, “Jimmy is 8 years old and a third-generation heroin addict, a precocious little boy with sandy hair, velvety brown eyes and needle marks freckling the baby-smooth skin of his thin brown arms. ... Jimmy’s is a world of hard drugs, fast money and the good life he believes both can bring.”<sup>562</sup> Cooke reported that his mother accepted Jimmy’s habit as a fact of life, and that her live-in-lover daily administered the drugs to Jimmy.

Public outcry resulted in an intense police search for Jimmy, lasting 17 days.<sup>563</sup> However, the story was a fabrication by the author, according to *The Washington Post* correction.<sup>564</sup> Janet Cooke eventually admitted, “‘Jimmy’s World’ was in essence a fabrication. I never encountered or interviewed an 8-year-old heroin addict. The September 28, 1980, article in *The Washington Post* was a serious misrepresentation which I deeply regret.”<sup>565</sup>

### **BANKER FLAUNTS STATUS AS ONE PERCENTER BY LEAVING 1% TIP**

In 2012, while Occupy Wall Street protested the One Percent, *The Huffington Post* published a story about a wealthy banker’s surprising tip to his server. The article featured a photo taken by the banker’s dining companion of a \$133.54 bill with a 1% tip of \$1.33 circled and an arrow pointing to the words “Get a real job.” According to the companion, “Mention the ‘99%’ in my boss’ presence and feel his wrath. So proudly does he wear his 1% badge of honor that he tips exactly 1% every time he feels the server doesn’t sufficiently bow down to his Holiness. Oh, and he always makes sure to include a “tip” of his own.”<sup>566</sup>

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<sup>562</sup> Cooke, “Jimmy’s World.”

<sup>563</sup> Green, “THE PLAYERS: It Wasn’t a Game.”

<sup>564</sup> Cooke, “Jimmy’s World.”

<sup>565</sup> Green, “THE PLAYERS: It Wasn’t a Game.”

<sup>566</sup> “Photo Purportedly Showing Banker’s 1% Lunch Bill Tip ‘Altered and Exaggerated’ [UPDATED].”

However, the picture was a fake. According to the restaurant's hard-copies of the receipt, the true bill was \$33.54, and the tip provided was \$7 which is slightly more than 20%.<sup>567, 568</sup> The article has been updated three times and corrected twice.

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<sup>567</sup> "Photo Purportedly Showing Banker's 1% Lunch Bill Tip 'Altered and Exaggerated' [UPDATED]."

<sup>568</sup> "Here's the Authentic Receipt at the Heart of the '1% Tip' Hoax Story."

## 11. Fostering a Culture of Lies

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Some of the above reports are egregious abuses of trust, but many are laughable. It would be easy to dismiss them as irrelevant mistakes that were eventually corrected. In fact, this has been the retort of the news media. In response to the president's fake news awards, *The Washington Post* wrote, "Everyone makes mistakes — and the point is not to play gotcha. News organizations operate in a competitive arena and mistakes are bound to be made. The key test is whether an error is acknowledged and corrected."<sup>569</sup>

While this seems reasonable, it fails to account for the fact that these reports often produced an immediate and disproportional frenzy of chatter on social media and commentary on cable news channels. Even if the report was quickly corrected, it often caused irrevocable damage. Moreover, a single fallacious article or tweet may be shared thousands of times, but the correction is rarely shared. For example, political columnist Ana Marie Cox's Tweet insinuating a pay-to-play arrangement at the Trump Hotel was retweeted 1,149 times,<sup>570</sup> but his correction was only retweeted 10 times.<sup>571</sup> Similarly, in 2015 the American Press Institute reported that 64% of Twitter users encountered something on Twitter they later discovered to be false, but only 16% of users passed those tweets along.<sup>572</sup>

A prime example of how social media allows fake news stories to spread wide and far is the now debunked report that Ivanka Trump ran a charity that mirrored the Clinton Foundation.<sup>573, 574</sup> Daniel Payne reports:<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>569</sup> Kessler, "Fact-Checking President Trump's 'Fake News Awards.'"

<sup>570</sup> Cox, Twitter Post, February 25, 2018, 6:17 PM.

<sup>571</sup> Cox, Twitter Post, February 26, 2018, 10:30 AM.

<sup>572</sup> Rosenstiel, "How False Information Spreads and Gets Corrected on Twitter."

<sup>573</sup> Sohrab, Twitter Post, May 21, 2017, 2:25 PM.

<sup>574</sup> Zarroli, "Saudis and the UAE Will Donate \$100 Million to a Fund Inspired by Ivanka Trump."

<sup>575</sup> Payne, "13 More Major Fake News Stories in Just Five Months of Trump's Presidency."

“ On May 20, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Rebecca Ballhaus tweeted, along with a WSJ story, that “Saudi Arabia and UAE pledge \$100 million to Ivanka’s Women Entrepreneurs Fund.” This tweet was retweeted over 3,400 times. She followed with another tweet: “Trump pilloried Clinton for such donations to the Clinton Foundation on the campaign trail.” This tweet was retweeted more than 7,400 times.

Shortly thereafter, CNN national security correspondent Jim Sciutto retweeted Ballhaus’s initial tweet and claimed: “This is virtually identical to what Trump and others in GOP criticized Clinton Foundation for.” This garnered an astonishing 11,700 retweets (at press time). George Takei claimed that “the Saudis plopped \$100mil into Ivanka’s charity.” Retweet count: 21,000 and growing. CNN contributor Ana Navarro tweeted: “Ivanka Fund got \$100MM pledge from Saudis & UAE.” At the time of this writing, this tweet had been retweeted more than 43,000 times. *Forty-three thousand.*

It is nearly impossible to convey the fervor with which most of these stories were reported and shared. Instead, the above summaries often appear trivial, sterile, and lifeless. As such, it is easy to assume this is merely a compilation of overlooked mistakes that were eventually corrected, resulting in little harm ... but nothing could be further from the truth. Whether innocent or not, these errors fueled highly divisive narratives that often had real-world consequences. However, the media rarely takes ownership of their role in these consequences. As such, the important thing is not that an error is corrected because by that point it is often too late, and we ought to be honest with ourselves regarding this truth.

Furthermore, journalists refuse to take ownership of their role in propagating “fake news” via their Twitter accounts. After Melania Trump’s public appearance, President Trump tweeted, “The Fake News Media has been so unfair, and vicious, to my wife and our great First Lady, Melania. During her recovery from surgery they reported everything from near death, to facelift, to left the W.H. (and me) for N.Y. or Virginia, to abuse. All Fake, she is doing really well!”<sup>576</sup> Brian Stelter responded by tweeting, “Trump is conflating random Twitter commenters with ‘the media’ here. A common tactic of bad faith critics. But disappointing to see POTUS do it.”<sup>577</sup> However, Brian Stelter was himself a key proponent of the missing Melania mystery, having tweeted about it himself as well as reporting on the matter at CNN.<sup>578</sup>

Many of these “random Twitter commenters,” including Brian Stelter, bear Twitter’s blue checkmark status of “verified” because of their status as professional journalists. When users read

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<sup>576</sup> Trump, Donald J. Twitter Post, June 6, 2018, 6:48 AM.

<sup>577</sup> Stelter, Brian. Twitter Post, June 6, 2018, 7:15 AM.

<sup>578</sup> Lahren, “Sean Hannity 6/5/18 | Hannity Fox News | June 5, 2018.”



tweets from professional journalists who have also been verified by Twitter, they assume the information to be accurate. Moreover, journalists use Twitter chatter to justify reporting on stories as legitimate news, such as in this instance. For journalists to distinguish their reporting of news from “the media” because their Twitter posts are not official publications from their places of employment is disingenuous, particularly when the chatter from those very tweets help to form the basis for “official” news coverage of the issue.

Nobody expects the news media to be 100% accurate all the time. However, there is a consistent pattern of misrepresentation and selective reporting of the facts among many of today’s news outlets. This should concern us ... not just because we rely upon these outlets for reliable information, but because this pattern could have significant spiritual consequences for our nation.

More than ever, it is important that we exercise discernment when digesting the news. A massive study that analyzed 126,000 contested news stories on Twitter over the course of 10 years discovered that fake news “consistently reaches a larger audience, *and* it tunnels much deeper into social networks than real news does.”<sup>579</sup> Moreover, it spreads 10 times faster than real news.<sup>580</sup>

Contrary to popular opinion, the study determined that the spread of fake news prospers “because humans, not robots, are more likely to spread it.”<sup>581</sup> In fact, “Twitter users seem almost to *prefer* sharing falsehoods. Even when the researchers controlled for every difference between the accounts originating rumors—like whether that person had more followers or was verified—falsehoods were still 70 percent more likely to get retweeted than accurate news.”<sup>582</sup> According to Soroush Vosoughi, the scientist who led the study, “It might have something to do with human nature.”<sup>583</sup>

In other words, we are complicit in fostering this culture of lies. We cannot lay the blame solely at the feet of news outlets and social media bots. Instead, the study concludes that our human nature gravitates toward the novelty and emotive elements inherent in fake news.<sup>584</sup> As such, we have not only grown accustomed to being lied to, we now prefer it. As such, we no longer hold accountable those who are responsible for relaying truth and information. Instead, we accept filters on our search engines and social media news feeds; we excuse flagrant misreporting by the most prominent news outlets, and we tolerate brazen lies from our politicians. As New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg notes, we are facing an “epidemic of dishonesty.”<sup>585</sup>

Put another way, Americans have fostered a culture of lies. In doing so, we have rejected God who is truth ([Isa. 65:16](#); [John 14:6](#), [16-17](#)). However, the Bible is filled with examples of God

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<sup>579</sup> Meyer, “The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News.”

<sup>580</sup> Ibid.

<sup>581</sup> Ibid.

<sup>582</sup> Ibid.

<sup>583</sup> Ibid.

<sup>584</sup> Ibid.

<sup>585</sup> Peoples, Steve. “Bloomberg Warns of ‘Epidemic of Dishonesty.’”

pronouncing judgment upon nations—even Israel, with whom He was in covenant—because of their dishonesty:

- *“Everyone utters lies to his neighbor”* (Psa. 12:2).
- *“[T]ruth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking”* (Isa. 59:14–15).
- *“Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find a man, one who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her”* (Jer. 5:1).
- *“Truth has perished; it is cut off from their lips”* (Jer. 7:28).
- *“They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land ... Everyone deceives his neighbor, and no one speaks the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves committing iniquity”* (Jer. 9:3–5).
- *“They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they abhor him who speaks the truth”* (Amos 5:10).

It is no minor thing when a nation becomes comfortable with deception and error. God’s standard is truth. He told His people in Exodus 23:1, *“You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to a malicious witness.”* Likewise, in Zechariah 8:16 and 19, God says, *“These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another ... Therefore, love truth and peace.”*

God delights in truth (Psa. 51:6) because He is truth (John 14:6). This is why we are called to rejoice with the truth (1 Cor. 13:6) and to strive to focus upon it (Php. 4:8). As such, the prevalence of fake news in our nation should grieve and alarm us. It is no over-reaction to say that fake news should be among our greatest concerns as Christian citizens of America.

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