

Culture of Lies

Understanding Fake News & Its
Spiritual Ramifications

Timothy Zebell

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“To your request of my opinion of the manner in which a newspaper should be conducted, so as to be most useful, I should answer, ‘by restraining it to true facts & sound principles only.’ Yet I fear such a paper would find few subscribers. It is a melancholy truth, that a suppression of the press could not more compleatly [*sic*] deprive the nation of it’s benefits, than is done by it’s abandoned prostitution to falsehood. Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle. The real extent of this state of misinformation is known only to those who are in situations to confront facts within their knowledge with the lies of the day. ... I will add, that the man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them; inasmuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods & errors. He who reads nothing will still learn the great facts, and the details are all false.”

~3rd U.S. President Thomas Jefferson
(*Letter to John Norvell, June 11, 1807*)

“The press has become so dishonest that if we don’t talk about it, we are doing a tremendous disservice to the American people.”

~45th U.S. President Donald Trump

1. The State of Our Media

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."¹ 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.² Furthermore, 66% of Americans say news outlets do not do a good job of separating fact from opinion.³

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 adult film 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.⁴ Three weekends later, *CNN* mentioned Stormy Daniels and another Trump accuser, *Playboy* model Karen McDougal, 602 times compared to only 162 mentions

¹ Ryun, "The Mainstream Media – The Lap Dogs of the Deep State and Propaganda Arm of the Left."

² Knight Foundation, *American Views: Trust, Media and Democracy*.

³ Knight Foundation.

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

of the Senate omnibus spending bill that was passed that Friday morning.⁵

For a year Stormy Daniels' lawyer, Michael Avenatti, became a regular guest on cable news shows,⁶ and we were fed headlines such as "Why Dismissing Stormy Daniels' Story Would Be a Mistake"⁷ and "How Stormy Daniels Could Impact the Russia Investigation."⁸ However, Daniels' defamation lawsuit was eventually dismissed in court, and a judge ordered her to pay President Trump \$293,000 for attorney fees and another \$1,000 in sanctions.^{9, 10}

According to a Harvard Kennedy School's Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy study, *CNN's* news coverage of President Trump's first 100 days in office was 93% negative.¹¹ But it is not only cable news that is unbalanced and narrative-driven in its coverage. Despite a flurry of positive events—particularly related to the economy—the same Harvard study concluded that coverage of President Trump's first 100 days was 93% negative by *NBC*, 91% negative by *CBS*, 87% negative by the *New York Times*, 83% negative by the *Washington Post*, and 70% negative by the *Wall Street Journal*.¹²

This trend continued beyond the first 100 days. Despite his administration's record-breaking successes, the news media chose to obsess over perceived faults in President Trump as an individual and those surrounding him. According to a Media Research Center study of the evening newscasts for *ABC*, *CBS*, and *NBC*, 90% of the

⁵ Athey, "CNN Mentions Stormy Nearly Twice as Much as Spending Bill."

⁶ O'Connor, "Trump Hatred Fueled Media's Yearlong Obsession with Avenatti and Stormy."

⁷ Costello, "Why Dismissing Stormy Daniels' Story Would Be a Mistake."

⁸ Cohen, "How Stormy Daniels Could Impact the Russia Investigation."

⁹ Taylor, "Stormy Daniels Ordered to Pay Trump \$293,000 in Fees in Defamation Lawsuit."

¹⁰ "Civil Minutes – General."

¹¹ Patterson, *News Coverage of Donald Trump's First 100 Days*, 10.

¹² Patterson, 10.

coverage of President Trump in both 2017 and 2018 was negative (excluding neutral comments).^{13, 14, 15}

Unbalanced and narrative-driven coverage has become a defining element in today's news. Take for example when the Trump White House released details of an immigration plan intended as a compromise with Democrats that would legalize 1.8 million illegal immigrants known as "Dreamers" in exchange for \$25 billion toward building a southern border wall; *CNN* dedicated 11 times more coverage to possible Trump scandals that had already received excessive coverage. These included the possibility that Trump colluded with Russia to steal the election, the discrediting of text messages exchanged between FBI agents Peter Strzok and Lisa Page, and allegations made by Stormy Daniels.¹⁶

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

- In the wake of the Parkland, Florida school shooting, *ABC*, *CBS*, and *NBC* aired 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 had openly championed the Second Amendment.¹⁷
- FBI Director Andrew McCabe made misleading comments in a formal interview with the Inspector General, as did National Security Advisor Michael Flynn with the FBI. An analysis of the first eight hours of coverage for both

¹³ Noyes, "2017: The Year the News Media Went to War against a President."

¹⁴ Noyes, "The Media Get Trumped: President's Polls Improve Despite 90% Negative Coverage."

¹⁵ Noyes, "Networks Trashed Trump with 90% Negative Spin in 2018, but Did It Matter?"

¹⁶ Houck, "Bread Crumbs: CNN Dedicates 11 Times More Coverage to Trump Scandals Than Immigration Plan."

¹⁷ Dickens, "Nets: Parkland Anti-Gun Activists Overwhelm Gun Rights Advocates by 11 to 1."

individuals reveals that *MSNBC* devoted 18 times more coverage to Michael Flynn than to Andrew McCabe.¹⁸

- 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 inspector general report in their speculation surrounding McCabe's resignation.¹⁹
- 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 only offers American workers crumbs, despite an immediate wave of bonuses and increased wages attributed to the tax cut. *MSNBC* only granted 17 seconds to Pelosi's comment in a week's worth of coverage.²⁰
- When newly appointed House Majority Leader Nancy Pelosi disinvented President Trump from visiting the House chambers to deliver the State of the Union address during a government shutdown, she was heralded at *CNN* as a "badass" who knew how to needle the president.²¹ In contrast *CNN* deemed Trump childish when he cancelled

¹⁸ D'Agostino, "MSNBC Gave Flynn's Lie 18 Times More Coverage Than McCabe's."

¹⁹ Fondacaro, "Nets Downplay Role of IG Report in McCabe Resignation, 6x More Trump Blame."

²⁰ Dickens, "CNN/MSNBC Cover Paul Ryan's \$1.50 Tweet 74x More Than Pelosi's 'Crumbs.'"

²¹ Kurtz, "Why the Press Praises Pelosi, Hailing Her 'Badass' Moves against Trump."

her flight to Afghanistan days later, also citing the government shutdown.²²

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:

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 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.²³

Likewise, *MSNBC* host of the *Morning Joe* Mika Brzezinski told her co-host in the aftermath of a spree of mass shootings:

You have to ask the question, Joe, and I'll ask you, isn't it okay to deduce that at this point this is what he [President Trump] wants? He is inciting hatred, inciting violence, inciting racism if he doesn't unequivocally call it off and say, this is wrong and we stand together against this and we are doing this, this and this to help fight hate

²² Flood, "Media Slams Trump for Delaying Pelosi's Trip after Fawning over House Speaker's Attempt to Delay State of Union."

²³ *CNN*, "Lemon: Trump Threw Himself a Party, Because No One Would Come."

crimes. I mean this is a president who seems to want these things to happen. How else can this be explained?^{24, 25}

Increasingly, the most trusted names in news are relying upon anonymous sources, rumors, and unverified leaks of classified material while news anchors spend countless hours speculating rather than reporting. 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 unverified allegations that then-candidate Donald Trump hired prostitutes to pee on a hotel bed formerly used by President Barack Obama, *CNN* broadcasts referenced this allegation 77 separate times over the course of five days.²⁶
- Obsessing over allegations that President Trump referred to African nations as "shithole 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 along 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.²⁷
- *CNN* devoted 41 minutes on March 10, 2018 to adult film star Stormy Daniels' performance at a Florida strip club, even assigning one of their correspondents, Nick Valencia,

²⁴ Ford, Adam (@Adam4d), "On 'Morning Joe' this morning, Mika Brzezinski actually accused the President of the United States of WANTING mass murders to happen."

²⁵ Dorman, "'Morning Joe' Host Claims Trump 'Seems to Want' White Nationalist Terror Attacks."

²⁶ D'Agostino, "Yellow Journalism: CNN Spouts off about 'Pee Tapes' 77 Times in Five Days."

²⁷ Graham, "CNN Leaps into the Toilet: Network Aired 195 Uses of 'Sh**hole' on Friday."

to her.²⁸ Additionally, reporter Hadas Gold published a 1,500-word exposé on Daniels, her career, and her efforts to “make adult great again.”²⁹

- 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*.³⁰

Prominent news outlets have created entire narratives from decontextualized comments, such as when a sheriff expressed concern about being unable to inform Immigration and Customs Enforcement about MS-13 gang members unless they reach a certain threshold of violence. The president responded by calling the gang members “animals,” but the media reported his comments as though they were directed at Latino immigrants. The *New York Times* wrote, “President Trump lashed out at undocumented immigrants during a White House meeting ... branding such people ‘animals.’”³¹ Likewise, *New York Daily News* ran the headline “‘These Aren’t People. These Are Animals.’ Trump Hurls Pure Hate at Immigrants.”³² And *USA Today* tied President Trump’s comments to the rhetoric of Adolf Hitler.³³

Moreover, prominent news outlets are progressively reporting as legitimate news pure conjecture. The *Washington Post* published a 1,300-word article speculating what the Duchess of Cornwall may have meant when she winked while walking behind President Trump and Prince Charles in a visit commemorating the 75th anniversary of D-Day. This was not an opinion piece. After commenting on how the “president not only bends the truth, but distorts shared reality,” the *Post* wrote, “The most recent reminder

²⁸ Houck, “Stormy Saturday: CNN Spends 41 Minutes Salaciously Recapping Stormy Daniels’ Strip Club Show.”

²⁹ Gold, “For Stormy, Controversy Blows up into a Club Scene Bonanza.”

³⁰ D’Agostino, “UPDATE: Porn Star Lawyer Interviewed 147 Times in 10 Weeks.”

³¹ Davis, “Trump Calls Some Unauthorized Immigrants ‘Animals’ in Rant.”

³² Sommerfeldt, “‘These Aren’t People. These Are Animals.’”

³³ Hafner, “OnPolitics Today: Trump Calls Undocumented People ‘Animals,’ Rhetoric with a Dark Past.”

came in the form of a wink from a member of the British royal family. When Camila Parker Bowles, the Duchess of Cornwall, quickly closed and opened one eye behind Trump's back on Monday, was she letting us in on a secret? Making a joke? Alerting us to an indecency?"³⁴ Despite having no idea about the nature of the wink, the *Post* repeatedly pressed the notion that the Duchess's wink was a signal intended to communicate that "these events are just as unbelievable to their participants as they are to outside observers who feel gaslighted by the president's rhetoric."³⁵

Perhaps one of the most egregious examples of reporters legitimizing speculation as news 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,³⁶ and despite the knowledge that she was recovering from kidney surgery, some in the media assumed a conspiracy.³⁷ *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 while reporting on the "mystery" of the First Lady being out of sight for 24 days.³⁸ Likewise, the *New York Times*, and also *Huffington Post* Senior Politics Reporter Laura Bassett, implied that Melania's surgery was suspect.³⁹ Bassett told *CNN* that the White House was not being honest about the whereabouts of the First Lady,⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

Furthermore, the senior editor at the *Atlantic* tweeted a theory that the President may have "punched the First Lady in the White

³⁴ Stanley-Becker, "The Duchess of Cornwall Winked behind Trump's Back. What Was She Telling Us?"

³⁵ Stanley-Becker.

³⁶ Javers, Eamon (@EamonJavers), May 30, 2018, 4:36 a.m.

³⁷ "Sean Hannity 6/5/18 | Hannity Fox News | June 5, 2018."

³⁸ Stelter, "Melania M.I.A."

³⁹ Rogers, "Melania Trump Returns to the Public Eye (Sort Of)."

⁴⁰ "Melania Trump's Absence Continues, Skips Camp David Weekend."

⁴¹ Payton, "8 Times Members of the Media Spread 'Missing Melania' Conspiracy Theories."

House ... then ordered the Secret Service to conceal the assault,”⁴² 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.”⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴

However, there was no grand conspiracy, and Melania soon 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),”⁴⁵ and the *Root* suggested that it was really Melania’s body double at the event.⁴⁶

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? Who is truly to blame for fake news? More importantly, there are spiritual ramifications to the problem of fake news in America. What are these ramifications?

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 sometimes changed, the text is “updated,” and corrections are amended with little-to-no explanation. Sometimes the stories are even deleted. 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

⁴² Frum, David (@davidfrum), June 2, 2018, 11:46 a.m.

⁴³ Smith, Jamil (@JamilSmith), June 3, 2018, 4:44 a.m.

⁴⁴ Ostroy, Andy (@AndyOstroy), May 31, 2018, 5:31 a.m.

⁴⁵ Rogers, “Melania Trump Returns to the Public Eye (Sort Of).”

⁴⁶ Crocket, “Wait, Was That a Melania Trump Look-Alike?”

erasing the fervor and intensity that often accompanied these reports.

In truth, prominent news sites regularly publish a surprising number of misleading, inaccurate, and sometimes entirely fabricated reports. Despite an astonishingly long tradition of fake news in America, what we are witnessing today is unprecedented. America is facing a burgeoning fake news epidemic that is fueling a culture of lies and is placing our nation at risk—both physically and spiritually.

2. The President's Fake News Awards

It is no secret that President Trump and the media have an adversarial relationship. “In President Trump’s first year in office, he tweeted about fake news and fake media 174 times,” according to *PBS News Hour*. “That is an average of once every two days.”⁴⁷ As he entered his second year, the president escalated the feud by publishing his “fake news awards,”—a list of what he believed to be the top 11 fake news stories of 2017.⁴⁸ Given the unprecedented nature of this action, it is worth asking how we got to this point and what may be its significance.

“Post-truth” defined the year 2016, being named the *Oxford English Dictionary’s* international word of the year.⁴⁹ It is an adjective “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”⁵⁰ Commenting on the 2,000% increase in the usage of the term “post-truth” in 2016, the president of *Oxford Dictionaries* said, “Fuelled [*sic*] by the rise of social media as a news source and a growing distrust of facts offered up by the

⁴⁷ “How Do Americans View ‘Fake News’ Today?”

⁴⁸ Team GOP, “The Highly-Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards.”

⁴⁹ “Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 Is...”

⁵⁰ “Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 Is...”

establishment, *post-truth* as a concept has been finding its linguistic footing for some time.”⁵¹

Perhaps not surprisingly, the following word of the year, according to *Collins Dictionary*, was “fake news,” having experienced a usage increase of 365% since 2016.⁵² Although officially defined as “false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting,” fake news came to mean many things in the year 2017.⁵³

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” ranked among the top 50 fake news stories circulated on Facebook in 2017, generating approximately 23.5 million shares, reactions, and comments.⁵⁴ Both of these headlines came 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*, *Daily Mash*, *National Report*, and *Daily Currant*.

Surprisingly, reports from these satirical sites are not propagated solely through social media. In today's competitive 24/7 news coverage, mainstream news outlets have frequently failed to properly vet such reports, sometimes participating in furthering stories that originated from these sites. Jack Murtha reports in *Columbia Journalism Review*:

Last fall, *The San Francisco Business Times* erroneously aggregated a fake news piece about Yelp suing the creators of *South Park*.^{[55][56]} Earlier that year, Bloomberg Politics wrote a post based on a bunk article on Nancy Reagan's endorsement of Hillary Clinton for

⁵¹ “Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 Is...”

⁵² “Word of the Year 2017.”

⁵³ *Collins English Dictionary*, s.v. “Fake News.”

⁵⁴ Silverman, “These Are 50 of the Biggest Fake News Hits on Facebook in 2017.”

⁵⁵ Hamill, “News Website Falls for Hoax Claim South Park Faced \$10M Lawsuit Despite Including Quotes from a Dolphin.”

⁵⁶ McDermid, “CORRECTION: Yelp Says \$10 Million Lawsuit against ‘South Park’ Is a Hoax.”

president.^[57] In 2014, *The New York Times* picked up a fake bit about Kanye West's love for his own butt.^{[58][59]} 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.^[60] 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.^[61] Breitbart then aggregated the story.⁶²

Assistant Professor of Communications and Media at Merrick College Melissa Zimdars has compiled a list of these satirical sites along with another, more sinister, kind of fake news site that regularly publishes misleading or intentionally false reports which rely upon the strength and nature of social media platforms for dissemination.⁶³ Many of these sites use names that sound official or are similar to reputable sources so as to better deceive people into believing them to be legitimate news sites, such as bostontribune.com or cbsnews.com.co. Unlike satirical sites, the goal of these is largely “not to persuade people or change minds, but to earn their ‘engagement,’ using explosive lies masquerading as facts” so as to generate advertisement revenue, according to former Editor of the *New York Times* Jill Abramson.⁶⁴

Craig Silverman was among the first to monitor this emerging phenomenon, dubbing the stories originating from such sites “fake news.” According to Abramson, “What defined fake news sites in Silverman’s eyes was twofold: first, it traded on the appearance of legitimate journalistic authority; second, it did so for financial gain. Fake news was characterized by the fact that it was in direct

⁵⁷ Feldman, “Bloomberg Runs, Then Pulls Hoax Story about Nancy Reagan Endorsing Hillary.”

⁵⁸ Wadler, “Fear of Kim Kardashian’s Derrière.”

⁵⁹ Silverman, “New York Times Column Used Quote from Fake News Site ‘Without Attribution.’”

⁶⁰ Parker, “Sarah Palin Tries to Stay Relevant.”

⁶¹ Weigel, “I Want to Believe.”

⁶² Murtha, “How Fake News Sites Frequently Trick Big-Time Journalists.”

⁶³ Zimdars, “False, Misleading, Clickbait-y, and/or Satirical ‘News’ Sources.”

⁶⁴ Abramson, *Merchants of Truth*, 294.

competition with real news.”⁶⁵ However, the term evolved, beginning in 2016.

Henri Gendreau's *Wired* article “The Internet Made ‘Fake News’ a Thing—Then Made It Nothing” provides an outstanding overview of how the term “fake news” transformed.⁶⁶ Social media played an unprecedented role in the 2016 election, drawing special attention to its ability to influence public opinion. 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.^{67, 68, 69} Three days later, Facebook apologized for trending a story that falsely claimed *Fox News* host Megyn Kelly had been fired for being “a closet liberal who actually wants Hillary to win.”⁷⁰

In October the *Washington Post* ran the headline “Facebook Has Repeatedly Trended Fake News since Firing Its Human Editors,”⁷¹ 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.”⁷² 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.”⁷³

Following the election of Donald Trump as president, reporters and pundits were desperate for an explanation as to how they

⁶⁵ Abramson, 294.

⁶⁶ Gendreau, “The Internet Made ‘Fake News’ a Thing—Then Made It Nothing.”

⁶⁷ Nunez, “Former Facebook Workers: We Routinely Suppressed Conservative News.”

⁶⁸ Herrman, “Inside Facebook's (Totally Insane, Unintentionally Gigantic, Hyperpartisan) Political-Media Machine.”

⁶⁹ Wong, “Facebook Is Trying to Get Rid of Bias in Trending News by Getting Rid of Humans.”

⁷⁰ Gunaratna, “Facebook Apologized for Promoting False Story on Megyn Kelly in #Trending.”

⁷¹ Dewey, “Facebook Has Repeatedly Trended Fake News since Firing Its Human Editors.”

⁷² Silverman, “Hyperpartisan Facebook Pages Are Publishing False and Misleading Information at an Alarming Rate.”

⁷³ Gendreau, “The Internet Made ‘Fake News’ a Thing—Then Made it Nothing.”

could have been so wrong in their predictions. Building upon the recent reports of fake news, Max Read offered an explanation in his *New York Magazine* 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.”^{74, 75}

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.”⁷⁶ 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.”⁷⁷

Days later, the *New York Times* reported that Google announced it would “ban websites that peddle fake news from using its online advertising service,” and that hours later, Facebook updated its policy to “explicitly clarify” that “it will not display ads in sites that show misleading or illegal content, to include fake news sites.”⁷⁸ Then, in January of 2017, Founder of Media Matters David Brock produced a memorandum titled “Democracy Matters: Strategic Plan for Action” in which he revealed that these changes were the result of an aggressive Media Matters campaign:

During the 2016 election, Facebook refused to do anything about the dangerous rise of fake news or even acknowledge their role in promoting disinformation: Mark Zuckerberg called the notion that fake news is a problem ‘crazy.’ In November, we launched a campaign pressuring Facebook to: 1) acknowledge the problem of the proliferation of fake news on Facebook and its consequences for our democracy and 2) commit to taking action to fix the problem. As a result of our push for accountability, Zuckerberg did both.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Read, “Donald Trump Won Because of Facebook.”

⁷⁵ Read.

⁷⁶ Gendreau, “The Internet Made ‘Fake News’ a Thing—Then Made it Nothing.”

⁷⁷ Gendreau.

⁷⁸ Wingfield, “Google and Facebook Take Aim at Fake News Sites.”

⁷⁹ Media Matters for America, *Democracy Matters: Strategic Plan for Action*.

However, these efforts were deeply partisan in nature. Brock sought to establish Media Matters as “the top watchdog against fake news and propaganda” for partisan purposes, as noted in his memorandum which detailed a strategy for defeating President Trump in 2020 by “leading the fight against the next generation of conservative disinformation: The proliferation of fake news and propaganda.”⁸⁰ Investigative journalist and author Jerome Corsi notes:

Brock was among the first to coin “conservative disinformation” as “fake news” in the attempt to launch a “meme,” or “narrative,” designed to target reporters, pundits, and news media that dare publish conservative views differing from the hard-left views reported uncritically by obviously left-biased cable news channels such as CNN and MSNBC.⁸¹

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.”⁸² 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!”⁸³

One month later *CNN* alluded to a compromising dossier⁸⁴ which *BuzzFeed* published in its entirety,^{85, 86} commenting, “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

⁸⁰ Media Matters for America.

⁸¹ Corsi, *Killing the Deep State*, 122.

⁸² Byers, “Donald Trump Will Remain EP on ‘Celebrity Apprentice.’”

⁸³ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), January 5, 2018, 6:11 a.m.

⁸⁴ Perez, Evan, “Intel Chiefs Presented Trump with Claims of Russian Efforts to Compromise Him.”

⁸⁵ Bensinger, “These Reports Allege Trump Has Deep Ties to Russia.”

⁸⁶ Steele, *Steele Dossier*.

officials, intelligence agents, and journalists for weeks.”⁸⁷ Once more, Trump tweeted, “FAKE NEWS—A TOTAL POLITICAL WITCH HUNT!”⁸⁸

During a press conference the next day, President-Elect Trump refused to field a question from *CNN* White House Correspondent 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.”⁸⁹ 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, it is the enemy of the people!”⁹⁰

David Brock had hoped to stigmatize conservative posts on social media as fake news; instead, President Trump successfully linked fake news with liberal reporting by the mainstream media. Moreover, he re-defined the term from being explosive lies masquerading as facts under the guise of legitimate news for the purpose of financial gain—something Craig Silverman described as being at odds with real news—to instead include any false and misleading story reported by the mainstream media as news.

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 confusion and occasional abuse of the term, “fake news” to the average person today primarily means:

- 1) Wrong information reported as accurate news
- 2) “Deliberately constructed lies [and innuendos], in the form of news articles, meant to mislead the public”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Besinger, “These Reports Allege Trump has Deep Ties to Russia.”

⁸⁸ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), January 10, 2017, 5:19 p.m. <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/818990655418617856>.

⁸⁹ Savransky, “Trump Berates CNN Reporter: ‘You Are Fake News.’”

⁹⁰ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), February 17, 2017, 1:48 p.m.

⁹¹ Sullivan, “It’s Time to Retire the Tainted Term ‘Fake News.’”

Sometimes these lies and innuendos 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.

With this history and understanding of the term fake news, 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!"⁹² Five weeks later, on January 2, 2018, 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!"⁹³

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,⁹⁴ Stephen Colbert, and Samantha Bee⁹⁵ published advertisements nominating themselves for the award.⁹⁶ 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," "Fakest Dishonesty," and "Dishonestest Corruption."^{97, 98} And comedian Jimmy Kimmel referred to the awards as "The Stupid People's Choice Awards."⁹⁹

⁹² Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), November 27, 2017, 6:04 a.m.

⁹³ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), January 2, 2018, 5:05 p.m.

⁹⁴ The Daily Show (@TheDailyShow), January 5, 2018, 9:34 a.m.

⁹⁵ Full Frontal (@FullFrontalSamB), January 4, 2018, 6:00 a.m.

⁹⁶ Carter, "Daily Show' Launches Ad Campaign for Trump's 'Dishonest and Corrupt Media Awards.'"

⁹⁷ Park, "Stephen Colbert Posts 'For Your Consideration' Ad for Trump's Fake News Awards."

⁹⁸ "Why Stephen Colbert Would Be Honored to Part of Trump's 'Fake News Awards.'"

⁹⁹ Serjeant, "'The Fakeys': Comedians Turn Tables on Trump's 'Fake News' Awards."

In anticipation of the fake news awards which were rescheduled for January 17,¹⁰⁰ comedian Jimmy Fallon ridiculed the upcoming ceremony by imagining through film what it might look like,¹⁰¹ and Stephen Colbert¹⁰² presented “the even fakier awards that President Trump has awarded himself.”^{103, 104} Following the president’s announcements, Jimmy Kimmel also featured his father as a fake Wolf Blitzer to accept a fake, fake news award on behalf of CNN.¹⁰⁵ 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* opinion piece:

[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.¹⁰⁶

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:

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.

¹⁰⁰ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), January 7, 2018, 12:35 p.m.

¹⁰¹ “Trump’s Fake News Awards.”

¹⁰² Colbert, Stephen (@StephenAtHome), January 3, 2018, 7:58 p.m.

¹⁰³ “A Full History of Trump’s Fake Awards.”

¹⁰⁴ Jensen, “Jimmy Fallon, Stephen Colbert Ridicule President Trump, His ‘Fake News Awards.’”

¹⁰⁵ “Wolf Blitzer Accepts Donald Trump’s Fake News Award.”

¹⁰⁶ McCain, “Mr. President, Stop Attacking the Press.”

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 is that person who should be the figure of suspicion, not the press.¹⁰⁷

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.”^{108, 109} 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.¹¹⁰

If we accept the president's explanation, then his fake news awards are a tool designed to initiate a national conversation on what the president perceives to be dishonest reporting. 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.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ “Sen. Jeff Flake Criticizes Trump's Attacks on Press | Los Angeles Times.”

¹⁰⁸ “Donald Trump Attacks the Media in Heated News Conference.”

¹⁰⁹ “President Trump Scolds Media at News Conference.”

¹¹⁰ “Donald Trump Attacks the Media in Heated News Conference.”

¹¹¹ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), November 27, 2017, 6:04 a.m.

Apparently to keep this focus, the president did not present the awards with a speech or any pageantry that might distract from his objective. Instead, he simply published a *GOP* blog post featuring media claims juxtaposed with photographs, tweets, and videos that directly refuted the reports.¹¹² 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.”¹¹³

It turns out the president’s picks were mostly trivial—albeit often flagrant—attacks against himself. Moreover, the president confused opinion commentary with fact-based reporting, resulting in some award winners who didn’t meet the definition of fake news. Below are the winners as reported by the *GOP* blog:

1. The New York Time’s Paul Krugman claimed on the day of President Trump’s historic, landslide victory that the economy would never recover.
2. ABC News’ Brian Ross CHOKES and sends markets in a downward spiral with false report about Russia.
3. CNN FALSELY reported that candidate Donald Trump and his son Donald J. Trump, Jr. had access to hacked documents from WikiLeaks.
4. *TIME* FALSELY reported that President Trump removed a bust of Martin Luther King, Jr. from the Oval Office.
5. Washington Post FALSELY reported that the president’s massive sold-out rally in Pensacola, FL was empty. Dishonest reporter showed picture of empty arena HOURS before crowd started pouring in.

¹¹² “The Highly-Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards.”

¹¹³ “The Highly-Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards.”

6. CNN FALSELY edited a video to make it appear President Trump defiantly overfed fish during a visit with the Japanese prime minister. Japanese prime minister actually led the way with the feeding.
7. CNN FALSELY reported about Anthony Scaramucci's meeting with a Russian, but retracted it due to a "significant breakdown in process."
8. Newsweek FALSELY reported that Polish First Lady Agata Kornhauser-Duda did not shake President Trump's hand.
9. CNN FALSELY reported that former FBI Director James Comey would dispute President Trump's claim that he was told he is not under investigation.
10. The New York Times FALSELY claimed on the front page that the Trump administration had hidden a climate report.
11. And last, but not least: "RUSSIA COLLUSION!" Russian collusion is perhaps the greatest hoax perpetrated on the American people. THERE IS NO COLLUSION!¹⁴

Perhaps the president's objective of exposing dishonesty in the media was overshadowed by the thinly veiled nature of his list as a personal defense. Nevertheless, the president believed he had identified a pattern of lying and distortion of the truth by our nation's most trusted news outlets, and in his own way he tried to draw attention to it.

We should be deeply troubled that any president has cause to host a fake news award ceremony. Irrespective of the source, and regardless of the motive, deliberately distorting truth to propagate a predetermined narrative only feeds a culture of lies. This should concern us because Jeremiah 9:1-9 teaches that a culture of lies can

¹⁴ "The Highly-Anticipated 2017 Fake News Awards."

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.

Our nation's guardians of truth—journalists and news anchors—have forsaken their commitment to objectively report the facts. For too many, 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.”*

If we as a nation wish to be in a right relationship with God, then we must value and defend 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. Instead, Jeremiah 9:1–9 reveals that we should fear judgment.

Before we as a nation can demand change, however, we must first understand what is wrong. Through an unprecedented—and albeit a somewhat self-centered—move, President Trump endeavored to lead our nation into an understanding of how broken and dishonest our news outlets have become. This was not for the purpose of suppressing free speech but for the purpose of restoring what has been lost, which is crucial for the success of our nation because a government by the people requires a population who knows the truth.

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 progressively embraced a culture of lies. This is evidenced by how far our guardians of truth—journalists and news anchors—have strayed from their commitment to objectively report the facts. Perhaps, through the president's antics, God has granted our nation an opportunity to look in the mirror and resolve to self-correct before God Himself is compelled

to intervene. Perhaps the president's fake news awards are an appeal to us as citizens to demand truth from our respected institutions.

3. A Culture of Lies

Two-thirds of voters believe there is a lot of fake news in the mainstream media according to a 2017 Harvard-Harris poll,¹¹⁵ and 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.¹¹⁶ One such agenda appears to be advancing the narrative that President Donald Trump and his administration is intolerant, xenophobic, and racist.

Days before the 2016 presidential election, Jim Rutenberg at the *New York Times* called upon journalists to “throw out the textbook American journalism has been using,” to stop being balanced in their reporting, and to become oppositional because he and other journalists “believe that Donald J. Trump is a demagogue playing to the nation’s worst racist and nationalistic tendencies, that he cozies up to anti-American dictators and that he would be dangerous with control of the United States nuclear codes.”¹¹⁷

The day after Hillary Clinton conceded defeat, David Remnick, wrote in the *New Yorker*:

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

¹¹⁵ Easley, “Poll: Majority Says Mainstream Media Publishes Fake News.”

¹¹⁶ Monmouth University Polling Institute, “*Fake News*” *Threat to Media; Editorial Decisions, Outside Actors at Fault*.

¹¹⁷ Rutenberg, “Trump Is Testing the Norms of Objectivity in Journalism.”

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.¹¹⁸

The subsequent months would see numerous false and misleading news reports to bolster these claims. Each of which were vigorously discussed on cable news shows, talk radio, and Twitter, creating a national frenzy. It wasn’t long before the narrative that President Trump and his administration is intolerant, xenophobic, and racist became established fact in the minds of many and the default assumption among journalists, news anchors, and pundits. This despite it largely being predicated upon reports that were later to be identified as fake news.

November 9, 2016:

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.”¹¹⁹ *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.”¹²⁰ Additionally, *Mic*,¹²¹ *Pink News*,¹²²

¹¹⁸ Remnick, David. “An American Tragedy.”

¹¹⁹ Monica LaFlair, “Trigger warning: suicide.”

¹²⁰ Brown, “Stop Sharing News That Trans Teen Suicides Spiked Post-Election—It’s Not Just Wrong, but Dangerous to LGBT Youth.”

¹²¹ Rodriguez, “Trans Group Reports Suicide Post-Election; LGBTQ Hotline Calls Surge.”

¹²² Preston, “Reports Claim ‘At Least 8’ Trans Youth Died by Suicide after Trump’s Win.”

and *BuzzFeed*¹²³ published stories on the subject, with *BuzzFeed* quoting Director of GLAAD's Transgender Media Program Nick Adams, "There have been unconfirmed reports that some trans people died by suicide in the hours following the election, but at this point it is not possible to substantiate those rumors."¹²⁴

Unsubstantiated was the conclusion of Elizabeth Brown who investigated the 10 names on a list circulating social media titled "Transgender People Who Killed Themselves Due to Trump Being President."¹²⁵ She reported in *Reason*:

In 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.¹²⁶

January 20, 2017:

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.¹²⁷ Being untrue, the article was corrected, noting, "An earlier version of the story said that a bust of Martin Luther King had been moved. It is still in the Oval Office."¹²⁸ Miller also e-

¹²³ Ghorayshi, "After Trump Win, Suicide Hotlines Flooded with Calls."

¹²⁴ Ghorayshi.

¹²⁵ Thebleupineapple, "Transgender People Who Killed Themselves Due to Trump Being President."

¹²⁶ Brown, "Stop Sharing News That Trans Teen Suicides Spiked Post-Election—It's Not Just Wrong, but Dangerous to LGBT Youth."

¹²⁷ Miller, "Donald Trump Signed Order to Prepare for Repeal of Obamacare."

¹²⁸ Miller.

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.”¹²⁹

January 27:

President Trump’s executive order restricting travel from seven countries was widely reported to be a “Muslim ban.”^{130, 131, 132} However, the countries selected were based upon the Terrorist Travel Prevention Act¹³³ 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.^{134, 135} According to the bill, these countries are considered to have “repeatedly provided support for acts of international terrorism.”¹³⁶ Furthermore, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer told *ABC’s This Week*, “There are 46 other countries 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.”¹³⁷

The executive order may have targeted some countries that are predominantly Muslim, but it was neither intended to prevent Muslims from entering the country, nor did it constitute a ban on

¹²⁹ Gibbs, “Note to Our Readers.”

¹³⁰ King, “KING: What are Trump’s True Motives with the Muslim Ban?”

¹³¹ Lithwick, “Sneak Attack: Trump Is Trying to Secretly Push through Another Muslim Ban.”

¹³² Benen, “Defending His Muslim Ban, Trump Remains His Own Worst Enemy.”

¹³³ Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015.

¹³⁴ ABC News, “‘This Week’ Transcript 1-29-17: Sean Spicer, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Robert Gates.”

¹³⁵ Loffredo, “Trump Aides: More Nations May Be Added to Immigration Ban.”

¹³⁶ Visa Waiver Program Improvement and Terrorist Travel Prevention Act of 2015.

¹³⁷ ABC News, “‘This Week’ Transcript 1-29-17: Sean Spicer, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Robert Gates.”

Muslims.¹³⁸ Instead, it was intended to prevent potential terrorists from entering the United States for 90 days by restricting travel—regardless of religious affiliation—from seven of the 53 countries with predominantly Muslim populations.¹³⁹ This was the verdict of the Supreme Court who acknowledged the executive order to be “facially neutral toward religion.”¹⁴⁰

January 28:

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.”¹⁴¹ 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.¹⁴²

Similar insinuations were made through the reporting of news outlets such as *CNN*,¹⁴³ *Fortune*,¹⁴⁴ *Bloomberg*,¹⁴⁵ *Newsweek*,¹⁴⁶ and

¹³⁸ Kertscher, “Is Donald Trump’s Executive Order a ‘Muslim Ban?’”

¹³⁹ ABC News, “‘This Week’ Transcript 1-29-17: Sean Spicer, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Robert Gates.”

¹⁴⁰ Trump, President of the United States, et al., v. Hawaii et al.

¹⁴¹ Helderman, “Countries where Trump Does Business are Not Hit by New Travel Restrictions.”

¹⁴² Helderman.

¹⁴³ Blaine, “How the Trump Administration Chose the 7 Countries in the Immigration Executive Order.”

¹⁴⁴ Hincks, “These Countries with Business Links to Trump Aren’t Part of His Immigration Ban.”

¹⁴⁵ Melby, “Trump’s Immigration Ban Excludes Countries with Business Ties.”

¹⁴⁶ Moore, “What’s behind Donald Trump’s Decision to Include Some Muslim-Majority Countries in the Travel Ban—and Not Others?”

NPR,¹⁴⁷ with headlines such as: “Trump’s Muslim Ban Is Harmful and Haphazard—but Is It Also Kleptocratic?” (*Slate*),¹⁴⁸ “President Trump’s Muslim Ban Excludes Countries Linked to His Sprawling Business Empire” (*New York Daily News*),¹⁴⁹ and “Who Hasn’t Trump Banned? People from Places Where He’s Done Business” (*New York Times*).¹⁵⁰

However, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer told *ABC’s This Week* that these seven countries were selected based upon existing concerns, saying, “The 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.”¹⁵¹ 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 2015.¹⁵²

President Trump used this Terrorist Travel Prevention Act as the starting point for his efforts to impose extensive travel restrictions on countries of concern.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ Geewax, “Countries Listed on Trump’s Refugee Ban Don’t Include Those He Has Business Ties With.”

¹⁴⁸ Voorhees, “Trump’s Muslim Ban Is Harmful and Haphazard—but Is It Also Kleptocratic?”

¹⁴⁹ Sommerfeldt, “President Trump’s Muslim Ban Excludes Countries Linked to His Sprawling Business Empire.”

¹⁵⁰ Painter, “Who Hasn’t Trump Banned? People from Places Where He’s Done Business.”

¹⁵¹ ABC News, “‘This Week’ Transcript 1-29-17: Sean Spicer, Sen. Mitch McConnell, and Robert Gates.”

¹⁵² Shelbourne, “Spicer: Obama Administration Originally Flagged 7 Countries in Trump’s Order.”

¹⁵³ Loffredo, “Trump Aides: More Nations May Be Added to Immigration Ban.”

January 28:

Referring to the president's executive order limiting travel between seven countries, *CNBC's* John Harwood tweeted, "Senior Justice official tells @NBCNews that Dept had no input. not sure who in WH [White House] is writing/reviewing. standard NSC [National Security Council] process not functioning."¹⁵⁴ An hour later, he corrected this, tweeting, "New info from @PeteWilliamsNBC: another DOJ official says proposed immigration order WAS reviewed by Department lawyers before it was issued."¹⁵⁵ Harwood's false information was retweeted 2,838 times, while his correction was only shared 179 times.

The executive order was properly reviewed by the Department of Justice. *CNN* reports, "The executive order was approved last Friday in a less than two-page memorandum by the Office of Legal Counsel—the office within the Justice Department that provides authoritative legal advice to the president and agencies within the Executive Branch."¹⁵⁶ The memo concluded, "The proposed Order is approved with respect to form and legality."¹⁵⁷

January 29:

In an article titled "How Trump's Rush to Enact an Immigration Ban Unleashed Global Chaos," the *New York Times* reported that President Trump blindsided the Department of Homeland Security when he signed his executive order restricting travel between seven countries:

Gen. John F. Kelly, the secretary of homeland security, had dialed in from a Coast Guard plane as he headed back to Washington from Miami. Along with other top officials, he needed guidance from the White House, which had not asked his department for a legal review of the order.

¹⁵⁴ Harwood, John (@JohnJHarwood), January 28, 2017, 12:45 p.m.

¹⁵⁵ Harwood, John (@JohnJHarwood), January 28, 2017, 1:47 p.m.

¹⁵⁶ Memorandum by Curtis Gannon, "Re: Proposed Executive Order Entitled, 'Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.'"

¹⁵⁷ Memorandum by Curtis Gannon, "Re: Proposed Executive Order Entitled, 'Protecting the Nation from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States.'"

Halfway into the briefing, someone on the call looked up at a television in his office. “The president is signing the executive order that we’re discussing,” the official said, stunned.¹⁵⁸

In a press briefing, General Kelly denied this report, saying, “We did know the EO [executive order] was coming. We had people involved in the general drafting of it. ... As I said, we had high level government lawyers from across the inter-agency, to include Homeland Security that were involved in the drafting of it. So we knew it was coming. It wasn’t a surprise that it was coming.”¹⁵⁹ He added, “This whole approach was part of what then-candidate Trump talked about for a year or two.”^{160, 161}

January 30:

The *Atlantic* reported that Acting Attorney General Sally Yates “instructed Justice Department lawyers not to defend his [President Trump’s] controversial executive order restricting Muslim travel and immigration to the United States.”¹⁶² For this, she was fired.

However, the executive order did not restrict Muslim travel and immigration. It prevented all travel—whether Muslim or not—between seven countries identified as “countries of concern” in the 2015 Terrorist Travel Prevention Act.¹⁶³ Only 12% of the world’s Muslim population reside in these countries.¹⁶⁴ Because the purpose of the order was related to security, not religion, the remaining 88% of Muslims from other countries were not affected

¹⁵⁸ Shear, “How Trump’s Rush to Enact an Immigration Ban Unleashed Global Chaos.”

¹⁵⁹ Fox Business (@FoxBusiness), January 31, 2017, 9:17 a.m.

¹⁶⁰ Fox Business.

¹⁶¹ “Homeland Security Secretary John Kelly: We Knew Executive Order Was Coming.”

¹⁶² Ford, “A Dramatic Showdown at the Department of Justice.”

¹⁶³ Shelbourne, “Spicer: Obama Administration Originally Flagged 7 Countries in Trump’s Order.”

¹⁶⁴ Kertscher, “Is Donald Trump’s Executive Order a ‘Muslim Ban’?”

by the executive order.¹⁶⁵ According to the White House, Yates was fired for “refusing to enforce a legal order designed to protect the citizens of the United States,” not for protecting Muslim travel and immigration.¹⁶⁶

February 1:

Fox 2—a *Fox* affiliate station in Detroit, Michigan—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.”¹⁶⁷

This was widely tweeted and was republished in the *Huffington Post*¹⁶⁸ and the *Independent*.¹⁶⁹ 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.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Kertscher.

¹⁶⁶ Perez, “Trump Fires Acting AG after She Declines to Defend Travel Ban.”

¹⁶⁷ Lange, “Detroit Family Caught in Iraq Travel Ban, Says Mom Died Waiting to Come Home.”

¹⁶⁸ Visser, “Detroit Station: Man Who Blamed Mom’s Death on Trump Lied about Date She Died (UPDATE).”

¹⁶⁹ Bulman, “Elderly Woman Dies after Trump’s ‘Muslim Ban’ Stops Her Returning from Iraq for Medical Treatment.”

¹⁷⁰ Lange, “Man Who Claimed Mom Died in Iraq after Trump’s Travel Ban Lied, Imam Confirms.”

February 1:

President Trump threatened to invade Mexico, according to an *Associated Press* report on February 1, 2017. Tweeted by many journalists^{171, 172, 173, 174} and republished in *Politico*,¹⁷⁵ *Yahoo News*,¹⁷⁶ and the *Los Angeles Times*,¹⁷⁷ the report stated:

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.”

Jon Favreau, former speech writer for President Barack Obama, responded with the tweet, “I’m sorry, did our president just threaten to invade Mexico today??”¹⁷⁸ 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.

¹⁷¹ Passantino, Jon (@Passantino), February 1, 2017, 3:35 p.m.

¹⁷² Goldmacher, Shane (ShaneGoldmacher), February 1, 2017, 3:54 p.m.

¹⁷³ Legum, Judd (@JuddLegum), Twitter, February 1, 2017, 5:21 p.m.

¹⁷⁴ Zurcher, Anthony (@awzurcher), February 1, 2017, 5:21 p.m.

¹⁷⁵ Associated Press, “Trump Threatens Mexico Over ‘Bad Hombres.’”

¹⁷⁶ Salama, “Trump to Mexico: Take Care of ‘Bad Hombres’ or US Might.”

¹⁷⁷ Associated Press, “Trump Reportedly Threatens to Send U.S. Military to Mexico in Call with Mexican President.”

¹⁷⁸ Favreau, Jon (@jonfavs), February 1, 2017, 3:46 p.m.

“The things that have been said are nonsense and a downright lie.”¹⁷⁹

February 2:

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 Black History Month.”¹⁸⁰ *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?”¹⁸¹

However, *Snopes* reports that President Trump did not officially change the name but “issued a proclamation honoring February 2017 as ‘African-American History Month.’”¹⁸² 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.¹⁸³ Furthermore, Presidents Jimmy Carter, George H. W. Bush, and Ronald Reagan referred to it as National Afro-American (Black) History Month.¹⁸⁴

¹⁷⁹ Linthicum, “Mexican Government Says Trump Never Threatened to Send Troops to Mexico.”

¹⁸⁰ “Donald Trump: I’ve 86’d Black History Month. It’s Now African American History Month.”

¹⁸¹ “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.’”

¹⁸² Evon, “Did President Trump Rename ‘Black History Month’ to ‘African-American History Month?’”

¹⁸³ Evon.

¹⁸⁴ Evon.

February 4:

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.^{185, 186} However, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer told the *Huffington Post*, "It's a patently false, made up story."¹⁸⁷

Washington Post Editorial Page Editor Fred Hiatt, acknowledged, "I think we got things wrong in this column"¹⁸⁸ and admitted to not seeking a comment from the White House before publishing the story.¹⁸⁹ The *Post* updated their account with several corrections, noting that the key reported meeting did not happen, one of the conference calls did not happen as reported, and that actions credited to Trump were actually made by his chief of staff.¹⁹⁰

February 7:

Following President Trump's executive order restricting travel between seven predominantly Muslim countries, *PopSugar* interviewed 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

¹⁸⁵ Rogin, "Inside the White House-Cabinet Battle over Trump's Immigration Order."

¹⁸⁶ Calderone, "The Washington Post Walks Back Report of Steve Bannon 'Confrontation.'"

¹⁸⁷ Calderone.

¹⁸⁸ Calderone.

¹⁸⁹ Rogin, "Inside the White House-Cabinet Battle over Trump's Immigration Order."

¹⁹⁰ Rogin.

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.¹⁹¹

This was widely reported.^{192, 193, 194, 195} It produced headlines such as "Olympic Athlete Ibtihaj Muhammad Was Detained Because of President Trump's Travel Ban" (*Motto*),^{196, 197} 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*).¹⁹⁸

In actuality Muhammad was detained for less than an hour, and it occurred in December of 2016, according to both a customs official¹⁹⁹ and a corrective tweet by Muhammad.²⁰⁰ Not only was this well before President Trump's January 27, 2017 executive order, it was also before President Trump was inaugurated. Ibtihaj Muhammad's detention occurred during President Barack

¹⁹¹ Muhammad, "Muslim-American Olympian Ibtihaj Muhammad Says She Was Recently Held at US Customs."

¹⁹² Boren, "Olympic Medal Winner Says She Was Detained by U.S. Customs."

¹⁹³ Worley, "US Olympic Fencer Ibtihaj Muhammad Says She Was Detained by Customs for Being Muslim."

¹⁹⁴ Vladimirov, "Muslim-American Olympian Says She Was Detained by Customs."

¹⁹⁵ 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."

¹⁹⁶ "Olympic Athlete Ibtihaj Muhammad Was Detained Because of President Trump's Travel Ban."

¹⁹⁷ Adams, "More Mainstream Media Mess-Ups: The Muslim Olympian 'Detained Because of President Trump's Travel Ban' Was Detained Under Obama."

¹⁹⁸ Botte, "U.S. Olympian Ibtihaj Muhammad Being Detained Illustrates Why Trump's Muslim Ban Is Not Who We Are as Americans."

¹⁹⁹ Adams, "More Mainstream Media Mess-Ups: The Muslim Olympian 'Detained Because of President Trump's Travel Ban' Was Detained Under Obama."

²⁰⁰ Muhammad, Ibtihaj (@IbtihajMuhammad), February 11, 2017, 12:56 p.m.

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 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."²⁰¹

February 14:

"Phone records and intercepted calls show that members of Donald J. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and other Trump associates had repeated contacts with senior Russian intelligence officials in the year before the election, according to four current and former American officials," the *New York Times* reported.²⁰² These "intercepts alarmed American intelligence and law enforcement agencies," provoking them to question whether the Trump campaign was colluding with the Russians to interfere with the presidential election.²⁰³

When questioned specifically about the claims made in this *New York Times* article, former FBI Director James Comey told Congress, "In—in the main, it was not true. ... The challenge—and I'm not picking on reporters about writing stories about classified information, is that people talking about it often don't really know what's going on."^{204, 205}

²⁰¹ Adams, "More Mainstream Media Mess-Ups: The Muslim Olympian 'Detained Because of President Trump's Travel Ban' Was Detained Under Obama."

²⁰² Schmidt, "Trump Campaign Aides Had Repeated Contacts with Russian Intelligence."

²⁰³ Schmidt.

²⁰⁴ *New York Times*, "Full Transcript and Video: James Comey's Testimony on Capitol Hill."

²⁰⁵ Fredericks, "Comey Says Times Story about Team Trump-Russia Ties Was False."

February 16:

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.”^{206, 207}

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*.^{208, 209, 210} 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.”²¹¹

However, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer explained 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

²⁰⁶ Lee, “10 Resign from President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.”

²⁰⁷ Nguyen, Letter to President Donald Trump.

²⁰⁸ Lee, “10 Resign from President’s Advisory Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.”

²⁰⁹ Bellware, “Two-Thirds of the President’s Commission on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Just Resigned.”

²¹⁰ Castillo, “16 Quit Commission for Asian American, Pacific Islanders since Trump’s Election.”

²¹¹ Savransky, “10 Members Resign from Trump Panel on Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders.”

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.²¹²

February 17:

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."²¹³

This story was republished in the *Los Angeles Times*,²¹⁴ *Boston Globe*,²¹⁵ *Chicago Tribune*,²¹⁶ and *CBS News*.²¹⁷ However, the Department of Homeland Security Acting Press Secretary refuted this report, saying, "The Department is not considering mobilizing the National Guard."²¹⁸ She also said the report's claim that White House Chief of Staff John Kelly authored the memo is "absolutely incorrect."²¹⁹

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."

²¹² "White House Daily Briefing Transcript."

²¹³ Burke, "AP Exclusive: DHS Weighed Nat Guard for Immigration Roundups."

²¹⁴ Burke, "White House Denies Report Trump is Considering Using National Guard Troops for Immigration Roundups."

²¹⁵ Burke, "Trump Reportedly Weighing Use of National Guard."

²¹⁶ Burke, "Trump Administration Weighed Mobilizing National Guard for Immigration Roundups: Memo."

²¹⁷ Burke, "AP: Trump Admin Considers Using 100,000 National Guard Troops for Immigration Raids."

²¹⁸ Woodruff, "Homeland Security on AP's National Guard: 'Absolutely Incorrect.'"

²¹⁹ Woodruff.

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.”^{220, 221} Instead, Senior Washington Post Political Reporter Aaron Blake tweeted that the draft memo was “a very early, pre-decisional draft that never made it to the Secretary,”²²² and Senior Washington Correspondent for Atlanta’s *WSB Radio* Jamie Dupree adds that “it was never seriously considered.”^{223, 224}

February 22:

In an article titled “CIA Cables Detail Its New Deputy Director’s Role in Torture,” *ProPublica* reported that the newly appointed CIA Deputy Director Gina Haspel oversaw the clandestine base where suspected Al-Qaida leader Abu Zubaydah was subjected to waterboarding 83 times²²⁵ in a single month. It also accused her of mocking the prisoner’s suffering in a private conversation.²²⁶

The waterboarding claim was further reported by *NBC New York*.²²⁷ A year later, *ProPublica* retracted its story, admitting, “Neither of these assertions is correct and we retract them. It is now clear that Haspel did not take charge of the base until after the interrogation of Zubaydah ended. ... This error was particularly unfortunate because it muddied an important national debate about Haspel and the CIA’s recent history.”^{228, 229}

²²⁰ Adams, “The AP Blew It Big Time on That National Guard Roundup Story.”

²²¹ Malor, Gabriel (@gabrielmalor), February 17, 2017, 9:19 a.m.

²²² Blake, Aaron (@AaronBlake), February 17, 2017, 9:18 a.m.

²²³ Dupree, Jamie (@jamiedupree), February 17, 2017, 8:05 a.m.

²²⁴ Adams, “The AP Blew It Big Time on That National Guard Roundup Story.”

²²⁵ Shane, “Waterboarding Used 266 Times on 2 Suspects.”

²²⁶ Bonner, “Correction: Trump’s Pick to Head CIA Did Not Oversee Waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah.”

²²⁷ O’Donnell, “Trump’s New CIA Choice Ran Secret Prison Where Terrorism Suspects Were Waterboarded.”

²²⁸ Bonner, “Correction: Trump’s Pick to Head CIA Did Not Oversee Waterboarding of Abu Zubaydah.”

²²⁹ Chappell, “ProPublica Corrects Its Story on Trump’s CIA Nominee Gina Haspel and Waterboarding.”

April 11:

Politico reporter Josh Dawsey took out of context a partial quote from a *Wall Street Journal* article²³⁰ and tweeted that Attorney General Jeff Sessions had called illegal immigrants “filth.”²³¹ *Washington Post* writer Daniel Drezner then tweeted, “Filth. He described illegal immigrants as ‘filth.’ Whatever your views on immigration that’s f**king embarrassing for a US official to say.”²³² 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.”²³³

However, Jeff Sessions’ actual statement was, “It is here on this sliver of land, on this border, where we first take our stand.”²³⁴ 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:

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.

²³⁰ Viswanatha, “Undocumented Immigrants who Commit Crimes Face Tougher Policy.”

²³¹ Dawsey, Josh (@jdawsey1), April 11, 2017, 10:21 a.m.

²³² Drezner, Daniel (@dandrezner), April 11, 2017, 10:30 a.m..

²³³ Griswold, “Liberal Journalists Falsely Accuse Jeff Sessions of Calling Illegal Immigrants ‘Filth.’”

²³⁴ Garcia, “Did Jeff Sessions Refer to Immigrants as ‘Filth?’”

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.²³⁵

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."²³⁶

May 16:

A sheriff expressed concern about being unable to inform Immigration and Customs Enforcement about MS-13 gang members unless they reach a certain threshold of violence. The president responded by calling the gang members "animals," but the media reported his comments as though they were directed at Latino immigrants. The *New York Times* wrote, "President Trump lashed out at undocumented immigrants during a White House meeting ... branding such people 'animals.'"²³⁷ Likewise, *New York Daily News* ran the headline "These Aren't People. These Are

²³⁵ "Attorney General Jeff Sessions Delivers Remarks Announcing the Department of Justice's Renewed Commitment to Criminal Immigration Enforcement."

²³⁶ Drezner, "I Was Wrong about Jeff Sessions."

²³⁷ Davis, "Trump Calls Some Unauthorized Immigrants 'Animals' in Rant."

Animals.’ Trump Hurls Pure Hate at Immigrants.”²³⁸ And *USA Today* tied President Trump’s comments to the rhetoric of Adolf Hitler.²³⁹

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.^{240, 241} 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 still 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,²⁴² but her correction was only retweeted 10 times.²⁴³ This is consistent with the 2015 American Press Institute findings that 64% of Twitter users encountered something on Twitter they later discovered to be false, but only 16% of users passed those tweets along.²⁴⁴

A prime example of how social media allows fake news stories to quickly spread far and wide is the now debunked report that Ivanka Trump ran a charity that mirrored the Clinton Foundation (see Appendix A for further details).^{245, 246} Daniel Payne reports:

²³⁸ Sommerfeldt, “These Aren’t People. These Are Animals.”

²³⁹ Hafner, “OnPolitics Today: Trump Calls Undocumented People ‘Animals,’ Rhetoric with a Dark Past.”

²⁴⁰ Shafer, “Should Journalists Have the Right to Be Wrong?”

²⁴¹ Kessler, “Fact-Checking President Trump’s ‘Fake News Awards.’”

²⁴² Cox, Ana Marie (@anamariecox), February 25, 2018, 6:17 p.m.

²⁴³ Cox, Ana Marie (@anamariecox), February 26, 2018, 10:30 a.m.

²⁴⁴ Rosenstiel, “How False Information Spreads and Gets Corrected on Twitter.”

²⁴⁵ Sohrab, Ahmari (@SohrabAhmari), May 21, 2017, 2:25 p.m.

²⁴⁶ Zarroli, “Saudis and the UAE Will Donate \$100 Million to a Fund Inspired by Ivanka Trump.”

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*.²⁴⁷

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 a public appearance by Melania Trump, President Trump tweeted, “The Fake News Media has been so unfair, and vicious, to my wife and

²⁴⁷ Payne, “13 More Major Fake News Stories in Just Five Months of Trump’s Presidency.”

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!”²⁴⁸ 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.”²⁴⁹ 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*.²⁵⁰

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 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.

Nobody expects the news media to be 100% accurate all the time. In fact, *Politico* Senior Media Writer Jack Shafer warns, “If we don’t make accommodations for errors, we’ll be left with a press too timid to get the story.”²⁵¹ However, there is a difference between occasional errors and the consistent pattern of misrepresentation and selective reporting of the facts present in some 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

²⁴⁸ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), June 6, 2018, 6:48 a.m.

²⁴⁹ Stelter, Brian (@brianstelter), June 6, 2018, 7:15 a.m.

²⁵⁰ “Sean Hannity 6/5/18 | Hannity Fox News | June 5, 2018.”

²⁵¹ Shafer, “Should Journalists Have the Right to Be Wrong?”

discovered that fake news “consistently reaches a larger audience, *and it tunnels much deeper into social networks than real news does.*”²⁵² Moreover, it spreads 10 times faster than real news.²⁵³

Contrary to popular opinion, the study determined that the spread of fake news prospers “because humans, not robots, are more likely to spread it.”²⁵⁴ 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.”²⁵⁵ According to Soroush Vosoughi, the scientist who led the study, “It might have something to do with human nature.”²⁵⁶

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.²⁵⁷ It seems that we have not only grown accustomed to being lied to, we now prefer it.

Even before the advent of social media, our nation struggled with the spread of fake news. As far back as the late 1800s, it became apparent that fake news thrives because of the public’s lust for it. *Florida Daily Citizen* Editor Loretta Metcalf told a group of prominent journalists in 1889 that because they sought to outdo one another with ever more sensational and salacious stories, “the evil grew until publishers all over the country began to think that perhaps at heart the public might really prefer vulgarity.”²⁵⁸

We prefer to be entertained and to have our biases affirmed. As such, we no longer hold accountable those who are responsible for

²⁵² Meyer, “The Grim Conclusions of the Largest-Ever Study of Fake News.”

²⁵³ Meyer.

²⁵⁴ Meyer.

²⁵⁵ Meyer.

²⁵⁶ Meyer.

²⁵⁷ Meyer.

²⁵⁸ “Yellow Journalism: The ‘Fake News’ of the 19th Century.”

relaying truth and information. Instead, we accept information 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 if they have the “right” political slant. As former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg once noted, we are facing an “epidemic of dishonesty.”²⁵⁹

Put another way, we as 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). This is troubling because the Bible is filled with examples of God pronouncing judgment upon nations—even Israel, with whom He was in a covenant relationship—because of their dishonesty:

- *“Everyone utters lies to his neighbor”* (Psa. 12:2).
- *“Truth 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).

²⁵⁹ Peoples, “Bloomberg Warns of ‘Epidemic of Dishonesty.’”

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 commands, *"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) and never lies (Tit. 1:2). 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 less than a cultural rejection of God, making it no over-reaction to say that fake news should be among our greatest concerns as Christian citizens of America.

4. The Anatomy of Fake News

Caricatured portrayals of fake news prevent us from seeing it where it matters most. Pulitzer prizes were awarded in 2018 to the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* for their “deeply sourced, relentlessly reported coverage” of something that, according to Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s report to the Department of Justice, did not exist.^{260, 261} The winning work included 20 stories that “dramatically furthered the nation’s understanding of Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election and its connections to the Trump campaign, the President-Elect’s transition team and his eventual administration.”²⁶² The *New York Times* even boasts that their article “Trump Team Met with Lawyer Linked to Kremlin During Campaign” revealed to Mueller the meeting’s truly nefarious purpose, prompting Mueller to further investigate it.²⁶³ But the *New York Times* was wrong.

Despite the accolades and relentless coverage, the narrative presented by these titans of the news industry proved to be false. Attorney General William Barr told the press on April 18, 2019:

²⁶⁰ “The 2018 Pulitzer Prize Winner in National Reporting.”

²⁶¹ New York Times, “Read the Mueller Report: Searchable Document and Index.”

²⁶² “The 2018 Pulitzer Prize Winner in National Reporting.”

²⁶³ Victor, “The Times Just Won 3 Pulitzers. Read the Winning Work.”

The report details efforts by the Internet Research Agency, a Russian company with close ties to the Russian government, to sow social discord among American voters through disinformation and social media operations. ... But the Special Counsel found no evidence that any Americans—including anyone associated with the Trump campaign—conspired or coordinated with the Russian government or the IRA in carrying out this illegal scheme. Indeed, as the report states, “[t]he investigation did not identify evidence that any U.S. persons knowingly or intentionally coordinated with the IRA’s interference operation.” Put another way, the Special Counsel found no “collusion” by any Americans in the IRA’s illegal activity.²⁶⁴

Nobody is immune to the allure of fake news, and we do ourselves a disservice when we assume that it is confined to the realm of tabloids, clickbait, and troll farms. Headlines such as “Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President”^{265, 266} and “ISIS Leader Calls for American Muslim Voters to Support Hillary Clinton,”^{267, 268} or the *Weekly World News*’ “Satan Captured by GIs in Iraq,” “Severed Leg Hops to Hospital,” and “Titanic Survivors Found Onboard” are easy to detect.^{269, 270} However, equally false headlines from reputable sources are readily accepted as being factually accurate, such as the *Washington Post*’s “The State Department’s Entire Senior Administrative Team Just Resigned,”²⁷¹ and “Russian Operation Hacked a Vermont Utility, Showing Risk

²⁶⁴ “Read Barr’s News Conference Remarks Ahead of the Mueller Report Release.”

²⁶⁵ Evon, “Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President.”

²⁶⁶ Silverman, “How Teens in the Balkans Are Duping Trump Supporters with Fake News.”

²⁶⁷ LaCapria, “ISIS Leader Calls for American Muslim Voters to Support Hillary Clinton.”

²⁶⁸ Ritchie, “Read All About It: The Biggest Fake News Stories of 2016.”

²⁶⁹ “The 25 Most Ridiculous Tabloid Headlines of All Time (PHOTOS).”

²⁷⁰ Heller, “Bat Boy, Hillary Clinton’s Alien Baby, and a Tabloid’s Glorious Legacy.”

²⁷¹ Rogin, “The State Department’s Entire Senior Administrative Team Just Resigned.”

to U.S. Electrical Grid Security, Officials Say,”²⁷² or the *New York Times*’ “Scientists Fear Trump Will Dismiss Blunt Climate Report,”²⁷³ and “With Trump in Charge, Climate Change References Purged from Website”²⁷⁴ (see Appendix A for further details).

Regardless of the source, fake news assumes two standard forms: Fabricated and misleading. Fabricated reports present a fictional narrative based upon either an absence of facts or incorrect information. Misleading reports present a narrative that is somewhat fabricated, based upon few facts, or based in reality but includes fictional elements.

Examples of Fabricated Reports

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.²⁷⁵ *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.²⁷⁶

Not only was the reported date fabricated, the entire premise that this e-mail from WikiLeaks advantaged the Trump campaign or proves Russian collusion was also fabricated. The e-mail says, “Wikileaks has uploaded another (huge 678 mb) archive of files

²⁷² Eilperin, “Russian Operation Hacked a Vermont Utility, Showing Risk to U.S. Electrical Grid Security, Officials Say.”

²⁷³ Friedman, “Scientists Fear Trump Will Dismiss Blunt Climate Report.”

²⁷⁴ Davenport, “With Trump in Charge, Climate Change References Purged from Website.”

²⁷⁵ Raju, “Email Pointed Trump Campaign to Wikileaks Documents.”

²⁷⁶ WikiLeaks (@wikileaks), September 13, 2016, 2:44 p.m.

from the DNC.”²⁷⁷ It was sent by Michael Erickson who was the president of an aviation management company, not a Russian spy.²⁷⁸ More importantly, 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.”²⁷⁹ *CNN* has since corrected the story.²⁸⁰

*Melania Trump Used Donald Trump
to Become a Successful Model*

The *UK Telegraph* deleted its article “The Mystery of Melania,” issued an apology, and agreed to pay “substantial damages” after publishing numerous false claims about Melania’s family and modelling career.²⁸¹ In their apology, the *Telegraph* wrote:

Following last Saturday’s (Jan 19) *Telegraph* magazine cover story “The mystery of Melania”, we have been asked to make clear that the article contained a number of false statements which we accept should not have been published. Mrs Trump’s father was not a fearsome presence and did not control the family. Mrs Trump did not leave her Design and Architecture course at University relating to the completion of an exam, as alleged in the article, but rather because she wanted to pursue a successful career as a professional model. Mrs Trump was not struggling in her modelling career before she met Mr Trump, and she did not advance in her career due to the assistance of Mr Trump.

We accept that Mrs Trump was a successful professional model in her own right before she met her husband and obtained her own modelling work without his assistance. Mrs Trump met Mr Trump in 1998, not in 1996 as stated in

²⁷⁷ Helderman, “Email Pointed Trump Campaign to Wikileaks Documents That Were Already Public.”

²⁷⁸ Helderman.

²⁷⁹ Helderman.

²⁸⁰ Raju, “Email Pointed Trump Campaign to Wikileaks Documents.”

²⁸¹ Phillips, “British Newspaper Apologizes, Agrees to Pay Damages for ‘False Statements’ about Melania Trump.”

the article. The article also wrongly claimed that Mrs Trump's mother, father and sister relocated to New York in 2005 to live in buildings owned by Mr Trump. They did not. The claim that Mrs Trump cried on election night is also false.

We apologise [*sic*] unreservedly to The First Lady and her family for any embarrassment caused by our publication of these allegations. As a mark of our regret we have agreed to pay Mrs Trump substantial damages as well as her legal costs.²⁸²

*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."²⁸³ *NPR* published the headline "House Votes to Overturn Rule Restricting Gun Sales to the Severely Mentally Ill."²⁸⁴ And other news outlets published similar headlines, such as *ABC News*,²⁸⁵ *USA Today*,²⁸⁶ *CNN*,²⁸⁷ *Newsweek*,²⁸⁸ and *Huffington Post*.²⁸⁹

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

²⁸² "Melania Trump – An Apology."

²⁸³ Associated Press (@AP), February 2, 2017, 1:12 p.m.

²⁸⁴ Taylor, "House Votes to Overturn Rule Restricting Gun Sales to the Severely Mentally Ill."

²⁸⁵ Vitali, "Trump Signs Bill Revoking Obama-Era Gun Checks for People with Mental Illnesses."

²⁸⁶ Gaudiano, "House Votes to Strike Rule Banning Guns for Some Deemed Mentally Impaired."

²⁸⁷ Barrett, "House Rolls Back Obama Gun Background Check Rule."

²⁸⁸ Gorman, "Trump Overturns a Mental Health Regulation on Gun Purchases."

²⁸⁹ McAuliff, "Congress Just Repealed Rules to Keep Guns from the Mentally Ill."

no means an NRA initiative.”²⁹⁰ According 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.²⁹¹

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.²⁹²

According to Cooke:

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).^[293] On statutory grounds, it seems clear that the SSA was acting *ultra vires*.^[294] 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”^[295] and that it was “not attempting to imply a connection between mental illness and a propensity for violence,

²⁹⁰ Cooke, “No, the GOP Did Not Just Repeal the Background Check System or Give Guns to the Mentally Ill.”

²⁹¹ Cooke.

²⁹² Cooke.

²⁹³ ACLU letter, February 1, 2017.

²⁹⁴ Bazelon, Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law.

²⁹⁵ “FACT SHEET: New Executive Actions to Reduce Gun Violence and Make Our Communities Safer.”

particularly gun violence”^[296]—was downright embarrassing.²⁹⁷

*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 “made being a rape survivor a pre-existing condition.”²⁹⁸ This claim was propagated by *CNN*,²⁹⁹ *New York Magazine*,³⁰⁰ *Huffington Post*,³⁰¹ and *Mic*.³⁰² 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.”³⁰³ 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.”³⁰⁴ Finally, “It 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.”³⁰⁵

²⁹⁶ “Implementation of the NICS Improvement Amendments Act of 2007.”

²⁹⁷ Cooke, “No, the GOP Did Not Just Repeal the Background Check System or Give Guns to the Mentally Ill.”

²⁹⁸ Ultraviolet (@UltraViolet), May 4, 2017, 3:56 p.m.

²⁹⁹ Christensen, “Rape and Domestic Violence Could Be Pre-Existing Conditions.”

³⁰⁰ Spellings, “In Trump’s America, Being Sexually Assaulted Could Make Your Health Insurance More Expensive.”

³⁰¹ Pearson, “Under the New Health Care Bill, Rape Could be a Pre-Existing Condition.”

³⁰² Solis, “Under the GOP’s Health Plan, Sexual Assault Could be Considered a Pre-Existing Condition.”

³⁰³ Lee, “Despite Critics’ Claims, the GOP Health Bill Doesn’t Classify Rape or Sexual Assault as a Preexisting Condition.”

³⁰⁴ Lee.

³⁰⁵ Lee.

Examples of Misleading Reports

Electronic Voting Machines in Wisconsin, Michigan, and Pennsylvania Were Hacked to Steal Votes from Hillary Clinton

An example of a misleading report appeared on November 22, 2016. *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.”³⁰⁶ 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.”³⁰⁷ This report was repeatedly tweeted by journalists, including host of *AM Joy* and *MSNBC* Political Analyst Joy Reid,³⁰⁸ *Politico* Cybersecurity Reporter Eric Geller,³⁰⁹ and *Reuters* Cybersecurity Reporter Dustin Volz.³¹⁰

The next day, *FiveThirtyEight* published an article titled “Demographics, Not Hacking, Explain the Election Results.”³¹¹ 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.³¹²

³⁰⁶ Sherman, “Experts Urge Clinton Campaign to Challenge Election Results in 3 Swing States.”

³⁰⁷ Sherman.

³⁰⁸ Reid, Joy (@JoyAnnReid), November 22, 2016, 7:51 p.m.

³⁰⁹ Geller, Eric (@ericgeller), November 22, 2016, 3:46 p.m.

³¹⁰ Volz, Dustin (@dnvolz), November 22, 2016, 3:59 p.m.

³¹¹ Bialik, “Demographics, Not Hacking, Explain the Election Results.”

³¹² Bialik.

Furthermore, J. Alex Halderman—one of the computer scientists referenced 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).”³¹³ 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.”³¹⁴ 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.”³¹⁵

17 US 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.”³¹⁶ Fact-checks from *ABC News*,³¹⁷ *PBS*,³¹⁸ *New York Times*,³¹⁹ *Politico*,³²⁰ and *Politifact*³²¹ rated Hillary’s claim as true, with *USA Today* running the headline “Yes, 17 Intelligence Agencies Really Did Say Russia Was behind Hacking.”³²²

³¹³ Halderman, “Want to Know If the Election Was Hacked? Look at Ballots.”

³¹⁴ Bialik, “Demographics, Not Hacking, Explain the Election Results.”

³¹⁵ Halderman, “Want to Know If the Election Was Hacked? Look at Ballots.”

³¹⁶ Politico Staff, “Full Transcript: Third 2016 Presidential Debate.”

³¹⁷ ABC News, “Presidential Debate Fact-Check: What Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton Are Claiming.”

³¹⁸ News Desk, “Read Our Fact Check of the Final Presidential Debate.”

³¹⁹ “Fact Checks of the Third Presidential Debate.”

³²⁰ Bennett, “On Russian Hacking Connection, U.S. Isn’t as Sure as Clinton Says It Is.”

³²¹ Carroll, “Hillary Clinton Blames High-Up Russians for WikiLeaks Releases.”

³²² Collins, “Yes, 17 Intelligence Agencies Really Did Say Russia Was behind Hacking.”

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.³²³ Additionally, many journalists tweeted the claim.^{324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329} 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.³³⁰ This was further corroborated by former Director of National Intelligence James Clapper during his testimony to Congress on May 8, 2017.³³¹

During the hearing, James Clapper told Senator Al Franken (D-MN), “There were only three agencies that directly involved in this 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.”³³²

The *New York Times* subsequently reported that only three agencies were involved in creating the intelligence report,³³³ but

³²³ Rosenberg, “Trump Misleads on Russian Meddling: Why 17 Intelligence Agencies Don’t Need to Agree.”

³²⁴ Riccardi, Nick (@NickRiccardi), December 30, 2016, 1:09 p.m.

³²⁵ Eichenwald, Kurt (@kurteichenwald), December 30, 2016, 9:39 a.m.

³²⁶ Griffin, Kyle (@kylegriffini), April 1, 2017, 6:19 a.m.

³²⁷ Beard, David (@dabeard), May 26, 2017, 6:43 p.m.

³²⁸ Jaffy, Bradd (@BraddJaffy), May 30, 2017, 4:14 a.m.

³²⁹ Bennett, “Katy Tur Tweets False Claim That 17 Intel Agencies Agree on Russian Election Meddling.”

³³⁰ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Background to “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections”: The Analytic Process and Cyber Incident Attribution*.

³³¹ Washington Post Staff, “Full Transcript: Sally Yates and James Clapper Testify on Russian Election Interference.”

³³² Washington Post Staff.

³³³ Shane, Scott. “What Intelligence Agencies Concluded about the Russian Attack on the U.S. Election.”

the earlier false claim later reappeared in the same paper.³³⁴ 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.³³⁵

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.”³³⁶ Likewise, in an interview with Senator Mike Lee (R-UT), *ABC News* Chief Political Correspondent George Stephanopoulos told Senator 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.”³³⁷ And *CNN* White House Correspondent Jim Acosta called “fake news” the President Trump’s claim that only three agencies were involved in the report. 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

³³⁴ Haberman, “Trump’s Deflections and Denials on Russia Frustrated Even His Allies.”

³³⁵ “Full Interview: Hillary Clinton, Former U.S. Secretary of State | Code 2017.”

³³⁶ Salama, “President Trump Appears to Dispute Russian Interference in 2016 Election.”

³³⁷ *ABC News*, “‘This Week’ Transcript 6-11-17: Preet Baharara, Jay Sekulow, Sen. Mike Lee, and Sen. Joe Manchin.”

sure we're going to get an answer, and if we do, it will be off camera.³³⁸

Town Hall wrote that the claim that 17 intelligence agencies worked on a comprehensive report regarding Russian activities during the election is “the myth that will not die.”³³⁹ Ultimately the *New York Times* 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 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.³⁴⁰

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.³⁴¹

³³⁸ Hains, “CNN’s Acosta to Trump: ‘Fake News’ to Question ‘17 Intel Agencies’ Claim; NYT Correction Proves Trump Right.”

³³⁹ Vespa, “The Myth That 17 Intelligence Agencies Were Involved in Russian Interference Analysis Will Not Die.”

³⁴⁰ Haberman, “Trump’s Deflections and Denials on Russia Frustrated Even His Allies.”

³⁴¹ Hains, “CNN’s Acosta to Trump: ‘Fake News’ to Question ‘17 Intel Agencies’ Claim; NYT Correction Proves Trump Right.”

*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."³⁴² However, this change was planned under the Obama 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."³⁴³

Nevertheless, reporters levied responsibility against President Trump with the headlines: "Trump Administration Modifies Sanctions against Russian Intelligence Service" (*CNBC*);³⁴⁴ "Trump Administration Relaxes U.S. Sanctions on Russia Imposed under Obama" (*CBS News*);³⁴⁵ and "Trump Administration Tweaks Sanctions against Russia" (*New York Daily News*).³⁴⁶ The *Chicago Tribune* later reported that this story turned out to be a "nothing-burger."³⁴⁷

*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."³⁴⁸ Also, *Vox* wrote, "The US Department of Justice is literally prosecuting a woman for laughing at now-Attorney General Jeff Sessions during his Senate

³⁴² Alexander, Peter (@PeterAlexander), February 2, 2017, 9:13 a.m.

³⁴³ Alexander, Peter (@PeterAlexander), February 2, 2017, 9:54 a.m.

³⁴⁴ Pramuk, "Trump Administration Modifies Sanctions Against Russian Intelligence Service."

³⁴⁵ Shabad, "Trump Administration Relaxes U.S. Sanctions on Russia Imposed Under Obama."

³⁴⁶ Joseph, "Trump Administration Tweaks Sanctions against Russia."

³⁴⁷ Tribune News Service. "How a Tweak Became a Tempest: Trump, Russia and Sanctions."

³⁴⁸ Reilly, "A Woman Is on Trial for Laughing During a Congressional Hearing."

confirmation hearing earlier this year.”³⁴⁹ This claim was made in headlines by the *New York Times*,³⁵⁰ *NBC News*,³⁵¹ *Mother Jones*,³⁵² and *Vanity Fair*.³⁵³

In reality, this woman was an activist and veteran protestor affiliated with Code Pink.³⁵⁴ Desiree Fairouz “laughed when Sen. Richard Shelby (R-Ala.) said that Sessions’ record of ‘treating all Americans equally under the law is clear and well-documented.’”³⁵⁵ For this, she was charged with “disorderly and disruptive conduct” intended to “impede, disrupt, and disturb the orderly conduct” of Congressional proceedings.³⁵⁶ 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.”³⁵⁷ According to the jury foreperson, “She did not get convicted for laughing. It was her actions as she was being asked to leave.”³⁵⁸

Wherever fake news is found, it always assumes the form of being either fabricated or misleading. Sometimes honest mistakes are made—of course, this does not make the report any less false—however, those reports that bear the moniker “fake news” are generally the result of intentional manipulation and implicit bias.

³⁴⁹ Lopez, “The US Department of Justice Is Literally Prosecuting a Woman for Laughing at Jeff Sessions.”

³⁵⁰ Mele, “A Code Pink Protester Laughs over a Trump Nominee and Is Convicted.”

³⁵¹ Rosenblatt, “Activist Faces Jail Time for Laughing During Sessions Hearing.”

³⁵² Oh, “Woman Convicted after Laughing During Jeff Sessions’ Confirmation Hearing.”

³⁵³ Nguyen, “A Jury Just Convicted a Woman for Laughing at Jeff Sessions.”

³⁵⁴ Reilly, “A Woman Is on Trial for Laughing During a Congressional Hearing.”

³⁵⁵ Reilly.

³⁵⁶ Reilly.

³⁵⁷ Adams, “No, a Woman wasn’t Convicted Today Simply for Laughing During Jeff Sessions’ Confirmation Hearing.”

³⁵⁸ Reilly, “Jury Convicts Woman Who Laughed at Jeff Sessions During Senate Hearing.”

5. Three Types of Fake News

Implicit bias is likely a driving force behind much of the fake news found among the mainstream media. For decades self-identified Democratic journalists have far outnumbered Republican journalists:

- **1971:** 35.5% Democrat; 25.7% Republican; 32.5% Independent
- **1982:** 38.5% Democrat; 18.8% Republican; 39.1% Independent
- **1992:** 44.1% Democrat; 16.4% Republican; 34.4% Independent
- **2002:** 35.9% Democrat; 18% Republican; 32.5% Independent
- **2013:** 28.1% Democrat; 7.1% Republican; 50.2% Independent³⁵⁹

In our modern hyper-partisan environment, *NewsBusters* Executive Editor Tom Graham speculates, “Journalists have gotten incredibly reluctant to identify with a party. I suspect liberals check the ‘independent’ box to avoid being properly

³⁵⁹ Willnat, *The American Journalist in the Digital Age*.

identified.”³⁶⁰ Nonetheless, self-identified Democratic journalists outnumber Republican journalists four-to-one.

Washington Post writer Erik Wemple notes, “The granddaddy of research on this topic is ‘The American Journalist,’ a series of studies that dates to the 1970s.”³⁶¹ The most recent iteration of this study finds that journalists are more than twice as likely to lean left than the general population (40% compared to 17%).^{362, 363}

Particularly notable is the shift to digital publishing. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, traditional newspaper jobs have declined from 455,000 in January of 1990 to 173,900 in January of 2017.³⁶⁴ In contrast, Internet publishing and broadcasting jobs have increased from 77,900 in January of 2008 to 206,700 in January of 2017.³⁶⁵ However, the vast majority of these digital journalists are located in decidedly liberal cities. *Politico* reports:

Today, 73 percent of all internet publishing jobs are concentrated in either the Boston-New York-Washington-Richmond corridor or the West Coast crescent that runs from Seattle to San Diego and on to Phoenix. The Chicagoland area, a traditional media center, captures 5 percent of the jobs, with a paltry 22 percent going to the rest of the country.³⁶⁶

The tendency toward left-leaning ideology and the concentration of journalists in strong liberal communities has produced what *FiveThirtyEight* Editor-in-Chief Nate Silver terms an ideological bubble or echo chamber.³⁶⁷ According to Jack Shafer and Tucker Doherty at *Politico*, this is why the overwhelming assumption of the media was that Hillary Clinton would win the 2016 presidential race, with the *Huffington Post* assigning her a 98.2% chance of winning and declaring, “Donald Trump has essentially

³⁶⁰ Wemple, “Dear Mainstream Media: Why so Liberal?”

³⁶¹ Wemple.

³⁶² Journalism and Media Staff, *The American Journalist*.

³⁶³ “Big News Covered by Fewer Full-Time Journalists, According to New Book by IU Faculty.”

³⁶⁴ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Employment Trends in Newspaper Publishing and Other Media, 1990–2016*.

³⁶⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics.

³⁶⁶ Shafer, “The Media Bubble Is Worse Than You Think.”

³⁶⁷ Silver, “There Really Was a Liberal Media Bubble.”

no path to an Electoral College victory.”³⁶⁸ They write, “Nearly 90 percent of all internet publishing employees work in a county where Clinton won, and 75 percent of them work in a county that she won by more than 30 percentage points.”³⁶⁹ As such, misleading reports—such as that by the *Huffington Post*—were not likely rooted in a nefarious plot to support Hillary but in a misplaced sense of reality influenced by their ideological echo chambers. In other words, implicit bias produced misleading and factually inaccurate reports—fake news.

Regardless of whether fabricated and misleading reports are the result of implicit bias or intentionality, these reports are fake news. Journalists may resist the charge, such as *Washington Post* writer Glenn Kessler’s response to the president’s fake news awards, “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.”³⁷⁰ But it doesn’t change the reality that the original report was—intentionally or not—fake news.³⁷¹ To some degree, it was reporting something false as if it were true. And some publications are far more prone to such errors than others.

There is nothing trivial about fake news. It should be taken seriously. Most fake news reports can be classified according to one of three categories: Disinformation and political propaganda, gossip and rumor, or deliberately constructed lies.

Disinformation and Political Propaganda

Regarding disinformation and political propaganda, Institute of Economic Affairs Head of Education Dr. Steve Davies observes:

Governments are constantly, and always have been, making claims about the world—about the behavior of their rivals or geopolitical opponents—which upon examination turn out to be, you know, completely untrue,

³⁶⁸ Jackson, “HuffPost Forecasts Hillary Clinton Will Win with 323 Electoral Votes.”

³⁶⁹ Shafer, “The Media Bubble Is Worse Than You Think.”

³⁷⁰ Kessler, “Fact-Checking President Trump’s ‘Fake News Awards.’”

³⁷¹

seriously exaggerated, mendacious in one way or another. Or they put out disinformation as it can be called during the Cold War. What purport to be factual accounts of apparently mutual matters which are actually completely made up which are put out in order to create a political advantage for the issuer.³⁷²

An example of this occurred during the 2018 Senate confirmation hearing for Supreme Court nominee Judge Brett Kavanaugh. The Democratic Party made an untrue and seriously exaggerated claim that inspired volumes of disinformation and political propaganda. Hours before the Senate's scheduled vote to nominate Judge Kavanaugh, Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) released a statement saying that she had referred to the FBI allegations of misconduct by Kavanaugh from 36 years ago when he was in high school.³⁷³ A constituent of Senator Feinstein, Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, claimed to have been sexually assaulted by Brett Kavanaugh at a high school party.^{374, 375}

Despite being denied access to the letter; discrepancies in the testimony; a lack of corroborating evidence; an absence of the most significant details, including the time and location; and a denial under oath of the event by every alleged witness, senators quickly rallied around Dr. Christine Blasey Ford, the alleged victim.^{376, 377, 378, 379} "I believe Professor Ford" became the mantra of

³⁷² "A History of Fake News."

³⁷³ De Vogue, "Democrats Send 'Information' Concerning Kavanaugh Nomination to FBI."

³⁷⁴ Bradner, "For '100%' Certain of Assault Claim; Kavanaugh Says 'I Am Innocent.'"

³⁷⁵ "Ford Says 100% Certain Kavanaugh Was Her Assaulter."

³⁷⁶ De Vogue, "Democrats Send 'Information' Concerning Kavanaugh Nomination to FBI."

³⁷⁷ Brown, "California Professor, Writer of Confidential Brett Kavanaugh Letter, Speaks Out about Her Allegation of Sexual Assault."

³⁷⁸ Nance, "Kavanaugh, Too? Christine Blasey Ford's Account Is Missing Key Details of Assault."

³⁷⁹ Space Force News, "Mitch McConnell DESTROYS Democrats' 'Choreographed Smear Campaign' against Kavanaugh."

Senators Chuck Schumer (D-NY),³⁸⁰ Kamala Harris (D-CA),³⁸¹ Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY),^{382, 383} Dianne Feinstein (D-CA),³⁸⁴ Richard Blumenthal (D-CT),³⁸⁵ Dick Durbin (D-IL),³⁸⁶ Mazie Hirono (D-HI),^{387, 388} and others.

Pundits and news contributors advocated Professor Ford, such as Symone Sanders who told *CNN*'s Jake Tapper, "I want to be clear that for me there is no debate. I believe Professor Ford."³⁸⁹ Senators received a letter signed by more than 1,000 alumnae of Ford's high school saying they believed her.³⁹⁰ A letter with over 700 signatures written by three teenage girls affirmed their belief in Ford's testimony and spoke of imagining themselves in her circumstances.³⁹¹ And many celebrities teamed up to create a viral video letter addressed to Ford saying, "Millions of us have your back. You and your testimony are credible. We believe you."^{392, 393}

³⁸⁰ "ICYMI – Schumer on ABC's The View: 'I Believe Professor Ford'; Schumer Urges Republicans Not to Rush through Nominee and Says FBI Should Complete Full Investigation before Both Judge Kavanaugh and Prof. Ford Testify before Senate Judiciary Committee."

³⁸¹ Morin, "Kamala Harris on Kavanaugh Accuser: 'I Believe Her.'"

³⁸² "Kavanaugh Accuser Wants FBI Investigation. TRANSCRIPT: 9/18/2018, All In w Chris Hayes."

³⁸³ Camp, "Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand: 'I Believe Dr. Blasey Ford Because She's Telling the Truth.'"

³⁸⁴ Feinstein, Dianne (@SenFeinstein), September 18, 2018, 2:57 p.m.

³⁸⁵ "Senate Democratic Agenda."

³⁸⁶ "Accuser of Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh of Sexual Assault Comes Forward Publicly and Agrees to Testify before Senate; Flooding Threatens Parts of North Carolina in Wake of Hurricane Florence. Aired 8-8:30a ET."

³⁸⁷ Sullivan, "Sen. Hirono's Message to Men: 'Just Shut up and Step up. Do the Right Thing.'"

³⁸⁸ "Accuser of Supreme Court Nominee Brett Kavanaugh of Sexual Assault Comes Forward Publicly and Agrees to Testify before Senate; Flooding Threatens Parts of North Carolina in Wake of Hurricane Florence. Aired 8-8:30a ET."

³⁸⁹ "Democrats: We Already Know Kavanaugh Is Guilty [Montage]."

³⁹⁰ Knoedler, "Gillibrand Receives Letter from 1,000 Women Supporting Kavanaugh's Accuser."

³⁹¹ Folley, "Teen Girls Pen Open Letter Supporting Kavanaugh Accuser: We Imagine You at That Party and 'See Ourselves.'"

³⁹² Da Silva, "#DearProfessorFord: Celebrities Show Support for Kavanaugh's Accuser Ahead of Hearing."

³⁹³ Moore, Julianne (@_julianne), September 19, 2018, 1:42 p.m.

Never mind that Judge Brett Kavanaugh had an impeccable testimony as a good and decent human-being who values women and the law. Never mind that, as Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell told Congress, “Hundreds of men and women who have known Brett Kavanaugh across his life have written or spoken out that he is a man of strong character and tremendous integrity,”³⁹⁴ including 75 female colleagues, classmates, and friends of Kavanaugh from every phase of his life who held a press conference testifying to his character and behavior over the years.³⁹⁵ Never mind that Kavanaugh had denied the accusation under oath before Congress and supplied evidence to support his alibi.³⁹⁶ Never mind that Kavanaugh had successfully passed six FBI background checks and a Senate confirmation process to the Federal Court.³⁹⁷ Never mind that Kavanaugh was considered to be one of the most respected Federal judges in the nation.^{398, 399} And never mind that *USA Today* reported, “On paper, Brett Michael Kavanaugh may be the most qualified Supreme Court nominee in generations.”⁴⁰⁰ Apparently these were not sufficient to earn Judge Brett Kavanaugh his right to a presumption of innocence and due process. Instead, the collective news media demanded with near unanimity that we believe Dr. Christine Blasey Ford.

Incredibly, this was just the beginning. Two more accusers stepped forward with allegations of sexual harassment. Deborah Ramirez, of her own admission, had significant gaps in her memory due to excessive drinking, such that she could not recall with certainty what Brett Kavanaugh’s role in the alleged incident

³⁹⁴ Space Force News, “Mitch McConnell DESTROYS Democrats’ ‘Choreographed Smear Campaign’ against Kavanaugh.”

³⁹⁵ Lee, “Women Rally in Support of Kavanaugh: ‘We Know the Man, We Know His Heart.’”

³⁹⁶ Bloomberg Government, “Kavanaugh Hearing: Transcript.”

³⁹⁷ Baker, “Christine Blasey Ford Wants F.B.I. to Investigate Kavanaugh before She Testifies.”

³⁹⁸ “Sen. Cruz: ‘Judge Kavanaugh Is One of the Most Respected Federal Judges in the Country, and I Look Forward to Supporting His Nomination.’”

³⁹⁹ “Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh Is an Exceptionally Qualified and Deserving Nominee for the Supreme Court.”

⁴⁰⁰ Wolf, “Brett Kavanaugh: Supreme Court Nominee Straight Out of Central Casting.”

may have been.^{401, 402} The *New York Times* refused to publish the story, explaining:

The Times had interviewed several dozen people over the past week in an attempt to corroborate her story, and could find no one with firsthand knowledge. Ms. Ramirez herself contacted former Yale classmates asking if they recalled the incident and told some of them that she could not be certain Mr. Kavanaugh was the one who exposed himself.⁴⁰³

Nevertheless, Senator Kirsten Gillibrand was quick to tweet, “Enough is enough. One credible sexual assault claim should have been too many to get a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court and make decisions that will affect millions of women’s lives for generations. Two is an embarrassment. It’s time for a new nominee.”⁴⁰⁴ Likewise, more than 2,200 women⁴⁰⁵ and nearly 200 men⁴⁰⁶ who attended Yale, where the alleged incident occurred, signed a letter in support of Ramirez.⁴⁰⁷

Then after days of teasing by her lawyer, Michael Avenatti,^{408, 409,} Julie Swetnick released a sworn statement testifying that she had observed Kavanaugh “consistently engage in excessive drinking” at high school parties and “engage in abusive and physically aggressive behavior toward girls” in a sexual manner.^{412,}

⁴⁰¹ Farrow, “Senate Democrats Investigate a New Allegation of Sexual Misconduct from Brett Kavanaugh’s College Years.”

⁴⁰² Perez, “Second Woman Accuses Brett Kavanaugh of Sexual Misconduct.”

⁴⁰³ Stolberg, “Christine Blasey Ford Reaches Deal to Testify at Kavanaugh Hearing.”

⁴⁰⁴ Gillibrand, Kirsten (@SenGillibrand), September 23, 2018, 7:11 p.m.

⁴⁰⁵ Yale Women. “Open Letter from Women of Yale in Support of Deborah Ramirez.”

⁴⁰⁶ Men of Yale, “An Open Letter from Men of Yale in Support of Deborah Ramirez, Christine Blasey Ford and Others.”

⁴⁰⁷ Saul, “In a Culture of Privilege and Alcohol at Yale, Her World Converged with Kavanaugh’s.”

⁴⁰⁸ “Avenatti Issues Warning to Trump, Kavanaugh.”

⁴⁰⁹ Avenatti, Michael (@MichaelAvenatti), September 23, 2018, 4:33 p.m.

⁴¹⁰ Avenatti, Michael (@MichaelAvenatti), September 24, 2018, 7:32 a.m.

⁴¹¹ Walters, “Brett Kavanaugh: Third Woman Expected to Make Accusations of Sexual Misconduct.”

⁴¹² Wagner, “Kavanaugh Nomination: Judge Says He Is Victim of ‘Character Assassination’ as Third Woman Comes Forward.”

⁴¹³ Most surprisingly, she testified to witnessing efforts by Kavanaugh to “cause girls to become inebriated and disoriented so they could then be ‘gang raped’ in a side room or bedroom by a ‘train’ of numerous boys.”^{414, 415}

Like the other accusations, Swetnick’s statement contained salacious details while lacking nearly all particulars critical for corroboration. Nevertheless, news outlets repeated the accusations on a seemingly endless loop, with *CNN*’s on-air anchors, reporters, and contributors associating Kavanaugh with the word “rape” 191 times over the course of 18 days. This does not include similar verbiage, such as “sexual assault,” or the many other instances in which the word “rape” was used by guests or by participants in live or replayed news events.⁴¹⁶ So intent were some networks in promoting the false narrative that *NBC News* sat on evidence that exonerated Kavanaugh of Julie Swetnick’s accusations and discredited her lawyer, Michael Avenatti.^{417, 418}

The media, which had previously expressed concern over Judge Kavanaugh’s politics and judicial philosophy, breathlessly reported these unsubstantiated rumors. *New Day* host John Berman even argued, “No one is accusing Professor Kavanaugh of being a rapist—Judge Kavanaugh of being a rapist. An attempted rapist, though yes.”⁴¹⁹ The resulting national fervor led to extended Congressional hearings that were described by Senator John Kennedy (R-LA) as an “intergalactic freakshow,” and it nearly prevented Judge Kavanaugh’s appointment to the Supreme Court.⁴²⁰

⁴¹³ Johnson, “Woman Repped by Avenatti Claims Kavanaugh Attended Gang-Rape Parties.”

⁴¹⁴ Wagner, “Kavanaugh Nomination: Judge Says He Is Victim of ‘Character Assassination’ as Third Woman Comes Forward.”

⁴¹⁵ Johnson, “Woman Repped by Avenatti Claims Kavanaugh Attended Gang-Rape Parties.”

⁴¹⁶ D’Agostino, “Destroying Kavanaugh: CNN Tars with ‘Rape’ 191 Times.”

⁴¹⁷ Adams, “NBC Sat on Evidence Exonerating Justice Kavanaugh, Discrediting Michael Avenatti and His Clients’ Accusations.”

⁴¹⁸ Adams, “NBC Reporter Tries, Fails to Explain Why She Sat on Exculpatory Kavanaugh Evidence.”

⁴¹⁹ D’Agostino, “Destroying Kavanaugh: CNN Tars with ‘Rape’ 191 Times.”

⁴²⁰ O’Reilly, “Kavanaugh Confirmation Process Has Been ‘an Intergalactic Freak Show,’ Sen. Kennedy Says.”

Ultimately, Dr. Blasey Ford's testimony collapsed under its own weight. Special victims prosecutor Rachel Mitchell, who questioned Dr. Ford during a congressional hearing, noted numerous inconsistencies and determined that "the activities of congressional Democrats and Dr. Ford's attorneys likely affected Dr. Ford's account."⁴²¹ Mitchell concluded that there was insufficient evidence to satisfy the preponderance-of-the-evidence standard, noting that her case is "even weaker" than a "he said, she said" case.⁴²²

Dr. Ford's testimony lacked any key corroborating details, such as the location, the year of the alleged incident, or how she got home from the party. The only details she seemed to remember were those potentially damaging to Kavanaugh.⁴²³ And everyone she claimed was at the party with her denied any knowledge of the party, including her best friend, LeLand Keyser, who said she had "no recollection of ever being at a party or gathering where [Kavanaugh] was present, with, or without, Dr. Ford."⁴²⁴

Several weeks later, the Senate Judiciary Committee released a 414-page report exonerating Kavanaugh of all wrongdoing, concluding that "there was no evidence to substantiate any of the claims of sexual assault made against Justice Kavanaugh."⁴²⁵ Additionally, the committee referred Michael Avenatti to the Justice Department for submitting a fraudulent sworn statement to the committee⁴²⁶ and referred both Avenatti and Julie Swetnick to the Justice Department for the crimes of conspiracy, providing materially false statements to Congress, and obstructing a Senate investigation.^{427, 428}

⁴²¹ "Read Prosecutor Rachel Mitchell's Memo about the Kavanaugh-Ford Hearing."

⁴²² "Read Prosecutor Rachel Mitchell's Memo about the Kavanaugh-Ford Hearing."

⁴²³ Boothe, "Christine Blasey Ford Has a credibility Problem."

⁴²⁴ Boothe.

⁴²⁵ "Kavanaugh Report." Senate Judiciary Committee, November 2, 2018. Accessed November 29, 2018. <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2018-11-02%20Kavanaugh%20Report.pdf>.

⁴²⁶ Segers, "Grassley Refers Avenatti to Justice Department for Second Criminal Investigation."

⁴²⁷ Segers.

⁴²⁸ "Second Avenatti Referral with Enclosures, Redacted."

Rumors and Gossip

Rumors and gossip generally center around someone in the public eye and often begin spontaneously. However, these reports are amplified when they are picked up by news outlets, such as when journalists report Twitter “outrage” as legitimate news. Other times, these are smear campaigns prompted by opposition research that Congressional staffers and campaign managers are all-too-eager to share with the press.⁴²⁹

An example of gossip and rumors occurred on February 13, 2017 when 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.⁴³⁰ 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*.”⁴³¹ 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.”⁴³²

Headlines read: “Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago Club Has a New Feature: Watch the President Discuss Top Secret Security Issues!” (*Salon*);⁴³³ “Missile Crisis by Candlelight: Donald Trump’s Use of Mar-a-Lago Raises Security Questions” (*Guardian*);⁴³⁴ and “Trump Handled North Korea Crisis in Full View of Diners and Waiters at His Private Club” (*ThinkProgress*).⁴³⁵

⁴²⁹ Attkisson, *The Smear*, 67–68.

⁴³⁰ Fahrenthold, “Trump Turns Mar-a-Lago Club Terrace into Open-Air Situation Room.”

⁴³¹ Liptak, “At Mar-a-Lago, Trump Tackles Crisis Diplomacy at Close Range.”

⁴³² Alcindor, “Scenes from Mar-a-Lago as Trump and Abe Get News about North Korea.”

⁴³³ Rozsa, “Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago Club has a New Feature: Watch the President Discuss Top Secret Security Issues!”

⁴³⁴ Borger, “Missile Crisis by Candlelight: Donald Trump’s Use of Mar-a-Lago Raises Security Questions.”

⁴³⁵ Rugar, “Trump Handled North Korea Crisis in Full View of Diners and Waiters at His Private Club.”

According to these reports, the president and the prime minister were being informed that North Korea had just launched a ballistic missile over a Japanese island,⁴³⁶ and this briefing was made in public because there was no secure briefing room in Mar-a-Lago.⁴³⁷ Moreover, the briefing was done on a candlelit patio, resulting in aides using their cell phones to illuminate the briefing documents.⁴³⁸ 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.”⁴³⁹

These reports resulted in a query from the House of Representatives Oversight Committee.^{440, 441} However, the report stemmed 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 already public and had reached his friend, he assumed that the president must be receiving a briefing on the matter.⁴⁴²

Contrary to reports, Mar-a-Lago does have a secure briefing room,⁴⁴³ 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

⁴³⁶ Lambiet, “Trump, Abe Got North Korea Missile News Amid Mar-a-Lago Crowd.”

⁴³⁷ Pratte, “Winter White House Hypocrisy.”

⁴³⁸ Bump, “Trump Ran a Campaign Based on Intelligence Security. That’s Not How He’s Governing.”

⁴³⁹ Lee, “Why It’s a Bad Idea for Trump Aides to Use Their Phone Flashlights to Read Documents.”

⁴⁴⁰ Reilly, “House Oversight Committee Probes Mar-a-Lago Security after North Korea Incident.”

⁴⁴¹ “Trump Handling of Security Information at Mar-a-Lago Queried by House Panel.”

⁴⁴² Fahrenthold, “Trump Turns Mar-a-Lago Club Terrace into Open-Air Situation Room.”

⁴⁴³ Bertrand, “Sean Spicer Addresses Mar-a-Lago Photos, Says Trump Was Briefed in Secure Location before Dinner with Abe.”

the dinner.^{444, 445} 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.”⁴⁴⁶ No classified information was present in the room.⁴⁴⁷

Deliberately Constructed Lies

Deliberately constructed lies may be less likely to appear in respected publications, but it is surprising how often it occurs. Over the years, Stephen Glass, Jay Forman, Jack Kelley, Janett Cooke, Jonah Lehrer, Christopher Newton, and others have become notorious for deliberately filing fictional accounts as fact-based reporting.^{448, 449} Perhaps one of the most notable examples is former reporter for the *New York Times* Jason Blair who was fired after an extensive internal investigation that found him guilty of “frequent acts of journalistic fraud.”⁴⁵⁰

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, crafting stories based upon photographs, and plagiarizing other news organizations.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁴ Saenz, “White House Says Only ‘Logistics,’ Not Classified Info, Discussed at Mar-a-Lago Dinner.”

⁴⁴⁵ “Trump Handling of Security Information at Mar-a-Lago Queried by House Panel.”

⁴⁴⁶ Saenz, “White House Says Only ‘Logistics,’ Not Classified Info, Discussed at Mar-a-Lago Dinner.”

⁴⁴⁷ Saenz.

⁴⁴⁸ Shafer, “Should Journalists Have the Right to Be Wrong?”

⁴⁴⁹ Green, “Washington Post Investigation of Janet Cooke’s Fabrications.”

⁴⁵⁰ “New York Times: Reporter Routinely Faked Articles.”

⁴⁵¹ “New York Times: Reporter Routinely Faked Articles.”

Less notable are reporters such as those at *NBC News*,⁴⁵² *CNN*,⁴⁵³ *Associated Press*,⁴⁵⁴ or *Washington Post*⁴⁵⁵ who provoked a tidal wave of hatred aimed at a group of high schoolers because of reporting that used assumption, prejudice, and political frustration to create an entirely fictitious narrative. The news media attacked a group of high school boys on a fieldtrip from a Catholic school in Covington, Kentucky based upon a viral video clip selectively ripped from nearly two hours of footage. We were told that a group of white privileged, hateful, bigots mobbed and mocked an elderly Native American identified as Nathan Phillips while he was singing a prayer of peace at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. Particularly troubling to the media was a smiling young man in a red make America great again hat⁴⁵⁶ who was said to be aggressively standing his ground⁴⁵⁷ with a “smirk”⁴⁵⁸ that says, “I’m richer, I’m white, and I’m a guy. My existence trumps your experience.”⁴⁵⁹

The video clip, which originated from a Twitter account that was subsequently suspended for “misleading account information,”⁴⁶⁰ simply showed boisterous high schoolers chanting with Phillips and a boy smiling as an elderly man beat a ceremonial drum inches from his face while chanting.⁴⁶¹ Nevertheless, this was sufficient to trigger social justice warriors throughout the nation, and the media was quick to supply the missing context based only upon the unquestioned testimony of the Native Americans.

⁴⁵² Fondacaro, “NBC Blasts Catholic Students as ‘Racist’, Fails to Retract Hot Take.”

⁴⁵³ Williams, “Teens in Make America Great Again Hats Mocked a Native American Elder at the Lincoln Memorial.”

⁴⁵⁴ Beam, “Students in ‘MAGA’ Hats Mock Native American after Rally.”

⁴⁵⁵ Wootson, “‘It Was Getting Ugly’: Native American Drummer Speaks on His Encounter with MAGA-Hat-Wearing Teens.”

⁴⁵⁶ Williams, “Teens in Make America Great Again Hats Mocked a Native American Elder at the Lincoln Memorial.”

⁴⁵⁷ Kim, “Nick Sandmann on Encounter with Nathan Phillips: ‘I Wish I Would’ve Walked Away.’”

⁴⁵⁸ Capehart, “Time to Take on the Covington ‘Smirk.’”

⁴⁵⁹ Cranz, Alex (@alexhcranz), January 19, 2019, 12:16 p.m.

⁴⁶⁰ CBS News, “Twitter Takes down Account That Helped Spread Lincoln Memorial Confrontation Video.”

⁴⁶¹ CBS News.

Marcus Frejo, known as Chief Queese Imc, told the *Associated Press* “he felt they were mocking the dance and also heckling a couple of black men nearby.”⁴⁶² Likewise, Nathan Phillips—erroneously presented as a valiant Vietnam war veteran rather than a long-time political activist with a history of lying^{463, 464}—said the confrontation felt like “hate unbridled.”⁴⁶⁵ He wiped away tears as he recounted, “I heard them say, ‘Build that wall, build that wall.’”⁴⁶⁶

Originally Phillips told the *Washington Post* that while he was “singing the American Indian Movement song that serves as a ceremony to send spirits home, he noticed tensions beginning to escalate when the teens and other apparent participants from the nearby March for Life rally began taunting the dispersing indigenous crowd.”⁴⁶⁷ Then the Covington high schoolers “swarmed around him,” but “Phillips kept drumming and singing, thinking about his wife, Shoshana, who died of bone marrow cancer nearly four years ago, and the various threats that face indigenous communities around the world.”⁴⁶⁸

Later, Phillips told a very different story to the *Detroit Free Press*: “[The boys] were in the process of attacking these four black individuals,” Phillip [*sic*] said. “I was there and I was witnessing all of this ... As this kept on going on and escalating, it just got to a point where you do something or you walk away, you know? You see something that is wrong and you’re faced with that choice of right or wrong.” ... “So I put myself in between that, between a rock and hard place.”⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶² Beam, “Students in ‘MAGA’ Hats Mock Native American after Rally.”

⁴⁶³ “Native American Elder Nathan Phillips’ Criminal Background Revealed after Release of New Reports.”

⁴⁶⁴ “Flashback: Bearing Smearing and Harassing Catholic Children – Native American Nathan Phillips Accused Frat Boys of Harassment in Similar Event.”

⁴⁶⁵ Williams, “Teens in Make America Great Again Hats Mocked a Native American Elder at the Lincoln Memorial.”

⁴⁶⁶ ka_yai, “Lincoln Memorial.”

⁴⁶⁷ Wootson, “‘It Was Getting Ugly’: Native American Drummer Speaks on His Encounter with MAGA-Hat-Wearing Teens.”

⁴⁶⁸ Wootson.

⁴⁶⁹ Warikoo, “Native American Leader of Michigan: ‘Mob Mentality’ in Students Was ‘Scary.’”

He went on to say, “There was that moment when I realized I’ve put myself between beast and prey. ... These young men were beastly and these old black individuals was their prey, and I stood in between them and so they needed their pounds of flesh and they were looking at me for that.”⁴⁷⁰

Likewise, Nathan Phillips told *CNN* that he confronted the Covington students because he was witnessing hatred and racism from the boys who looked ready to lynch a group of nearby Black Hebrew Israelite activists just because of the color of their skin.⁴⁷¹ Phillips also said he feared for his own safety from the kids who seemed to want to rip him apart because he had “denied them their prey.”⁴⁷² They were very aggressive and said things like, “Build the wall,”⁴⁷³ and, “In my state, those Indians are nothing but a bunch of drunks.”⁴⁷⁴

However, the hours of video footage taken of the event reveals a remarkably different story—one in which the Covington high schoolers, as victims of harassment and racism, exercised incredible restraint, seeking instead to defuse escalating tensions while being berated as “incest babies,” “dusty [expletive] white crackers,” “child molesting faggots,” “racists,” “future school shooters,” and more.^{475, 476} This would have been evident to any reporter who bothered to investigate the facts by first watching the viral video clip in context from the two hours of available footage—or even talk to any of the other witnesses present. Instead, the news media rushed to judgment.

After the March for Life rally, the Covington students reconvened at the Lincoln Memorial to wait for a bus. Upon arriving at the memorial, they witnessed a cultic group known as the Black Hebrew Israelites viciously and persistently shout racist remarks

⁴⁷⁰ Warikoo.

⁴⁷¹ Sidner, “Native American Elder Nathan Phillips, in His Own Words.”

⁴⁷² Sidner.

⁴⁷³ Sidner.

⁴⁷⁴ AP Wire, “Native American Says He Tried to Ease Tensions at Mall.”

⁴⁷⁵ “RAW Full Video – Covington Catholic High Encounter with Nathan Phillips 1/19/19.”

⁴⁷⁶ “Covington Catholic Student’s Full Statement on Encounter with Native American Protestor.”

at those involved in the Indigenous Peoples March which was protesting President's Trump's plans to build a border wall.^{477, 478} After a heated and profane exchange between members of these two groups, which is too vulgar to repeat, the Black Hebrew Israelites tried to redirect the Native American's hatred to the handful of teenagers who were quietly watching from a distance. As some of the Black Hebrew Israelites hollered, "build that wall," another shouted:

That's the problem. A bunch of demons, always talking out their [expletive]. Always talking out their [expletive], but you won't say that to this peckerwood wearing a Make America Great hat again. You [expletive] Uncle Tomahawks. You a bunch of Uncle Tomahawks. Why don't you crack that peckerwood with the hat on? Why you don't crack his head? Why you don't speak to him like that? Cause you an Uncle Tomahawk. You think that this—there's Uncle Toms? You an Uncle Tomahawk. Out of your mind. Got your head up the white man's [expletive]. Talk about peace, peace. Ain't gonna be no peace. You gonna be ripped in pieces, thus saith the Lord if you don't repent from your wicked ways.⁴⁷⁹

Over the course of the next hour, tensions escalated as the Black Hebrew Israelites hurled continuous insults at the Native Americans as well as other bystanders, occasionally threatening physical harm.⁴⁸⁰ In an effort to drown out and counter these profane, hateful, homophobic, and racist rants, the Covington students asked their chaperones for permission to sing their school pep rally songs.⁴⁸¹ Given that the school had an annual

⁴⁷⁷ "RAW Full Video – Covington Catholic High Encounter with Nathan Phillips 1/19/19."

⁴⁷⁸ "Covington Catholic Student's Full Statement on Encounter with Native American Protestor."

⁴⁷⁹ "RAW Full Video – Covington Catholic High Encounter with Nathan Phillips 1/19/19."

⁴⁸⁰ "RAW Full Video."

⁴⁸¹ "Covington Catholic Student's Full Statement on Encounter with Native American Protestor."

tradition of rallying at the steps of the Lincoln memorial where they sung their school spirit songs, the chaperones agreed.⁴⁸²

Soon Nathan Phillips and a few other Native Americans waded through the crowd of kids, beating a drum and chanting. Nobody tried to block his path as he locked eyes with Nick Sandmann and came within inches of his face, all-the-while beating his drum and chanting.^{483, 484} In an official statement, Sandmann explained what followed:

I never interacted with this protestor. I did not speak to him. I did not make any hand gestures or other aggressive moves. To be honest, I was startled and confused as to why he had approached me. We had already been yelled at by another group of protestors, and when the second group approached I was worried that a situation was getting out of control where adults were attempting to provoke teenagers.

I believed that by remaining motionless and calm, I was helping to diffuse [*sic*] the situation. I realized everyone had cameras and that perhaps a group of adults was trying to provoke a group of teenagers into a larger conflict. ... During the period of the drumming, a member of the protestor's entourage began yelling at a fellow student that we "stole our land" and that we should "go back to Europe." I heard one of my fellow students begin to respond. I motioned to my classmate and tried to get him to stop engaging with the protestor, as I was still in the mindset that we needed to calm down tensions.⁴⁸⁵

For this, Nick Sandmann, his family, and his fellow students received death threats because of how he was portrayed by the

⁴⁸² "HERE Is the Definitive Timeline for the Covington Catholic Run in at the Lincoln Memorial."

⁴⁸³ "RAW Full Video – Covington Catholic High Encounter with Nathan Phillips 1/19/19."

⁴⁸⁴ "Covington Catholic Student's Full Statement on Encounter with Native American Protestor."

⁴⁸⁵ "Covington Catholic Student's Full Statement on Encounter with Native American Protestor."

news media,⁴⁸⁶ and a bomb threat was called into their school.⁴⁸⁷ Media Research Center's Dan Gainor writes:

The Twitter mob formed, threatening first the wrong student and then bombarding the Covington students with everything from calls to doxx them to death wishes and death threats. The assault was incredible. MAGA hats are “offensive” or “white privilege” or the “new white hood.” The Washington Post ran an entire opinion piece about one boy's ‘smirk.’ The students were called “baby snakes’ and mocked as ‘victims of their own choices.’⁴⁸⁸

Twitter was in an uproar. Comedian Kathy Griffin repeatedly⁴⁸⁹ asked that the children be doxxed, “Name these kids. I want NAMES. Shame them. If you think these [expletive] wouldn't dox you in a heartbeat, think again.”⁴⁹⁰ Comedian Sarah Beattie offered oral sex to “whoever manages to punch that maga kid in the face.”⁴⁹¹ Adult film star Stormy Daniels tweeted, “I'm suddenly in favor of building a wall...around Covington Catholic High in K.Y. And let's electrify it to keep those disgusting punks from getting loose and creating more vileness in society.”⁴⁹² Disney producer Jack Morrissey shared a cartoon image of a woodchipper spraying blood with the caption, “#MAGAKids go screaming, hats first, into the woodchipper.”^{493, 494} Actress and political activist Alyssa Milano tweeted, “The red MAGA hat is the new white hood.”⁴⁹⁵ And musician “Uncle Shoes” tweeted, “If you are a true fan of Shoes I want you to fire on any of these red hat [expletive] when you see them. On sight.”⁴⁹⁶ Also, “Lock the kids in the school

⁴⁸⁶ Sellers, “Death Threats and Protests: Kentucky Town Reels from Fallout Over Lincoln Memorial Faceoff.”

⁴⁸⁷ Day, “Covington High School Given the ‘All Clear’ to Return after Bomb Threat.”

⁴⁸⁸ Gainor, “This Week We Learned That Mainstream Media Won't Tattle on Each Other, No Matter How Badly They Do Journalism.”

⁴⁸⁹ Griffin, Kathy (@kathygriffin), January 20, 2019, 2:25 a.m.

⁴⁹⁰ Griffin, Kathy (@kathygriffin), January 20, 2019, 2:05 a.m.

⁴⁹¹ Beattie, Sarah (@nachosarah), January 21, 2019, 2:01 p.m.

⁴⁹² Daniels, Stormy (@StormyDaniels), January 19, 2019, 3:46 p.m.

⁴⁹³ Sweden, Peter (@PeterSweden7), January 20, 2019, 4:46 p.m.

⁴⁹⁴ Palin, Sarah (@SarahPalinUSA), January 21, 2019, 10:29 a.m.

⁴⁹⁵ Milano, Alyssa (@Alyssa_Milano), January 20, 2019, 8:19 a.m.

⁴⁹⁶ Uncle Shoes (@HouseShoes), January 20, 2019, 5:11 p.m..

and burn that [expletive] to the ground.”⁴⁹⁷ He reiterated this the next day, tweeting, “Burn the [expletive] school down.”⁴⁹⁸

Apparently, the only true villains in this story were the Covington students, and Nick Sandmann’s greatest crime was smiling at a Native American. Never mind how inappropriate it is for Native American adults to confront and provoke a group of high schoolers by locking eyes with a boy and banging a drum inches from the kid’s face. Never mind the hours of homophobic and racist rants that came from the Black Hebrew Israelites. Never mind the profanity-laced confrontations between the Native Americans and the Black Hebrew Israelites. In short, never mind that the clear examples of division, intolerance, and aggression were entirely from the others involved. According to the media, Nick Sandmann’s expression was aggressive and intolerant, therefore, he had to be portrayed as the villain of the story.⁴⁹⁹

Nick Sandmann has since sued the *Washington Post*, saying that it targeted him and defamed him for political purposes.⁵⁰⁰ The suit points to “no less than six false and defamatory articles.”⁵⁰¹ He has also sued *CNN*, having identified four television broadcasts and nine online articles as defamatory.⁵⁰² And he has sued *NBCUniversal* and *MSNBC*, claiming that they produced 15 defamatory newscasts and six articles as well as multiple inaccurate tweets about the incident.⁵⁰³

Fake news exists, and it has real-world consequences. It is not conspiratorial to reference fake news. However, fake news is not monolithic. There is no one category that defines all fake news.

⁴⁹⁷ Uncle Shoes (@HouseShoes), January 19, 2019, 3:58 p.m.

⁴⁹⁸ Uncle Shoes (@HouseShoes), January 20, 2019, 9:24 a.m.

⁴⁹⁹ Kim, “Nick Sandmann on Encounter with Nathan Phillips: ‘I Wish I Would’ve Walked Away.’”

⁵⁰⁰ Chappen, “Covington Catholic Teen Nick Sandmann Sues ‘Washington Post’ for \$250 Million.”

⁵⁰¹ Londberg, “Covington Catholic Student’s Legal Team Files \$250M Suit against the Washington Post.”

⁵⁰² Brookbank, Sarah. “Nick Sandmann’s Legal Team Files \$275 Million Lawsuit against CNN.”

⁵⁰³ Brookbank, Sarah. “Nick Sandmann: Covington Catholic Student’s Legal Team Sues NBC, MSNBC for \$275M.”

Instead, nearly all of what today bears the label “fake news” fits into one of three groupings: Political propaganda, gossip and rumor, or deliberately constructed lies.

These are not editorial oversights, and they are far more common than we would like to believe. Indeed, such false reports can be readily found in varying degrees among nearly all our nation’s popular news outlets, including those that have labeled themselves the defender of democracy, the paper of record, and the most trusted name in news.

According to God’s standard, any news source that sacrifices a faithful recounting of the facts to propagate political propaganda, gossip and rumor, or deliberately constructed lies is inherently deceitful. Proverbs 14:25 says, *“A truthful witness saves lives, but one who breathes out lies is deceitful.”* Likewise, Psalm 7:14 reveals that such deception is the fruit of a heart that is not aligned with God, *“Behold, the wicked man conceives evil and is pregnant with mischief and gives birth to lies.”*

6. A Long History of Fake News

“There has been more new error propagated by the press in the last ten years than in an hundred years before 1798,” wrote second President of the United States John Adams.⁵⁰⁴ Similarly, Thomas Jefferson claimed that the newspapers of his day had fully prostituted themselves to falsehood, concluding, “Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle.”⁵⁰⁵

Fake news is not a new phenomenon. It dates back to the founding of our country ... and further. Fake news is at least as old as the printing press.

On March 26, 1475 the body of a 28-month-old child named Simonino was found floating in a ditch that ran through the house cellar of a Jewish community leader in Trent, Italy. Following weeks of torture, some Jews were compelled to confess to the crime of ritually murdering the child “in order to obtain Christian blood for use in the Jewish ceremonies of Passover.”⁵⁰⁶ Because of the recent invention of the printing press, this event received extensive and sensationalized coverage⁵⁰⁷ which inspired surrounding communities to commit heinous crimes against the

⁵⁰⁴ Mansky, “The Age-Old Problem of ‘Fake News.’”

⁵⁰⁵ “Thomas Jefferson to John Norvell, June 11, 1807.”

⁵⁰⁶ Po-Chia Hsia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany*, 40.

⁵⁰⁷ Bowd, *Tales from Trent: The Construction of ‘Saint’ Simon in Manuscript and Print, 1475–1511*, 183.

Jews.⁵⁰⁸ Unsuccessfully, the pope endeavored to expose the story as fake news.⁵⁰⁹ Instead, almost 130 “miracles” were claimed to be associated with Simonino’s body, and a cult following was produced.⁵¹⁰ Prince-Bishop of Trent Johannes IV Hinderbach even canonized Simonino as a saint.⁵¹¹

Fake news has always been a persistent and powerful influence upon societies. In an article titled “The Long and Brutal History of Fake News,” Jacob Soll notes that it was because of fake news that the French philosopher Voltaire refuted religious explanations of natural events. Likewise, Voltaire’s attacks against a fake news story resulting in the wrongful conviction of Jean Calas became a touchstone for the Enlightenment. Even America’s founding fathers employed fake news, using it to fuel the Revolutionary War and to recruit soldiers.⁵¹² Later, “During the contentious election of 1800, Federalist newspapers tried to keep people from voting for Thomas Jefferson by running fake stories of his death.”⁵¹³

Indeed, American newspapers have a long and often sordid history of printing misleading and fabricated stories. Prior to the rise of the penny press, newspapers were decidedly partisan. They were generally funded by political parties and were operated by political party officials.⁵¹⁴ According to Professor Barbara Friedman of the University of North Carolina, “Political parties considered newspapers as extensions of what they did. They were tools. The point was to discredit and even savage the opponent with falsehoods.”⁵¹⁵

It was the penny press—cheap, tabloid-style newspapers beginning in the 1830s that often lied about sensational events to entertain readers—that created the modern reporter and the notion of providing independent information for the public

⁵⁰⁸ Soll, “The Long and Brutal History of Fake News.”

⁵⁰⁹ Soll.

⁵¹⁰ Bowd, *Tales from Trent: The Construction of ‘Saint’ Simon in Manuscript and Print, 1475–1511*, 188.

⁵¹¹ Soll, “The Long and Brutal History of Fake News.”

⁵¹² Soll.

⁵¹³ Seidenberg, “Fake News Has Long Held a Role in American History.”

⁵¹⁴ Tucher, “Fake News: An Origin Story.”

⁵¹⁵ Seidenberg, “Fake News Has Long Held a Role in American History.”

good.⁵¹⁶ Not driven by political ideology, journalistic practice shifted from interpreting an event from afar to timely and descriptive boots-on-the-ground reporting.⁵¹⁷

Unlike traditional newspapers, the penny presses weren't underwritten by political parties. Instead, they were dependent upon their sales and advertisement revenue which relied upon providing the people what they wanted.⁵¹⁸ As newspapers began to view their readers as consumers, they began catering to the people's desires, providing sensational news with mass-market appeal.⁵¹⁹ Often this meant shaping stories around consumer expectations, and it sometimes resulted in a blatant disregard for the truth.⁵²⁰

The *New York Sun* is notorious for perpetrating one of the most famous media hoaxes in history—the discovery of life on the moon. In an 1835 series of articles, the paper triumphantly listed astronomical discoveries made by the famous British astronomer Sir John Herschel.⁵²¹ According to the *Sun*, Herschel:

has discovered planets in other solar systems; has obtained a distinct view of objects in the moon, fully equal to that which the naked eye commands of terrestrial objects at the distance of a hundred yards; has firmly established a new theory of cometary phenomena; and has solved or corrected nearly every leading problem of mathematical astronomy.⁵²²

The paper then proceeded to describe in great detail the exotic, lush, and watery habitat of the moon, along with its many animals and sentient inhabitants. This included semi-humans with bat-

⁵¹⁶ Tucher, "Fake News: An Origin Story."

⁵¹⁷ *Science Encyclopedia*, s.v., "Communication in The Americas and Their Influence."

⁵¹⁸ *Science Encyclopedia*.

⁵¹⁹ *International Encyclopedia of Communication*, "Penny Press."

⁵²⁰ Tucher, "Fake News: An Origin Story."

⁵²¹ Boese, "The Great Moon Hoax."

⁵²² Boese, "The Great Moon Hoax of 1835 (text): Day One: Tuesday, August 25, 1835."

like wings⁵²³ and biped beavers who carry their young in their arms, build huts, and use fire.⁵²⁴

Known as “The Great Moon Hoax of 1835,” the *New York Sun* fabricated the entire story unbeknownst to Sir John Herschel. This was America’s first mass-media event, made possible by the advent of steam powered presses.⁵²⁵ Famed author Edgar Allen Poe later commented, “The hoax was circulated to an immense extent, was translated into various languages—was even made the subject of (quizzical) discussion in astronomical societies... and was, upon the whole, decidedly the greatest hit in the way of sensation—of merely popular sensation—ever made by any similar fiction either in America or in Europe.”⁵²⁶

Mass-media was changing, and with it, the ability to influence the nation, but human nature remains predictable. People gravitated to newspapers that matched their perspective on life. Aware of this, newspapers allowed an early form of identity politics to influence their reporting, as is evidenced in America’s next mass-media event.

In 1836, the sensational murder of an upscale prostitute named Helen Jewett produced one of America’s first criminal whodunit media circuses. Author of *Froth and Scum: Truth, Beauty, Goodness, and the Ax Murder in America’s First Mass Medium* Andie Tucher explains:

The Herald wanted a more respectable readership. The Herald wanted middle-class people. So the Herald decided that the nice, middle-class young man who had been accused of the crime was actually innocent. He was a poor lamb who was being framed by evil and designing madams and police officers. The Sun was a newspaper tied much more closely to the working class. They wanted to give a story that was more appealing to the working class, which was this poor woman on the fringe of society is being abused and exploited by rich and powerful people. So they

⁵²³ Boese, “The Great Moon Hoax of 1835 (text): Day Six: Monday, August 31, 1835.”

⁵²⁴ Boese, “The Great Moon Hoax of 1835 (text): Day Three: Thursday, August 27, 1835.”

⁵²⁵ Boese, “The Great Moon Hoax.”

⁵²⁶ Boese.

both looked at the same crime and had entirely different interpretations based on what they thought their readers would prefer to hear.

In some ways, it's a very democratic approach to news. It's telling these readers, you can make up your own minds. You can look at the case, and you can figure out what you believe based on your own intuition and your own intelligence. You don't need smart elites to tell you this. So even though each newspaper kind of fudged and shaded the truth, they did it on the understanding that readers would choose one or the other. And that was part of their pitch. You can figure it out. You can decide. That was really exciting.⁵²⁷

There were very few rules for how reporters should operate, and abuses were abundant. During the Civil War a *New York Tribune* reporter wrote a long and detailed account of the Battle of Pea Ridge. However, two of his colleagues later admitted that he made up the story based upon other reports because he hadn't arrived at the battlefield in time. According to Andie Tucher, "It was common knowledge among many journalists, but they were very wary about revealing that. They would refer to it, but they didn't use the name of the reporter. They were trying to protect their own guy rather than worrying about whether this was truthful and whether audiences might be misled."⁵²⁸

By the end of the 19th century, Tucher concludes, "people beg[a]n to think of journalism as incapable of telling the truth."⁵²⁹ It was the golden age of "yellow journalism," a term referring to unethical reporting that was "coined in the 1890s to describe the ferocious circulation war between William Randolph Hearst's *New York Journal* and the *New York World*, owned by Joseph Pulitzer."⁵³⁰

Together, they were instrumental in provoking the Spanish-American war for Cuba's independence. William Hearst is

⁵²⁷ Tucher, "Fake News: An Origin Story."

⁵²⁸ Tucher.

⁵²⁹ Tucher.

⁵³⁰ Woolf, "Back in the 1890s, Fake News Helped Start a War."

perhaps best remembered for telling Frederic Remington, “You furnish the pictures and I will furnish the war.”⁵³¹ His newspaper falsely reported Spanish atrocities, including a report of Spanish soldiers strip-searching American women.⁵³² And before he had a correspondent on the ground in Cuba, “the Hearst paper shamelessly attached Havana datelines to bylined stories creatively manufactured by rewrite men back in New York who interviewed exiled Cuban supporters of the revolt.”⁵³³

Fake news stories were regularly used to shape public opinion. Professor Matthew Jordan of Pennsylvania State University writes:

Fake news was not only a sin of commission, but also one of omission: For profit wire services would refuse to cover social issues, from labor protests to tainted meat, in ways that would depict their powerful patrons in a negative light. ... Meanwhile, groups critical of big business, especially socialists, were often targets of fake news. Whenever sensational crimes were committed, for-profit media would tie those crimes to socialists, adding phrases like “shot by socialist” before anything was known about the perpetrators.⁵³⁴

Likewise, Max Sherover explains how fake news articles were used to manipulate prices in his 1914 book *Fakes in American Journalism*. If the Beef Trust wanted to raise their prices, their “publicity bureaus” would write false stories:

These stories are then published broadcast throughout the land. The people that read the news get accustomed to the idea of scarcity of beef. And when a few days later they are informed by the butcher that the price of beef has gone up they take it as a matter of course. They will uncomplainingly pay the higher price or cut down their usual supply. ... The same is true of the lumber supply, coal supply, oil supply and all other necessities controlled by the flim-flammers.⁵³⁵

⁵³¹ Krauss, “The World; Remember Yellow Journalism.”

⁵³² Krauss.

⁵³³ Krauss.

⁵³⁴ Jordan, “A Century Ago, Progressives Were the Ones Shouting ‘Fake News.’”

⁵³⁵ Sherover, *Fakes in American Journalism*, 25.

Controlling the news was lucrative. According to the radical press, “Fake news was the pernicious effect of the profit motive on American journalism.”⁵³⁶ False reports—such as Hearst’s made-up interviews and stories about invented battles—were often copied by news gathering agencies and sold wholesale to newspapers throughout the nation. Professor Jordan writes, “They cascaded throughout the media system because, at each point, publishers realized they could make money by reprinting the stories.”⁵³⁷

The *New York Sun* accused the *Associated Press* of being nothing more than a “fake news factory,” arguing that “each time a ‘fake news publisher’ recirculated fakes, it became harder to tell what was true.”⁵³⁸ Professor Jordan writes:

No matter how often radical periodicals denounced fake news published by their competitors, they found it difficult to suppress false information spread by powerful newswire companies like Hearst’s International News Service, the United Press Associations and the Associated Press.

These outlets fed articles to local papers, which reprinted them, fake or otherwise. Because people trusted their local newspapers, the veracity of the articles went unchallenged.⁵³⁹

There simply was no way of knowing the veracity of anything that was published at the turn of the century. Today’s journalistic values of objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality were a foreign concept until Adolph Ochs purchased the *New York Times* in 1896 with the aspiration of establishing it as the nation’s paper of record.⁵⁴⁰ He sought to make it a decent and honorable newspaper that could serve as the final arbitrator in matters of fact.⁵⁴¹

The standards of the *New York Times* transformed journalism as we know it, but it didn’t entirely eliminate fake news. During

⁵³⁶ Jordan, “A Century Ago, Progressives Were the Ones Shouting ‘Fake News.’”

⁵³⁷ Jordan.

⁵³⁸ Jordan.

⁵³⁹ Jordan.

⁵⁴⁰ *New York Times*, “Adolph S. Ochs Dead at 77; Publisher of Times Since 1896.”

⁵⁴¹ Tucher, “Fake News: An Origin Story.”

World War I, President Woodrow Wilson created the Committee on Public Information (CPI) which flooded the country with government press releases “disguised as news stories.”⁵⁴² According to the History Channel:

During the 20 months of the U.S. involvement in the war, the CPI ... sent out 6,000 press releases written in the straightforward, understated tone of newspaper articles. It also designed and circulated more than 1,500 patriotic advertisements. ... Editors eager to avoid trouble with the Post Office and the Justice Department published reams of CPI material verbatim and often ran the patriotic ads for free.⁵⁴³

Novelist and journalist Upton Sinclair complained at the time that without dissenting journalists, “there is no way to get the truth to the people.”⁵⁴⁴ He warned:

The greatest peril in America today is a knavish press maintained by organized private greed, and engaged in fomenting social hatred in the interest of private greed. Day by day the presses of our capitalist-owned newspapers are pouring out their floods of falsehood, like poisoned gas which blinds us and makes it impossible for us to see straight or to think straight about the terrific problems which confront us.⁵⁴⁵

In 1964 the support of American newspapers that unquestioningly parroted government officials stirred the nation to war with the North Vietnamese. President Lyndon Johnson informed the nation that two days after an unprovoked attack on the US destroyer Maddox during a routine patrol, North Vietnamese ships deliberately attacked two US destroyers with torpedoes.⁵⁴⁶ However, the USS Maddox wasn’t innocently patrolling waters during its attack. It was engaged in aggressive intelligence-gathering maneuvers in an area where the South Vietnamese were

⁵⁴² O’Toole, “When the U.S. Used ‘Fake News’ to Sell Americans on World War I.”

⁵⁴³ O’Toole.

⁵⁴⁴ Sinclair, *Upton Sinclair’s*, 5.

⁵⁴⁵ Sinclair.

⁵⁴⁶ Johnson, “Radio and Television Report to the American People Following Renewed Aggression in the Gulf of Tonkin.”

attacking the North Vietnamese.⁵⁴⁷ Moreover, declassified documents, tapes, and released transcripts reveal that there was no second attack on US ships.^{548, 549} According to the US Naval Institute:

The evidence suggests a disturbing and deliberate attempt by Secretary of Defense McNamara to distort the evidence and mislead Congress. ... Almost 90 percent of the SIGINT [signal intelligence] intercepts that would have provided a conflicting account were kept out of the reports sent to the Pentagon and White House. Additionally, messages that were forwarded contained “severe analytic errors, unexplained translation changes, and the conjunction of two messages into one translation.” Other vital intercepts mysteriously disappeared. Hanyok claimed that “The overwhelming body of reports, if used, would have told the story that no attack occurred.”⁵⁵⁰

In the documentary *Fog of War*, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara admitted that the Gulf of Tonkin attack never happened.⁵⁵¹ In *Uncensored War* historian Daniel Hallin notes that journalists had “a great deal of information available which contradicted the official account; it simply wasn’t used.”⁵⁵² It was even known, and “had been reported in the *Times* and elsewhere in the press, that ‘covert’ operations against North Vietnam, carried out by South Vietnamese forces with US support and direction, had been going on for some time. But neither the *Times*, nor the *Washington Post* mentioned them at all, either at the time of the incidents or in the weeks that followed.”⁵⁵³

Fake news has always been a part of the American story. To deny its existence is to deny history. In fact, there was even a time when journalists openly lauded the virtues of fake news. Journalists argued that “faking”—embellishing articles and filling in the gaps

⁵⁴⁷ Paterson, “The Truth about Tonkin.”

⁵⁴⁸ Paterson.

⁵⁴⁹ Bumiller, “Records Show Doubts on ’64 Vietnam Crisis.”

⁵⁵⁰ Paterson, “The Truth about Tonkin.”

⁵⁵¹ Morris, *Fog of War*.

⁵⁵² Hallin, *The Uncensored War*, 20.

⁵⁵³ Hallin, 20.

with imagination—was a virtue because it was something journalists could do to make their readers happier.⁵⁵⁴

To some extent this was true as, in the past, “A large part of the newspaper was to entertain,” according to Matthew Goodman, author of *The Sun and the Moon*. “The papers printed stories and jokes. There was not the same bright line between fact and fiction that we expect in our newspapers today.”⁵⁵⁵ Fake news was driven as much by the people’s desire to be entertained by sensational and scandalous stories as it was driven by the profit margin and agendas of the newspapers.

Today not much has changed. *CNN* president Jeff Zucker admitted to *Vanity Fair* in 2018 that his network’s obsession with President Trump was driven by ratings, “People say all the time, ‘Oh, I don’t want to talk about Trump. I’ve had too much Trump.’ And yet at the end of the day, all they want to do is talk about Trump. We’ve seen that, anytime you break away from the Trump story and cover other events in this era, the audience goes away. So we know that, right now, Donald Trump dominates.”⁵⁵⁶ Similarly, Anderson Cooper’s titillating *60 Minutes* interview with adult film star Stormy Daniels about her alleged sexual dalliance with President Trump drew the largest audience in a decade.⁵⁵⁷

Fundamentally, fake news exists because it meets a felt need, and it is an oversimplification to blame Facebook, satire news sites, political allegiances, teenagers in Macedonia, or any number of other scapegoats. Fake news is a multi-faceted problem, and any honest conversation must begin by recognizing its cultural moorings and its long history. Nevertheless, these do not justify the practice of fake news.

The phrase “fake news” is merely a polite way of saying “error, lies, and deception wrapped in the guise of factual information.” According to Jesus, this is rooted in the devil who is the father of lies (John 8:44). We cannot dismiss fake news simply because it is

⁵⁵⁴ Tucher, “Fake News: An Origin Story.”

⁵⁵⁵ Seidenberg, “Fake News Has Long Held a Role in American History.”

⁵⁵⁶ Pompeo, “It’s Our Job to Call Them Out’: inside the Trump Gold Rush at CNN.”

⁵⁵⁷ Smith, “Stormy Daniels Interview Draws Biggest ‘60 Minutes’ Audience in 10 Years.”

a part of our national heritage, and we cannot be too politically correct to identify its true source because we know that the eventual fruit of those in partnership with the devil's schemes is nothing short of death and destruction (John 10:10).

A culture of lies begins with “the father lies,” and if left unaddressed, it will rob us of our peace and joy before concluding in death and destruction. A culture of lies begins with individuals who listen to and believe what the father of lies says. When enough people accept these lies, society reaches a tipping point where it collectively embraces the deception, becoming a culture of lies.

Collectively, we are capable of far more than we are individually. A culture of lies can propagate deception on a mass scale, often resulting in the acceptance of lies on a mass scale. It is a self-perpetuating cycle that is difficult to break. This is why through hearing and believing relatively minor lies in the form of fake news, we have made ourselves—individually and as a nation—more vulnerable to being deceived by greater and more destructive lies. In turn the devil has more access to our minds, both individually and the cultural mindset. However, Jesus promises that the truth will set us free (John 8:32). This is why, as discussed in the next chapter, fake fact-checkers are so subversive.

7. Fake Polls & Fake Fact-Checkers

“If you like your health care plan, you can keep it” was ranked by PolitiFact as the “2013 Lie of the Year.”⁵⁵⁸ Not surprisingly, PolitiFact failed to mention that in 2008—at a critical point in President Barack Obama’s re-election campaign—PolitiFact rated this claim as true, saying, “His [Obama’s] description of the plan is accurate, and we rate his statement True.”⁵⁵⁹

Perhaps the reason PolitiFact believed the president’s promise rests in its stated belief that “Obama’s plan essentially takes today’s system and seeks to expand it to the uninsured.”⁵⁶⁰ In reality, the Affordable Care Act, commonly called Obamacare, fundamentally restructured America’s healthcare system. As such, implicit bias may have blinded PolitiFact to the error of a statement significant enough to later be awarded “Lie of the Year.”

There are many ways that reality can become distorted, even among respectable institutions. When *Literary Digest* conducted one of the largest and most expensive major public opinion polls in 1936, it was one of the most respected magazines with a 20-year history of accurately predicting presidential winners.⁵⁶¹ Having

⁵⁵⁸ Holan, “Lie of the Year: ‘If You Like Your Health Care Plan, You Can Keep It.’”

⁵⁵⁹ Holan, “Obama’s Plan Expands Existing System.”

⁵⁶⁰ Holan.

⁵⁶¹ DeTurck, “Case Study I: The 1936 *Literary Digest* Poll.”

questioned 10 million prospective voters, and having receiving 2.4 million responses, the magazine boldly presented data forecasting a 14-point victory by Alfred Landon over President Franklin D. Roosevelt in the upcoming presidential election.^{562, 563} Nevertheless, the incumbent president crushed Landon, winning all but the states of Vermont and Maine.⁵⁶⁴

Competing theories exist for why this famous poll was so far off in its predictions.⁵⁶⁵ Two primary culprits are generally blamed. First: The sample chosen was not representative of voters; and second: The sample demonstrated a response bias. Those who supported President Roosevelt appear to have been less likely to respond to the survey, creating a non-response bias toward Landon winning.⁵⁶⁶

Even the best of intentions can produce a distorted view of reality. Implicit bias, methodology errors, and incompetence likely account for the majority of mistakes among pollsters and fact-checkers. Nevertheless, the end result is a false representation of reality that can significantly impact public opinion—fake news. Particularly troubling is the frequency of such distortions today.

Fake Fact-Checkers:

“President Trump Has Made 12,019 False or Misleading Claims over 928 Days,” reported *Washington Post* fact-checkers.⁵⁶⁷ Certainly, our president’s relationship with the truth is tentative, at best, but many of these fact-checks are themselves false or misleading.

The *Washington Post* database of false and misleading claims made by the president leads with the president’s statement, “We’re building the wall, by the way, we’re going to have over 400

⁵⁶² DeTurck.

⁵⁶³ “Landon, 1,293,669; Roosevelt, 972,897: Final Returns in the *Digest’s* Poll of Ten Million Voters.”

⁵⁶⁴ Fottrell, “10 Things Pollsters Won’t Tell You.”

⁵⁶⁵ Squire, “Why the 1936 Literary Digest Poll Failed.”

⁵⁶⁶ “Famous Statistical Blunders in History: Literary Digest, 1936.”

⁵⁶⁷ Kessler, “President Trump Has Made 12,019 False or Misleading Claims over 928 Days.”

miles of wall built by the end of next year.” According to the *Post’s* fact-check:

No, Trump’s wall is not yet being built. Congress inserted specific language in its appropriations bill that none of the \$1.57 billion appropriated for border protection may be used for prototypes of a concrete wall that Trump observed while in California. The money can be used only for bollard fencing and levee fencing, or for replacement of existing fencing. The same restrictions were included in the spending bill Trump signed on Feb. 15, 2019. Trump appears to acknowledge the renovations, except he persists in claiming it is a wall. All told, Congress has funded about 175 miles of barriers. Trump has also tapped a Treasury Department asset forfeiture fund to build 30 miles and unused Pentagon funding to fund 53 miles. That adds up to a little under 260 miles, which Trump-speak often gets translated to 400 miles.⁵⁶⁸

The president’s concept of a border wall has evolved.^{569, 570} As a candidate he occasionally used “fence” and “wall” interchangeably,⁵⁷¹ but he soon associated the term fence with weakness.⁵⁷² He began speaking of a looming concrete barrier, with no windows, made of precast concrete plank.⁵⁷³ When asked, “What are the walls going to be made of?” by a boy at a campaign rally, Trump answered, “I’ll tell you what it’s going to be made of. It’s going to be made of hardened concrete, and it’s going to be made out of rebar and steel.”^{574, 575}

According to Donald Trump, much of the existing border barrier didn’t qualify as a wall because it was too easy to scale. At a campaign rally in New Hampshire, he explained, “It is not a wall.

⁵⁶⁸ “In 928 Days, President Trump Has Made 12,019 False or Misleading Claims.”

⁵⁶⁹ Cummings, William. “A WALL is a WALL! Trump Declares. But His Definition Has Shifted a Lot over Time.”

⁵⁷⁰ Quealy, “A Fence, Steel Slats or ‘Whatever You Want to Call It’: A Detailed Timeline of Trump’s Words about the Wall.”

⁵⁷¹ “Donald Trump: I Would Build a Wall...and Have Mexico Pay for It.”

⁵⁷² Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), August 25, 2015, 5:39 a.m.

⁵⁷³ Yen, “AP Fact Check: Trump’s Shift on a Concrete Border Wall.”

⁵⁷⁴ Cummings, “A WALL is a WALL! Trump Declares. But His Definition Has Shifted a Lot over Time.”

⁵⁷⁵ “Donald Trump Defines the Mexican Border Wall Construction Details.”

It is a little fence. People put up a ladder that they buy at home depot and they jump and that's the end of it. I'm talking about a wall. See that ceiling there? higher." He went on to speak of using concrete plank, concluding: "And you put that plank up—there's no ladder going over that. If they ever go up there, they're in trouble, because here's [*sic*] no way to get down. Maybe a rope."⁵⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, half of the first eight wall prototypes reviewed by the Department of Homeland Security were made of concrete.^{577, 578} After originally stating that the prototypes should be made of concrete, the government said it would consider other designs provided they were "physically imposing in height," able to resist penetration for a minimum of one hour, could not be tunneled below for a minimum of six feet, and included "anti-climb topping features that prevent scaling using common and more sophisticated climbing aids."⁵⁷⁹

As the president became better educated regarding the needs of border patrol agents, he began speaking of the need for visibility in any wall design.⁵⁸⁰ Eventually he tweeted a design for a 30-foot tall steel slat barrier.⁵⁸¹ He was convinced by border security that a steel slat (bollard) fence is a better and stronger solution than concrete,^{582, 583} and also that it would meet his expectations for a barrier strong enough to be called a wall.^{584, 585}

The *Washington Post* fact-check unfairly limited Trump's wall to the concrete prototypes that he observed in California, implying that steel slat (bollard) fencing does not meet the president's expectations for a wall. In reality the president himself has admitted that bollard fencing is plenty strong and imposing enough to qualify as a wall. Moreover, dilapidated and ineffective

⁵⁷⁶ Schwartz, "Trump on Border: Maybe They'll Call It 'The Trump Wall.'"

⁵⁷⁷ Clark, "Trump Visits California to See Wall Prototypes Near Mexico Border."

⁵⁷⁸ Rodgers, "Trump Wall – All You Need to Know about US Border in Seven Charts."

⁵⁷⁹ U.S. Customs and Border Protection, *HSBP1017R0022*.

⁵⁸⁰ "Transcript of Donald Trump Interview with the Wall Street Journal."

⁵⁸¹ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), December 21, 2018, 2:14 p.m.

⁵⁸² Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), January 6, 2019, 1:53 p.m.

⁵⁸³ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), December 31, 2018, 4:51 a.m.

⁵⁸⁴ Cummings, "President Trump: 'Less Than 50-50' Odds Congress Cuts Border Deal, New Shutdown 'Certainly an Option.'"

⁵⁸⁵ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), January 31, 2019, 4:16 a.m.

border fencing has already been replaced with this “wall.” Commander of the Army Corps of Engineers General Todd Semonite told the president on April 5, 2019:

We have put in the ground over 82 miles [of wall/bollard fencing] that is up to date. And then, right now, by the end of this year, we’ll have another 97 miles that will go in. ... And then, sir, where the money that both Congress has appropriated and other money that you have been able to direct, we will put in the ground another 277 miles in the next year. What that will end up with is by the end of—around December of 2020, ... will be about 450 miles.”⁵⁸⁶

To secure the estimated \$8 billion necessary to complete this project, the president is utilizing a mix of spending from congressional appropriation bills, executive action, and an emergency declaration. *ABC News* reports:

\$1.375 billion would come from the spending bill Congress passed Thursday; \$600 million would come from the Treasury Department’s drug forfeiture fund; \$2.5 billion would come from the Pentagon’s drug interdiction program; and through an emergency declaration: \$3.5 billion from the Pentagon’s military construction budget.⁵⁸⁷

Nevertheless, the *Washington Post* fact-check declared the president’s statement, “We’re building the wall, by the way, we’re going to have over 400 miles of wall built by the end of next year” to be a lie because Congress has only appropriated enough money to fund 260 miles of construction. And because this “false statement” has been repeated by the president 160 times, it accounts for 190 of the 12,019 false and misleading statements compiled by the *Post*.

This *Washington Post* fact-check is false. It is a form of fake news. Technically it is correct when it says that President Trump cannot build a wall that matches any of the eight concrete prototypes unveiled in California, and technically it is correct when it says that Congress has not allotted the president enough money to

⁵⁸⁶ Davis, “Trump Goes to California to Give Big Update on Border Wall: ‘400 Miles Will Cover It.’”

⁵⁸⁷ Haslett, “Trump Declares National Emergency to Get Border Wall Funding.”

fund 400 miles of construction. But President Trump never said that his wall had to match one of the eight prototypes, and the *Post* failed to report that the president has secured additional monies for the wall besides those allotted by Congress.

Many of the 12,019 presidential lies collected by the *Post* fit into this category of being fake news. One example was apparently so blatant that the *Post* removed it from its updated database. The president made the statement, “I also ended up another one, you know, the great Paris Accord....Saved a lot of money, saved a lot of jobs, saved a lot of businesses.” According to the *Post*, this is false or misleading because:

Each country set its own commitments under the Paris Accord, so Trump’s comment is puzzling. He could unilaterally change the commitments offered by former President Barack Obama, which is technically allowed under the Accord. Plus, as we’ve noted before, Trump ignores any possible benefits that could come from tackling climate change, including potential green jobs.⁵⁸⁸

Perhaps the president could have accomplished the same outcome—saving money, jobs, and businesses—by unilaterally changing our country’s commitments. Nevertheless, it is not false or misleading for President Trump to say that he accomplished these things by ending our country’s involvement in the Paris Accord. Nothing in this fact-check refutes the president’s statement that by withdrawing from the accord, he saved a lot of money, jobs, and businesses. Fact-checks determine the truth of a statement, not whether the statement was the best policy solution; nevertheless, this supposedly false and misleading statement accounted for 19 of the *Post*’s, at that time, 10,111 presidential lies.⁵⁸⁹

“The number of fact-checkers around the world,” according to Duke Reporters’ Lab, “has more than tripled over the past four years, increasing from 44 to 149 since the Duke Reporters’ Lab first began counting these projects in 2014—a 239 percent increase.”⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁸ “In 928 Days, President Trump Has Made 12,019 False or Misleading Claims.”

⁵⁸⁹ “In 828 Days, President Trump Has Made 10,111 False or Misleading Claims.”

⁵⁹⁰ Stencil, “Fact-Checking Triples Over Four Years.”

Despite the perception that they serve as politically neutral and objective bastions of truth, these fact-checkers have repeatedly proven themselves to be biased. Such bias was on full display following President Trump's January 8, 2019 Oval Office speech on the issue of illegal immigration and the need to fund a border wall.

In the days leading up to the address, many major news outlets drummed the theme "facts not fear." With a chyron reading "Trump faces credibility crisis as he addresses nation tonight," CNN's Alisyn Camerota introduced a news segment by saying, "Fact-checkers are eating their Wheaties and getting extra rest since they will be working overtime tonight to separate fact from fiction on this border situation."⁵⁹¹ Instead, it was the fact-checkers who struggled with the truth.

At *Politico*, Ted Hesson's fact-check took issue with the president's opening words. President Trump said, "I am speaking to you because there is a growing and humanitarian and security crisis at our southern border. Every day customs and border patrol agents encounter thousands of illegal immigrants trying to enter our country. We are out of space to hold them, and we have no way to promptly return them back home to their country."⁵⁹² According to Hesson, "The notion that the number of illegal border crossings represent a 'crisis' is not true."⁵⁹³

Two months later, US Customs and Border Protection Commissioner Kevin McAleenan told the press that the system "is well beyond capacity and remains at the breaking point."⁵⁹⁴ Natalie Asher, a senior Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officer who coordinates detention and deportations admitted that a "crushing" volume of arrivals at the border had forced ICE to release 107,000 illegal migrant family members, averaging more than 1,000 per day.⁵⁹⁵ And in June, Department of

⁵⁹¹ New Day (@NewDay), January 8, 2019, 4:28 a.m.

⁵⁹² New York Times, "Full Transcripts: Trump's Speech on Immigration and the Democratic Response."

⁵⁹³ Hesson, "Fact Check: Trump's Speech on Border 'Crisis.'"

⁵⁹⁴ Associated Press, "Record-Breaking Family Migration Overwhelming Border Agency, U.S. Officials Say."

⁵⁹⁵ Miroff, "ICE Immigration Arrests Are Declining as Law Enforcement Focuses on Border Surge."

Homeland Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen told Congress that there is a crisis at our southern border that is not new. She admitted, “What’s happening at the border is the border is being overrun by those who have no right to cross it.”⁵⁹⁶

The *New York Times* reported, “In recent days, officials have grasped for ever-more-dire ways to describe the situation: ‘operational emergency’; ‘unsustainable’; ‘systemwide meltdown.’ One top official said simply: ‘The system is on fire.’”⁵⁹⁷ Likewise, the *Washington Post* ran the headline “U.S. Has Hit ‘Breaking Point’ at Border Amid Immigration Surge, Customs and Border Protection Chief Says.”⁵⁹⁸

It seems that Ted Hesson could not resist the urge to use his fact-check to make a political argument that was almost immediately discredited. In fact, much of his fact-check fit into this category. He claimed President Trump was misleading when he said, “Sen. Chuck Schumer, who you will be hearing from later tonight, has repeatedly supported a physical barrier in the past, along with many other Democrats. They changed their mind only after I was elected president.”⁵⁹⁹ According to Hesson, “Schumer and nearly two dozen other Democrats voted for the 2006 Secure Fence Act, which authorized the construction of roughly 700 miles of fence along the southwest border. But Schumer never voted for anything close to the scale of Trump’s wall.”⁶⁰⁰ Regardless of how 700 miles of fence compares against President Trump’s proposal for 450 miles of steel slat fencing, President Trump was correct in stating that Senator Schumer (D-NY) and the Democrats had previously supported “a physical barrier.”

Perhaps most surprising was Ted Hesson’s response to the president’s statement, “Over the years, thousands of Americans have been brutally killed by those who illegally entered our

⁵⁹⁶ New York Times. “Kirstjen Nielsen Addresses Families Separation at Border: Full Transcript.”

⁵⁹⁷ Shear, “The U.S. Immigration System May Have Reached a Breaking Point.”

⁵⁹⁸ Miroff, “U.S. Has Hit ‘Breaking Point’ at Border Amid Immigration Surge, Customs and Border Protection Chief Says.”

⁵⁹⁹ New York Times, “Full Transcripts: Trump’s Speech on Immigration and the Democratic Response.”

⁶⁰⁰ Hesson, “Fact Check: Trump’s Speech on Border ‘Crisis.’”

country.”⁶⁰¹ According to Hesson, “That distorts the truth. Several studies show that immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native-born Americans.”⁶⁰² However, this does not refute the president’s claim that many Americans are dead because of illegal immigrants.

Equally as surprising is the *Washington Post*’s fact-check of President Trump’s statement, “In the last two years, ICE officers made 266,000 arrests of aliens with criminal records including those charged or convicted of 100,000 assaults, 30,000 sex crimes, and 4,000 violent killings.”⁶⁰³ According to the *Post*, “The number is right but misleading... It’s important to keep in mind that this figure includes all types of crimes, including nonviolent offenses such as illegal entry or reentry.”⁶⁰⁴ Considering that the president subcategorized the violent crimes as 134,000 among the 266,000 total, this should be self-evident. Nevertheless, the *Post* refused to classify the statement as factual.

Likewise, *CBS News* provided a live fact-check of the president’s statement, “One in three women are sexually assaulted on the dangerous trek up through Mexico. Women and children are the biggest victims, by far, of our broken system.”⁶⁰⁵ Implying that the president lied, *CBS News* responded, “FACT: Between 60 percent and 80 percent of female migrants traveling through Mexico are raped along the way, Amnesty International estimates.”⁶⁰⁶ When mocked for insinuating that the president lied because he was too conservative in his estimates, *CBS News* deleted this figure from its fact-check⁶⁰⁷ and replaced it with the statement, “This is challenging to judge, and there may not be enough data to fully represent the facts.”⁶⁰⁸

⁶⁰¹ New York Times, “Full Transcripts: Trump’s Speech on Immigration and the Democratic Response.”

⁶⁰² Hesson, “Fact Check: Trump’s Speech on Border ‘Crisis.’”

⁶⁰³ New York Times, “Full Transcripts: Trump’s Speech on Immigration and the Democratic Response.”

⁶⁰⁴ Hemingway, “Media’s Angry Response to President Trump’s Oval Office Speech Comes Up Short.”

⁶⁰⁵ New York Times, “Full Transcripts: Trump’s Speech on Immigration and the Democratic Response.”

⁶⁰⁶ Curl, “FACT FAIL: CBS Deletes ‘Fact-Check’ That Proved Trump Right.”

⁶⁰⁷ Curl.

⁶⁰⁸ “Fact Checking Trump’s 2019 State of the Union.”

And then there is *CNN's* fact-check of President Trump's statement, "Last month, 20,000 migrant children were illegally brought into the United States—a dramatic increase. These children are used as human pawns by vicious coyotes and ruthless gangs."⁶⁰⁹ Rather than refute the figure of 20,000 or the claim that smuggled children are used as human pawns, *CNN* challenged the veracity of the president's statement by arguing that "smuggled minors make up less than 1% of family apprehensions."⁶¹⁰

Likewise, *CNN's* fact-check took issue with the president's statement, "Every week, 300 of our citizens are killed by heroin alone, 90% of which floods across from our southern border."⁶¹¹ Rather than accept this statement as true, *CNN* chose to fact-check the president's solution to this problem, saying, "While Trump's statistics on heroin deaths are true, it's unclear what a border wall would do to reduce the amount of heroin coming across the border."⁶¹² Such personal commentary is inappropriate in a fact-check.

Among today's fact-checkers, there is a tendency to make counterarguments that are rife with superfluous, politically charged, color commentary.⁶¹³ Moreover, the subjective bias of the fact-checker likely influences which statements are chosen for evaluation.⁶¹⁴ Perhaps this is why during the 2016 presidential campaign, PolitiFact gave its "Pants on Fire" label to Donald Trump 57 times but only seven times to Hillary Clinton.⁶¹⁵ Similarly, "A Media Research Center analysis in June found that Trump received the 'False'/'Mostly False'/'Pants on Fire' label from PolitiFact's Truth-O-Meter 77 percent of the time. Clinton

⁶⁰⁹ New York Times, "Full Transcripts: Trump's Speech on Immigration and the Democratic Response."

⁶¹⁰ Hemingway, "Media's Angry Response to President Trump's Oval Office Speech Comes Up Short."

⁶¹¹ New York Times, "Full Transcripts: Trump's Speech on Immigration and the Democratic Response."

⁶¹² Alvarez, "Fact-Checking Trump's Immigration Speech."

⁶¹³ Marx, "What the Fact-Checkers Get Wrong."

⁶¹⁴ Roff, "Who's Checking the Fact Checkers?"

⁶¹⁵ Lucas, "DISHONEST FACT-CHECKERS: How Fact-Checkers Trivialize Lies by Politicians and Undermine Truth-Seeking."

received just ‘False’/‘Mostly False’ for 26 percent of her statements.”⁶¹⁶

Both candidates frequently lied throughout the campaign, but PolitiFact and the majority of journalists lean to the political left which likely influenced which statements attracted their special attention.⁶¹⁷ In an interview with *Pacific Standard Magazine*, founder of PolitiFact Bill Adair responded to the comment, “But there is some subjectivity baked into the process, in terms of which claims you check, and where you draw the line between statements of opinion and statements of fact. Objective journalists are still making subjective choices.” Adair answered, “Oh, absolutely. ... Yeah, we’re human. We’re making subjective decisions. Lord knows the decision about a Truth-O-Meter rating is entirely subjective. As Angie Holan, the editor of PolitiFact, often says, the Truth-O-Meter is not a scientific instrument.”⁶¹⁸

According to a 2013 George Mason University Center for Media and Public Affairs study:

PolitiFact rated 32% of Republican claims as “false” or “pants on fire,” compared to 11% of Democratic claims—a 3 to 1 margin. Conversely, PolitiFact rated 22% of Democratic claims as “entirely true” compared to 11% of Republican claims—a 2 to 1 margin.

A majority of Democratic statements (54%) were rated as mostly or entirely true, compared to only 18% of Republican statements. Conversely, a majority of Republican statements (52%) were rated as mostly or entirely false, compared to only 24% of Democratic statements.⁶¹⁹

Increasingly, fact-checkers have become our nation’s arbiters of truth. However, this is not the job of a fact-checker. FactCheck.org Co-Founder Brooks Jackson wrote in 2003, “Our goal here can’t be to find truth—that’s a job for philosophers and

⁶¹⁶ Lucas.

⁶¹⁷ Lucas.

⁶¹⁸ Schulson, “An Interview with the Founder of PolitiFact, During a Season of Distorted Reality.”

⁶¹⁹ “Study: Media Fact-Checker Says Republicans Lie More.”

theologians. What we can do here is sort through the factual claims being made between now and election day, using the best techniques of journalism and scholarship.”⁶²⁰ When fact-checkers lose sight of this objective, they begin to qualify obviously correct or incorrect statements with political commentary. As such the truth or inaccuracy of the statement is sacrificed in pursuit of the greater good of communicating a political idea. At this point fact-checking becomes little more than punditry, and objective reality becomes distorted by ideology.

Fake Polls:

Robert “Kid Rock” Ritchie sparked a flurry of speculation with a July 12, 2017 tweet announcing that the website KidRockForSenate.com was absolutely real.⁶²¹ It turns out, this was nothing more than “an artistic and commercial undertaking,”⁶²² but it quickly developed into a serious national story when Delphi Analytica produced a poll showing Kid Rock leading Michigan Senator Debbie Stabenow. The results of the July 14–18 survey of 668 Michigan residents placed Ritchie four points ahead of Stabenow in a hypothetical vote.⁶²³

FiveThirtyEight Senior Political Writer and Analyst Harry Enten recounts, “Websites like Daily Caller,^[624] Political Wire^[625] and Twitchy^[626] all wrote about it. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott tweeted it out.^[627] And finally, Kid Rock himself shared an article^[628] from *Gateway Pundit*^[629] about the poll.”⁶³⁰ This in turn prompted further polling, with the *Los Angeles Times* reporting,

⁶²⁰ Jackson, “Is This a Great Job or What?”

⁶²¹ Kid Rock (@KidRock), July 12, 2017, 1:51 p.m.

⁶²² McCollum, “Kid Rock Cleared of Federal Election Violations after Senate Gimmick.”

⁶²³ Delphi Analytica, “Kid Rock Ahead in Hypothetical Matchup with Debbie Stabenow, Large Number of Voters are Undecided.”

⁶²⁴ Stucky, “Kid Rock Leads Democrat in New Poll.”

⁶²⁵ Goddard, Taegan (@politicalwire), July 23, 2017, 1:30 p.m.

⁶²⁶ P., “IT’S HAPPENING! New Poll Has Kid Rock up by 4 over Debbie Stabenow.”

⁶²⁷ Abbott, Greg (@GregAbbott_TX), July 23, 2017, 6:28 p.m.

⁶²⁸ Kid Rock (@KidRock), July 24, 2017, 9:47 a.m.

⁶²⁹ Caplan, “BOOM! Kid Rock LEADS in Michigan Senate Race Poll.”

⁶³⁰ Enten, “Fake Polls Are a Real Problem.”

“Early polling shows Rock is dominating the Republican primary field and is competitive with Stabenow.”⁶³¹

As a prospective Kid Rock candidacy gained momentum in the media, some within the GOP establishment expressed support for Ritchie.⁶³² Steven Law, president of the Senate Leadership Fund, a GOP super PAC that had Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell’s (R-KY) backing, said, “We’d be very interested in his candidacy.” He cited the polls and concluded that it was “not a bad place to start.”⁶³³

However, the catalyst for all this—the Delphi Analytica poll—was “almost certainly a fake.”⁶³⁴ Delphi Analytica’s website had been created only two weeks earlier, using a GoDaddy privacy service.⁶³⁵ Moreover, this self-described “grassroots public polling organization” failed to include important details in their poll, such as the names of anyone associated with the organization or the weighted mechanisms used in the poll.⁶³⁶ An investigation into the organization found a Discord chat by a person using the screen name “Autismo Jones” claiming to have started Delphi Analytica and bragging about the popularity of the Kid Rock poll.⁶³⁷ Apparently reacting to an investigative e-mail from Harry Enten, he wrote, “We don’t need Harry Enten. we got governors tweeting about our polls. we are already famous.”⁶³⁸

Following his investigation, Harry Enten concluded, “Delphi Analytica isn’t a polling firm in any traditional sense, and it’s not entirely clear they even conducted the poll as advertised.”⁶³⁹ But they are not alone. The Internet is now riddled with such non-traditional polling firms, making it increasingly difficult to discern between legitimate and illegitimate polls.

⁶³¹ Pearce, “No Joke: Kid Rock Is a Competitive Candidate for the U.S. Senate in Michigan.”

⁶³² Weiner, “George Pataki Wasn’t Kidding: He Endorses Kid Rock for Senate.”

⁶³³ Siu, “Kid Rock Gains GOP Backing for U.S. Senate Run.”

⁶³⁴ Berman, “Kid Rock Leads in Poll ... There’s Just One Problem.”

⁶³⁵ Berman.

⁶³⁶ Enten, “Fake Polls Are a Real Problem.”

⁶³⁷ Enten.

⁶³⁸ Enten.

⁶³⁹ Enten.

Traditional polling is quickly becoming an irrelevant vestige of a bygone era. Rising costs and declining quality has transitioned much of the industry to online polls. The tried-and-true method of using robocalls to call landlines is no longer a viable option because it skews to older respondents who are predisposed to having landlines.⁶⁴⁰ Head of product marketing at Distil Networks Edward Roberts notes, “Younger people are more likely to only have cell phones. But there is a federal law that prohibits auto-dialing cell phones, while manual dialing makes the process more expensive and time-consuming for research companies to complete.”⁶⁴¹ Moreover, according to a Pew Research report, “In 2017 and 2018, typical telephone survey response rates fell to 7% and 6%, respectively.”⁶⁴²

For many, the solution has been online polling. This has allowed new players to arise, such as Morning Consult, Survey Monkey, Google Survey, and YouGov.⁶⁴³ It has also made polling affordable for those who wish to exploit it, such as Delphi Analytica. A survey that once cost thousands of dollars may now cost less than \$100.⁶⁴⁴ As such, Harry Enten warns, “We now have to ask ourselves not just whether a survey is real or fake, but also whether the person designing the survey knows what they are doing.”⁶⁴⁵

Asking questions to a large and diverse group of people is no longer difficult, but getting an accurate perspective is extraordinarily challenging. Internet polls are often unscientific in their data sampling and tend to skew toward those who use the website hosting the poll.⁶⁴⁶ For example, it is not surprising that a 2016 *NBC Sports Philadelphia* poll that asked the question, “Who is the best 3-0 team in the NFL?” favored the Philadelphia Eagles at 96%.⁶⁴⁷

Random sampling is integral to the accuracy of polling, but it is seemingly impossible to accomplish online. Instead, Internet

⁶⁴⁰ Roberts, “How to Manipulate an Online Poll with a Bot.”

⁶⁴¹ Roberts.

⁶⁴² Kennedy, *Response Rates in Telephone Surveys Have Resumed Their Decline*.

⁶⁴³ Cohn, “Online Polls Are Rising. So Are Concerns About Their Results.”

⁶⁴⁴ Enten, “Fake Polls Are a Real Problem.”

⁶⁴⁵ Enten.

⁶⁴⁶ Roberts, “How to Manipulate an Online Poll with a Bot.”

⁶⁴⁷ NBC Sports Philadelphia (@NBCSPHilly), September 25, 2016, 5:51 p.m.

pollsters tend to rely upon statistical modeling to balance their results, but there is no consensus model among pollsters. The *New York Times* reports that “there’s far greater diversity of methods among these [Internet] polls than among telephone polls. The diversity is a reflection of the still-developing science of Internet polling. No one is sure of the right way to do it.”⁶⁴⁸

Perhaps this is why political polls in the last few election cycles have been wildly off target.⁶⁴⁹ Hours before the 2016 presidential election, the media reported that the latest polls overwhelmingly favored a Hillary Clinton win: *New York Times* – 85⁰%,^{650, 651} *Reuters* – 90⁰%,⁶⁵² *CNN* – 91%⁶⁵³ *Huffington Post* – 98.2%.^{654, 655}

To some extent Internet polling is more of a guessing game than a science, yet it continues to sway public opinion because news organizations obsess over polling data. Moreover, as the medium for polling becomes increasingly easier and cheaper to use, the number of inaccurate and skewed polls produced by incompetent and unethical pollsters will only increase, further influencing public opinion. But inaccurate models, incompetence, and flagrant exploitation are only some of the ways that polls can reflect a false reality.

Industries, candidates, political parties, and even news organizations have long employed tactics designed to deliberately tilt polling results toward their preferred narrative. Chief among these is oversampling. For example, after the first 2016 presidential debate, *CNN* reported that 62% of voters who watched it believed Hillary Clinton won the debate compared to just 27⁰% who thought Donald Trump won it.⁶⁵⁶ What was not reported in the article is that, of the 521 registered voters sampled

⁶⁴⁸ Cohn, “Online Polls Are Rising. So Are Concerns About Their Results.”

⁶⁴⁹ Flood, “Here’s Every Major Poll That Got Donald Trump’s Election Win Wrong.”

⁶⁵⁰ Katz, “Who Will Be President?”

⁶⁵¹ Andrews, “Latest Election Polls 2016.”

⁶⁵² Tamman, “Clinton 90 Percent Chance of Winning: Reuters/Ipsos States of the Nation.”

⁶⁵³ Kenny, “Political Prediction Market: Clinton’s Odds Rise Again.”

⁶⁵⁴ Jackson, “HuffPost Forecasts Hillary Clinton Will Win with 323 Electoral Votes.”

⁶⁵⁵ Jackson, “Election 2016 Forecast: President.”

⁶⁵⁶ Agiesta, “Post-Debate Poll: Hillary Clinton Takes Round One.”

in the CNN/ORC International poll, 41% identified as Democrat while only 26% identified as Republican and 33% as Independent.⁶⁵⁷ Similarly, a 2016 *ABC News* poll announced a 12-point Clinton lead over Trump. What was not mentioned is that the survey oversampled Democrats over Republicans by 9 percentage points with a sample division of 36% Democrat, 27% Republican, and 31% Independent.⁶⁵⁸

Leaked e-mails from John Podesta, Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman, document deliberate efforts to oversample polls for the purpose of influencing media coverage of the candidates, "I also want to get your Atlas folks to recommend oversamples for our polling before we start in February. By market, regions, etc. I want to get this all compiled into one set of recommendations so we can maximize what we get out of our media polling."⁶⁵⁹ This e-mail included a 37-page guide detailing recommendations for oversampling ethnic groups in each state and how to influence national polls by oversampling key districts, regions, and ethnic groups as needed.⁶⁶⁰

Another way that polls can reflect a false reality is through the influence of "robo-voting" in online surveys. Simply put, this is an automated script—otherwise known as a bot—designed to submit multiple votes to skew online polls.⁶⁶¹ For example, Michael Cohen claims to have paid the owner of a technology company to create a script that submitted fake votes for Donald Trump in a 2014 online poll asking people to identify top business leaders and a 2015 online poll of potential presidential candidates.⁶⁶² Given that malicious bots of all types account for nearly 20% of all Internet traffic, the potential for artificially manipulating online surveys via bots is immense.⁶⁶³

An entire black market for buying online votes has arisen because of the significance of polls in determining news agendas, creating talking points, and manipulating public opinion. Inexpensive bots

⁶⁵⁷ "ORC International Poll."

⁶⁵⁸ "ABC News Poll: 2016 Election Tracking No. 1."

⁶⁵⁹ "Atlas Polling Recommendations."

⁶⁶⁰ Atlas Project, *Selected Polling and Media Recommendations*.

⁶⁶¹ Roberts, "How to Manipulate an Online Poll with a Bot."

⁶⁶² "Cohn Says He Rigged Online Polls for Trump in 2014, 2015."

⁶⁶³ Essaid, "Commentary: The War against Bad Bots Is Coming. Are We Ready?"

and even “real people” votes via large crowdsourcing programs can be bought through Chinese, Russian, Arabic/Middle Eastern, and English marketplaces.⁶⁶⁴ The sophistication of these campaigns is impressive. It appears that for the right price, nearly any vote can be bought, creating an artificial sense of reality.

Discernment has always been necessary when reading polls, but in our modern age, it is now critical for anyone seeking the truth. Skewed and falsified online polls have become an integral component in manipulating public perception. Fake polling results produce fake news narratives that influence public thinking.

We are predisposed to accept as truth those things that match our personal beliefs and opinions, and numerous scientific studies have confirmed that facts rarely matter to an ideologue who has already made up his mind.⁶⁶⁵ Moreover, we are immersed in a post-truth society where “objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”⁶⁶⁶ The inevitable consequence is that we have corrupted some of our most powerful tools for evaluating reality—polls and fact-checks—having recruited them into our quest to validate our beliefs and to win arguments.

Far too often polls are used, not to reflect public opinion, but to craft it, and fact-checkers manipulate context and data to form politically advantageous counterarguments. So prevalent are these tactics, that today there is a poll or a fact-check to support nearly any position. We have become what the Apostle Paul prophesied when he warned Timothy that a time was coming when people would pursue teachers who would tell them what they want to hear (2 Tim. 4:3). We today are those who, according to 2 Timothy 4:4, have turned away from hearing the truth, preferring to belief myths.

⁶⁶⁴ Gu, *The Fake News Machine: How Propogandists Abuse the Internet and Manipulate the Public*.

⁶⁶⁵ Altmire, “The Importance of Fact-Checking in a Post-Truth World.”

⁶⁶⁶ “Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year 2016 Is...”

Furthermore, we have become like Judah, whose people clung to deceit and refused to change their thinking (Jer. 8:5). Like Judah, we have become emboldened in our foolishness because those who have been tasked with protecting and proclaiming truth have themselves become deceitful (Jer. 8:8, 10). Ultimately, this culture of lies provoked God to render national judgment upon Judah (Jer. 8:4-17). If we are not careful, we too may reap divine judgment.

8. Fake Hate

In the waning days of 1987, a 15-year-old African-American girl named Tawana Brawley was found behind a New York apartment building, curled into a fetal position inside a plastic bag. Scrawled across her chest in charcoal were the words “nigger” and “KKK,” and feces was smeared across her face and chopped-off hair.⁶⁶⁷ Having been repeatedly sodomized by six white men in a wooden area, she was apparently so traumatized that, at the hospital, she answered yes-or-no questions only by blinking her eyes.^{668, 669}

Her case became more shocking when her counselors, Al Sharpton, Alton Maddox, and C. Vernon Mason, named Assistant New York Attorney General Steven Pagonis as one of Brawley’s rapists—an allegation publicly made on 33 separate occasions.⁶⁷⁰ Reverend Al Sharpton boldly proclaimed, “We have the facts and the evidence that an assistant district attorney and a state trooper did this.”⁶⁷¹ Likewise, C. Vernon Mason declared, “He was one of the attackers, yes. If I didn’t have direct evidence, I wouldn’t be here saying that.”⁶⁷²

⁶⁶⁷ Iverem, “Bias Cases Fuel Anger of Blacks.”

⁶⁶⁸ Iverem.

⁶⁶⁹ Winerip, “Revisiting a Rape Scandal That Would Have Been Monstrous If True.”

⁶⁷⁰ McShane, “After a Decade, the Tawana Brawley Case Goes to Court.”

⁶⁷¹ Winerip, “Revisiting a Rape Scandal That Would Have Been Monstrous If True.”

⁶⁷² McShane, “After a Decade, the Tawana Brawley Case Goes to Court.”

For a season, Tawana Brawley became the posterchild for racial injustice in America. Celebrities rallied around her⁶⁷³ while protestors demanded a special prosecutor for Brawley, vowing further demonstrations and civil disobedience until her attackers could be found.⁶⁷⁴ Nevertheless, after seven months, 6,000 pages of testimony, and 180 witnesses,⁶⁷⁵ a New York grand jury reported “an avalanche of evidence” that Brawley had lied.⁶⁷⁶

Eyewitness testimony and voluminous forensic evidence indicated that Tawana Brawley had spent the majority of the four days in question at her family’s former apartment. Her condition was likely self-inflicted. The hospital found no evidence of rape. And “persuasive and credible” alibis for Assistant Attorney General Steven Pagonos accounted for “virtually every hour of the period” in which Tawana Brawley was missing.⁶⁷⁷

This was a demonstrably fake hate crime. A decade later, Tawana Brawley and her advisors lost a defamation lawsuit to Steven Pagonos, and Alton Maddox was suspended from practicing law for refusing to answer questions from an ethics panel regarding his conduct during the case.^{678, 679} Nevertheless, Twana Brawley became “an incendiary symbol of racism across the nation.”⁶⁸⁰ Her case generated one of the largest inquiries in New York history, and it shook the public’s confidence in law-enforcement.⁶⁸¹ However, the *New York Times* ultimately concluded that this fake hate crime was “little more than a girl’s escapade used for the political agendas of her advisors.”⁶⁸²

Thirty years later political activists continue to drum-up emotional fervor over events that are later proven to be fake

⁶⁷³ #team EBONY, “Tawana Brawley Case: 25 Years Later.”

⁶⁷⁴ Iverem, “Bias Cases Fuel Anger of Blacks.”

⁶⁷⁵ Winerip, “Revisiting a Rape Scandal That Would Have Been Monstrous If True.”

⁶⁷⁶ McFadden, “Brawley Made Up Story of Assault, Grand Jury Finds.”

⁶⁷⁷ McFadden.

⁶⁷⁸ Winerip, “Revisiting a Rape Scandal That Would Have Been Monstrous If True.”

⁶⁷⁹ Lubasch, “Court Suspends Maddox for Refusal to Testify at Grievance Hearing.”

⁶⁸⁰ McFadden, “Brawley Made Up Story of Assault, Grand Jury Finds.”

⁶⁸¹ McFadden.

⁶⁸² McFadden.

hatred. As in the Tawana Brawley case, the news media remains all-too-eager to provide such activists a national platform, frequently focusing more on what the alleged crime says about the moral fabric of America than the objective facts of the case. A glaring example of this is the 2019 Jussie Smollett hoax.

Jussie Smollett, an actor in the popular television show *Empire*, shocked the nation when he claimed to have been accosted in Chicago at 2:00 a.m. during an historic polar vortex that had most people barricaded in their homes.⁶⁸³ According to Smollett, two white men hung a noose around his neck, poured a bleach-like chemical on him, punched him in the face, yelled homophobic and racial slurs, and shouted, “This is MAGA country!”^{684, 685}

Outrage over this incident dominated the news with anchors, pundits, celebrities, and even members of Congress quick to blame conservatives, white privilege, and Vice President Mike Pence.^{686, 687} Presidential candidate Kamala Harris even called it “an attempted modern day lynching.”⁶⁸⁸ However, the entire incident appears to have been an elaborate hoax designed to further Jussie Smollett’s acting career.⁶⁸⁹

For weeks as many as 20 detectives interviewed 100 witnesses, reviewed video footage from 55 cameras, and executed 50 search warrants,^{690, 691} resulting in a grand jury charging Smollett with 16

⁶⁸³ Murdock, “Deroy Murdock: Jussie Smollett ‘Attack’ Melts down as Leftists Self-Immolate.”

⁶⁸⁴ Moniuszko, “‘Empire’ Star Jussie Smollett: Attackers Yelled, ‘This Is MAGA Country’ During Beating.”

⁶⁸⁵ “Jussie Smollett FULL Interview on Alleged Attack | ABC News Exclusive.”

⁶⁸⁶ Bort, “What Will It Take for Mike Pence to Respect LGBTQ Americans?”

⁶⁸⁷ Kurtz, “Ellen Page Calls out Anti-LGBT Rhetoric in Wake of Jussie Smollett Attack: ‘This Needs to F---ing Stop.’”

⁶⁸⁸ Fredericks, “Kamala Harris: Attack on Jussie Smollett Was ‘Modern Day Lynching.’”

⁶⁸⁹ McLaughlin, “Jussie Smollett Paid \$3,500 to Stage His Attack, Hoping to Promote His Career, Police Allege.”

⁶⁹⁰ Gorner, “Inside Jussie Smollett’s Alleged Plot: Chicago Police Say They Were Suspicious from the Start.”

⁶⁹¹ “Chicago Police to Give an Update on the Arrest of Jussie Smollett.”

felony counts.^{692, 693} Chicago Police Superintendent Eddie Johnson concluded that Smollett was not the victim of a hate crime, nor were his attackers white. Rather, Olabinjo and Abimbalo Osundairo—two brothers with Nigerian ancestry—confessed to conspiring with Jussie Smollett to perpetrate the fraud.⁶⁹⁴

Smollett's assailants were not hateful strangers. The *Chicago Sun Times* reports:

Prosecutors said Thursday that Abimbola Osundairo and Smollett became friends in Fall 2017 after they met while working on "Empire," where Abel Osundairo, 25, played a stand-in for a character that was Smollett's character's love interest on the show.

They socialized, worked out together and Abimbola "Abel" Osundairo would, on occasion, sell the drug ecstasy to Smollett. An attorney for Smollett said one had served as the actor's personal trainer.⁶⁹⁵

According to the brothers, this was an escalation of an earlier self-induced fake-hate crime: A racist letter Smollett sent himself containing a white powder later determined to be aspirin.^{696, 697, 698} The letter, whose return address was listed as "MAGA"—short for make America great again—included a childlike drawing of a gun pointing at a man hanging by a noose from a tree with

⁶⁹² Madani, "'Empire' Actor Jussie Smollett Indicted on 16 Felony Counts by Grand Jury."

⁶⁹³ Kirkos, "Jussie Smollett Indicted on 16 Felony Counts for Allegedly Making False Reports."

⁶⁹⁴ "Police: Chicago Didn't Deserve This 'Publicity Stunt.'"

⁶⁹⁵ Charles, "Who Are the Osundairo Brothers, Key Witnesses in the Smollett Case?"

⁶⁹⁶ "Chicago Police to Give an Update on the Arrest of Jussie Smollett."

⁶⁹⁷ "Police: 'Empire' Actor Jussie Smollett Sent Himself Racist and Homophobic Letter and Was Dissatisfied with His Salary."

⁶⁹⁸ Wash, "Brothers Implicated in Attack on Jussie Smollett Tell Police the 'Empire' Actor Was Upset That Earlier Threatening Letter Didn't Get Enough Attention: Source."

magazine clippings forming the words, “You will die black fag.”⁶⁹⁹
700

From the beginning clues abounded for the skeptical reporter willing to reserve judgment. Three days after the alleged attack, Kyle Smith wrote at *National Review*:

So let’s recap what Smollett says happened, together with what Chicago reporters have heard from police. Two men recognized a gay black actor from a TV show at 2 a.m. on a Chicago street during an extreme cold snap while he was on his phone. Instead of taking the phone from him, they began to shout slurs at him. The assailants happened to have a rope and an unknown liquid with them. They put a rope around his neck, but instead of strangling him with it, they just left it there and then ran away. Instead of calling the police immediately on the phone, Smollett walked into an apartment building and past security, without informing anyone about the alleged assault, and he kept the rope around his neck for some three-quarters of an hour. He neglected to tell the police about the MAGA remark in this first interview, revealing it only later in a subsequent interview. He took himself to Northwestern Memorial Hospital that morning and was released later in the morning. TMZ posted a picture of Smollett with a small scratch or cut beneath his right eye.

That’s pretty much all we know. Here’s hoping we find out more.⁷⁰¹

Not all reporters were as cautious as Kyle Smith. *CNN* was quick to render judgment with the headline “‘Empire’ Actor Victim of Racist and Homophobic Assault.”⁷⁰² Such a headline established as fact that an attack occurred and that it was racially motivated.

⁶⁹⁹ Lewis, “Jussie Smollett Received Chilling Hate Mail Eight Days before Racist Attack.”

⁷⁰⁰ Carter, “‘Phony Attack’ Jussie Smollett Sent HIMSELF Letter Saying ‘You Will Die, Black F*g’ and Exploited ‘Pain of Racism’ to Boost His Career with Staged Assault, Cops Say.”

⁷⁰¹ Smith, “The Curious Case of Jussie Smollett.”

⁷⁰² Young, “‘Empire’ Actor Victim of Racist and Homophobic Assault.”

Incredibly, *CNN* news anchor Don Lemon told Red Table Talk that, despite reporting on this story night after night, his primary concern wasn't searching for facts and reporting the truth but simply supporting his friend because he is black and gay:

My initial reaction was sadness. I wasn't shocked. ... One, he has to deal with discrimination as a black man. Then, on top of that, he has to be gay—and then, fame—fame is not natural—When something happens to you and it's controversial, everyone is coming for you, and so I knew everyone would be picking apart his story. It's not for me. That's not my concern. So, every day I say, "I know you think I'm annoying." I can show you a text. "I know you think I'm annoying you, but I just want to know that you're doing—that you're OK. If you need somebody, you can talk to me because there's not a lot of us out there."⁷⁰³

Anyone who questioned the validity of Jussie Smollett's testimony was criticized as a conspiracy theorist.⁷⁰⁴ The vast majority of reporters stumbled over themselves to render judgment and affirm Smollett:

- *MSNBC* Political Analyst Zerlina Maxwell tweeted:
The media is broken. If they can't call the attack on Jussie racist straight up then they need to find alternative employment.
Apparent HATE CRIME? Sure bc that has a legal definition.

But to be clear pouring bleach on a Black person while you are yelling about MAGA = RACIST."⁷⁰⁵
- *Washington Post* reporter Eugene Scott wrote, "To many, the Smollett incident—and the political nature of the assault—is yet another reminder for many black gay

⁷⁰³ "Black and Gay in America with Don Lemon."

⁷⁰⁴ Ross, "Is Donald Trump Jr. Promoting a Jussie Smollett Conspiracy Theory?"

⁷⁰⁵ Maxwell, Zerlina (@ZerlinaMaxwell), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 11:13 a.m.

Americans that this president's vision of a 'great America' does not appear to include them."⁷⁰⁶

- *CNN* Political Analyst April Ryan tweeted, "This attack on @JussieSmollett is a hate crime and should be treated as such!"⁷⁰⁷
- *New York Post* real estate and travel reporter Zachary Kussin tweeted, "I also hate when cops investigate this kind of blatant [expletive] as a 'possible hate crime.' This is obviously a hate crime."⁷⁰⁸
- *Huffington Post* writer Kimmy Yam tweeted, "That MAGA violence targeting Jussie Smollett is particularly horrifying because it's not new."⁷⁰⁹
- *Philadelphia Magazine* writer Ernest Owens tweeted, "Hoping for justice & vengeance for @JussieSmollett. Now who is going to defend Black LGBTQ?"⁷¹⁰
- *Washington Post* Global Opinions Editor Karen Attiah tweeted, "Regarding the heinous attack on @JussieSmollett, yet another reminder that Trump's ascendance and the resulting climate of hate has meant that lives have been increasingly at stake since 2015. Smollett could have been killed by those thugs screaming MAGA. Let that sink in."⁷¹¹
- *CNN* news anchor Brooke Baldwin used such phrases as "absolutely despicable,"⁷¹² or, "and this is America in 2019" when reporting on her show *OutFront*.⁷¹³

⁷⁰⁶ Scott, "The Jussie Smollett Attack Highlights the Hate Black Gay Americans Face."

⁷⁰⁷ Ryan, April (@AprilDRyan), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 12:50 p.m.

⁷⁰⁸ Stieber, "Reporter Deletes 'Inaccurate' Tweets on Jussie Smollett Case, Other Reporters Quietly Remove Theirs."

⁷⁰⁹ Yam, Kimmy (@kimmythepooh), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 9:24 a.m.

⁷¹⁰ Owens, Ernest (@MrErnestOwens), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 8:44 a.m.

⁷¹¹ Attiah, Karen (@KarenAttiah), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 12:23 p.m.

⁷¹² "Trump Ally Roger Stone Pleads Not Guilty in the Mueller Indictment."

⁷¹³ "‘Empire’ Star Says He Was Victim of Racial, Homophobic Attack."

- *BuzzFeed* writer Ryan Shocket tweeted, “Jussie Smollett was called homophobic and racist things. They put rope around him, POURED BLEACH on him, beat him, and said, ‘This is MAGA country.’ These are the people our president is emboldening. This is what that red hat stands for.”⁷¹⁴
- *PBS Newshour* White House Correspondent Yamiche Alcindor tweeted, “We have to do better as a country. This is disgusting.”⁷¹⁵
- *Washington Post* and *Teen Vogue* writer Broderick Greer tweeted, “This Jussie Smollett news is heartbreaking. The MAGA element to this unsurprising. Red Hat Wearers are a threat to black LGBTQ people all over this country.”⁷¹⁶ He added, “We told you these things would happen with the rise of trump [*sic*]. He has emboldened his followers to commit acts of violence against racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities. What a disgusting man and political party to identify with.”⁷¹⁷
- *Associated Press* and *MSNBC* writer Brian Latimer tweeted:

The people who say LGBTQ Americans should be thankful they don’t live somewhere like Saudi Arabia need to pay attention to the details of this story.

America is not safe for queer people—especially if they are POC.

My heart goes out to @JussieSmollett. You’re an inspiration.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁴ Stieber, “Reporter Deletes ‘Inaccurate’ Tweets on Jussie Smollett Case, Other Reporters Quietly Remove Theirs.”

⁷¹⁵ Alcindor, Yamiche (@Yamiche), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 8:41 a.m.

⁷¹⁶ Greer, Broderick (@BroderickGeer), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 10:53 a.m.

⁷¹⁷ Greer, Broderick (@BroderickGreer), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 11:08 a.m.

⁷¹⁸ Latimer, Brian (@Briskwalk), Twitter, January 29, 2019, 12:18 p.m.

These reporters are convinced that President Donald Trump has empowered America's latent racism to express itself through a surging wave of hate crimes.^{719, 720, 721} Indeed, they frequently cite an FBI report showing a three consecutive-year increase in hate crimes with a 17% rise between 2016 and 2017.^{722, 723} However, even this can be considered fake news as it appears to deliberately mislead for the purpose of advancing a particular narrative.

According to the FBI, "Although the numbers increased last year, so did the number of law enforcement agencies reporting hate crime data—with approximately 1,000 additional agencies contributing information."⁷²⁴ Perhaps hate crimes are rising, but we cannot compare the FBI statistics from 2016 to those from 2017 to prove this point if there is a difference in participation between the two years of 1,000 agencies. Furthermore, the initial increase in hate crime statistics began in 2014—before Donald Trump announced his candidacy—and it was caused by a surge in anti-white hate crimes.⁷²⁵ As such it is misleading to report these figures as though they prove that President Trump's "white nationalist" rhetoric is at fault. Instead, objective reporting would show that insufficient data makes hate crimes either rare or common, depending upon one's bias.⁷²⁶

Like the Tawana Brawley case, the Jussie Smollett fake hate crime encouraged racial division and was used to promote political agendas. It was even briefly held up as an example in a House Judiciary Committee on hate crimes and the rise of white

⁷¹⁹ Ravani, "FBI: Hate Crimes in U.S., CA Surge in First Year of Trump's Presidency."

⁷²⁰ Editorial Board, "Editorial: Hate Crimes Are Increasing Alongside Trump's Rhetoric."

⁷²¹ Grinberg, "4 Days, 5 Reports of Hate Crimes, and a Disturbing Trend Developing in America."

⁷²² "FBI Releases 2017 Hate Crime Statistics."

⁷²³ Eligon, "Hate Crimes Increase for the Third Consecutive Year, F.B.I. Reports."

⁷²⁴ "2017 Hate Crime Statistics Released."

⁷²⁵ Palumbo, "No, Trump Didn't Spark a 'Hate Crime Surge.'"

⁷²⁶ Mastrine, "Hate Crimes Are Either Rare or Common, Depending on Your Bias."

nationalism.^{727, 728} The events themselves may be fictitious, but they had a very real impact upon society.

Fake hate crimes divide our nation. They create a tinderbox of emotion that news outlets are often eager to light provided it furthers the preferred narrative. The result is dehumanizing. These fake hate crimes encourage us to view one another according to skin color, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, cultural background, and political views rather than as fellow human beings in need of the transforming power of the gospel. Ultimately, fake hate crimes steal away our compassion and distract us from our primary task of serving as Christ's ambassadors.

The proliferation of unquestioned fake hate crimes reported in our news media is evidence that the father of lies is winning the battle for control over our news media. The Holy Spirit is repeatedly referred to as the Spirit of truth (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:13; 1 John 4:6) who exposes error (John 16:8 Eph. 5:9). As such, it is not surprising to see the conflict between the Spirit of truth and the father of lies manifested within our nation's primary institution for communicating general truth—our news media. But there can be only one victor. As the father of lies increasingly squeezes the Spirit of truth out of the national conversation, we should expect to see more of his fruit produced through our news media—and that fruit is division and conflict (Gal. 5:19–23; Jude 1:19).

⁷²⁷ "Full Committee Hearing on Hate Crimes and the Rise of White Nationalism."

⁷²⁸ "Hate Crimes and the Rise of White Nationalism."

9. The Growing Threat of Censorship

A quarter of all Americans (26%), and nearly half of all Republicans (43%) believe “the president should have the authority to close news outlets engaged in bad behavior,” according to a 2018 Ipsos public opinion survey.⁷²⁹ Increasingly, Americans on both sides of the aisle are becoming intolerant of opposing views. Even journalists have joined the chorus of voices championing the censorship of those with whom they disagree.

Today those responsible for disseminating information are choosing sides based upon politics and worldview. More than half of America’s 30 most politically polarizing brands polled by Morning Consult are media companies. These are not fringe publications. Rather, they are what many refer to as “mainstream media,” including such names as *ABC News*, *CBS News*, *NBC News*, *MSNBC News*, *CNN*, *Fox News*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *TIME*, and more.⁷³⁰ Incredibly, some of these outlets have even championed and celebrated efforts by Big Tech companies in Silicon Valley to silence journalists and personalities who disagree with their politics.

Internationally, social networks have readily censored verified journalists who have challenged their respective country’s political authorities. Following a political coup in Turkey, Twitter

⁷²⁹ “Americans’ Views on the Media.”

⁷³⁰ Fischer, “America’s Most Polarizing Brands.”

censored journalists deemed by the government to be political dissidents.⁷³¹ Twitter acquiesced to Indian government requests to suspend accounts and removed tweets that were sympathetic to the Kashmiri independence.⁷³² At the request of Saudi Arabia, Snapchat removed a Qatari news media channel.⁷³³ Facebook blocked Pulitzer prizing-winning journalist Matthew Caruana Galizia for publishing a series of posts alleging corruption by the Prime Minister of Malta and his associates.⁷³⁴ Facebook temporarily banned all links and publications from the independent Ukrainian news website Liga.net.⁷³⁵ Facebook removed photos of abuses by the Myanmar government against the Rohingya ethnic minority, and YouTube removed documentation of the civil war in Syria.⁷³⁶ Now these social networks are censoring journalists and influential personalities in the United States based upon differences in political and social ideology.

In 2019 *Project Veritas* tweeted evidence of bias at Pinterest against pro-life advocates. It revealed screenshots of Pinterest's internal communications where an employee called *Daily Wire* Editor-in-Chief Ben Shapiro a "white supremacist" and noted that his name and advertisements have been added to the "sensitive terms" list.⁷³⁷ According to *Project Veritas*, Pinterest also removed the term "Christian" from auto-fill search functions and temporarily blocked posts that linked to the pro-life organization Live Action. Pinterest placed Live Action on its porn domain block list before banning it entirely. It also labeled undercover videos of Planned Parenthood from Center for Medical Progress founder David Daleiden as "conspiracy," despite the opinion of digital

⁷³¹ Sozeri, "Twitter Refuses to Explain Censorship of Verified Journalist Accounts in Post-Coup Turkey."

⁷³² Manve, "Twitter Tells Kashmiri Journalists and Activists That They Will Be Censored at Indian Government's Request."

⁷³³ York, "Silicon Valley Should Just Say No to Saudi Arabia."

⁷³⁴ Carrie, "Facebook Blocks Pulitzer-Winning Reporter Over Malta Government Exposé."

⁷³⁵ Oksana Romaniuk, "This may be an interesting case for international experts."

⁷³⁶ Asher-Schapiro, "YouTube and Facebook Are Removing Evidence of Atrocities, Jeopardizing Cases Against War Criminals."

⁷³⁷ O'Keefe, James (@JamesOKeefeIII), Twitter, June 12, 2019, 6:37 a.m.

forensic experts that his videos are “authentic and show no evidence of manipulation.”^{738, 739}

Twitter blocked *Project Veritas*’ post regarding the censorship at Pinterest, stating that it violated Twitter’s rules against posting private information.⁷⁴⁰ Host of *Tipping Point* at *One America News Network* Liz Wheeler challenged the hypocrisy of Twitter with the tweet, “Did Twitter apply this so-called privacy standard to Wikileaks? Or HRC’s [Hillary Rodham Clinton’s] emails? Or Trump’s tax documents? NO.”⁷⁴¹

Likewise, YouTube removed *Project Veritas*’ Pinterest insider story from its platform.⁷⁴² Founder of *Project Veritas* James O’Keefe tweeted, “The established media and technology are so afraid of investigative journalism they need to censor it. YouTube calls REPORTING on someone by showing their face and name, and how they added a pro-life group to a porn blacklist, a ‘privacy complaint.’ Would they do this to NYT?”⁷⁴³

Particularly disturbing is the appearance of coordination among Big Tech social networks to suppress *Project Veritas*’ content. This prompted the *Daily Wire* to write:

The layers of censorship here are overlapping. First, Pinterest censors content that offends their employees’ personal or political beliefs, despite what their users want to post or share according to their own personal or political beliefs. Second, Twitter then censors the investigative journalists exposing the Pinterest censorship. Then, YouTube removes content *Project Veritas* put up about the Pinterest and Twitter censorship. It’s a social media blackout.⁷⁴⁴

⁷³⁸ Osburn, “Twitter Is Now Banning Conservatives for Investigating Journalism about Big Tech’s Abortion Activism.”

⁷³⁹ Mattox, “New Forensic Report Flushes Planned Parenthood’s ‘Highly Edited’ Talking Point.”

⁷⁴⁰ O’Keefe, James (@JamesOKeefeIII), Twitter, June 12, 2019, 6:37 a.m.

⁷⁴¹ Wheeler, Liz (@Liz_Wheeler), Twitter, June 12, 2019, 12:00 p.m.

⁷⁴² O’Keefe, James (@JamesOKeefeIII), Twitter, June 12, 2019, 3:43 p.m.

⁷⁴³ O’Keefe, James (@JamesOKeefeIII), Twitter, June 12, 2019, 4:37 p.m.

⁷⁴⁴ Osburn, “Twitter Is Now Banning Conservatives for Investigating Journalism about Big Tech’s Abortion Activism.”

Such blackouts and selective censorship are more common among social networks than many realize. In 2018 *Project Veritas* secured video of a former Twitter software engineer explaining how the censorship of certain political viewpoints is becoming automated via machine learning.⁷⁴⁵ Moreover, he admitted that Twitter is “shadow banning” certain viewpoints, saying, “One strategy is to shadow ban so you have ultimate control. The idea of a shadow ban is that you ban someone but they don’t know they’ve been banned, because they keep posting and no one sees their content. So they just think that no one is engaging with their content, when in reality, no one is seeing it.”⁷⁴⁶

Similarly, Facebook appears to have deliberately targeted conservative content for censoring. According to a June 2018 *Gateway Pundit* study, “Facebook has eliminated 93% of traffic to top conservative news outlets” since January of 2017.⁷⁴⁷ And Microsoft threatened to remove Gab, an alternative to Twitter, from its Microsoft Azure website hosting service if it failed to self-censor posts Microsoft considered to be hate speech.^{748, 749}

The quest to prevent “inaccurate information” (fake news) and intolerance is producing a growing threat in America. Hate speech policies are playing a particularly significant role in the effort to control information. The nebulous term “hate speech” has become a convenient catch-all for anything that either side deems to be fake news, intolerant, and potentially harmful to their politics and worldview.

Recently, this ambiguous category of speech was cited as justification for an apparently coordinated effort by corporate giants in technology and social media to censor syndicated radio host Alex Jones and his news site, *InfoWars*.⁷⁵⁰ The initial domino

⁷⁴⁵ “Undercover Video: Twitter Engineers to ‘Ban a Way of Talking’ through ‘Shadow Banning,’ Algorithms to Censor Opposing Political Opinions.”

⁷⁴⁶ “Undercover Video.”

⁷⁴⁷ Hoft, “Facebook Eliminates 93% of Traffic to Top Conservative Sites – Stocks Plunge 24%.”

⁷⁴⁸ Price, “Microsoft Threatens to Boot the Far-Right’s Favorite Social Network off Its Cloud over Posts That Threatened Jews with ‘Vengeance.’”

⁷⁴⁹ D’Abrosca, “CENSORSHIP: Microsoft Threatens to Drop Gab Hosting over ‘Hate Speech.’”

⁷⁵⁰ Jones, Alex (@RealAlexJones), Twitter, August 6, 2018, 11:23 a.m.

fell when Spotify removed some of his podcasts. Within days, Apple removed all but one of Jones' podcasts from iTunes and its podcast apps. Hours later, Facebook blocked four of Jones' pages, Google removed the official "Alex Jones Channel" from its platform, YouTube deleted the *InfoWars* channel, and Pinterest eliminated the *InfoWars* board.^{751, 752} Together these channels had millions of subscribers and billions of views.⁷⁵³

In the space of a single day, a nationally known—albeit polarizing—journalist and radio host was largely purged from the Internet's largest platforms for the crime of disseminating "the wrong" information. The justification for abruptly removing entire libraries featuring 20 years of content and channels boasting millions of subscribers was unspecified violations of hate speech policies and hateful content that could lead to harm.⁷⁵⁴ Likewise, Facebook said it blocked Jones "for glorifying violence ... and using dehumanizing language to describe people who are transgender, Muslims, and immigrants, which violates our hate speech policies."⁷⁵⁵

Eager to defend the decisions of these tech giants, several among the media pointed to five examples as justification of the censorship:

- Alex Jones regularly propagated unverified conspiracy theories.
- A video posted by Jones showed an adult pushing a child.
- In 2016 a man fired three shots inside a restaurant endeavoring to save children who were alleged by Jones to

⁷⁵¹ Timberg, "Apple, Facebook and Other Tech Companies Delete Content from Alex Jones."

⁷⁵² Rappoport, "The War to Destroy Alex Jones, Part One."

⁷⁵³ Scheer, "The InfoWars Bans Aren't about Alex Jones, They're about Big Tech's Control over What We See."

⁷⁵⁴ Browne, "Facebook, Apple and YouTube Remove Pages and Podcasts from Alex Jones for Hate Speech, Policy Violations."

⁷⁵⁵ Timberg, "Apple, Facebook and Other Tech Companies Delete Content from Alex Jones."

be held captive as part of a child sex-ring involving high-ranking government officials.

- Followers of Jones harassed family members of the Sandy Hook shooting victims after Jones claimed the shooting was a staged event involving crisis actors.
- Alex Jones has profited financially from using fear and paranoia to sell vitamin supplements and survival gear.⁷⁵⁶

The thinking seems to be that a true journalist wouldn't propagate unverified conspiracy theories, show video of people perpetrating violence, or report news in a manner that emotionally riles people to the point that they may harass others or possibly commit violence—this despite these being the mainstay of most news coverage these past few years.

In the court of public opinion, the views of Alex Jones have been deemed inaccurate and too extreme for public consumption. Clearly, Alex Jones is a menace to society, and his hateful rhetoric and politically biased news coverage fomented a spirit of hatred and harm among his followers ... or so we've been told. But if this is our country's new standard for determining who should be permitted a voice in the social conversation, then something is dreadfully wrong because this standard has not been consistently applied. Consider some recent examples of individuals and groups whose voice has been championed and defended by the news media:

- **Black Lives Matter**—The group incited violence against police officers, justifying the violence and killing of officers as “necessary to the movement and war.”⁷⁵⁷ An example of the violent rhetoric used by Black Lives Matter is the chant against police officers, “Pigs in a blanket, fry 'em like bacon.”⁷⁵⁸ Nevertheless, this is deemed excusable

⁷⁵⁶ Williamson, “Conspiracy Theories Made Alex Jones Very Rich. They May Bring Him down.”

⁷⁵⁷ Andone, “Baton Rouge Officer Sues Black Lives Matter over 2016 Ambush of Cops.”

⁷⁵⁸ “‘Pigs in a Blanket’ Chant at Minnesota Fair Riles Police.”

because Black Lives Matter is a special interest group that is merely trying to draw attention to their issue.⁷⁵⁹

- **Antifa**—Eventually labeled a domestic terrorist group by the Department of Homeland Security, Antifa uses weapons, shields, Molotov cocktails, and bombs to wreak havoc.⁷⁶⁰ Antifa regularly spews vitriolic rhetoric and relies on intimidation, group violence, and riots to accomplish its objectives.⁷⁶¹ Nevertheless, this is deemed excusable because the group is opposing neo-Nazis and white supremacists.⁷⁶²
- **Comedians**—When Kathy Griffins tweeted a photo of her holding a bloody decapitated head of President Trump, she joined an ever-growing group of comedians who have crossed the line.⁷⁶³ Michelle Wolfe body shamed White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders and called her a white Uncle Tom;⁷⁶⁴ Samantha Bee called Ivanka Trump a feckless cunt,⁷⁶⁵ and Stephen Colbert’s *Late Show* featured a segment depicting Trump aide Stephen Miller’s decapitated head on a spike.⁷⁶⁶ Nevertheless, this is deemed excusable because the jokes are “true,” or because nothing should be sacred or off-limits in comedy.⁷⁶⁷
- **Peter Fonda**—In response to reports of families of illegal immigrants being separated at the border, actor Peter

⁷⁵⁹ Bellware, “Sean Hannity Draws Comparison between Black Lives Matter and KKK.”

⁷⁶⁰ Haltiwanger, “Are the Antifa Terrorists? Feds Have Reportedly Classified Their Activities as ‘Domestic Terrorist Violence.’”

⁷⁶¹ Beinart, “The Rise of the Violent Left.”

⁷⁶² Bray, “Who Are the Antifa?”

⁷⁶³ Thomsen, “Kathy Griffin Defends Picture with Mock Trump Head.”

⁷⁶⁴ Williams, “Never Mind Michelle Wolf’s Eye Shadow Joke. Let’s Talk about That ‘Uncle Tom’ Crack.”

⁷⁶⁵ Martinelli, “The White House Condemns *Full Frontal* as ‘Not Fit for Broadcast’ after Samantha Bee’s Crude Ivanka Insult.”

⁷⁶⁶ Locker, “Stephen Colbert Mocks Trump Advisor Stephen Miller *Game of Thrones* Style.”

⁷⁶⁷ Mckenzie, “Comedians Defend Michelle Wolf for Controversial Jokes at White House Correspondents’ Dinner.”

Fonda tweeted that “we should rip Barron Trump from his mother’s arms and put him in a cage with pedophiles.”⁷⁶⁸ Barron Trump was 12 years old. Nevertheless, this is deemed excusable because it was an explosion of emotion on Twitter in response to the devastating images that he was seeing on television.⁷⁶⁹

- **James Gunn**—Many came to the defense of Hollywood director James Gunn when he was fired after old tweets resurfaced in which he joked about such things as rape, pedophilia, 9/11, AIDS, and the holocaust.⁷⁷⁰ Nevertheless, this is deemed excusable because he is a highly successful director with a large fan base.⁷⁷¹
- **Sarah Jeong**—The recent addition to the *New York Times*’ editorial board has a history of racist tweets, even commenting, “Oh man it’s kind of sick how much joy I get out of being cruel to old white men.”⁷⁷² Nevertheless, it is deemed excusable because other people were racist toward her first, and she was merely responding to their harassment by imitating the rhetoric of her harassers.⁷⁷³
- **Maxine Waters**—At a time when people were being harassed and driven out of public venues,⁷⁷⁴ ⁷⁷⁵ Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA) called upon her supporters to publicly harass members of the Trump administration, saying, “Let’s make sure we show up wherever we have to show up. And if you see anybody

⁷⁶⁸ Mckenzie, “Peter Fonda Apologizes for ‘Highly Inappropriate and Vulgar’ Tweet about Barron Trump.”

⁷⁶⁹ Mckenzie.

⁷⁷⁰ Grenoble, “Disney Fires ‘Guardians of the Galaxy’ Director over Old Tweets.”

⁷⁷¹ Selcke, “Guardians of the Galaxy Stars, Celebrities and Fans Rally behind James Gunn.”

⁷⁷² “Sarah Jeong: NY Times Stands by ‘Racist Tweets’ Reporter.”

⁷⁷³ “Sarah Jeong.”

⁷⁷⁴ Mervosh, “Kirstjen Nielsen Is Confronted by Protestors at Mexican Restaurant: ‘Shame!’”

⁷⁷⁵ Richardson, “Sarah Sanders Heckled by Red Hen Owner Even after Leaving, Mike Huckabee Says.”

from that Cabinet in a restaurant, in a department store, at a gasoline station, you get out and you create a crowd. And you push back on them. And you tell them they're not welcome anymore, anywhere."⁷⁷⁶ She later added, "The people are going to turn on them, they're going to protest, they're going to absolutely harass them until they decide that they're going to tell the president, 'No, I can't hang with you.'"⁷⁷⁷ Nevertheless, this is excusable because, as a politician, she is being combative and tough and true to her core values.⁷⁷⁸

When the standards of "hate speech" and "dehumanizing language" are inconsistently used to suppress the voice of some and not others, we have a problem. Like Alex Jones, mainstream news networks have been accused of propagating unverified conspiracy theories—such as the missing Malaysia flight 370,^{779, 780} when *Fox News* theorized that the flight had been hijacked and was somewhere in Pakistan, and *CNN* theorized that it may have been sucked into a black hole or abducted—perhaps by God Himself. Mainstream news networks have been accused of fomenting a spirit of hatred and division that may have provoked some to violence—such as James Hodgkinson, who shot at Republicans during a Congressional baseball game, nearly killing Congressman Steve Scalise.^{781, 782} Likewise, mainstream media networks have been accused of giving a platform to activists who employ violent tactics, such as Black Lives Matter and Antifa, and of defending those who harass public figures with differing

⁷⁷⁶ Glanton, "Column: Maxine Waters Shows That Gutsiness Is in the Eye of the Beholder."

⁷⁷⁷ Staggs, "Rep. Maxine Waters Stands by Call to Confront Trump Officials; Trump Hints at Similar Response."

⁷⁷⁸ Glanton, "Column: Maxine Waters Shows That Gutsiness Is in the Eye of the Beholder."

⁷⁷⁹ Gray, "The 5 Most Horrifically Embarrassing Cable News Stories about Malaysia Airlines."

⁷⁸⁰ Irving, "The Secret of CNN's Turnaround: Flight MH370."

⁷⁸¹ Leavenworth, "Republican Leader in Critical Condition after Shooter Attacks GOP Baseball Practice."

⁷⁸² Scalise, "Rep. Steve Scalise: When Eric Holder, Other Dems Call for Violence, That's a Direct Threat to Our Democracy."

political views. How is this fundamentally different from what Alex Jones is accused of?⁷⁸³

President of Media Research Center Brent Bozell warns:

Conservatives are increasingly concerned that Infowars is not the end point for those who want to ban speech. It's just the beginning. I don't support Alex Jones and what Infowars produces. He's not a conservative. However, banning him and his outlet is wrong. It's not just a slippery slope; it's a dangerous cliff that these social media companies are jumping off.⁷⁸⁴

Likewise, Editor-in-Chief of the *Daily Wire* Ben Shapiro warns that the social media giants “show no signs of limiting their censorship” to *InfoWars*.⁷⁸⁵ Shapiro is no fan of Alex Jones, but he is concerned that these corporations—whom he lumps together with the political left—are using deliberately ambiguous policies and guidelines to target anyone with whom they disagree under the guise of combating hate speech:⁷⁸⁶

The problem is this: Once you start saying that hate speech is a rationale for banning people from social media, you get into some very vague territory. Because, as we know, the left does not have a consistent standard that they uphold when they are looking at hate speech. They don't say that anything that is hateful is banned and then define hateful in extraordinarily specific terms. They don't say anything that is offensive is banned because a lot of things are offensive. Instead, they use this term “hate speech” to simply label stuff they don't like as hate speech.

I know this because I've been targeted—not by social media *per se*, but by a lot of folks on the left who suggest that I am some kind of provocateur involved in hate speech. What exactly have I said that is hate speech? Well,

⁷⁸³ Hermann, “Gunman Who Shot Steve Scalise Cased Baseball Field for Weeks before Rampage.”

⁷⁸⁴ Timberg, “Apple, Facebook and Other Tech Companies Delete Content from Alex Jones.”

⁷⁸⁵ Muñoz, “Alex Jones Shutdown Ignites Debate over Social Media Content Policing, Censorship.”

⁷⁸⁶ Muñoz.

their favorite is that I don't use preferred pronouns. So, if somebody like Caitlyn Jenner says that Caitlyn Jenner is a woman, I will still say that Caitlyn Jenner is a man, and I will say that Caitlyn Jenner is a "he." Alright, this is hate speech according to a lot of folks on the left.

But what's to prevent Apple or Facebook from removing my content online simply because I don't abide by their standards? There are rumors today that a lot of these social media giants are going to start banning or restricting content from people whom they deem "climate change deniers."

... What exactly violates that hate speech policy? So, if I say that transgender people have mental disorders, which they do—ok, gender dysphoria or gender identity disorder is, as you may have noticed from the term gender identity disorder, a disorder—if you say that, is that now hate speech?

What if I say that, while not all Muslims are terrorists, a disproportionate number of terrorists are Muslim? Is that hate speech? Because that is also a fact.

What if I say that immigrants coming to the United States ought to be vetted because we don't know who is violent and who is not? Is that hate speech? I don't think it is. I don't think it even comes close to hate speech.⁷⁸⁷

Alluding to the 2.4 million subscribers to the now deleted Alex Jones YouTube channel, WikiLeaks mused on Twitter, "Which publisher in the world with millions of subscribers is next to be wiped out for cultural transgression?"⁷⁸⁸ Nine months later, comedian and political commentator Steven Crowder's YouTube channel with nearly 4 million subscribers⁷⁸⁹ became the target of a deplatforming campaign led by Vox video producer Carlos

⁷⁸⁷ TRUTHBOMBS, "Ben Shapiro REACTS to ALEX JONES' Banning: 'He's a Crazy Liar but He Shouldn't Be Banned.'"

⁷⁸⁸ WikiLeaks (@wikileaks), Twitter, August 6, 2018, 9:10 a.m.

⁷⁸⁹ StevenCrowder.

Maza.^{790, 791, 792} Despite himself having advocated violence⁷⁹³ and having defended militant groups such as Antifa,⁷⁹⁴ Maza argued that Crowder's disrespectful references to his sexual orientation should be sufficient cause to eliminate Crowder's channel.

Following an "in-depth review," YouTube concluded that, although Steven Crowder used hurtful language, he hadn't violated any specific policy.⁷⁹⁵ As such, YouTube did not ban Crowder's channel. However, the next day it appeared to backtrack, announcing that YouTube was suspending Crowder's ability to run ads and monetize his videos because of a pattern of "egregious actions" that had "harmed the broader community" and violated the vague and ambiguous YouTube partner program policies.^{796, 797} It also announced plans to remove thousands of videos and channels in an effort to clean up extremism and hate speech on its platform.⁷⁹⁸ YouTube's new standard specifically prohibits "videos alleging that a group is superior in order to justify discrimination, segregation or exclusion based on qualities like age, gender, race, caste, religion, sexual orientation or veteran status."⁷⁹⁹

Moreover, YouTube announced plans to further adjust its algorithms to suppress videos that do not violate any specific policy but whose content is considered "borderline."⁸⁰⁰ These efforts began in 2017 when YouTube limited features like comments and the ability to share videos they deem to be hateful.⁸⁰¹ According to YouTube, "This step dramatically reduced

⁷⁹⁰ Maza, Carlos (@gaywonk), Twitter, May 30, 6:02 p.m.

⁷⁹¹ Rosenberg, "A Right-Wing YouTuber Hurling Racist, Homophobic Taunts at a Gay Reporter. The Company Did Nothing."

⁷⁹² Prestigiacom, "YouTube Won't Ban Steven Crowder. Vox Reporter behind Banning Campaign Has Meltdown."

⁷⁹³ Maza, Carlos (@gaywonk), Twitter, May 21, 2019, 8:47 a.m.

⁷⁹⁴ Maza, "Don't Fall for the Antifa Trap."

⁷⁹⁵ TeamYouTube (@TeamYouTube), Twitter, June 4, 2019, 4:41 p.m.

⁷⁹⁶ TeamYouTube (@TeamYouTube), Twitter, June 5, 2019, 11:39 a.m.

⁷⁹⁷ Rosenberg, "A Right-Wing YouTuber Hurling Racist, Homophobic Taunts at a Gay Reporter. The Company Did Nothing."

⁷⁹⁸ Roose, "YouTube to Remove Thousands of Videos Pushing Extreme Views."

⁷⁹⁹ YouTube Team, "Our Ongoing Work to Tackle Hate."

⁸⁰⁰ YouTube Team.

⁸⁰¹ Walker, "Four Steps We're Taking Today to Fight Terrorism Online."

views to these videos (on average 80%).”⁸⁰² Now YouTube is changing their recommended videos feature “to limit recommendations of borderline content and harmful misinformation, such as videos promoting a phony miracle cure for a serious illness, or claiming the earth is flat.”^{803, 804} Already this change has successfully reduced the number of views to borderline content by 50% in the United States.⁸⁰⁵

Furthermore, YouTube will now deliberately “start raising up more authoritative content in recommendations.”^{806, 807} News sources deemed authoritative by YouTube will be pushed to the forefront while less authoritative and borderline content will be intentionally suppressed. However, YouTube is by no means ideologically objective. According to the *New York Times*, “Like many Silicon Valley companies, YouTube is outwardly liberal in its corporate politics. It sponsors floats at L.G.B.T. pride parades and celebrates diverse creators, and its chief executive endorsed Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election.”⁸⁰⁸

Who should determine what content is borderline, whose opinions are informative versus hateful, and which news reports are accurate? The world’s largest platforms for social conversation have taken this responsibility upon themselves and are now creating boundaries for acceptable content based upon their worldview and political predispositions. Considering that the *New York Times* labels these companies overtly partisan, it is not surprising that there appears to be an inconsistent standard as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, *et. al* continue to allow some of the most inaccurate, perverse, and hate-ridden rhetoric from those with the “correct” political and social views. Truth has become relative, and the concept of hate speech is becoming the new Billy club of those who wish to suppress certain views.

⁸⁰² YouTube Team, “Our Ongoing Work to Tackle Hate.”

⁸⁰³ YouTube Team.

⁸⁰⁴ YouTube Team, “Continuing Our Work to Improve Recommendations on YouTube.”

⁸⁰⁵ YouTube Team, “Our Ongoing Work to Tackle Hate.”

⁸⁰⁶ YouTube Team.

⁸⁰⁷ Mohan, “Building a Better News Experience on YouTube, Together.”

⁸⁰⁸ Roose. “The Making of a YouTube Radical.”

Considering that Google and its platforms, including YouTube, accounted for 34% of all time spent on digital media when measured in June of 2018, we should be greatly concerned that companies like Google are taking the initiative to determine what content is and is not appropriate for the social conversation.⁸⁰⁹ Freedom of speech is under assault by corporations, and we are permitting it because they claim to be protecting us from intolerance and fake news. Today, conspiracy theories and intolerant language toward transgenders, Muslims, and immigrants are deemed too egregious and vitriolic to expose the public to it. What will be considered too extreme tomorrow?

We already know that many influential corporations believe the Christian message to be intolerant, hateful, and potentially harmful to society. The clock is ticking down. After the conspiracy theorists, xenophobes, and homophobes are silenced, these corporations will likely turn their attention to the next group espousing intolerant hate speech ... Christians who uphold the teachings of the Bible and who say that Jesus is the only way to God. This has already occurred in countries such as Canada⁸¹⁰ and Sweden.⁸¹¹ If we are not careful, it will also happen here in America. If we do not protect the freedom to express contrary viewpoints in the public square, then the Bible and the Christian message risk being eventually censored as hate speech.

There is a growing threat to our ability to spread the gospel and uphold God's moral standard in America, and it is using the spread of false and inaccurate information as its cover. Controversies over the control of information under the guise of combating intolerance and fake news are nothing to be dismissed. They are not irrelevant partisan fights. Instead, they are the front lines of the culture war, and they deserve our prayerful attention.

⁸⁰⁹ Fischer, "Google Consumes One-Third of Our Digital Minds."

⁸¹⁰ Clark, "Canadian Supreme Court Rules Biblical Speech Opposing Homosexual Behavior Is a 'Hate Crime.'"

⁸¹¹ Mohler, "Criminalizing Christianity: Sweden's Hate Speech Law."

10. When Fake News Becomes a Culture of Lies

The French philosopher Marquis de Condorcet wrote in 1795 that because of the printing press' ability to quickly produce written content that can be circulated, "Every new error is resisted from its birth; frequently attacked before it has disseminated itself, it has not time to take root in the mind."⁸¹² However, he assumed the virtue of those running the presses, and he took for granted that people desire to learn truth above error. Condorcet was mistaken.

Fake news was not defeated by the press. Rather, the press soon became the primary tool for increasing the circulation of fake news farther and faster than ever imagined. The assault against the truth only assumed a new form.

The famous satirist Jonathan Swift commented in the *Examiner*, "If a lie be believ'd only for an Hour, it has done its Work, and there is no farther occasion for it. Falsehood flies, and the Truth comes limping after it; so that when Men come to be undeceiv'd, it is too late; the Jest is over, and the Tale has had its Effect."⁸¹³ This eventually evolved into the maxim printed by the *New*

⁸¹² Condorcet, *Outlines of An Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind, Being a Posthumous Work of the Late M. de Condorcet*, 147.

⁸¹³ "A Lie Can Travel Halfway Around the World While the Truth Is Putting on Its Shoes."

England Magazine in 1834, “Error will run half over the world while truth is putting on his boots to pursue her.”⁸¹⁴

In modern times the disproportional dissemination of falsehoods compared with truth has been exacerbated by the nature of the Internet and social media. According to an extensive MIT study of how information travels on Twitter, fake news spreads six times faster than the truth when reaching 1,500 people and 20 times faster when reaching thousands.⁸¹⁵

Truth rarely becomes viral. The report notes:

Falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects were more pronounced for false political news than for false news about terrorism, natural disasters, science, urban legends, or financial information. ... Whereas the truth rarely diffused to more than 1000 people, the top 1% of false-news cascades routinely diffused to between 1000 and 100,000 people.⁸¹⁶

A prime example of this occurred on November 9, 2016 when Eric Tucker tweeted about paid protesters being bused into Austin, Texas to demonstrate opposition to President-Elect Donald Trump. Having done a quick Google search for local conferences and finding none, he mistakenly assumed a large group of buses must be connected with reports of protests in the city and tweeted pictures of the buses with the comment, “Anti-Trump protestors in Austin today are not as organic as they seem. Here are the busses they came in. #fakeprotests #trump2016 #austin.”^{817, 818}

Tucker’s tweet generated a viral conspiracy theory. Despite having only 40 followers, his post was soon shared over 16,000 times on Twitter and more than 350,000 times on Facebook.⁸¹⁹ According to the *New York Times*, the 8 p.m. tweet was posted to the main Reddit community for Trump nearly five hours later under the

⁸¹⁴ “A Lie Can Travel Halfway Around the World While the Truth Is Putting on Its Shoes.”

⁸¹⁵ Vosoughi, “The Spread of True and False News Online.”

⁸¹⁶ Vosoughi.

⁸¹⁷ Maheshwari, “How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study.”

⁸¹⁸ Tucker, Eric (@erictucker), Twitter, November 9, 2016, 6:43 p.m..

⁸¹⁹ Maheshwari, “How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study.”

heading “BREAKING: They found the buses! Dozens lined up just blocks away from the Austin protests.”^{820, 821} The next morning, a user on the forum Free Republic linked to the Reddit thread. It was shared more than 5,000 times, and over 307,000 Facebook users linked to the Free Republic thread.⁸²² Among these were such pages as Robertson Family Values, whose post was itself shared 5,000 times.^{823, 824}

By early evening, the conservative blog *Gateway Pundit* posted the story “Figures. Anti-Trump Protesters Were Bused in to Austin,”⁸²⁵ which was shared 65,600 times on Facebook.⁸²⁶ Then, at 9 p.m., President Trump tweeted, “Just had a very open and successful presidential election. Now professional protesters, incited by the media, are protesting. Very unfair!”⁸²⁷ This was retweeted 60,573 times and received 207,802 likes.

However, it turns out there actually was a large conference with more than 13,000 people in Austin, Texas on November 9, 2016. It was hosted by a company called Tableau Software, who had also hired the buses. Eric Tucker later admitted, “I did think in the back of my mind there could be other explanations, but it just didn’t seem plausible.” Besides, Tucker reasoned that he was only a “private citizen who had a tiny Twitter following.”⁸²⁸

Three days later, Tucker deleted his original tweet and posted an image of it with the word “false” stamped atop it in large red letters. This was only retweeted 55 times and received 69 likes.⁸²⁹

Viral news stories often become unavoidable and have the appearance of truth because they are parroted by so many different sources. This produces two psychological effects. It

⁸²⁰ Maheshwari.

⁸²¹ r/The_Donald, “BREAKING: They found the buses! Dozens lined up just blocks away from the Austin protests.”

⁸²² Maheshwari, “How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study.”

⁸²³ Maheshwari.

⁸²⁴ Robertson Family Values, “Paid agitators. Good work if you can get it.”

⁸²⁵ Maheshwari, “How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study.”

⁸²⁶ Hoft, “Figures. Anti-Trump Protesters Were Bussed in to Austin #FakeProtests (Updated).”

⁸²⁷ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), Twitter, November 10, 2016, 6:19 p.m.

⁸²⁸ Maheshwari, “How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study.”

⁸²⁹ Tucker, Eric (@erictucker), Twitter, November 11, 2016, 9:57 p.m.

triggers our tendency toward group think—our desire to conform to the majority opinion even when it is irrational.⁸³⁰ More importantly, it creates the illusory truth effect—where false statements are more likely to be accepted as truth the more they are repeated.⁸³¹ Vox reports:

When you're hearing something for the second or third time, your brain becomes faster to respond to it. "And your brain misattributes that fluency as a signal for it being true," says Lisa Fazio, a psychologist who studies learning and memory at Vanderbilt University. The more you hear something, the more "you'll have this gut-level feeling that maybe it's true."⁸³²

Today these gut-level feelings regarding truth are producing chain effects on a massive scale, exponentially increasing the illusory truth effect. Articles are regularly shared via social networks based upon nothing more than the emotion generated by the headline. A 2016 study by computer scientists at Columbia University and the French National Institute found that 59% of all links shared on Twitter are never actually clicked—meaning those sharing the links haven't even read the article.⁸³³ Study co-author Arnaud Legout commented, "People are more willing to share an article than read it."⁸³⁴

Increasingly, people are consuming news based solely upon how it relates to their preferred narratives. Headlines that match what they already believe are automatically accepted as fact. Similarly, reports that challenge their preferred narratives are immediately suspect. People care less about the facts and truth of a story than they do about how the story may advance or harm their preferred narrative.

A 2014 Pew Research study found 47% of "consistent conservatives" and 50% of "consistent liberals" choose their main source of news based upon ideological alignment with

⁸³⁰ "Groupthink."

⁸³¹ Polage, "Making Up History: False Memories of Fake News Stories," 246.

⁸³² Resnick, "The Science behind Why Fake News Is so Hard to Wipe Out."

⁸³³ Gabielkov, "Social Clicks: What and Who Gets Read on Twitter?"

⁸³⁴ Dewey, "6 in 10 of You Will Share This Link without Reading It, a New, Depressing Study Says."

themselves.⁸³⁵ Furthermore, people tend to surround themselves with like-minded people. Conservatives “are more likely to have friends who share their own political views,” and liberals are more likely “to block or ‘defriend’ someone on a social network—as well as to end a personal friendship—because of politics.”⁸³⁶ There are even filters that can be applied to social media accounts to prevent unwanted political posts and news stories.⁸³⁷

The speed of information is increasing, and people are becoming increasingly reliant upon information from select and progressively partisan sources.⁸³⁸ As such, the potential impact of fake news upon society is increasing. Remarkably, this is not particularly troubling for many Americans. More troubling to many is the thought that entire communities of people may be consuming news that contradicts their own preferred narratives. Indeed, we’ve become a society that cares less about objective reality than we do about our preferred narratives.

According to the *New York Times*, “Americans’ deep bias against the political party they oppose is so strong that it acts as a kind of partisan prism for facts, refracting a different reality to Republicans than to Democrats.”⁸³⁹ Rather than seek to counterbalance this, the *Times* observes that we tend to seek out information that fits the story we want to believe, “usually one in which the members of the other party are the bad guys.”⁸⁴⁰ Wittingly or unwittingly, we have predetermined what we want to believe, and we actively seek information to support our beliefs even as we actively seek to shield ourselves from contrary views. In short, we are now a society that fears the truth, preferring instead to live with a distorted view of reality.

Fake news is a real phenomenon, and it has always played a key role in the development of our nation. Politicians have often relied upon the charge of fake news to excuse their behavior, and fake news has long been used to manipulate prices, protect the powerful, and influence the masses. Indeed, apart from fake news,

⁸³⁵ Mitchell, “Political Polarization and Media Habits.”

⁸³⁶ Mitchell.

⁸³⁷ Earl, “3 Ways to Block Political Posts from Your Facebook Feed.”

⁸³⁸ Mitchell, “Political Polarization and Media Habits.”

⁸³⁹ Taub, “The Real Story about Fake News Is Partisanship.”

⁸⁴⁰ Taub, “Why People Continue to Believe Objectively False Things.”

America may never have secured its independence.⁸⁴¹ But there is something notably different regarding today's publication of false and misleading news reports. No longer is fake news mere embellishment of facts for sensational entertainment value, nor is it something imposed upon the unwitting masses. Today's fake news is often morally charged, and it exists because the people long for it. The people demand to be affirmed in their ideology, irrespective of reality.

This is the point when a nation becomes accountable to God for fostering and embracing a culture of lies—something for which God judges nations (Isa. 59:14–15; Jer. 5:1; 9:1–9; Amos 5:10). We are crossing a threshold into dangerous territory, and even God's people don't seem to care. It is easy to dismiss our cultural appetite for fake news as being irrelevant compared with serious moral issues, such as abortion, gender confusion, and sexual promiscuity, but fake news is itself a moral issue. It is an affront against the very nature of God, and it too provokes His judgment. But even before judgment, our dishonesty exacts a significant toll upon us and our nation. This is epitomized in Isaiah 59.

God withholds His blessing and salvation

God declared through the prophet Isaiah, *“Behold, the LORD’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; **but** your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear. For ... your lips have spoken lies; your tongue mutters wickedness”* (Isa. 59:1–3, emphasis added). Sometimes it is tempting to question whether God is paying attention. Why doesn't He answer our prayers? Why does He allow difficulties to occur? Where is the Lord's blessing and salvation?

According to Isaiah, it is not that God cannot hear our prayers, nor is He incapable of intervening on our behalf. Rather, God has chosen to ignore our pleas. He remains intentionally distant because we have first distanced ourselves from God through our

⁸⁴¹ Soll, “The Long and Brutal History of Fake News.”

sinful practices. Specifically, we have distanced ourselves from God by spreading lies and fostering a national culture of lies.

It is not that God has moved. Rather, our dishonesty has moved us away from God into dangerous territory. All-the-while, God remains as a strong tower of refuge, but towers are immobile. We should not expect God to come to us in our rebellion. Instead, we must return to the tower that we forsook. We must return to God in humility and repent of our dishonesty. As Psalm 145:18 says, *“The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him **in truth**”* (emphasis added). Until then, our dishonesty makes us vulnerable to all kinds of difficulties.

Peace and justice are lost

“The way of peace they do not know, and there is no justice in their paths; they have made their roads crooked; no one who treads on them knows peace. Therefore justice is far from us” (Isa. 59:8–9). The natural fruit of a culture that has embraced dishonesty is strife, division, and injustice. No amount of social justice movements, political reforms, bipartisan efforts, or national calls for unity will heal a nation that has embraced a culture of lies.

Despair and depression increase

“We hope for light, and behold, darkness, and for brightness, but we walk in gloom. We grope for the wall like the blind; we grope like those who have no eyes; we stumble at noon as in the twilight, among those in full vigor we are like dead men” (Isa. 59:9–10). Gradually, hope turns to despair as our best efforts to find solutions to our plight prove useless. Until we repent of our dishonesty, we will continue to stumble about, hoping for a brighter future but never realizing it. The natural result of such futility is increased despair and depression, often resulting in a society that is obsessed with death and that views suicide as an escape.

People fear the truth

“Justice is turned back, and righteousness stands far away; for truth has stumbled in the public squares, and uprightness cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey” (Isa. 59:14–15). When a culture embraces dishonesty and refuses to uphold justice, the good and truthful among them become a threat because they challenge the status quo. Increasingly, truthful voices are silenced because society, preferring to believe the lie, will turn against them and seek to destroy their reputations and livelihood simply for daring to speak the truth. Boycotts, Twitter mobs, and slanderous hit-pieces are a dishonest society’s natural response to those bold enough to speak the truth.

All of this greatly displeases God (Isa. 59:15). As such, it is our responsibility as God’s people to fight against such a culture of lies. The nation addressed in Isaiah 59:15 became so thoroughly corrupt that God could not find anyone to intervene on His behalf (Isa. 59:16). Instead, God Himself was compelled to intervene, *“He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no one to intercede; then his own arm brought him salvation, and his righteousness upheld him. He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on his head; he put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and wrapped himself in zeal as a cloak”* (Isa. 59:16–17).

When God intervened, He went to war against that nation. It is a dangerous thing when a nation embraces dishonesty and accepts lies and misrepresentations from its news institutions. The trajectory for a nation that begins along this path is only downward. In such nations, God seeks individuals who can stand in the gap as intercessors who can plead for mercy on behalf of their nation while challenging cultural lies with the truth of God’s Word (Isa. 59:16).

Truth is not relative. We are commanded to speak and uphold the truth (Eph. 4:25), and Jesus taught that the truth will set us free, implying that when we believe lies we are in captivity (John 8:31–32). Terms such as post-truth, fake news, and alternative facts are an assault upon the character of God and His charge to us as

Christians. As such, truth is worthy of being defended. If we fail to defend it ourselves, it is at that point that God Himself may be compelled to intervene. God Himself may be compelled to judge America's culture of lies.

Appendix A

Further Details of Examples Used

HILLARY CLINTON HAD 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. The *Washington Post* ran the headline “Trump’s Path to an Electoral College Victory Isn’t Narrow. It’s Nonexistent,”⁸⁴² and *Politico* reported:

In June, the *Washington Post*’s Greg Sargent called it “a fantasy.”^[843] In July, Moody’s Analytics suggested that the electoral outcome was a done deal—Clinton would win easily.^[844] 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.’”^[845] In September, on *With All Due Respect*, 2008 Obama campaign manager David Plouffe broke down why he believed Hillary Clinton had a 100

⁸⁴² Rothenberg, “Trump’s Path to an Electoral College Victory Isn’t Narrow. It’s Nonexistent.”

⁸⁴³ Sargent, “Can Trump Ride White Anger into the White House? A New Analysis Suggests It’s a Fantasy.”

⁸⁴⁴ Needham, “Election Model: Clinton Will Win Easily.”

⁸⁴⁵ Shepard, “GOP Insiders: Trump Can’t Win.”

percent chance of winning.^[846] In October, the editor-in-chief of GQ, Jim Nelson, penned an essay titled, “Let’s Face It, Donald Trump Is About to Lose.”^[847] And the day before the election, Larry Sabato’s Crystal Ball prophesied 322 electoral votes for Clinton and 216 for Trump.^{[848] 849}

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.”⁸⁵⁰ Likewise, the *Huffington Post* gave Clinton a 98.2% chance of winning, declaring, “Donald Trump has essentially no path to an Electoral College victory.”⁸⁵¹ And the *New York Times* gave Clinton 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.”⁸⁵² 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.^{853, 854} He even secured four staunchly 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 1988.⁸⁵⁵

⁸⁴⁶ “David Plouffe on Why Donald Trump Can’t Get to 270.”

⁸⁴⁷ Nelson, “Hack Trump.”

⁸⁴⁸ Sabato, “2016 President.”

⁸⁴⁹ Arrieta-Kenna, “The Worst Political Predictions of 2016.”

⁸⁵⁰ Kenny, “Political Prediction Market: Clinton’s Odds Rise Again.”

⁸⁵¹ Jackson, “HuffPost Forecasts Hillary Clinton will Win with 323 Electoral Votes.”

⁸⁵² Katz, “Who Will Be President?”

⁸⁵³ “Presidential Results.”

⁸⁵⁴ “Presidential Election Results: Donald J. Trump Wins.”

⁸⁵⁵ Schleifer, “Trump Stomps All Over the Democrats’ Blue Wall.”

RUSSIAN HACKERS PENETRATED THE USA 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 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.”⁸⁵⁶

In truth, 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.”⁸⁵⁷ 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.”⁸⁵⁸

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.”⁸⁵⁹

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

⁸⁵⁶ Eilperin, “Russian Operation Hacked a Vermont Utility, Showing Risk to U.S. Electrical Grid Security, Officials Say.”

⁸⁵⁷ Burlington Electric Department, “Burlington Electric Department Statement in Response of Russian Hacking of Vermont Electric Grid.”

⁸⁵⁸ Nakashima, “Russian Government Hackers Do Not Appear to Have Targeted Vermont Utility, Say People Close to Investigation.”

⁸⁵⁹ Leetaru, “‘Fake News’ and How the Washington Post Rewrote Its Story on Russian Hacking of the Power Grid.”

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.⁸⁶⁰

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.

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.”⁸⁶¹ She then immediately added, “Trump pilloried Clinton for such donations to the Clinton Foundation on the campaign trail.”⁸⁶² Likewise, *CNN* National Security Correspondent Jim Sciutto tweeted, “This is virtually identical to what Trump and others in GOP criticized Clinton Foundation for.”⁸⁶³ And *CNN*, *ABC News*, and *Telemundo* contributor Ana Navarro also affirmed this as an “Ivanka Fund.”⁸⁶⁴

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.”⁸⁶⁵ 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

⁸⁶⁰ Davenport, “With Trump in Charge, Climate Change References Purged from Website.”

⁸⁶¹ Ballhaus, Rebecca (@rebeccaballhaus), Twitter, May 20, 2017, 9:16 p.m.

⁸⁶² Ballhaus, Rebecca (@rebeccaballhaus), Twitter, May 20, 2017, 9:17 p.m.

⁸⁶³ Sciutto, Jim (@jimsciutto), Twitter, May 21, 2017, 5:59 a.m.

⁸⁶⁴ Navarro, Ana (@ananavarro), Twitter, May 21, 2017, 5:54 a.m.

⁸⁶⁵ Sohrab, Ahmari (@SohrabAhmari), May 21, 2017, 2:25 p.m.

with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, she is not involved with its operation.”⁸⁶⁶

FBI DIRECTOR JAMES COMEY WOULD 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.”⁸⁶⁷ 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.”⁸⁶⁸

However, when James Comey’s opening statement was released to the press the next day, it contradicted *CNN*’s claims, reading in part:

Prior 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.⁸⁶⁹

⁸⁶⁶ Zarroli, “Saudis and the UAE Will Donate \$100 Million to a Fund Inspired by Ivanka Trump.”

⁸⁶⁷ Durden, “CNN Corrects ‘Fake News’ Story on Comey–Trump.”

⁸⁶⁸ Concha, “CNN Issues Correction after Comey Statement Contradicts Reporting.”

⁸⁶⁹ Comey, “READ: James Comey’s Prepared Testimony.”

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.⁸⁷⁰

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.^{871, 872, 873, 874} *Newsweek* published the headline “Watch Donald Trump Handshake Rejected by Polish First Lady in Hilariously Awkward Exchange,”⁸⁷⁵ and *Vanity Fair’s* headline read “The First Lady of Poland Smoothly Avoided Shaking Donald Trump’s Hand.”⁸⁷⁶ This led Polish President Andrzej Duda to 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.”⁸⁷⁷

⁸⁷⁰ Borger, “Comey Unlikely to Judge on Obstruction.”

⁸⁷¹ “Poland’s First Lady Ignored the Hell out of Trump’s Handshake.”

⁸⁷² “Polish First Lady Passes Over Trump’s Handshake.”

⁸⁷³ Kircher, “Poland’s First Lady Expertly Curves a Handshake from Trump.”

⁸⁷⁴ Gerretsen, “Donald Trump Tried to Shake the Hand of Poland’s First Lady but She Was Having None of It.”

⁸⁷⁵ Riotta, “Watch Donald Trump Handshake Rejected by Polish First Lady in Hilariously Awkward Exchange.”

⁸⁷⁶ Weaver, “The First Lady of Poland Smoothly Avoided Shaking Donald Trump’s Hand [Updated].”

⁸⁷⁷ Duda, Andrzej (@AndrzejDuda), July 6, 2017, 2:44 p.m.

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.”⁸⁷⁸ 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.⁸⁷⁹

⁸⁷⁸ Friedman, “Scientists Fear Trump will Dismiss Blunt Climate Report.”

⁸⁷⁹ Friedman.

Appendix B

Additional Examples of Fake News in the Era of Trump: 2016

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*,⁸⁸⁰ *Independent*,⁸⁸¹ and *International Business Times*⁸⁸² 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.⁸⁸³

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.⁸⁸⁴

⁸⁸⁰ Hopkins, “Muslim Woman Mowed Down at Brussels Anti-Islam Rally in Shocking Incident Caught on Video.”

⁸⁸¹ Staufenberg, “Muslim Woman Run Down During Anti-Islamic Rally in Brussels.”

⁸⁸² Porter, “Brussels: Muslim Woman Knocked Down in Molenbeek Hit and Run During Far-Right Protest.”

⁸⁸³ Staufenberg.

⁸⁸⁴ Gibbons-Neff, “The History of the AR-15.”

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-15.⁸⁸⁵ The *Miami Herald* ran an article titled “Orlando Shooter’s AR-15: Accurate, Lightweight, and There Are Millions.”⁸⁸⁶ Likewise, the *Washington Post*⁸⁸⁷ and *Mic*⁸⁸⁸ 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 Sauer MCX which Orlando police officials first described as an “AR-15-type assault rifle.”⁸⁸⁹

MELANIA TRUMP COMMITTED IMMIGRATION FRAUD

Strategically blurred nude photographs of Melania Trump filled the front page of the *New York Post* on July 30⁸⁹⁰ and 31,⁸⁹¹ 2016. According to the *Post*, Alé de Basseville photographed Melania in Manhattan in 1995, and “Her sexy photo spread appeared in the January 1996 issue of Max Magazine, whose cover featured a photo of supermodel Cindy Crawford.”⁸⁹²

Although the *New York Post* focused on the risqué nature of the photos, other outlets used the published dates to question Melania’s immigration status.^{893, 894} *Politico* reported:

“If Melania was traveling to the U.S. on a B-1 business visa, there is a potential problem,” said a Washington-based partner of a major national immigration law firm. “She would not have been authorized to work in the U.S. while

⁸⁸⁵ NRABlog Staff, “Why the AR-15 is America’s Most Popular Rifle.”

⁸⁸⁶ Sherman, “Orlando Shooter’s AR-15: Accurate, Lightweight, and There Are Millions.”

⁸⁸⁷ Gibbons-Neff, “The History of the AR-15.”

⁸⁸⁸ Lampen, “A Brief History of the AR-15, the Weapon behind the Deadliest Shootings in the US.”

⁸⁸⁹ Gibbons-Neff, “The Gun the Orlando Shooter Used Was a Sig Saucer MCX, Not an AR-15. That Doesn’t Change Much.”

⁸⁹⁰ Vincent, “Melania Trump Like You’ve Never Seen Her Before.”

⁸⁹¹ Vincent, “Melania Trump’s Girl-On-Girl Photos from Racy Shoot Revealed.”

⁸⁹² Vincent.

⁸⁹³ Helderman, “Many Questions and Few Answers about How Melania Trump Immigrated to the U.S.”

⁸⁹⁴ West, “Report: Melania Trump Worked in the United States without a Visa.”

on a B-1 visa. In fact, if a customs agent encounters someone entering the U.S. on a B-1 visa and they know that the individual intends to work for a U.S. employer, the individual will usually be denied admission. In order to avoid being sent back to Slovenia, she may have had to lie about the purpose of her trip.”

Visa fraud would call into question a green card application and subsequent citizenship application, said immigration lawyers—thus raising questions about Melania Trump’s legal status, even today, despite her marriage to a U.S. citizen.⁸⁹⁵

However, *Vox* reports, “Max Magazine didn’t have a ‘January issue’ in 1996. It had a double issue for December/January, and then a February issue (which came out in January).”⁸⁹⁶ And Cindy Crawford did not appear on the cover of *Max* until the February 1997 issue.⁸⁹⁷ *Politico* later confirmed that Melania’s photos were published in the February 1997 issue of *Max*, issue #88.⁸⁹⁸

The *New York Post* eventually ran the correction, “Photographer Alé de Basseville later told The Post that he misspoke, and the photo session actually took place in 1996 in Manhattan, and appeared in a 1997 issue of the magazine.”⁸⁹⁹ However, de Basseville told *Politico* that he had always told the *Post* he could not remember the timing of the photo shoot.⁹⁰⁰

In a signed letter, Melania’s lawyer further refuted the reporting. He provided a timeline detailing Melania’s immigration status and testified that he had reviewed her immigration records and

⁸⁹⁵ Schreckinger, “Gaps in Melania Trump’s Immigration Story Raise Questions.”

⁸⁹⁶ Lind, “How Nude Photos and Bad Fact-Checking Created Melania Trump’s Big Immigration Scandal.”

⁸⁹⁷ Lind.

⁸⁹⁸ Schreckinger, “New York Post Corrects Timeline of Melania Trump Photo Shoot.”

⁸⁹⁹ Vincent, “Melania Trump Like You’ve Never Seen Her Before.”

⁹⁰⁰ Schreckinger, “New York Post Corrects Timeline of Melania Trump Photo Shoot.”

hadn't found anything indicating that she had violated US immigration law.^{901, 902} According to her lawyer:

Because Mrs. Trump did not enter the United States until August 27, 1996, the allegation that she participated in a photo shoot in 1995 is not only untrue, it's impossible. In reality, through an interview with Mrs. Trump, we ascertained that the photo shoot in question did not occur until after she was admitted to the United States in H1-B visa status in October 1996.^{903, 904}

DONALD TRUMP MAY NOT HAVE PAID TAXES FOR 18 YEARS

Upon anonymously receiving portions of President Trump's 1995 taxes,⁹⁰⁵ the *New York Times* ran the headline "Donald Trump Tax Records Show He Could Have Avoided Taxes for Nearly Two Decades, the Times Found."⁹⁰⁶ His losses in Atlantic City casino projects, a Trump airline, and the Plaza Hotel in New York were nearly \$916 million, a "loss that could have allowed him to legally avoid paying federal income taxes for up to 18 years."⁹⁰⁷

The insinuation of the *Times* was widely reported.^{908, 909} The *New York Times* even suggested that Trump had "explicitly acknowledged" their report to be true.⁹¹⁰ However, another anonymously leaked tax return^{911, 912}—this one from 2005—

⁹⁰¹ Trump, Melania (@MELANIATRUMP), September 14, 2016, 6:30 a.m.

⁹⁰² Lind, "How Nude Photos and Bad Fact-Checking Created Melania Trump's Big Immigration Scandal."

⁹⁰³ Trump, Melania (@MELANIATRUMP), September 14, 2016, 6:30 a.m.

⁹⁰⁴ Sneed, "NY Post Flubbed Story That Fueled Melania Trump Immigration Questions."

⁹⁰⁵ Craig, "The Time I Found Donald Trump's Tax Records in My Mailbox."

⁹⁰⁶ Barstow, "Donald Trump Tax Records Show He Could Have Avoided Taxes for Nearly Two Decades, the Times Found."

⁹⁰⁷ New York Times, "Pages from Donald Trump's 1995 Income Tax Records."

⁹⁰⁸ Jackson, "NY Times: Trump May Not Have Paid Taxes for 18 Years."

⁹⁰⁹ Miller, "Leaked Donald Trump Records Show He May Not Have Owed Taxes for Years."

⁹¹⁰ Eder, "Donald Trump Acknowledges Not Paying Federal Income Taxes for Years."

⁹¹¹ Yarow, "Donald Trump 2005 Federal Tax Information Revealed on 'The Rachel Maddow Show.'"

⁹¹² Sutton, "The Man behind Trump's Tax Return."

revealed that he had not avoided paying taxes for nearly two decades.^{913, 914, 915} He paid about \$38 million on an income of nearly \$153 million.^{916, 917} Nevertheless, the *New York Times* continued the narrative with the headline “Trump Wrote off \$100 Million in Losses in 2005, Leaked Forms Show.”⁹¹⁸

DETROIT FREE PRESS CALLED MICHIGAN RACE FOR HILLARY

Relatively early in the evening, at 10:25, the *Detroit Free Press* called the state of Michigan for presidential candidate Hillary Clinton.⁹¹⁹ The paper virtually assured its readers of a Hillary Clinton victory:

A loss in Michigan could be a crushing blow to the Trump campaign, which had bet heavily on winning there to offset expected losses elsewhere; without a win in Michigan or Pennsylvania—another traditionally Democratic state he courted—his path to the White House could be impossible even if he wins Ohio and Florida, two states which hadn’t yet been called.⁹²⁰

Ultimately, Michigan went to Donald Trump.⁹²¹ It was narrow race. Trump edged-out Clinton by a mere 10,704 votes.⁹²²

⁹¹³ Blake, “It Turns out Donald Trump Didn’t Avoid Income Taxes for 18 Years, after All.”

⁹¹⁴ Reilly, “No, President Trump Didn’t Escape Income Taxes for 18 Years.”

⁹¹⁵ Blake, “Trump Didn’t Avoid Paying Income Taxes for 18 Years, After All.”

⁹¹⁶ Gandel, “Trump’s 2005 Tax Return Was Leaked. He Paid Far More Than People Thought.”

⁹¹⁷ Johnson, “Trump Paid \$38 Million in 2005 Federal Income Tax, White House Says before Report.”

⁹¹⁸ Baker, “Trump Wrote off \$100 Million in Losses in 2005, Leaked Forms Show.”

⁹¹⁹ Spangler, “Free Press Projection: Hillary Clinton Wins Michigan.”

⁹²⁰ Spangler, “Free Press Projection: Hillary Clinton Wins Michigan.”

⁹²¹ Jesse, “Donald Trump Wins Michigan by 13,225 Votes in Final Unofficial Count.”

⁹²² Agiesta, “Trump Wins Michigan, State Officials Say.”

TRUMP REQUESTED 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.⁹²³

This was widely reported, including by *NBC News*⁹²⁴ and Rachel Maddow on *MSNBC*.⁹²⁵ *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.”⁹²⁶ 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.”⁹²⁷

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

⁹²³ Goldman, “Trump Team Seeks Top-Secret Security Clearances for Trump’s Children.”

⁹²⁴ Mitchell, “Donald Trump Requests Security Clearance for Son-in-Law Jared Kushner.”

⁹²⁵ “Trump Queries about Top Secret Security Clearance for His Kids.”

⁹²⁶ Maloy, “Donald Trump’s Trying to Give His Kids Top Secret Security Clearance, Making Sure His Conflicts of Interest Are Extra Bold.”

⁹²⁷ Ventura, “Trump Didn’t Request Top Secret Clearance for Kids: Official.”

a second check for 3 cents. Because of this, the bank foreclosed on her house.⁹²⁸

This story was repeated in the *Huffington Post*,⁹²⁹ *New York Daily News*,⁹³⁰ and *Vanity Fair*,⁹³¹ and it was tweeted by journalists such as the *Associated Press*' David Beard,⁹³² and the *New York Times*' Steven Rattner.⁹³³ 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."⁹³⁴ *Politico* later issued a correction.⁹³⁵

⁹²⁸ Woellert, "Trump Treasury Pick Made Millions after His Bank Foreclosed on Homeowners."

⁹²⁹ Bellware, "Bank Owned by Trump's Top Treasury Pick Foreclosed on a 90-Year-Old over 27 Cents."

⁹³⁰ Salinger, "Trump Treasury Secretary Pick Steven Mnuchin's Bank Foreclosed on 90-Year-Old Woman Who Owed 27 Cents."

⁹³¹ Levin, "Foreclosing on a 90-Year-Old Woman over 27 Cents and Other Heartwarming Tales from Steven Mnuchin's Days at OneWest."

⁹³² Beard, David (@dabeard), December 1, 2016, 4:43 a.m.

⁹³³ Rattner, Steven (@SteveRattner), January 19, 2017, 9:11 a.m.

⁹³⁴ Frank, Ted (@tedfrank), January 19, 2017, 2:22 p.m.

⁹³⁵ Woellert, "Trump Treasury Pick Made Millions after His Bank Foreclosed on Homeowners."

Appendix C

Additional Examples of Fake News in the Era of Trump: 2017

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.”⁹³⁶ 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.⁹³⁷ This rumor began in November of 2016^{938, 939} and was widely reported in such outlets as the *New York Daily News*,⁹⁴⁰ *New York Post*,⁹⁴¹ *Daily Beast*,⁹⁴² and *Mediaite*.⁹⁴³ 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

⁹³⁶ “First Lady Melania Trump May Stay in NYC Permanently and Never Move into the White House.”

⁹³⁷ “First Lady Melania Trump May Stay in NYC Permanently and Never Move into the White House.”

⁹³⁸ Revesz, “Melania and Barron Trump May Not Be Moving to the White House.”

⁹³⁹ Vincent, “Melania and Barron Trump Won’t Be Moving to the White House.”

⁹⁴⁰ Sblendorio, “Melania Trump May Not Move to Washington as Planned: Report.”

⁹⁴¹ Steinbuch, “Melania Trump Might Not Move to the White House.”

⁹⁴² Crocker, “Will Melania Trump Really Be an Absent First Lady?”

⁹⁴³ Durkin, “REPORT: Melania Trump ‘Will Reevaluate’ Plans, May Not End up Moving into White House after All.”

Begin Performing Traditional First Lady Duties to Help Out,”⁹⁴⁴ and *CBS News* focused on the increased cost of protecting Trump Tower, suggesting “Year-round protection could cost as much as \$180 million.”⁹⁴⁵

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.⁹⁴⁶

At the end of Barron’s school year on June 11, 2017, Melania and Barron did move into the White House.^{947, 948}

TRUMP SAID THE PRESS IS NOT BEHAVING

The *Boston Globe* tweeted, “VIDEO: Trump remarks that the press is ‘not behaving’ after signing executive order.”⁹⁴⁹ However, he was referring to Iran, having been asked a question about new US sanctions targeting Iran’s missile program.^{950, 951} The *Boston Globe* eventually corrected its mistake, tweeting, “Correction: Trump remarks ‘they’re not behaving’ after press pool asks question on Iran.”⁹⁵²

⁹⁴⁴ Spargo, “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.”

⁹⁴⁵ “First Lady Melania Trump and Son Barron Might Stay in NYC after All, Report Says.”

⁹⁴⁶ Bennett, “Whither Melania Trump? 12 Days without a Public Sighting.”

⁹⁴⁷ Andrews, “So Long, Trump Tower. First Lady Melania Trump and Son Barron Move into White House.”

⁹⁴⁸ Grisham, Stephanie (@StephGrisham45), June 11, 2017, 5:32 p.m.

⁹⁴⁹ Boston Globe (@BostonGlobe), February 3, 2017, 11:54 a.m.

⁹⁵⁰ Knoller, Mark (@markknoller), February 3, 2017, 10:32 a.m.

⁹⁵¹ Resnick, Gideon (@GideonResnick), February 3, 2017, 10:47 a.m.

⁹⁵² Boston Globe (@BostonGlobe), February 3, 2017, 2:46 p.m.

**SECRETARY OF EDUCATION PICK BETSY DEVOS SAID
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*);⁹⁵³ “Guns Could Protect Schools from Grizzly Bears, Trump Education Pick Says” (*BuzzFeed*);⁹⁵⁴ “Betsy DeVos Says Guns Shouldn’t Be Banned in Schools ... Because Grizzly Bears” (*Vox*);⁹⁵⁵ “Betsy DeVos Says Guns Should Be Allowed in Schools. They Might Be Needed to Shoot Grizzlies” (*Slate*)⁹⁵⁶ “Betsy DeVos: Schools May Need Guns to Fight off Bears” (*Daily Beast*);⁹⁵⁷ “Betsy DeVos Says Guns in Schools May Be Necessary to Protect Students from Grizzly Bears” (*ThinkProgress*).⁹⁵⁸

However, *NBC News* reports what was actually said:

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

⁹⁵³ Merica, “Citing Grizzlies, Education Nominee Says States Should Determine School Gun Policies.”

⁹⁵⁴ Dalrymple II, “Guns Could Protect Schools from Grizzly Bears, Trump Education Pick Says.”

⁹⁵⁵ Stein, “Betsy DeVos Says Guns Shouldn’t Be Banned in Schools ... Because Grizzly Bears.”

⁹⁵⁶ Hannon, “Betsy DeVos Says Guns Should Be Allowed in Schools. They Might Be Needed to Shoot Grizzlies.”

⁹⁵⁷ “Betsy DeVos: Schools May Need Guns to Fight off Bears.”

⁹⁵⁸ Quinlan, *ThinkProgress*, “Betsy DeVos Says Guns in Schools May Be Necessary to Protect Students from Grizzly Bears.”

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.⁹⁵⁹

NANCY SINATRA ANGRY TRUMP WILL DANCE TO “MY WAY”

Responding to news that President-Elect Donald Trump and his wife’s first dance at the inauguration Liberty Ball would be to the song “My Way,” Nancy Sinatra joked, “Just remember the first line of the song” which says, “And now, the end is near.”⁹⁶⁰ CNN ran the headline “Nancy Sinatra Not Happy Trump Using Father’s Song at Inauguration.”^{961, 962} Sinatra responded to the report by tweeting, “That’s not true. I never said that. Why do you lie, CNN?”^{963, 964}

Other outlets ran such headlines as “Nancy Sinatra Warns Trump over Use of ‘My Way’”⁹⁶⁵ and “Nancy Sinatra Reminds Trump of the Ominous Lyrics to ‘My Way.’”⁹⁶⁶ In response, Sinatra tweeted, “It was a joke not a warning,”⁹⁶⁷ and, “Oh, man! I’m not angry. What a rotten spin to put on a harmless joke.”⁹⁶⁸

⁹⁵⁹ Jamieson, “Betsy DeVos Cites Grizzly Bears During Guns-in-Schools Debate.”

⁹⁶⁰ Hall, “Frank Sinatra’s Daughter Responds to Trump Using ‘My Way’ for First Dance as President.”

⁹⁶¹ Kenny, “Sinatra on Trump Picking ‘My Way’: Remember the First Line.”

⁹⁶² CNN (@CNN), January 19, 2017, 10:45 a.m.

⁹⁶³ Fox News, “Nancy Sinatra Slams CNN for Anti-Trump Spin on Story about Her Humorous Tweet.”

⁹⁶⁴ Baragona, “‘I Never Said That’: Nancy Sinatra Calls Out CNN for Saying She’s Unhappy with Trump Using ‘My Way.’”

⁹⁶⁵ Kurtz, “Nancy Sinatra Warns Trump Over Use of ‘My Way.’”

⁹⁶⁶ Ziv, “Nancy Sinatra Reminds Trump of the Ominous Lyrics to ‘My Way.’”

⁹⁶⁷ Sinatra, Nancy (@ValeryOnFire), January 19, 2017, 11:22 a.m.

⁹⁶⁸ Fox News, “Nancy Sinatra Slams CNN for Anti-Trump Spin on Story about Her Humorous Tweet.”

ARI FLEISCHER CRITICIZED SEAN SPICER

ABC News Nightline deceptively edited a quote from Ari Fleischer to make it appear as though he was critical of Sean Spicer, President Trump’s press secretary.⁹⁶⁹ Following the lead the anchor announced, “George W. Bush’s press secretary Ari Fleischer says Spicer shouldn’t have delivered provable falsehoods,” Fleischer was quoted as saying, “His briefing made me feel uncomfortable. It was too truculent, too tough. It looks as if the ball was dropped on Saturday.”⁹⁷⁰

Ari Fleischer responded with a series of tweets,^{971, 972, 973, 974} noting that he originally said, “It looks to me as if the ball was dropped on Saturday, Sean recovered it and ran for a 1st down on Monday.”⁹⁷⁵ *ABC News* issued a correction and apology, saying:

Nightline aired a segment Monday night about the first three days of the new administration including Sean Spicer’s statement to the press on Saturday. As part of the report, we interviewed former White House press secretary Ari Fleischer. In editing the piece for air, his quote was shortened and as a result his opinions mischaracterized. We are fixing the piece online to include his full quote and context. We apologize and regret the error.⁹⁷⁶

FETAL HEARTBEATS ARE IMAGINARY

In an error-ridden article originally titled “How the Ultrasound Pushed the Idea That a Fetus Is a Person,” the *Atlantic* claimed that fetal heartbeats are imaginary. The *Atlantic* “significantly revised” the article and issued a correction, writing:

⁹⁶⁹ Griswold, “ABC News Apologizes after Editing Former Bush Spox’s Praise of Sean Spicer to Sound Like Attack.”

⁹⁷⁰ “Nightline’s Deceptive Editing.”

⁹⁷¹ Fleischer, Ari (@AriFleischer), January 24, 2017, 8:18 a.m.

⁹⁷² Fleischer, Ari (@AriFleischer), January 24, 2017, 8:18 a.m.

⁹⁷³ Fleischer, Ari (@AriFleischer), January 24, 2017, 8:18 a.m.

⁹⁷⁴ Fleischer, Ari (@AriFleischer), January 24, 2017, 8:16 a.m.

⁹⁷⁵ Fleischer, Ari (@AriFleischer), January 24, 2017, 8:18 a.m.

⁹⁷⁶ ABC News, “Nightline Correction.”

This article originally stated that there is "no heart to speak of" in a 6-week-old fetus. In fact, the heart has already begun to form by that point in a pregnancy. The article also originally stated that an expectant mother participating in a study decided to carry her pregnancy to term even after learning that the fetus was suffering from a genetic disorder, when in fact the fetus was only at high risk for a genetic disorder. The article originally stated, as well, that Bernard Nathanson headed the National Right-to-Life Committee and became a born-again Christian. Nathanson was active in, but did not head the committee, and was never a born-again Christian, but rather a Roman Catholic. The article originally stated that many doctors in 1985 claimed fetuses had no reflexive responses to medical instruments at 12 weeks. Finally, the article originally stated that John Kasich vetoed a bill from Indiana's legislature, instead of Ohio's legislature, after which the article was incorrectly amended to state that Mike Pence had vetoed the bill. We regret the errors.⁹⁷⁷

INAUGURATION RATINGS FOR CNN TIED FOX NEWS

Following his inauguration, President Trump tweeted, "Congratulations to @FoxNews for being number one in inauguration ratings. They were many times higher than FAKE NEWS @CNN - public is smart!"⁹⁷⁸ *CNN* responded with the tweet, "According to Nielsen cumulative numbers, 34 million people watched Fox News. There were an additional 16.9 million live video starts on *CNN* Digital platforms. Those are the facts."⁹⁷⁹

The only problem is that these aren't the facts. Television viewership is calculated on an hour-to-hour basis—never cumulative—because many viewers in one hour are the same viewers from the previous hour. Despite this, the data still does

⁹⁷⁷ Weigel, "How Ultrasound Became Political."

⁹⁷⁸ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), January 24, 2017, 6:16 p.m.

⁹⁷⁹ *CNN* Communications (@CNNPR), January 24, 2017, 8:33 p.m.

not support *CNN*'s claim.⁹⁸⁰ In every hour, *Fox News* significantly outmatched *CNN*. The *Daily Wire* reports:

Noon to 12:30 p.m. (oath of office and inaugural address):

CNN: 3.375 million total viewers

Fox News: 11.768 million total viewers

11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

CNN: 3.047 million total viewers

Fox News: 10.483 million total viewers

1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

CNN: 2.326 million total viewers

Fox News: 7.901 million total viewers

Primetime (8 p.m. to 11 p.m.)

CNN: 4.528 million total viewers

Fox News: 6.958 million total viewers⁹⁸¹

**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

⁹⁸⁰ Nolte, "FAKE NEWS: CNN Caught Lying (to Trump) about Inauguration Day Ratings."

⁹⁸¹ Nolte.

the Environmental Protection Agency^{982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989} with headlines such as: “Make America Gagged Again” (*Slate*);⁹⁹⁰ “Trump Administration Orders Media Blackout at EPA” (*Los Angeles Times*);⁹⁹¹ “Trump Administration Seeks to Muzzle U.S. Agency Employees” (*Reuters*);⁹⁹² “EPA Gag Order: Why Donald Trump’s Media Blackout Is a Threat to the Agency’s Core Values” (*Mic*);⁹⁹³ and “House Dems: Trump’s Federal ‘Gag Orders’ Likely Illegal” (*The Hill*).⁹⁹⁴

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.’”⁹⁹⁵ Furthermore, *WXYZ Detroit* reporter Kacie Hollins tweeted, “This is a very, very big deal;”⁹⁹⁶ *CBC* radio host Raina Douris tweeted, “This is incredibly, incredibly dangerous and irresponsible,”⁹⁹⁷ and *WBAL-TV* investigative reporter Jayne Miller tweeted, “Transparency is being shut down.”⁹⁹⁸

⁹⁸² Biesecker, “Trump Admin Orders EPA Contract Freeze and Media Blackout.”

⁹⁸³ King, “EPA ‘Pause’ on Public Communications Fuels Wider Alarm about Openness.”

⁹⁸⁴ Dennis, “Trump Administration Tells EPA to Freeze All Grants, Contracts.”

⁹⁸⁵ “Trump Admin Institutes Media Blackout for EPA, Suspends Social Media Activity.”

⁹⁸⁶ Restuccia, “Information Lockdown Hits Trump’s Federal Agencies.”

⁹⁸⁷ Sheppard, “EPA Freezes Grants, Tells Employees Not to Talk about It, Sources Say.”

⁹⁸⁸ “Trump Admin Orders EPA Media Blackout and Contract Freeze.”

⁹⁸⁹ Lartey, “Trump Bans Agencies from ‘Providing Updates on Social Media or to Reporters.’”

⁹⁹⁰ Plait, “Make America Gagged Again.”

⁹⁹¹ “Trump Administration Orders Media Blackout at EPA,” *Los Angeles Times*.

⁹⁹² Volcovici, “Trump Administration Seeks to Muzzle U.S. Agency Employees.”

⁹⁹³ Solis, “EPA Gag Order: Why Donald Trump’s Media Blackout Is a Threat to the Agency’s Core Values.”

⁹⁹⁴ Cama, “House Dems: Trump’s Federal ‘Gag Orders’ Likely Illegal.”

⁹⁹⁵ Marsh, “Trump Administration Reviewing EPA Website, Curbs Agency Communication.”

⁹⁹⁶ Hollins, Kacie (@kaciehollinsTV), January 24, 2017, 11:04 a.m.

⁹⁹⁷ Douris, Raina (@RahRahRaina), January 24, 2017, 1:28 p.m.

⁹⁹⁸ Miller, Jayne (@jemillerwbal), January 24, 2017, 12:14 p.m.

However, the *New York Times* reported, “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.”⁹⁹⁹

White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer denied any specific directive from the president, saying, “There’s nothing that comes from the White House.”¹⁰⁰⁰ Instead, *Science* magazine reported, “A senior ARS official tells *ScienceInsider* 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 Agriculture (USDA) policy on clearing statements that have policy relevance with senior officials before releasing them.”¹⁰⁰¹ Likewise, the *New York Times* reported, “‘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.’”¹⁰⁰² And Director of Communications for the USDA’s Agricultural Research Service Christopher Bentley told *Scientific American*, “What happened yesterday was a misunderstanding.”¹⁰⁰³

TRUMP LIED ABOUT PHILADELPHIA’S INCREASING MURDER RATE

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* took issue with President Trump in an article titled “Trump Said Philly’s Murder Rate Is ‘Terribly Increasing.’ It’s Not.” The article led with the statement, “President Trump said Thursday that Philadelphia’s murder rate has been ‘steady, I mean, just terribly increasing.’ By almost any interpretation, he’s wrong.”¹⁰⁰⁴

⁹⁹⁹ Davenport, “Federal Agencies Told to Halt External Communications.”

¹⁰⁰⁰ Marsh, “Trump Administration Reviewing EPA Website, Curbs Agency Communication.”

¹⁰⁰¹ Mervis, “Firestorm over Supposed Gag Order on USDA Scientists Was Self-Inflicted Wound, Agency Says.”

¹⁰⁰² Davenport, “Federal Agencies Told to Halt External Communications.”

¹⁰⁰³ Maron, “USDA Calls Scientist Gag Order a ‘Misunderstanding.’”

¹⁰⁰⁴ Palmer, “Trump Said Philly’s Murder Rate Is ‘Terribly Increasing.’ It’s Not.”

Only four months earlier, the same journalist published the article “Why Is Philly’s Homicide Rate Going Up?” He wrote:

Philadelphia is recording homicides at the fastest pace since 2012, and those killings and others last week added to a homicide total that by Saturday at midnight stood at 203, an increase of about 8 percent over the same point last year, police statistics show.

“It’s one of the things that keeps you up at night,” said Police Commissioner Richard Ross, who noted that the number of shooting victims also has increased at a similar pace.¹⁰⁰⁵

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.¹⁰⁰⁶ According to the article, “The entire senior level of management officials resigned Wednesday, part of an ongoing mass exodus of senior Foreign Service officers who don’t want to stick around for the Trump era.”¹⁰⁰⁷ This was tweeted by journalists at *ABC News*,¹⁰⁰⁸ *Guardian*,¹⁰⁰⁹ *Wired*,¹⁰¹⁰ *Bloomberg*,¹⁰¹¹ and *Foreign Policy*.¹⁰¹²

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

¹⁰⁰⁵ Palmer, “Why Is Philly’s Homicide Rate Going Up?”

¹⁰⁰⁶ Rogin, “The State Department’s Entire Senior Administrative Team Just Resigned.”

¹⁰⁰⁷ Rogin.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Belot, Henry (@Henry_Belot), January 26, 2017, 1:43 p.m.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Walker, Shaun (@shaunwalker7), January 26, 2017, 8:22 a.m.

¹⁰¹⁰ Thompson, Nicholas (@nxthompson), January 26, 2017, 8:12 a.m.

¹⁰¹¹ Baker, Stephanie (@StephaniBaker), January 26, 2017, 1:50 p.m.

¹⁰¹² McCormick, Ty (@TyMcCormick), January 26, 2017, 12:49 p.m.

resignation.”¹⁰¹³ 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.”¹⁰¹⁴ 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.”¹⁰¹⁵

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.¹⁰¹⁶

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*¹⁰¹⁷ and the *Chicago Tribune*,¹⁰¹⁸ 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.”¹⁰¹⁹ Additionally, the *Associated Press* tweeted, “.@AP

¹⁰¹³ Allam, Hannah (@HannahAllam), January 26, 2017, 9:56 a.m.

¹⁰¹⁴ Labott, “Trump Administration Asks Top State Department Officials to Leave.”

¹⁰¹⁵ Labott.

¹⁰¹⁶ “6 Dead in Quebec City Mosque Shooting.”

¹⁰¹⁷ Burke, “AP: Trump’s Voter Fraud Expert Registered in 3 States,” *USA Today*.

¹⁰¹⁸ Burke.

¹⁰¹⁹ Burke, “AP: Trump’s Voter Fraud Expert Registered in 3 States,” *The Associated Press*.

learns Donald Trump’s voter fraud expert was registered in 3 states during 2016 presidential election. apne.ws/2klIzDz.¹⁰²⁰

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.”¹⁰²¹ 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.”¹⁰²²

TRUMP’S AIDES COULDN’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.”¹⁰²³

Not surprisingly, 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.”¹⁰²⁴ 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!”¹⁰²⁵

¹⁰²⁰ Associated Press (@AP), January 30, 2017, 5:31 p.m.

¹⁰²¹ Burke, “AP: Trump’s Voter Fraud Expert Registered in 3 States.”

¹⁰²² Burke.

¹⁰²³ Thrush, “Trump and Staff Rethink Tactics after Stumbles.”

¹⁰²⁴ Fabian, “Spicer: New York Times Owes Trump an Apology.”

¹⁰²⁵ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), February 6, 2017, 8:32 a.m.

TRUMP’S CAMPAIGN WAS NEVER WIRETAPPED

In a series of tweets, President Trump accused the Obama administration of wiretapping his phones in Trump Tower to spy on his campaign.^{1026, 1027, 1028} *CNN* responded with such headlines as “Trump’s Baseless Wiretap Claim,”¹⁰²⁹ and “Donald Trump Just Flat-Out Lied about Trump Tower Wiretapping.”¹⁰³⁰ *CNN* Editor-at-Large Chris Cillizza wrote, “To sum up: The current President of the United States flat-out lied about the then-sitting president issuing a wiretap of his campaign headquarters.”¹⁰³¹

Although President Trump may not have been entirely accurate in his specifics, it was soon discovered that the FBI had spied upon his campaign—both before and after the election.^{1032, 1033, 1034} The FBI wiretapped Paul Manafort, his campaign chairman who had a residence in Trump Tower, although *CNN* later reported that it is unclear whether the FBI tapped his Trump Tower phones and whether they captured phone conversations with Donald Trump.¹⁰³⁵ The communications of Carter Page, “a junior member of the Trump campaign’s foreign policy advisory group,” were also surveilled.¹⁰³⁶

¹⁰²⁶ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), March 4, 2017, 3:35 a.m.

¹⁰²⁷ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), March 4, 2017, 3:49 a.m.

¹⁰²⁸ Trump, Donald (@realDonaldTrump), March 4, 2017, 4:02 a.m.

¹⁰²⁹ Diamond, “Trump’s Baseless Wiretap Claim.”

¹⁰³⁰ Cillizza, “Donald Trump Just Flat-out Lied about Trump Tower Wiretapping.”

¹⁰³¹ Cillizza.

¹⁰³² Schwartz, “Clapper: Trump Should Be ‘Happy’ That the FBI Was ‘Spying’ on His Campaign.”

¹⁰³³ Attkisson, “It Looks like Obama Did Spy on Trump, Just as He Apparently Did to Me.”

¹⁰³⁴ Nicholas, “Barr Asserts Intelligence Agencies Spied on the Trump Campaign.”

¹⁰³⁵ Perez, “Exclusive: US Government Wiretapped Former Trump Campaign Chairman.”

¹⁰³⁶ Nakashima, “FBI Obtained FISA Warrant to Monitor Former Trump Advisor Carter Page.”

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

Following the passage of the American Health Care Act in the House, Capitol Hill reporter for *The Hill* Molly Hooper tweeted, “@Reince exiting gop cloakroom tells me: ‘The president stepped up and helped punt the ball into the end zone.’”¹⁰³⁷ News outlets such as *Fox Sports*,¹⁰³⁸ *New York Daily News*,¹⁰³⁹ *Slate*,¹⁰⁴⁰ *Vice*,¹⁰⁴¹ and *Mic*¹⁰⁴² were quick to report on Priebus’ inaccurate football analogy, using it to bolster the narrative that the Trump administration is filled with inept individuals. 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.”¹⁰⁴³

GOP BEER PARTY

Following the passage of the controversial 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.”¹⁰⁴⁴ The story grew as people speculated on Twitter,^{1045, 1046, 1047} resulting in *Mic*, among others, running the headline “Republicans Celebrate Taking away Americans’ Health Insurance with Cases of Beer.”^{1048,}
¹⁰⁴⁹

¹⁰³⁷ Hooper, Molly (@mollyhooper), May 4, 2017, 11:46 a.m.

¹⁰³⁸ Traina, “Reince Priebus Just Dropped a Truly Terrible Sports Analogy.”

¹⁰³⁹ Silverstein, “Reince Priebus Celebrates Health Care Victory with Terrible Football Analogy.”

¹⁰⁴⁰ Mathis-Lilley, “Reince Priebus’ Football Metaphor Was Basically Fine, It Turns Out.”

¹⁰⁴¹ Gordon, “Reince Priebus Sucks at Sports Metaphors.”

¹⁰⁴² Lutz, “Reince Priebus Celebrates Trumpcare Vote with Incoherent Sportsball Metaphor.”

¹⁰⁴³ Hooper, Molly (@mollyhooper), May 4, 2017, 1:42 p.m.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Jaffe, Alexandra (@ajjaffe), May 4, 2017, 10:50 a.m.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Kohn, Sally (@sallykohn), May 4, 2017, 11:28 a.m.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Igorvolsky (@igorvolsky), May 4, 2017, 10:59 a.m.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Devine, Dan (@YourManDevine), May 4, 2017, 10:58 a.m.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Rodriguez, “Reports of Beer Delivery to GOP Health Care Celebration Called into Question.”

¹⁰⁴⁹ Mic (@mic), May 4, 2017, 4:39 p.m.

However, there was no drunken celebration. House Majority Leader Paul Ryan’s spokeswoman denied the claims on Twitter,¹⁰⁵⁰ 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.”¹⁰⁵¹

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.¹⁰⁵²

This was reported by such news outlets as *US News and World Report*,¹⁰⁵³ *New York Daily News*,¹⁰⁵⁴ *ABC News*,¹⁰⁵⁵ and *Huffington Post*.¹⁰⁵⁶ It was also tweeted by numerous reporters.^{1057, 1058, 1059, 1060,}
¹⁰⁶¹ However, as some of these later updated their reports to

¹⁰⁵⁰ Rodriguez, “Reports of Beer Delivery to GOP Health Care Celebration Called into Question.”

¹⁰⁵¹ Jaffe, Alexandra (@ajjaffe), May 5, 2017, 11:14 a.m.

¹⁰⁵² Rucker, “Inside Trump’s Anger and Impatience – and His Sudden Decision to Fire Comey.”

¹⁰⁵³ Neuhauser, “Report: Rosenstein Threatened to Resign after White House Said He Was behind Comey Firing.”

¹⁰⁵⁴ Bodner, “Deputy AG Rod Rosenstein Threatened to Resign after White House Pinned Comey’s Firing on Him: Report.”

¹⁰⁵⁵ Karl, “Deputy AG Rosenstein Was on the Verge of Resigning, Upset over WH Pinning Comey Firing on Him.”

¹⁰⁵⁶ Visser, “Deputy Attorney General Reportedly Threatened to Quit over Comey Backlash.”

¹⁰⁵⁷ Hanrahan, Tim (@TimJHanrahan), May 10, 2017, 8:29 p.m.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Ali, Yashar (@yashar), May 10, 2017, 8:25 p.m.

¹⁰⁵⁹ Griffin, Kyle (@kylegriffin1), May 10, 2017, 8:30 a.m.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Marcus, Ruth (@RuthMarcus), May 11, 2017, 5:00 a.m.

¹⁰⁶¹ Hounshell, Blake (@blakehounshell), May 10, 2017, 8:25 p.m.

reflect, top spokesperson for the Department of Justice, Sarah Flores, called this report “totally false,”¹⁰⁶² saying it “didn’t happen.”¹⁰⁶³

This began two years of the news media “protecting” Rosenstein through repeated speculation that Rosenstein would be fired or forced to resign because of the threat he posed to President Trump in overseeing Special Investigator Robert Mueller’s investigation.^{1064, 1065, 1066, 1067} Often this was accompanied by lengthy explanations of how this would constitute obstruction of justice on the part of the president. However, Rosenstein was never fired and only resigned after the investigation was completed.^{1068, 1069} Even so, the news media could not let go of the narrative that they had pushed for two years. *CNN*’s final two sentences in its article on Rosenstein’s resignation after the Mueller report was completed were, “In January 2018, *CNN* reported Trump had been venting about Rosenstein and at times said he wanted Rosenstein removed. One source told *CNN* the President made comments like ‘let’s fire him, let’s get rid of him’ but his advisers told him it was a bad idea.”¹⁰⁷⁰

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

¹⁰⁶² Neuhauser, “Report: Rosenstein Threatened to Resign after White House Said He Was behind Comey Firing.”

¹⁰⁶³ Visser, “Deputy Attorney General Reportedly Threatened to Quit over Comey Backlash.”

¹⁰⁶⁴ Cassidy, “Will Donald Trump Fire Rod Rosenstein?”

¹⁰⁶⁵ Bennett, “Trump Has Wanted to Fire Rosenstein for Months. Has He Just Been Given a Reason?”

¹⁰⁶⁶ Phillips, House Republicans’ Flimsy Case for Impeaching Rod Rosenstein.”

¹⁰⁶⁷ Gerstein, “What Happens if Trump Fires Rosenstein?”

¹⁰⁶⁸ Barrett, “Rosenstein Resigns Effective May 11, Ending Tumultuous Run as Justice Department’s Second-in-Command.”

¹⁰⁶⁹ Egan, “Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein Resigns from Justice Department, Effective May 11.”

¹⁰⁷⁰ Jarrett, “Deputy Attorney General Rod Rosenstein Resigns.”

interference in the presidential election and Russian ties to President Trump’s presidential campaign.^{1071, 1072} This was reported by media outlets such as the *New York Times*,¹⁰⁷³ *CNN*,¹⁰⁷⁴ *Washington Post*,¹⁰⁷⁵ *Reuters*,¹⁰⁷⁶ *NBC News*,¹⁰⁷⁷ *CBN*,¹⁰⁷⁸ *CBS News*,¹⁰⁷⁹ *ABC News*,¹⁰⁸⁰ *Fox News*,¹⁰⁸¹ *Vox*,¹⁰⁸² *Politico*,¹⁰⁸³ *The Hill*,¹⁰⁸⁴ *ThinkProgress*,¹⁰⁸⁵ *Business Insider*,¹⁰⁸⁶ *Chicago Tribune*,¹⁰⁸⁷ and the *Los Angeles Times*,¹⁰⁸⁸ 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

¹⁰⁷¹ Rosenberg, “Days before Firing, Comey Asked for More Resources for Russian Inquiry.”

¹⁰⁷² Murray, “Sources: James Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Investigation.”

¹⁰⁷³ Rosenberg, “Days before Firing, Comey Asked for More Resources for Russian Inquiry.”

¹⁰⁷⁴ Murray, “Sources: James Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Investigation.”

¹⁰⁷⁵ Parker, “Comey Sought More Resource for Russia Probe Days before He Was Fired by President Trump, Officials Say.”

¹⁰⁷⁶ Volz, “Comey Had Pushed for More Resources for Russia Probe before Being Fired by Trump: Source.”

¹⁰⁷⁷ Winter, “Comey Asked for More Prosecutor Resources for Russia Probe.”

¹⁰⁷⁸ Wang, “Comey Reportedly Asked for More Resources for Russia Probe; DOJ Calls Reports ‘Totally False.’”

¹⁰⁷⁹ Shabad, “James Comey Asked DOJ for More Resources for Russia Investigation.”

¹⁰⁸⁰ Kutsch, “Comey Asked for More Money, Staffing for Russia Investigation Days before Firing.”

¹⁰⁸¹ “Comey Wanted More Resources for Russia Probe, Sources Say.”

¹⁰⁸² Lopez, “Report: James Comey Asked for More Resources to Investigate Trump-Russia Ties. Then He Was Fired.”

¹⁰⁸³ Karni, “Sources: Comey Told Lawmakers He Wanted More Resources for Russia Probe.”

¹⁰⁸⁴ Savransky, “Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Probe before Firing: Reports.”

¹⁰⁸⁵ Peck, “Comey Asked for More Funds to Support the FBI’s Russia Investigation. Days Later, He Was Fired.”

¹⁰⁸⁶ Sheth, “Comey Reportedly Asked the Justice Department for More Resources for the Trump-Russia Probe Days before He Was Fired.”

¹⁰⁸⁷ Pace, “Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Investigation in Days before Firing, Officials Say.”

¹⁰⁸⁸ Tanfani, “Comey Sought More Resources for Russia Investigation before He Was Fired, Officials Say.”

the talk about Russia was definitely Trump’s motive. But the report is *very* suggestive.”¹⁰⁸⁹

These reports were entirely based upon anonymous sources. Department of Justice spokesman Ian Prior said the report was “totally false,”¹⁰⁹⁰ 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.”¹⁰⁹¹ He also said he was not aware of any request for more resources.¹⁰⁹²

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.¹⁰⁹³ This was then widely reported by other media outlets.^{1094, 1095, 1096, 1097, 1098, 1099} 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

¹⁰⁸⁹ Lopez, “Report: James Comey Asked for More Resources to Investigate Trump-Russia Ties. Then He Was Fired.”

¹⁰⁹⁰ Cohen, “Justice Department: Report That Comey Asked for More Money for Russia Probe Is ‘Totally False.’”

¹⁰⁹¹ “FBI Has Sufficient Resources for Russia Investigation: McCabe.”

¹⁰⁹² “FBI Has Sufficient Resources for Russia Investigation: McCabe.”

¹⁰⁹³ Raju, “First on CNN: AG Sessions Did Not Disclose Russia Meetings in Security Clearance Form, DOJ Says.”

¹⁰⁹⁴ Levine, “Sessions Did Not Disclose Meetings with Russian Ambassador on Security Clearance Forms.”

¹⁰⁹⁵ Levine, “Jeff Sessions Reportedly Failed to List Russian Ambassador Meetings on Security Form.”

¹⁰⁹⁶ Koerner, “Attorney General Jeff Sessions Did Not Disclose Russia Meetings on Security Clearance Form.”

¹⁰⁹⁷ “Sessions Failed to Disclose Meetings with Russian Envoy on Security Clearance Form.”

¹⁰⁹⁸ Gerstein, “Sessions’ Background Check Form Omitted Meetings with Russian.”

¹⁰⁹⁹ Horwitz, “Sessions Didn’t Disclose Meetings with Russian Officials on Security Clearance Form.”

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.¹¹⁰⁰

Likewise, *ABC News* embedded 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.”^{1101, 1102}

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.¹¹⁰³

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.”¹¹⁰⁴

Aside from the fact that this “Russian official” was the Russian Ambassador Sergey Kislyak whom Sessions met in his role as a US Congressman,¹¹⁰⁵ 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

¹¹⁰⁰ Raju, “First on CNN: AG Sessions Did Not Disclose Russia Meetings in Security Clearance Form, DOJ Says.”

¹¹⁰¹ Levine, “Sessions Did Not Disclose Meetings with Russian Ambassador on Security Clearance Forms.”

¹¹⁰² “New Intelligence Information on the Russia Investigation.”

¹¹⁰³ Raju, “First on CNN: AG Sessions Did Not Disclose Russia Meetings in Security Clearance Form, DOJ Says.”

¹¹⁰⁴ Raju.

¹¹⁰⁵ Raju.

foreign government contacts while in official government business unless he developed personal relationships from such contacts.”¹¹⁰⁶

PUTIN HAS COMPROMISING INFORMATION ON TRUMP

Strongly implying that Russian President Vladimir Putin admitted to Megyn Kelly that he had compromising information about President Trump, *NBC News* tweeted, “EXCLUSIVE: Putin does not deny having compromising information on President Trump in Interview with @Megyn Kelly.”¹¹⁰⁷ However, Putin did deny having such information, calling the claim “nonsense.”¹¹⁰⁸ *NBC News* later tweeted, “CORRECTION: Putin denies having compromising information about President Trump, calls it nonsense.”¹¹⁰⁹

ATTORNEY GENERAL JEFF SESSIONS TOLD FBI DIRECTOR COMEY TO CALL RUSSIA INVESTIGATION “A MATTER”

During former FBI Director James Comey’s testimony to Congress, Deputy Washington Editor Jonathan Weisman tweeted, “Comey says Attorney General Sessions told him not to call Russia probe an investigation but ‘a matter.’ Led him to step away from DOJ.”¹¹¹⁰ In reality, Comey said it was former Attorney General Lorretta Lynch who supplied the directive. Weisman never corrected his mistake which was sent to his 56,000 followers.¹¹¹¹

In actuality, Senator James Lankford (R-OK) asked Comey, “And then you made a comment earlier about the attorney general—previous attorney general—asking you about the investigation on

¹¹⁰⁶ Perez, “FBI Email: Sessions Wasn’t Required to Disclose Foreign Contacts for Security Clearance.”

¹¹⁰⁷ No One (@tweettruth2me), June 4, 2017, 6:06 p.m.

¹¹⁰⁸ McCausland, “Putin Interview: Did Russia Interfere in the Election, Collect Info on Trump?”

¹¹⁰⁹ *NBC News* (@NBCNews), June 4, 2017, 5:08 p.m.

¹¹¹⁰ Adams, “No, Jeff Sessions Never Told James Comey to Call the Russia Probe a ‘Matter’ Instead of an ‘Investigation.’”

¹¹¹¹ Adams.

the Clinton e-mails, saying that you'd been asked not to call it an 'investigation' anymore, but to call it a 'matter.'"¹¹¹² And you had said that confused you. Can you give us additional details on that?" Comey answered:

We were getting to a place where the attorney general and I were both going to have to testify and talk publicly about. And I wanted to know, was she going to authorize us to confirm we had an investigation?

And she said, yes, but don't call it that, call it a matter. And I said, why would I do that? And she said, just call it a matter.¹¹¹³

ANTONY SCARAMUCCI WAS 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.¹¹¹⁴ This story was eventually deleted and then retracted,¹¹¹⁵ and the reporter and two editors associated with the story resigned from *CNN*.¹¹¹⁶

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.¹¹¹⁷ However, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who was present at the meeting, told reporters that President

¹¹¹² New York Times, "Full Transcript and Video: James Comey's Testimony on Capitol Hill."

¹¹¹³ New York Times.

¹¹¹⁴ Logan, "3 CNN Staffers Are out over Retracted Russia Investigation Story."

¹¹¹⁵ CNN Politics (@CNNPolitics), June 23, 2017. 8:50 p.m.

¹¹¹⁶ Logan, "3 CNN Staffers Are out over Retracted Russia Investigation Story."

¹¹¹⁷ Wolking, Matt (@MattWolking), July 7, 2017, 4:36 p.m.

Trump opened the conversation with Putin by “raising the concerns of the American people regarding Russian interference in the 2016 election.”¹¹¹⁸ Moreover, Tillerson said that President Trump “pressed” Putin on the matter “on more than one occasion.”¹¹¹⁹

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.’”¹¹²⁰ 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.¹¹²¹

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.”¹¹²² 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 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.”¹¹²³

¹¹¹⁸ Easley, “Tillerson: Trump Pressed Putin on Election Interference.”

¹¹¹⁹ Easley.

¹¹²⁰ Dilanian, “Manafort Notes from Russian Meet Contain Cryptic Reference to ‘Donations.’”

¹¹²¹ Dilanian.

¹¹²² Hasson, “Yet Another Anonymously Sourced Trump-Russia Story Falls Apart.”

¹¹²³ Dawsey, “Notes from Meeting with Russians Said Not to Be Damaging to Trump Family.”

RUSSIAN MISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS HELPED DONALD TRUMP WIN THE ELECTION

Citing a study from the Oxford Internet Institute, news 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.¹¹²⁴ *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.”¹¹²⁵

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 *Briertbart*, *Infowars*, and the *Washington Examiner*.¹¹²⁶ 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.”¹¹²⁷ Journalists from some of these sites even have seats in the White House press pool and contribute original reporting.¹¹²⁸ The *Daily Caller* reports, “Labeling outlets like Breitbart and the Washington Examiner as ‘junk news’ wildly skews the results of the study.”¹¹²⁹

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.¹¹³⁰ And many of these articles came

¹¹²⁴ Caruso, “ECLUSIVE: Mainstream Media Reporting about Twitter ‘Fake News’ Is 100% False.”

¹¹²⁵ Kwong, “Twitter Users Got More Fake News Than Real News before Trump Won Election.”

¹¹²⁶ Caruso, “ECLUSIVE: Mainstream Media Reporting about Twitter ‘Fake News’ Is 100% False.”

¹¹²⁷ Howard, “Social Media, News and Political Information During the US Election: Was Polarizing Content Concentrated in Swing States?”, 2.

¹¹²⁸ Caruso, “ECLUSIVE: Mainstream Media Reporting about Twitter ‘Fake News’ Is 100% False.”

¹¹²⁹ Caruso.

¹¹³⁰ Howard, “Social Media, News and Political Information During the US Election: Was Polarizing Content Concentrated in Swing States?”, 3.

from the openly Russian state-funded websites *Russia Today* and *Sputnik*.¹¹³¹ This is hardly proof of a Russian conspiracy to influence the presidential election, as many mainstream media outlets insinuated.

LAS VEGAS SHOOTER'S GIRLFRIEND WAS MARRIED TO TWO 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 state records you review.¹¹³²

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.¹¹³³

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 40th birthday who was among the victims of the Las Vegas shooting—after it was discovered that he doesn’t exist.¹¹³⁴ The only source for Caitlin Keating’s article was Jason Rogers, who was identified in the story

¹¹³¹ Howard, 4.

¹¹³² Delkic, “Paddock’s Girlfriend Used Two Social Security Numbers and Was Married to Two Men at the Same Time.”

¹¹³³ “Retracted: Paddock’s Girlfriend Used Two Social Security Numbers and Was Married to Two Men at the Same Time.”

¹¹³⁴ Koukoulas, “‘People’ Profiled as Las Vegas Shooting Victim – but His Identity Can’t Be Confirmed Anywhere Else.”

as Larry Parra’s best friend.¹¹³⁵ In reality, Facebook photographs reveal Larry Parra to likely be Steven Anderson, Jason Rogers’ still living husband.¹¹³⁶

TRUMP SAID HE IS THE ONLY PRESIDENT TO CALL 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.”¹¹³⁷ 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.”¹¹³⁸

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.”¹¹³⁹

¹¹³⁵ Koukoulas.

¹¹³⁶ Koukoulas.

¹¹³⁷ “Trump: Obama Didn’t ‘Often’ Call Families of Fallen Soldiers.”

¹¹³⁸ Trump.

¹¹³⁹ ABC News, “White House Press Briefing: Chief of Staff John Kelly on How Military Deals with Soldier’s Death.”

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."¹¹⁴⁰

TRUMP ASKED JAPAN TO BUILD CARS IN THE USA 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:

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?"¹¹⁴¹

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."¹¹⁴² 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."¹¹⁴³

¹¹⁴⁰ Lemire, "Under Fire, Trump Defends Call to Soldier's Grieving Family."

¹¹⁴¹ Weissmann, "Trump Begg Japanese Automakers to Build Their Cars in America, Which They Already Do."

¹¹⁴² Shane, "Trump Wants Japan to Build More Cars in the U.S."

¹¹⁴³ Shane.

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 US manufacturing plants:

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 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).¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Blake, “Stop Cherry-Picking That Trump Quote about Japanese Cars. It’s Not What You Think.”

TRUMP OFFENDED 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.¹¹⁴⁵ Nevertheless, major media reporters chose to convey that the president had made a major cultural *faux pas*.^{1146, 1147}

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.¹¹⁴⁸

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.¹¹⁴⁹

IVANKA TRUMP PLAGIARIZED HERSELF

Newsweek ran the headline "Ivanka Trump Plagiarizes One of Her Own Speeches in India."¹¹⁵⁰ However, it is not plagiarism to pull "several lines" directly from one's prior work as plagiarism is "to

¹¹⁴⁵ Associated Press, "Trump, Abe Dump Fish Food in Tokyo Carp Pool."

¹¹⁴⁶ Concha, "Media Shows Why It's so Mistrusted after Falsified Trump Fish-Feeding 'Story.'"

¹¹⁴⁷ Flood, "Anti-Trump Media Makes up Fake Story about Overfeeding Fish at Japanese Koi Pond."

¹¹⁴⁸ Hartmann, "Trump under Fire for Improper Fish-Feeding Technique."

¹¹⁴⁹ Rocha, "Trump Feeds Fish, Winds up Pouring Entire Box of Food into Koi Pond."

¹¹⁵⁰ Riotta, "Ivanka Trump Plagiarizes One of Her Own Speeches in India."

steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own," according to the *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*.¹¹⁵¹

**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 Dow¹¹⁵² 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 ISIS in Syria."¹¹⁵³ The hosts of *ABC's The View* later celebrated this report amid audience cheers.^{1154, 1155}

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

¹¹⁵¹ *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. "Plagiarize."

¹¹⁵² Egan, "Wall Street Rocked by Michael Flynn, Tax Debate."

¹¹⁵³ Ross, "Flynn Prepared to Testify That Trump Directed Him to Contact Russians about ISIS, Confidant Says."

¹¹⁵⁴ "The View' Hosts Cheer Trump Impeachment Russian Collusion Mueller News."

¹¹⁵⁵ Hains, "The View' Celebrates Report That Flynn Will Cooperate with Mueller: 'Yay!' 'Lock Him Up!'"

president-elect asked him to contact Russia on issues including working together to fight ISIS.¹¹⁵⁶

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.”¹¹⁵⁷ *ABC News* eventually replaced the wording “clarification” with “correction” and suspended Brian Ross for four weeks.^{1158, 1159, 1160}

FORMER AIDE LIED TO CONGRESS ABOUT NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR MICHAEL FLYNN’S RUSSIAN CONTACTS

The *New York Times* article, “McFarland Contradicted Herself on Russia Contacts, Congressional Testimony Shows,” has been retitled numerous times, and four key paragraphs have been removed without any notification that the article has been updated. According to the *Washington Examiner*,¹¹⁶¹ the article originally reported:

An email sent during the transition by President Trump’s former deputy national security adviser, K.T. McFarland, appears to contradict the testimony she gave to Congress over the summer about contacts between the Russian ambassador and Mr. Trump’s former national security adviser, Michael T. Flynn.

Ms. McFarland had told lawmakers that she did not discuss or know anything about interactions between Sergey I. Kislyak, who had been Moscow’s ambassador to

¹¹⁵⁶ Darcy, “ABC News Corrects Bombshell Flynn Report.”

¹¹⁵⁷ Darcy.

¹¹⁵⁸ ABC News (@ABC), December 1, 2017, 7:53 p.m.

¹¹⁵⁹ Ross, “Flynn Prepared to Testify That Trump Directed Him to Contact Russians about ISIS, Confidant Says.”

¹¹⁶⁰ Wang, “ABC Suspends Reporter Brian Ross over Erroneous Report about Trump.”

¹¹⁶¹ Adams, “New York Times Forced to Heavily Amend Another Supposed K.T. McFarland ‘Scoop.’”

the United States, and Mr. Flynn, according to Senate documents.

But emails obtained by The New York Times appear to undermine those statements. In a Dec. 29 message about newly imposed Obama administration sanctions against Russia for its election interference, Ms. McFarland, then serving on Mr. Trump’s transition team, told another transition official that Mr. Flynn would be talking to the Russian ambassador that evening.

The discrepancy is likely to add to mounting troubles for the White House that stem from Mr. Flynn’s interactions with Russian officials. He pleaded guilty on Friday to lying to F.B.I. agents about his discussions with Mr. Kislyak about the sanctions.¹¹⁶²

These bold statements have since been replaced with innuendo, “A leading Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee questioned on Monday whether a high-ranking official in Donald J. Trump’s transition team had been deceptive over the summer about her knowledge of discussions between Michael T. Flynn, the former national security adviser, and a former Russian ambassador.”¹¹⁶³

MUELLER SUBPOENAED 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.^{1164, 1165} 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

¹¹⁶² Schmidt, “McFarland’s Testimony about Russia Contacts Is Questioned.”

¹¹⁶³ Schmidt.

¹¹⁶⁴ Arons, “Deutsche Bank Records Said to Be Subpoenaed by Mueller.”

¹¹⁶⁵ Strasburg, “Mueller Subpoenas Deutsche Bank Records Related to Trump.”

have confirmed this with the bank and other sources.”¹¹⁶⁶ *Bloomberg* and the *Wall Street Journal* both issued corrections noting that the subpoenaed records instead pertain to people affiliated with President Trump.^{1167, 1168}

¹¹⁶⁶ Arons, “Deutsche Bank Records Said to Be Subpoenaed by Mueller.”

¹¹⁶⁷ Arons.

¹¹⁶⁸ Strasburg, “Mueller Subpoenas Deutsche Bank Records Related to Trump.”

Appendix D

Additional Examples of Fake News in the Era of Trump: 2018

TRUMP REDUCED THE LENGTH OF HIS BORDER WALL

“Trump Waffles on Border Wall: ‘We Don’t Need a 2,000 Mile Wall’” blared a *Mediaite* headline as Lawrence Bonk informed his readers, “Trump dropped what may be something of a bombshell to his more hardline supporters.”¹¹⁶⁹ According to the president, “We don’t need a wall where you have rivers and mountains and everything else protecting it.”¹¹⁷⁰ Likewise, *CNN* ran the headline “Trump’s Border Wall May Be Shorter Than First Advertised.”¹¹⁷¹

However, this “bombshell” was nothing new. Six months earlier, *BBC News* reported “Now, almost six months into his presidency, it seems he [Trump] is acknowledging some of the geographical and practical difficulties of such a construction.”¹¹⁷² And *BuzzFeed* ran the headline “Trump Just Said There’s Actually No Need for a Full Border Wall.”¹¹⁷³

More importantly, these reports are consistent with comments made by President Trump during his campaign. In a February 9, 2016 interview with *MSNBC*, Trump told Tamron Hall, “We have 2,000 miles, right? ... Of the 2,000, we don’t need 2,000, we need

¹¹⁶⁹ Bonk, “Trump Waffles on Border: ‘We Don’t Need a 2,000 Mile Wall.’”

¹¹⁷⁰ Bonk, “Trump Waffles on Border: ‘We Don’t Need a 2,000 Mile Wall.’”

¹¹⁷¹ Tatum, “Trump’s Border Wall May Be Shorter Than First Advertised.”

¹¹⁷² “Trump Says US-Mexico Wall May Not Need to Cover Entire Border.”

¹¹⁷³ Flores, “Trump Just Said There’s Actually No Need for a Full Border Wall.”

1,000 because we have natural barriers.”¹¹⁷⁴ Trump also said this in an August 20, 2015 *Fox Business Mornings with Maria* interview and during the October 28, 2015 *CNBC GOP* primary debate.¹¹⁷⁵

NEW REPORT SHOWS TRUST IN MEDIA DECLINED DURING TRUMP PRESIDENCY

According to an *Associated Press* article titled “Trust in News Media Takes a Hit During Trump Presidency,” a new Pew Research report indicated that people have lost trust in the media because of how the president denigrates journalists.¹¹⁷⁶ However, the cited report was not published the previous month, as reported. Rather, it was published a year earlier and was conducted when President Obama was in office.¹¹⁷⁷

REPUBLICANS FIRST FUNDED THE RUSSIAN DOSSIER

The *Associated Press* wrongly reported 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.”¹¹⁷⁸ Likewise, 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.”¹¹⁷⁹ Similarly, in an interview between *CNN* anchor Wolf Biltzer and Representative Sean Duffy (R-WI), the chyron at the bottom of the screen read “Who’s the anti-Trump Republican who helped fund Dossier?”¹¹⁸⁰

¹¹⁷⁴ Brand, “Trump Puts a Price on His Wall: It Would Cost Mexico \$8 Billion.”

¹¹⁷⁵ Time Staff, “Transcript: Read the Full Text of the *CNBC* Republican Debate in Boulder.”

¹¹⁷⁶ Kellman, “Trust in News Media Takes a Hit During Trump Presidency.”

¹¹⁷⁷ “Correction: Trump-One Year-Media Story.”

¹¹⁷⁸ “Correction: Trump-Russia Probe Story.”

¹¹⁷⁹ “*CNN* Reporter Falsely Claims Republicans Funded Trump-Russia Dossier.”

¹¹⁸⁰ “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.¹¹⁸¹ 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.¹¹⁸² 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.¹¹⁸³ 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.”^{1184, 1185}

The *Associated Press* issued a correction, noting, “Though the former spy, Christopher Steele, was hired by a firm that was initially funded by the Washington Free Beacon, he did not begin work on the project until after Democratic groups had begun funding it.”¹¹⁸⁶

TRUMP’S TAX CUT INCREASED COUPLE’S TAXES BY NEARLY \$4,000

On February 23, 2018, the *New York Times* wrote about the president’s new tax cuts, “Thanks to lower rates and a doubled standard deduction, 2018 taxes will fall for many people. But that won’t be true for quite a few others, like this hypothetical couple in suburban New York, Samuel and Felicity Taxpayer.”¹¹⁸⁷

¹¹⁸¹ Continetti, “Fusion GPS and the Washington Free Beacon.”

¹¹⁸² Entous, “Clinton Campaign, DNC Paid for Research That Led to Russia Dossier.”

¹¹⁸³ 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.”

¹¹⁸⁴ Berger, “Fusion GPS Fallout: DNC, Clinton, FBI Take Heat after Bombshell That Dems Funded Trump Dossier.”

¹¹⁸⁵ Hamburger, “FBI Once Planned to Pay Former British Spy Who Authored Controversial Trump Dossier.”

¹¹⁸⁶ “Correction: Trump-Russia Probe Story.”

¹¹⁸⁷ Rosen, “Get to Know the New Tax Code While Filling out This Year’s 1040.”

According to the *Times*, “The family would owe \$3,896 more in taxes under the new law.”¹¹⁸⁸

A *Times* correction revealed that this hypothetical couples’ taxes would actually decrease by \$43:

An earlier version of this article incorrectly described the probable effect of the new tax law on a hypothetical couple’s 2018 tax bill. The TurboTax “What-If Worksheet” that generated the projection for their 2018 taxes failed to indicate that the couple would probably be entitled to claim a sizable deduction for income earned from consulting. As a result of that deduction, the amount they would likely owe on taxes would decline by \$43, not rise by \$3,896.¹¹⁸⁹

Moreover, this hypothetical couple failed to take advantage of some available credits.¹¹⁹⁰

FEDS TAPPED PRESIDENT’S LAWYER MICHAEL COHEN’S PHONES

NBC News reported that, for weeks, Federal investigators had wiretapped personal attorney for President Trump Michael Cohen’s, phones.^{1191, 1192} This was independently confirmed by *ABC News*.^{1193, 1194}

The report was inaccurate. *ABC News* tweeted a correction,¹¹⁹⁵ and the author of the *NBC News* report, Tom Winter, made the

¹¹⁸⁸ Rosen.

¹¹⁸⁹ Rosen, “Get to Know the New Tax Code While Filling out This Year’s 1040,” March 2, 2018.

¹¹⁹⁰ Flood, “New York Times Issues Embarrassing Correction after Botching Story Attacking Trump’s Tax Plan.”

¹¹⁹¹ Winter, “Feds Monitored Trump Lawyer Michael Cohen’s Phones.”

¹¹⁹² Hayes, “NBC Corrects Story That Trump Attorney Michael Cohen Was Wiretapped, Intercepted White House Call.”

¹¹⁹³ Hayes.

¹¹⁹⁴ Darcy, “NBC News Corrects Explosive Story on Michael Cohen.”

¹¹⁹⁵ ABC News (@ABC), May 3, 2018, 2:38 p.m.

announcement on *MSNBC Meet the Press Daily*.¹¹⁹⁶ *NBC News* also issued a correction, explaining:

Earlier today, *NBC News* reported that there was a wiretap on the phones of Michael Cohen, President Trump's longtime personal attorney, citing two separate sources with knowledge of the legal proceedings involving Cohen.

But three senior U.S. officials now dispute that, saying that the monitoring of Cohen's phones was limited to a log of calls, known as a pen register, not a wiretap where investigators can actually listen to calls.¹¹⁹⁷

MICHAEL COHEN HAS HISTORY OF LEGAL TROUBLE

CNBC wrongly reported about President Trump's personal attorney:

Cohen has had past legal troubles, as well. *The Times* reported that Cohen paid nearly \$1 million in fines after Chicago authorities found more than 180 cars used in his taxi businesses were unauthorized. He was barred from managing taxi medallions in New York City last April, the newspaper said.

He has also been authorities' radar for transferring more than \$60 million offshore to avoid paying debts, and is awaiting trial on charges of failing to pay millions in taxes, the *Times* reported.¹¹⁹⁸

However, the *New York Times* did not report these things. Instead, they attributed these offenses to Michael Cohen's business partners, Evgeny Freidman and Symon Garber.¹¹⁹⁹ *CNBC* issued a correction.¹²⁰⁰

¹¹⁹⁶ "Correction: Feds Have Pen-Register, Not Wiretap on Michael Cohen | MTP Daily | MSNBC."

¹¹⁹⁷ Winter, "Feds Monitored Trump Lawyer Michael Cohen's Phones."

¹¹⁹⁸ Breuninger, "Michael Cohen's Business Steeped in Opaque Deals, Questionable Times: *New York Times*."

¹¹⁹⁹ Rashbaum, "How Michael Cohen, Trump's Fixer, Built a Shadowy Business Empire."

¹²⁰⁰ Breuninger, "CORRECTION: Michael Cohen's Business Steeped in Opaque Deals, Questionable Times: *New York Times*."

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION HOLDS CHILDREN IN CAGES

In the midst of a contentious national debate over illegal immigration, “The New York Times Magazine Editor-in-Chief Jake Silverstein incorrectly shared Obama-era pictures of children sleeping in enclosed cages to take a swipe at the Trump administration,” wrote *Fox News*.^{1201, 1202} Likewise, *CNN* reporter Hadas Gold tweeted the photos with the explanation, “First photos of separated migrant children at holding facility.”¹²⁰³

However, the photos were first published by the *Arizona Republic* in 2014 during the Obama administration.¹²⁰⁴ Both retracted their tweets,¹²⁰⁵ but Hadas Gold tried to place the fault for the error on her readers. She wrote, “Deleted previous tweet because gave the impression of recent photos (they’re from 2014).”¹²⁰⁶

TRUMP RALLY UNDER-ESTIMATED BY 4,500

The news media consistently downplay and misrepresent the size of President Trump’s rallies. Reporting on a Trump rally in Nashville, the *New York Times* estimated the crowd to be about 1,000 people.¹²⁰⁷ It later issued a correction, saying, “The fire marshal’s office estimated that approximately 5,500 people attended the rally, not about 1,000 people.”¹²⁰⁸

TWO-YEAR-OLD GIRL SEPARATED FROM MOTHER AT BORDER

The *Washington Post* reports, “The widely shared photo of the little girl crying as a U.S. Border Patrol agent patted down her

¹²⁰¹ Flood, “Embarrassment for New York Times as Top Editor Falls for Old Photo Amid Weekend of Misleading Anti-Trump Tweets.”

¹²⁰² Silverstein, Jake (@jakesilverstein), May 27, 2018, 11:26 a.m.

¹²⁰³ Streiff, “That Picture of Immigrant Kids in Cages? It Has a Surprising Backstory.”

¹²⁰⁴ Kiefer, “First Peek: Immigrant Children Flood Detention Center.”

¹²⁰⁵ Silverstein, Jake (@jakesilverstein), May 27, 2018, 1:33 p.m.

¹²⁰⁶ Gold, Hadas (@Hadas_Gold), May 27, 2018, 11:43 a.m.

¹²⁰⁷ Davis, “At Rally in Nashville, Trump Links Democrats to MS-13.”

¹²⁰⁸ Davis, “At Rally in Nashville, Trump Links Democrats to MS-13,” May 30, 2018.

mother became a symbol of the families pulled apart by the Trump administration’s ‘zero tolerance’ policy at the border, even landing on the new cover of *Time* magazine.”¹²⁰⁹ *TIME* photoshopped the girl to be looking up at President Trump who towered over her alongside the words “Welcome to America.”¹²¹⁰

However, the girl’s father told the *Washington Post* that she was never separated from her mother.¹²¹¹ This was also confirmed by a US Customs and Border Protection spokesman.¹²¹² The two were detained together in the Texas border town of McAllen, where the mother applied for asylum.¹²¹³

TRUMP BANNED RED CROSS FROM HELPING SEPARATED CHILDREN OF ILLEGAL IMMIGRANTS

MSNBC Morning Joe host Joe Scarborough tweeted, “Trump’s Centralized State is even banning the Red Cross from visiting those infants and toddlers being incarcerated by Trump. What do Trump and Pence have to hide?”¹²¹⁴ However, the Red Cross refuted this claim, tweeting, “This is not true, and we are sorry if our statement led you to this conclusion. We’ve had discussions with federal officials to see if there is a way we can help, but no one is ‘banning’ us from anything, and if there is a role for the Red Cross to play, we will.”¹²¹⁵

MASS SHOOTER LEFT A MAGA HAT AT CRIME SCENE

Reporting on a man who shot to death five employees at the *Capital Gazette* newspaper on June 28, 2018, the *Republican*

¹²⁰⁹ Schmidt, “The Crying Honduran Girl on the Cover of Time Was Not Separated from Her Mother.”

¹²¹⁰ Vick, “A Reckoning after Trump’s Border Separation Policy: What Kind of Country Are We?”

¹²¹¹ Schmidt, “The Crying Honduran Girl on the Cover of Time Was Not Separated from Her Mother.”

¹²¹² Schmidt.

¹²¹³ Palencia, “Father Says Little Honduran Girl on Time Cover Was Not Taken from Mother.”

¹²¹⁴ Scarborough, Joe (@JoeNBC), June 22, 2018, 7:41 p.m.

¹²¹⁵ American Red Cross (@RedCross), June 23, 2018, 6:09 a.m.

reporter Conor Berry tweeted, “Shooter who killed 4 people at Annapolis newspaper dropped his #MAGA hat on newsroom floor before opening fire.”¹²¹⁶ However, this was not true, and it resulted in his resignation from the paper.¹²¹⁷ He later told the *Boston Globe* that his tweet was a “snarky, sarcastic, cynical remark.”¹²¹⁸

U.N. AMBASSADOR NIKKI HALEY SPENT \$52,701 ON CURTAINS

Alongside a picture of United Nations Ambassador Nikki Haley, the *New York Times* ran the headline “Nikki Haley’s View of New York Is Priceless. Her Curtains? \$52,701.”¹²¹⁹ However, the curtains were authorized and approved by the Obama administration in 2016, a note buried in the sixth paragraph.¹²²⁰ The *New York Times* later changed the headline and added an editor’s note, saying:

An earlier version of this article and headline created an unfair impression about who was responsible for the purchase in question. While Nikki R. Haley is the current ambassador to the United Nations, the decision on leasing the ambassador’s residence and purchasing the curtains was made during the Obama administration, according to current and former officials. The article should not have focused on Ms. Haley, nor should a picture of her have been used.¹²²¹

¹²¹⁶ Kerr, “Reporter Who Falsely Claimed Annapolis Shooter Wore MAGA Hat Resigns.”

¹²¹⁷ Republican Newsroom, “Reporter at The Republican Resigns over False Twitter Post Linking Trump to Maryland Newspaper Shooter.”

¹²¹⁸ Andersen, “Springfield Republican Reporter Resigns after Tweet about Maryland Newspaper Gunman.”

¹²¹⁹ Harris, “State Department Spent \$52,701 on Curtains for Residence of U.N. Envoy.”

¹²²⁰ Farhi, “New York Times Backtracks on a Tale about Some Expensive Curtains.”

¹²²¹ Harris, “State Department Spent \$52,701 on Curtains for Residence of U.N. Envoy.”

TRUMP BECAME FIRST RECENT PRESIDENT NOT TO VISIT TROOPS AT CHRISTMASTIME

The *NBC News* headline “Trump Becomes First President Since 2002 Not to Visit Troops at Christmastime” was quickly discredited when the president and First Lady arrived in Iraq on December 26. To make the surprise visit, they left the White House Christmas night.¹²²²

NBC News added an editor’s note saying, “On Wednesday, a day after this article was published, President Trump made a surprise visit to Iraq to greet U.S. troops,” but they left the headline unchanged and failed to update language within the article.¹²²³ It continued to read, “By staying home on Tuesday, Trump became the first president since 2002 who didn’t visit military personnel around Christmastime.”¹²²⁴ Eventually the headline was changed to the still misleading, “Trump Becomes First President since 2002 Not to Visit Troops on or before Christmas.”¹²²⁵

¹²²² Wemple, “Following Backlash, NBC News Revises Story about Trump’s ‘Christmastime’ Visit to Iraq.”

¹²²³ Chaitin, “NBC News Insists Corrected Story about Trump Not Visiting Troops Was Correct ‘at the Time.’”

¹²²⁴ Wemple, “Following Backlash, NBC News Revises Story about Trump’s ‘Christmastime’ Visit to Iraq.”

¹²²⁵ Perlmutter-Gumbiner, “Trump Becomes First President since 2002 Not to Visit Troops on or before Christmas.”

Appendix E

Historical Examples of Fake News

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.”¹²²⁶ 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.¹²²⁷ However, the story was a fabrication by the author, according to a *Washington Post* correction.¹²²⁸ Janet Cooke eventually admitted, “‘Jimmy’s World’ was in essence a fabrication. I never encountered or interviewed an 8-year-old

¹²²⁶ Cooke, “Jimmy’s World.”

¹²²⁷ Green, “THE PLAYERS: It Wasn’t a Game.”

¹²²⁸ Cooke, “Jimmy’s World.”

heroin addict. The September 28, 1980, article in *The Washington Post* was a serious misrepresentation which I deeply regret.”¹²²⁹

BANKER FLAUNTED 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.”¹²³⁰

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%.^{1231, 1232} The article has been updated three times and corrected twice.

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

¹²²⁹ Green, “THE PLAYERS: It Wasn’t a Game.”

¹²³⁰ “Photo Purportedly Showing Banker’s 1% Lunch Bill Tip ‘Altered and Exaggerated’ [UPDATED].”

¹²³¹ “Photo Purportedly Showing Banker’s 1% Lunch Bill Tip ‘Altered and Exaggerated’ [UPDATED].”

¹²³² “Here’s the Authentic Receipt at the Heart of the ‘1% Tip’ Hoax Story.”

those claims.”¹²³³ 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.”¹²³⁴

**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 policer officer Darren Wilson, *MSNBC* wrote:

“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 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.

¹²³³ “Here’s the Truth. We Don’t Know’: How False Reports of Boston Bombing Arrest Left Media Outlets Scrambling.”

¹²³⁴ Carter, “The F.B.I. Criticizes the News Media after Several Mistaken Reports of an Arrest.”

“I seen the fire come out of the barrell,” [*sic*] 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.¹²³⁵

¹²³⁵ Lee, “Eyewitness to Michael Brown Shooting Recounts His Friend’s Death.”

“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.¹²³⁶ 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.”¹²³⁷ Several members of Congress 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.”¹²³⁸

Despite being widely reported, the “hands up, don’t shoot” account was “built on a lie.”¹²³⁹ A Department of Justice investigation concluded that the testimony of Dorian Johnson, who had a history of lying to police officers,¹²⁴⁰ did not match the forensic evidence and conflicted with other eyewitness testimonies.¹²⁴¹ 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

¹²³⁶ Ruffin, “Black Lives Matter: The Growth of a New Social Justice Movement.”

¹²³⁷ Pearce, “Protesters Use Hands-Up Gesture Defiantly after Michael Brown Shooting.”

¹²³⁸ McCalmont, “Lawmakers Make ‘Hands Up’ Gesture on House Floor.”

¹²³⁹ Capehart, “Hands Up, Don’t Shoot’ Was Built on a Lie.”

¹²⁴⁰ Zennie, “Revealed: Star Witness in Michael Brown Shooting Has Arrest Warrant for Theft and Was Busted for Lying to Cops.”

¹²⁴¹ “Department of Justice Report Regarding the Criminal Investigation into the Shooting Death of Michael Brown by Ferguson, Missouri Police Officer Darren Wilson.”

neck, nor was there evidence of petechial hemorrhaging of Brown's remaining left eye.¹²⁴²

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."¹²⁴³ Instead, Michael Brown attacked officer Wilson and endeavored to wrestle away his gun.¹²⁴⁴ According to the report:

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 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.¹²⁴⁵

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.¹²⁴⁶ The most notable incident occurred during an episode of *NBC Nightly News*

¹²⁴² "Department of Justice Report."

¹²⁴³ Capehart, "Hands Up, Don't Shoot' Was Built on a Lie."

¹²⁴⁴ "Department of Justice Report Regarding the Criminal Investigation into the Shooting Death of Michael Brown by Ferguson, Missouri Police Officer Darren Wilson."

¹²⁴⁵ "Department of Justice Report."

¹²⁴⁶ *Wikipedia* s.v. "Brian Williams."

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.”^{1247, 1248} 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.¹²⁴⁹ 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.”^{1250, 1251}

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.¹²⁵² He admitted on February 4, 2015, “I made a mistake in recalling the events of 12 years ago.”¹²⁵³ According to *Stars and Stripes*:

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 159th 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.¹²⁵⁴

¹²⁴⁷ “In 2003, this soldier saved Brian Williams’ life. 12 years later, they were reunited at a hockey game.”

¹²⁴⁸ Tritten, “NBC’s Brian Williams Recants Iraq Story after Soldiers Protest.”

¹²⁴⁹ Tritten.

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