



Written by [James Murphy](#) on February 19, 2018

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## Unnoteworthy News

*From the print edition of The New American*

Hillary Clinton blamed her election loss, at least in part, on it. President Trump has repeatedly accused mainstream news outlets, most notably CNN, of disseminating it. It pops up unbidden in our Facebook and Twitter feeds. It used to reside mainly in checkout aisles in supermarkets, purveyed by newspapers such as *Weekly World News*, *Globe*, and *The National Enquirer*. It consists of those sensational headlines that we look at and immediately think, “Can that be true?” The new term for it is “fake news,” and it’s a thorn in the side to anyone searching for truth.



Fake news is not a new thing. It’s probably as old as man himself. Ever since the serpent lied to Eve, humans have been trying to convince other humans that lies are truth. Throughout history, propagandists have used false stories to impugn, besmirch, and vilify perceived enemies. Johannes Gutenberg’s 1439 invention of the printing press made disseminating such news much easier.

On Easter Sunday in 1475, in Trent, Italy, a Christian boy named Simonino went missing. Franciscan preacher Bernardino da Feltre gave a series of sermons claiming that Jewish immigrants had abducted the boy, killed him, and drunk his blood in a Passover celebration. Prince-Bishop Johannes IV Hinderbach, an Austrian noble, issued a circular that described the event throughout churches in the area. The entire Jewish community of Trent was arrested because of the unsubstantiated rumor; 15 of them were found guilty and burned at the stake. The stories of Jewish blood-libel spread far and wide and led to much of the anti-Semitism that still exists today.

America also has a long history of false news. While ambassador to France in 1782, Ben Franklin used a makeshift printing press to manufacture a completely false edition of the *Independent Chronicle* — a very real Boston newspaper. The main headline of the fake edition was a fabricated story about a group of Indians who had scalped more than 700 New Yorkers, many of them children. The Native Americans were said to be in league with King George. Franklin sent copies of the dishonest newspaper to colleagues in the New World. The story was then picked up by real newspapers in many states. Franklin’s phony story did nothing to swing the Revolution in America’s favor, since it occurred after the American win at Yorktown. But it may have had repercussions beyond that, such as the manner in which many Americans saw the native population.

The turn of the 20th century gave us Joseph Pulitzer, William Randolph Hearst, and the term “yellow journalism.” While most of the “yellow” stories had some basis in fact, they were exaggerated and scandalized beyond their original newsworthiness. (Sound familiar?) Sensationalized headlines drove sales in a newspaper war between Pulitzer’s *New York World* and Hearst’s *New York Journal*. The two newspapermen — particularly Hearst — are often blamed for causing the Spanish-American War in



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1898, although that cannot be substantiated.

Throughout the 20th century, false propaganda was used, especially during times of war. The British used the radio to broadcast *Gustav Siegfried Eins*, a self-proclaimed proud Nazi who issued profanity-laced tirades against the German leadership. But “Gustav” was a German ex-patriot named Peter Seckelman, a writer who had fled Germany in 1938. Seckelman and other German exiles knew enough about Nazi Germany to keep spreading false information and demoralize German troops until November of 1943. Most of the combatants in WWII used this type of “black propaganda.”

Now, in the 21st century, anyone with an Internet connection can create and circulate stories about the events of the day. A plethora of hoax news sites, which use sensationalized headlines as “click bait,” exists. Many of these sites mimic actual news sites, with names such as ABCnews.com.co, NBCnews.com.co and cnn-trending.com.

Many of these sites exist outside of America, with the Macedonian city of Veles being a hub of many of them. Residents of the city — many of them teenagers — were responsible for spreading a great number of lies and rumors, masquerading as real news stories, during the 2016 presidential election. Fake news creators made money with Google AdSense, a program that pays content creators for generating views for advertising on websites.

Americans are the main target for fake news creators because of our robust economy. They focus their content on America because American page views are much more valuable to advertisers than those of other countries. These sites exist on the right and left of the political spectrum. Most of the creators have no political axe to grind; they are simply searching for clicks, which lead to dollars.

Facebook and Google have been looking into ways to stem the tide of what they deem “fake news” by adjusting their algorithms. But both of the Internet giants have a confirmed liberal bias, opening up the possibility that Facebook and Google’s “real” news might simply come to be their “approved” news.

It’s human nature to look for stories that confirm our own preconceptions. The psychological term for this is called “confirmation bias.” When a sensationalized headline pops up on social media that confirms one’s preconceived notions, it’s a natural instinct to click on it, check it out, and share it on social media. This is one of the ways in which we create our own echo chambers. We simply prefer hearing like-minded opinions instead of those we disagree with.

A large factor in the proliferation of fake news is the public’s mistrust of the mainstream media. Gone are the days when CBS anchor Walter Cronkite was considered “the most trusted man in America.” This skepticism of the news media is one of the reasons that the election of Trump caught so many in that profession completely off-guard. They vastly underestimated the lack of trust that Americans have in the media.

*Photo: AP Images*

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The liberal bias in most American media is rather obvious. But bias in and of itself does not necessarily make news “fake.” The bigger reason that Americans don’t trust ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN is because of their agenda-driven and deceptively managed coverage of the events of the day.

The mainstream media are not immune to spreading incorrect information. In December, ABC’s Brian Ross broke a false news story alleging that Donald Trump had directed former National Security



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Advisor Michael Flynn to contact Russian officials before the election. It quickly turned out that the story was erroneous, and ABC was forced to issue a clarification. The network would wait until the next day before issuing a full correction. ABC suspended Ross for four weeks because of the incident. It wasn't the first false story Ross had reported, either. Previously, after the 2012 mass shooting in Aurora, Colorado, Ross reported that the suspect in custody for the attack was a member of the local Tea Party, a group that had protested many of President Obama's initiatives during his first term.

Reporting incorrect information is not always necessarily *fake* news. Everyone makes mistakes, after all. Sources go rogue, information is misinterpreted; these things happen. All of the mainstream media outlets have been caught disseminating false information at one time or another. Retractions are issued; apologies are made. It's part of life when reporting news.

The mainstream media, in general, do a decent job of reporting events that occur. Whether it be a flood in the Midwest, a hurricane in Florida, or a terrorist attack, the mainstream media do their job, issuing factual, if sometimes overhyped, information. But it's in the minutiae of such stories, when reporting begins to focus on the whys and how of events, that the news giants show their true colors. That is where advocacy begins and impartiality ends.

In Milwaukee in August of 2016, the police shooting of a young African-American, Sylville Smith, sparked a weekend of civil unrest in the city. In the midst of the violence, CNN aired a brief video of Smith's sister, Sherelle, supposedly calling for peace in her community. "Don't bring the violence and ignorance here," she said in the clip. But it turned out that the video was heavily edited. Smith went on to say, "Take that sh\*t to the suburbs! Burn that sh\*t down! We need our sh\*t!" This made it clear that Smith was not "calling for peace." CNN eventually apologized on air for its misrepresentation of the video.

On December 8 of last year, CNN again misreported crucial facts in a story. With the Trump-Russia narrative crumbling, they seized upon a piece of news that said the Trump campaign had received access to the hacked WikiLeaks documents, including the infamous DNC e-mails that were so damning to the Clinton campaign, on September 4 of 2016. However, the date was wrong. The *Washington Post* reported that the Trump campaign didn't receive the access until September 14. The timing was critical because WikiLeaks itself released the hacked e-mails on September 13, meaning the Trump campaign didn't have access to them before anyone else. The talking heads on CNN gabbed about the story for an entire day before the network was forced to correct the story and apologize.

And that mishap came on the heels of a June incident in which CNN (again) reported that Trump confidant Anthony Scaramucci, a member of the president's transition team, took a meeting with a Russian investment team prior to the inauguration where, allegedly, the lifting of sanctions against Russia were discussed. Scaramucci reportedly called CNN Washington Bureau Chief Sam Feist and threatened legal action if the false story was not removed. Again, the same refrain — CNN was forced to issue a retraction and apologize.

Apologies are nice, but when these types of things happen continually, it becomes clear that media are not simply reporting news. They are managing how it comes out and creating a narrative that viewers are meant to follow. Deceptive editing, such as the case in Milwaukee, is one tool they use, but there are others. Certain stories, such as the Trump-Russia probe, are hyped and overblown. Other stories, such as the release of the memo alleging FISA court abuses by the FBI and the Obama administration,



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are downplayed. So-called experts are often trotted out on subjects such as global warming to hit us over the head with globalist-approved opinions. Polls are taken using deceitful methodology, which leads to a predetermined outcome. Then, these polls are used to confirm the media's narrative. Conservative voices are talked over, belittled, and marginalized.

If the 2016 election didn't prove that the mainstream media lack objectivity in reporting political news, nothing will. While liberal bias has been an issue for years, the election of Donald Trump has caused the mainstream media to lose even their thin façade of objectivity. They are openly aggressive toward this president, reporting frantically on everything from the president's perceived "mental health" problems to how many scoops of ice cream he receives with dessert.

At least President Trump seems to have a sense of humor about all of this. On January 17, the president released his "Fake News Awards" of 2017. The "awards" turned out to be a top-10 list of media mistakes throughout the year. CNN made the list four times, but the top spot went to Paul Krugman of the *New York Times*, who suggested on the day of the election that the economy might never recover. On election day, the Dow Jones Industrial average was at 18,332.43. As of this writing, the Dow is at 26,214.60.

A recent *Wall Street Journal* poll showed that only 32 percent of the public trusts the mainstream media to "report the news fully, accurately and fairly." By creating their own liberal echo chamber, the media compel the public to seek information elsewhere. A number of citizen journalists (who can convey fake news — but not always) have stepped in to fill the void. But sometimes, it's difficult to determine what news is phony and what is factual.

In general, *real* news, regardless of the slant, relies on proper sourcing and fact checking. Certainly, "whistleblowers" are still needed and they may wish to remain anonymous for legitimate reasons. But stories that say, "according to an unnamed source," and rely on that source alone, should be viewed with suspicion. Stories with sensational, click-baiting headlines should be treated with a healthy dose of skepticism. News consumers need to understand the agenda of each source of news — and they all have an agenda — and dole out trust accordingly. The credibility of each member of the media should depend upon his track record of truthfulness.

Part of the First Amendment to the Constitution prohibits Congress from making any law "abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." Perhaps the fake-news phenomenon is just one of the consequences of that freedom. Certainly, members of the press have a right to report stories how they see fit, but they shouldn't be surprised when consumers treat them skeptically and search for "real" news elsewhere, especially when their track record of factual reporting comes into question.

So, in many ways, the news media have only themselves to blame for the proliferation of fake news.

*Photo: AP Images*

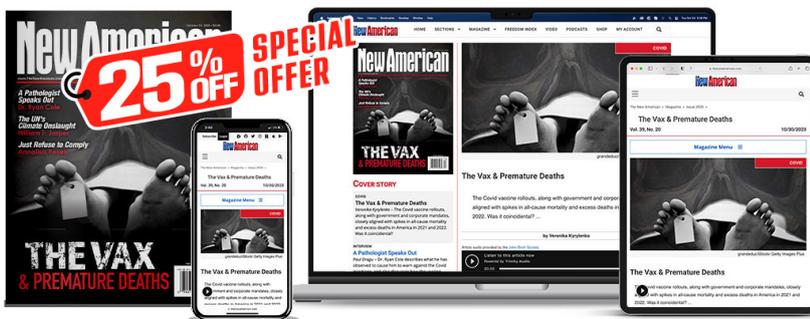


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