



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on October 15, 2018

NBC Correction on Trump's Remarks About Lee and Grant

It is certainly commendable that NBC News issued a correction on Sunday after mistakenly reporting that President Donald Trump had described Civil War General Robert E. Lee as "incredible." Actually, Trump was referring to General Ulysses S. Grant, not Lee, during the political rally in Ohio.

"An earlier tweet misidentified the general President Trump described as 'incredible' at a rally in Ohio," stated the network's correction. "It was Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, not Gen. Robert E. Lee."



This episode vividly illustrates the hair-trigger tendency of the mainstream media in general, and NBC News in particular, to jump on anything that they believe will make Trump look bad. Trump, while speaking to a political rally in Ohio, noted that Lee was a great general who was winning battle after battle over Union forces, until President Abraham Lincoln turned to Grant.

"Robert E. Lee was a great general, and Abraham Lincoln developed a phobia," Trump said during the rally. "He couldn't beat Robert E. Lee. But Grant figured it out, and Grant is a great general, and Grant came from right here."

It is hard to imagine how multiple media sources could have honestly got Trump's remarks wrong. It makes perfect sense that Trump would praise Grant in Ohio (as Grant was from Ohio), rather than Lee. After all, praising a Virginian in Ohio makes little sense.

Trump explained during his rally speech that Ohio gave Lincoln "a general who was incredible, drank a little bit too much. You know who I'm talking about, right?"

Obviously, Trump's Ohio crowd understood it, even if the national news media supposedly did not. Instead of accurately reporting that Trump had heaped praise on Grant of Ohio, NBC and other news outlets reported that it was *Lee* that Trump was praising. Trump had criticized NBC for twisting his remarks deliberately, but then graciously thanked NBC for the correction in a Sunday tweet.

But how could so many media sources all get it wrong?

After all, it is really not that surprising that so much of the media, which clearly despise Trump, would report that his remarks were about Lee, rather Grant. Perhaps we can better understand this entire episode better if we look at the work of Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov. Pavlov demonstrated in his famous experiment that certain responses can be conditioned through his experiments with dogs. Noting that dogs naturally salivated at the sight of dog food, like meat, Pavlov began "ringing a bell" (actually a metronome) when he fed the dogs. After doing this repeatedly, the dogs began to salivate "at the sound of a bell," even when no food was presented.

This he called "conditioned response."

Over the past several years, it has been repeated that the Civil War was fought to settle the issue of



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slavery, and that the main Confederate general, Robert E. Lee, was fighting to preserve the institution of slavery, with many noting that Lee was a slave owner. It would not be too bold to say that Lee has been libeled in this regard.

The truth is that Lee was an opponent of slavery, writing a letter to his wife years before the Civil War that he looked forward to the day when slavery was finally abolished in America. Lee had inherited slaves from his father-in-law — slaves that he freed.

But this is not the picture that is painted of Lee today. Schoolchildren today, for example, are indoctrinated into thinking that Lee was fighting to keep slavery. It is rare for them to be told that Lee freed his slaves — slaves whom he inherited — and that he was an opponent of slavery.

By falsely alleging that Trump was calling Lee “incredible” in Ohio, it is probable that the media presumed they could successfully tag Trump as praising this false “pro-slavery” image of Lee — in other words, a conditioned response, as with Pavlov’s dogs.

Lest one give NBC too much credit for backing off their original slur on Trump, it should be noted that Brian Williams of NBC later interviewed historian Michael Beschloss, who has recently written a book on presidents involved in war going back to 1807, entitled *Presidents of War*. At Williams’ prompting, Beschloss conceded that Trump’s version of how Lincoln chose Grant to lead the Union army was “not quite the way it happened.” Beschloss did praise Trump, however, for attempting to use “an historical figure” in an effort to make a historical point.

But Williams showed his own historical ignorance during the interview. He said that President John F. Kennedy referred to his predecessor, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, as “General Eisenhower,” which was true. What was not true, however, was when Williams said Kennedy served under Eisenhower during World War II. That is quite a stretch, considering that Lieutenant Kennedy was in the Navy — in the Pacific Theater — while Ike was supreme commander in the European Theater.

Beschloss did make one excellent point during the interview, while discussing his book about presidents and war. Beschloss insisted that the Founders intended for *Congress*, not the president, to declare war. Of course, the conversation quickly shifted to the possibility that Trump might go to war in order to get reelected in 2020.

Maybe what Pavlov should have talked about was the liberal media salivating at the sound of Trump.

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