



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on December 29, 2018

## Fake News Scandal: What Firing of Germany's Star Reporter (and CNN Favorite) Reveals About the Media

**Not only the German media, but news organizations worldwide, are engaged in cathartic breast beating and how-did-it-happen sessions over the huge Fake News scandal at *Der Spiegel*, one of Germany's most prestigious publications.**



In 2014, CNN proclaimed German reporter Claas Relotius (shown) as “CNN Journalist of the Year” and “Print Journalist of the Year.” In 2013, 2015, 2016, and 2018, Relotius received awards from Deutscher Reporterpreis (Reporter Forum), a German press association. In 2017, he was honored with the European Press Prize. Just before this past Christmas, however, the celebrity “journalist” was exposed as a scheming fraud. He was more than a mere fraudster however; his fabricated stories invariably carried a political agenda, one that notably involved painting extremely negative portraits of the United States and President Trump. His stories and others like it have helped poison U.S.-European relations and have fed the rise of anti-American sentiments not only in Europe but globally as well.

*Der Spiegel*, Germany's “most respected” news magazine, famed for its investigative stories, has fired Relotius. CNN has revoked its double award to the charlatan. And the Reporter Forum [says](#) the 33-year-old Relotius has returned the four awards the organization had bestowed on him.

“Claas Relotius, a reporter and editor, falsified his articles on a grand scale and even invented characters, deceiving both readers and his colleagues,” *Der Spiegel* reported on December 19. “This has been uncovered as a result of tips, internal research and, ultimately, a comprehensive confession by the editor himself,” the magazine said, in an article entitled [“The Relotius: Case Answers to the Most Important Questions.”](#)

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“Claas Relotius committed his deception intentionally, methodically and with criminal intent,” the *Der Spiegel* report noted. “For example, he included individuals in his stories who he had never met or



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spoken to,” it continued. “He also made up dialogue and quotes.”

According to *Der Spiegel*, it had published “just under 60” of the articles of Relotius in its print and online editions since 2011, and it is setting up “a commission of experienced internal and external persons to investigate the indications of falsification” in all of his stories.

Now, it turns out, lying may not be the disgraced reporter’s only vice; he appears to suffer from avarice as well. *Der Spiegel* has announced that it intends to file a criminal complaint against their erstwhile employee for fraudulently collecting charitable donations, ostensibly for Syrian orphans. “Relotius contacted *Der Spiegel* readers from his private email address, soliciting donations to benefit two Syrian orphans in Turkey he had previously written about,” reports [TheWrap](#). “However, Relotius not only fabricated multiple elements of that article — including the existence of one of the orphans — but also instructed donors to send the money to his personal bank account, the editors said.”

An important question is how many other publications were infected by this serial fabulist? *Der Spiegel* reports that “During his time as a freelance journalist, his work got published by other media including *Cicero*, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung am Sonntag*, the *Financial Times Deutschland*, *Die Tageszeitung*, *Die Welt*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung Magazin*, *Weltwoche*, *Zeit Online* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Sonntagszeitung*.” Of course, the infection goes far beyond the publications he worked for, since news groups worldwide ran with his stories.

### **“Seething anti-Americanism”**

“There was an unmistakable thread tying together Relotius’ tall tales: seething anti-Americanism.” So writes Abe Greenwald, senior editor of the neoconservative journal *Commentary* in an op-ed for the [New York Post](#). “In his downfall,” says Greenwald, “we see the crisis of left-liberal journalism in microcosm: Animosity toward Red America too often trumps reporting the facts — a blind spot that leads astray the prestige press on both sides of the Atlantic.”

Greenwald is right. The Relotius/*Spiegel* scandal is but the latest episode shining a much-needed light on the leftist bigotry so prevalent in the “mainstream” media. Wonder why so many “educated” Europeans seem to hate America and Donald Trump so intensely? It’s really no mystery. They are marinated in anti-American propaganda of the type that Relotius excelled at producing.

Richard Grenell, the U.S. ambassador in Germany, called the revelations “troubling to the U.S. Embassy, particularly because several of these fake stories focused on U.S. policies and certain segments of the American people.” The ambassador said he wrote to the magazine’s senior editors “calling for an independent and transparent investigation.”

### **Claas Warfare**

A primary target of Relotius’ poison pen has been rural, small-town America. You know, the stupid, sick, racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic, misogynist, violent, gun-obsessed hicks who voted for Donald Trump. A leading example of his toxic handiwork is the hit piece he did on Fergus Falls, Minnesota, entitled [“Where they pray for Trump on Sundays.”](#)

Appalled and angered by the smear of Relotius of their hometown, Fergus Falls residents Michele Anderson and Jake Krohn produced a stinging refutation of his lies, errors, and fabrications that was published recently in *Medium* as [“Der Spiegel journalist messed with the wrong small town.”](#) Anderson notes up front that she was more than just a little bit apprehensive when she learned a German journalist was in town. “I know I’m not the only rural advocate and citizen that is wary about the



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anthropological gaze on rural America in the wake of the 2016 elections, and has struggled with how or whether to respond to the sudden attention and questions, when before we really didn't matter to mass media at all," she relates. It turns out her apprehension was more than justified.

"What happened," she reports, "is beyond what I could have ever imagined: An article titled 'Where they pray for Trump on Sundays,' and endless pages of an insulting, if not hilarious, excuse for journalism." Millions of Americans (and Germans, Dutch, French, Austrians, Hungarians, etc.) can relate to the terrible feeling of being reputation-raped by a media thug. Anderson writes:

Not only did Relotius' "exposé" on Fergus Falls make unrecognizable movie-like characters out of the people in my town that I interact with on a daily basis, but its very basic lack of truth and its bizarrely bleak portrayal of the place I love left a very sick, unsettled feeling in the pit of my stomach.

There's really nothing like this feeling — knowing that people in another country have read about the place I call home and are shaking their heads over their coffee in disgust, sharing the article on Facebook and Twitter, and making comments on the online article like "creepy," and "these are the people who don't believe electricity exists."

"Relotius has received accolades for his daring quest to live among us for several weeks," Anderson notes, "And yet, he reported on very little actual truth about Fergus Falls life. In 7,300 words he really only got our town's population and average annual temperature correct, and a few other basic things, like the names of businesses and public figures, things that a child could figure out in a Google search. The rest is uninhibited fiction."

"There are so many lies here, that my friend Jake and I had to narrow them down to top 11 most absurd lies (we couldn't do just 10) for the purpose of this article."

Relotius begins his lying spree about Trump's Fergus Falls right out of the starting gate. "After three and a half hours," he writes, "the bus bends from the highway to a narrow, sloping street, rolling towards a dark forest that looks like dragons live in it. At the entrance, just before the station, there is a sign with the American stars and stripes banner, which reads: 'Welcome to Fergus Falls, home of damn good folks.'"

Anderson and Krohn provide some needed truth antidote: "Fergus Falls is located on the prairie — which means our landscape mostly consists of tall grass and lakes. While we have trees, we do not have any distinct forests in our city limits, and definitely not in the route that the bus Relotius would have taken from the Twin Cities. And sadly, our welcome sign is quite mundane in its greeting." They then provide a photo of the actual town sign, which reads, simply, "Welcome to Fergus Falls." The color theme is green and tan, with a touch of blue. No "American stars and stripes banner" and no "home of damn good folks" tagline — both of which are convenient, vivid details to buttress Relotius' intended stereotyping, but are baldfaced lies.

Naturally, *Der Spiegel's* star reporter had to find evidence of racism in Trump's Fergus Falls. Finding none, he apparently manufactured some of his own. Anderson, a professed "die-hard liberal," notes that the "Mexicans Keep Out" sign Relotius claims to have seen appears to have been an invention of his fevered imagination. That sign, she says, "as far as we've asked other members of the community, was not seen by anyone else, and would have certainly generated a significant community discussion" if it existed.

The *Medium* piece by Anderson and Krohn roasts Relotius-the-Devious over and over with fact checks



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that should have been performed by his magazine overseers. After all, the *Columbia Journalism Review* glowingly describes *Der Spiegel* as having the “world’s largest fact-checking operation.”

When Relotius headed south earlier this year to cover the U.S.-Mexican border, it was more of the Fergus Falls vilification routine. This time it was Trump-inspired yahoo vigilantes hunting Mexicans. Unfortunately for Relotius, but fortunately for everyone who still believes in truth, *Der Spiegel* paired him up with a colleague who realized Relotius had a veracity problem. Juan Moreno, a longtime freelance writer for *Der Spiegel*, went to Mexico to write on the “migrant caravan” while Relotius worked the Arizona border angle and the evil “vigilantes” there who allegedly hunted Mexicans.

Moreno became very skeptical about many details of Relotius’ reports. He was concerned about his own reputation because his name appeared on the *Der Spiegel* articles alongside that of Mr. Relotius. He took his concern to the *Spiegel* editors. “At first they just didn’t believe it... they resented it,” he [said](#).

The editors were not about to question the integrity of their celebrity reporter who crafted such masterful, emotion-packed, detail-rich, award-winning stories that so effectively promoted their leftist agenda and trounced everyone they identified “extreme right.” Relotius was their superstar practitioner of “narrative journalism,” and he knew how to pull heartstrings and manipulate feelings as well as any of Herr Goebbels’ propagandists. But Moreno persisted. “Imagine in six months, one year, this thing comes out and they find out and they say, ‘Why didn’t you do something?’, and they would think I kept quiet to keep my job,” he said.

Moreno traveled to the United States at his own expense to fact check the many troubling problems with Relotius’s border coverage, something the editors should have done themselves or commissioned someone to do. When he presented his damning evidence, the editors at *Der Spiegel* were forced to acknowledge that Relotius had indeed perpetrated journalistic fraud “on a grand scale.”

### **Media Excuses and Countercharges**

One of the most immediate reactions of the media elites across Germany, Europe, and the United States was to ruefully lament that the Relotius scandal would add more fuel to the Trump-fed Fake News meme. It would provide more confirmation (as if more were needed) that the establishment press is loaded with liars and systemically polluted. “After German Journalism Scandal, Critics Are ‘Popping the Corks,’” a *New York Times* article by Katrin Bennhold declared on December 20. It quoted Ines Pohl, editor in chief of German broadcaster *Deutsche Welle*. “It’s a dark day for German journalism,” said Pohl. “For something like this to happen in the heart of Europe is devastating — and just as we’re seeing the attacks on the free press in places like Hungary and Turkey.... Trump and populists everywhere will be popping the corks.”

Indeed, victims of reputational lynching by the liberal-left media see no reason not to celebrate the outing of the exposed smear bund. Götz Frömking, a politician in the Alternative for Germany (Alternative for Deutschland, AfD) party, [tweeted](#): “*Der Spiegel*, the self-declared standard-bearer that loves to bad-mouth Trump, AfD and others, delivered Fake News for years.”

Fromming and the AfD, like other conservative parties and organizations angered over efforts by Angela Merkel and the European Union to flood Europe with Muslim migrants, are used to being savaged by the media and falsely described as racist, extreme right, and neo-Nazi. Tino Chrupalla, another AfD lawmaker, wrote on Facebook: “The accusation of the ‘lying press’ is clearly fair in this case.” True to form, the *New York Times* and other news gatekeepers immediately denounced German media critics for use of the term “lying press,” declaring it is “a term used by the Nazis in the 1920s before they rose



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to power.”

Like the [Deep State media cartel here](#), *Der Spiegel* and most of the German media have supported Angela Merkel and the other European political leaders who are pushing for the destruction of national sovereignty and submergence of all EU member states under the complete control of Brussels. The media organizations have supported wide-open migration, increased regulation and taxation by the EU, in short, every measure to bring about an “ever closer union,” the motto of EU architects for gradual political and economic “integration” and “federalization.”

If freelance reporter Juan Moreno hadn’t risked his career, Claas Relotius and his managers at *Der Spiegel* would still be riding high, continuing to along their merry way. Relotius is now being sacrificed and the management at *Der Spiegel* insist that they were his victims too. If they were fooled by him it was only because they were so delighted with the politicized storybook bilge he was delivering that they refused to check the obvious warning signals.

For those in the journalism profession who are truly “woke” and not merely virtue signaling, the Relotius scandal should provide a genuine, sobering reality check concerning the blatant bias and ideological blinders that prevail in medialand. However, despite institutional embarrassment at prominent members of the media pack getting caught with their pants down, we see no reason to believe that there has been any systemic change of heart — no real confessions, mea culpas, and contrition; no evidence of departure from the media herd mentality; and no cause for believing that the Fourth Estate, as represented by the “mainstream” media, will suddenly burst forth in a commitment to truthfulness and fairness.

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