

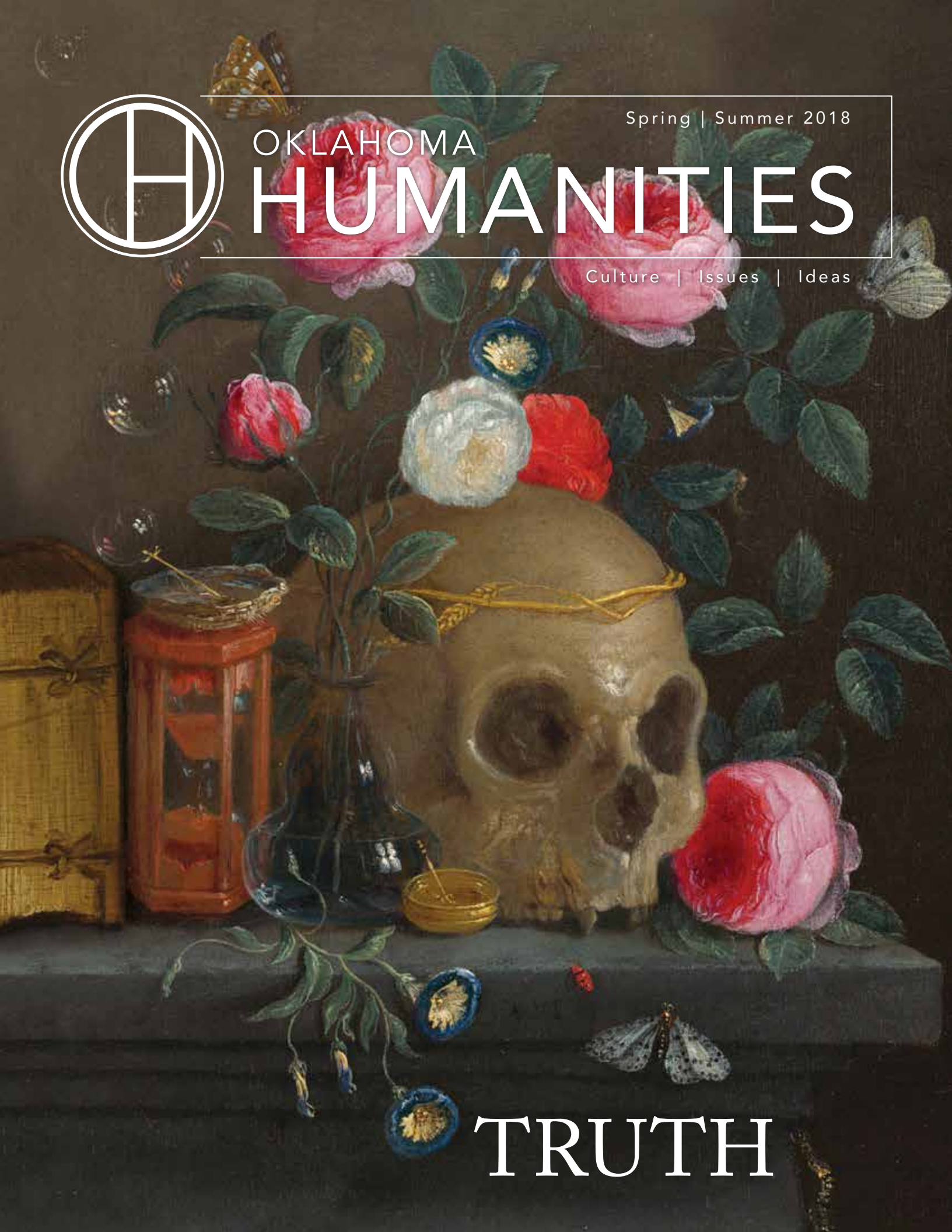


OKLAHOMA

HUMANITIES

Spring | Summer 2018

Culture | Issues | Ideas



TRUTH



ANN THOMPSON
Executive Director

A Federal/State Partnership

There's an interesting history lesson on Oklahoma Humanities' origin. Our nonprofit organization is one of 55 state, territorial, and jurisdictional state humanities councils that serve as affiliates of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), an independent federal agency. When the NEH was authorized in 1965, there was language in the bill that established the presence of state-based organizations to carry out the NEH mission effectively throughout the country. That's where Oklahoma Humanities came to be.

All state humanities councils are nonprofit organizations led by volunteer board members. This model was chosen through an early pilot project that tested three models. The first was partnering with state arts councils to incorporate humanities into their work. The second was university-based outreach programs. The third model, our current

one, was determined to be the best option and it has worked well for over forty-five years.

Annually, each state humanities council receives a general support grant from the NEH. These amounts differ depending largely upon population. For Oklahoma Humanities, NEH funds comprise about 70% of our budget; we raise the remainder through individual and corporate donations. The federal funds go toward administrative costs and our statewide grant program, leaving local fundraising to support our public programs such as *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine, *Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma*, and the Smithsonian's *Museum on Main Street* traveling exhibit program. We depend heavily upon our donors and are very grateful for the necessary support they provide. Thank you, donors, for your part in continuing this successful public/private endeavor!

ON THE COVER: *Vanitas Still Life*, c. 1665/1670, Jan van Kessel. National Gallery of Art. Puzzled by our choice of cover image? Turn to The Editor's Desk, p. 6, for a bit of art history on the Vanitas genre and its relevance to our theme.



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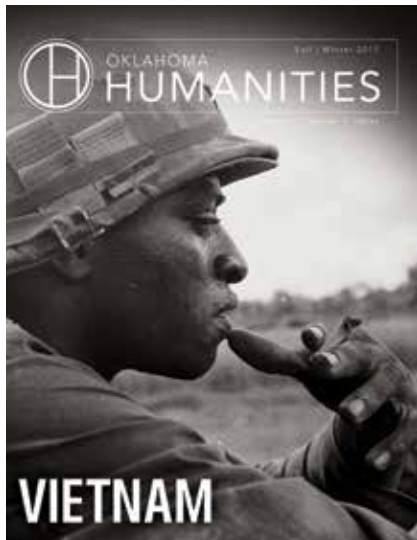
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LEFT: *Marionettes*, 1903, John Singer Sargent.
[PD] via Wikimedia Commons

Reader Feedback



Thank you for the copy of the *Oklahoma Humanities* Vietnam issue. I found the article written by Thom Nickels [a conscientious objector] to be particularly interesting as I never knew anyone who chose that path. While I did not agree with his argument, it did cause me to better understand the mindset of those that refused to serve in the military. I admired the fact that he was willing to stand by his principles and risk jail [rather] than desert to Canada.

—Sam Jackson, Oklahoma City

The Fall/Winter 2017 issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* devoted to the Vietnam War is outstanding. Each article has enlightened me and has moved me in ways I had thought I was beyond being emotionally affected by. The series of articles has helped me internalize the PBS documentary series on the Vietnam War. Thank you for the professional effort and the loving care with which this issue was put together.

—Frantzie Couch, Lawton

I am a longtime reader of your magazine and have thoroughly enjoyed them. However, I must tell you that this issue on Vietnam is the first that has made me feel compelled to write to the editor. It made me realize how little I knew about the war, even though I was an adult during that time.

My dad served in the U.S. Army during WWI, my oldest brother served in the Army during WWII, and I served in the U.S. Navy prior to the Vietnam War. I was patriotic enough that I just automatically accepted what my president and other leaders were telling us about our reasons for sending troops to Vietnam: to prevent the spread of communism to other countries. I thought that the protesters were just a bunch of cowardly potheads.

Thanks to this magazine, I've taken a long, hard look at myself. On major issues facing our nation, I will no longer accept at face value the information provided by "The Establishment." I will research and look at both sides with an open mind before deciding where I stand. I also feel our leaders should look at the lessons learned in Vietnam and ask if we are not repeating the same mistakes in Afghanistan. Still, knowing what I know today, if my country had recalled me for military duty in the Vietnam era I would have gladly served out of love for my country.

—D.W. Morgan, Oklahoma City

Another exceptional issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine, Fall/Winter 2017 on Vietnam. Congratulations!

—Humanities Nebraska via Facebook

I just saw the *Oklahoma Humanities* Vietnam issue. It is stunning. As a child of that era I can see myself reading it cover to cover over the next few weeks. I watched many of my cohorts go to war and would have myself in May 1976 (with a draft lottery number of 9/365) had Nixon not ended the war in an election year move. Again, congratulations.

—Philip Patterson, Oklahoma City

Exceptional writing on Vietnam.

—Judith O'Connor, Oklahoma City

Thank you for sponsoring the Ken Burns Vietnam War series. My husband, a Vietnam-era vet, and I are watching every one.

—Christina Rich-Splawn, Ponca City

[Editor's note: *Oklahoma Humanities* was one of three major underwriters for the OETA public television broadcast of the Ken Burns and Lynn Novick film series, *The Vietnam War*.]

Just received the latest *Oklahoma Humanities* issue, Vietnam. The mix of contextual and personal, plus the timeline and statistical pages, make it a "keeper." Especially glad to see some pieces from the Vietnamese perspective. I think, however, the cutline on page 42 has an error. As I remember, either the girl or the victim in the picture was not a student at Kent State, which in no way detracts from the significance of the photo. All in all, a fine issue, one you can be justly proud of.

—Bill Hagen, Shawnee

[Editor's note: We printed the cutline provided by license holder Getty Images, courtesy PBS. At Mr. Hagen's suggestion, we researched the image and learned that, at the time, Mary Ann Vecchio was a 14-year-old runaway who had befriended students on the Kent State campus.]

I've been trying to put together a response to the Vietnam issue. I certainly learned a great deal, perhaps more than from any previous issue. *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine almost always will cause me to think and question and wonder and maybe look for more and Vietnam did all of this.

It seems there are only two big stories connected to the Vietnam War: one, the duplicity-ignorance-arrogance-incompetence of the government and military leaders; the other, the human tragedy of U.S. servicemen who served in that war. The OH Vietnam issue did an excellent job with the first story. The men who served,

[continued p. 46]

SEND YOUR IDEAS, opinions, and suggestions. Email the editor, carla@okhumanities.org, or comment via Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram.

CORRECTION: The timeline in our Vietnam issue incorrectly designated Ron Beer as a veteran. He was a graduate student and assistant to the president at Kent State at the time of the shootings. We deeply regret the error.

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Oklahoma Humanities magazine is an award-winning collection of culture, issues, and ideas—a rich mix of humanities scholarship, insightful narratives, informed opinions, and beautiful images, for a read that is smart, balanced, educational, and entertaining. Subscribe online: okhumanities.org or call (405) 235-0280.

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Oklahoma Humanities awards include twenty-six Oklahoma Society of Professional Journalists awards, including multiple first place honors for Best Writing, Best Cover, and Best PR Publication; five Great Plains Journalism awards, including firsts for Best Magazine Feature Writing and Best Magazine Page Design, and as a finalist for the 2017 Great Plains Magazine of the Year; three Central Oklahoma IABC Bronze Quill Awards; the State Historic Preservation Officer's Citation of Merit; and an Oklahoma Heritage Distinguished Editorial Award.

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Your Brain on the Humanities

So . . . what can a humanities podcast tell us about current events? Our new monthly *BrainBox* podcast steps out of the cacophony of the 24/7 news cycle to find out.

BrainBox takes listeners on a deep dive into history, literature, ethics, philosophy, and other humanities fields to give context to the issues gripping American society. Considering news in the broader scope of culture, historical events, and the human experience informs our understanding of current affairs and their effects on our day-to-day lives.

OH program officer and *BrainBox* host Chris Carroll says the podcast has ambitious goals. “The original meaning of the term *BrainBox* was a WWII-era think tank. The term also refers to a skull or someone of above-average intelligence. Our podcast challenges listeners to ‘use your *BrainBox*’ to consider what we can learn from the choices made by those who came before us, what literature and pop culture are saying about the

times we live in, and what experts think is coming in our future.”

The premiere episode of *BrainBox* investigates the Watergate era. Dr. Ben Alpers, a professor of American Intellectual and Cultural History at the University of Oklahoma Honors College, is our guest commentator. The conversation examines the historical memory of Watergate, media scrutiny and public debate surrounding Richard Nixon's involvement, and the changing ways Americans have come to consider political scandals in decades since.

Future *BrainBox* episodes will look at sexual harassment and the #MeToo movement through the wider lens of women's history, race and identity in Oklahoma and across the country, and the historical contexts of pop culture touchstones like *Game of Thrones*. Guests will include some of Oklahoma's most interesting and talented humanities scholars. If you're not listening, you're missing out!

It's easy to listen to *BrainBox* through your smartphone, tablet, or computer. Use any of the following platforms and type *BrainBox* podcast in the search box. Look for our *BrainBox* microphone logo, then click any episode to listen.

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Like what you hear? Click *subscribe* or *follow* to be notified of new episodes—and please rate and review our episodes!



Vanitas Still Life, Edwaert Collier, 1662. [PD] via Wikimedia Commons

The Editor's Desk

CARLA WALKER
carla@okhumanities.org

Two years ago, the *Oxford English Dictionary* designated “post-truth” the word of the year, and its relevance continues to loom large. Truth, about almost any subject, seems harder to find, and it’s not a new phenomenon. As authors in this issue of *Oklahoma Humanities* tell us, American history is filled with people and industries that have “massaged” the truth to advantage.

Newspaper moguls Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst perfected sensationalism to grab and hold audiences. Technology progressed and so did the term; today we call it click bait. Political figures (from Richard Nixon to Donald Trump, as contemporary examples) have fired back, accusing journalists of peddling fake news and alternate facts. Where once a free press had ready access to newsmakers and a commitment to objectivity, cable television stepped in with a new philosophy, filling the airwaves with “analysis” and “commentary,” niche content crafted for small, like-minded audiences. Now, viewers can connect with viewpoints that confirm what they already believe, with diverse perspectives conveniently filtered out.

A spirit of populism emerged with the 2016 presidential campaign and suddenly any authority—political or scholarly—was called into question. *Truth is relative. Who are you (the press,*

Congress, the Supreme Court, scientists, scholars) to tell me what is or isn't the truth or what I should believe about it?

But when expertise is shunned, when facts are manipulated, when a free press is denied access to leaders and information, how does it affect democracy? To what sources can we turn if we want to be informed citizens? When we present ourselves as polished avatars rather than real people, does it warp our regard for truth? Are there fictional worlds where we can find the truth of human experience? This magazine issue explores these questions and more.

Which brings us to an accidental brush with art history. To illustrate this wide-ranging, nebulous topic of “truth,” a keyword search of international art museums repeatedly returned results using the term *vanitas*, associated with sumptuous still life paintings of similar subject matter: books, globes, musical instruments, jewels, human skulls, and, strangely, bubbles. Click bait, humanities style.

The *vanitas* genre gained popularity among artists in the Netherlands in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and was named for its allusion to scripture (Latin: *Vanitas vanitatum; et omnia vanitas*. Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.—Eccles. 1:2 KJV). It was an art form with an admonition: to live a modest, circumspect life. These works pointed to the “futility” or “worthlessness” (*vanitas*) of striving for worldly goods, a reminder of the transience of life and certainty of death. At their moralistic extreme, *vanitas* pieces were a condemnation of earthly vice. Books, music, wine, and wealth were expressions of pleasures to be shunned in favor of attending to higher, spiritual matters.

Common symbols communicated these ideas: skulls (the certainty of death); rotten fruit (decay); flowers (which wither and die); smoke (the transience of life); a pocket watch or hourglass (time on earth is finite); and those puzzling little bubbles (life can vanish in a snap).

Jan van Kessel (1626-1679), the artist featured on our arresting magazine cover, used bright colors and intricate detail that was prized by collectors. Catalogue entries from the Getty Museum note that “van Kessel worked from nature and used illustrated scientific texts” to give objects authenticity.

Edwaert Collier (ca. 1640-after 1707), the artist represented on this page, layered his *vanitas* works with abundance: draped tables, swags of silk, musical instruments, pearls, watches, snuffed candles, hourglasses, and overturned wine goblets all speak to a life of excess. In the far right of this rendition, Collier tucks a curling scrap of paper bearing the reminder: *Vanitas Vanitatum Et Omnia Vanitas*.

Ironically, *vanitas* paintings were valued by how they attracted viewers; the more dazzlingly executed, the higher the price to own such a work. Only the wealthiest patrons could afford them. Some artists poked fun at the double standard, as did Collier who often included, among the symbols of death and doom, an artfully penned aphorism: *Vita brevis, ars longa*. (Life is short, art long.)

The rise of the genre coincided with urbanization and the growing importance of commerce, trade, and skilled learning. As objects in *vanitas* artworks, books carried a double meaning: while a life devoted to study (depicted by worn tomes and tattered pages) was to be commended, richly bound books collected as possessions were just another expression of vain consumerism. Art historian Walter Liedtke observed that *vanitas* objects “refer to wealth and individual accomplishment, with . . . the vanity of learning given particular emphasis.”

It becomes clear: Disillusionment with highly educated so-called experts, and trying to decipher what is true and abiding, has preoccupied us for centuries. The trick is to chase the bubbles that burst with new perspectives, outrun those that break against hardened cynicism. Gather ye bubbles of *truth* while ye may.



Democracy AND THE INFORMED CITIZEN

Carl Bernstein weighs in on
truth and journalism

INTERVIEW BY DICK PRYOR

OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES HAD A RARE OPPORTUNITY to invite Pulitzer Prize winner Carl Bernstein to give his opinions on the role of journalism in our democracy as part of a nationwide initiative, “Democracy and the Informed Citizen.” The following interview with Dick Pryor, General Manager of KGOU Radio, features Bernstein’s thoughts on the challenge journalists and news consumers face in the distrustful climate of “fake news.”

DICK PRYOR: Why is there such a high level of anger and distrust of the news media in the last several years, especially during and since the 2016 election cycle?

CARL BERNSTEIN: It’s part of a cold civil war that’s been going on in this country for a while. The Trump campaign and his presidency have fanned the flames of that cold civil war, focusing on the media as an easy target for demagoguery.

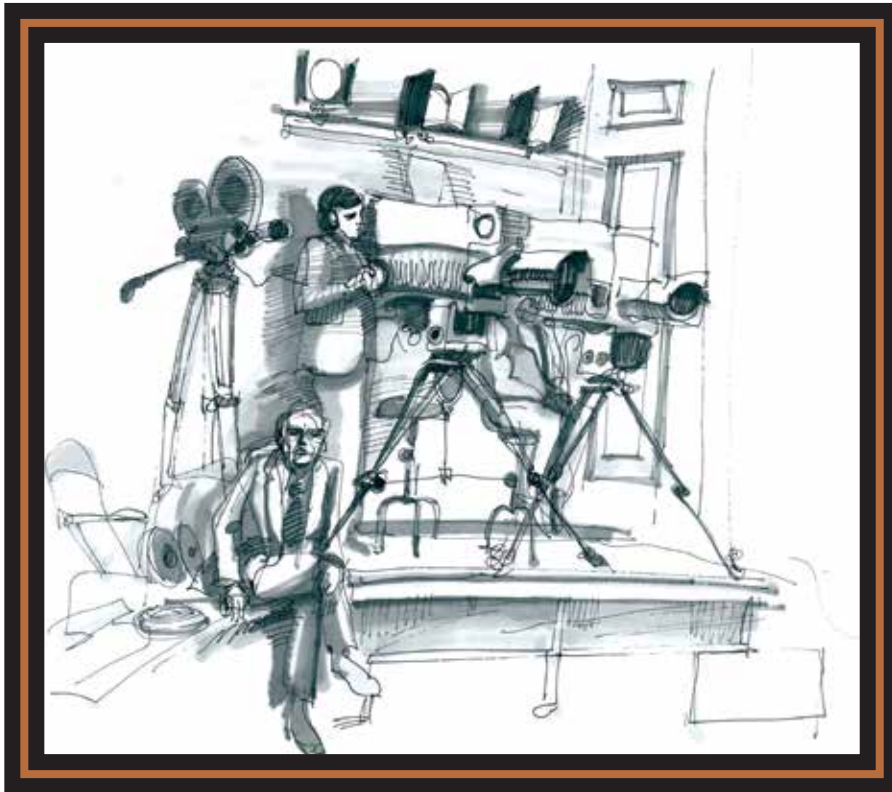
Here’s another thing. Obviously we make mistakes, but we are in a golden age of reporting today by the major mainstream news organizations. What *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, CNN, and other news organizations have done in terms of reporting and investigative reporting on the Trump presidency is nothing short of heroic. It’s probably the greatest confluence of different news organizations reporting on a single story in which rather consistent themes emerge from all of their reporting. This has to do with the conduct, behavior, and questions of fitness about the President of the United States and particularly as related to the so-called Russian investigation.

Did you see the same kind of pushback during your Watergate reporting?

Nixon tried to make the conduct of the press the issue in Watergate. It didn’t succeed but it was a much simpler time. There was no FOX News. Let’s not kid ourselves. The creation and success of FOX News is probably the most important political development; it’s not really about news, it’s about advocacy of a particular point of view masquerading as news.

This goes back to your first question. Increasingly over the past forty years, people are looking for information to reinforce what they already believe, their already-held prejudices and religious and cultural beliefs, rather than being open to the best obtainable version of the truth. That is what good reporting is really about, what real journalism is—the best obtainable version of truth.

So, if you look at the numbers of people who are not open to the best obtainable version of truth, it’s almost impossible to have a fact-based debate in this culture. I’m not talking just about the Congress of the United States or a state legislature, but increasingly at dinner tables.



“

Nixon tried to make the conduct of the press the issue in Watergate. It didn't succeed but it was a much simpler time.

”

News and television cameras, perhaps related to the Senate Watergate hearings, Joseph Papin, c. 1973. Library of Congress

How do you believe professional journalists can best respond to these charges of fake news and a media strategy that talks about alternative facts and never gives an inch. How can the media overcome that and earn the people's trust?

I think we just have to do our job. A lot of this gets back to the fact that too many people are not open to real news. They want to see information that they believe will advance what they already believe. If we're talking about the political system here—and, incidentally, this goes way beyond mere “politics,” it extends to all kinds of cultural questions about who we are—we just need to do our reporting and get it out there and also call out stories that are not true.

The other thing is that sometimes, particularly in such a highly charged atmosphere where all kinds of accusations are thrown at the press by the president and others, we are a little too prone to take the bait. We are perhaps smug

or provocative or self-righteous in our appearance, though it might not be the reality. I think we could probably improve on that a bit.

You mentioned facts. For citizens who don't know really what to trust, who to trust, what to believe, why does the truth matter?

I think this is a cultural question. We are living in a time when many, many people are disinterested in truth or honest contextual information. A string of simple facts put together is not necessarily the truth. Context is a really important element of truth.

What do you wish regular citizens would better understand about journalism and the First Amendment?

I would reverse that question and say, “What do you wish citizens would understand about the First Amendment?” because what follows from that is what journalists do. The First Amendment has protected us

throughout our history. I think we now have an authoritarian president with no regard or understanding of the First Amendment. Even today, while we're conducting this interview, he's threatening to file lawsuits against publishers. No president who understands the Constitution of the United States would dare do that or even make the threat. Donald Trump has done this throughout his career. He's indeed filed lawsuits against journalistic institutions as well as people who have spoken out against him.

There's a reason this amendment comes first; freedom of speech, freedom of expression is what keeps us free. We have presidents and other public officials who want to constrain that. They are more interested in pursuing leakers than they are in the truth—and that's about a lack of understanding of the First Amendment and the role of a free press.

The work that you and Bob Woodward and *The Washington Post*, in particular, did during Watergate inspired a generation of young people to become journalists. Do you see that happening again?

I have to say I see tremendous numbers of young people doing great work in journalism, in nontraditional news organizations, online for the big news organizations that are the successors to the great print institutions. I think it's a very difficult environment because of the attacks on the credibility of journalists. There are those who would abuse governance by demagoguery, by authoritarianism. You know that in every single tyrannical, despotic country, it's always the media that is the first institution to be shut down. Now we have a President of the United States who has not only shown an inclination himself to inhibit and constrain the free press, but to make it a basic part of his demagogic appeal.

Finally, I want to ask you this: Given your vast experience, having gone through tumultuous times, covered tumultuous events, seen the threats against the media, what's your best advice for journalists today who may be experiencing this level of intensity in their work?

Journalists need to do self-examination. We need to be better listeners. A story, more often than not, is different than our preconceived notion of the story. Certainly my experience has been that almost no story I've worked on has come out precisely as I thought it would when I started on it, before I really did the reporting and came to know the facts and context.

I've found that while covering almost everybody, including many people who have been really angry at the press, if I listen to them closely enough I'm able to get better information from them as well as understand their points of view a little better. I also can measure what I'm hearing against what other sources are saying as a means of getting to the best obtainable version of the truth.

You know, I think it's a matter of the most important elements of doing our job:

be thoughtful and not in too much of a hurry. Most stories can wait a day before they need to go. They require checking and additional information. I think that today's news environment—with the internet, with social media, with cable news and the 24/7 environment—is antithetical to the kind of thoughtful reporting that we need. It always goes back to the basics about the best obtainable truth. It requires a lot of effort, a lot of perseverance, a lot of listening and respecting your sources and the people you are covering. This includes covering the Trump presidency. Hear what they have to say. That's one of the reasons the reporting has been so good about the White House. A lot of reporters there really got their ear to the ground and came up with a picture, interestingly enough, not too different from what Steve Bannon has suggested in interviews in the Michael Wolff book [*Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House*, Henry Holt and Co., 2018]. Reporting needs to be methodical, thoughtful, energetic, contextual, and with a sensibility that we need to serve, not preach.

CARL BERNSTEIN: For forty years, from *All the President's Men* to *A Woman-in-Charge: The Life of Hillary Clinton*, Bernstein's books, reporting, and commentary have revealed the inner workings of government, politics, and the hidden stories of Washington and its leaders. In the early 1970s, Bernstein and Bob Woodward broke the Watergate story for *The Washington Post*, leading to the resignation of President Richard Nixon and setting the standard for modern investigative reporting, for which they and *The Post* were awarded the Pulitzer Prize.

DICK PRYOR is General Manager of KGOU Radio. He has more than 25 years of experience in public service media, previously serving as deputy director, managing editor, news manager, news anchor, and host for OETA, Oklahoma's statewide public television network.

"Democracy and the Informed Citizen" is a nationwide initiative administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils. We thank The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their support of this initiative and for the partnership of The Pulitzer Prizes.



**OKLAHOMA
HUMANITIES
PRESENTS**

**AN EVENING WITH
CARL BERNSTEIN**

**Fake News! The Media, the
Truth, and Our Democracy**



THURSDAY, MARCH 22, 2018

5PM VIP Reception
6:30PM General Admission
OCU Law School
800 N. Harvey

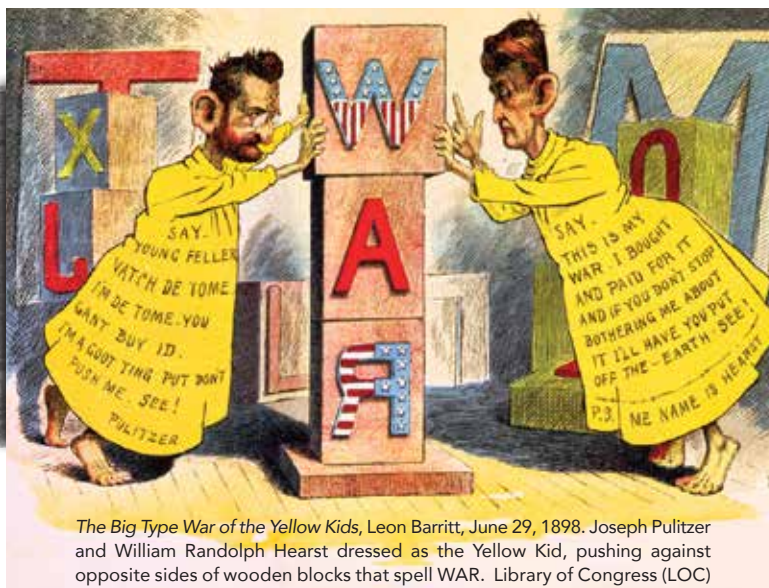
Seating is limited. Tickets required.
Register at okhumanities.org



Arrangements for the appearance of Carl Bernstein made through Greater Talent Network, Inc., New York, NY



Joseph Pulitzer (1847-1911). LOC



The Big Type War of the Yellow Kids, Leon Barritt, June 29, 1898. Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst dressed as the Yellow Kid, pushing against opposite sides of wooden blocks that spell WAR. Library of Congress (LOC)



William Randolph Hearst (1863-1951), Harris & Ewing. LOC

HAVE I GOT A STORY FOR YOU!

The checkered past of
“fair and balanced”
news in America

PHILIP PATTERSON

FAKE NEWS. We hear the allegations all the time. If there’s one thing a divided America can agree on, no matter which side you’re on, it is this: the news generated by the *other* side is nothing but half-truths, misrepresentations, or downright lies.

Is there such a thing as objective journalism? Could an objective medium even survive in today’s deeply partisan journalism? Does democracy require an objective press—whatever that means?

When we begin to examine the problem, whether the charge is “fake news,” “bias,” “clickbait,” or “mistrust of the media,” we realize that we’ve been here before, near the beginning of our republic. Perhaps a few lessons from history would be instructive.

GOSSIP RUN AMOK

Not unlike cable news today, newspapers in early America were decidedly partisan and, at times, ugly. When President John Adams, a Federalist, found himself in a nation of Anti-Federalist newspapers, he proposed the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, which made it a crime to criticize the president—at least until the law’s sunset on Inauguration Day 1801. A handful of newspaper editors went to jail, along with ministers, college presidents, and minor political appointees, all victims of what has been called the “worst act ever passed through Congress.” Despite that early attack, the partisan press thrived.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, American journalism was a swamp of lies, sensationalism, and gross invasions of privacy. Two Boston lawyers, Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis (who would become the first Jewish U.S. Supreme Court Justice), had had enough of the snooping, prying Boston press, whose photographers had disrupted the society wedding of Warren’s daughter. They aired their views in “The Right to Privacy,” an 1890 article in the *Harvard Law Review*, a respected publication read by the legal minds of the day. In a 20/20 segment on privacy, John Stossel of ABC News would later refer to the treatise as “perhaps the most influential

law review article of all time.” Warren and Brandeis proposed a basic constitutional right to privacy, a novel argument, for nowhere does the Constitution mention privacy. Their commentary on the public appetite for a gossip-mongering press is as relevant as if written in 2018.

Gossip is no longer the resource of the idle and of the vicious, but has become a trade, which is pursued with industry as well as effrontery . . . In this, as in other branches of commerce, the supply creates the demand. Each crop of unseemly gossip, thus harvested, becomes the seed of more . . . Even gossip apparently harmless, when widely and persistently circulated, is potent for evil. It both belittles and perverts. It belittles by inverting the relative importance of things, thus dwarfing the thoughts and aspirations of a people. When personal gossip attains the dignity of print, and crowds the space available for matters of real

interest to the community, what wonder that the ignorant and thoughtless mistake its relative importance. . . . No enthusiasm can flourish, no generous impulse can survive under its blighting influence.

HAWKING THE HEADLINES

At the time of the Warren and Brandeis article, the average major city had at least two competing newspapers—William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer having the biggest chains—and often three or four papers. Hawked by “newsies,” a paper earned its readership daily in the shouted, sensational headlines. So powerful were the papers that modern history books still expound the theory that Hearst and Pulitzer bullied American politicians into the Spanish-American war to provide content for their pages. The truth is more complicated, but Hearst and Pulitzer newspapers certainly fueled public support for war.

In New York City, a relatively unknown Benjamin Day lowered the

price of his *New York Sun* from a nickel to a penny—a price less than the cost of printing. Under Day’s plan, the advertiser would foot the bill, a complete flip of the economic model. Day was rewarded with a huge boost in circulation and enough eyeballs for ads to make the model work.

The “penny press” was a revolution: Sex sold. Crime sold. Celebrity sold. Poorly researched stories were legitimized by bold headlines. News staffs were stolen between papers, and syndicated works such as comic strips shifted ownership and readership regularly. One such comic strip character, the “Yellow Kid,” was so popular in New York that it ran simultaneously in Hearst’s *Journal* and Pulitzer’s *World*. The “Yellow Kid” would also provide the media era its name, “yellow journalism,” coined by *New York Press* editor Ervin Wardman. Of the sensational headlines and often faked news stories and interviews, Wardman pronounced a scathing judgment: “The ‘new journalism’ continues to think up a varied assortment of new lies.”



The Yellow Press, Louis M. Glacken, *Puck* magazine, © Oct. 12, 1910, by Keppler & Schwarzmann. Library of Congress. Depicts William Randolph Hearst tossing newspapers with headlines such as “Appeals to Passion, Venom, Sensationalism, Attacks on Honest Officials, Strife, Distorted News, Personal Grievance, and Misrepresentation.” Box contains excerpt from a letter by NYC Mayor William Jay Gaynor published in the *New York Evening Post*: “The time is at hand when these journalistic scoundrels have got to stop or get out, and I am ready now to do my share to that end. They are absolutely without souls. If decent people would refuse to look at such newspapers the whole thing would right itself at once. The journalism of New York City has been dragged to the lowest depths of degradation. The grossest rilleries and libels, instead of honest statements and fair discussion, have gone unchecked.”

MAKE WAY FOR OBJECTIVITY

With the heretofore untried notion of “objectivity,” savvy newspaper owners sensed a way out of low public favor while also generating a greater profit. Why not release the paper from its partisan past, report all sides of an issue and let the public decide? Now readers of all political persuasions would buy the same paper. Then came the boldest idea: Call it an *ethical* decision. The objective newspaper was born.

The turn of the twentieth century provided the right intellectual climate for the objectivity experiment to thrive. The “Age of Enlightenment,” accepted in Europe for years, had come to America where it was also known as the “Age of Reason.” According to Enlightenment thinkers, truth was findable, knowable, and replicable. Enlightened humans would eventually solve major problems—including war and poverty. Social justice would rule. And what better institution to lead us to that enlightenment than an objective press?

Objectivity was nuanced, but minimally required that journalists divorce facts from opinion, refuse to allow individual bias to influence what they chose to report or how they reported it. All facts and people were regarded as equal and equally worthy of coverage. Opinion would be relegated to specific pages, apart from objective news. Citizens and publishers believed that objectivity was an attainable ideal. Credibility was established. Reputations began to rise so that, in the 1960s, a journalist—Walter Cronkite of CBS News—was the “most trusted man in America.”

The Enlightenment view of truth was readily compatible with democracy. People who could reason together could arrive at some shared “truth” of how they should govern themselves. Information was essential to good government, for it allowed informed citizens to scrutinize their prospective leaders and vote

accordingly. Information provided both the “glue” that held a society together as well as the “grease” that made it all run smoothly. As long as truth was ascertainable, government could function.

The notion that an objective media plays an important role in our democratic wellbeing became so ingrained that “fairness” was written into FCC law for more than half of the twentieth century. The Fairness Doctrine mandated that radio and television stations address “all sides” of matters of public interest in a fair and balanced way. The assumption was that open, robust debate was good for democracy—even when the debate was forced on the radio or television programmer. The FCC’s Fairness Doctrine was legally tested and upheld by the Supreme Court in 1969, only to be rescinded by Congress in 2011.

At its heyday, objectivity served the social contract as well. Citizens and government needed an unfettered flow of believable information to maintain and enjoy their lives. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness were somehow more obtainable when shared truths were available. Objective journalism, and the notion that it corresponded with the truth, carried enormous promise.

Until it didn’t.

TRUTH IS RELATIVE

Twentieth-century pragmatists challenged the Enlightenment view of truth. To pragmatist philosophers, the truth depended on who was doing the investigating and how it was being investigated. Borrowing from Einstein, pragmatists argued that truth, like matter, was relative. They proposed that reality varied, based on context. No journalist could be completely objective, thus casting doubt on the “truth” they discovered. While truth lost much of its universality under pragmatism, the movement was in remarkable agreement with the American value of democratic individualism. Soon pragmatism filtered through

literature, science, and other professions. Truth was whatever worked—and your truth could be different than mine.

No sooner had the journalistic profession embraced objectivity than the culture moved to a more pragmatic notion of truth. Pragmatism fueled new challenges to objectivity: If truth is subjective, is it best reported by an impassive, objective, detached reporter? Does such a reporter exist? Does an objective medium exist?

Postmodernism took these questions to their logical extension, suggesting that the concept of truth was devoid of meaning, that context was literally everything, and that meaning could not exist apart from context. All truth was subjective, intrinsically bound with the searcher. All this directly opposed fact-based, objective journalism which assumed that facts were facts, regardless of context.

CITIZEN JOURNALISTS

Technology added another level of complexity. With the information explosion, “facts” raced around the globe before they could be verified. Today, the internet allows anyone to be a journalist through an array of new mediums (think blogs, Twitter, and Facebook Live). These developments blur the lines of journalism in a way that could never have been predicted, even two decades ago.

In a 500-channel universe, objectivity, which required massive audiences to survive, declined. “Broadcasting” for huge audiences was replaced by “narrowcasting,” where small audiences could find a niche medium that reinforced their pragmatic view of the world. Once again it became financially viable, if not outright preferable, to operate a partisan press. While objective reporting remained *one* standard, it was not the *only* standard, and the financial success of outlets such as MSNBC and FOX News indicated that a partisan press could be made profitable.

For years, the debate over which media were partisan and which media were objective was largely subjective. It is no surprise that, as America became an increasingly divided nation, we



couldn't agree on when an outlet was "playing it straight" with their viewers or readers. "Fair and balanced" claims notwithstanding, there was no yardstick to measure objectivity.

READERS' CHOICE

Twenty-first century innovations are changing media—and our understanding of how it works—in new ways. Developments in database tools are eye-opening in their ability to predict media bias. In their study "What Drives Media Slant?" economists Matthew Gentzkow of Stanford University and Jesse Shapiro of Brown University found that the political leanings of newspapers can be analyzed using word tendencies. To prove it, the two researchers entered and searched the content of 433 newspapers, looking for the frequency of 1,000 politically charged phrases in the pages of each newspaper.

As an example, during the 2011 debate over inheritance tax reform, *The Washington Post* used the words "estate tax" 13.7 times more frequently than "death tax," while the more conservative *Washington Times* used the two descriptors equally. Other phrases like "war on terrorism" and "universal health care" were studied as well.

The findings of Gentzkow and Shapiro, reported initially in economics journals like *Econometrica*, got widespread attention in *Everybody Lies: Big Data, New Data, and What the Internet Can Tell Us about Who We Are* by former Google analytics scientist Seth Stephens-Davidowitz (HarperCollins, 2017). Based on their research, Gentzkow and Shapiro named the *Philadelphia Daily News* the most liberal newspaper in America and the *Billings Gazette* the least liberal. Using zip code analysis of community voting patterns and their findings on word choice, the researchers showed that "right-wing newspapers circulate relatively more in zip codes with a higher proportion of Republicans . . . Left-wing newspapers show the opposite pattern."



LEFT: Newsies in Bank Alley waiting for afternoon papers, Syracuse, NY, Feb. 1910. RIGHT: Charlie Scott, 9 years old, is a truant newsboy. Said: "I dunno where school is." Oklahoma City, March 15, 1917. Photos by Lewis W. Hine for National Child Labor Committee. Library of Congress



Gentzkow and Shapiro further found that the correlation between word choice and the political leanings of ownership proved to be statistically insignificant. What *did* correlate significantly were the political leanings of readers: "Readers have an economically significant preference for like-minded news."

This new and compelling granular-level research disputes the long-held assumption that political leanings in the media come from the bias of ownership. Instead, it places the presence of biased language squarely on the shoulders of the consumer who prefers it that way. The study disposes the myth of modern day successors to Pulitzer and Hearst (such as Rupert Murdoch) imposing their will on news pages. Instead, it is readers who steer media bias as they seek a medium that "tells it like it is" and remain faithful to that choice—and media owners reap the profits of those choices.

With money to be made in partisanship, objectivity takes a walk. We've come full circle. The two economists conclude: "There is no grand conspiracy. There is just capitalism."

ANGLING FOR AUDIENCE

Was the notion of objective journalism ever a noble one? Or was it always market-driven? Will it ever return? Like other questions about truth, the answer is not simple. Objectivity certainly has a noble ring and has undoubtedly advanced democracy. But when the entire history

of American journalism is examined, the experiment with objectivity lasted for only a few decades and only when it made economic sense. Otherwise, as we have done since our nation's founding, most of us seek confirmation for and reassurance of our existing beliefs in the media we choose. Media owners, ever aware of which way the political winds blow, supply partisan content when it is profitable and objective content when the market requires that.

Is it "fake news"? That depends on the angle from which you view it.

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EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "U.S. Diplomacy and Yellow Journalism, 1895-1898," Office of the Historian, U.S. Dept. of State. Discusses the origins of yellow journalism and dueling headlines between the *New York Journal* and the *New York World* that fueled anti-Spanish sentiments and public support for the Spanish-American war.
- "The Yellow Kid on the Paper Stage." Online exhibit compiled by Mary Wood, University of Virginia, detailing the history, political themes, and journalistic era of the Yellow Kid character that helped establish comic pages in the newspaper industry.



Dancing at the Bal Masqué, August Willem van Voorden, c. 1910. [PD] Wikimedia Commons

LIFE IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA



Truth has become a matter of convenience.

RALPH KEYES

We live in an era in which borders between truth and lies, honesty and dishonesty, fiction and nonfiction have blurred. Deceiving others has become both a challenge and a game. There is much incentive and little penalty for improving the storyline of our lives. This practice has become so common that we hardly even consider it “dishonest.”

Ours is the post-truth era. Standards of honesty have not only changed, they have *transformed*. At one time we had truth and lies. Now we have truth, lies, and the form of dissembling I call “post-truth”—statements that aren’t actually true but that the teller considers too benign to call lies.

Bill Clinton personified the post-truth era (a phrase first used in a 1992 *Nation* essay by Steve Tesich). Al Gore was a good backup singer. George W. Bush carried on the tradition. Donald Trump is its exemplar. But we can’t assess dissembling by prominent public figures in a vacuum. They trim the truth in a context of trends that have created an atmosphere of deception-tolerance.

THE TRUTH IMPROVED

In the Clinton-Trump era we’re so accustomed to being deceived that we forget that as recently as the early 1970s we could still get outraged about Richard Nixon’s many deceptions. Jimmy Carter got elected in part because he promised *not* to

tell us lies. In the years of Reagan, then Clinton, Bush, and now Trump, outrage about presidential dishonesty has given way to cynicism: *They're all liars.*

It's probably safe to say that honesty is on the ropes in contemporary American society. The gap between truth and lies has narrowed. Choosing which to tell becomes largely a matter of convenience. One survey found that 95% of college students polled said they would make at least one false statement to get a job. Another pollster found that 91% of a sample of 2000 subjects admitted they told lies on a regular basis. This pollster concluded that lying had become a cultural trait in America. "That hasn't really been understood around the world," he said. "Americans lie about everything—and usually for no good reason."

Of course, there have always been those who believed lying is overrated as an ethical lapse. "Without lies" said author Anatole France, "humanity would perish of despair and boredom." Nonetheless, in nearly all cultures for most of time, lies have been considered the antithesis of truth and best not told. Society would collapse if lying became the norm.

This is why, rather than simply accept dishonesty as a way of life, we manipulate notions of truth. We say we're "economical with the truth," we "massage" truthfulness, we "sweeten it," we tell "the truth improved" or engage in "truthful hyperbole," Donald Trump's favorite rationale for being dishonest. No matter how casual dishonesty has become, those who engage in it don't want to consider themselves liars. That sounds so *judgmental*. As a result, we say we "misspoke" or "exercised poor judgment." The term "deceive" gives way to "spin." At worst, saying "I wasn't truthful" sounds better than "I lied." Nor would we want to accuse others of lying. We say they're "in denial."

LITTLE "LIFE LIES"

We're probably no more prone to make things up than our ancestors were, just better able to get away with it. The size, complexity, and mobility of postwar society facilitate artifice. With less face-to-face contact among those who know each other well enough to tell when they're lying, incentives to be honest dwindle.

Nowhere is this more true than in cyberspace. Here, the urge to dissemble is not just tolerated but celebrated. When interacting with those whom

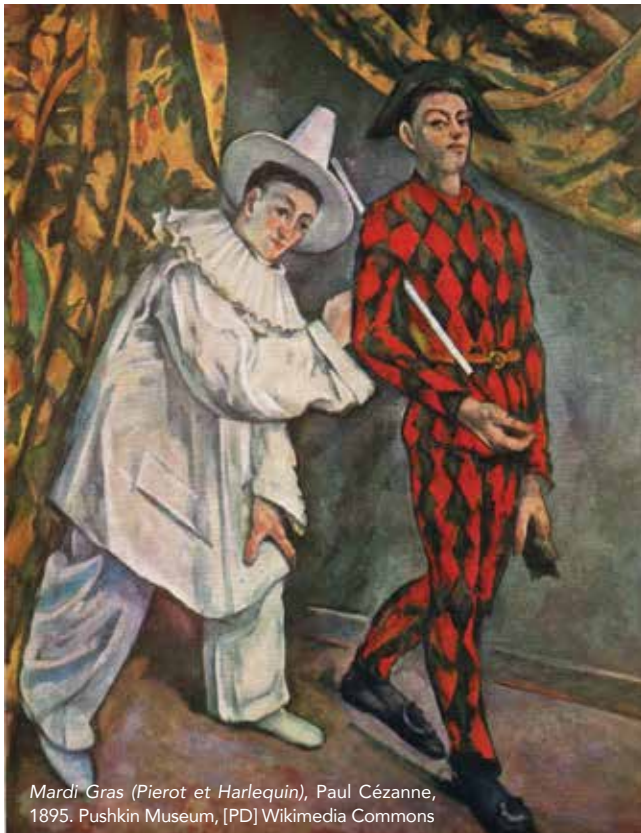
we don't know and can't even see, there is great temptation to convey whatever is convenient—true or false. Deception is even encouraged online, as a safety measure or simply because it's part of the fun. Cybercitizens list the freedom to be someone they're not as a key appeal of this electronic masked ball. The millions who don and doff identities like baseball caps get in the habit of being *poseurs*.

Offline, this reinforces the common practice of buffing up one's identity with apocrypha about our age, our weight, our education, even how tall we are. Ibsen called these "life lies," unprovoked deceptions designed to bolster the self. With life lies we dress up in psychic outfits beyond our means. In time we may forget they aren't true. The 200 game we bowled in high school creeps upward to 250. A retort we wish we'd made now is one we did. A degree we wish we'd earned shows up on our resume.

THE TRUTH EMBELLISHED

Personnel officers take it for granted that up to half the vitas they read are padded, and as many as a quarter include gross misinformation. They've learned to be skeptical about everything, from degrees earned through jobs held to birth dates. Executive recruiter Jude Werra of Milwaukee compiles a semiannual *Liars Index*®. In the 300 or so resumes Werra reviews every year for top management positions, the proportion that include serious misrepresentation—usually about education credentials—has steadily risen from about 13% in the mid-1990s to over 20%.

Educational credentials are easy to check, but if a job applicant lies about those, what might he or she be faking that's harder to verify? Wayland Clifton, the one-time police chief of Gainesville, Florida, spent years boasting about playing football for the legendary coach Bear Bryant at the University of Alabama. When Clifton ran for county sheriff, reporters couldn't verify this claim. To help them out, Clifton produced a 1960 clipping from *The Birmingham News*. According to the article, during an October 29 game against Mississippi State, "Buster" Clifton made nine tackles, recovered a fumble, and ran an intercepted pass back 80 yards. The clipping—complete with a picture of Clifton in his Alabama uniform (number 43)—reported that he was named Southeastern Conference defensive player of the week for these heroics. The clipping was a fake. Not that it did him much harm. A year later Wayland Clifton was one of five finalists to become police chief of Dallas.



Mardi Gras (Pierot et Harlequin), Paul Cézanne, 1895. Pushkin Museum, [PD] Wikimedia Commons

Clifton is one of the life-lying elite I call *imposeurs*. Imposeurs go beyond petty resume touch-ups into elaborate ID makeovers. Unlike impostors, they retain their basic identity but alter key elements. These psychic transformations can involve anything from medals won to touchdowns run. The ranks of imposeurs include Oracle CEO Larry Ellison, among the world's richest men, who claims graduate degrees he never earned; Time-Warner's Steve Ross, who convinced *The New York Times* that he'd once played football for the Cleveland Browns; and Chicago Judge Michael O'Brien who had not one but two Congressional Medals of Honor cast on his own behalf.

My tally of hundreds of such imposeurs includes four judges, three police chiefs, any number of college professors, countless politicians, the head of Houston's transportation authority, and one ambassador to Switzerland, the late Larry Lawrence whose corpse was dug up from Arlington National Cemetery when it turned out he'd invented a story about being wounded while serving in the Merchant Marine during World War II. If ever imposeurship was wish fulfillment it is on the field of combat. In recent years several thousand fake veterans have been called to account by real ones.

TRUTH IS RELATIVE

Postmodernism is the ship on which this development sails. The core postmodern concept is that there's no such

This is the post-truth credo:
If your intentions are good,
accuracy is beside the point.

thing as objective truth; only what we say is true. This shifts the emphasis of intellectual thought from *facts* to *meaning*. Many academics concluded that because the fanciful autobiography of Nobel Prize-winning Guatemalan activist Rigoberta Menchu helped improve our understanding of oppression, who were we to call it dishonest? After columnist Patricia Smith was fired from *The Boston Globe* for fabricating material, a Boston University professor who used her writing in his class argued that Smith's "fidelity to the truth of the human condition . . . never wavered."

Even though such postmodern thinking raises important questions about the nature of truth, what's relevant to intellectual discourse doesn't always travel well into daily life. Unfortunately, that's exactly where it's gone. As one observer of postmodern relativism recently wrote, "It is a creeping assumption at the start of a new millennium that there are things more important than truth."

This is the post-truth credo: If your intentions are good, accuracy is beside the point.

If anything, literal truth is considered a poorer, more meager means of communication than creative falsehood. Embellished information can be true in spirit; truer than truth. Edmund Morris called his fictionalized depiction of Ronald Reagan's life "an advance in biographical honesty." This is intellectually fashionable doublethink. It puts a New Age spin on the old Marxist conviction that facts can be altered for a greater good, and that rigid notions of accuracy are a relic of bourgeois morality.

HONESTY AND COMMUNITY

How did we get to this moral impasse? The obvious cause of honesty's decline is an erosion of ethical standards. From this perspective, America's moral compasses have broken down: *Our sense of right and wrong has taken a vacation. Religious faith has been replaced by nihilism.*

Nonsense.

There is no evidence that early Americans were more moral than their descendants, let alone more religious. This country never enjoyed an ethical golden age. It's doubtful that former-day



In nearly all cultures for most of time, lies have been considered the antithesis of truth and best not told. Society would collapse if lying became the norm.

Americans—the ones who broke treaties with Native Americans, enslaved Africans, and engaged in rapacious capitalism—were any more “moral” than current ones.

The rise of deceit has less to do with ethical decline than with the breakdown of community. There was a time when it was harder to deceive others and the consequences greater if one got caught. Those who feel closely tied to each other, and who share common values, are more hesitant to dissemble. Neighbors keep each other honest. In small communities, much gets conveyed between the lines. No lie detector can match people who are well acquainted. Consciously or unconsciously they register the throbbing carotid, the blinking eyes, or drumming fingertips of a dissembler. Friends and neighbors are organic polygraphs.

ALTERNATE REALITIES

There is a widespread, prevalent sense that we're all being deceived, routinely, and that much of what others tell us can't be trusted. From potential mates to prospective employees, we no longer feel sure whom exactly we're dealing with.

Lawyers have always considered truth to be an ambiguous concept. When we hear a term such as “legally accurate,” we're reminded that there's not just honesty as the rest of us understand that term but honesty as conceived by the law. In the legal sense, a lie that isn't told under oath is no lie at all. In an adversarial

system of justice, a lawyer's first loyalty is to the client, not the truth. Lawyers are second only to postmodern philosophers in accepting that there are many ways to perceive truthfulness. What a lay person might consider a lie, a lawyer might see as simply an “alternative version of reality.” If we wonder why notions of truth and falsehood have become more vague, more relative, and more flexible, our legal system (and the perspective that truth and lies are fungible) is an important influence to consider.

No one doubts that politicians routinely blow smoke in our faces. Research by Colgate psychology professor Caroline Keating has even found a connection between an ability to lead and an ability to lie (among men, anyway). With its penchant for politicians who perform well, TV gives the nod to this type of candidate. Does it matter? One politician's blarney can be more entertaining than another's accurate account, and no harm done. But look again. If a dissembling candidate beats one who's told the truth, was the election fair? And when politicians doctor their background, as so many have, what else might they lie about?

Nowhere is “truth” more ambiguous than in the entertainment industry, where a combustible mixture of ambitious people pursue the art of artifice. Movie studios are settings in which the success of one's work is ultimately measured by the quality of its deception. A common



joke in Hollywood is: “Hello, he lied.” There, lies are told to gain advantage, because you don't like somebody, or simply because you think you can get away with it and find lying more interesting than telling the truth. Over time this attitude has filtered into a broader society fascinated by celebrities.

SUSPICIOUS MINDS

In the absence of actual knowledge about each other, we depend on outer symbols to assess those we meet: designer labels, shoe style, firm handshakes, steady eye contact. These symbols are easy to manipulate. A former KGB agent said one of the first things they learned in spy school was how to look firmly in the eyes of those they were deceiving. When Bill Clinton told clergyman Robert Schuller that he hadn't had sex with Monica Lewinsky, Rev. Schuller later recalled that “he did it with such passion, and with his eyes locked on me.”

The assumption that those with whom we're dealing are as likely to be lying as telling the truth drastically alters

the flavor of social discourse. In the suspicious society, background-checking is a growth industry and “Google” has become a verb. Suitors and others assiduously Google each other to find out what court cases they’ve been involved in, who else they might have been married to, if they’re at all who they said they were. Society pays a price for this level of suspicion.

The damage that deceit does to social interactions isn’t necessarily direct. According to one study, recipients of lies like the other person less, even when they don’t realize that person is being dishonest. Another study found that subjects considered interactions in which lies were deliberately told “less pleasant and less intimate” than ones in which lies weren’t told. Employees who work for organizations they perceive as honest have higher morale than those who suspect their employer is being deceptive.

Integrity, in other words, has market value.

IN TRUTH WE TRUST

There is a pragmatic case for telling the truth, one based more on social imperatives than morality, one less concerned about questions such as “What is truth?” or “Is lying always bad?” than “How can we live together with some semblance of trust?”

Virtue may be its own reward, but there are other, more practical reasons to avoid lying. The confidence engendered in a society whose members are generally honest with each other is the basis not only of political stability but economic prosperity. Francis Fukuyama has devoted an entire book to the theme that only societies with a high level of trust can enjoy the benefits of social capital, civility, and a free market economy. The more massive society gets, the more true this is.

As direct contact with others declines and technology serves as a go-between, we need *more* emphasis on honesty, not less. Large, complex societies like ours are actually more dependent on truth-telling than small, simple ones. The most important issue is not honesty per se but honesty’s most important product: *trust*.

In our contemporary climate of post-truthfulness, alas, our attitude toward honesty has grown casual. The burden of proof is as much on telling the truth as telling a lie. We need to shift it back, make truth-telling the default if

not the certainty. Some won’t swallow so much as a Tylenol without first asking, “Is this really necessary?” The same criterion should be applied to deception.

Philosopher Sissela Bok thinks any lie should be given “negative weight” when evaluating whether to let it leave one’s mouth. Unlike truth-telling, which almost never needs justification, lies should only be told when there’s a compelling reason to do so. “Mild as this initial stipulation sounds,” Bok writes in her classic book *Lying* (Vintage Books, 1989, 1999), “it would, if taken seriously, eliminate a great many lies told out of carelessness or habit or unexamined good intentions.”

Establishing a moral standard does not assume that all will always live up to this standard, or that whoever doesn’t should be punished. Rather, in the case of honesty, it means reaffirming that lying is wrong, and we know it’s wrong, even though it can sometimes be a lesser evil. This is a judgmental position, to be sure. But perhaps we *need* more judgment on this issue.

One reason we’ve lost our way in the ethical woods is that we’ve adopted the stance in which no one is held accountable for dishonesty. Casual duplicity picks away at our social fabric. Society would crumble if we assumed others were as likely to lie as tell the truth. We are perilously close to that point.

RALPH KEYES has authored sixteen books, including *The Post-Truth Era*, cited by *Oxford Dictionaries* as a key source of their 2016 Word of the Year: “post-truth.” He is completing a forthcoming book for Oxford University Press on *The Hidden History of Coined Words*.

EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- “The Truth about Lying,” a collection of six TED Talk videos on why we lie (to others and ourselves), why we believe lies, and how to spot a liar. ted.com
- “How Politicians Have Adapted for a Post-Truth Reality,” Zahira Jaser, *Newsweek*, Nov. 28, 2016. Jaser notes that modern leaders “adapt their style to different contexts” and followers are influenced by “subjective emotions and beliefs, rather than by objective facts.” newsweek.com
- “Martín Espada Reads ‘Blessed Be The Truth-Tellers,’” *Moyers & Company*, Feb. 26, 2013. A poem on childhood and discovering the truth about truth. billmoyers.com



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All the dictators up to now have had to work hard at suppressing the truth. We, by our actions, are saying that this is no longer necessary, that we have acquired a spiritual mechanism that can denude truth of any significance. In a very fundamental way we, as a free people, have freely decided that we want to live in some post-truth world.—Steve Tesich, “A Government of Lies,” *The Nation*, Jan. 1992.





History as we know it . . .
The history we don't know.

Discovery, hegemony:
Civilize "savages";
Shackle slaves.
Whitewashed history.

Colonization, conquest:
Protect property;
Manifest destiny.
Eurocentric history.

Victors, vanquished:
Declare winners;
Stifle strife.
Anodyne history.

Rights, realities:
Proclaim equality;
Deny dignity.
Asymmetrical history.

Foundational facts, inconvenient truths:
Question authority;
Pressure power.
Unvarnished history.

Fundamental freedom, real justice:
Celebrate struggles;
Mark movements.
Social history.

Open wounds, lasting pain:
Strategize solutions;
Reconcile differences.
Healing history.

New voices, untold stories
Live legacy;
Preserve past.
People's history.

History as we know it . . .
The history we don't know.

Hidden History


HANNIBAL B. JOHNSON

HANNIBAL B. JOHNSON, a Harvard Law School graduate, is an attorney, author, and consultant specializing in diversity, inclusion, and competence issues and nonprofit governance. His books include: *Images of America: Tulsa's Historic Greenwood District*; *Apartheid in Indian Country?: Seeing Red over Black Disenfranchisement*; and *IncogNegro: Poetic Reflections on Race & Diversity in America*. Johnson's play, *Big Mama Speaks—A Tulsa Race Riot Survivor's Story*, has been performed at the Tulsa Performing Arts Center, Philbrook Museum of Art, and was selected for the 2011 National Black Theatre Festival in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

FAKE NEWS

How Did We Get Here?

SHAD SATTERTHWAITE



In a tweet on Dec. 10, 2016, Donald Trump used the term “fake news” for the first time (*The Washington Post*, Jan. 3, 2018). At his first post-election news conference, President-elect Trump pointed to particular journalists to take their questions, but refused questions from CNN reporter Jim Acosta, saying, “Not you. Your organization’s terrible. . . I’m not going to give you a question. You are fake news” (CNBC, Jan. 11, 2017). Photo by Gage Skidmore: Presidential candidate Donald Trump at a campaign rally, Phoenix, AZ, Oct. 29, 2017 (CC BY-SA-3.0)

ON the heels of Vietnam and Watergate, the public had a significant level of trust in the media. The high watermark was 1976 when Gallop Poll results indicated that 72% of Americans trusted the news. During the 2016 election cycle that figure dropped to an all-time low of 32%. Now, two-thirds of Americans no longer trust the news media.

While the term *fake news* is not new, it gained notoriety during the 2016 election. Subsequently, another term, *alternative facts*, entered the political vocabulary. Walter Cronkite’s famous signoff, “That’s the way it is,” would not

hold up by contemporary standards. Today’s viewing audience is more skeptical of the media than ever before.

EARLY BRUSHES WITH FAKE NEWS

Newspaper comic strips became popular in the late nineteenth century with the introduction of color printing presses. *Hogan’s Alley* starred a boy in a yellow nightshirt known as the Yellow Kid. Joseph Pulitzer’s *New York World* and William Randolph Hearst’s *New York Journal* both featured the Yellow Kid in a ratcheted attempt to outdo the other, a duel in sensational headlines and colorful, sometimes spurious content that gave

rise to the term *yellow journalism*. The term is still used pejoratively to describe reporting that is less than ethical.

Sensationalism and attempts to scoop the competition often skip fact-checking a story and the result is an unintentional, embarrassing form of fake news. Case in point: In spring 1897, Hearst hired Mark Twain to cover Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee. While Twain was in London, the rival *New York Herald* reported he was “grievously ill and possibly dying.” The following day, Hearst’s *New York Journal* published the caption “Mark Twain Amused,” quoting Twain: “The report of my death was an exaggeration.”



The *Journal* enjoyed elbowing its competition who tried to capitalize on being the first to report what would have been a notable story.

Newspapers were the staple source for news throughout American history, but with twentieth-century advances in radio technology, the public turned to a new medium for information and entertainment. In an early example of fake news, Orson Welles attempted to meld “breaking news” and entertainment in a now-famous radio adaptation of H.G. Wells’s *The War of the Worlds*. On October 30, 1938, Welles broadcast his *Mercury Theatre on the Air* using simulated news interruptions for effect. Since it sounded like a news bulletin interrupting scheduled programming, listeners who tuned in after the introduction mistook the drama for actual unfolding events. The program purportedly caused panic among some who feared an actual Martian invasion.

MONETIZING THE NEWS

In the early days of television, news programming was viewed as a public service. Revenue and profits came through paid advertising during sitcoms, game shows, and variety broadcasts; advertisers were *not* clamoring to sponsor news broadcasts. News shows simply did not attract ratings. That all changed when *60 Minutes* aired as a completely revamped news format in 1968. In his book *Breaking the News* (Vintage Books, 1997), James Fallows notes that *60 Minutes* fundamentally changed TV journalism for one simple reason—it made money. This “news magazine,” as it billed itself, broadcast news stories in a way that attracted viewers’ attention and proved to networks that news programming could generate revenue.

Others recognized the profitability of news and looked for ways to capitalize on it. Ted Turner launched CNN on June 1, 1980. The idea of having a news-only channel was novel enough, but having it on around the clock would lead to significant changes in news presentation. It contributed to a 24-hour news cycle and viewers’ voracious appetite for fresh stories and breaking news—and it was profitable.

Time Warner eventually acquired Turner Broadcasting System, Inc. in a \$7.5 billion merger. For over sixteen years, CNN enjoyed sole supremacy as the only cable news network on a national scale. That changed when MSNBC

and FOX News came on the scene in 1996, and the competitive race for ratings in round-the-clock coverage became frenzied. Reminiscent of the past, it fueled a competition to go after the most salacious and sensational stories.

TRUTH AND CONSEQUENCES

The rush for ratings has driven mainstream news outlets to broadcast stories they otherwise would have shunned. Sensational stories, often reserved for tabloids, have increasingly made their way into conventional media. Stories on scandal or the private lives of public figures have become prominent fixtures in the news.

Nowhere is the burden of keeping an audience felt more keenly than in the print media. While many outlets have tried to adapt to the 24-hour news cycle by adding online versions of print content, many were unable to keep up and closed their doors.

Sales and advertising are all-important to print media and a larger readership means more profits. Print media outlets have always courted talented writers, hoping that good articles will equate to wider circulation. The pressure to perform is felt by journalists who go to great lengths to get a good story.

One such journalist was Stephen Glass, a rising star at *New Republic* magazine. Glass was a gifted writer with a knack for getting stories that no one else could. His articles were entertaining and earned him a high profile. He published in *Rolling Stone*, *Harper’s Magazine*, and *The New York Times Magazine*. He appeared as a commentator on C-SPAN and was seen as one of the most sought-after journalists in Washington in the late 1990s.

There was just one problem—he was fabricating some of his stories.

Glass allowed the rush of notoriety to detract him from the truth. He went to great extremes to deceive his editor and fact-checkers at *New Republic*. His cover was blown when a particular story caught the attention of a reporter at *Forbes*. The so-called facts of Glass’s story didn’t add up and the editor of *New Republic* was called on it. An investigation ensued and the magazine determined that more than half of Glass’s stories contained fabricated material or were completely made up.



In remarks at a retirement ceremony for Sen. Harry M. Reid on Dec. 8, 2016, Hillary Clinton said:

Let me just mention briefly one threat in particular that should concern all Americans—Democrats, Republicans, and independents alike, especially those who serve in our Congress: the epidemic of malicious fake news and false propaganda that flooded social media over the past year. It's now clear that so-called fake news can have real-world consequences. This isn't about politics or partisanship. Lives are at risk—lives of ordinary people just trying to go about their days, to do their jobs, contribute to their communities. It's a danger that must be addressed and addressed quickly. . . . It's imperative that leaders in both the private sector and the public sector step up to protect our democracy and innocent lives.

(*The Washington Post*, Jan. 3, 2018). Photo by Gage Skidmore: Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at a campaign rally in Phoenix, Arizona, March 21, 2016 (CC BY-SA-3.0)



OKLAHOMA HUMANITIES

Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma is a statewide scholar-led book club offered by OH, and participants heartily endorse it: 85% learned about the human experience through reading and discussing literature; 76% gained awareness of a new perspective; 84% increased their ability to be open-minded. Visit okhumanities.org to learn more and to find a series near you.

THE INTERNET: ANYTHING GOES

As newspapers and magazines struggled and cable news channels expanded, the internet rapidly became a popular source for information, coinciding with the development of affordable personal computers. More and more Americans became connected to the web. Reputable news outlets tapped into this new media to supplement coverage, hoping of take advantage of its potential to attract more advertising. Others outside the traditional news business discovered that the internet offered an easy platform to circulate stories and commentary to a larger audience. Anyone could become a journalist.

Enter Matt Drudge. Drudge was working odd jobs in Hollywood in the early 1990s when he started an email subscription service to relay the latest celebrity gossip. In 1995 he began publishing online, adding Washington political scandals to the Hollywood gossip. The *Drudge Report* was the first source to break the news that Jack Kemp would be Bob Dole's running mate in the 1996 presidential election. In 1998, the *Drudge Report* broke an unpublished *Newsweek* story about Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton. Matt Drudge's name became renowned in political circles and today his website receives around three million hits a day.

The internet was a new platform to distribute hard news—and quickly generated an audience for commentary and fake news. Since it is largely unregulated, individuals and organizations can put out any type of material at will. In many cases that includes intentionally false information. Internet sites that look like legitimate news organizations crank out false stories ranging from the humorous to the subversive. The purveyor of false news can

operate under a veil of secrecy, making it hard to detect story sources or their validity.

TRUMPIAN HYPERBOLE

Donald Trump gained national prominence when his book *Trump: The Art of the Deal* was published in 1987. The book was number one on *The New York Times* Best Seller list for thirteen weeks and remained on the list for almost a year. Throughout the 2016 presidential campaign, candidate Trump touted the book and said as president he would make the best deals for the country.

Tony Schwartz, who worked with Trump to ghostwrite the book, spent eighteen months following Trump around to get a feel for the New York businessman's style and mannerisms. Schwartz noticed Trump's frequent bold (not always truthful) exaggerations. Schwartz often heard others' accounts that differed from Trump's version of the same story. To explain the disconnect, Schwartz came up with the term *truthful hyperbole*. Speaking in Trump's voice he penned:

The final key to the way I promote is bravado. I play to people's fantasies. People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular. I call it truthful hyperbole. It's an innocent form of exaggeration—and a very effective form of promotion.

While nonsensical, *truthful hyperbole* was a catchy phrase that seemed to explain how Trump operates. Schwartz claimed that Trump



Fake news is like dry water. Anybody here ever seen dry water? No. There's no such thing. Water is wet. News is not fake.—Journalist Jerry Jacob, quoted in *Springfield New-Leader*, Aug. 11, 2017

loved the term. Something always has to be the biggest, greatest, the most spectacular and it worked well for Trump on the campaign trail. Not long after his inauguration, however, that bravado from the new administration set off an early bout with the press.

In his first briefing, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer contended that the media had distorted the number of attendees at the president's inauguration on January 20, 2017. Spicer reported that Trump's inauguration attracted more people than any previous president. When Spicer's assertion was disputed with aerial photographs and ridership numbers from the D.C. Metro, the Trump team went on the defensive. Campaign consultant and White House counselor Kellyanne Conway defended Spicer the following day on NBC's *Meet the Press*. Conway claimed that Spicer was using "alternative facts." Moderator Chuck Todd quickly jumped in: "Alternative facts? Alternative facts are not facts. They're falsehoods." The exchange between Conway and Todd sparked accusatory and defensive responses throughout the media.

Since then, use of the term *alternative facts* is common. Though critics refer to it as "Orwellian," comedians love it. TIME magazine created a "Facts vs. Alternative Facts" section to fact-check statements made by the president and other public officials.

POST-TRUTH: STATE OF OUR TIME

It may not be surprising that *post-truth* beat out *alt-right* and *Brexiteer* as Oxford Dictionaries' 2016 Word of the Year. Selected in the wake of the presidential election in the United States, the word seemed appropriate given the tenor of the campaign and the fake news associated with it. Fake

news stories garnered attention from both parties during the 2016 elections. Pizzagate, a conspiracy theory claiming that a pizza restaurant served as cover for a child sex ring involving prominent Democrats, was based on Clinton campaign manager John Podesta's hacked emails. The conspiracy claimed these emails (which made their way to WikiLeaks) contained coded messages propagating pedophilia. Another story involved a Twitter user who claimed he attended a Trump rally in Manhattan and witnessed thousands chanting, "We hate Muslims, we hate blacks, we want our great country back." The post caused a stir, though there was no evidence to substantiate the purported account. Pizzagate, the Trump Rally Chant, and many stories like them were completely false, but spread like wildfire through social media. Casper Grathwohl, President of Oxford Dictionaries, noted that with "social media as a news source and a growing distrust of facts offered up by the establishment, *post-truth* as a concept has been finding its linguistic footing for some time."

Post-truth implies that we are living in an age where the concept of truth is no longer relevant. While it may be too soon to see if this is the case, Grathwohl postulated, "Given that usage of the term hasn't shown any signs of slowing down, I wouldn't be surprised if *post-truth* becomes one of the defining words of our time."

SHAD SATTERTHWAITE is Associate Dean of the College of Professional and Continuing Studies at the University of Oklahoma. He and his wife, Valerie, are the parents of three children with two wonderful in-law children, and a new grandson.



(Excerpt from *Meet the Press* with Chuck Todd, NBC News, Jan. 22, 2017)

CHUCK TODD: (voiceover introduction) Late in the day on his first full day in the job, the new press secretary, Sean Spicer, gathered reporters, took no questions and then flatly accused the media of lying, intentionally lying to understate the size of Mr. Trump's inaugural crowd.

SEAN SPICER: (video clip, speaking to reporters) This was the largest audience to ever witness an inauguration—period—both in person and around the globe.

CHUCK TODD: And joining me now is the counselor to President Trump, Kellyanne Conway. . . . Let me begin with this question[:] . . . I'm curious why President Trump chose yesterday to send out his press secretary to essentially litigate a provable falsehood when it comes to a small and petty thing like inaugural crowd size. . . .

KELLYANNE CONWAY: I don't think ultimately presidents are judged by crowd sizes at their inauguration. I think they're judged by their accomplishments. . . . Sean Spicer, our press secretary, gave alternative facts. . . .

CHUCK TODD: Look, alternative facts are not facts. They're falsehoods. . . .

KELLYANNE CONWAY: There's no way to really quantify crowds. We all know that. . . . The way that you just laughed at me is actually symbolic of the way, very representative of the way we're treated by the press. I'll just ignore it. I'm bigger than that. *Photo by Gage Skidmore: Kellyanne Conway speaking at Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), National Harbor, MD, Feb. 23, 2017 (CC BY-SA-3.0)*



"Just the Facts, Ma'am"

Sleuthing for real news
in a post-truth world

CHRISTOPHER KELLER

CLAIM: Dragnet's Sgt. Joe Friday frequently implored female informants to provide "just the facts, ma'am."

STATUS: FALSE. Jack Webb's Joe Friday character typically stated, "All we want are the facts, ma'am."—Snopes.com

News—in all its forms—is constructed.

An event or occurrence is observed or researched and then reported to us. Social media and the almost universal adoption of networked smart devices have created a world where anyone with a keyboard and internet access may claim to be a journalist. Old-school gatekeepers of news information are being joined (or replaced) by an army of citizen reporters who are writing, recording, editing, and publishing with varying levels of expertise and ethics. This tech-driven, always-live, on-demand delivery of news is both exhilarating and perilous. Never in human history has so much information been available to so many, so quickly, and with such breadth.

The immediacy and sheer volume of information has had consequences. Simply put, we are overwhelmed.

Everywhere there is a story, show, site, or broadcast vying for attention. And if we're trying to stay informed—trying to actually pay attention—finding content that is meaningful and relevant is increasingly difficult. We no longer have an issue with access to information; now the issue is recognizing *good* information.

Content creators are often less concerned with getting their story right than with just getting it out. Too, there are spaces where information is purposefully exaggerated or flat-out false. Call it "truthiness," "post-truth," or "fake news"—whatever the moniker, these are lies clad in the sheep's clothing of truth-based media.

Propagation of fake news is especially insidious in that it mimics traditional media on which we have culturally relied to make democratic decisions. With old radio shows, like Paul Harvey's, careful listeners could tell when the news ended and the commercial began. Today's fake sites, stories, and tweets use the vernacular, design, and format of traditional news against us. Frequently it seems impossible to distinguish truth from fabrication. Following are a few tactics to help you cross-examine conflicting news and, in the process, become media savvy.

WHAT IS (AND ISN'T) FAKE NEWS

64% U.S. ADULTS WHO SAY FABRICATED NEWS CAUSES CONFUSION ABOUT CURRENT EVENTS
(pewresearch.org)

For a majority of people, fake news is having a significant impact on their ability to understand the news. Fake news is essentially bad information—either made up entirely or crafted around a grain of truth. It can easily deceive when presented in a traditional news-media format and disseminated as current, noteworthy content. The term “fake news” has been used by President Donald Trump and others to discredit a story, source, or organization, even when facts are legitimate.

Fake news can take many forms:

- **Spinning the facts**, such as Kellyanne Conway's use of the term alternate facts. Good public relations strategy relies on credibility, transparency, and truth. “Spinning the facts” takes credible information and conflates it or presents it through an overtly biased lens to support an agenda.
- **Intentional fake news**, like the deceptive, distorted news stories posted by Russian bloggers during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Fake news can be a form of political propaganda intended to persuade an audience and is easily disguised as coming from a professional news site replete with made-up sources and doctored images.
- **Unintentional fake news**, which can occur when no one has checked for facts and original sourcing before passing along a news-related rumor to friends and family on social media.
- **Tactical accusations of fake news** can be a purposeful redirection of attention by implying that news reports are incorrect or biased—for instance when a celebrity calls into question sourcing or content to discredit unflattering media coverage. Calling credible journalism “fake news” seeks to undermine the authenticity of information.



TOP 5 FAKE NEWS STORIES

(By number of Facebook shares, reactions, and comments as compiled by BuzzFeed.com)

During the Final Three Months of 2016 Presidential Election

- 906,000** “Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement” (*Ending the Fed*)
- 789,000** “WikiLeaks Confirms Hillary Sold Weapons to ISIS . . . Then Drops Another Bombshell! Breaking News” (*The Political Insider*)
- 754,000** “It’s Over: Hillary’s ISIS Email Just Leaked & It’s Worse Than Anyone Could Have Imagined” (*Ending the Fed*)
- 701,000** “Just Read the Law: Hillary is Disqualified From Holding Any Federal Office” (*Ending the Fed*)
- 567,000** “FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide” (*Denver Guardian*)

LOOK FOR ETHICS

In a tumultuous political climate, the need for ethical journalism is critical. The Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) is a national organization dedicated to high ethical standards of journalism. SPJ “promotes the free flow of information vital to a well-informed citizenry” and advocates for protection of “First Amendment guarantees of freedom of speech and press.” When consuming media content, look for journalists that practice the four principles SPJ declares are foundational to ethical journalism:

- **Seek truth and report it:** Ethical journalism should be accurate and fair. Journalists should be honest and courageous in gathering, reporting, and interpreting information.
- **Minimize harm:** Ethical journalism treats sources, subjects, colleagues, and members of the public as human beings deserving of respect.
- **Act independently:** The highest and primary obligation of ethical journalism is to serve the public. Journalists should avoid conflicts of interest, real or perceived.
- **Be accountable and transparent:** Ethical journalism means taking responsibility for one’s work and explaining one’s decisions to the public. (adapted from spj.org)



137

**Number of active
fact-checking
services and
organizations
worldwide in 2017,
up from 114 in 2016**

(Duke University, reporterslab.org)

CHECK THE FACTS

Smart news consumers question details, evaluate sources, and double-check what is presented as hard facts. Skepticism, reading a wide variety of sources, and using tools to test accountability are wise behaviors for those who aspire to become informed citizens.

- Be wary of superlative adjectives and adverbs (i.e., latest, best, perfect, only, most, worst, least). In the words of Mark Twain, "When you catch an adjective, kill it."
- Question the quoted so-called authority. Does that person have the knowledge or qualifications to back up statements of fact or opinion?
- Compare different sources reporting on the same information.
- Purposefully seek out opposing viewpoints.
- Recognize the differences between hard news, editorial commentary, advertising, and entertainment.

■ **FACT-CHECKING** is an arduous process which, done right, is as painstaking as good reporting. Professional fact-checkers adhere to a code of ethical principles to research and verify stories and sources. In digital news feeds, fact-checking tools sometimes include apps, links, or widgets as a second source for consumers to measure the validity of content. Following are a few sites to help do your own fact-checking.

FactCheck.org

A nonpartisan, nonprofit project of The Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, FactCheck monitors accuracy in political reporting, debunks viral rumors, maintains an archive of helpful articles, and offers space to "Ask FactCheck." Here's their solid advice on "How to Spot Fake News" (Eugene Kiely and Lori Robertson, Nov. 18, 2016): Consider the source. Read beyond the headline. Check the author. What's the support? Check the date. Ask: Is this some kind of joke? Check your biases.

PolitiFact.com PunditFact.com

PolitiFact uses a six-point Truth-O-Meter scale, from "True" to "Pants on Fire," to rate the veracity of claims made by candidates, political parties, elected officials, and activists. PunditFact checks the accuracy of information presented in talk shows, blogs, and political analysis. APP: Settle It!, from PolitiFact, can resolve dinner table arguments, check facts in campaign ads, and test your knowledge of the Truth-O-Meter service.

ShareTheFacts.org ReportersLab.org

Share The Facts, developed by Duke University Reporters' Lab and Jigsaw (Alphabet's technology incubator), is a widget (like Twitter or Facebook icons) that can be attached to fact-checked online publications. It helps readers quickly identify fact-checked content and share it across multiple platforms. The Reporters' Lab maintains a database of fact-checking sites for public access. PLUG-IN: FactPopUp, a web browser plug-in from PolitiFact, keeps you informed with pop-up notifications whenever there's a new fact check.

Snopes.com

Snopes began as an urban-legend-checking forum in 1994 and has evolved to a reliable "touchstone of rumor research" with a clearly defined methodology and transparent rating system, from "True" to "False" (and shades in between) and variables for "Unproven" or "Outdated" information.

Washingtonpost.com/ factchecker

"The Fact Checker" webpage and Sunday column of *The Washington Post* is written and managed by award-winning journalist Glenn Kessler, who helped initiate fact-checking of candidates' campaign claims in the 1992 and 1996 elections. The "Pinocchio Test" is its standard: One Pinocchio for "selective" telling of the truth to Four Pinocchios for falsehoods that are downright "whoppers." APP: GlennKessler aggregates fact-checked claims in the news. Play a built-in game to test your fact-checking knowledge or watch video interviews with crack fact-checker Glenn Kessler.

CULTIVATE MEDIA LITERACY

16%

U.S. ADULTS WHO SAY THEY HAVE SHARED FAKE POLITICAL NEWS THAT WAS LATER DISCOVERED TO BE FALSE

26%

REPORT GETTING NEWS FROM TWO OR MORE SOCIAL MEDIA SITES (UP FROM 18% IN 2016)

67%

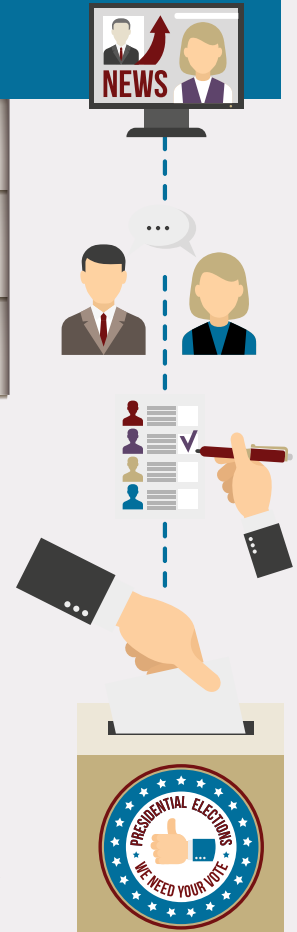
REPORT GETTING AT LEAST SOME NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA

(pewresearch.org)

■ **THOUGH MANY** people are confident they have the media skills to identify fake news when they see it, Pew Research respondents recognize that they are sometimes fooled by and pass along misinformation. A fake news media environment will not improve unless we educate ourselves and demand change. Dr. W. James Potter at UC Santa Barbara has written about social effects of media and the importance of media literacy. Potter recommends developing a set of skills for reading, watching, and interacting with mass media:

- Have a specific goal in mind when you access media. You control the information.
- Be aware of your personal patterns, when and where you encounter media products, and do think of them as products. You decide who, what, where, when, why, and how you consume information.
- Acquire a broad base of knowledge. Read more varied content.
- Investigate sources that journalists cite, question everything, and seek out new sources of information.
- Think about how your personal ideology colors—and perhaps limits—the information you consume.
- Analyze fact-based content and discuss it with others.

(adapted from Media Literacy, Sage Publishing, 2016)



BEWARE: BIAS AND THE BANDWAGON

Media information can affect your values, behavior, and attitudes, directly impacting democratic decision-making. Awareness can help you understand how your own cognitive biases influence the ways you seek and consume news.

When asked what elements have “a large impact” on their trust in a news story, U.S. adults report:

51%

THE SOURCES A NEWS STORY CITES IMPACTS THEIR TRUST.

48%

THE PUBLISHER OF A NEWS STORY AFFECTS THEIR TRUST.

30%

GUT INSTINCT IMPACTS THEIR TRUST IN A NEWS STORY.

(pewresearch.org)

- **Confirmation Bias** refers to our tendency to remember details or infer meaning that matches what we already believe or know about a topic. If we want something to be true, we interpret media information as confirmation of that view. Or, worse, we seek only information with which we can agree. Certain news agencies build or maintain these biases with politically-charged commentary and slanted interpretation of the facts.
- **Early Information Bias** makes us prone to believe or remember the first reports of news information we see or hear. Even when faced with contradictory or modified information, the original report often holds sway.
- **The Bandwagon Effect**, doing something because everyone else is doing it, is also at play in reporting the news: “If everyone else is reporting a new Kardashian hairstyle, we better publicize it too.”

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Photos: Gage Skidmore (CC BY-SA-3.0)

DEMOCRACY AT RISK

The American Media Under Attack

MARK HANE BUTT

Without a free press, democracy is in peril.

A popular government, without popular information, or the means of acquiring it, is but a Prologue to a Farce or a Tragedy; or, perhaps both. Knowledge will forever govern ignorance: And a people who mean to be their own Governors, must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives.
—James Madison, "Father of the U.S. Constitution," author of the U.S. Bill of Rights, and 4th President of the United States

Greed. Politics. Irrelevance. Indifference. Technology. The American news media is under attack. If it fails, the American republic may fail with it—for information is the lifeblood of a free people.

How did it come to this? The American press had a noble start. At least in theory, it was based on a grand idea: the pursuit of truth.

Born in a time of monarchies and theocracies and those who promoted “official truth,” the press was a byproduct of the fifteenth-century invention of the printing press and the subsequent growth in freedom of thought, the development of markets and education and the need to share information, and the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rise of “the Enlightenment.” This new philosophy moved away from mysticism and toward rationality and empiricism, the idea that knowledge comes through experience and experimentation. Truth could be proven; facts were important.

Breaking with the past, the Framers adopted the Enlightenment as the foundational philosophy of the new republic. Truth would no longer be determined by the personal whims of the elite; it would be determined objectively, scientifically. Finding that objective truth about ourselves and our world would enable us to advance and flourish. The Founders knew that a free press would play a central role in this gathering and sharing of knowledge and gave it First Amendment protection.

Yet the press arguably has not reached its philosophical potential, even with advances in technology. It remains stuck in a free-for-all of opinion and political diatribe. Only for a few decades in the last century did we see glimpses of what it might have become. Today, the American news media is in danger of slipping even further from its envisioned goal—thus putting our very democracy at risk.

HAPPY TALK The reputation of the press has eroded significantly during the past four decades. The Pew Research Center’s Project for Excellence in Journalism notes that in the 1980s more people thought the press was accurate than not. At present, those numbers are reversed. Changes in the news industry as well as our culture are to blame for the media’s philosophical stumble.

Perhaps the biggest initial change in the modern era was the advent of television. Like its radio predecessor, television started primarily as an entertainment medium. But when television entered the news business, it took center stage, teaching us to see the world differently.

Early broadcast journalists, having made the transition from newspapers, retained their objective approach to presenting the news. Well into the 1960s, news stories were detailed and focused on government and social issues that affected the public. Sound bites explaining important matters often lasted 60 seconds or more. To make more money, TV executives had to consider ratings, which eventually dictated content. News became anything that would shock, entertain, or pander.

In effect, the news was just another show, not a vital part of democracy.

The trend ushered in the era of happy-talk journalism. No longer would a mature, respected journalist with years of experience dominate the screen. Instead, young, attractive, largely inexperienced news readers smiled their way into viewers’ homes, adding their own personality and banter to the story. Objective news became subjective—if not in fact, in manner—with flashy promos, dramatic video, and colorful graphics. (Search YouTube to contrast a national newscast from the 1960s with one today.)

The changes took a toll on the printed press as well. Profits began to fall. News holes shrank. Less space meant less news for readers. To

compete, newspapers borrowed from TV formats, focusing on graphics and visually enticing content rather than longer, detailed stories. Our attention spans were shrinking and we wanted things quickly and easily.

Cable television filled the gap with more channels than one could count. The evolution may have been good for consumers, but it was bad for the news business. With more channels, portions of the advertising pie got smaller, leaving broadcasters with less money to pay for expensive, well-trained journalists. Cable news programs no longer appeared just in the evening. Before, journalists had all day to gather information. Now, the news could be broadcast 24 hours a day. Fewer reporters had less time to gather more information, which also meant less time to check facts or report in context. The news became snippets of often incorrect information—and credibility took another hit.

Not to worry, though. Clever media moguls switched from news to commentary. One news item could be talked about and debated for hours, with various people giving opinions on what the news meant. Celebrity became more important than expertise; the more famous one was, the more “credible” the commentary.

And then the world unveiled a true Tower of Babel—the internet—followed by the complete democratization of information—social media. Add ready access and dissemination via cell phones and objective news reporters became an afterthought. Suddenly, everyone with a camera phone was a journalist. Without training in objective newsgathering, the difference between fact and opinion blurred. It was more difficult than ever to tell who was credible and who was not—and what was fact and what was not.

PRETTY PERSUASION With so many places to turn to for information (the so-called fragmentation of the media)





CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: John F. Kennedy speaking in front of Springwood, the Roosevelt home in Hyde Park, NY, during the presidential campaign, Aug. 4, 1960; FDR Presidential Library & Museum. Richard Nixon gives his trademark "victory" sign during the presidential campaign, July 1968, by Ollie Akins; National Archives. President Gerald Ford talks with reporters during a White House press conference, Sept. 30, 1976, by Marion S. Trikosko; Library of Congress. Walter Cronkite broadcasting during the presidential debate, Sept. 23, 1976, by Thomas J. O'Halloran; Library of Congress.

the common information that once held us together as a people was no longer so common. The marketplace of ideas had arrived and everyone was seeing, listening, and reading something different. No longer was the nation watching the same news every night, discussing and debating and trying to answer the same questions with the same facts. Profit and politics, not Enlightenment philosophy, was driving our media principles. "One nation indivisible" was harder to come by.

Some media moguls, on the right *and* the left, ignorant or disdainful of the national philosophy, took the press to an even lower level of gossip, fake news, and propaganda, seeing the change as a way to influence and create democracy in their own image. The result was a crisis in confidence and a move toward the news you *agreed* with. Choosing a news source was no longer about what was accurate, but what you liked. Some facts were good, others were not. At best, the news

became irrelevant; at worst, dangerous.

Predictably, we were listening to a lot of angry voices. The news wasn't bringing us together, it was splitting us apart. We became individualistic and tribal, suspicious of one another. We could no longer reach consensus. We abandoned the pursuit of Enlightenment truth. We abandoned our national philosophy.

We were no longer seeking facts and creating policy from those facts, even if we didn't like them. If global warming was indeed fact, many of us weren't buying it. We followed the "facts" that mirrored our political view, our philosophies of conservatism or liberalism. Enlightenment-based democracy demanded one view; we opted for others.

We changed our concept of America in the middle of the experiment.

To be fair, one could argue that our national philosophy was flawed from the start. The Enlightenment

presupposed that people behave logically and rationally. The reality is that people are swayed by emotions, which are anything but logical and rational.

The Founders may have envisioned Enlightenment principles, but they also adopted a capitalistic economic system that produced abundant wealth. Out of that abundance arose a need to differentiate between products, refocusing our attention away from communicating fact and toward communicating *persuasion*. Advertisers found it easier to persuade using emotion rather than logic and, given that more of our discourse was concerned with commerce than politics, advertising became part of our national conversation and reinforced our focus on feeling as a way to make decisions.

Even in our political discourse we abandoned the philosophy of the Enlightenment and adopted the philosophy of the Aesthetic. We began to see national issues, leaders, and facts

themselves as attractive or unattractive. We made judgments on the basis of what was pretty. Most voters thought Richard Nixon was more logical than John Kennedy in the 1960 presidential debate, but Kennedy looked better. And Kennedy won. The remaining question was whether a nation founded on one principle (the Enlightenment) could survive using another (the Aesthetic) or, more realistically, both.

TRAINING FOR TRUTH Certainly the press was far worse two hundred years ago. The Adams-Jefferson debates, and the news stories generated about them, were more vitriolic than current political skirmishes. Perhaps in the eighteenth century, when the biggest local problem was an outbreak of typhoid, political pandering could be tolerated. But the world has become much more complex and complicated, requiring a greater need for knowledge. In an age when problems are global, we need a highly efficient media system providing us with credible, factual information.

How do we accomplish this?

As we rely ever more on knowledge, we need to return to and reinvigorate the institutions and practices that move us toward objective logical thought. The American media and our educational system are at the forefront of finding and sharing knowledge and must be encouraged and protected. Currently, those institutions are seriously challenged—financially, politically, and philosophically. Much of public resentment is a result of perceived and real biases that promote conservative or liberal agendas. The press enjoyed more widespread respect, for example, when it focused on facts rather than promoting the news from a particular political view.

A growing number of students are unaware of the basic tenets of democracy. Schools must move away from the current obsession with job-training and renew curricula that place as much emphasis on the

humanities (specifically English, history, and civics) as mathematics and science. Jefferson and other Founders promoted public schools as a way to prepare the next generation of Americans *for democracy*, not just jobs.

Required courses should help students understand the scientific method of finding truth and train them to identify fake or biased news. Before we can reestablish and promote an Enlightenment-based democracy, citizens must be trained in that method of finding truth; too many of us never learned or have forgotten it. Schools and the media are responsible for that training. Employers say the biggest problem they have with graduates isn't that they don't understand technology, it's that they don't know how to think and write.

Students must understand, too, that democracy is about compromise. Excessive individualism or focus on one's rights at the expense of community will not ensure democracy's success. We must maintain a balance between the individual and the state.

The internet and fractured media are not going away, and it must not be government's job to police content. That responsibility belongs to citizens. To succeed, those citizens' analytical skills must be effective.

The media, for its part, must understand its role extends beyond making money. A responsible press focused on facts and democratic ideals helps us sort fact from fiction, exposes corruption by foreign and domestic interests, helps educate citizens about policies, reduces panic during emergencies, and provides us with a sense of community and oneness.

To reduce reliance on ratings and advertising for financial support, the press should investigate endowments. Some institutions, aside from public television, already have moved in this direction. In the meantime, those in the news media should spend more time checking facts and reporting stories in context.

They should seek to separate fact from opinion, correct mistakes openly, and become more transparent in how they define and gather news.

The American people must see their press as an integral part of the democratic experiment, and the news media must see it that way, too. For if the news media fails in its noble pursuit of truth, so does the push for objective thought and the exchange of credible information. Without these, democracy dies.



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EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "How to Tell Fake News from Real News," Laura McClure, TED-Ed editor, TED-Ed Blog, Jan. 12, 2017. Five questions to ask yourself when vetting news, plus links to tipsheets and respected media sources. blog.ed.ted.com
- "Here's What Non-Fake News Looks Like," Michael Schudson, *Columbia Journalism Review*, Feb. 23, 2017. Commentary on the value and reliability of news providers, and a list of indicators of journalistic quality. cjr.org
- "Did Technology Kill the Truth?" Tom Wheeler, Brookings Report, Brookings Institution, Nov. 14, 2017. "We exist in a time when technological capabilities and economic incentives have combined to attack truth and weaken trust." brookings.edu



20 questions

Finding a News Source You Can Trust

DICK PRYOR

BELIEVE WHO OR WHAT YOU WANT, but remember there is danger in living inside a news and information bubble. People who reside in the bubble risk being isolated, misinformed, and unaware of reality. The truth is essential to a functioning democracy, but when citizens limit their sources of news to just a few and don't question news sources' accuracy and trustworthiness, informed discourse suffers. News bubbles can easily become echo chambers that lead to polarized thought.

An echo chamber is a group situation where information, beliefs, and ideas are amplified or reinforced by transmission and repetition, while different or competing views are censored, disallowed, or underrepresented. In an echo chamber, it takes just a few unreliable or untrustworthy sources to taint the conversation.

For news consumers, it has become increasingly important to determine what is real, what is fake, and who can be trusted. That is especially critical in this age of expanding

numbers of “news” sources and ubiquitous social media.

Becoming a discerning news consumer requires some work—active participation in the communication process. When evaluating a source of news and information, professionalism, ethics, accuracy, reliability, transparency, fairness, objectivity, and honesty matter. Here are twenty questions (in no particular order) that I recommend news consumers ask when choosing a trustworthy news source. No one question is determinative; news consumers need to weigh several to reach their own, personal conclusions.

1 How long has the news entity been in business? Organizations that have stood the test of time are more likely to be reliable.

2 Who is their audience? Organizations that are intended to appeal to broad audiences are generally more likely to be fair than those targeting specific audiences and appealing to special interests.



So the next time you are tempted to make a snarky ‘fake news’ quip, instead look up the number of journalists who are killed every year in the quest for the truth. And maybe be big enough to admit that perhaps you simply do not like some of those truths.—Greg Milam, “Time to Spike the ‘Fake News’ Defense,” *Sky News*

3 Do they belong to a professional association? Trustworthy news organizations typically do.

4 Do they subscribe to and operate under a code of ethics? Professional news organizations and reporters are upfront about their commitment to ethics and take it seriously. Real journalists commonly adhere to codes of ethics from the Society of Professional Journalists, Radio Television Digital News Association, and ethical standards developed by their own governing organizations and professional membership associations.

5 What do they do when their reporters make a mistake? Professional news organizations promptly retract or correct mistakes and discipline reporters and editors who make egregious or consistent mistakes and violate rules of ethics.

6 Do their stories use multiple sources? Use of anonymous sources is not unprofessional. In fact, it is often the only way stories can be developed. But, trustworthy news organizations go to great lengths to confirm facts and statements through multiple sources. Their stories will prove that dedication.

7 Are photos identified and attributed? Proper identification of people in photos and disclosure of the source of images are critical to providing accuracy and context.

8 Do they disclose their parent organization and/or governing board? Transparency illustrates values that guide editorial decision-making. "Reporting" supported by advocacy groups and political special interests (or undisclosed groups) is less likely to be accurate, fair, and trustworthy.

9 Do they employ professional journalists with relevant newsgathering, editing, and presentation experience? Trustworthy news organizations are more likely to hire journalists and commentators with appropriate education, skills, and work experience.

10 Do they produce "news" or "opinion"? Do they label opinion? Blurring news and opinion confuses news consumers. Part of a journalist's job is to interpret facts, but trustworthy organizations try to be clear about when their journalists are providing their own personal opinion, commentary, or opinions of others.

11 Are they advocates for causes, issues, candidates, or parties? Trustworthy news organizations and reporters avoid conflicts of interest. Ethics codes are clear about the necessity of professional journalists to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may lead to bias.

12 Do they have access to newsmakers, thought leaders, and government decision makers? If so, that suggests important news sources view them as credible and trustworthy. Access reinforces journalists' professional status.

13 Do they use "loaded" words? Pay attention to the words news sources use. Journalists who are not commentators, analysts, or opinion writers take great pains to avoid loaded words that inflame emotions or suggest advocacy for a position.

14 Do they brand themselves as a professional organization? Mission statements and core values suggest a news entity supports the search for truth and practice of journalistic integrity.

15 Do they have a "real" office? Even in today's virtual workplace world, news organizations that can be trusted have a public-facing office and can easily be contacted. Fair, public-service-minded organizations encourage citizen input and feedback and are responsive to criticism.

16 Do they provide a forum for competing viewpoints? News organizations that can be trusted provide an opportunity for differing opinions on matters of public interest. Stacking the deck in quality or quantity suggests bias and an editorial agenda.

17 Over time, do they seem to operate ethically and fairly? Consistent quality and professionalism matters and should be judged over an extended period of time, rather than through a brief snapshot.

18 Do other journalists view them as "journalists"? Journalists are a picky bunch. If they shun a reporter or an organization, take note.

19 Do they enter and receive awards in professional competitions? Real news organizations and reporters do this.

20 Is their "interpretative reporting" supported by commonly accepted facts and/or professionally obtained information? This one requires some work on the part of news consumers. Check out sources listed (or linked) and whether other news organizations are reporting similar stories. Lack of attributed sources, use of questionable data, and failure of other organizations to develop or repeat the story suggests it may not be credible.

DICK PRYOR is general manager of KGOU Radio and has more than 40 years of experience in television, radio, public relations, law, and government service. He earned a B.A. in Journalism and a J.D. from the University of Oklahoma. In 2015, he was chosen a Distinguished Alumnus of the Gaylord College of Journalism and Mass Communication at OU. Pryor was inducted into the Oklahoma Journalism Hall of Fame in 2009.



EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- "ASU Cronkite Professor: Mistakes Don't Equal Fake News," *Arizona State University News*, July 6, 2017. Interview-profile of ASU Innovation Chief Eric Newton on fake news and its threat to democracy. asunow.asu.edu
- "Ten Journalism Brands Where You Find Real Facts Rather Than Alternative Facts," Paul Glader, *Forbes*, Feb. 1, 2017. A list of credible news and information entities. forbes.com



How America Lost Faith in Expertise

And Why That's a Giant Problem

TOM NICHOLS

Following the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014, *The Washington Post* published the results of a poll that asked Americans whether the United States should intervene militarily in Ukraine. Only one in six could identify Ukraine on a map. But this lack of knowledge did not stop people from expressing pointed views. In fact, the respondents favored intervention in direct proportion to their ignorance; the people who thought Ukraine was located in Latin America or Australia were the most enthusiastic about using military force there.

The following year, Public Policy Polling asked a broad sample of Democratic and Republican primary voters whether they would support bombing Agrabah. Nearly a third of Republican respondents said they would, versus 13% who opposed the idea. Democratic preferences were roughly reversed; 36% were opposed, and 19% were in favor. Agrabah doesn't exist. It's the fictional country in the 1992 Disney film *Aladdin*.

Increasingly, incidents like this are the norm rather than the exception. It's not just that people don't know a lot about science or politics or geography. The bigger

concern is that Americans have reached a point where ignorance—at least regarding what is generally considered established knowledge in public policy—is seen as an actual virtue. To reject the advice of experts is to assert autonomy, a way for Americans to demonstrate their independence from nefarious elites—and insulate their increasingly fragile egos from ever being told they're wrong.

This isn't the traditional American distaste for intellectuals and know-it-alls. I'm a professor; I'm used to people disagreeing with me. Principled, informed arguments are a sign of intellectual health and vitality in a democracy. I'm worried because we no longer have those kinds of arguments, just angry shouting matches.

When I started working in Washington in the 1980s, random people would instruct me in what the government should do about any number of things, particularly my own specialties of arms control and foreign policy. At first I was surprised, but I came to realize that this was understandable and even to some extent desirable. We live in a democracy, and many people have strong opinions about public life. Over time, I found that other policy specialists had similar experiences, with laypeople subjecting them to lengthy disquisitions on taxes, budgets, immigration, the environment, and many other subjects. Such interactions go with the job and, at their best, they help keep you intellectually honest.

I started hearing the same stories from doctors and lawyers and teachers and many other professionals. These were stories not about patients or clients or students raising informed questions but about them telling the professionals why their professional advice was actually misguided or even wrong. The idea that the expert was giving considered, experienced advice worth taking seriously was simply dismissed.

I fear we are moving beyond a natural skepticism regarding expert claims to the death of the ideal of expertise itself: a Google-fueled, Wikipedia-based, blog-sodden collapse of any division between professionals and laypeople, teachers and students, knowers and wonderers—in other words, between those with achievement in an area and those with none. By the death of expertise, I do not mean the death of actual expert abilities. There will always be doctors and lawyers and engineers and other specialists. And most sane people go straight to them if they break a bone or get arrested or need to build a bridge. But that represents a kind of reliance on experts as technicians, the use of established knowledge as an

off-the-shelf convenience: “Stitch this cut in my leg, but don't lecture me about my diet.” “Help me beat this tax problem, but don't remind me that I should have a will.” “Keep my country safe, but don't confuse me with details about national security tradeoffs.”

The larger discussions require conversations between ordinary citizens and experts. But increasingly, citizens don't want to have those conversations. Rather, they want to weigh in and have their opinions treated with deep respect and their preferences honored not on the strength of their arguments or on the evidence they present but based on their feelings, emotions, and whatever stray information they may have picked up.

This is a very bad thing. A modern society cannot function without a social division of labor. No one is an expert on everything. We prosper because we specialize, developing mechanisms that allow us to trust one another in those specializations and gain the collective benefit of our individual expertise. If that trust dissipates, eventually both democracy and expertise will be fatally corrupted. At that point, expertise will no longer serve the public interest; it will serve the interest of whatever clique is paying its bills or taking the popular temperature at any given moment. And such an outcome is already perilously near.

A Little Learning Is A Dangerous Thing

Over a half century ago, the historian Richard Hofstadter wrote that the complexity of modern life has steadily whittled away the functions the ordinary citizen can intelligently and comprehendingly perform for himself.

In the original American populist dream, the omniscience of the common man was fundamental and indispensable. It was believed that he could, without much special preparation, pursue the professions and run the government. Today he knows that he cannot even make his breakfast without using devices, more or less mysterious to him, which expertise has put at his disposal; and when he sits down to breakfast and looks at his morning newspaper, he reads about a whole range of vital and intricate issues and acknowledges, if he is candid with himself, that he has not acquired competence to judge most of them.

Hofstadter argued that this overwhelming complexity produced feelings of helplessness and anger among a citizenry that knew itself to be



U.S. Army Teaches a Trade (G.I. Telegrapher), Norman Rockwell, 1919.
Norman Rockwell Museum, [PD] Google Art Project, Wikimedia Commons

increasingly at the mercy of more sophisticated elites. “What used to be a jocular and usually benign ridicule of intellect and formal training has turned into a malign resentment of the intellectual in his capacity as expert,” he noted. “Once the intellectual was gently ridiculed because he was not needed; now he is fiercely resented because he is needed too much.”

In 2015, the law professor Ilya Somin observed that the problem had persisted and even metastasized over time. The “size and complexity of government,” he wrote, have made it “more difficult for voters with limited knowledge to monitor and evaluate the government’s many activities. The result is a polity in which the people often cannot exercise their sovereignty responsibly and effectively.” Despite decades of advances in education, technology, and life opportunities, voters now are no better able to guide public policy than they were in Hofstadter’s day and, in many respects, they are even less capable of doing so.

The problem cannot be reduced to politics, class, or geography. Campaigns against established knowledge are often led by people who have all the tools to know better. For example, the anti-vaccine movement—one of the classic contemporary examples of this phenomenon—has

gained its greatest reach among people such as the educated suburbanites in Marin County, outside San Francisco, where at the peak of the craze, in 2012, almost eight percent of parents requested a personal belief exemption from the obligation to vaccinate their children. These parents had just enough education to believe that they could challenge established medical science, and felt empowered to do so—even at the cost of the health of their own and everybody else’s children.

Don't Know Much

Experts can be defined loosely as people who have mastered the specialized skills and knowledge relevant to a particular occupation and who routinely rely on them in their daily work. People who know considerably more about a given subject than the rest of us, and to whom we usually turn for education or advice on that topic. They constitute an authoritative minority whose views on a topic are more likely to be right than those of the public at large.

How do we identify who these experts are? In part, by formal training, education, and professional experience, applied over the course of a career. Teachers, nurses, and plumbers all have to acquire certification to exercise their skills, as a signal to others that



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their abilities have been reviewed and met a basic standard of competence, helping separate real experts from amateurs or charlatans.

Experts agree to evaluation and correction by other experts. Every professional group has watchdogs, boards, accreditors, and certification authorities whose job is to police its members and ensure that they live up to the standards of their own specialty. Experts are often wrong, and the good ones are the first to admit it—because their professional disciplines are based not on some ideal of perfect knowledge and competence but on a constant process of identifying errors and correcting them, which ultimately drives intellectual progress. Yet these days, members of the public search for expert errors and revel in finding them—not to improve understanding but rather to give themselves license to disregard all expert advice they don't like.

We've all been trapped at a party where one of the least informed people holds court, confidently lecturing the other guests with a cascade of banalities and misinformation. It's called "the Dunning-Kruger effect," after research psychologists David Dunning and Justin Kruger. The essence of the effect is that the less skilled or competent you are, the more confident you are that you're actually very good at what you do. The psychologists' central finding: "Not only do [such people] reach erroneous conclusions and make unfortunate choices, but their incompetence robs them of the ability to realize it."

To some extent, this is true of everybody. Most people rate themselves higher than others would regarding a variety of skills. But less competent people overestimate themselves more than others do. As Dunning wrote in 2014,

A whole battery of studies . . . have confirmed that people who don't know much about a given set of cognitive, technical, or social skills tend to grossly overestimate their prowess and performance, whether it's grammar, emotional intelligence, logical reasoning, firearm care and safety, debating, or financial knowledge. College students who hand in exams that will earn Ds and Fs tend to think their efforts will be worthy of far higher grades; low-performing chess players, bridge players, and medical students, and elderly people applying for a renewed driver's license, similarly overestimate their competence by a long shot.

The reason turns out to be the absence of a quality called "metacognition," the ability to step back and see your own cognitive processes in perspective. Good singers know when they've hit a sour note, good directors know when a scene in a play isn't working, and intellectually self-aware people know when they're out of their depth. Their less successful counterparts can't tell—which can lead to a lot of bad music, boring drama, and maddening conversations. Worse, it's very hard to educate or inform people who, when in doubt, just make stuff up. The least competent people turn out to be the ones least likely to realize they are wrong, the most likely to respond to their own ignorance by trying to fake it, and the least able to learn anything.

Surreality-Based Community

Even competent and highly intelligent people encounter problems in trying to comprehend complicated issues of public policy with which they are not professionally conversant. Most prominent of those problems is confirmation bias, the tendency to look for information that corroborates what we already believe. Scientists and researchers grapple with this all the time, which is why, before presenting or publishing their work, they make sure their findings are robust and pass a reality check from qualified colleagues without a personal investment in the outcome of the project. This peer-review process is generally invisible to laypeople because the checking and adjustments take place before the final product is released.

Outside the academy, in contrast, debates usually have no external review or accountability. Facts come and go as people find convenient, making arguments unfalsifiable and intellectual progress impossible. The gap between informed specialists and uninformed laypeople often gets filled with crude simplifications or conspiracy theories.

At their worst, conspiracy theories can produce a moral panic in which innocent people get hurt. Their prevalence undermines the reasoned interpersonal discourse on which liberal democracy depends. Why? Because by definition, conspiracy theories are unfalsifiable: experts who contradict them demonstrate that they, too, are part of the conspiracy.

The addition of politics makes things even more complicated. Political beliefs are subject to the same confirmation bias that plagues other issues. Political views are deeply rooted in a person's self-image and most cherished beliefs. What we believe says something



important about how we see ourselves, making disconfirmation of such beliefs a wrenching process that our minds stubbornly resist.

Unable to see their own biases, most people simply drive one another crazy arguing rather than accept answers that contradict what they already think about the subject—and shoot the messenger, to boot. A 2015 study by scholars at Ohio State University, for example, tested the reactions of liberals and conservatives to

Facts are not the same as knowledge or ability—and on the internet, they're not even always facts.

certain kinds of news stories and found that both groups tended to discount scientific theories that contradicted their worldviews. Even more disturbing, when exposed to scientific research that challenged

their views, both liberals and conservatives reacted by doubting the science rather than themselves.

Welcome To The Idiocracy

Ask an expert about the death of expertise, and you will probably get a rant about the influence of the internet. People who once had to turn to specialists now plug search terms into a Web browser and get answers in seconds—so why should they rely on some remote clerisy of snooty eggheads? Information technology, however, is not the primary problem. The digital age has simply accelerated the collapse of communication between experts and laypeople. It has allowed people to mimic intellectual accomplishment by indulging in an illusion of expertise provided by a limitless supply of facts.

But facts are not the same as knowledge or ability—and on the internet, they're not even always facts. Of all the axiomatic “laws” that describe internet usage, the most important may be the predigital insight of science fiction writer Theodore Sturgeon, whose eponymous rule states that “90 percent of everything is crap.” More than a billion websites now exist. Even if Sturgeon's cynicism holds, that yields 100 million pretty good sites—including those of all the reputable publications of the world; universities, think tanks, research institutions, and nongovernmental organizations; and vast numbers of other edifying sources of good information.

The bad news, of course, is that to find any of this, you have to navigate a blizzard of useless or misleading garbage posted by everyone from well-intentioned grandmothers to propagandists for the Islamic State (or ISIS). Some of the smartest people on earth have

a significant presence on the internet. Some of the stupidest people reside just one click away. Ordinary people who already had to make hard choices about where to get their information when there were a few dozen newspapers, magazines, and television channels now face endless webpages produced by anyone willing to pay for an online presence. The convenience of the internet is a tremendous boon, but it does little good for a student or an untrained layperson who has never been taught how to judge the provenance of information or the reputability of a writer.

Libraries, or at least their reference and academic sections, once served as a kind of first cut through the noise of the marketplace. The internet, however, is less a library than a giant repository where anyone can dump anything. In practice, this means that a search for information will rely on algorithms usually developed by for-profit companies using opaque criteria. Actual research is hard and often boring. It requires the ability to find authentic information, sort through it, analyze it, and apply it. But why bother with all that when the screen in front of us presents neat and pretty answers in seconds?

Technological optimists will argue that people can tap directly into the so-called wisdom of crowds. It is true that the aggregated judgments of large groups of ordinary people sometimes produce better results than the judgments of any individual, even a specialist; the aggregation process helps wash out a lot of random misperception, confirmation bias, and the like. Yet not everything is amenable to the vote of a crowd. Understanding how a virus is transmitted from one human being to another is not the same thing as guessing the number of jellybeans in a glass jar.

The whole point of the wisdom of crowds is that the members supposedly bring to bear various independent opinions. The internet tends to generate communities of the like-minded, groups dedicated to confirming their own preexisting beliefs rather than challenging them. And social media only amplifies this echo chamber, miring millions in their own political and intellectual biases.

Expertise And Democracy

Experts fail often, in various ways. The most innocent and most common are what we might think of as the ordinary failures of science. Individuals, or even entire professions, observe a phenomenon or examine a problem, come up with theories or solutions, and then test them. Sometimes they're right, and sometimes they're wrong, but most errors are

eventually corrected. Intellectual progress includes a lot of blind alleys and wrong turns.

Other forms of expert failure are more worrisome. Experts can go wrong when they try to stretch their expertise from one area to another. This is less a failure of expertise than a sort of minor fraud—somebody claiming the general mantle of authority though not a real expert in the specific area—and it is frequent and pernicious and can undermine the credibility of an entire field. And there is the rarest but most dangerous category: outright deception and malfeasance, in which experts intentionally falsify their results or rent out their professional authority to the highest bidder.

When they do fail, experts must own their mistakes, air them publicly, and show the steps they are taking to correct them. Laypeople, for their part, must educate themselves about the difference between errors and incompetence, corruption, or outright fraud and cut the professionals some slack regarding the former while insisting on punishment for the latter. As the philosopher Bertrand Russell once wrote, the proper attitude of a layperson toward experts should be a combination of skepticism and humility:

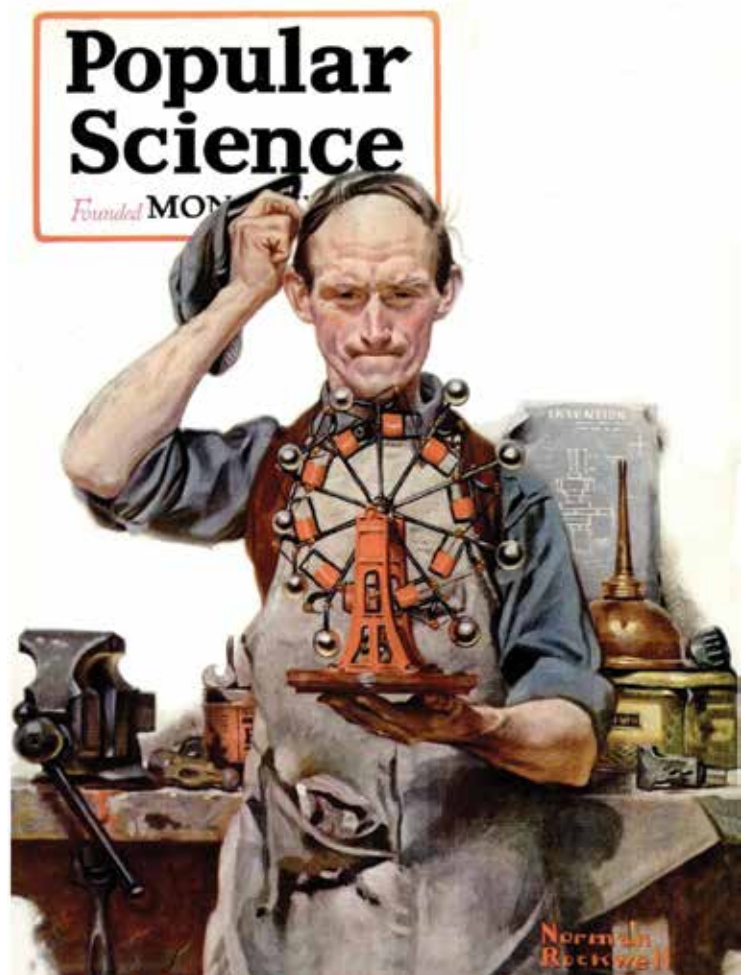
The skepticism that I advocate amounts only to this: (1) that when the experts are agreed, the opposite opinion cannot be held to be certain; (2) that when they are not agreed, no opinion can be regarded as certain by a non-expert; and (3) that when they all hold that no sufficient grounds for a positive opinion exist, the ordinary man would do well to suspend his judgment.

As Russell noted, “These propositions may seem mild, yet, if accepted, they would absolutely revolutionize human life”—because the results would challenge so much of what so many people feel most strongly.

Government and expertise rely on each other, especially in a democracy. The technological and economic progress that ensures the well-being of a population requires a division of labor, which in turn leads to the creation of professions. Professionalism encourages experts to do their best to serve their clients, respect their own knowledge boundaries, and demand that their boundaries be respected by others, as part of an overall service to the ultimate client: society itself.

Dictatorships demand this same service of experts, but they extract it by threat and direct its use by command. This is why dictatorships are actually less efficient and less productive than democracies (despite some popular stereotypes to the contrary). In a democracy, the expert’s service to the public is part of the social contract. Citizens delegate the power of decision on myriad issues to elected representatives and their expert advisers, while experts, for their part, ask that their efforts be received in good faith by a public that has informed itself enough—a key requirement—to make reasoned judgments.

This relationship between experts and citizens rests on a foundation of mutual respect and trust. When that foundation erodes, experts and laypeople become warring factions and democracy itself can become a casualty, decaying into mob rule or elitist technocracy. Living in a world awash in gadgets and once unimaginable conveniences and entertainments, Americans (and many other Westerners) have become almost childlike in their refusal to learn enough to govern themselves or to guide the policies that affect their lives. This is a collapse of functional citizenship, and it enables a cascade of other baleful consequences.



Perpetual Motion, Norman Rockwell, for cover of *Popular Science* magazine (Vol. 97, No. 4, Oct. 1920). [PD] Wikimedia Commons

In the absence of informed citizens, more knowledgeable administrative and intellectual elites do in fact take over the direction of the state and society. Unelected bureaucrats and policy specialists exert tremendous influence on the daily lives of Americans. Today, this situation exists by default rather than design. And populism actually reinforces this elitism because the celebration of ignorance cannot launch communications satellites, negotiate the rights of U.S. citizens overseas, or provide effective medications. Faced with a public that has no idea how most things work, experts disengage, choosing to speak mostly to one another.

Meanwhile, Americans have developed increasingly unrealistic expectations of what their political and economic systems can provide, and this sense of entitlement fuels continual disappointment and anger. When people are told that ending poverty or preventing terrorism or stimulating economic growth is a lot harder than it looks, they roll their eyes. Unable to comprehend all the complexity, they choose instead to comprehend almost none of it and then sullenly blame elites for seizing control of their lives.

“A Republic, If You Can Keep It”

Experts can only propose; elected leaders dispose. And politicians are very rarely experts on any of the innumerable subjects that come before them for a decision. Nobody can be an expert on China policy and health care and climate change and immigration and taxation, all at the same time—which is why during, say, congressional hearings, actual experts are usually brought in to advise the elected laypeople charged with making authoritative decisions.

In 1787, Benjamin Franklin was supposedly asked what would emerge from the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia. “A republic,” Franklin answered, “if you can keep it.” Americans too easily forget that the form of government under which they live was not designed for mass decisions about complicated issues. Neither was it designed for rule by a tiny group of technocrats or experts. Rather, it was meant to be the vehicle by which an informed electorate could choose other people to represent them, come up to speed on important questions, and make decisions on the public’s behalf.

The workings of such a representative democracy are exponentially more difficult when the

electorate is not competent to judge the matters at hand. Laypeople complain about the rule of experts and demand greater involvement in complicated national questions, but many of them express their anger and make these demands only after abdicating their own important role in the process: namely, to stay informed and politically literate enough to choose representatives who can act wisely on their behalf. As Somin has written, “When we elect government officials based on ignorance, they rule over not only those who voted for them but all of society. When we exercise power over other people, we have a moral obligation to do so in at least a reasonably informed way.” Like anti-vaccine parents, ignorant voters end up punishing society at large for their own mistakes.

Too few citizens today understand democracy to mean a condition of political equality in which all get the franchise and are equal in the eyes of the law. Rather, they think of it as a state of actual equality, in which every opinion is as good as any other, regardless of the logic or evidentiary base behind it. But that is not how a republic is meant to work, and the sooner American society establishes new ground rules for productive engagement, the better.

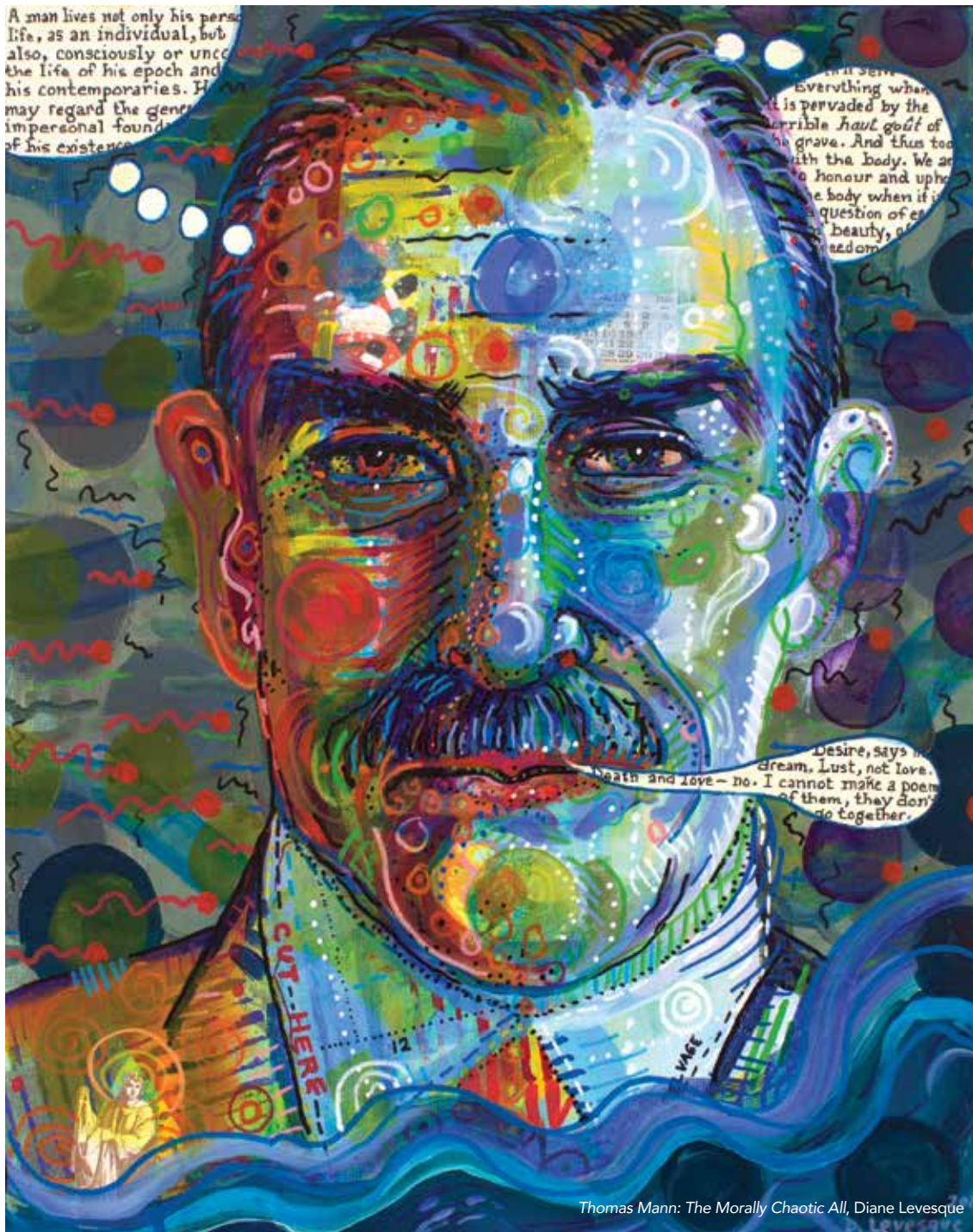
Experts need to remember, always, that they are the servants of a democratic society and a republican government. Their citizen masters, however, must equip themselves not just with education but also with the kind of civic virtue that keeps them involved in the running of their own country. Laypeople cannot do without experts, and they must accept this reality without rancor. Experts, likewise, must accept that they get a hearing, not a veto, and that their advice will not always be taken. At this point, the bonds tying the system together are dangerously frayed. Unless some sort of trust and mutual respect can be restored, public discourse will be polluted by unearned respect for unfounded opinions. And in such an environment, anything and everything becomes possible, including the end of democracy and republican government itself.

TOM NICHOLS is Professor of National Security Affairs at the U.S. Naval War College. He is the author of *The Death of Expertise: The Campaign Against Established Knowledge and Why It Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2017), from which this essay is adapted and first appeared in *Foreign Affairs* magazine. Follow him on Twitter @RadioFreeTom.



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Do you know a rural community that would like to host a Smithsonian exhibit? OH's *Museum on Main Street* program will bring the world-class *Water/Ways* exhibit from the Smithsonian to tour Oklahoma towns starting in summer 2019! Contact Program Officer Kelly Burns for more information: (405) 235-0280 or kelly@okhumanities.org



Thomas Mann: *The Morally Chaotic All*, Diane Levesque

FINDING TRUE NORTH: The Power of Story

DARRYL TIPPENS



Hans Christian Andersen's memorable tale of "The Emperor's New Clothes," a couple of clever swindlers convince the ruler that they can weave him a magical outfit that looks invisible to those who are stupid or inept, but to everyone else appears as the finest of garments. No one dares tell the Emperor that he is naked, so, as he makes a procession through the town, the people exclaim, "How fine are the Emperor's new clothes! Don't they fit him to perfection!" The scheme goes well, until one small child remarks, "But he hasn't got anything on."

In his book *The Uses of Enchantment*, child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim shows how fairy tales perform an important function in the moral development of children. Through engaging plots, curious characters, and fanciful settings, these old stories convey important life lessons: Evil is as real and omnipresent as virtue. The bad stuff is not just *out there*—look within and around if you don't want to be fooled. A wolf dressed up like your grandmother is not the same as your real grandmother. Crooks can make even a powerful ruler look like a fool if he doesn't pay attention.

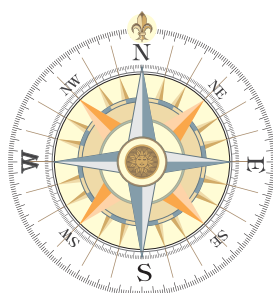
It's not just fairy tales that teach important lessons about truth. So do works of literature and film. In an era of "post truth," the need for truth-revealing stories is more important than ever.

But ascertaining truth can be difficult: *Truth is in the eye of the beholder*, some say. Or, *That's your truth, not mine*. Even the great philosopher Nietzsche said: "There are no facts, only interpretations. . . . Truths are illusions of which one has forgotten that they *are* illusions." And Nietzsche's nineteenth-century ideas have gone mainstream. Pop star Marilyn Manson once said: "But what's real? You can't find the truth, you just pick the lie you like the best."

Such quips may be humorous, but when you are seeking justice, wanting an

honest relationship, or wondering where to invest your savings, Nietzsche's idea of truth may not satisfy.

A corrective to such cynicism is literature that stands the test of time. Literature is rooted in the grand paradox that fiction—whether a fairy tale, novel, poem, play, or film—can express enduring wisdom and practical advice for living in a complex world. Intuitive writers often exhibit an uncanny grasp of truth—especially those who have endured great suffering, and particularly those who



have suffered under totalitarian systems.

Consider a novelist like Dostoevsky, who suffered under Russian czars, or those persecuted under the Soviet system, like Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Czesław Miłosz, Anna Akhmatova, and Václav Havel. Or those who suffered (many dying) under Nazi tyranny—Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Anne Frank, Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi. Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo recently died after being held for years in a Chinese prison.

These diverse authors are united in the conviction that power does not make right. For them, truth matters. The moral darkness they endured made them even more certain that there is light—truth. In the words of Russian poet Apollon Maykov, "The darker the night, the brighter the stars." These voices from the abyss are witnesses to the reality that human virtues—whether dignity, love, generosity, or forgiveness—are good, no matter who says otherwise.

When a majority within a culture goes silent in the face of moral evil, it is writers' truths which provide the antidote. Czesław Miłosz, who suffered

doubly under the tyranny of the Nazis and the Soviets, said it well in his address to the Nobel Prize committee: "In a room where people unanimously maintain a conspiracy of silence, one word of truth sounds like a pistol shot." The transformative power of truth helps explain why dictators relentlessly suppress literary works.

Through the centuries, authors have been driven by the conviction that there are enduring truths to live by, and they must be dramatized and expressed through words and images. William Faulkner called these "the old verities and truths of the heart . . . love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice." In an age of cynicism and doubt, we might do well to spend a little more time with Emily Dickinson and George Eliot, with Faulkner and Twain, Dickens and Austen, Milton and Shakespeare, Dante and Dostoevsky. If we did so, we might receive a double blessing—understanding and empathy for people who are different from us, and deeper insight to our own foibles and follies. The "heart of darkness" is both *out there* and *within*.

Recent research confirms what many teachers of literature have long believed. Reading can affect our capacity for insight and empathy. According to *Scientific American* (Oct. 4, 2013), researchers have discovered that those who read literary fiction—that is, works that deal with "the psychology of characters and their relationships"—acquire empathy for others. Gary Saul Morson, Professor of Slavic languages and literature at Northwestern University, explains why this might be so:

When you read a great novel, you put yourself in the place of the hero or heroine, feel her difficulties from within, regret her bad choices. Momentarily, they become *your* bad choices. You wince, you suffer, you have to put the book down for a while.



When Anna Karenina does the wrong thing, you may see what is wrong and yet recognize that *you* might well have made the same mistake. And so, page by page, you constantly verify the old maxim: *There but for the grace of God go I*. No set of doctrines is as important for ethical behavior as that direct sensation of being in the other person's place.

American novelist Barbara Kingsolver agrees: "A novel takes you somewhere and asks you to look through the eyes of another person, to live another life."

The best stories have a knack for getting inside our heads and hearts, breaking open "the prison house of the self," as Morson calls it. These works introduce us to the thoughts and motivations of different people, helping us to understand their weaknesses and challenges. The best writers can do this in an enchanting way. Oklahoma novelist Ralph Ellison expressed it well: "There must be possible a fiction which, leaving sociology and case histories to the scientists, can arrive at the truth about the human condition, here and now, with all the bright magic of the fairy tale."

If good stories have this transformative power, we should be alarmed at those forces which inhibit deep reading. These trends deserve our attention and our challenge:

1. THE DECLINE OF READING

"A book unopened is just a block of wood." "The person who *doesn't* read good books has no advantage over someone who *can't* read them." These maxims contain much truth. But according to TIME magazine, 53% of nine-year-olds read for pleasure every day, and only 19% of seventeen-year-olds do so. Young people and adults are reading less than previous generations. Why? A recent Nielson report reveals that Americans on average spend about ten hours a day on electronic media.

Of course plenty of reading continues on small screens today, on tablets, computers, and smart phones, but what's being lost is

"deep reading," the kind that requires slow, thoughtful attention to long passages and complex ideas.

2. THE UBIQUITY OF FACE NEWS

Since the days when Homer recited the legend of the Trojan horse and the ancient Hebrews shared the story of the lying serpent in the Garden of Eden, deception, trickery, slander, and propaganda have attended the human condition in infinite variety. Literature has noted the phenomenon with remarkable frequency. Shakespeare's tragic plots often hinge on a malicious lie. In *Othello*, the villain Iago destroys a marriage and causes several deaths due to "a lie, a hateful, damnable lie," as Shakespeare's character Emilia calls it.

"Fake news" is not new.

What *is* new today is the power of technology to heighten the deceit and its effects. Nicholas Carr, author of *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*, writes: "Technology is an amplifier. It magnifies our best traits, and it magnifies our worst." Rumor, bullying, and hate speech have always plagued societies; but smart phones in the hands of six billion people become potential weapons of mass deception. Social networking hardly encourages thoughtful listening to others; rather, it tends to increase mistrust and tribalism, exciting our identification with the herd that thinks like us and tempting us to "unfriend" those who think differently.

Thoughtful, enduring literature works in the other direction—activating the imagination, challenging our tribalism, and encouraging us to identify common ground with those different from us. Tolstoy wisely observed, "Art, all art, has this characteristic, that it unites people."

3. A DECLINING APPETITE FOR TRUTH

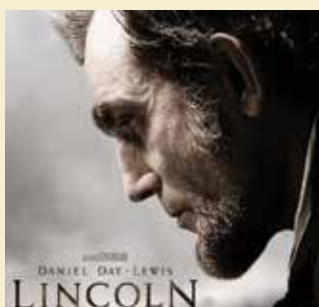
According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), "post-truth" denotes circumstances "in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." There have been many "post-truth" eras



10 TIPS

to More Gratifying Reading & Movie-Going Experiences

- 1 Read daily at a regular time, even if you have only a few minutes.
- 2 Balance your reading and movies. For every contemporary work, explore a time-honored classic.
- 3 Read to a child and have a child read to you.
- 4 Join a reading or movie-lovers' discussion group. The shared ideas and conversation will often bring the meaning and power of story fully home to you.
- 5 Read reviews regularly—in newspapers, magazines, and online.
- 6 Ask for advice. What are your friends reading and watching?
- 7 Vary the genres you read. Try fiction, nonfiction, biography, history, and poetry. The same goes for movies. Sample comedy, mystery, adventure, drama, and documentaries.
- 8 Stretch yourself—read or watch something outside your area of training, familiarity, or inclination.
- 9 Browse your local library (for books and movies), bookstore, bestseller lists, and movie streaming websites. Something unexpected is bound to pique your interest.
- 10 Explore the links between movies and books. Let a good movie prompt you to read the book on which it's based—or let a great book lead you to a movie adaptation.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: *Hacksaw Ridge*, Lionsgate, Summit Entertainment, 2016; *Hidden Figures*, 20th Century Fox, 2016; *Sully*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 2016; *Unbroken*, Universal Pictures, Legendary Pictures, 2014; *Wonder*, Lionsgate, 2017; *Lincoln*, DreamWorks Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Participant Media, 2012



before our own. One only needs to recall the German public's readiness in the 1930s to swallow Hitler's anti-Semitic propaganda en masse to see that this is so. Only a few brave souls—like novelist Thomas Mann who spoke out against the “devilish nihilism” of the Nazis—were able to challenge the deceit of “post-truth” National Socialism. The enticement to elevate prejudice above fact is not new.

But social media platforms enlarge the field of play exponentially. And our appetite for entertainment 24/7—fed by an endless stream of questionable online content—makes matters worse. The OED illustrates how “post-truth” operates today, in “a nether world in which readers willingly participate in their own deception because it feels good.” Oliver Moody points out in the *London Times*, “It is not that truth has died in the post-truth world: it is our appetite for truth.”

Over against these discouraging trends—the decline of reading, the omnipresence of “fake news,” and the waning commitment to truth—we must hear the constructive voices of major writers and other artists whose works have stood the test of time. If we can resist our penchant for willful self-deception, good literature and film can awaken us and our children to the enduring themes of the good, the true, and the beautiful.

This is not an elitist claim. The best stories, poems, plays, and films come in many forms; and they are not limited to “the classics.” Some recent popular films, for example, express themes of courage, love, forgiveness, respect, and truth telling. Movies like *Hacksaw Ridge*, *Sully*, *Hidden Figures*, *Unbroken*, *Coco*, and *Wonder*, to name a few, convey powerful messages that inspire courage, honesty, and understanding of others.

Literature is compressed experience. It succeeds because it leaves abstraction behind and leads us to the deeply personal and the intensely felt. We need experiences, not just abstract rules, if our hearts are to be transformed. Over the centuries, writers have developed ways to expose our ignorance and heal

our prejudices by inviting us, through imagination, into the struggles of others.

Steven Spielberg's film *Lincoln* illustrates how this can happen. A key moment comes in the downstairs kitchen of the White House where President Lincoln discusses with Congressman Stevens how to end slavery during the Civil War. Stevens's passion for truth (“true north”) is admirable. The president agrees with him, but achieving the goal also requires an understanding of the moment. Lincoln says:

A compass, I learnt when I was surveying, it'll . . . it'll point you True North from where you're standing, but it's got no advice about the swamps and desert and chasms that you'll encounter along the way. If in pursuit of your destination you plunge ahead, heedless of obstacles, and achieve nothing more than to sink in a swamp . . . what's the use of knowing True North?

In this fictional episode, the screenwriter is saying something important about how we must dedicate ourselves to grand purposes; but we must also practice discernment. This requires thoughtful listening and humility. The scene invites the viewer to empathize, even anguish with both the congressman devoted to abolition and the president desperately trying to lead and heal a divided nation.

If we agree with Professor Morson that stories have this capacity to help us “learn *from within* what it feels like to be *someone else*,” if they help us “experience the perceptions, values, and quandaries of a person from another epoch, society, religion, social class, culture, gender, or personality type,” then we will be wise to ensure that our school curricula, our homes, and our lives are filled with good books and films—and we will dedicate large blocks of uninterrupted time to the enjoyment of these literary and cinematic riches.

One of the finest gifts we could bestow on the next generation would be a set of transformative experiences found in the stories of the world's most gifted poets, novelists, dramatists, and filmmakers—narratives that open one up to a larger, truer world.

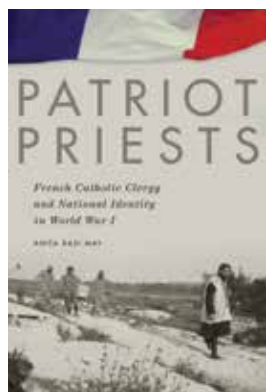
Dostoevsky claimed that “beauty will save the world.” Through immersion in the world's greatest stories, we can discover why and how this might be possible.

DARRYL TIPPENS is University Distinguished Scholar at Abilene Christian University and is the author or editor of several books, including *Shadow & Light: Literature and the Life of Faith*. He is Provost Emeritus, Pepperdine University, and chaired the Division of Language and Literature at Oklahoma Christian College. He graduated from Weatherford High School and Oklahoma Christian, and holds a Ph.D. from Louisiana State University.

DIANE LEVESQUE is an assistant professor of art at Carthage College in Kenosha, WI. She has exhibited nationally as a professional artist since 1980, garnering numerous grants, fellowships, and awards. She holds an MFA from the University of Chicago. *Thomas Mann* is from a series of portraits of well-known authors whose works contain existential query. dianelevsque.net

EXTRA! READ | THINK | TALK | LINK

- “This is Your Brain on Jane Austen, and Stanford Researchers are Taking Notes,” Corrie Goldman, *Stanford News*, Sept. 7, 2012. Based on fMRI imaging, researchers conclude that reading may create unique brain patterns unlike those generated in ordinary work or play. news.stanford.edu
- “Novel Finding: Reading Literary Fiction Improves Empathy,” Julianne Chiaet, *Scientific American*, Oct. 4, 2013. Outlines a study that suggests reading classic fiction forces readers to imagine characters' conflicts and motivations, creating empathy that applies to real-world relationships. scientificamerican.com
- American Film Institute's 100 Greatest American Movies of All Time. Scholar-researched details on great films, video commentary from film stars and directors on the importance of individual works, and more. afi.com [This editor checked off 58 films seen from the list of 100. What's your score?]



A NEW BOOK BY ANITA MAY

The Oklahoma Humanities Board of Trustees congratulates former Executive Director Anita May, whose tenure with this organization spanned thirty years, on the publication of her book *Patriot Priests: French Catholic Clergy and National Identity in World War I* (University of Oklahoma Press, 2018). The book reveals a new perspective of the Great War.

At the time of WWI, French law had opened the clergy's ranks to conscription, removing their exemption from combat. Using letters and diaries of priests who served in battle, Dr. May documents how clergymen used religious values of sacrifice to define the meaning of the war, even as the discipline of military life effectively transformed them from missionaries into soldiers. Their courage and solicitous care for their fellow soldiers won them new respect and earned the Church renewed esteem in postwar French society. Available in bookstores and online at oupres.com

[continued from p. 4]

in my opinion, were not treated fairly; but they, of course, are used to it. Almost 60,000 men died. Many of those deaths were heroic—of which little mention was made. And men are still dying from effects directly traceable to their service in Vietnam. The good soldiers deserved more than just a couple of cameos and a few philosophical meanderings based on fictionalized accounts of the war. Room should have been found for stories of those who fought honestly, bravely, and heroically. I hope you get a lot of comments from veterans. Those would be much more valid than mine.

This issue of OH Magazine is strong, powerful, thought-provoking and, obviously, controversial. How could the topic of Vietnam be anything else? It will be remembered as one of your best. You would probably be surprised how often I am reminded of issues of your magazine. This morning I was reminded of three: WWI, Vietnam, and Poetry. Every morning I try to read a poem, which is directly attributable to your Poetry issue. The issues of *Oklahoma Humanities* continue to resonate over the years.

—Bill Woodard, Bartlesville

NOTEWORTHY



FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Ken Fergeson, Chair

We're pleased to welcome five new Oklahoma Humanities Trustees, who have committed to serve as volunteer board members. Their activities include approving grant applications, fundraising, governing, serving as ambassadors in their local communities, and helping to plan the direction of our work. The Board of Trustees is comprised of active community members, faculty members of colleges and universities, and six gubernatorial appointees whose terms are coterminous with the Governor of Oklahoma.

If you have a passion for the humanities, we'd like to hear from you. You can complete the nomination information any time before May 31st to be considered for the next vacancies. It's not hard to do, just go to: okhumanities.org/board-nominations. If you know individuals who would be a good fit, encourage them to apply or let us know and we will contact them. As many of our board members say, this is an organization that does good work and has fun doing it!

OH BOARD OF TRUSTEES NOMINATIONS

Oklahoma Humanities is always looking for talented, dedicated individuals to serve on our volunteer board of twenty-four members, who serve terms of three years. We seek enthusiastic individuals who are active in their communities, have a passion for the humanities, and can dedicate time to attend board meetings three times per year.

Board members govern our organization; participate in strategic planning; attend OH-sponsored programs; serve on committees; advocate on behalf of the National Endowment for the Humanities, our largest funder; and help identify additional funding sources for our programs. They also approve grant applications from other nonprofits to support humanities programs in communities across the state. Read more on our website (okhumanities.org) and consider submitting a nomination. We'd love to have you join us!

OH WELCOMES NEW BOARD MEMBERS



DAVID N. "CHIP" CARTER is a Vice President at Jones PR, a national public affairs and strategic communications agency, where he leads the corporate communications practice group and directs the agency's business development and marketing efforts. Chip earned a B.A. in Philosophy from Kenyon College. He is President of the Quail Community Foundation and is a member of the Board of Trustees for the Oklahoma Foundation for Excellence, the Economic Club of Oklahoma, and the Greater Oklahoma City Chamber's Board of Advisors.



CINDY FRIEDEMANN is Executive Officer, District Strategy and Development, at Metro Technology Centers. Cindy served as Chair of the Oklahoma Venture Forum, the Metropolitan Library Commission, the Board of FOLIO, and the Board of Creative Oklahoma. Memberships include Leadership Oklahoma Class 30, the State Chamber, Leadership OKC Alumni, the OKC Chamber Board of Advisors, and the OKC Boat Club. At a national level, she was Secretary/Treasurer for United for Libraries, a division of the American Library Association.



ERICK W. HARRIS is an associate with Dyer, Coatney & Schroder in Edmond, Oklahoma. Previously, Erick was an Assistant Attorney

General for the Oklahoma Attorney General's Office. He received a B.A. in Political Science from Tuskegee University, a Master of Public Administration from the University of Oklahoma, and is a graduate of the OU College of Law. Erick volunteers for several organizations and is a member of the Tuskegee University Board of Trustees, serving as Second Vice Chairman of the Board.



TOM KIRK is a professor of Humanities at the University of Central Oklahoma. He holds a B.A. in Letters from the University of Oklahoma, an M.A. in History from New York University, and a Ph.D. in History and Civilization from the European University Institute in Florence. Tom taught in Italy for twenty-three years before returning to Oklahoma. He is a published author and has appeared in the British documentary series "East to West," currently available on Netflix.



SARAH MILLIGAN is Head of the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program at the Oklahoma State University Library. Before returning to Oklahoma, she was the administrator of the Kentucky Oral History Commission at the Kentucky Historical Society (2007-2014) and a folklife specialist for the Kentucky Folklife Program (2005-2007). Sarah has a B.A. in English and German from Oklahoma City University and a Master of Arts in Folk Studies from Western Kentucky University.



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Oklahoma Humanities (OH) strengthens communities by helping Oklahomans learn about the human experience, understand new perspectives, and participate knowledgeably in civic life. As the state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities, OH provides and supports programming for the general public that uses humanities disciplines (such as history, literature, ethics, and philosophy) to deeply explore what it means to be human.

OH accepts grant applications from nonprofits across the state for programs that may take the form of museum exhibits, film festivals, teacher institutes, oral history projects, or other formats that best serve local communities. In addition, OH administers programs that provide free access to cultural humanities content, including: *Oklahoma Humanities* magazine; *Let's Talk About It, Oklahoma*,

a reading and discussion series; and *Museum on Main Street*, a collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution to provide traveling exhibits in small rural communities.

Visit our website to find an event near you, read archived issues of this magazine, or explore grant and program opportunities. We look forward to hearing from you. (405) 235-0280 | okhumanities.org
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DEADLINES | okhumanities.org/grants

- Major and Challenge Grant applications are considered twice per year
- Spring: Draft Mar. 1 | Final: April 1
- Fall: Draft Aug. 1 | Final: Sept. 1
- Opportunity Grant applications accepted year-round
- Guidelines posted on our website

NEXT UP: CURIOSITY | Fall/Winter 2018

As a companion publication to Oklahoma Humanities' Curiosity Fest, debuting October 20, our next issue will explore all manner of curiosities, humanities trivia, and little-known facts. From the Oklahomarama to the National Mustard Museum, we'll take a journey to the wildly unexpected.