

Disrespect for Truth
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We already know that President Trump has no respect for truth. He lies every time he speaks, and what we need is a running banner on the television screen that truth-checks as he speaks.

As annoying as this is, the disrespect for truth has gone beyond this one man. Around the world, particularly in the more traditional (lesser-developed) countries with more than 50 percent illiteracy, there is little acceptance of facts as a source of truth. Dictators and authoritarian religious leaders have always lied and used conspiracy theories to distract outraged subjects from revolting against themselves. Rumors, spread person to person, were more likely to be believed than official truth, and carefully planted lies worked to keep people divided and weak.

On the eve of the first Crusade, in 1099, a Catholic monk traveled up and down the Rhine River, spreading the word that Jews were Christ-killers and should be exterminated. Thousands of Jews were murdered as a result of this conspiracy. Later, as these same fools went through Hungary on their way to the Holy Land, they murdered Hungarians because of the rumor that they were pagans. They didn't speak "Christian languages" (Latin or German).

The Russian Empire maintained its power by distracting the peasants from their misery by spreading rumors that the Jews should be murdered because they used the blood of Christian babies in their Passover unleavened bread. Annual pogroms took place under the watchful eye (and encouragement) of local law enforcement and priests. (Remember the pogrom in Fiddler on the Roof?)

The Ku Klux Klan maintained its power by spreading elaborate lies about Black people, claiming that they had inferior brains, lesser morality, and oversexed men who wanted to rape White women. Murders and lynching were endemic throughout the first third of the 20th century.

Hitler launched the most sophisticated propaganda machine of all, using an elaborate pseudo-scientific justification for exterminating Jews, Gypsies, and the handicapped and mentally ill. The consequences were so horrific that we thought that such things could not happen ever again. Unfortunately, we were wrong. The same sort of lying propaganda and conspiracy theories moved the Rwandan leadership into genocide. As Yugoslavia disintegrated, the same thing happened among the ethnicities living there: genocide was launched.

Today, in our country, we have a crisis of disbelief, a crisis in which many lesser-educated citizens have no faith in the institutions that have long been sources of truth. It doesn't matter that modern science, begun in the 17th century, has created a system of producing facts that can be checked and replicated. Despite repeated reports by scientists that childhood vaccinations are essential to protect all of us against serious diseases, people who should know better believe conspiracy theories that such medicines cause autism in children. Others, even in our government, prefer fantasy to science in the issue of climate change.

We used to believe our presidents when they spoke to us, and any untruths would be a scandal. No more. We used to read the newspapers of record (meaning the most trustworthy, which tried to get the news right), and the anchors of the nightly national and international news to tell us the facts to the best of their ability.

Now we have the phenomenon of all truth being challenged by "alternate truth" (lies) and the claim that all respected news media produce "fake news." The real "Fake News" are propaganda, lies designed to corrupt and confuse the credulous. The two major sources of fake news and conspiracy theories are our President and his circle and Putin's Russia, with their own agenda to disrupt and discredit liberal democracy.

A recent movie, *Sword of Trust*, illustrates a mentality in today's American life, disrespect for truth, and promotion of stupidity.

In it, a woman goes to a pawnshop to sell a Civil War-era sword, supposedly surrendered by a Union general to a Confederate general that the "deep state" has kept out of history. The sword, she says, proves that the South actually won the war! She is sure that there are people stupid enough to believe this and buy the sword.

Alas, indeed there are.

685 words

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