

Did ‘Fake News’ Begin With Trump?

by Charles Dyer © 2022

“Fake news”, “biased news”, “twisted news”, all seem to have begun with Donald Trump.

They didn’t.

“In 1782, none other than Benjamin Franklin created a fake issue of a Boston newspaper... reporting that bags of money, goods and human scalps were discovered along with a note for the King as a token of friendship and loyalty. He sent the newspaper to friends who sent it to their friends, adding to animosity against Native Americans.”¹ Clearly, the fake news was an act of commission.

A 1972 review of the #10 non-fiction bestseller, “The News Twisters” by Edith Efron, noted, “Not one of the important reviewing publications – the New York Times, Time, Newsweek, Saturday Review – chose to consider it. The morning and evening talk shows of television networks ignored it.” The book’s subject is that “all three (TV) networks actively slanted their coverage: to oppose...Vietnam policy; in favor of black militants against white middle-class majority; and were strongly biased in favor of the Democratic-liberal-left axis of opinion, and strongly biased against the Republican conservative-right axis of opinion.”²

Clearly, those were acts of omission or withheld news.

Variations of news omission and commission abound. The recent Johnny Depp vs. Amber Heard defamation case initially sparked much public attention from a 2018 Washington Post’s published op-ed citing Heard’s implicit accusation of him committing domestic abuse. Mr. Depp sued her for defamation of character. The jury, in 2022, found for Mr. Depp and against Ms. Heard, which now opens the question, “How much defamation of Mr. Depp’s character did the Washington Post create by publishing her unverified claims? And is the Post legally liable?” Had the Post scrutinized and checked further than Ms. Heard’s mere claim, as news reporting is supposed to, it may have found her claims to be false, questionable or accurate. Failing to adhere

¹ D’Costa, Krystal, “Three Historical Examples of ‘Fake News’”, Scientific American, 1 Dec. 2016

² Haight, David Ernest, TV & Politics, “The News Twisters” Commentary Magazine, 1 March, 1972

to professional news reporting standards not only undermines public confidence in the newspaper's reportage itself, it can prove costly in lawsuits.

In a 1995 review of three books addressing tainted news, the reviewer sums up, "The U.S. press, like the U.S. government, is a corrupt and troubled institution. Corrupt not so much in the sense that it accepts bribes but in a systemic sense. It fails to do what it claims to do, what it should do, and what society expects it to do."³

Though "fake news" isn't new, its expanding pervasiveness can well cause the news media to lose their influence. Which perhaps explains why people are relying on social media (Facebook, Twitter, TikTok et al), where misinformation, disinformation and fake news transcend even traditional media.

As individuals, we must hold "fake" news media accountable (including TV, radio, online and print) by casting economic "No" votes. We should opt out of buying their publications or watching and listening to their TV or radio news shows, regardless of where they or we may be on the social/political spectrum. Without reliable, objective news reporting (as opposed to opinions posing as such), we will have no trust in anything anyone says. Chaos will reign.

³ Vanderwicken, Peter, "Why the News Is Not the Truth" Harvard Business Review, May-June, 1995