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# Foreword

**T**he idea of truth has taken a beating since the 2016 presidential campaign. Truth itself soldiers on, of course.

Yet so much deliberately false information has made its way into, well, seemingly everywhere in American life that finding new frameworks for understanding and evaluation is essential.

Where to start though? Truth, it's apparent, has become increasingly difficult to tease out.

Look at your social media diet.

Consider the information you consume.

Take a stroll through your Facebook feed.

It's ugly out there — and it feels like it's getting worse. Because of the insular ways we can now self-select where we get news, where we find out what is true and what is not, our individual filter bubbles are in full effect.

Our social worlds, and thus often our belief systems, are contributing to a distance that feeds on itself. Can we ever understand someone with a view different from our own? Can we know if that view is true? Or whether we simply dislike it, despite its veracity?

Finding a way forward amid the misinformation, the fake news and head fakes, the endless cycle of Twitter memes and movements, is the best part of living in our current information age because we're equipped with all the tools we need to stay out of the dark.

So let's get started.

First, a word about the publishers of this book: It is natural for CQ to take on this thorny topic and contribute to the widening conversation about truth. It's in keeping with CQ's unparalleled role as a nonpartisan player.

"CQ is in the truth business," said Paul McHale, CQ's president. "I asked Ellen [Shearer] and Matt [Mansfield] to examine how CQ could help people understand the truth in this tremendously confusing time. Our promise to clients is 'Truth, Delivered' and they count on us for that. Readers of this book, I trust, will also see our value in this regard."

CQ, which is owned by The Economist Group, has a deep, well-deserved reputation, as McHale notes, 

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for explaining the labyrinth that is *"CQ is in the TRUTH business."* 

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official Washington: Congress, the White House, agencies, lobbyists, think tanks, the advocacy industry and all the forces that contribute to federal rules.

Congressional Quarterly, as it was then known, was founded in 1945 by Nelson Poynter and his wife, Henrietta. They had a goal in mind. "The federal government will never set up an adequate agency to check on itself, and a foundation is too timid for that," he said. "So it had to be a private enterprise beholden to its clients."

Keeping a check on power, then, is officially in the DNA of CQ.

The media and legislative tracking company has enlisted an all-star roster of writers to look at the idea of truth in our time. These writers explore 10 different concepts and frameworks for finding the truth amid deliberate falsehoods, propaganda, partisan rhetoric and the nonstop cacophony enabled by technology.

Why do this? Everyone needs to know how to separate truth and facts from everything else; we need ways to test ideas. If you're having difficulty finding the truth or understanding which "fake news" isn't fake and which is, we hope this book will guide you.

We'll follow up throughout 2018 with podcasts and other digital (and IRL) conversations to consider truth ahead of the fall elections. We anticipate a great deal of fodder for this exploration.

We hope you will join us.

— Matt Mansfield and Ellen Shearer

# Truth Matters

**W**hen people today worry about the rise of misinformation and the prevalence of opinion mongering on cable television and elsewhere, they often quote the late Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan's line: "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts."<sup>1</sup>

Oh, if the senator could only take it back.

Moynihan made the comment offhandedly in a television interview, not in a carefully written treatise, and there's a problem with his construction: While people are entitled to their own opinions, they are also entitled to select their own facts. Doing so is part of logic and argumentation.

The problem facing democracy in the 21st century — and with it the profession of journalism that helps make democracy possible — is larger and more serious than people being selective about their facts. It is a degradation of the idea that facts have meaning at all.

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*"Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts."*

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## Finding Our Way

**J**oshua Hatch knows what he's doing around journalism and the disrupted world of data and social media. President of the Online News Association in 2017, Hatch has provided multimedia training for journalists all over the world. And as the assistant managing editor of data and interactives at the Chronicle of Higher Education, Hatch inspires data reporters, designers and developers to tell stories in creative, effective and digital ways. Yet some of Hatch's most compelling observations about media come from his experience as the father of a 14-year-old daughter.

Her world has always been one of nonstop content, media from all sides, at all times of the day and night, flying "fast and furious." Hatch is concerned, as any father should be, about whether his daughter can distinguish digital dangers from credible content that can inform and enlighten. It's not easy.

"She doesn't want me to sit down and give her a news literacy lecture," Hatch told me. But he wants his daughter to know how to tell good from bad, true from false, fact from opinion. So he talks to her about knowing the sources of news and recognizable brands. He tells his daughter that if she sees a story on Facebook, "don't just read the story, but click in and do

## The Weaponizing Of Fake News

**W**ielded by emperors, deployed by chancellors and brandished by presidents, disinformation — or fake news — has been an effective political weapon of dictatorships, as well as democracies, for centuries.

In 44 B.C., following the assassination of Julius Caesar<sup>1</sup> (his friend Brutus and a group of conspirators stabbed him 23 times on the Senate floor), a struggle for power broke out between respected general Marc Antony and Octavian, the adopted son of the slain leader.

So Octavian turned to fake news. He spread rumors that Antony was a sex addict and a ruined soldier, and had been having an illicit romance with Cleopatra, the head of Roman rival Egypt. He even printed snappy catchphrases on coins — the tweets of the time — to spread the word. It worked. In 31 B.C., Octavian won, changed his name to Augustus, and was proclaimed the first emperor of Rome.

Centuries later, Reich Minister of Propaganda for Nazi Germany Joseph Goebbels mastered the use of fake news. Among his tenets, according to “Goebbels’ Principles of Propaganda” by Leonard W. Doob,<sup>2</sup> Goebbels

## The Psychology of Political Polarization and Pessimism

**N**o one in history has ever joined a cult — they join a group they believe will be beneficial to themselves, to society or to both. In like manner, no one thinks that they belong to a political party — left or right — whose goal it is to destroy America, despite what members of the other party think about the intentions of their opposites. And, in my own field of science, no one in either party is self-consciously anti-science, blatantly denying evidence everyone else can see is valid, nor does anyone engage in pseudoscience or think that their beliefs are supported by pseudo-facts collected in pseudo-laboratories in support of pseudo-theories.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, most people think that their political beliefs are logical and sound, and nearly everyone embraces science and recognizes that we live in the Age of Science, which is why even extreme political ideologists on both the right and the left attempt to at least ground their science-related beliefs in evidence and reason. It's also why most of us unconcernedly board jet aircraft, use cellphones, watch television and listen to radio, heed tornado warnings, acknowledge earthquakes as the product

## Algorithms: What Drives Our Filter Bubbles?

**T**he weekend before the 2016 presidential election, while Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton were jetting around the country trying to close the deal with voters, I was on Facebook. I'm from the small town of Rayne, Louisiana, and I'd just seen one of my relatives share a post from the mayor there. It wasn't an update on street repairs or an announcement of a new event at the RV park. It was: "Hillary Clinton Calling for Civil War If Trump Is Elected."

I looked at what the mayor had been sharing over the previous few days and there was a theme:

"Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President"

"Barack Obama Admits He Was Born in Kenya"

"FBI Agent Who Was Suspected of Leaking Hillary's Corruption Is Dead"

## Beliefs Versus Facts: Getting The Brain To Change Its Mind

Consider the following question: Why do firefighters who score higher on measures of risk-taking perform better on long-term measures of career success? Perhaps it's because firefighting is inherently risky; surely if one is prone to avoiding danger, this isn't the wisest career choice, as appealing as the thought of sliding down that pole and driving a big red truck with flashing lights at high speed may be. Clearly, to be a great firefighter one has to be willing to charge into a burning house without hesitation.

There's just one problem with this explanation. It isn't actually true that risk-taking firefighters are better at their jobs. The piece of information that I snuck into my first sentence was bogus. Hogwash. Malarkey. Fake news. It was made up by social psychologists Craig Anderson, Mark Lepper and Lee Ross for an experiment they conducted on Stanford undergraduates in 1980. Some of the students were told, as you were, that risk-taking firefighters are more successful. But others were told the exact opposite: it's conservatism that correlates with success. No matter which

## Correcting The Record

2016 was a bumper year for political fact-checking. “Truth squading” of some variety has been a feature of American journalism for at least 30 years.<sup>1</sup> But it wasn’t until the 2016 presidential election that fact-checking became a dominant format of political reporting.

To be clear, fact-checkers have had other moments in the national spotlight. During the 2004 vice presidential debate, then-Vice President Dick Cheney invited viewers to read Factcheck.org’s articles on attacks made by his Democratic rival, John Edwards, concerning Halliburton, which Cheney headed before joining the Bush White House in 2001. (Cheney erroneously said the site’s URL was Factcheck.com, which was quickly snatched up by a supporter of the Democratic ticket in an ironic confirmation of the importance of fact-checking.)<sup>2</sup>

Five years later, fact-checking was recognized with a Pulitzer Prize, awarded to PolitiFact in the National Reporting category. (Disclosure: PolitiFact is a project of the Poynter Institute-owned Tampa Bay Times.) The Pulitzer Board noted that the initiative “used probing reporters and the power of the World Wide Web to examine more than 750 political

# Russian Import Or Made In America?

## Conspiracy Theories, Magical Thinking And State-Sponsored News

**E**ven in the aftermath of a presidential election that divided America, the specter of Russian propaganda influencing American voters has galvanized the attention of experts and citizens alike. While the U.S. audience has seemed relatively complacent about much of the propaganda and false information purporting to be news that appeared around the election, the idea that a foreign country is deliberately manipulating U.S. voters is one of the few concerns on which conservatives, liberals and those in between can agree.

But how much is Russia really the problem when it comes to deliberate fake news? Experts and observers have found plenty of troubling evidence of widespread fake news online that has nothing to do with Russia. This has led researchers to shift their focus from dismissing the circulation of conspiracy theories as merely sensational to considering it a central element in the U.S. media ecosystem. Evidence ranging from the Pizzagate violence caused by a fabricated story about a Hillary Clinton-backed pedophilia ring to the persistent belief among many Americans that former