

## The Daily Damage to Truth

Ken Olson

In a civilized society, everything depends upon a certain level of confidence that others can be trusted, including those in positions of authority. No nation can survive very long that has lying leaders and tens of millions of citizens incapable of distinguishing lies from truth.

George Washington wrote, "I hope that I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man." People aspiring to be better cherish truth and authenticity above all else. They would resonate to the character of the woman described by the Swedish author Olav Harmann in his novel *Holy Masquerade*, she who wrote in her diary, "I want a single center for all circles, I want one and the same thing in what I do and say and think and dream."

To the Great Pretender, Donald Trump, this is language from a different planet. At a 2022 rally he declared, "I am the most honest person perhaps that God ever created." One thinks of the comment by Ralph Waldo Emerson about a banquet speaker: "The louder he talked of his honor, the faster we counted our spoons." Trump's compulsion to create his own reality extends even to trivial things. Rick Reilly, author of *The Commander in Cheat*, writes that, if Trump really is a 2.8 handicap golfer, the late Queen Elizabeth "was a pole-vaulter."

It is a deranged Trump that thinks something is true just because he claims it is. Even Trump's buddy Lindsey Graham, testifying under oath about Trump's attempts to overturn the 2020 election, said, "I have told him more times than we can count that he fell short. ...If you told him Martians came and stole votes, he'd be inclined to believe it."

The lessons of WWII are being forgotten. In his book, *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle), Hitler wrote from his prison cell that the masses "...will more easily fall victims to a great lie than to a small one." When in power, he and Joseph Goebbels, his Minister of Propaganda for The Third Reich --yes, that was his title-- concluded that really big lies are indeed easier to sell than little ones, because people would react by thinking that nobody would ever say something so outrageous if it weren't true. --Nobody normal, that is.

In his second inauguration, won by off-the-chart lying, Trump did not put his hand on the nearby Bible held by his wife but did "promise to obey and defend the Constitution." He has demonstrated, time and again, that this was a lie. For instance: the "We the people" document explicitly states that only Congress can declare war. So, after the strikes against Iran, both Trump and Hegseth said that we were not at war. But now, they say we are. They said that Congress was bypassed because of "an immanent nuclear threat" to the USA but cited no evidence. One cannot help but think of the time-worn maxim that "The first casualty of war is truth."

Remember, George. W. Bush used the terrifying image of an imminent "mushroom cloud" to justify invading Iraq in 2003. Many of those who raised questions were labeled as unpatriotic, but it turned out that he invaded the wrong country: there were no such weapons, and almost all the hijackers of the planes that destroyed the Twin Towers were from Saudi Arabia. The Iraq war left 4,432 American military dead, tens of thousands wounded, and many more innocent Iraqi

civilians died, and the war shifted to Afghanistan. To be clear, the recent death of the radically evil Iranian Supreme Leader merits not a single tear. But the strikes that killed 168 Iranian schoolgirls were brushed off as merely “collateral damage,” saying, “That’s just war.” Really?

There’s also Trump’s own media platform, a torrent of lies with the jarring title of Truth Social that seems daily to echo the doublespeak in Orwell’s classic novel 1984. In that story, citizens are told by The Ministry of Truth (i.e. Lies) that “war is peace” and not to trust their own eyes. The public is kept confused, fearful and obedient by the government’s “news” of constant “security threats” and an endless but imaginary war. Speaking of distractions, the subject that was heating up in our own news coverage --thousands of missing files—is now “off the radar.” What if...? Just asking.

Consider a Shoshone Native American oath, profound in its simplicity: “The earth hears me. The sun hears me. Shall I lie? No.” Many of us share the faith that God is everywhere present, but Trump, with his unending stream of demonstrable lies on every imaginable subject, cannot possibly believe any such thing. To him, the concluding phrase of various oaths, “So help me, God,” means exactly nothing. That’s the truth --and how perilous that is for the country we love.

Ken Olson lives in Lewistown, MT and is the author of *Lens to the Natural World: Reflections on Dinosaurs, Galaxies, and God* (Foreword by Jack Horner.)