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**Subject:** Fake news(Propaganda) /real news

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**Language Arts/Social Studies**

## **America Is Awash in Fake News**

Viewers and readers can no longer distinguish between truth and fiction.

By [Chris Hedges](#) / [Truthdig](#)

December 26, 2016



Lessons:

Find 4 or 4 examples f fake news in the article. Document how you decided that it wasn't truth.

What area the strategies used to make these examples appear to be real news. Have you fund these strategies on TV, internet, print media.

Give examples of images that try to give a perception that you feel isn't true. Where did you see them. Were they just distractions or were they mistruths misrepresenting what really happened? Where do you see this most? Were you questioning them before?

Take a news story that interests you that you feel is factual and turn it into fake news .

Use the campaigns as a center for study of fake news or fact. What examples are give in this article? Can students tell the fake news from the real news?

What fake news do you feel had the greatest impact on voters?

**Propaganda or Truth - Traffic sign with two options - Appeal to uncover manipulation, disinformation, lying, deception and censorship, fakes.**

*Photo Credit: M-SUR/Shutterstock*

The media landscape in America is dominated by “fake news.” It has been for decades. This fake news does not emanate from the Kremlin. It is a multibillion-dollar-a-year industry that is skillfully designed and managed by public relations agencies, publicists and communications departments on behalf of individuals, government and corporations to manipulate public opinion. This propaganda industry stages pseudo-events to shape our perception of reality. The public is so awash in these lies, delivered 24 hours a day through electronic devices and print, that viewers and readers can no longer distinguish between truth and fiction.

Donald Trump and the racist-conspiracy theorists, generals and billionaires around him inherited and exploited this condition, just as they have inherited and will exploit the destruction of civil liberties and collapse of democratic institutions. Trump did not create this political, moral and intellectual vacuum. It created him. It created a world where fact is interchangeable with opinion, where celebrities have huge megaphones simply because they are celebrities, where information must be entertaining and where we can all believe what we want to believe regardless of truth. A demagogue like Trump is what you get when you turn culture and the press into burlesque.

Journalists long ago gave up trying to describe an objective world or give a voice to ordinary men and women. They became conditioned to cater to corporate demands. News personalities, who often make millions of dollars a year, became courtiers. They peddle gossip. They promote consumerism and imperialism. They chatter endlessly about polls, strategies, presentation and tactics or play guessing games about upcoming presidential appointments. They fill news holes with trivial, emotionally driven stories that make us feel good about ourselves. They are incapable of genuine reporting. They rely on professional propagandists to frame all discussion and debate.

There are established journalists who have spent their entire careers repackaging press releases or attending official briefings or press conferences—I knew several when I was with The New York Times. They work as stenographers to the powerful. Many such reporters are highly esteemed in the profession.

The corporations that own media outlets, unlike the old newspaper empires, view news as simply another revenue stream. Revenue streams compete inside a corporation. When the news division does not make what is seen as enough profit, the ax comes down. Content is irrelevant. The courtiers in the press, beholden to their corporate overlords, cling ferociously to their privileged and well-compensated perches. Because they slavishly serve the interests of corporate power, they are hated by America’s workers, whom they have rendered invisible. They deserve the hate they get.

Most of the sections of a newspaper—“life style,” travel, real estate and fashion, among others—are designed to appeal to the “1 percent.” They are bait for advertising. Only about 15 percent of any newspaper is devoted to news. If you were to remove from that 15 percent the content provided by the public relations industry inside and outside government, news falls to single digits. For broadcast and cable news, the figure for real, independently reported news would hover close to zero.

The object of fake news is to shape public opinion by creating fictional personalities and emotional responses that overwhelm reality. Hillary Clinton, contrary to how she often was portrayed during the recent presidential campaign, never fought on behalf of women and children—she was an advocate for the destruction of a welfare system in which 70 percent of the recipients were children. She is a tool of the big banks, Wall Street and the war industry. Pseudo-events were created to maintain the fiction of her concern for women and children, her compassion and her connections to ordinary people. Trump never has been a great businessman. He has a long history of bankruptcies and shady business practices. But he played the fictional role of a titan of finance on his reality television show, “The Apprentice.”

“The pseudo-events which flood our consciousness are neither true nor false in the old familiar senses,” [Daniel Boorstin](#) writes in his book “The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America.” “The very same advances which have made them possible have also made the images—however planned, contrived, or distorted—more vivid, more attractive, more impressive, and more persuasive than reality itself.”

Reality is consciously deformed to easily digestible sound bites and narratives. Those involved in public relations, political campaigns and government stay relentlessly on message. They do not deviate from the simple sound bite or cliché they are instructed to repeat. It is a species of continuous baby talk. And it dominates the news and talk shows on the airwaves.

“The refinements of reason and shading of emotion cannot reach a considerable public,” [Edward Bernays](#), the father of modern public relations, noted cynically.

The rapid-fire, abbreviated format of television precludes complexities and nuance. Television is about good and evil, black and white, hero and villain. It makes us confuse induced emotions with knowledge. It reinforces the mythic narrative of American virtue and goodness. It pays homage through carefully selected “experts” and “specialists” to the power elites and the reigning ideology. It shuts out, discredits or ridicules all who dissent.

Is the Democratic establishment so clueless it believes its party lost the presidential election because of the [leaked John Podesta emails](#) and FBI Director [James Comey’s decision](#), shortly before the vote, to send a letter to Congress related to Clinton’s private email server? Can’t the Democratic leadership see that the root cause of the defeat was that it abandoned workers in order to promote corporate interests? Doesn’t it understand that although its lies and propaganda worked for three decades, Democrats eventually lost credibility among those they had betrayed?

The Democratic establishment’s outrage over the email leak to the website WikiLeaks ignores the fact that such disclosure of damaging information is a tactic routinely used by the U.S. government and other governments, including Russia’s, to discredit individuals and entities. It is a staple of press coverage. No one, even within the Democratic Party, has made a convincing case that the Podesta emails were fabricated. These emails are real. They cannot be labeled fake news.

As a foreign correspondent, I was routinely given leaked, sometimes classified, information by various groups or governments seeking to damage certain targets. The national intelligence agency of Israel, the Mossad, told me about a small airport owned by the Iranian government outside of Hamburg, Germany. I went to the airport and wrote [an investigative piece](#) that found that, as the Israelis had correctly informed me, Iran was using it to break down nuclear equipment, ship it to Poland, reassemble it and send it on transport planes to Iran. The airport was shut down after my exposé.

In another instance, the U.S. government gave me documents showing that an important member of the Cypriot parliament and his law firm were laundering money for the Russian mafia. [My story](#) crippled the law firm’s legitimate business and prompted the politician to sue The New York Times and me. Times lawyers chose not to challenge the suit in a Cypriot court, saying they could not get a fair trial there. They told me that, to avoid arrest, I should not visit Cyprus again.

I could fill several columns with examples like these.

Governments do not leak because they care about democracy or a free press; they leak because it is in their interest to bring down someone or something. In most cases, because the reporter verifies the leaked information, the news is not fake. It is when the reporter does not verify the information—as was the case when The New York Times uncritically reported the Bush administration’s false charge that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction in Iraq—that he or she becomes part of the vast fake news industry.

Fake news is now being used in an attempt to paint independent news sites, including Truthdig, and independent journalists as witting or unwitting agents of Russia. Elites of the Republican and Democratic parties are using fake news in an attempt to paint Trump as a stooge of the Kremlin and invalidate the election. No persuasive evidence for such accusations has been made public. But the fake news has become the battering ram in the latest round of Red baiting.

In a [Dec. 7 letter to Truthdig](#), a lawyer for The Washington Post, which printed an article Nov. 24 about allegations that Truthdig and some 200 other websites had been tools of Russian propaganda, said that the article’s author, Craig Timberg, knows the identity of the anonymous accusers at PropOrNot, a group that made the charges. [Editor’s note: The lawyer wrote, in part, concerning the Nov. 24 story and PropOrNot, “The description in the Article was based on substantial reporting by Mr. Timberg, including numerous interviews, background checks of specific individuals involved in the group (whose identities were known to Timberg, contrary to your speculation). . . .”] The Post says it has to protect PropOrNot’s anonymity. It passed along a false accusation without evidence. The victims in this case cannot respond adequately because the accusers are anonymous. Those who are smeared are told that they should appeal to PropOrNot to get their names removed from the group’s “blacklist.” The circular reasoning gives credibility to anonymous groups that draw up blacklists and fake news as well as to the lies they disseminate.

The 20th century’s cultural and social transformation, [E.P. Thompson](#) wrote in his essay “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism,” has turned out to be much more than the embrace of an economic system or the celebration of patriotism. It is, he pointed out, part of a revolutionary reinterpretation of reality. It marks the ascendancy of mass culture and the destruction of genuine culture and genuine intellectual life.

[Richard Sennett](#), in his book “The Fall of the Public Man,” identified the rise of mass culture as one of the prime forces behind what he termed a new “collective personality . . . generated by a common fantasy.” And the century’s great propagandists would not only agree but would add that those who can manipulate and shape those fantasies determine the directions taken by the “collective personality.”

This huge internal pressure, hidden from public view, makes the production of good journalism and good scholarship very, very difficult. Those reporters and academics who care about the truth and don’t back down are subjected to subtle and at times overt coercion and often are purged from institutions.

Images, which are how most people now ingest information, are especially prone to being made into fake news. Language, as the cultural critic [Neil Postman](#) wrote, “makes sense only when it is presented as a sequence of propositions. Meaning is distorted when a word or sentence is, as we say, taken out of context; when a reader or a listener is deprived of what was said before and after.” Images do not have a context. They are “visible in a different way.” Images, especially when they are delivered in long, rapid-fire segments, dismember and distort reality. The condition “recreates the world in a series of idiosyncratic events.”

Michael Herr, who covered the Vietnam War for Esquire magazine, observed that the images of the war presented in photographs and on television, unlike the printed word, obscured the brutality of the conflict. “Television and news were always said to have ended the war,” Herr said. “I thought the opposite. These images were always seen in another context—sandwiched in between commercials, so that they became a [blancmange](#) in the public mind. I think if anything, the blancmange coverage prolonged the war.”

A populace divorced from print and bombarded by discordant and random images is robbed of the vocabulary as well as the historical and cultural context to articulate reality. Illusion is truth. A whirlwind of emotionally driven cant feeds our historical amnesia.

The internet has accelerated this process. It, along with cable news shows, has divided the country into antagonistic clans. Members of a clan watch the same images and listen to the same narratives, creating a collective “reality.” Fake news abounds in these virtual slums. Dialogue is shut down. Hatred of opposing clans fosters a herd mentality. Those who express empathy for “the enemy” are denounced by their fellow travelers for their supposed impurity. This is as true on the left as it is on the right. These clans and herds, fed a steady diet of emotionally driven fake news, gave rise to Trump.

Trump is adept at communicating through image, sound bites and spectacle. Fake news, which already dominates print and television reporting, will define the media under his administration. Those who call out the mendacity of fake news will be vilified and banished. The corporate state created this monstrous propaganda machine and bequeathed it to Trump. He will use it.

Chris Hedges, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, writes a regular column for [Truthdig](#) every Monday. Hedges' [most recent book](#) is "Wages of Rebellion: The Moral Imperative of Revolt."

our developing world  
408-379-4431  
<http://www.ourdevelopingworld.org>  
[odw@magiclink.net](mailto:odw@magiclink.net)  
13004 Paseo Presada  
Saratoga, CA 95070