



L. M. Glacken's *The Yellow Press*, showing William Randolph Hearst as a jester handing out fake news. October 12, 1910.

graphic: Library of Congress

Fighting Fake News

By Suspending Judgement

By Nolan Higdon

News is as old as humans. Fake news is as old as the news itself. Since 2016, a moral panic over fake news has engulfed the US, due in part to the [lies](#) and consistent use of “fake news” as an epithet by former President Trump, loss of public faith in legacy journalism, and the World Health Organization’s claim of a global [infodemic](#).

Fake news is a part of the human experience. We easily create, imagine, and believe unsubstantiated fake news and other forms of propaganda. People cannot simply eradicate fake news, they have to learn to navigate through it as part of our media ecosystem. In response, experts have developed tools for determining the veracity of content such as the [CRAAP test](#) or the fake news detection kit, in my book *The Anatomy of Fake News*.

However, a person cannot use evidence to prove something is false, if they do not know the evidence exists. For example, many people may have believed Biden’s claim about his uncle (see sidebar) until they realized the available evidence proved it was untrue. In situations where the evidence is not readily available, people are best served by looking for indications of fake news while practicing healthy skepticism.

Here are warning signs for possible fake news.

- **Censoring “fake news” for democracy?** Those in power utilize censorship to marginalize narratives that challenge official fake news. So when the ruling class prohibits dissenting voices, like its suppression of [RT America](#), [Al Jazeera](#), and [TikTok](#), it is a sign they are protecting their own fake news.
- **Othersidism** Fake news narratives create [false equivalencies](#), as when they compare Democratic Party concerns about Russian interference in the 2016 election to Republican claims the election was stolen in 2020. The inequality is that Democrats accepted the 2016 vote count, while,

Republicans denied the actual vote count in 2020.

- **Online proof?** Artificial intelligence (AI) can create fabricated videos, audio, and images. Therefore, online news consumers cannot believe what they see or hear without additional corroborating evidence. They should suspend judgment until further research finds corroborating evidence.
- **Confirmation Bias** Fake news producers prey on existing biases to convince audiences to accept falsehoods. When content supports a user’s world view, it is a possible sign of fake news.
- **Establishment Consensus** Powerful organizations use vast wealth and resources to make it appear that a consensus favorable to their interests has emerged organically. News consumers should suspend judgment until corroborating evidence emerges from independent sources.
- **Legacy Media** has a history of spreading fake news from Weapons of Mass Destruction to [Stop the Steal](#). Audiences need to scrutinize legacy media the same way as they scrutinize any other media outlet.

Savvy, critically thinking citizens understand that it is best to suspend judgment rather than risk accepting and spreading fake news. When warning signs are apparent, and the evidence non-existent or incomplete, citizenry of our fragile democracy must remain skeptical and suspend judgment on what they hear, read, and see until transparently sourced corroborating evidence, free from conflicts of interest, is provided. Otherwise, we risk democracy being cannibalized by disinformation.

Hyperlinks for this article at <https://bit.ly/47cSMA0t>

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Presidential Fake News

“He got shot down in an area where there were a lot of cannibals in New Guinea at the time. They never recovered his body,” explained President [Joe Biden](#) in an April 2024 comment about his uncle, who, while serving for the US military, perished during World War II. The comment created an international incident; [New Guinea](#) demanded an apology as Biden’s account was misleading at best. Existing military documents reveal that the uncle’s plane was shot down near New Guinea, but he actually died by drowning. In fact, there is [no evidence](#) to support Biden’s suggestion that his uncle was consumed by cannibals at all. The story is just another example of fake news, this one coming straight from the President of the United States.



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