

When was the Truth Era? Post-Truth, Toxic Nostalgia, and the Library Fixation with Fake News

Kevin Seeber / Auraria Library / University of Colorado Denver
Canadian Association of Professional Academic Librarians Conference
University of British Columbia / Vancouver, BC / June 2-4, 2019
@kevinseeber / #capal19

There has been a lot of talk
about “fake news” for the last
few years...

Fake News Onslaught Targets Pizzeria as Nest of Child-Trafficking



James Alefantis, owner of Comet Ping Pong, at his restaurant in Washington, D.C. Fake news websites have called it the home base of a child abuse ring led by Hillary Clinton and John D. Podesta.
Chad Bartlett for The New York Times

By Cecilia Kang

Nov. 21, 2016



The concept was around before the fall of 2016, but “Pizzagate” really brought it to the fore.

Lots of folks in the library
world decided this was our
time to shine.

CULTURE & ARTS 03/09/2017 09:19 am ET | Updated Apr 18, 2017

After Trump Was Elected, Librarians Had To Rethink Their System For Fact-Checking

The American Library Association wants to help you distinguish real news from fake with the help of CRAAP.



By Maddie Crum




TOMMIL VIA GETTY IMAGES


MISINFORMATION IS NO MATCH FOR A LIBRARIAN.


Separating fact from fiction poses a unique challenge in the internet era: a recent study found that 80% of middle schoolers couldn't distinguish between sponsored news content and real journalism.*


LibGuides Community

Search for LibGuides content and librarian authors, and find great examples of guides from our worldwide user community.

 **FIND GUIDES**

 **FIND INSTITUTIONS**

 **FIND LIBRARIANS**

 **SPRINGY PICKS**

KEYWORD:

Showing 20 of 7,474 Pages, Sorted By **Relevance** ▼



As of last week, there are nearly 7,500 Fake News LibGuides.

Subsequently, library workers
have stated “we are in a
post-truth era” a few million
times in the last few years.
I have some problems with this
sentiment.

“We are in a post-truth era.”



The sentiment is often expressed in first-person plural, implying a shared experience of “truth.”

We all exist in a “real world” that is threatened by this “fake” one.

“We are in a post-truth era.”



The word “era” is often used to situate this phenomenon in time. (Another frequent temporal signifier is the word “now,” as in “now that facts don’t matter.”) It implies that norms change with time.

“We are in a post-truth era.”



The preposition “post” likewise implies
that time is moving.

In this use, we evidently had “truth,”
but time has progressed and we’ve lost it.

The resulting sentiment is
that we had a shared
understanding of the world,
and it only recently left us.
And wouldn't it be *great* if it we
could *make* it like that *again*?

My point: Lamentations about
“post-truth” (especially from
the left) represent the same
toxic nostalgia as phrases like
“Make America Great Again.”

By “toxic nostalgia,” I mean the desire to return to a nebulous past that never existed rather than engage with the complications of the present.

CULTURE & ARTS 03/09/2017 09:19 am ET | Updated Apr 18, 2017

After Trump Was Elected, Librarians Had To Rethink Their System For Fact-Checking

The American Library Association wants to help you distinguish real news from fake with the help of CRAAP.



By Maddie Crum



TOMMIL VIA GETTY IMAGES

“We’re having to, sadly, take another look at the standard credibility that you and I, and children and adults everywhere, have taken for granted for years. That’s no longer there.”

Then-ALA President Julie Todaro, as quoted in *The Huffington Post*.

Technology gets blamed a lot
in these discussions
(i.e. you can't trust websites
the way you can trust books).

CULTURE & ARTS 03/09/2017 09:19 am ET | Updated Apr 18, 2017

After Trump Was Elected, Librarians Had To Rethink Their System For Fact-Checking

The American Library Association wants to help you distinguish real news from fake with the help of CRAAP.



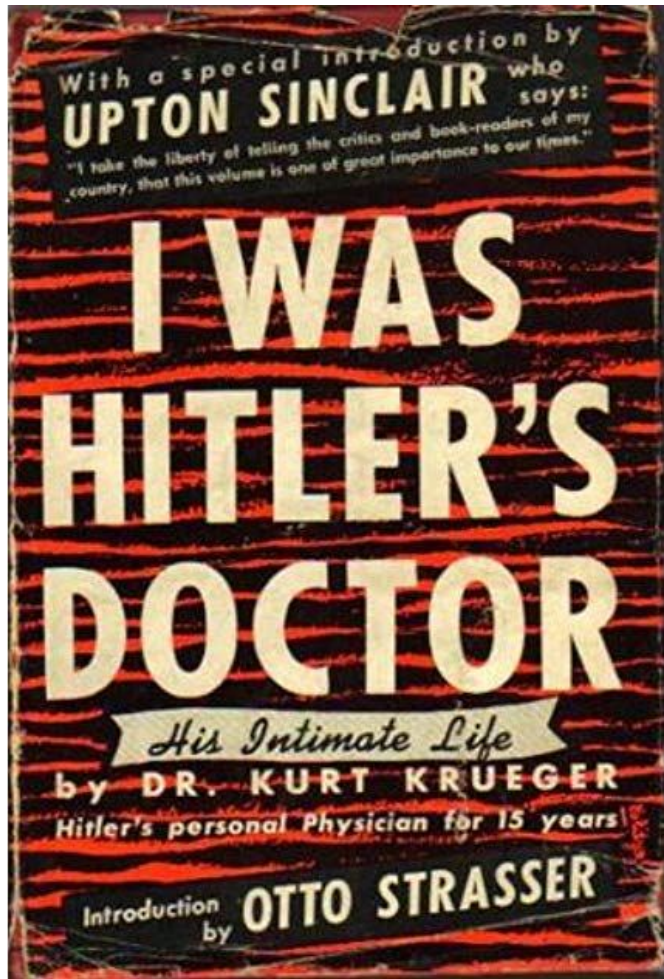
By Maddie Crum



TOMMIL VIA GETTY IMAGES


“Teachers and librarians have had to reconcile student interest in online sources — and the relevancy those sources have to their lives — with the fact that in the past, sites haven’t been as rigorously fact-checked as published books.”
(Crum, 2017)

Let's talk about why blaming
the Internet is ahistorical and
wrong.



The book *I Was Hitler's Doctor* (1942), was written by Dr. Kurt Krueger.

Only it wasn't written by Dr. Kurt Krueger (there is no Dr. Kurt Krueger). The author was Samuel Roth, a New York publisher who specialized in selling unauthorized copies of banned books (Hamalian, 1974).



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
UBC LIBRARY

Library Home
Search Collections
Hours & Locations
Use The Library
Get Research Help
About Us
Ask Us!
LOGIN

Basic Search :
Go
New Search
Search History
Need Help?
My Account
Login
Catalogue Basic Search Tips

Titles 1 of 1

Inside Hitler
I was Hitler's doctor / from the German of Kurt Krueger ; foreword by Upton Sinclair ; introduction by Otto Strasser ; preface by K. Arvid Enlind.

Title: [\[Inside Hitler\]](#)
[I was Hitler's doctor / from the German of Kurt Krueger ; foreword by Upton Sinclair ; introduction by Otto Strasser ; preface by K. Arvid Enlind.](#)

Author/Creator: [Krueger, Kurt \(Physician\)](#)

Published/Created: New York : Boar's Head Books, 1953, ©1942.

Permalink: <http://resolve.library.ubc.ca/cgi-bin/catsearch?bid=1692633>

Location: KOERNER LIBRARY stacks (Floor 1) [Where is this?](#)

Call Number: [DD247.H5 K732 1943](#)

Number of Items: 1

Status: Available

Subject(s): [Hitler, Adolf, 1889-1945.](#)
[Heads of state--Germany--Biography.](#)

Description: 322 p. ; 22 cm.

Notes: Originally published: Inside Hitler. 1st ed. New York : Avalon Press, 1941.

Actions

[Request this item: Recall/ASRS](#)

[Order via Document Delivery](#)

[E-mail](#)


[Export](#)

[Print](#)

[Add to My List](#)

[Report a problem with this record](#)

Google Books:

 ["About This Book"](#)

Display

[Full Record](#)

[MARC Format](#)

The book sold 250,000 copies and is cited in multiple scholarly publications as though it's genuine. (It's not.)

Also, lots of libraries have it in their collection, shelved with the rest of German history.

OK, so maybe a few fabrications have been published in books over the years... That's not systematic like what we're seeing *now*.

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

NAVY, Army, OSD
reviews completed.

INFORMATION

June 1, 1972

THE PRESIDENT HAS SEEN...

~~TOP~~
~~SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLY~~

MEMORANDUM FOR: THE PRESIDENT
FROM: HENRY A. KISSINGER *Haig for*
SUBJECT: Psychological Warfare Campaign

As you directed and as I reported on May 23, an intensive psychological warfare campaign is underway against North Vietnam.

-- A massive leaflet campaign is being conducted with over 46 million dropped in the last ten days and 90 million ready for delivery. Themes stressed are high NVA casualties, ARVN military successes, the isolation and destruction of North Vietnam, our desire for meaningful negotiations, and U.S.-Soviet agreements.

-- Radio broadcasting aimed at NVN has been more than doubled, and a new transmitter will be operating by 9 June. Both covert and overt radios are broadcasting names of NVA POWs and KIA and are playing heavily on NVA reverses, your Moscow meetings, ARVN victories, and our air attacks.

-- Disinformation operations with the aim of sowing doubt and confusion among the leaders in Hanoi are underway, and contact has been made.

-- A program to proselytize North Vietnamese in Paris is being conducted with the purpose of achieving defections, acquiring new channels of inserting desired information, and increasing confusion and mistrust in the North's leadership.

-- Five amphibious diversionary operations off the coast of North Vietnam and the DMZ have been planned, and one has been ordered executed as soon as ships and helicopters are available. These operations are designed to increase enemy uncertainty and spread the feeling that our forces may strike anywhere.

-- We continue to benefit from Al Haig's backgrounder as more articles reflecting North Vietnamese difficulties appear daily.

NSS, State Dept. reviews
completed

~~TOP~~
~~SECRET/SENSITIVE~~

This is a declassified
memo detailing
systematic
disinformation
committed by the
U.S. government in
Vietnam.

Yeah, but that's Nixon. He's the exception, not the rule.
And this is supposed to be about how people read and understand "news."

Both William Randolph Hearst
and Joseph Pulitzer published
fabrications in order to justify
the U.S. going to war with
Spain in 1898.

But that was the Gilded Age!

Newspaper barons were
running amok. It's not like this
has *always* been going on...

Supplement
to the Boston
Independent Chronicle.

Numb. 705.

Boston, March 12.

Extract of a Letter from Capt. Gerrish, of the New-England Militia, dated Albany, March 7.

"His Excellency is the Expedition [See the Account of the Expedition to Oswego] on the River St. Lawrence, at the Cape of the Infant. I will as you see amount to a good deal of Money. The Officer of this Body at first gave us a letter; but we were struck with Horror to find among the Packages, 8 large ones containing S & L P S of our unhappy Country-folks, raised in the three last Years by the Seneca Indians from the Inhabitants of the Frontiers of New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Virginia, and sent by them as a Present to Col. Halliday, Governor of Canada, in order to be by him transmitted to England. They were accompanied by the following curious Letter to that Gentleman.

May it please your Excellency,

"At the request of the Seneca Chiefs I send herewith to your Excellency, under the Care of James Boyd, eight Packs of Skins, cured, hooped and painted, with all the Indian triumphal Marks, of which the following is Invoice and Explanation.

No. 1. Containing 43 Scalps of Congress Soldiers killed in different Skirmishes; there are stretched on black Hoops, 4 inches diameter, the inside of the Skin painted red, with a small black Spot to note their being killed with Bullets. Also 6 of Farmers, killed in their Hoofes; the Hoops red; the Skin painted brown, and marked with a Ho; 3 black Circle all round; to denote their being surprised in the Night; and a black Hatchet in the Middle signifying their being killed with that Weapon.

No. 2. Containing 28 of Farmers killed in their Hoofes; Hoops red; Figure of a Ho, to mark their Profession; great white Circle and Sun, to show they were surprised in the Day-time; a little red Foot, to show they stood upon their Defence, and died fighting for their Lives and Families.

No. 3. Containing 27 of Farmers; Hoops green, to show they were killed in their Fields; a large white Circle with a little round Mark on it for the Sun, to show that it was in the Day-time; black Buller-mark on fone. Hatchet on fone.

No. 4. Containing 102 of Farmers, mixed of the several Marks above; only 18 marked with a little yellow Flame, to denote their being supplied to be of a rebel Clayman, his Hand being pulled out by the Roots, and other Torments; one of the others fixed to the Hoop of his Scalp. Most of the Farmers appear by the Hair to have been young or middle-aged Men; there being but 7 or very grey Heads among all, which makes the Service more efficient.

No. 5. Containing 18 Scalps of Women; Hair long, braided in the Indian Fashion, to show they were Mothers; Hoops blue; Skin yellow Ground, with little red Tadpoles to represent, by way of Triumph, the Tears or Grief occasioned to their Relations; a black scalping Knife or Hatchet at the Bottom, to mark their being killed with those Instruments. 19 others, Hair very grey; black Hoops; plain brown Color; no Mark but the Iron Club or Calumet, to show they were knocked down dead, or had their Brains beat out.

No. 6. Containing 129 Boys' Scalps, of various Ages; small green Hoops; whitish Ground on the Skin, with red Tears in the Middle, and black Buller-marks, Knives, Hatchet, or Club, as their Deaths happened.

No. 7. 11 Gift Scalps, big and little; small yellow Hoops; white Ground; Tears; Hatchet, Club, Calumet, &c.

No. 8. This Package is a Mixture of all the Varieties above-mentioned, to the Number of 122; with a Box of Black Hair, containing 12 little Infants' Scalps of various Sizes; small white Hoops; white Ground; no Tears; and only a little black Knife in the Middle, to show they were ripe out of their Mothers' Bellies.

With these Packs, the Chiefs find your Excellency the following Speech, delivered by Congress to Council, interpreted by the elder Moore, the Trader, and taken down by me in Writing.

Father,

We find you have with many Scalps, that you may see we are not idle Friends.

After,

We wish you to send these Scalps over the Water to the great King, that he may regard them and be refreshed; and that he may see our faithful Acts, in destroying his Enemies, and be convinced that his Friends have not been made to you in vain.

A little and white Belt with red Taffels.

And,

Attend to what I am now going to say: it is a Matter of much Weight. The great King's Enemies are many, and they grow fast in Number. They were formerly like young Panthers; they could not

their blue not scratch; we could play with them as safely; we feared nothing they could do to us. But now their Bodies are become big as the Elk, and strong as the Buffalo; they have also got great and sharp Claws. They have driven us out of our Country for taking Part in your Quarrel. We expect the great King will give us another Country, that our Children may live after us, and be his Friends and Children, as we are. Say this for us to the great King. To enforce it we give this Belt.

A great white Belt with blue Taffels.

For,

We have only to say farther that your Traders exact more than ever for their Goods; and our Hunting is hindered by the War, so that we have fewer Skins to give for them. This ruins us. Talk of fone for me. We are poor; and you have Plenty of every Thing. We know you will lend us Powder and Guns, and Knives and Hatchets; but we also want Shirts and Blankets.

A little white Belt.

I do not doubt but that your Excellency will think it proper to give fone farther Encouragement to these honest People. The high Prices they complain of are the necessary Effect of the War. Whoever Prefers to be sent for them through my Hands, shall be distributed with Prudence and Fidelity. I have the Honour of being,

Your Excellency's most obedient

And most humble Servant,

JAMES CRAWFORD.

"It was at first proposed to bury these Scalps; but Lieutenant Fitzgerald, who you know has got Leave of Absence to go for Ireland on his private Affairs, said he thought it better they should proceed to their Destination; and if they were given to him he would undertake to carry them to England, and hang them all up in some dark Night on the Trees in St. James's Park, where they could be seen from the King and Queen's Palaces in the Morning; for that the Sight of them might perhaps bring Wally-Ismat (as he called him) with some Composition of Confidence. They were accordingly delivered to Fitzgerald, and he has brought them safe hither. To-morrow they go with his Baggage in a Wagon for Bolton, and will probably be there in a few Days after this Letter.

I am, &c.

SAMUEL GERRISH.

Boston, March 20.

Monday last arrived here Lieutenant Fitzgerald above-mentioned, and yesterday the Wagon with the Scalps. The Heads of People are flocking to see them this Morning, and all Mouths are full of Topic for their Particulars enquire of Adam Peters, on the Premises.

TO BE SOLD.

A convenient Ten-Yard, lying in Medfield, on the Post Road, Half a Mile from the Meeting-House, with a good Dwelling-House and Barn, and about 20 Acres of Land, consisting of Mowing, Pasture, and an excellent Orchard. For further Particulars enquire of Adam Peters, on the Premises.

TO BE SOLD.

A large Tract of LAND, lying partly in Oxford, and partly in Charlton, in the County of Worcester. It is situated on a great Country Road, about Half a Mile from Charlton Meeting-House, and is capable of making a Number of fine Settlements. For further Particulars enquire of Joseph Henry, of Salem, or Doctor Samuel Danforth, of Bolton.

All Persons indebted to, or that have any Demands on, the Estate of Richard Greenleaf, late of Newbury-Port, Esq; deceased, are requested to bring in their Accounts to Moses Frazer and Mary Greenleaf, Executors to the last Will and Testament of the deceased, for an immediate Settlement.

TO BE SOLD.

A small new Brick HOUSE, two Rooms on a Floor at the South Part of the Town.—Enquire of the Printer.

Strayed or stolen from the Subscriber, a Bay Horse, about seven Years old, a Hacky well set Horse, marked C. on his off Thigh, iron all, who ever shall take said Horse and return him to the Owner, shall be handsomely rewarded.

HENRY WHITE.

Benjamin Franklin
printed a "hoax" article
in 1782 describing an
attack on American
colonists by Iroquois
and Seneca people. It
relied on racist tropes
to sway public opinion.

The article mimics the typography of the *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser* (Boston, MA, USA).

The edition was numbered in sequence with the paper and included the real editor's name. Europeans accepted it as genuine.

My point: Disinformation has been used for *centuries*. And it's often (though not always) used to shape the course of wars. Subsequently, lots of folks are using militarized language.

So if this has been going on
for so long, why are we
being told that it's a recent
development?

The first reason:
So we'll surrender money
and/or data to would-be
protectors.

The truth is worth it.

The New York Times

SUBSCRIBE TODAY

This is an advertisement that is
predicated upon the idea that
“truth” costs money.



**Let's Fight
Misinformation
Together**

Snopes members can help Snopes
do even more. Sign up for updates.
[Learn more.](#)

Enter your email here...

☐ Accept our **Terms & Privacy
Policy**

Sign Up

This is an attempt
to collect user data
for an otherwise
“free” fact-checking
website. Note the
use of the word
“fight.”

EVALUATING INFORMATION FOR ACCURACY IS A SKILL THAT IS TIMELY—AND TIMELESS.

Two out of three of adults in the U.S. today say fabricated news stories cause a great deal of confusion about the basic facts of current issues and events.*

Thankfully, we have librarians, because teaching people how to be better consumers of information is the fundamental task at the heart of their profession.

This is an ALA fundraising campaign.
Note the use of the word “timely.”

**BECAUSE FAKE
NEWS CAN HAVE
REAL-WORLD
CONSEQUENCES.**

This is an ALA poster. Note the use of the phrase “real-world.”

The second reason:

So we'll accept *outrageous*
technological "solutions" as
seeming necessary.

*Facebook 'Better Prepared'
to Fight Election Interference,
Mark Zuckerberg Says*



Facebook's chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg. Josh Edelson/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

By Sheera Frenkel and Mike Isaac

Sept. 13, 2018



It is not the job
of social
networks to
protect
democratic
elections.

Predicting Factuality of Reporting and Bias of News Media Sources

Ramy Baly¹, Georgi Karadzhov³, Dimitar Alexandrov³, James Glass¹, Preslav Nakov²

¹MIT Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Laboratory, MA, USA

²Qatar Computing Research Institute, HBKU, Qatar;

³Sofia University, Bulgaria

{baly, glass}@mit.edu, pnakov@qf.org.qa
{georgi.m.karadjov, Dimitiy.Alexandrov}@gmail.com

Abstract

We present a study on predicting the factuality of reporting and bias of news media. While previous work has focused on studying the veracity of claims or documents, here we are interested in characterizing entire news media. These are under-studied but arguably important research problems, both in their own right and as a prior for fact-checking systems. We experiment with a large list of news websites and with a rich set of features derived from (i) a sample of articles from the target news medium, (ii) its Wikipedia page, (iii) its Twitter account, (iv) the structure of its URL, and (v) information about the Web traffic it attracts. The experimental results show sizable performance gains over the baselines, and confirm the importance of each feature type.

1 Introduction

The rise of social media has democratized content creation and has made it easy for everybody to share and spread information online. On the positive side, this has given rise to citizen journalism, thus enabling much faster dissemination of information compared to what was possible with newspapers, radio, and TV. On the negative side, stripping traditional media from their gate-keeping role has left the public unprotected against the spread of misinformation, which could now travel at breaking-news speed over the same democratic channel. This has given rise to the proliferation of false information that is typically created either (a) to attract network traffic and gain financially from showing online advertisements, e.g., as in the case of *clickbait*, or (b) to affect individual people's beliefs, and ultimately to influence major events such as political elections (Vosoughi et al., 2018). There are strong indications that false information was weaponized at an unprecedented scale during the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.

“Fake news”, which can be defined as “fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent” (Lazer et al., 2018), became the word of the year in 2017, according to Collins Dictionary. “Fake news” thrive on social media thanks to the mechanism of sharing, which amplifies effect. Moreover, it has been shown that “fake news” spread faster than real news (Vosoughi et al., 2018). As they reach the same user several times, the effect is that they are perceived as more credible, unlike old-fashioned spam that typically dies the moment it reaches its recipients. Naturally, limiting the sharing of “fake news” is a major focus for social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

Additional efforts to combat “fake news” have been led by fact-checking organizations such as Snopes, FactCheck and Politifact, which manually verify claims. Unfortunately, this is inefficient for several reasons. First, manual fact-checking is slow and debunking false information comes too late to have any significant impact. At the same time, automatic fact-checking lags behind in terms of accuracy, and it is generally not trusted by human users. In fact, even when done by reputable fact-checking organizations, debunking does little to convince those who already believe in false information.

A third, and arguably more promising, way to fight “fake news” is to focus on their source. While “fake news” are spreading primarily on social media, they still need a “home”, i.e., a website where they would be posted. Thus, if a website is known to have published non-factual information in the past, it is likely to do so in the future. Verifying the reliability of the source of information is one of the basic tools that journalists in traditional media use to verify information. It is also arguably an important prior for fact-checking systems (Popat et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2018).

It is not the job
of algorithms
and artificial
intelligence to
decide what is
“factual” or
“biased.”

This is not a
“fight against fake news”
and library workers are not
“on the front lines.”

This is not a
“post-truth era”
and there are not
“alternative facts.”

The world is the same
as it has always been.
People in power will use
disinformation to exert
control and oppress the
marginalized.

It is the job of libraries to
discuss how information
functions in society.
Please, talk about this in
your work.

References

- American Library Association. (2019). Libraries transform: An initiative of the American Library Association. <http://www.ilovelibraries.org/librariestransform/>
- Baly, R., Karadzhov, G., Alexandrov, D., Glass, J., & Nakov, P. (2018). Predicting factuality of reporting and bias of news media sources. arXiv preprint. arXiv:1810.01765.
- Crum, M. (2017, March 9). After Trump was elected, librarians had to rethink their system for fact-checking. *Huffington Post*. https://www.huffingtonpost.ca/entry/after-trump-librarians-develop-new-fact-checking-system_n_58c071d3e4b0ed7182699786
- Frenkel, S. & Isaac, M. (2018, September 13). Facebook 'better prepared' to fight election interference, Mark Zuckerberg says. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/13/technology/facebook-elections-mark-zuckerberg.html>
- Hamalian, L. (1974). Nobody knows my names: Samuel Roth and the underside of modern letters. *Journal of Modern Literature*, 3(4), 889-921. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3830902>
- Harrington, H.T. (2014, November 10). Propaganda warfare: Benjamin Franklin fakes a newspaper. *Journal of the American Revolution*. <https://allthingsliberty.com/2014/11/propaganda-warfare-benjamin-franklin-fakes-a-newspaper/>
- Kang, C. (2016, November 21). Fake news onslaught targets pizzeria as nest of child-trafficking. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/21/technology/fact-check-this-pizzeria-is-not-a-child-trafficking-site.html>
- Kissinger, H.A. (1972, June 1). Psychological warfare campaign. *CIA Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room*. <https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/docs/LOC-HAK-512-7-21-2.pdf>
- Krueger, K. (1942). I was Hitler's doctor: His intimate life. (Various fabricated publishers).
- Mulford, C. (2008). Benjamin Franklin's savage eloquence: Hoaxes from the press at Passy, 1782. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 152(4), 490-530. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40541605.pdf>