

# [Alternative Facts: War on Trees and What Are We Watching?](#)

## **The War on the Press Gets Strategic**

To publish, we in the press rely on paper. The internet is great, but paper is real. Paper makes it solid. Paper is respect. So even if you agree with the current administration that the best news is on TV and Twitter, if looking to cut the legs out from under the most thoughtful, in-depth reporting left, cut the paper (so to speak). Why else would the US declare a tree-based trade war with Canada?

Forget the predicted 4+% rise in homebuilding costs ([nytimes.com/2017/04/24/us/politics/lumber-tariff-canada-trump.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/24/us/politics/lumber-tariff-canada-trump.html)). The rising price of paper puts a strain on the *Motif*-like entities that remain in the world, but also on the bigger operations that go right under the current administration's skin - the *WSJ*, *NYT*, *Washington Post*. They all suffer from the financial strain paper tariffs, recently and relatively quietly introduced, put on printers and, upstream, on the media. Not to mention Canada and all the paper pushers in Washington. That's our best explanation for the new tariffs that are driving up the cost of paper. Our second best explanation was plain old tree-envy. And speaking of trees ...

## **Tree Vandalizers: The End of Truth as We Know It**

The star-spangled Genesis that is the American creation story is a socio-political minefield littered with fables. You might have heard that George Washington vandalized his father's cherry tree with an ax, but later admitted to the crime because it is important to be honest and steadfast. Ironically, there is no veracity in this story about telling the truth. It is fake news, a propagandist's tale from 1799. But at least the author had young George face his cross-examination rather than deny the accusations through delusional streams of consciousness sent via carrier pigeon.

Fast-forward to 2018, and another American president is embroiled in a controversy over a tree, and this time it involves (coincidentally enough) Washington's old nemesis, the French. When France's President Emmanuel Macron visited the White House last month, his razor-edged chastening of what America has *really* voted into office was a sober awakening, while Fox News explaining that Macron kissing Trump on the cheeks is an acceptable greeting in France (so not to worry that the Man Who Tells It Like It Is is getting all gay and stuff) was frankly embarrassing.

So, what of this tree? During his visit, Macron presented the White House with an oak sapling to commemorate the American soldiers who fell in the First World War battle of Belleau Wood. But just three days after Macron returned to France, the tree vanished from the White House garden. The president's staff reported that the tree was put in quarantine, as with all foreign flora and fauna, but I like to entertain a different vision. Picture a man in his early 70s wearing a nightgown and a pair of slippers thrashing at the tree with a golden rod, cursing the defiant young whippersnapper who so thoroughly dressed him down.

Is this the truth? Who knows? From Washington and his cherry tree to Donnie and his sapling, America has been perpetually twisted into believing the party line. Custer's Last Stand ... just a myth. Pilgrims on Plymouth Rock ... just a myth. Even the age-old staple that Henry Ford invented the motor car is just a myth. That was the Germans. And if anyone tries to tell you that "In God We Trust" and the Pledge of

Allegiance are part of the nation's foundational principles, tell them that the latter is a tool institutionalized in 1942 for instilling uniformity and belief in the abstract, while the former was adopted as recently as 1956.

With all this uncertainty, it is no wonder that a chunk of society has latched onto the fake news wagon. They have no idea what's real. Deep inside, I believe that many of these people *know* that their longstanding convictions are nothing more than propaganda. But since they are now being asked to recognize that so much of what they hold dear are carefully constructed mendacities, they would rather embrace more fibs than recognize they have been wronged by the very thing they were expected to unquestioningly follow in the first place.

The result? The en-masse vandalization of cherry trees followed by the denial of having even seen a cherry tree before. Which is just as well, as they probably weren't there in the first place.

### **Apprentice Flashbacks**

The long-running reality series was a career highlight for the OOOO (Orange Orangutan in the Oval Office), so we suppose it's not too surprising to find his orangeness flashing back to those days of heady production. Still, we hope at some point an aide will make clear to him that he no longer needs to fire one top staffer every week. He presumably thinks that the pattern will bolster his ratings, but after a year we were hoping he'd realize he's currently the host of a whole different pseudo-reality show.

### **The Poor Us Border**

Trump apparently subjected Kirstjen Nielson, chief of homeland security, to a prolonged tirade about her failure to fix the porousness of the southern US border, saying afterward, "Never liked Nielsen. They always underreported the viewers for *The Apprentice*," clearly demonstrating again his confusion about what show he's on.

Meanwhile, his ban on the poor, the hungry, the huddled masses in his quest to preempt terrorism sets a stunning example of intolerance for the world. Humans are naturally migrant, and with modern technology it's easier than ever, which is part of why refugees keep winding up on the doorsteps of other nations. At what point should those other nations take responsibility for the misery and desperation of fellow humans? We don't know the answer, but we hope someday for a recognition that we are less a planet of nations with individual problems, and ever more a world with shared problems.

Perhaps, by hardening hearts and taking some conservative stances to a bizarro destructive extreme, OOOO is setting the stage for a future compassionate boomerang reaction. Are we a world yet?

And now for a series of **completely untrue news bites**, which represent the best information we have at this time:

This just in from our new DC correspondent Michelle Wolf: "Fuck you, and you're ugly." Thanks Michelle! Now back to regularly scheduled fake news.

### **Plausible Deniability**

It was the cherished friend and defender of generations of presidents, and its capricious failure was the downfall of at least a few leaders forced to answer, "What did you know and when did you know it?" As

the most paranoid Orangutan in Chief since Nixon, it's not surprising that Trump would use fixers with instructions to not tell him the details, as Trump-newbie-attorney Rudy Giuliani is currently claiming Michael Cohen did for Trump in "taking care of" Stormy Daniels. If you've watched *Scandal*, you know that a portentous gaze followed by a close-up is all you really need to communicate, if you have the right fixer.

But on his way to championing plausible deniability, OOOO has somehow invented a whole new flavor - implausible deniability. Which might sound like a bad thing, but he has raised it to an art form in the last year, making the truth so mushy it can be squished into any mold leaving no one believing anything. It's the "hit them with everything we've got" approach to the "bullshit baffles brains" school of persuasion (or, in this case, governance). He did promise to bring American innovation to bear on our government - let's hope some of it survives.

In other testimony, **Gina Haspel**, currently being vetted as candidate to head the CIA, was asked whether she considered torture immoral. The question clearly caught her off guard, and she responded, "I don't know, but we somehow elected him, so listening to his blather feels like something we signed up for, whether it's moral or not."

Finally, the medical community has opened up a new revenue stream. A new division of the American Society of Strategic Medicine (ASS-M), to be headed by New York's **Dr. Harold Bornstein**, will be brokering the sale of celebrity health records. "We envision an auction system - somewhere between Christy's and eBay," he said of the new venture. "Experience has shown that once one becomes a celebrity, one does essentially belong to the public. So these records are, in a sense, public records and can be shared. Unless you're in politics," he added. "The public has absolutely no right to know anything about the general health of their representation, especially - and I'm not naming names here - when it comes to mental health. The public should not know anything about that. Believe me, you don't want to know." When asked, in followup questions, Dr. Bornstein conceded, "Hair health is an exception. That's easily viewed. Hair health is clearly everyone's business."