

How to Get the Nonsense Straight

By Dennis Payton Knight

It's a baffling world, what with all the fake news sites alleging fakery by real politicians, and the real politicians alleging fakery by the real news outlets.

For instance, the *American Tribune* published an article last week reporting President Trump had "just defended the Confederate Flag he hung in the White House." It followed Trump's response to the recent violence in Charlottesville, Virginia.

The article showed a photo of a Confederate flag hanging in the White House, reporting that Trump claimed the flag was part of history and that "the Confederates fought for their country during a very terrible war."

But the story originated from a satirical outlet that prominently warns readers to take their stuff with a grain of salt. As often happens, however, with stories in a spoofing vein, it went viral in the social media, and soon the gag was lost on a gullible, believing public. It was a joke, folks, and Donald Trump was the brunt of it. I learned about the piece on another website, FactCheck.org, which works with Facebook to help identify fake news reports.

About ten years ago another bit of biting satire in *The Arizona Conservative* hung a nonsensical attribution on Senator Barack Obama, with a photograph of him standing with his hands clasped in front of a flag rather than with his hand over his heart. Emmons called out what he described as Obama's aversion to the flag and national anthem, then ascribed this response to the man who would become President. "As I've said... I don't want to be perceived as taking sides. There are a lot of people in the world to whom the American flag is a symbol of oppression. The anthem itself conveys a war-like message. You know, the bombs bursting in air and all that sort of thing... The National Anthem should be 'swapped' for something less parochial and less bellicose. I like the song 'I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing.' If that were our anthem, then, I might salute it. In my opinion, we should consider reinventing our National Anthem as well as 'redesign' our Flag to better offer our enemies hope and love..."

That spoof also went viral, was often repeated, even in the regular press, and soon became another perceived truth that haunted Obama throughout his candidacy and presidency. I learned about that one from Snopes.com, a website dedicated to investigating rumors, sometimes affirming them, often debunking them. I've been using it for decades.

I selected these stories because they caught up both political parties. They started as political satire but achieved the level of real news by sheer repetition. I had plenty to pick from.

Fake news surrounds us, sometimes satirical, but usually unmitigated fabrications advancing a candidate or a cause. The next time you hear something ridiculous, please check out Snopes.com or FactCheck.org for yourself. They are entertaining and standing by to help us get the nonsense straight.