

Lies, Big Lies, and Ballistics

Mark Twain and others are credited with saying “Lies, damned lies, and statistics” as a way to call out politicians and pundits who skew facts and figures to concoct false scenarios and deceitful impressions. The phrase needs some updating.

In 1968 Richard Nixon lied to me when he promised to withdraw our troops and end the war in Viet Nam. I preferred Hubert Humphrey’s domestic agenda, but I believed Nixon, not knowing that he was treasonously subverting the Paris peace talks and would later extend and expand the war with incursions into Cambodia and other heinous policies. My first vote in a public election went to Nixon. I did not make that mistake again.

Jimmy Carter ran for President in 1976, promising that he would “never lie” to us. I voted for him and, despite the disappointments of his presidency, never felt betrayed. No other president during my adult life has been more credible.

Ronald Reagan (deeply delusional or adroitly dishonest?), promising to increase military spending and cut taxes while balancing the budget, unseated Carter, then steered the country toward its current disparities, degradations, and disasters while greatly increasing the national debt, acting dumb, and seriously misleading the public and the press regarding the illegal Iran-Contra dealings.

George H. W. Bush led us into the first Gulf War, invading Iraq under false pretenses that included staged testimony regarding a Kuwaiti hospital travesty that deceived and incensed credulous Americans.

Bill Clinton squandered his mandate, then diddled with Monica and lied about it (as he had with other sexual liaisons). He may not have committed great deceit regarding grave matters of state, but many of his policies worked against his professed values and priorities.

George W. Bush, with lots of direction from Dick Cheney, raised the “art” of lying to new levels. He lied so much that a moral philosopher wrote a best-selling book titled *On Bullshit* to characterize the habitual and pervasive dishonesty of #43. When 9/11 happened the traumatized nation quickly became distracted from the administration’s growing failures, forgot how egregious they were, and generally accepted as true not only the when and where but also the what, who, why, and how in the preposterous story that has become the official account of the events of that day. Bush got his prefabricated pretext for going to war in Afghanistan, and then Iraq, based on all kinds of lies about Islamic terrorists, bin Laden, yellow cake, and WMDs. And America became a torture regime, almost indiscriminately brutalizing and killing “unlawful combatants” without evidence, due process, or trial. Perversely, the psychology of state torture worked so that torture was not so much justified by terrorism as it served to justify the war on terror.

Barack Obama was a breath of fresh air, and not someone who begged credulity. However, his reasonableness and rhetoric often diverted attention from the disconnect between his apparent

good nature and his intolerance for whistleblowers, his massive deportations of undocumented immigrants, and his extrajudicial assassinations, to name some of his worst deceptions.

Then along came Donald Trump, whose constant barrage of lies and deceptions had major news sources keeping count, though it took too long for them to use the “L” word. With Trump, lies became ballistic volleys, weaponized in vindictive, cruel, and self-serving tweets, rants, and media psy-ops designed to stoke grievances and sore egos, arousing anger, fear, resentment, distrust, and division. The stage was set for the biggest big lie of all – that America’s democratic institutions can no longer be counted on to fulfill the will of the people. Not altogether false, that is nonetheless the Big Lie that today’s GOP is doing its damndest to make true.

Copyright 2022 by Byron C. Bangert