
EDITORIAL



JOURNALISM AMONGST THE ELKS

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

Just days before the dastardly Miss Janet Cooke and the *Washington Post* bespattered the elegant gray robes of the fourth estate by hoodwinking a hapless Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board, there appeared a swell piece about bogus news stories in the *Wall Street Journal*. It is perhaps tasteless of me to mention this, but the piece concluded that journalistic hoaxes are rare today because journalists are so "serious."

Actually, it is because they are so absurdly serious that bogus news stories appear all the time. Moreover, if these news stories accord with the pious predilections of other journalists they take on a life of veritable immortality. Who doubts that despite Janet Cooke's downfall there remain earnest Americans solemnly believing that there really is a little black boy gripped by a \$50-a-day heroin habit somewhere?

Many journalists consider themselves adepts in the wonder of social science, a pretension that rattles their vision. Thus when they report news stories they are bowed down by all the bugaboos and primitive myths that idiotize third-rate graduate students sweating to please their haughty profs. Of course they heave up news stories that are severely biased. Some are outright fabrications. I know. Occasionally I have retold such news stories, only to be corrected by careful readers. In fact, our report in the last "Continuing Crisis" about a Jewish boy becoming Chief of the Sioux is just such a story. It is a hoax, the Arabs can relax.

For bias, consider Anthony Lewis's recent column on Jonestown in the illustrious *New York Times*. Mr. Lewis is one of the greatest urban sophisticates of all time, and so when he writes about the Rev. Jim Jones

he drones on about "how an egomaniac religious leader or political leader can lead the credulous into madness" and "the methods of paranoid leadership and the nature of evil." Like a timorous student in Professor Balderdash's seminar, he is too sophisticated to mention that the Rev. Jones was a fervent Communist, who had actually made overtures to the USSR. Or consider all those hour-by-hour accounts of John Hinckley's last days before his assault on President Reagan. Only the *Washington Post* spotted Hinckley in a porn parlor during his last night of freedom. There in the Plain Brown Wrapper adult book store, Hinckley spurned the advances of the store's homosexual clerk, perused the store's bondage literature, and took in a peep show. Every other account of Hinckley's last hours ignored this sizable chunk of time. Did the journalists miss this, or were

they simply reluctant to appear anxious about porn? Twenty years ago the Communism of the Rev. Jones and John Hinckley's taste for porn would have been discussed obsessively. Now fashion dictates that the tough-minded journalists avert their eyes.

The touching piety of many of our journalists and their faithful adherence to quack liberalism makes them prime suckers for hoaxes and, occasionally, willing hoaxers. My favorite journalistic legend is the Eatherly story, a story that went through many recastings and has endured for more than three decades. The hoax began when a larcenous dissipator recently discharged from the Army Air Corps, Major Claude Robert Eatherly, palmed himself off on a credulous reporter as the highly decorated (the Distinguished Flying Cross) World

War II pilot who had bombed Hiroshima and—hounded by guilt—entered upon a life of self-destructive petty crime. He became an instant media hero, and a sensation with the peace movement. He was awarded the 1962 Hiroshima Award "for outstanding contributions to world peace," and one of England's "Angry Young Men," John Wain, composed a poem whose last lines sobbed "Say nothing of love, or thanks, or penitence: Say only 'Eatherly, we have your message.'"

Well, the real message was that here was humbug. Eatherly had no Distinguished Flying Cross. He had not commanded the Hiroshima bombing mission and had never harmed the hair of a Japanese head—at least not in combat. All he had done was fly a navigation plane over Hiroshima collecting information on weather conditions. Yet in 1978, when Eatherly finally gave up the ghost, the *New York Times* dutifully reported that in 1945 he had "radioed the B-29 Enola Gay to drop its atomic bomb." The *Times* retold all the ancient claptrap about Eatherly's tortured conscience. And there was a new twist appropriate to the ideological hypochondria of our day, namely: a link between Eatherly's alleged military exploits and his death from cancer.

As for more recent hoaxes consider the bogus story of May 4, 1980 on CBS's "Sixty Minutes," the burden of which was that Henry Kissinger had once schemed with the Shah to buy more weapons. Or what about Seymour Hersh's dubious contortions on Chile? Even he now admits that things were amiss in those lurid stories. Things were also amiss in his 1973 story asserting that President Nixon two days after his 1969 inauguration personally authorized "a secret Marine Corps" invasion of Laos. More recently, a so-called "Dissident Paper" on El Salvador



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was the occasion for bogus stories by Karen De Young in the *Washington Post* and Stephen Kinzer in the *Boston Globe*, along with Flora Lewis and Anthony Lewis in the *New York Times*. Passed off as an "official document" from American foreign policy experts alarmed by secret Carter administration plans for El Salvador, we now know that the document was a forgery. The duped journalists have yet to find out who hornswoggled them.

Will the hoaxes and biased news stories end now that Janet Cooke has been unhorsed? Not if the Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board can help it; the prize withdrawn from Cooke was given to a *Village Voice* journalist for at least one story that is even trashier than Cooke's and scarcely better substantiated. Based on our lazy journalists' favorite expedient—gossiping unidentified sources—the story alleges that a widely admired civil rights activist was a homosexual who

preyed on his disciples, one of whom murdered him. Shoddy journalism like this could render the Archbishop of Canterbury a homosexual, though he is more fit to defend himself.

The latest word on this odoriferous news story is that James Wechsler of the *New York Post* believes he has found fraud. He has filed a complaint with the National News Council. The story's author implied in the piece that she had gained information from an interview with the murderer of the

deceased. Now Wechsler had discovered that the interview never took place. Thus it is possible that this year's Pulitzer Prize for feature writing was given to not one but two bogus stories. Is the Pulitzer Prize Advisory Board worried? There is no indication of it. The Pulitzer crowd still gathers to sing and to solemnize and to carry on the noble business of kissing each other on both cheeks. The Board remains journalism's equivalent of the Elks. □

C A P I T O L I D E A S



THE BLOOMSBURY SAVINGS & LOAN

by Tom Bethell

I was listening to the radio a few weeks ago when I realized that a counter-revolution had taken place in one important area of public policy. Representative Jim Jones of Oklahoma was being interviewed by Washington's WRC "all news" radio station. He is the congressman Tom Wicker of the *New York Times* has described approvingly as a conservative; since Tom Wicker has disapproved of all conservatives on principle ever since he forsook the South and joined the Hive of collectivism, one was immediately put on the alert: Jones cannot be a conservative at all—otherwise Tom Wicker wouldn't be praising him. And in fact said Jones has since shown himself to be a rather useless fellow—more interested in impressing the constituency of Great Society true believers than in representing First District Oklahomans.

Still, there he was on the radio saying that the nation needs to increase its savings rate. I wonder if he realized at that point that there is only one way to improve savings, and that is to lessen the tax penalty on upper income groups—something

that Great Society true believers and Hive collectivists don't approve of at all. Anyway, his comment was a step in the right direction, and at that point I began to keep a tally. President Reagan has several times commented adversely on our low savings rate. His Secretary of the Treasury Donald Regan believes that saving should be increased. So does Senator Pete Domenici, the chairman of the Senate Budget Committee. And Representative William Green of New York recently had this to say in the *Congressional Record*:

Mr. Speaker, the United States has the lowest personal saving rate of any major industrial nation—4.7 percent in the third quarter of 1980. The current U.S. rate has dropped by half over the past ten years to a level that is one-fourth the Japanese rate and one-third the German rate . . . When saving is inadequate, something has to give.

The problem is to find anyone who is *against* savings. Oh, I'm sure Alice Rivlin, the left-wing numbers-cranker so supinely retained on the federal payroll by Senator Domenici, still maintains her hostility to the virtuous and prudent practice, but by and

large it is rapidly becoming impossible to find anyone in the public policy arena who is opposed to saving.

This I have called a counter-revolution because the original revolution was created by the British economist Lord Maynard Keynes about 50 years ago. Keynes argued, in his utterly weird but nevertheless extremely influential book *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*, that savings wasn't a good thing after all. His argument was quite ludicrous, but had the virtue of simplicity: Money saved was money not spent, resulting in static inventories, idle factories, and workers dismissed. It was here that he reversed cause and effect in economics, arguing that the *demand* for goods (consumption) created the supply of them.

In his *Essays in Persuasion* (1931), written a few years earlier, Keynes put the matter as plainly as he knew how: "The best guess I can make is that when you save five shillings you put a man out of work for a day." Five years later, in the *General Theory*, he knew enough about intellectual fashions to serve this up with suitable algebraic complexity. But the idea was the same. The "paradox



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