

Fake News

Nobody asked but ...

POTUS likes to take credit for things that are going to happen anyway. Thus it is with “fake news.” Fake news is really incompetent news. And incompetent news has been around for a long time, as it will be as long as there is news.

News is caused by the social need of humans to not live in a bubble. News requires communication, and we have developed reasonably sophisticated means of communication wherever *homo sapiens* has occurred. We have simultaneously developed the game of telephone/telegraph/grapevine, where one player whispers a message to the next, and so it goes around a circle. When the circuit has been run, the first player and the last compare messages. When hell freezes over, the content matches.

The same thing happens in the professional media. Sure there is bias, but that’s just part of the territory. The effect is heightened when there is a feeding frenzy or a slow news day. For example, there was a recent story where a group of adults were keeping a bunch of children in dire circumstances. Malnutrition was just one of the bad outcomes. Every iteration of the story I saw had the word “compound” in it — an instant cliché, a shorthand attempt at describing a domicile. Do all cults live in compounds, and/or do all compounds involve cults? In many journalists’ minds, that bias occurs. Most journalists, like the participants in the above game, will take biased shortcuts because they are pressed for time and original-seeming content. In matters that they do not have time to understand, they will leave in the clichés, and omit the truer detail. Not once did a story describe the actual living conditions at the “compound.”

— Kilgore Forelle