

## Breitbart “News” spreads some bright lies

By Julian Sereno

I never understood why Breitbart News wasn't thoroughly discredited a few years back, when it posted a video that had been edited to put words in the mouth of an African American civil servant to make it appear she made a racist anti-white statement when she had said no such thing.

In 2010, Shirley Sherrod, Georgia State Director of Rural Development for the U.S. Department of Agriculture gave a speech to the National NAACP about the importance of overcoming racism. Andrew Brietbart, since deceased, excerpted her remarks to make it sound like she said the opposite, and posted it on his eponymous website.

President Obama bit and swallowed it hook, line and sinker, as did Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, who fired Sherrod. It wasn't until the entire tape of her speech was examined that the truth came out and Breitbart's big lie was exposed. Obama and Vilsack apologized and offered her a better job at the USDA, which she declined. In 2014 she sued Breitbart and co-defendant Larry O'Connor for defamation. They settled before trial in 2015; terms were not disclosed.

After that, knowing them to be willful liars, I stopped reading anything they posted. Breitbart's credibility should have been in tatters, but instead of withering away, it metastasized. Robert Mercer, an American oligarch, endowed it with \$11 million. Steve Bannon, *eminence gris* of the Alt. Right, took over after Breitbart died in 2012.

This was the dawn of Fake News, the reporting of falsehoods and rumor as fact. Once disparaged as canards, hoaxes and con jobs, they gained currency. Credulous conservatives believed it all; no matter how painstakingly lies were exposed, they fit so perfectly with their world view. And the lies spread.

Breitbart's falsehoods were posted on the enormously popular Drudge Report, broadcast on Fox News, and printed and posted elsewhere. They were picked up by Donald Trump who used them as the basis of his political platform. And they spread through Facebook, Twitter and Google, with a big assist from Vlady Putin's legions of Bolshevic bots. How wide was the Russian reach? Their ads reached 126 million American Facebook users, according recent testimony before congress from the Tech oligarchs and their lawyers.

Breitbart's lies were worthy of their ideological forebear, Dr. Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda: That Barack Obama was a Muslim born in Kenya; that he supported terrorists, that he wiretapped Trump tower during the 2016 election campaign. That Hillary Clinton and other prominent Democrats ran a sex ring with enslaved children out of various restaurants, including the Cosmic Ping Pong Pizzeria in Washington D.C. The list goes on and on.

Less than a year ago, a credulous true believer, Edgar Maddison Welch of Salisbury, NC, enraged by the false reports, went to investigate, armed with an assault rifle. He shot up the restaurant, thankfully without harming anyone. He is now serving four years in prison after a plea deal. And not a single child sex slave was to be found.

Now there are many more purveyors of propaganda, conspiracy theories and right-wing lies. Alex Jones "infowars" comes to mind. Steve Bannon left Breitbart to head up the Trump campaign last year and then moved on to the West Wing of the Trump White House. Now he is back at Brietbart, taking aim at Establishment Republicans in next year's election.

Breitbart continues to serve up falsehoods *flambe*. Most recently, it reported that an undocumented immigrant started the wildfires in the California wine country in October. The Sonoma County Sheriff issued a statement: "This is completely false, bad, wrong information that Breitbart started and is being put out

into the public.” Brietbart’s true believers, including President Trump, loved the lie and embrace it nonetheless.

But probably not Edgar Maddison Welsh anymore.

Chico Marx’s question sounds sadly prophetic: Who are you going to believe? Me or your own two eyes?

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