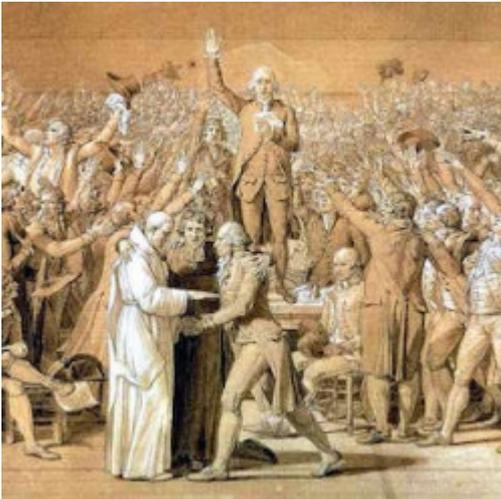


Casual Lies: Is Postmodernism a Hallmark of Societal Decline?



By Alex Berezow — July 5, 2018



Credit: Public Domain/Wikipedia [1]

Geopolitical analyst George Friedman wrote in his book [The Next 100 Years](#) [2] that cultures go through three phases: barbarism, civilization, and decadence/decline. "Decadents cynically believe that nothing is better than anything else. If they hold anyone in contempt, it is those who believe in anything." I think he's right.

There's a word for "not believing in anything": It's called postmodernism, and one wonders if it might go hand-in-hand with societal decline.

Barring some cataclysmic event, decline doesn't happen overnight. Decline is a choice. Historians disagree exactly why the Roman Empire eventually collapsed, but we do know that it was a long, protracted process, largely involving a series of bad choices. For example, the Romans had a habit of, as Vox aptly describes, "[choosing bizarre and perverted emperors](#) [3]," which likely gave rise to the notion that decadence played a role in Rome's ruin.

If there's any truth to that, what does decadence look like? In my estimation, postmodernism is a hallmark of decadence. We have previously described [postmodernism](#) [4] -- along with its identical twin, [anti-intellectualism](#) [5] -- as the biggest threats to science and society as a whole. Indeed, when a society can no longer distinguish truth from lies, that serves as a flashing red warning light that it may be headed toward decline.

And postmodernism is everywhere, perhaps nowhere as clearly and painfully obvious as our national discourse. As usual, journalists lead the way.

Truth and Integrity Matter to Few Journalists

I will readily admit to being harsh on journalists. Obviously, they aren't the only people for whom truth and integrity appear to matter very little. The same problem plagues many politicians, lawyers, businessmen, and practically all alternative medicine hucksters. But, because I'm a professional science communicator (as well as a science journalism critic), I feel it is my special duty to speak up when my "colleagues" so woefully tarnish our reputation.

The biggest and most recent jaw-dropping assault on the integrity of journalism just occurred at the *New York Times*. One of their reporters -- who covered national security, no less -- was [caught sleeping with a source](#) [6]. In any sane world, that would result in immediate termination and likely the end of a career. The institution would be embarrassed. But not today. Instead, the NYT [reassigned](#) [7] her to another post, and her colleagues [publicly praised and defended her on Twitter](#) [8]. What should have been a moment of shame and self-introspection was instead turned into a celebration -- a giant middle finger to anyone with a basic sense of integrity.

That offense was simply the most egregious in recent days, but it was hardly the only one. Indeed, I could write an article every single day showcasing the lack of truth and integrity in science journalism alone. I choose not to because, thankfully, there are plenty of good things to write about. However, here are some examples from the last several days:

- The *New York Times* ran an op-ed about how a person with cancer believes a [stuffed animal helped cure him](#) [9]. This one line summarizes the tone of the article: "I would not leave my fate in doctors' hands alone. The fairy god bunny would be my amulet."
- CNN's Christiane Amanpour and her guest, Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha, [flat-out lied about the Flint water crisis](#) [10], the latter of whom characterized it as the "most important... public health disaster of this young century." In reality, the [average blood lead level among Flint's children was lower during the crisis](#) [10] than it was from 2006 to 2012, when there was no crisis.
- Live Science, usually a trustworthy source, published an article that [linked glyphosate to cancer](#) [11], despite the well-known fact that every major, reputable regulatory agency rejects that.

Just yesterday, *Scientific American* [tweeted](#) [12]:

Blog: This Independence Day comes at a time when science has been sidelined in the U.S., threatened by steep proposed budget cuts, skepticism, and denial on all sides of the political spectrum.

Can science thrive in today's America?

bit.ly/2u5SngD

A better question is, "Should a science news outlet be spreading false information?" The "proposed budget cuts" never happened. In fact, the exact opposite occurred: [Science got the biggest funding boost in a decade](#) ^[13].

Truth, lies. They're all the same now. Is that too cynical? I don't think so. When I criticized Deborah Blum, publisher of Undark, for running an op-ed written by an environmental activist that was full of erroneous information, her [response](#) ^[14] was, "It's an op-ed, Alex. Get a grip."

In other words, the truth doesn't matter. I never thought I would see a journalist openly say so, but there it is.

Truth Is the First Casualty

It's been said that truth is the first casualty in war. I think it could also be said that truth is the first casualty in a decadent and declining society. But remember, like telling the truth, decadence and decline are choices.

Standing up for science and truth is also a choice, and tens of millions of Americans are willing to do just that. They do so by reading ACSH or any other outlet that places evidence over ideology. Though mainstream media may have been infected by postmodernism, plenty of us are standing against it. By reading this and sharing it with friends, we can sound the alarm that it's not too late.

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- [2] <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/books-speeches/the-next-100-years-a-forecast-for-the-21st-century/>
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