

# HST



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

## HISTORY STUDENT TIMES

FAKE NEWS: CONSPIRACY AND CONTROVERSY IN  
HISTORY



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# HST

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**THANK YOU TO THE TEAM OF  
ASSISTANT EDITORS FOR ISSUE 1  
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# FAKE NEWS: CONSPIRACY AND CONTROVERSY IN HISTORY



## Letter from the Editor

We live in a world where information and news is freely available to access anywhere we go and I'm not just talking about our phones either. Posters stuck to lampposts; advertisements on the sides of buses; protests in the streets; and graffiti on the walls all try to fight for our attention. But how much do we trust these sources of information? A certain former president was a fan of the phrase 'fake news.' Though this term seems like a modern phenomena, the spreading of false information and conspiracies are evident throughout history.

Some of the most exciting aspects of studying history is uncovering the conspiracies within the common narratives of popular culture. This first issue of History Student Times 2021/22 explores some of history's conspiracies and controversies from Anne Boleyn to the 'Gay Agenda'.

A big thank you to all the contributors and editors of this issue. I've thoroughly enjoyed compiling this issue together. I hope you enjoy reading these articles over the holidays!

Henna Ravjibhai

*NOTE: The content of this issue includes conversations on war, conflict and other conspiracies that some readers may find uncomfortable. I have tried my best to include content warnings (CW) at the beginning of these articles where appropriate.*

# FAKE NEWS IN AMERICA: A HISTORY

In his 1807 letter to newspaper editor John Norvell, Thomas Jefferson famously wrote, “the man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them” and that “nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle”. Of course, the newspapers of the nineteenth-century were political mouthpieces, with no real claims of objectivity; their names — The Cecil Whig and the Easton Star-Democrat in Maryland, for example — often reflected and evidenced this lack of objectivity and their political biases. Furthermore, the printed press of Jefferson’s era can be seen as the epitome of “fake news” itself. In August, 1838, for example, the New York Sun published articles detailing the discovery of life on the moon, attributed (falsely) to the astronomer Sir John Herschel. The five published articles described sightings of flying bat-winged men and unicorns living on the surface of the moon, discovered using Herschel’s “hydro-oxygen magnifiers”. The “Great Moon Hoax”, intended to be satirical, instead succeeded in attracting new readers to the New York Sun despite the falsity of the news described.

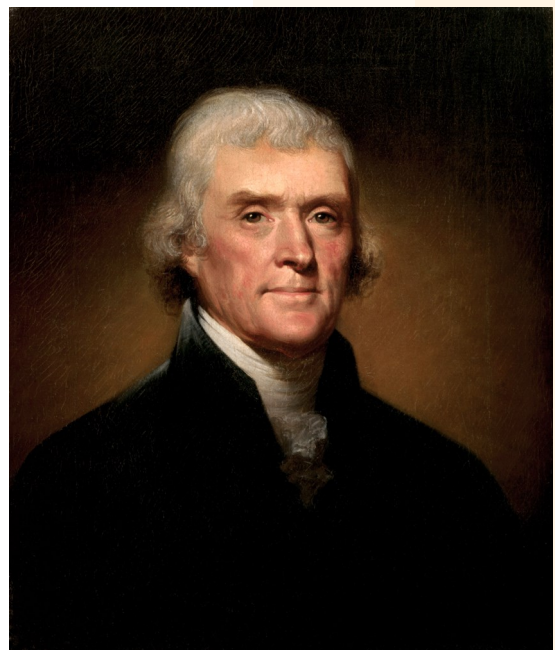
Moving forward in time then “fake news” is evidently by no means a new phenomenon. Today, the more “highbrow” newspaper outlets seem to pride themselves on their reliability — the CEO and President of the New York Times in 2016 advised; “if you as a citizen are worried about fake news, put your money where your mouth is and pay for the real thing.” Despite this strive for reliability from outlets such as the New York Times, however, the newspaper itself as well as media outlets at large (including social media and online news sources) remain a “polluted vehicle”.

In 2017, “fake news” was penned the Collins Dictionary’s word(s) of the year. A year prior to which, in 2016, Trump’s election campaign was accused of being won due to the misinformation spread by Facebook ads — “fake news”. From an alternate point of view, according to Trump, it is “fake news” itself that led to his political losses -- “The FAKE NEWS media (failing @nytimes, @NBCNews, @ABC [...])”, he tweeted “is not only my enemy, it is the enemy of the American people!” and, in another tweet, “Any negative polls are fake news, just like the CNN, ABC, NBC polls in the election”. Furthermore, in 2017 at a “Make America Great Again Rally”, Trump himself quoted Jeffer-

son’s “nothing can be believed which is seen in a newspaper” to attack “fake news”.

However, when we return to Jefferson’s quote, we must consider its context. The full quote reads: “it is a melancholy truth, that a suppression of the press could not more completely deprive the nation of its benefits, than is done by its abandoned prostitution to falsehood. Nothing can now be believed which is seen in a newspaper. Truth itself becomes suspicious by being put into that polluted vehicle”. Jefferson then goes on to suggest ways to organise newspapers to distinguish areas of truth from “fake news”. Prior to his letter to Norvell, Jefferson had defended the importance of the press, and said: “were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter” — contrary to Trump’s opinion that the press is an “enemy of the American people!”.

Access to news and information online has rendered today’s generations more informed than those previous ever have been. Yet how can we ourselves recognise the differences between what is “fake news” and what is real in newspapers and news sources both physical and online? Although Jefferson’s statement is true to some extent, perhaps Mark Twain’s iteration is better: “if you don’t read the newspapers, you’re uninformed. If you read the newspapers, you’re misinformed”.



Olivia Tait

# HAS NATO BECOME A COLD WAR RELIC?

George Davis

CW: AFGHANISTAN CONFLICT



[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Collage\\_%E2%80%94\\_US\\_Troop\\_withdrawal\\_from\\_Afghanistan\\_\(2020%E2%80%94942021\).png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Collage_%E2%80%94_US_Troop_withdrawal_from_Afghanistan_(2020%E2%80%94942021).png)

The image of people desperately running alongside and in front of a US military plane as it prepared to take off from Kabul runway has drawn comparisons with a similar photograph taken in April 1975, of a conga of people scrambling to get on a US military helicopter perched atop the embassy in Saigon. Both images serve as an eternal memorandum of botched US foreign policy attempts at engaging in a conflict in a faraway land and ultimately, being hounded out by their local victors. And in both cases, they were doing it alone, without the military assistance of their NATO allies.

The debacle which was the US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan puts into focus NATO's failure in establishing a stable government to defend against the Taliban menace and lead the war-ravaged country into long-term democracy. The fact that the US left so suddenly, without consulting its NATO allies, points to their disregard for the transatlantic organisation which has grown so imbalanced that the US have been making significant strategic decisions unilaterally. This was not the case during the Cold War when safeguarding Europe was the bedrock of US foreign policy.

President Macron's reference to 'NATO's brain death', accounts for a demise from a multilateral organ which decided and settled international disputes through military and diplomatic means. This downward trajectory can be explained through an analysis and comparison

of the changing geopolitical landscapes from its inception in 1949 to the present day.

To understand the original role of NATO and to therefore chart its decline, it's instructive to understand the geopolitical climate behind its birth. From 1945-48 Stalin's salami tactics saw the Soviet Union (USSR) slice away the post war democracies of Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland and Czechoslovakia into communist satellite states as Eastern Europe fell behind an Iron Curtain.

The United States feared the further spread of their rival ideology as well as the collective industrial mite of Europe being harnessed under a communist hegemony which could then be used to challenge their position as global superpower. After all, the US had intervened in Europe twice before in 1917 and 1941 to stop Germany doing precisely the same thing. President Truman launched his containment strategy in 1947 of which NATO was an extension, in order to stop communism spreading through Europe.

Thus, NATO was borne out of US self-interest rather than any benevolent act of philanthropy. It worked for both the US and Western Europe who wanted protection from the reach of Stalin.

The Washington treaty was a Transatlantic alliance signed between the US, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Norway, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Within it was enshrined collective military cooperation and protection, stating that if any individual member was attacked by a foreign power then the collective would come to its defence.

Article 5 of the treaty states: 'The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.'

The agreement also saw US military bases established across Western Europe.

Ultimately NATO was successful in acting as a deterrent against the spread of communism on the continent as no other country became part of the Soviet empire which finally crumbled in December 1991.

Now in the present day we find an organisation which has become 'politically unmanageable, militarily dysfunctional and strategically confused.'



Let's start with the politically unmanageable and militarily dysfunctional accusation. There has been a growing rift between the US and its European allies over spending on defence. In 2020 the US spent just over 3.7% of its GDP on defence, whilst the average European members (and Canada) spent 1.77%. This has been a long-standing bone of contention between the alliance. In 2011 US defence secretary Robert Gates predicted "a dim, if not dismal future" for NATO warning that "there will be dwindling appetite and patience in US congress and in the American body politic writ large to expand increasingly precocious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to be serious and capable partners in their own defence." Both Obama and Trump cited similar concerns, albeit in slightly different styles.

Here lies the crux of the issue. The US want their allies to invest more on their defence to address the military imbalance. European members have become junior partners lacking the capacity to support the US effectively in modern conflicts which demand high intensity combat, logistical and operational capabilities.

Such was the case in Afghanistan where NATO only oversaw an international security force to maintain law and order after the US had removed the Taliban from power, rather than help their senior partner in ousting the militant group in the first place.

The reason why European members are reluctant to invest more in arms is behind NATO's strategic confusion. Nowadays there is no massive threat to European government's sovereignty. Borne out of the ashes of the decrepit USSR, Russia although undoubtedly meddling, are a shadow of the former communist bloc, lacking the resources to threaten the rest of Europe. With a population of 140 million, 360 million fewer than the combined populations of European NATO members coupled with a GDP seven times smaller,

Russia spends three times less on defence per year. European members don't see the point in spending more on defence when there is no obvious threat to counter. In the 20th century NATO has provided a significant pillar of security in Europe. Yet unless the organisation can adapt politically and strategically to the current geopolitical landscape, it runs the risk of becoming a cold war relic.

#### Further Reading

*Sean Kay, 'What Went Wrong with NATO?', Cambridge Review of International Affairs, 18:1 (2005), 69-83 (p.69).*



# MYTH OF ENLIGHTENMENT DESPOTISM

Katie Male

**B**ritain has long justified its colonial policy in India as 'enlightened despotism' which was conducted for the benefit of the governed. There is a commonly held view that Britain's colonial presence was a modernising force which India benefited from, with the Indian railways and political system often cited as symbols of Britain's positive impact. In fact, the marginal benefits from British colonial rule were mere by-products of a wider programme of exploitation. Britain's treatment of India was brutal, a hindrance to development and exacerbated many of the socio-political problems which can still be seen today.

India's economic demise is the clearest example of how Britain's rule hindered its development. At the start of the 18th century, India's share of the world economy was 23%. By the time that Britain had left India, it had dropped to under 4%. Industries which were previously prominent, such as textiles, were suppressed in favour of converting the sub-continent into forging India into a cash-cow to Britain. Instead of being an exporter of goods, India became the world's biggest importer of British ones, with its share of world exports falling from 27% to 2%. The infamous British Industrial Revolution, therefore, was built upon the exploitation and deindustrialisation of the Indian economy.

British exploitation did not cost Indian economic growth alone, but millions of lives. Under British rule, 4 million Bengals died in the 1943 Great Bengal Fam-

ine. During World War Two, Winston Churchill deliberately ordered the diversion of food from starving Indians to British soldiers without regard for millions of Indian lives. This is particularly disturbing shocking, given that 2.5 million Indians fought on behalf of Britain in WW2, becoming the largest volunteer army in history.

'But what about the railways?'. Admittedly, the British-constructed railway system in India has brought about benefits for the movement of peoples. Yet the simple fact that numerous countries constructed railway systems without undergoing the trouble and expensive of being colonised, is often overlooked. The railways were hugely profitable for British shareholders whose extravagant returns were funded by Indian taxes. Moreover, its primary objective was not so much to assist the movement of peoples, but to transport extracted resources to British ports.

Much of Britain's mistreatment of India can still be seen today. India's hasty partition in 1947, which was completed in a mere 6 weeks, displaced between 10-20 million people along religious lines. This created an overwhelming refugee crisis, with India-Pakistan conflicts over disputed areas such as the Kashmir region continuing today. It is not a mere coincidence, therefore, that many of the violent, contemporary political hot spots (India-Pakistan, Israel-Palestine) share a colonial British legacy.





# FACT VS FICTION: THE CASE OF ANNA ANDERSON AND ANASTASIA ROMANOV

CW: MENTAL ILLNESS AND SUICIDE



<https://www.flickr.com/photos/royaloperahouse/29794391984>

The brutal execution of the Romanov family at the hands of Bolshevik revolutionaries in July 1918 is something widely documented today, but which at the time was kept secret from the public. This led to swirling rumours about the survival of certain members of the family, particularly Grand Duchess Anastasia, enabling a number of individuals to emerge claiming to be the Grand Duchess. Most famous, and arguably successful, of these claimants was Anna Anderson who, though being proven a fraud, was able to convince even some who knew the Romanovs closely of her identity as Anastasia until DNA testing was able to prove otherwise.

Claims that Anderson, who was born in 1896, was a Russian Grand Duchess first emerged in 1922 while she was institutionalized at Daldorff Asylum following a suicide attempt in 1920, and who at the time used the name Fraulein Unbekannt, German for Miss Unknown. Anderson was described by medical staff as speaking

German with a Russian accent, and a fellow patient, Clara Peuthert, claimed the woman with an unknown identity was Grand Duchess Tatiana, one of Anastasia's sisters. Peuthert informed a Russian émigré, Captain Nicholas von Schwabe after her release that she had seen Tatiana at the asylum, a claim Schwabe accepted as true when he visited the asylum. Others were persuaded to visit, with a mixed response to the claim. Years after the woman's release from the asylum Thea Malinovsky, a nurse, claimed that she had been told in Autumn 1921 the woman was Anastasia, though Anderson herself had no memory of the incident.

Anderson was taken out of the asylum in May 1922 and given a room in the Berlin home of a Russian émigré, Baron Arthur von Kleist. Referring to herself as Anna Tchaikovsky at this point, she was again visited by a number of those who knew the Romanovs, with reports again being mixed, though many who agreed she was Anastasia later rescinded their claims. In 1925, while in hospital being treated for a tuberculous infection in her arm, a number of visitors, including Anastasia's tutor Pierre Gilliard and his wife, all denied she was Anastasia, though this did not stop those who did believe her claim paying for her expenses, including her convalesce in Lugano being paid for by Anastasia's great-uncle, Prince Valdemar of Denmark. It was at this time Anderson also began travelling under Anastasia's personal details as Anna Tchaikovsky, although her identity had not yet been formally identified.

A private detective was hired by the Tsarina's brother to investigate Tchaikovsky's claims, determining that she was a Polish factory worker called Franziska Schanzkowska, who worked in a munitions factory during the First World War and who had suffered head injuries after a grenade fell out of her hand. Schanzkowska had been declared insane in 1916 and spent time in two asylums, but was reported missing from her lodgings in Berlin in early 1920, and hadn't been seen or heard from since. Schanzkowska's brother was introduced to Anderson in May 1927 but was ambivalent as to her identity. It was later suggested that he had known her to be his sister, but chose to leave her to her new life.

Increased publicity in America as a result of Gleb Botkin, who had known Anastasia as a child, publishing a number of articles, meant that in 1928, Anderson's passage to America was paid by a distant cousin of Anastasia, Xenia Leeds, at whose estate in Oyster Bay, New York, Anderson stayed at for six months. It was also around this time questions of the Tsar's estate were gaining increased traction, and it was following an argument over the estate that Anderson left the Leeds' mansion, moving into the Garden City Hotel in New York, where she was booked in as Mrs Anderson. Further denunciation of Anderson's claim came in October 1928 at the funeral of the Dowager Empress Marie, at which twelve of the Romanov's closest relations signed a declaration that would become known as the Copenhagen settlement. In this, they all denounced Anderson as an imposter.

Anderson returned to Germany in August 1931 after spending time in a sanatorium, drawing more members of the German aristocracy to her cause and enabling her to live as a guest among her supporters, which she continued to do into the Second World War. With a number of law suits in progress, in 1946 Anderson moved into former army barracks, where she lived as a recluse until being taken to hospital in May 1968 after being found semi-conscious, in a decaying house with an Irish Wolf Hound and sixty cats, all of which were put down following orders the house be cleaned.

Accepting an offer from Gleb Botkin, who continued to support her, to return to America, Anderson married history professor Jack Manahan before her six-month visitor's visa expired, and lived legally as Anastasia Manahan. The law suits ended in February 1970 with neither side able to establish the truth of her identity, and Anderson herself died in February 1984, still with a good amount of support to her claim to be Anastasia Romanov.

Ultimately, The bodies of Tsar Nicholas II, his wife and three of their daughters were exhumed in 1991, with Anastasia and Alexei's bodies being discovered in 2007. Following DNA and mitochondrial testing, it was proven that these were the seven members of the Romanov family, and that Anderson's DNA did not match. Furthermore, Anderson's DNA was tested on the Schanzkowski family, leading to confidence that Anderson was indeed Franziska Schanzkowska, as the private detective had suggested many years earlier.

Schanzkowska's claim was able to persist while many others didn't, largely due to a lack of physical or documentary proof which meant that until the discovery of the bodies it was largely a matter of personal belief. This was how Anderson's claim was able to survive so long, with many books, pamphlets, films and even a ballet being produced using large parts of Anderson's story both while she was alive and after her death. Though her claim has now been proven false, historians remain unsure as to whether Anderson was simply going along with what was happening, or whether she came to believe that she was Anastasia. Either way, what started in mental hospital grew into what became one of the most publicised cases of mistaken identity in the twentieth century.



**Victoria Beningfield**

# Fear, Paranoia and the 'War on Terror'

CW: TERRORISM, WAR AND ISLAMOPHOBIA

Henna Akhtar

This year marked the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 terror attacks which affected all aspects of the American life. This article looks at a range of conspiracy theories within world politics, focusing on those emerging from United State (US) foreign politics in the aftermath of 9/11 and the resulting war on terror. It also looks at conspiracies emerging from terrorist organisations to justify their own war.

## War on Terror?

Major world events have been triggered by conspiracies. The War on Terror began with the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. The foreign politics launched in the wake of 9/11, such as the war with Iraq in 2003, were based on the looming conspiracy that Iraq was building weapons of mass destructions (WMD) with the intention to sell to terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda. No nuclear weapons or programmes were found in Iraq and the intelligence source for the relation between Iraq and Al-Qaeda was unreliable. The Chilcot inquiry claims that both the UK and the US drew conclusions about Iraqi WMD and terrorist links which were unfounded and based on misconceptions about the Iraqi regime. Military action was opposed worldwide with protests and longstanding US allies argued that Iraq did not have WMD. But media sources in the US were largely pro-war and pushed for ideological support for the American government. The claims against Iraq were not linked with paranoia and so were not identified as conspiracies. But the war on Iraq was based on unreliable sources and shows how authoritative actors can advance conspiracies to legitimise their own goals, in regard to Iraq, to further American interest in the Middle East and have a stronger interest in Iraq's oil.

## War on Islam?

Conspiracy theories also emerge from terrorist organisations to justify their own war. Osama bin Ladin and Ayman al-Zawahhrin used conspiracy theories about the US to gain support for Al-Qaeda and their rhetoric to distinguish themselves from other terrorist groups. The war on Islam controversy, for example, is an alleged conspiracy to indicate that Islam is under attack by, generally, western nations that intend to weaken or harm Islam. Al-Qaeda used this term as propaganda to justify their attacks. For example, the continued support from Western nations for the occupation of Palestine is used as evidence by Osama bin Ladin in his letter addressed to the American people following the 9/11 attacks for the 'war on Islam'. Though American politics have stated they are not at war with Islam but at 'war against evil' (Bush) and 'people who have perverted Islam' (Obama), terrorist organisations continue to use the controversy of war on Islam to gain support for their cause and legitimise their attacks.

Conspiracy theories are at the heart of modern-day world politics and influence our political view on contemporary events.



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# THE PERILS OF THE PRESS: A MISGUIDED MONTGOMERY MAKES FOES AMONGST FRIENDS

Neil Blenkinsop

In December 1944, Field Marshal von Rundstedt (Commander of the German Armed Forces in North West Europe) unexpectedly launched three German armies (15th Panzer Army, 6th (SS) Panzer Army and 7th Army) through the seemingly impenetrable and therefore thinly defended Ardennes. Turning northwards towards Antwerp and the Flemish Coast, his aim was to divide the Allied armies in the west, destroy their lines of communication and force the British and Americans to the negotiating table.

This audacious plan, mounted in secrecy and under radio silence, was aided by dismal weather conditions which negated Allied air power and masked German movements. As the German panzers tracked through the snow behind an unprecedented artillery barrage, the inexperienced American troops, wholly unaccustomed to maintaining a defensive posture, were largely overwhelmed by the assault. However, in critical locations such as Bastogne, the line held. Slowly, American resolve began to stiffen.

General Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, realised the danger and quickly adjusted his command arrangements, placing US forces to the north of the German salient under the command of the British Field Marshal Montgomery. This left Eisenhower's US subordinate, General Bradley, to focus his efforts upon the south. By early January 1945, weather conditions improved and a combination of Allied airpower, failing German logistics and the renewed fighting spirit of the now reinforced American armies forced the Germans back to their starting positions. The so called 'Battle of the Bulge' was over.

For Montgomery, the battle was a triumph that expressly demonstrated his approach to operations. An early advocate of the power of the media, on 7th January 1945 he delivered a rousing briefing to

the Allied press. Flushed with the exhilaration of victory, in his excitement he arguably overstated his own role, and that of the British. Clumsily choosing to describe the battle as being 'most interesting', an unfortunate choice of words for an operation which had severely dented US pride and cost 75,482 American casualties (compared to 1,408 British). More damagingly, he underplayed the critical role played by American leadership, making little mention of his American peers. Worse still, the partisan British press largely ignored the positive comments Montgomery did make about his contemporaries, further fueling animosity amongst the Allies.

For the German propaganda strategists, well aware of tensions within the Allied leadership, the press briefing was a godsend. Seeing an opportunity to turn a military defeat into a propaganda victory, they intercepted and amended the Allied press release. The Germans thus entirely removed Montgomery's faint praise for the American forces and further emphasised Montgomery's role in the battle.<sup>1</sup> This provocatively edited message was swiftly rebroadcast on Arnhem Radio, a Dutch station that was a popular choice with American Forces in Europe. The station's style and tone neatly mimicked that of the BBC and it transmitted on a frequency used by the genuine BBC World Service.



<sup>1</sup>The adjusted narrative included provocative statements including "It is the most brilliant and difficult task he (Montgomery) has yet managed. He found no defence lines, the Americans somewhat bewildered, few reserves on hand and supply lines cut....He quickly studied maps and started to 'tidy up' the front...He took over scattered American forces, planned his action, and stopped the German drive... The Battle of the Ardennes can now be written off, thanks to Field Marshal Montgomery".

The German propaganda success is attributable to their maintenance of a key principle of disinformation - confirmation bias. The propagandists were clearly reinforcing an uncomfortable but acknowledged narrative within the Western Allies - the tension between the British and Americans, and in particular the competition between Montgomery and Bradley. The message they promoted was clearly acceptable and relatable to the target audience, and therefore it was readily recognised and amplified. Ultimately, the audience 'heard what they wanted to hear'. Equally, the medium of transmission used to communicate to the audience was highly credible. The use of a popular radio station which imitated the BBC gave further credence to the message, lending further authenticity to the broadcast.

Thankfully for the Allies their senior leaders, General Eisenhower and Prime Minister Churchill in particular, quickly saw through the German ruse. Both leaders were strong advocates for the Alliance. They quickly recognised the danger, downplayed the situation and restored amity. However, the interpersonal relationships between the British and American Generals were irreparably damaged. Ulti-

mately Montgomery's credibility in the eyes of his superior, Eisenhower, was forever tarnished.

In consequence, as the war progressed, the ability of the British to shape the Allied approach to operations in north-west Europe diminished. In Montgomery's mind he may well have won the Battle of the Bulge, but ultimately the Americans won the war and were able to determine the future strategic direction of the campaign. For Germany, this fleeting propaganda victory was costly. The US strategy prevailed, the Soviets arrived at Berlin and the seeds of the Cold War were sown. Germany would be defeated and ultimately divided for the next 44 years.

The German disinformation quickly achieved its desired effect, with General Bradley in particular highly embarrassed by the whole affair. General Patton, Bradley's subordinate and a general who had previously clashed with Montgomery in Sicily, viewed the press conference as a betrayal. Throughout the remainder of the war, he actively sought to discredit Montgomery at any and every opportunity - most notably crossing the Rhine in advance of Montgomery.

## PAKISTAN IN THE METAVERSE

Yasmin Fahy

The term 'fake news' is deployed in a number of ways. Former-president Donald Trump famously dismissed any inconvenient claim as 'fake news', albeit economist Tim Harford notes that he was tapping into an 'unfortunate truth' of its very existence. Some people use 'fake news' to describe something that has the intention to deceive, irrespective of its truth. Others use the term to exclusively refer to untrue stories. All the same, manipulating and misusing evidence is hugely dangerous and problematic.

In the twentieth century, it was not infrequent to use image manipulation to eradicate 'enemies' from the historical record. Hitler, Mao, Mussolini and Stalin to name but a few were all guilty of such strategies in meticulous efforts to craft a certain image of themselves and their regime. In the twenty

first century, technology has advanced so far as to allow for a complete manipulation over one's facial expressions and voice known as 'Deepfakes'. Further, such content can be disseminated worldwide in seconds.

Facebook is pervasive. With almost three billion users, Facebook has completely changed the social fabric of society and is accused of encouraging prejudice and undermining democracy. Former Facebook president Sean Parker observed its capability to exploit "a vulnerability in human psychology". People will believe what they want to believe and can be confined by their own preconceptions. At the same time, the malleability of digital technologies means that evidence is now tricky to authenticate. So how do we know that something has happened?

The dissemination of fake news has enjoyed widespread currency in India for decades. It dates to partition in 1947. Since demands for independence Muslim and Hindu communities disagreed on what constituted a 'nation'. The 'two-nation' theory propagated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah of a 'Pakistan' and a 'Hindustan' was lost, as Congress narrated a British-accepted 'Union of India' of which Muslim majorities had 'opted out' of. Since this divide Pakistan and India have engaged in an information warfare to discredit one another to serve their own interests. But the battle to create an effective narrative online has serious consequences on the ground, inciting violence and intensifying conflict.

It is important to acknowledge that both India and Pakistan have promulgated major disinformation campaigns against each other. Further, the violence generated by such disinformation should not be homogenised and generalised as the experience and opinion of an entire country. This is a pernicious inclination of Western mainstream accounts and one this article hopes to avoid. That said, this article focuses primarily on the dissemination of fake news by Indian websites, news, and social media outlets to show Pakistan in a negative light and propagate the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), a Hindu nationalist party that came to power in 2014.

In December 2020, the EU DisinfoLab published a report which detailed a fifteen year long disinformation campaign to "discredit Pakistan internationally" by operating 750 fake media outlets across at least 116 countries. The report described how a Delhi-based Indian holding company, the Srivastava Group (SG), organised fake NGOs and Think tanks to target the UN and European MPs. The operation then disseminated these MPs pro-India stances on their fake news outlets, giving the impression that there was an internationally one-sided view of the conflict. Worryingly, the investigation also found that at least 10 UN-accredited NGOs had direct links with the SG, which were used to promote Indian interests and criticise Pakistan. Further, India's leading multimedia news agency Asian News International has allegedly been running articles from the SG linked organisations. There is no evidence linking the Indian government to the operation, and the government have denied any role in the scandal.

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan this year prompted another wave of anti-Pakistan misinformation. Right-wing Republic TV in India and Afghan Hasti in the UK both displayed images of the Pakistan Air Force (PAF) supposedly conducting airstrikes in Panjshir, the last holdout from Taliban forces in Afghanistan. "The world is watching the role of Pakistan" the reporter read as footage was played, presenting a Pakistan/Taliban alliance to the international community. However, on further inspection the images presented were from a video game - ARMA-3 - utilised to promote an Islamophobic, anti-Pakistan rhetoric. This is not unusual. In the past images of the Syrian and Iraqi civil wars have been manipulated to appear as though they were scenes from Kashmir to fuel unrest and encourage insurgency backing. The danger here is its further dissemination on social media platforms. Facebook has over 340 million users in India. (Facebook-owned) WhatsApp has 400 million users in India. Facebook has also been accused of favouring the BJP in its censorship.

The dissemination of fake news is a serious problem in India because it can incite religious violence. In October, followers of a right-wing Hindu nationalist group vandalised several mosques and Muslim-owned homes and businesses in Tripura in an apparent response to anti-Hindu violence in Bangladesh. The Indian police are investigating 70-100 social media accounts that are accused of promoting the violence through fake videos and fabricated statements.

The relationship between Hindus and Muslims is not a homogeneous one and should not be generalised as in a state of conflict. The point here is that the dissemination of fake news occludes realities internationally, is pernicious in nature and can disrupt peaceful communities. More should be done to thwart its spread, particularly by those technological giants.





# THE MYTH OF ATLANTIS:

## FACT OR FICTION?

The story of Atlantis and its destruction remains culturally significant even now, thousands of years after it's writing. Plato wrote the story around 360 BC, telling the tale of Atlantis, a Utopian civilisation inundated with gold and silver as well as rare, striking wildlife. According to Plato, the people became obsessed with greed and were deemed immoral causing the Gods to sink the continent using fire and earthquakes as punishment for their corruption. Atlantis' demise pre-dated Plato by 9000 years and was passed down generation to generation. This article discusses the different theories surrounding the myth of Atlantis.

### Atlantis was a continent that did sink

One of the few people to argue the existence of complete Atlantis was Ignatius Donnelly who claimed Atlantis must be real in the late 19th century. He asserted that the development of ancient worlds was too progressive not to have been developed by an unknown earlier civilisation. Take the pyramids, both the Egyptian and Mayan built pyramids despite having no known connection to each other. The existence of Atlantis explains this connection under Donnelly's theory. He believed Atlantis was in the mid-Atlantic near the 'pillars of Hercules', the location in Plato's work. However, this theory has been disproved by oceanography and understanding of plate tectonics to show it was virtually impossible a whole continent would have sunk, as well as it being impossible we haven't detected it. The Egyptian-Mayan pyramid theory also holds little weight due to the differences in the pyramids and the belief that humans would be able to work out that pyramids were one of the most stable structures the civilisations could build.

### Atlantis was Antarctica

Charles Hapgood in 1958 developed his own theory that Atlantis was an older, milder-climate version of modern-day Antarctica. His theory rests on an event 12,000 years ago when the continent shifted north due to the earth crust shifting. The advanced civilisation was killed due to the creation of layers of ice with the change of climate. However, this theory has little scientific backing and has not been proven.

### Atlantis was inspired by the Black Sea flood

This theory strays away from Atlantis being real but rather based on the flooding of the freshwater lake, the

Black Sea around 5600 BC. The Bosphorus was breached by the Mediterranean sea after the ice began to thaw and elevated sea levels. Civilisations were flooded across the shore and those who survived fled and told their story. Plato may have heard the story after thousands of years of different accounts to create the mythical Atlantis.

### Atlantis was based on the Minoan civilisation

The Minoan civilisation were located in the Greek islands Crete and Thera (Santorini) between 2500-1600 BC. They were named after the King Minos and were considered a great civilisation including being the first European civilisation to use written language. The Minoans virtually disappeared from history. However, an earthquake is said to have caused the Thera volcano to erupt causing million tons of ash and gas into the air. The Minoans were then hit with Tsunamis which killed entire cities of people and ultimately making them vulnerable to attack. This would give Plato a basis for Atlantis and he may have believed in the divine intervention of the Minoans in the stories passed down to him, inspiring the story of Atlantis.

### Atlantis was entirely fictional

Of course, there is also the theory that Atlantis was completely fabricated by Plato to show the demise of humans with their hubris which would be punished by the Gods. This is in line with Plato's common themes: the corruption of human society and the divine vs human nature which appear in his other works. This is supported in the lack of written records around Atlantis by any surviving ancient texts. Also many contemporaries, including Aristotle, Plato's pupil, believe the work to have been nothing more than a fable.

These are the main theories surrounding Atlantis although there are many more conspiracies over the lost continent throughout literature and history. Everyone may have their own view on what's real or not. But if anything historical is found in the Antarctic ice, we know what theory to believe.

### Further reading:

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/atlantis>

Katie Winfield

# LEEDS' FINAL ACT OF CAPITAL PUNISHMENT: LEGAL OR NOT?

CW: VIOLENCE

Betsy Cohen

Situated between the right wing in HM Leeds Prison and the Holy Family Catholic Primary School, derelict signs of Armley's former gallows still exist. Across the span of a hundred years, over 100,000 spectators would gather at the site for an annual hanging. In 1961, Zsiga Pankotia, a refugee who had fled the Hungarian Uprising only five years prior, was hung at the Armley gallows for First degree murder. Pankotia had learned that a wealthy market seller named Jack Eli Myers had won £15,662 (now worth £30,000) at a pool syndicate. With the industrial sector providing limited job prospects for Pankotia, he decided to venture to the seller's house in Roundhay with the intent to steal the wins. However, Pankotia was stopped in his attempts when Myers came downstairs to confront him. A fight broke out between the two and Myers was fatally stabbed to death with a bread knife. Myers was well-known in Roundhay, and the news of his death quickly gained local attention. This certainly wasn't helped by Pankotia fleeing the crime scene in his victim's clothes. After his court hearing and sentence, he'd walk up to the assizes where he told the policemen who were aiding him, "You don't have to help me".

Offenders who received the death penalty were all-but -one-incident men, likely perpetrators of mariticide or homicide, and exclusively only murderers since the Judgement of Death Act (1932). From 1957, in line with the Homicide Act, the court had to prove that the murder was 'aforethought', that the defendant had pre-planned to kill before entering the crime scene. The difficulty was that the act had outlawed Constructive Malice, ensuring that the jury could no longer apply (construct) pre-meditative murder intent to thieves who committed murder during other illicit acts, such as vandalism or robbery. The Pankotia case was resolutely homicide, whether he had planned the murder is entirely questionable and contentious. In the 1920 Edwin Sowerby case, where a Wakefield miner stabbed Jane Darwell for ending their



relationship, exemplified the typical case of retributive justice and therefore received the executioner's axe, where jealousy and directed anger were synonymous with first degree murder. Without dismissing the gruesome act of killing with a serrated instrument, the fashioning of the victim's property for a weapon is itself a blaring indicator that the homicide was spontaneous. The Homicide Act had only ever delivered illogical exceptions and unrealities; Pankotia's being one such case, only added fuel to abolitionists case against clause contingent capital punishment.

The reign of Godly reform, retribution, and the figure of Plato's 'diseased criminal' started to dwindle in the 20th Century, so did the cruel act of execution. Although much to the disappointment of the local Leeds community, the British parliament passed legislation that suspended public executions in 1964. But the castle arches upon entering the Gaol are a reminder of the splendid and decadent acts of public capital punishment that were hosted in its walls from 1861 to 1961.

# JODIE TURNER-SMITH AS ANNE BOLEYN: CAN DEPICTING A FAKE HISTORY ACTUALLY PROVIDE GREATER UNDERSTANDING?

Ella Murdoch

Almost 500 years after her coronation on the 30th of October 2020 it was announced Anne Boleyn was to be played by black actress Jodie Turner-Smith in a three-part sociological drama *Anne Boleyn*, depicting Anne's fall from power and subsequent death. Maybe it is wrong of me to state the race of Jodie Turner-Smith as Channel 5 said her appointment solely was due to her being the best actress that auditioned. Making this casting an example of colour-blind casting, the casting of the best actor or actress for a role regardless of their race, ethnicity, size and sometimes gender. Of course, colour-blind casting is not always appropriate, especially when a project is set within a highly racialised context. For example, *Django Unchained*'s Calvin Candie being played by a black actor instead of Leonardo DiCaprio would have left audiences somewhat confused. However, within Tudor England the concept of race as we know it didn't even exist, as it wasn't until the 17th century when the word race began to be associated with differences between humans from Africa, Asia and Europe. Surely audiences could see Turner-Smith for simply the amazing actress she is, especially as nothing within the programme would even comment upon the concept of race. Unfortunately, this wasn't the case with Twitter in uproar and Anne Boleyn trending for hours as people worried about the image of one of the most famous and studied women in British history being distorted by a three-part TV programme on Channel 5.

The obvious rebuttal to these complaints would be to call on the idea I have listed above of race being of no importance during Anne Boleyn's time. However, as many people, including myself, watched the show, it became clear that Jodie's race and her being a black woman isolated within a white court reinforced Anne Boleyn's situation in 1536 to a modern audience. In this article, I want to use this casting of Anne to explain why sometimes 'fake news' can help portray a greater understanding of the truth. Despite Anne Boleyn being white, a black woman is the perfect person to encapsulate how she was perceived and treated to a 21st-century audience.

The common image of Anne Boleyn as an evil seductress was something that her enemies used to suggest that she was corrupting Henry VIII. For example, scholar Reginald Pole wrote in 1536 that Anne Boleyn was the one who made Henry believe his marriage to Catherine was against God's will. The blame was mainly placed on Anne



despite the clear mutual gain both her and Henry VIII would receive from an annulment of Henry's first marriage. As it was only once Henry realised Catherine of Aragon couldn't give him the son he needed that he began to pursue the idea of Anne becoming his wife and not just a mistress. It is vital audiences understand the harsh ways in which some perceived Anne Boleyn as it is part of the reason she found herself in such a volatile situation by 1536. This concept of Anne Boleyn being overtly sexual to get the king to do as she pleased combined with what was perceived as her 'manly' ambition are two stereotypes many still associate with black women. Throughout European history white women have been placed at the centre of femininity with any other woman being seen as outside of this ideal. For black women, this concept is taken further as for 250 years during slavery they were not even seen as fully human. 'Blackness' is also seen in complete opposition of 'whiteness', therefore since white women are seen to embody femininity, black women became to be seen to be opposite, being associated with qualities such as hypersexuality and masculinity. A dichotomy one could argue is also present in the contrast between Anne Boleyn and the pure, pious Jane Seymour who Henry VIII married after Anne's execution.



Despite these stereotypes being extremely racist and not as prevalent within our 21st-century society, they still exist. A most recent example is the media's treatment of Meghan Markle particularly after she and Prince Harry gave up their titles as senior members of the royal family and moved to North America. Despite nothing in the couples' official statement suggesting this had been anything but a joint decision, The Sun produced a headline on the 9th of January coining the incident 'Megixt'. The word caught on, being added to the Collins dictionary, searched over 250,000 times and becoming the 2020 word of the year. The obsession with this word showed how as a society, we were happy to place the sole decision the Sussex's made on only Meghan Markle. Much like how Anne Boleyn was seen by many as being the person who persuaded Henry VIII to make himself the head of the English church. The comparison between the two royal women continues with the divisive response to their perceived role in these two famous exits. For those that were against Meghan, like with

Anne, labelled her as a master manipulator. British tabloid such as The Express, Daily Star and even hosts on all-female panel show Loose Women deemed her controlling. However, in complete contrast fans of Meghan saw her decision to step back as inspiration and a great example of putting your family and mental health first. There is a common theme, between Meghan and Anne, of their criticism centring around their controlling nature and their praise being for breaking away from tradition when it was wrong.

In the example of Meghan Markle, it becomes clear that within our society, these stereotypes of black women are still perpetuated, just as many in popular culture still depict Anne Boleyn as a controlling, Femme fatale. When married correctly, like with Channel 5's Anne Boleyn, the casting of Anne Boleyn as a black woman can both visually and subconsciously give depth to the role of a woman who in the 16th century was underestimated and shamed by society in the way black women, such as Meghan Markle, are today.

## 'RADICAL ORIENTALISM': BLACK PANTHER PARTY, MAO'S CHINA AND PROPAGANDA OF ANTI-COLONIALISM IN THE COLD WAR

In the late 1960s, Americans witnessed the decline of the Civil Rights Movement and the rise of the Black Power movement. The Civil Rights Movement's non-violent challenge to Jim Crow segregation in the South achieved its symbolic success when the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed. However, activists gradually realised that abolition of segregation enforced by law had not changed the economic, political, and social exclusion that African Americans suffered daily. This perspective, combined with the escalating Vietnam War, disillusioned many African Americans who then turned to the revolutionary nationalism pioneered by Malcolm X and Robert F. Williams. In this context, the Black Panther Party for Self-Defence (BPP), using militant rhetoric against rampant police brutality in the black community, expanded rapidly from an Oakland local organisation to a national organisation with over forty chapters across the country in 1968.

Jiajia Duan

Based on the urban ghetto condition, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, the founders of BPP, advocated a self-armed revolutionary strategy to protect the African American community. Though they were not the first to propose the revolutionary nationalism in the U.S, they were among the foremost committed to action. With its iconic image of a disciplined Panther in a black beret, leather jacket, holding guns, and the commitment to fight against urban racism, BPP achieved great support among the black community. This led to powerful repression from the police and FBI.

Under the great repression, BPP sought a broader alliance. In the party's newspaper and public speech, the Panthers endeavoured to identify black freedom struggle in American as part of the global anti-colonialism.

Maoism played an important role in this process: China provided a 'coloured revolutionary model' appealing to many black radicals and a flexible Maoism emphasised that revolutionary theory should be adapted based on the local conditions.

The idea that the African American community was 'the colony in the belly of the beast' was reaffirmed with the vocabulary from Mao, Fanon and Che. Opposition to the Vietnam war and support for anti-colonialism became the only common ground to unite activism across the political spectrum. Internationalising their local struggle, BPP successfully forged a broad coalition with multi-racial organisations at home and abroad. Additionally, BPP's struggle portrayed as global anti-colonialism legitimised its militant tactics, ensuring their African American followers felt lonely no longer.

Mao's public support for the African American struggle dates back to 1963, when he issued a statement that denounced American racism and showed great support and sympathy to African Americans. During the 1950s and 1960s, Maoist China welcomed many prominent black travellers and expatriates, e.g., W.E.B. Du Bois, Robert F. Williams and Claudia Jones, all of whom helped shape an ideal image of revolutionary China through their reports, speeches, and books. The global radical imagination of Maoist China reached its height during the Cultural Revolution, which started in 1966. With a national mass struggle against revisionism, elitism and bureaucratism, Maoist China became the most prominent revolutionary model compared to the 'evil imperialist and racist America'. Radical expatriates in China were simultaneously silent about the chaos and brutality during the Cultural Revolution. Cooperating with the official propaganda machine, radical travellers helped shape a new form of 'radical orientalism' for their own purpose. This mechanism is also represented in BPP's interaction with Mao's China.

To what extent BPP's contact with Mao's China operated for the geopolitics goal rather than the ideological appeal deserves consideration. Mao's support for African Americans started in a very tricky time. Because of escalating conflict with the Soviets and clashes with India, China was isolated internationally. For Maoist China, contacts with black activists and global anti-colonialism movements promoted Chinese leadership in the Third World and provided

moral ground to denounce 'revisionism Soviet' and 'imperialism America'.

On the other hand, BPP started its contact with Communist Asia after both Cuba and Algeria's relationship with American improved in the late 1960s. In other words, China was the most powerful force that was not afraid of irritating America at that moment. In contrast to the coalition with the leftist organisations in Europe, BPP's contact with China was completely operated at the government level. Received by the leadership of CCP and having visited Beijing with governmental guidance, most of the Panthers were merely impressed by the level of modernisation in China, lacking insights into Chinese society.

However, both parties achieved their goals. For BPP, propagating China's achievement helped legitimise their revolutionary tactics and mobilised more people committed to action. The contact with China and its great publicity also promoted their status among the radical organisations in America. For China, BPP became a new force to propagandise the Maoist revolution and reaffirm China's leadership role in the Third World.



Appealing to a romanticised Maoist China, BPP themselves contributed to shaping this 'radical orientalism'. China and the revolutionary East were portrayed as an ideal place while America was portrayed as an imperialist and racist evil. The orientalist exoticisation, however, obscured a more nuanced and complex understanding of the revolutionary reality in China. In practical terms, it succeeded in allying global anti-colonialism with the black freedom struggle in the Cold War.

# “LET’S GO GAY AGENDA!”: ANTI-LGBTQ+ CONSPIRACIES

CW: HOMOPHOBIA

When Lil Nas X took home the award for video of the year at the 2021 MTV Video Music Awards, he accepted his prize with an iconic line: “first I want to say thank you to the gay agenda! Let’s go gay agenda!” For many people who identify as LGBTQ+, the phrase ‘gay agenda’ is used satirically, poking fun at homophobes who believe the community has some widespread nefarious objective that stretches further than gaining equal rights. But the fearmongering power of this kind of conspiracy can easily disrupt the path towards equality in society and stir up hate. The historic character of accusations about the existence of a ‘gay agenda’ in the twentieth century shows the dark side of conspiracy theories and how they can be used to inspire negative political and social ideas.

Throughout the twentieth century, elites in the western world were captured by the theory that there was some elite level of queer people infiltrating different areas of society with villainous intentions. The identifiable presence of people who did not fit the standard heterosexual model in positions of influence in the arts, especially Hollywood, in the early 1900s fed this fear. Nicknamed ‘Homintern’ – after Lenin’s Communist International organisation, Comintern – this conspiracy suggested that LGBTQ+ actors, writers, academics, and other artists used their positions to promote others who shared their sexual preferences. There was alarm that they would then use this dominance to promote ‘immoral’ and ‘indecent’ behaviour that could upset the values of society. Of course, this was completely fabricated. It’s true that there were many influential artists who did not fit into the heterosexual box that they were expected to. It’s also true that many of these people formed connections, often across borders throughout Europe and North America. But the idea that there was a formal network of queer people plotting to dominate and corrupt western society through the arts and academia was pure fearmongering.

The panic over this international gay conspiracy persisted through the twentieth century. In the 80s and 90s, newspapers and producers in America discussed their distress over a ‘velvet’ or ‘lavender’ mafia dominating Hollywood. This conjured

Becca Iliffe

machination extended to the political world too. In 1998, The Sun newspaper published two weeks of articles outing three members of the Labour cabinet and theorising about the dominance of these gay politicians in government. The gay agenda has also been used in the US Supreme Court to try and stop a ruling outlawing criminal punishment for sodomy. Similarly, Hungary and Uganda have both cited this supposed gay cultural domination to attempt to pass anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in the last decade.

Anti-LGBTQ+ conspiracies therefore can’t be seen as things of the past or viewed in isolation when they’re being replicated today and used as justification for hate, notably in rhetoric produced by the conservative right. This rhetoric is even more prevalent amongst the Christian conservative right in the US. In fact, the term ‘gay agenda’ was popularised after being used as the title for propaganda created by a Californian evangelical religious group in 1992, and subsequently entered popular vocabulary. The pervasiveness of this harmful invention throughout the twentieth century has contributed to a constant pool of fear and hatred towards LGBTQ+ people that can be easily weaponised.

The sarcastic use of the term gay agenda by activists and artists like Lil Nas X can help highlight the ridiculousness of such conspiracies. Claiming these ideas with a healthy dose of satire can help affected groups resist their damage. This tactic has its own history too. Sir Maurice Bowra – scholar, critic, and Vice Chancellor for the University of Oxford – referred to himself as part of the Homintern leadership in 1937, and the poet W. H. Auden was also known to jokingly use the term. By recognising the historical precedent of ‘the gay agenda’, we see how conspiracies can be used by dominant groups in society to try and disrupt the influence of those they feel threatened by. However, we can also use this history to work out how to fight these dangerous lies.

## Further Reading

*Gregory Woods, Homintern: How Gay Culture Liberated the Modern World (Yale University Press, 2016)*



# HOLOCAUST DENIAL: AN ANTI-SEMITIC ILLUSION

CW: HOLOCAUST AND TRAUMA



For many, the existence of the Holocaust and the atrocities inflicted by the Third Reich are a given and for most part, a history learnt about at school. So, it's hard to fathom that there are really people out there who think highly of the Nazi Party and believe that that their mass extermination of Jewish people did not really happen. Incredibly, these people do exist and have been aptly named as 'Holocaust deniers'. These Holocaust deniers believe that the Nazi's did not, in fact, murder anyone. Instead, their agenda always meant the emigration of Jews, and never included their extermination. But who are these people and why do they think one of the most prolific genocides of the twentieth century didn't happen?

Well, what did they believe? Without stating the obvious, they believed that the Holocaust did not happen. They think that the Nazi's just wanted to move Jewish people out of Germany and that the gas chambers used for the extermination of millions of men, women and children, were actually only used on bodies that were already dead due to natural illnesses caused by overcrowding.

The beliefs of the deniers have been so rife across the world that many governments have found the need to put in place prison sentences and fines for those spreading the false narrative and inciting racism. A bill was passed in 1994 in Germany permitting prison sentences for those denying the existence of the Holocaust. Robert S. Wistrich, Professor of European and Jewish history at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, discusses the case of David Irving. Irving claimed that the gas chambers in Auschwitz were in fact fake and were constructed to attract tourists to Poland. As a result of this, Irving was fined by Munich in 1992.

Holocaust deniers have been in abundance since the collapse of the Third Reich in 1945, but why do they deny the mass murder of 6 million Jews? Most agree that this is down to outright anti-Semitism or just plain ignorance. On the other side, some deniers concluded that the Holocaust was a hoax by the Allied Forces for financial gain from Germany.

What is truly shocking is that these deniers have totally ignored factual evidence from the war. Not only have they have ignored the heartbreaking eyewitness testimonies from countless individuals who suffered tremendously at the hands of the Nazi party, but they have also ignored the admissions of guilt from the perpetrators when the war ended. They instead deduced that the perpetrators were forced into their admissions. With Germany now playing a major political role in Western Europe, surely the government would have mentioned that they were forced into admitting guilt for atrocities that they had no part in? Instead, Germany has memorials and museums dedicated to this across the country. Deniers have even ignored official papers from the Third Reich evidencing the atrocities that they instilled on those they deemed 'undesirable'. Many deniers rely on the fact that there is no written proof that Hitler ordered the mass extermination of Jews despite the evidence that the Nazi party was responsible. The likelihood is that Hitler may not have written his name on these documents because he knew how incriminating this would have been.

With the aid of public museums and historical education in schools, we can only hope that the Holocaust denier rhetoric is decreasing. Alongside historical education, it is clear that anti-Semitism is at the core of the denial of the Holocaust.

Katie Simpson

# DECOLONISING THE MAU MAU MYTH

Layla Kharroubi

The Mau Mau Uprising (1952-60) occurred in Kenya as primarily an anticolonial and liberation movement against the British and Colonial Administration. This movement was largely comprised of the Kikuyu people and their aims coalesced around 'land and freedom'. Over the course of the uprising, 32 white settlers were killed, yet officially over 11,000 Mau Mau members were killed, although Elkins predicts the unofficial total to be much higher. The vast majority of the Kikuyu population (1.5 million) was impacted, either through the Pipeline (forced detention without trial and rehabilitation camps), or villagisation. The Mau Mau were victims of fake news, or rather, political myths. These myths were spun to demonise and depoliticise their legitimate socio-economic and political grievances whilst rationalising and validating the extreme repressive response of the Colonial Administration.

## Myth Construction:

There were two main schools of European thought which influenced how Mau Mau were understood. These became political myths, used to the advantage of the colonial power. Firstly, there were the 'extremist conservatives'. The extremist conservatives held true to the more traditionally racist European views of Africans, chiefly that they were 'savages' who only understood the medium of violence and did not have the intelligence for modernisation. Many of the settlers and colonial administrators were secretly members of this group, shedding light on why the colonial repression was so brutal.

Liberal paternalists on the other hand, believed that Africans could eventually gain self-governance and become 'civilised' due to European influence. However, they rationalised the Mau Mau rebellion in terms of a sickness that only they could cure. For them, the Mau Mau was caused by psychosis due to an incompatibility with European rapid modernisation. From this, they framed the Mau Mau as a madness, depoliticising valid grievances. Liberal paternalism was thus the favoured official view of Britain and the Admin-

istration, considering the global situation. The policy of rehabilitation was seen as the answer to the Mau Mau uprising, enabling a wholesale repression whilst still portraying the Administration as benevolent. However, this policy was heavily influenced by the extremist conservatives on the ground, resulting in the brutal suppression of the Kikuyu population.

## Legacy:

These understandings of Mau Mau lives on in popular memory, both in Britain and Kenya today. This can be traced back to the propaganda war waged from London during the Emergency. Upon independence, Kenya's first president, Kenyatta, declared that Mau Mau were criminals who should be forgotten. However, recent ideas about Mau Mau have started to change thanks to new scholarly research in the early 2000s, as well as the historic 2011 lawsuit levelled against the FCO in 2011 by 5 Kenyan claimants. The success of the lawsuit was facilitated by the Hanslope Park disclosures revealed in the same year, containing hidden documents detailing atrocities committed by the British and Administration. Although there is still progress to be made, globally, the phenomenon of decolonising the mind and revealing the truths of empire is gaining traction. An important aspect of this movement is challenging the various imperial political myths remaining in popular memory, which this essay hopes to have achieved.

## Further Resources:

*The Museum of British Colonialism* [<https://www.museumofbritishcolonialism.org>]





# THE DOWNFALL OF ANNE BOLEYN: THE CONSPIRACY THAT KILLED A QUEEN

In May 1536 England's most controversial Queen met an end as controversial as her, being the first Queen in English history to be executed. Amassing a variety of enemies throughout her political career, it is probably unsurprising to hear that much of what was said against Anne Boleyn is suspect. But what exactly was she accused of? The Middlesex Indictment on 10th May 1536 reveals that Anne Boleyn was charged with committing adultery with five men – including her own brother – and plotting to commit regicide to marry one of her lovers, Sir Henry Norris. That last accusation was the most important one as under the law at that time regicide was the only one of the charges to carry with it the death penalty. However, despite the serious nature of the charges against Anne as mentioned before, most of the evidence against her fell flat with much of 'specific' details of her crimes listed in the later indictment easily being disproved through the fact that Anne and her supposed 'lovers' were rarely in the same place when their 'affairs' was allegedly conducted.



So, with the evidence against Anne Boleyn being shown to be fabrications, or in the case of the regicide charge a gross exaggeration of a statement made by Anne, who had the motive to get rid of Anne by accusing her of these things? The most obvious choice is Henry VIII, with many familiar to Anne's story attributing him and his need for a male heir as the reason for Anne's execution. This is true – to an extent. Certainly, Henry was desirous of a male heir and Anne Boleyn could not have been executed without the King's consent but if Henry wanted to discard Anne simply due to a lack of a son it makes more sense that he would have done so earlier rather than waiting through the birth of a daughter and three lost pregnancies. It makes more sense that Henry was 'bounced into action', spurred on by the reminder of his own mortality from his 1535 jousting accident, bringing his desire for a male heir to a fever-pitch level, and presentation of the 'evidence' against Anne presented to him by Cromwell. It may therefore be reasonably concluded that Henry may have genuinely believed the accusations against his second wife. Despite this, as mentioned before, Anne could not have been deposed in this way unless Henry's approval was explicit, making him an active – not a passive – participant in Anne's downfall whatever his belief in her 'guilt' may have been.

Moving on then, as mentioned above, part of 'bouncing' Henry VIII into action had been the evidence presented to him by Cromwell. This is important as by May 1536 Cromwell had sufficient reason to be fearful of Anne Boleyn and her faction, with the main source of tension resulting from a dispute between the two parties on the handling of the Monastic Dissolution – with Cromwell's agenda ultimately winning out – made clear the sermon made by Anne's preacher, John Skip in April 1536 which directly criticized Cromwell's policy. It was shortly after this that the first investigations by Cromwell into Anne began. It was also during April 1536 that Henry VIII finally forced the Imperial Ambassador, a staunch supporter of Katherine of Aragon, to acknowledge Anne Boleyn as Queen – a concession unlikely to have continued to be fought for had Henry been wanting to depose Anne at this point, leading to the conclusion that the investigations into Anne had been started without Henry's prior knowledge.

Charlotte McDonnell



This argument is further rationalized by the idea that in order to 'bounce' Henry into action Cromwell would have needed him to be completely blindsided by an apparently solid case, enough not to question the finer details of the evidence presented and allow Cromwell more time gain further evidence – proved by the fact that 'evidence' for the regicide charge appeared after Anne's arrest.

With Cromwell appearing so far as the figure with the most involvement and motivation in Anne Boleyn's downfall there is also the court faction to consider lead by the Seymour's. It has often been thought that the conservative court faction and the radical Cromwell were two opposing parties who happened to have the same goal, but it can actually be seen that they were working together under the leadership of Cromwell. Despite this, the conservative court faction

shouldn't be written off given that it comprised of some of the most powerful nobles in England such as the Dukes of Suffolk and Norfolk (Anne Boleyn's own uncle). Nor should its lead, Jane Seymour be dismissed as a simple and unwitting pawn – she was very much in control of herself though she can almost certainly be cleared of plotting Anne's death given how unprecedented her execution was.

To conclude, not only was Anne Boleyn's downfall falsely manufactured, the main player in that downfall was Thomas Cromwell who, through himself and the conservative court alliance, plotted to bring down Anne Boleyn through this conspiracy – it should also be noted that four out of five men that went down with her were threats to his power.

## SPAIN'S 'MEMORY WAR'

Alfie Norris

**T**he quiet, lush, green hills of the Basque country in northern Spain are not a place that you would associate with the horrors of modern warfare. In fact, from the industrial capital, and coal fields, of Bilbao to the tranquil coastal resort of San Sebastian, the region shares much in common with Yorkshire, mirroring our own industrial cities of Leeds and Sheffield, and resort towns such as Scarborough.

Yet it was here, in the small town of Guernica, during the spring of 1937, that one of the most infamous war time atrocities of the twentieth century occurred during the Spanish Civil War. On the 26th of April 1937 the Nazi German Luftwaffe and Fascist Italian Aviazione Legionaria bombed Guernica on behalf of General Franco's forces. A civilian town, the bombing gave the world its first taste of the 'blitzkrieg' that was to be practiced on cities across the UK and Europe, killing innocent civilians and spreading a psychological terror immortalised in Picasso's 'Guernica'. But why does this matter? What does Spain have to tell us about fake news and the distortion of history, and how does this still affect the country today?

Spain provides a fascinating insight into how the distortion of the past can impact society. For

many people today, Spain conjures images of sun-drenched holidays, the excess of Magaluf and Benidorm, and the delights of sangria and tapas. But from 1939-1975 it endured a regime, which with the support of Hitler and Mussolini, was allowed to overthrow a democratically elected government, and execute hundreds of thousands of innocent people. While the evil of Hitler and Mussolini is almost universally known by the public, what occurred in Spain is largely forgotten globally. Even within Spain itself, it stirs furious political debate to this day. One striking example is the existence of a 'Franco bar' in Madrid, while a 'Hitler' or 'Mussolini' bar would be unthinkable in modern Italy and Germany. This begs the question why is this tolerated, and why are the crimes of the Franco regime not so widely acknowledged?

The answer partly lies in the longevity of the regime, and the way in which it was able to distort historical truth. Under Franco, discussion of politics and the events of the 1936-1939 Spanish Civil War were tightly controlled, with the regime publishing its own sanitised version of what had occurred. It painted the conflict as a Catholic crusade against 'Marxist' and 'atheist' hordes, and a defence of Spain against a Soviet inspired communist revolution.



A mural copy of Picasso's painting 'Guernica', (taken by Alfie) Guernica, Basque Country, summer 2019)

In reality, the war emerged after elements within the Spanish military, supported by extremists such as the Falange fascist party, launched a botched coup against the democratically elected left-wing government. Following the Second World War, Franco was also able to portray his regime, not as fascist, but as a totalitarian catholic state, allowing him to emerge from international isolation in the early 1950s. This 'cover up' of his fascist leanings during the Second World War contributed to him becoming allied to the US, under the pretence of being a bulwark against communism throughout the cold war.

The contrast between the regime's official narrative, and the reality of what occurred, is at the heart of why it is so controversial in Spain. For the generations of people who grew up under the regime, this official narrative was the only history they were taught and knew. Many older people still retain 'fond' memories of the Franco era, partly because the extremely violent political repression and widespread of hunger of the 1940-50's, was followed by an economic boom in the 1960-70's, which often gives a rose-tinted perspective.

Unlike in Germany after the Second World War, there was never an official root out of Francoist influence from the judiciary or politics, with one notorious Francoist police torturer nicknamed 'Billy the Kid' living

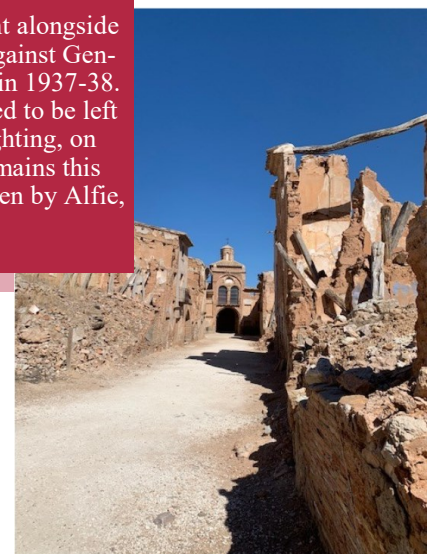
freely in Madrid until his death in 2020. To calm the nerves of the Francoist establishment, the transition to democracy that occurred in Spain between 1975-78 included the passing of an amnesty law in 1977 preventing investigation into Francoist crimes and leading to a 'pact of forgetting'.

However, recently there has been efforts to address these crimes. In November 2019 a left-wing coalition, led chiefly by the Spanish Socialist Party (PSOE) and regional nationalists, won the general election. This has led to the removal of General Franco's body from its huge mausoleum, built with forced labour after the Civil War, and in September 2020 a new 'Democratic Memory Law' was introduced, which aimed to further address historic crimes committed under the Franco era.

Spain's dark twentieth century past provides an important lesson on the role of memory in society, and the importance of both justice and truth. Debate over the past, and the 'memory war' will likely continue to rage in Spain for the coming decades. The role of historians in bringing this uncomfortable truth to the surface is a step forward in healing society and helping to provide comfort to the relatives of those whose families suffered under the regime.

In an age of 'fake news', and half-truths, facts matter.

The town of Belchite, where British and American volunteers fought alongside Republican troops against General Franco's forces in 1937-38. The town was ordered to be left as it was after the fighting, on Franco's order. It remains this way to the day. (Taken by Alfie, Summer 2020)





# THE JACOBITE AND HANOVERIAN CONSPIRACY

Harry Morris



and rational legal authority. Both Jacobite and Hanoverian sources can be seen to use these methods to legitimise themselves to the nation.

The Jacobite Manifesto of August 1714 deploys themes of tradition and the uncharismatic nature of the 'Elector of Brunswick' (King George I) to bolster his cause for the throne. In this letter, James Stuart (the would-be James III of England and Ireland) attacks the foreign successor to the English throne and questions the possibility of civil order whilst someone who is ignorant of the country's customs sits on the throne.

That idea of the threat to civil order can also be seen in pro-Hanoverian sources where in 1718 it was reported that a young man was radicalised towards the Jacobite cause firstly as a Tory and was then subsequently executed due to his oath of allegiance to the Stuarts and to kill in cold blood if required.

The difference between the two factions is that of the power and agency that they held. After the succession of George I in 1715 and the dismissal of the Tory ministry, the Tory party became isolated, with some sections of the party openly conspiring with the exiled Stuarts. Moreover, the Whig Juncto were able to use their political ascendancy after the 1715 election to secure their position through increasingly authoritarian means. This materialised in many forms such as purging prominent Tory's from office within government and the church such as the impeachment of Robert Harley the former First Minister of Queen Anne. Moreover, legislation such as The Septennial Act of 1716 increased the duration of Parliament to seven years thus allowing the Whigs more time uncontested in power with the new Hanoverian monarch.

This political power grab should be viewed in context with considerable Whig unpopularity in Tory leaning areas of the country, with the Whig Party being viewed as the party of the city, higher taxes, foreign interventions, and war profiteering. The insecurity of the new establishment in sections of the nation is necessary to both the ostracization of the Tory's and Jacobite's and the enhanced legitimisation campaign that the Whig's took.

**T**o define conspiracy and fake news there needs to be an idea of the legitimate, the truth and the lawful. The debate on the definition of truth and what that means within history are well established and wide ranging. However, what is deemed legitimate and lawful throughout history is always a contemporary construction and thus subject to the ideas and actors prevalent at the time.

Throughout the Jacobite risings of the Eighteenth Century, we can see a contested idea of the lawful and legitimate between the dethroned Stuarts and Hanoverians.

Within political and sociological studies how states and regimes legitimise themselves has come under considerable study, with Weber conceptualising three ways in which this is done; Tradition, charismatic leadership,



This is not to say that Jacobite's did not pose a threat to the Hanoverian monarchy but that the idea of this threat was enhanced with ideas of chaos and a threat to the Protestant nature of the nation in order to advance the security of the new government.

The Jacobite and Whig contest over legitimacy saw the Whigs prevail, in part due to their control of government institutions but continued Jacobite activity propaganda served another purpose; uniting isolated political groups into the evolved country Tory Party of the mid and later 1700s. This 'conspiracy' saw attempts to revive new customs such as Restoration Day, the day in which the Stuarts were restored after the English Civil War. This became a loyalist event with oak leaves on display (a Tory symbol). Challenging the dominant Whig narrative required challenging its ideological reference and thus for those rebuilding the Tory party, Jacobite symbolism offered exactly this as well as an opportunity for collective action by groups isolated by the Whig domination of government.

Historians should thus be careful when labelling 'conspiracy theories' as atypical political movements from a subordinate political group who deliberately use false information to deceive the wider populace about a threat to their safety. This imposes a modern view of conspiracy theories attached to the growth of the internet and its regulation, thus is not translatable

throughout history. Moreover, this interpretation and wider application throughout history risks a view of history that is defined and controlled by contemporary elites who were able to use their position and agency to determine truth and legitimise themselves. Future histories should adopt a more complex interpretation of conspiracy theories whereby they can be seen not just as misinformation by a subordinate group but as an attempt at political regrouping by isolated groups whose position has been greatly diminished by the dominant group in power. Resigning the Jacobite's to a mere conspiracy group would not only deny the role that they played in the wider political realignment of the Tory party in the 1700s but would also mean that it would hold the subsequent historical interpretation as subject to the Whig ascendancy after 1715.

#### Further reading

Astore, Rocco A. "Defining the Legitimacy and Power of the State Through Weber and Foucault." *Inquiries Journal/ Student Pulse* 8.05 (2016). <<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1410>>

Sapountzis, Antonis, and Susan Condor. "Conspiracy Accounts as Intergroup Theories: Challenging Dominant Understandings of Social Power and Political Legitimacy." *Political Psychology*, vol. 34, no. 5, [International Society of Political Psychology, Wiley], 2013, pp. 731–52, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43783733>.



# THE FAILURE OF SCIENCE: MODERN SCIENCE'S STRUGGLE TO COMBAT THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

David Richardson

The institutional framework that we have set up around science, in order to understand the universe and learn all the facts and truths of it, is supposed to be objective. This framework is a complex system of specialisation, collaboration, research, review and education, and the result of this, alongside its objectivity and the vast reach of science across all corners of society and daily life, is a well-established authority that is trustworthy and a main source of our knowledge. However, it seems that scientific authority is losing its standing in today's alleged 'post-truth' world. Influencers are promoting alternative advice on healthcare and dieting, the anti-vax movement is gaining popularity, and politicians and public alike are being selective in what they believe about climate change. This article is not against public or influencer authorities, aiming only to outline how they have grown to undermine or even rival scientific authority.

In order to comprehend how such a highly respected and trusted framework could lose its authority, we should bear in mind that scientific authority as we know it is a recent development. It grew in the 19th century with the professionalisation of science and the establishment of important institutions. Harry Redner highlights that the 'World science' of today came out of the Second World War. His 'path-breaking and controversial' study and review of the changing nature of science, *The Ends of Science* (1987), suggests that science was still unstable and changing directions by the 1990s, drawing attention to its apparent declining authority even before social media became popular.

Perhaps the most important factor in the rise of scientific authority is its engagement with the public sphere in the 1800s, through experiment and spectacle, and the periodical press. Authority depends on public perception, trust and respect. Science developed a foothold in society through the public being surrounded by scientific discoveries, inventions and advances. Authority may also be established by a show of force, which science performed in 1945 with the atomic bomb. The Second World War put science at the centre of conversation, and the development of computing, technology and its accessibility over the

next few decades left science as a governing body over our lives.

However, criticism and resistance to science was prevalent even then, with a review of the popular eugenics movement that culminated in the Holocaust, and the use of atomic weapons by world powers. Considering this will help us to understand how science could lose its prevalence, but its objective framework remains strong and what we are seeing today is not only an ethical protest against the utilisation of science, but a rise in people not believing what science proves as fact. This is largely due to the communication of influencers through sources of alternative facts, and the limited dialogue between science and the public.

Authority lies in the power to convince, and influencers use methods tailored to today's audience, namely through emotive language and stories, simple solutions, celebrity status and the power of social media to spread posts everywhere. These methods are the most influential, but often go against the objective nature of science. As such, science is being left behind. While there are scientific magazines and a few celebrity scientists—who may not be held in as high esteem by the scientific community than by the public—the public generally does not read academic journals, and we read about science through third parties that relay and filter information through their own biases and emphases. The objective science that we know does not have a strong direct communication with us. This is why its authority can be challenged. It is not as vocal or accessible as influencers/new authorities.

Is it time for science to refocus its public engagement? Hannah Arendt wrote that institutions need to provide a public space, or those that polarise situations and covet media coverages will gain power and influence. This seems to an extent to be the case with science. There has been discussion on how science should respond:

Kathryn Perera et al. argue in the *British Medical Journal* in 2019 that science should adopt influencer tactics to become more accessible and trustworthy.



Maya J Goldberg responds saying that Perera's recommendation 'rings hollow,' that the problem is not with the public and its changing ways of consumption, but with science 'not fulfilling its public function'. The institutional framework is at fault and can be fixed to better include the public while remaining objective.

Either way, scientific authority is in decline, and social media clearly has the power to influence the public and spread information rapidly. A dangerous power that lies in the hands of anyone with access to the Internet.

#### Further reading:

*Redner, Harry, The Ends of Science (Boulder: Westview Press, 1987)*

*Crease, Robert P., The Workshop and the World: What Ten Thinkers Can Teach Us About Science and Authority (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2019)*

## THE TRUTH BEHIND THE ANZAC LEGEND

Emma Shears

The Battle of Gallipoli (17 February 1915 - 9 January 1916) was an attempt by the allies to take control of the Gallipoli Peninsula from the Ottoman Empire who had joined the side of the Germans. The Australian Imperial Force (AIF) played a crucial part in this attack after landing in Anzac Cove on the 25th April 1915. However, the immense failure of the campaign resulted in 8,141 dead and 26,111 wounded Australians, and the forced evacuation of the Allies. Due to the substantial amount of death and destruction brought on from this campaign, any sane person would assume that it would simply go down as a failed battle in Australian history. Instead, Anzac Day on the 25th April is one of Australia's most popular national days that commemorates all who have served Australia and New Zealand. It celebrates the revival of the nation that occurred on the beaches of Gallipoli and the community is united over the Anzac legend which was created to commend the bravery and strength of Australian soldiers. However, there are questions over why this failed battle became so significant in national memory and why the racist roots that created the Anzac legend are often overlooked?

The Anzac Legend was formed on the beaches of Gallipoli where it was said that the Australian soldiers demonstrated aspirational qualities that set them at a higher standard to all other soldiers. C.W. Bean is credited as one of the main campaigners for this idea as his war reports from the battle described the characteristics of the AIF sol-

diers to be uniquely Australian and worthy of praise. These characteristics included independence of thought, resourcefulness, mateship, endurance and courage. These distinct Anzac qualities became integral to Australia's national identity and were used to demonstrate that the 'White Australia' policy was 'effective' in creating a pure, superior state. At the time Australia was obsessed with the concept of an exclusively white nation as they believed it would allow them to fit better on the dominating world stage, motivated by twisted ideas of racial purity. The Anzac legend was created to establish a patriotic memory as a coping mechanism for a disastrous battle, but it had the underlying intention of fuelling the racist government's agenda that sought to neglect the Aboriginals and immigrants present in Australia. Bean had no proof that the White Australia policy had created an elite race; his ideas can really be credited to his racist eugenic beliefs and the biased affection he carried for the AIF soldiers. Therefore, despite the Anzac legend being used now to unite and support brave soldiers, we must not forget that the very idea of the Anzac legend is a myth that is rooted in ideas of white supremacy that dominated Australia's political sphere at the time.

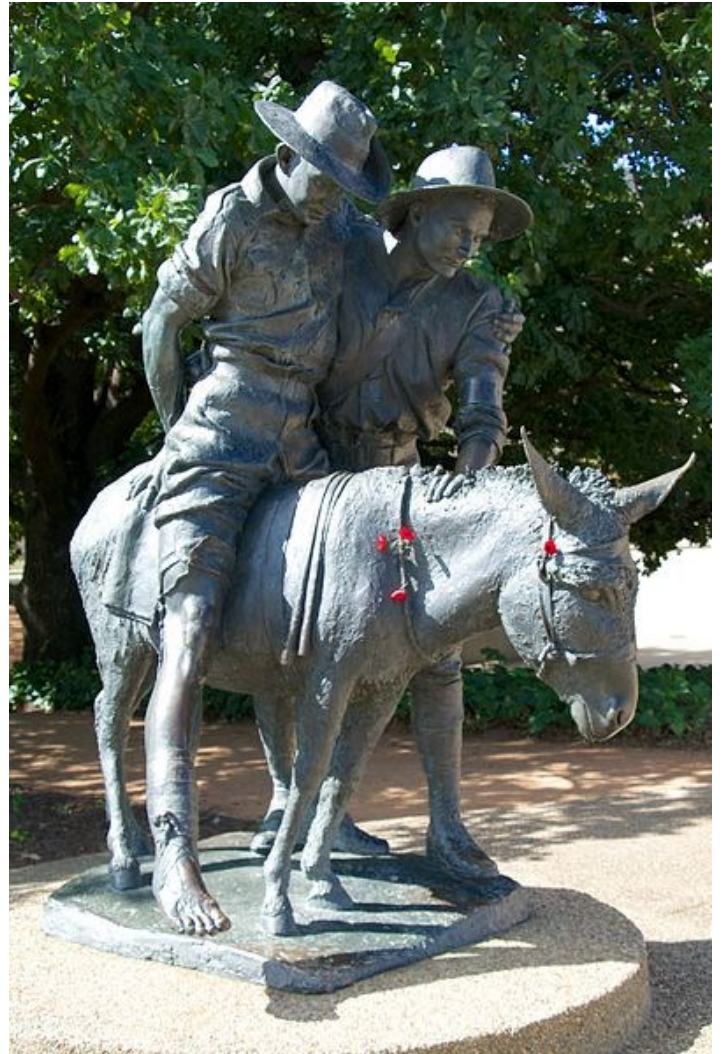
A reason why Anzac Day generated immense public support is because it was preferred over National Australia Day (26th January) which commemorates the landing of the first convict ships when the colony was established in 1788.



This day was thought to bring attention to Australia's original status as a penal colony and was not an idea the free Australian people of the day could relate to. Therefore, Australia lacked a day which symbolised independent national identity and patriotic duty. The 1st January 1901 was a potential national commemoration day as this was when Australia was federated, however this event was peaceful and did not accommodate with the belief that a nation had to be formed from fire or some substantial violent event. The Battle of Gallipoli encapsulates this as it was certainly violent and when paired with the propaganda of the Anzac legend could generate pride and a sense of successful independence. This controversial idea of a nation needing to be formed by violence can explain why nations try to prove themselves by participating in global events that they are not ready for.

Contemporaries now are debating over whether more light needs to be shed on to the truth of the Anzac legend which in reality originated from a failed battle and is entwined with ideas of white supremacy. The events of the Battle of Gallipoli and the actions of the soldiers were greatly exaggerated to create a united identity. Famous falsified stories were publicised such as that of John Simpson Kirkpatrick and his donkey who helped to carry wounded Australian soldiers to safety during Gallipoli. Kirkpatrick was said to showcase Australian's heroic deeds, but the truth is that he was a British man who moved to Australia in 1910, meaning his brave actions can only be credited to himself and not to any supposed superiority of Australian blood. The true story of Gallipoli and the Anzac soldiers is one of a lost battle that became twisted in national memory to celebrate Australia's first demonstration of independent, unique strength. Nevertheless, Anzac Day is still rightfully important to Australian national identity since it

shows respect for soldiers' sacrifice and overtime it has become more inclusive to aboriginals and other ethnic backgrounds. However, people need to be more aware of its racist origins and ensure that these aspects remain in the past and only the commemoration of all the brave soldiers (no matter their race) remains in the present.



# MEDIEVAL FAKE NEWS: THE SCAPEGOATING OF THE JEWS

The Plague of 1346-1353 is now believed to have been caused by the bacteria *Yersinia pestis*, passed from rodents to humans through the bite of an infected flea. The bubonic plague caused significant mortalities across medieval Europe and was termed the Black Death. It manifested through armpit and groin tumours and black spots. The Plague killed so quickly that burial and cremation rituals could not be observed and instead, mass graves were created. Thus, as well as fearing death from infection, medieval people feared spiritual death if their rites were not read by a member of the clergy in the hysteria to bury bodies quickly.

Whole villages were abandoned. Crops were not harvested, with the workforce either dying or hiding, causing food shortages that ravaged villages. Whole families disappeared in the period 1347-50, with estimates ranging from around 30 to 60 million killed. In this climate of fear, the Jewish were blamed for the Plague, accused of poisoning wells and soon thereafter, supposed 'proof' was supplied by people of all classes to condemn the Jewish.

A crisis like the Plague required justification and explanation and thus inevitably, the Jews, a repeatedly scapegoated group in medieval society, were punished both physically through executions, torture, posthumous body mutilation and economically through tax. Although Pope Clement VI condemned the accusations levelled at the Jewish as irrational, resentment steeped in religious stigma against the Jewish community's reigned supreme and they became targets for the pressure medieval society felt from this ruthless disease. Widespread anti-Semitic rhetoric gave way to hysteria and mass murder. Yet these accusations were completely unfounded – the Plague ravaged through wholly Jewish areas and still the Jews were accused of poisoning themselves in an obsession with conspiracy.

Indeed, Isaac ben Todros, a French Jewish physician, stated that the Plague had 'spread among our people first' and was puzzled as to why God was not diverting the danger away from the 'Children of Israel'.

Little sympathy manifested for the Jews in a world that believed that the Plague was an act of God sent to punish mankind for its sins. The masses inevitably blamed outsiders like the Jews for causing 'bad air' and forced the Jews to 'confess' through torture for attempting to

wipe out all Christians in a 'Jewish conspiracy'. Jewish communities were not just persecuted physically but also economically in that they were heavily taxed as well as deprived by the cancellation of any debts owed to them. Modern historiography asserts that much of this anti-Semitic financial persecution was motivated by greed of possessing Jewish wealth.

This view continued to circulate throughout the fifteenth century and became a central element of anti-Semitic ideas. Alongside intersecting with inherent resentment caused by religious difference, the accusations levelled against the Jews led to significant demographic shifts with Jewish communities moving to Eastern European areas. This forced immigration into concentrated Jewish centres sadly led to an easier path of Nazi extermination, trapping Eastern European Jews during the Holocaust.

To conclude, the scapegoating of the Jews for causing a Plague, caused by rats and fleas, was an exceptional example of medieval 'fake news'. It reminds us that the scapegoating of important minority groups is not a modern phenomenon and that these events intersect with the conspiracy theories levelled against the Jews today.

## Further Reading:

Cohn, Samuel, *The Black Death and the Burning of Jews*, Past and Present, 196 (2007), pp. 3-36.

*The Sicut Judeis* – document published by Clement VI.

**Evie Hallitt**



# UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

## HISTORY SOCIETY

### **Hello Historians!**

We just want to say another big thank you to all that attended our Winter Ball at the start of this month. It was so nice to finally see you all dressed up and celebrating everything that we love about being apart of the History Society.

We have been a central hub for socialising and academic engagement. This year was off to a great start when members flocked to the 'Welcome Drinks' to meet like-minded people and it was exciting to watch new friendships blossom. This was quickly followed by a game's night at the Roxy Ball Room and our traditional Otley Run brought the Wild West to the streets of Headingley. The Career Networking Event enlightened students on the many options available to them as they leave academic life or alternatively decide to extend it. We heard from our sponsors the 'British Online Archives' who are offering amazing internship opportunities. After two years of restrictions HistSoc have organized a trip to Athens where you can immerse yourself in an abundance of culture, and let's not forget about the views!

We were proud to support the 'Girls Night In' initiative and feel that the cause should not be forgotten. Cases of assault, spiking and violence against women should not be forgotten and the momentum needs to be kept up. As a society we will be actively participating in protests to support this cause in order to raise further awareness.

The History Society have brought back to university life the side we all missed last year and reignited a sense of community. We can't wait to see you back next Semester for more!

**Elizabeth McEvaddy (Academic Sec)**

### **Thankyou to the 2021/22 Issue 1 Assistant Editing Team!**

Henna Akhtar, Victoria Beningfield, Betsy Cohen, George Davis, Evie Hallitt, Layla Kharroubi, Charlotte-Rose McDonnell, Harry Morris, David Richardson, Emma Shears, Katie Simpson, Olivia Tait & Katie Winfield





# HISTORY STUDENT TIMES