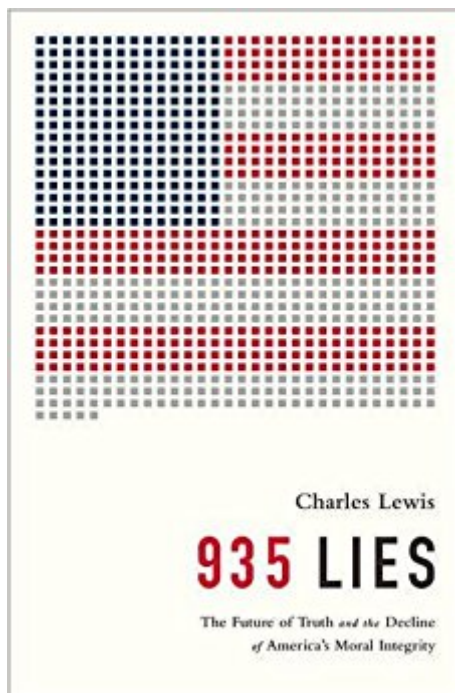




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935 Lies: The Future Of Truth And The Decline Of America's Moral Integrity



Synopsis

Facts are and must be the coin of the realm in a democracy, for government is of the people, by the people and for the people, and requires and assumes to some extent an informed citizenry. Unfortunately, for citizens in the United States and throughout the world, distinguishing between fact and fiction has always been a formidable challenge, often with real life and death consequences. But now it is more difficult and confusing than ever. The Internet Age makes comment indistinguishable from fact, and erodes authority. It is liberating but annihilating at the same time. For those wielding power, whether in the private or the public sector, the increasingly sophisticated control of information is regarded as utterly essential to achieving success. Internal information is severely limited, including calendars, memoranda, phone logs and emails. History is sculpted by its absence. Often those in power strictly control the flow of information, corroding and corrupting its content, of course, using newspapers, radio, television and other mass means of communication to carefully consolidate their authority and cover their crimes in a thick veneer of fervent racialism or nationalism. And always with the specter of some kind of imminent public threat, what Hannah Arendt called "objective enemies." An epiphanic, public comment about the Bush war on terror years was made by an unidentified White House official revealing how information is managed and how the news media and the public itself are regarded by those in power: "[You journalists live] in what we call the reality-based community. [But] that's not the way the world really works anymore. We're an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality . . . we're history's actors . . . and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do." And yet, as aggressive as the Republican Bush administration was in attempting to define reality, the subsequent, Democratic Obama administration may be more so. Into the battle for truth steps Charles Lewis, a pioneer of journalistic objectivity. His book looks at the various ways in which truth can be manipulated and distorted by governments, corporations, even lone individuals. He shows how truth is often distorted or diminished by delay: truth in time can save terrible erroneous choices. In part a history of communication in America, a cri de coeur for the principles and practice of objective reporting, and a journey into several notably labyrinths of deception, 935 Lies is a valorous search for honesty in an age of casual, sometimes malevolent distortion of the facts.

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Customer Reviews

“Charles Lewis probably did more than anyone else to launch institutional nonprofit journalism in America. So it is worth paying attention to what he has to say”; His reflections, especially on network television, point up the inherent limits of our largest legacy news organizations and embody the hope that new entrants will fill the gaps in newsgathering and, thereby, enlarge the public’s capacity for democratic governance.”—the Wall Street Journal

935 LIES provides a powerful survey of the quest for truth amid an explosion of mis-information and misinterpretations in everything from news reporting by traditional TV media to paid lobbyists, advocates, the Internet, and more. The truth becomes even more confusing and impossible under such an onslaught, and 935 Lies explores the many ways truth is manipulated by business and political interests alike. Any college-level reader concerned with the evolving world of disinformation will find this a powerful revealing study.”—Midwest Book Review

At a time when truth is under siege, acclaimed investigative reporter Charles Lewis has given us a gripping insider’s guide to a new journalistic ecosystem which is exposing lies, greed, and abuses of power across the globe. For citizens everywhere who care about truth-telling and holding those in power accountable.”—Katrina vanden Heuvel, Editor and publisher of The Nation

Though people in Washington lie all the time, the word “lie” is very rarely used. In 935 Lies, veteran investigative journalist Chuck Lewis reminds us, in vivid detail, of the many times government leaders and corporations have lied to us and sought to muscle the news business to keep it from exposing the truth. Don’t read it and weep ... read it and get angry!”—Ray Suarez, Host, Inside Story, Al Jazeera America

A bestselling author and national investigative journalist for the past thirty years, Charles Lewis is a

tenured professor of journalism and, since 2008, the founding executive editor of the Investigative Reporting Workshop at the American University School of Communication in Washington, D.C. He is the founder of The Center for Public Integrity and several other nonprofit organizations. He lives in Washington, D.C.

I'm not thrilled with the title because it implies to the browser that the book is about the 935 now-documented lies that led to the war in Iraq, and that is not the case -- those lies are simply one of many evidentiary cases spanned a much broader spectrum. As the author himself outlines early on, the book is about a retrospective review of the struggle for truth from the lies that led to Viet-Nam to date (less 9/11); a concurrent review of the corruption and diminution of commercial journalism; and finally, the future of the truth. Start at the end -- on a whim I did, reading the 8th and final chapter first, and what I found not only persuaded me that this author is an intellectual and moral giant, but that he may yet have his most important work before him, the astonishing depth and breadth of his past 20 years notwithstanding. Returning to the beginning, I appreciated the first seven chapters with the benefit of the author's own concluding perspective. I would quibble with the author in starting with Viet-Nam, but it makes sense in the context of his focus on the Constitution as the first casualty, and the long march from giving the President war powers for Viet-Nam to letting Dick Cheney get away with 935 lies leading to Iraq. For me, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the Warren Commission cover-up are a more logical starting point. That was the point at which presidents ceased being president, and the start of what Matt Taibbi would later immortalize with a new word: Griftopia: A Story of Bankers, Politicians, and the Most Audacious Power Grab in American History. Among the many integrated elements of this book that inspire my admiration are the woven tale of how information has been controlled by the government in a manipulative manner, and truth foresaken -- mission abdicated -- by the professional press -- along with stellar selections of quotations from key figures. In some ways I am reminded of Howard Zinn's book A People's History of the United States: 1492 to Present. The perfect complement to this book's beginning is Daniel Ellsberg's Secrets: A Memoir of Vietnam and the Pentagon Papers where I have a very long summary review. It is helpful to remember that J. Edgar Hoover was in charge of the FBI during this period, and in addition to being complicit in the assassination of both Kennedy's and Martin Luther King, was the originator of governance by blackmail -- he would surely drool today over how the Department of Homeland Security and the National Security Agency, along with all too many "federalized" adjuncts at the state and local level, are able to intimidate virtually anyone daring to risk independent thought. Chapter three brings us home to the

matter of race and the author's early discovery that just about everything the government says and does with respect to race is theater -- lip service -- dishonoring all that we allegedly stand for. This is the chapter that causes me to appreciate the author's broadness of reading -- every page sparkles with at least one recommended book title. Here I will add one of my own, William Pepper's *An Act of State: The Execution of Martin Luther King*. Chapter four uses CIA activities in Chile, Guatemala, and El Salvador, as well as the Iran-Contra scandal, to explore secret foreign policy and the arrogance of power. There are some gems here, including the realization that there are many different US foreign policies on any given issue, each with its own variation of truth. The author cites Seymour Hersh in noting that [just as with Viet-Nam] the central issue here is the assumption by the Executive of war powers and enactment of treaty-level rampages without respect for the Constitutional authority of the Senate. He does not quote, but I choose to insert here, Henry Kissinger's now immortal quote from a Wikileaks cable, "The illegal we do immediately, the unconstitutional takes a little longer." And all those gathered in the White House laughed. As a complement to this chapter, see Ambassador Mark Palmer's book, *Breaking the Real Axis of Evil: How to Oust the World's Last Dictators by 2025* -- the US Government is best pals with 42 of the 44 dictators on the planet. As I write this, elements of the US Government are still trying to throw Ghani in Afghanistan under the bus, and illegally instal Abdullah, a 100% Tajik who can be definition never win more than 40% of the vote no matter how much Iranian or CIA money he has going for him. Ghani won the election 60-40 (55-45 if you count the fraudulent votes Karzai arranged for Abdullah) and for reasons that escape me, the Secretary of State is in Afghanistan trying to pretend that Ghani lost, Abdullah won, and they should split the power (which in the case of Abdullah and the Panjshiri kleptocracy, means gaining a license to loot). Chapter five, "Doubt Is Their Product," focuses on corporate lies and corporate pressures that have essentially shut down investigative journalism. The author focuses on tobacco and ends with references to other industries and now the Koch Brothers (to which he might have added Justice Powell and the US Chamber of Commerce). Ralph Nader's book *Unsafe At Any Speed* was in fact about corporate irresponsibility -- his number two, Jim Turner, went on to focus on the irresponsibility of the industries reducing health and allegedly fostering health). True cost economics is not in this book, but I am inspired to believe this book is a starting point for the author's next 20 years, NOT just a summary of the past 20. There is so much to be done. Chapter six explores the beginning of media self-censorship, media executive complicity with government misbehavio and misrepresentation. I am struck by the US military declaration that "unwarranted criticism" is censorable. QUOTE (164): "TV is an immensely powerful medium, but its potential to make astonishing sums of money is typically realized only by

appealing to the lowest-common denominator instincts of viewers."Someone smarter than me has observed that television destroyed in-depth reporting in historical context because there are no archives from the 15th Century (when Herat in Afghanistan was the capital of the Persian Empire). As I have watched the NYT and WSJ makes fools of themselves over the Afghan run-off election [see 15 truth-full posts on Ghani at Phi Beta Iota the Public Intelligence Blog], I have to conclude that both TV and print media have lost their minds -- over-paid reporters are getting by recycling unverified information and no one is doing what Robert Young Pelton, one of America's greatest journalist, does: go talk to those affected on the ground, outside the hotel -- it's actually much safer on the streets than most realize. This chapter is finished in the final chapter -- the author begins to articulate a new ecology of truth-finding and truth-telling that is non-profit in nature, replacing the traditional media outlets that are financially unsustainable in their current configurations. Chapter seven has this quote and I will leave it at that -- buy the book for this chapter (and the last) alone. QUOTE (180): "Over the years, those unhappy with my investigations have tried just about everything to discourage me. They have issued subpoenas, stalked my hotel rooms, escorted me off military bases, threatened me with arrest or with being thrown from a second-story window, hired shills to pose as reporters asking disruptive questions at nationally televised news conferences and even arranged to have death threats delivered by concerned state troopers who urged me to leave town immediately. (I didn't). And of course they have launched frivolous libel lawsuits that took years and cost hundreds of thousands, even millions, of dollars to fight before they were dismissed."The last chapter floored me. This is the one chapter that should be in every single journalism course -- and every scientific research seminar, every civil activist training class, every government school, every business school (they still don't teach commercial intelligence), every law enforcement, media, military, and non-profit curriculum. This is the chapter that brings it all together and outlines an inspiring future in which non-profit journalism and a new model combining non-profit reporters, academic interns, and many others across all boundaries, come together what is in essence a healthy World Brain. QUOTE (225): "Imagine a world in which individual researchers, public-interest activists, lawyers, political scientists, government prosecutors and investigators, corporate investigators, forensic accountants, political scientists (sic - second mention), computer experts, investigative historians, public anthropologists, and journalists are sometimes looking for truth in all the same places, using the same exciting new data technologies and analytics, exchanging ideas and information, and sometimes working and writing together, whether side by side or across borders and genres."Wow. This is also a chapter that mentions a number of organizations that are trying -- but not succeeding -- at taking truth-finding and telling to the next level, and it includes

some noteworthy book recommendations, such as Tim Wu's *The Master Switch: The Rise and Fall of Information Empires* (Vintage). The author ends with a call for a new multi-disciplinary field he calls "Accountability Studies." It is at this point that I reflect the benefit of connecting the author to both Open Source Everything (the technical solution) and True Cost Economics as pioneered by Herman Daly (see for instance *For The Common Good: Redirecting the Economy toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future*). The legal counterpart to this book focused on the public's right to know and in particular the First Amendment, is Danny Sheehan's *The People's Advocate: The Life and Legal History of America's Most Fearless Public Interest Lawyer*. On the economic side, in addition to Matt Taibbi's *Griftopia* cited above, I recommend William Greider's many books, and especially *The Soul of Capitalism: Opening Paths to a Moral Economy*. I have to say that of all the books I have read in the past few years, this one has given me more hope in relation to the emergence of public intelligence in the public interest. I pray that the extraordinary accomplishments of the author and those he organized is but a preamble to the main event: the emergence of transparency, truth, and trust as a non-negotiable public good. Best wishes to all.

Robert David STEELE Vivas
INTELLIGENCE FOR EARTH: Clarity, Diversity, Integrity, & Sustainability

This book has much to impart. The review of the treachery surrounding Watergate and the Vietnam War was illuminating and a timely reminder political evil is not new to America. Then, disjointedly, the book goes on to cover the author's career in the context of a tepid news journalism industry. Additionally, the book covers good journalistic work by various non-profit and publicly support organizations that are crucial but not household names. The overall purpose of this book is unclear. Plus, its scope is very specific to the author's era and direct experience. "935 Lies" is completely misleading. Further, the discussion of governmental dishonesty is anecdotal, not systematic or adherent to an underlying theme about government and society. Naturally, this book is well written and fun to read. I have knowledge and insight that I didn't have before. And, knowing that there are still journalists like this author still "out there" is very heartening.

Charles Lewis makes a strong argument that our constitutional future is challenged by the demise of journalism as we knew it. He advocates for the alternative ways journalism is reforming, such as the non-profit media, and puts out red flags next to the dangers that are developing as big money buys candidates for office and the truth is ignored or twisted to appear as false and false as true. Lewis is a distinguished reformer leading over time several media education and alternative

venues after working with Mike Wallace and 60 Minutes for several years. His perspective as set forth in this book is essential for folks wanting to see how we can find a democracy that is not frozen in grid lock and reflective of the majority of the population, not just the few in the class characterized as the one per cent.

From time immemorial governments have lied to cover up their tracks. Over the course of the years the only thing that has changed is that they have greatly improved their methods and techniques of dissembling. At the present time those in power have become more skilled than ever at hiding the truth from the American people. In 2004 public opinion polls disclosed that more than half of all Americans believed that weapons of mass destruction had been used in Iraq. Numerous widely publicized international reports had shown, beyond doubt, that no such weapons existed. "What had the U.S. Government officials said to cause most Americans and their elected representatives to completely ignore facts, logic and reason in the rush to war? The author of this book, Charles Lewis, founder of the Center for Public Integrity, began to investigate these questions and ultimately issued a report that "Two years after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, President George W. Bush and seven of his administration's top officials made at least 935 false statements about the national security threat posed by Iraq. The carefully orchestrated campaign of untruths about Iraq's alleged threat to U.S. national security from its WMDs or links to al Qaeda (also specious) galvanized public opinion and led the nation to war under decidedly false pretenses." With a few notable exceptions the Main Stream Media (MSM) "overwhelmingly failed to investigate or challenge the Administration's failed case for war, although some major news organizations later grudgingly acknowledged that their coverage was insufficiently critical of government pronouncements." Mr. Lewis tells us that "investigating this tale of dishonesty by those in power and acquiescence on the part of those charged with reporting the truth has been a disheartening experience . . . Even more sobering, however, is the fact that the Iraq War deception, with its 935 shameful, public lies, is simply the latest and most egregious story of truth betrayed . . . in the past five decades." This book is a modern history of government and corporate lying and what can be done about it. I highly recommend it.

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