



University of Kentucky
UKnowledge

Theses and Dissertations--Communication

Communication

2013

Both Sides of Our Mouths: Contemporary Legends as a Means of Dissent in a Time of Global Modernism

Gerald D. Abbott Jr.

University of Kentucky, gdabbo2@uky.edu

[Right click to open a feedback form in a new tab to let us know how this document benefits you.](#)

Recommended Citation

Abbott, Gerald D. Jr., "Both Sides of Our Mouths: Contemporary Legends as a Means of Dissent in a Time of Global Modernism" (2013). *Theses and Dissertations--Communication*. 11.
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/comm_etds/11

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Communication at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations--Communication by an authorized administrator of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.

STUDENT AGREEMENT:

I represent that my thesis or dissertation and abstract are my original work. Proper attribution has been given to all outside sources. I understand that I am solely responsible for obtaining any needed copyright permissions. I have obtained and attached hereto needed written permission statements(s) from the owner(s) of each third-party copyrighted matter to be included in my work, allowing electronic distribution (if such use is not permitted by the fair use doctrine).

I hereby grant to The University of Kentucky and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive and make accessible my work in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known. I agree that the document mentioned above may be made available immediately for worldwide access unless a preapproved embargo applies.

I retain all other ownership rights to the copyright of my work. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of my work. I understand that I am free to register the copyright to my work.

REVIEW, APPROVAL AND ACCEPTANCE

The document mentioned above has been reviewed and accepted by the student's advisor, on behalf of the advisory committee, and by the Director of Graduate Studies (DGS), on behalf of the program; we verify that this is the final, approved version of the student's dissertation including all changes required by the advisory committee. The undersigned agree to abide by the statements above.

Gerald D. Abbott Jr., Student

Dr. Alan DeSantis, Major Professor

Dr. Timothy Sellnow, Director of Graduate Studies

BOTH SIDES OF OUR MOUTHS:
CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS AS A MEANS OF DISSENT
IN A TIME OF GLOBAL MODERNISM

DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the
College of Communication and Information
at the University of Kentucky

By
Gerald Dean Abbott Jr.

Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Alan DeSantis, Professor of Communication

Lexington, Kentucky

2013
Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

BOTH SIDES OF OUR MOUTHS: CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS AS A MEANS OF DISSENT IN A TIME OF GLOBAL MODERNISM

The legend is a permanent fixture of human societies. Though the legends themselves are permanent, their functions and meanings can fluctuate as the context in which they are told and retold shifts. As societies move through history, certain authoritative institutions create narratives that direct those societies and frame debates within them. Issues neglected by these institutions yet experienced by members of the population can be said to be unconstructed. Social problems that have achieved some level of construction inevitably provoke those who dissent from those constructions.

In these situations, members of a society look for alternative means for talking about these problems. Often they turn to the contemporary legend for this purpose. This study reviews a sample of the most popular legends in the early part of 2012 to determine the ways members of American society were dealing with the unconstructed social problems of that time.

KEYWORDS: Contemporary Legend, Unconstructed Social Problems, Folklore, Globalism, Modernism

G.Dean Abbott

Student's Signature

July 12,2013

Date

BOTH SIDES OF OUR MOUTHS:
CONTEMPORARY LEGENDS AS A MEANS DISSENT
IN A TIME OF GLOBAL MODERNISM

By

Dean Abbott

Alan DeSantis

Director of Dissertation

Timothy Sellnow

Director of Graduate Studies

July 12, 2013

Date

For those who have carried me here:

Mom and Dad
Rebecca
Daisy and Lucy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One	
Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	6
Theory.....	17
Method.....	19
Central Claims and Summary of Findings.....	22
Chapter Two	
Introduction.....	24
Sub-Group One.....	25
Sub-Group Two.....	30
Sub-Group Three.....	37
Sub-Group Four.....	39
Analysis of Themes.....	45
Chapter Three	
Introduction.....	54
Legend Texts.....	54
Analysis of Themes.....	62
Chapter Four	
Introduction.....	69
Legend Texts.....	70
Analysis of Themes.....	81
Chapter Five	
Introduction.....	88
Legend Texts.....	88
Analysis of Themes.....	96
Chapter Six	
Introduction.....	99
Legend Texts.....	99
Analysis of Themes.....	107
Chapter Seven	
Introduction.....	111
Legend Texts.....	111
Analysis of Themes.....	122

Chapter Eight	
Introduction.....	129
Legend Texts.....	129
Analysis of Themes.....	139
Chapter Nine	
Introduction	143
Legend Texts.....	143
Analysis of Themes.....	146
Chapter Ten	
Introduction.....	148
Analysis of Supra-Themes.....	152
Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study.....	166
References	170
Vita.....	176

Chapter One

Introduction

Everyone has heard them, those tales that get passed around, often presented as true. Their plots are a little too neat; their elements a little too perfectly dramatic or humorous to have the feel of real life. They appear in conversation with family and friends, in popular culture and, increasingly, on the Internet.

Most people in American culture are familiar with at least those stories that have been around long enough to become “classics” of the genre.

Consider the example of “The Hook” :

A teenage boy drove his date to a dark and deserted Lovers' Lane for a make-out session. After turning on the radio for mood music, he leaned over and began kissing the girl.

A short while later, the music suddenly stopped and an announcer's voice came on, warning in an urgent tone that a convicted murderer had just escaped from the state insane asylum — which happened to be located not far from Lovers' Lane — and that anyone who noticed a strange man lurking about with a hook in place of his right hand should immediately report his whereabouts to the police.

The girl became frightened and asked to be taken home. The boy, feeling bold, locked all the doors instead and, assuring his date they would be safe, attempted to kiss her again. She became frantic and pushed him away, insisting that they leave. Relenting, the boy peevishly jerked the car into gear and spun its wheels as he pulled out of the parking space.

When they arrived at the girl's house she got out of the car, and, reaching to close the door, began to scream uncontrollably. The boy ran to her side to see what was wrong and there, dangling from the door handle, was a bloody hook (Emery, n.d.).

Not all these tales contain an element of terror: for example, "Biscuit for Brains" is a humorous favorite.

A few years back my uncle swore that this story happened to someone in his church...

There was a sweet older lady who would often do grocery shopping for the infirm and elderly in her church. One hot, summer day a lady asked her to pick up a few things and bring them by her house in a dangerous part of Baltimore City. The sweet old lady was wary but felt that she couldn't say no, even though she was terrified of driving in the part of the city that often had shoot-outs and other drug violence. Anyway, the woman went on her way, picked up the groceries and proceeded to the lady's house.

As she entered the lady's neighborhood she noticed young hoodlums gathering on every street corner. Although she had no air conditioning in the car, she rolled the windows up tightly (as a safety precaution) and suffered in the 90 plus degree heat.

She drove ahead until suddenly she heard a loud "POP!" and felt a jolt to the back of her head. She reached to feel the back of her head and came back with a wet oozing mess that she was sure was part of her brain!

Knowing that she had been shot, the woman turned around and raced to a local hospital.

Somehow she made it to the emergency room and had the strength to walk right in. She told the attendant that she had been shot. Immediately she was rushed back to an exam room. Doctors whirled around and asked where she had been shot (since they saw no blood.) She said "my head," and the doctors found a mass of the oozing white substance the woman had first noticed.

Upon inspection the doctors realized that the white substance wasn't part of her brain but was instead a lump of biscuit dough (the kind in a can) that had exploded from the heat of her car! (Emery, n.d)

These tales are among the thousands that have circulated throughout American culture for years and are popularly known as "urban legends". Some may assume that legends and belief in them might be a phenomenon relegated to the past, to a more superstitious, credulous age.

Not so. Such legends continue to circulate and to be believed. The emergence of the Internet in the last decade and a half has enabled these legends to spread even more broadly and at a more rapid pace since tellers, who once would have been limited to audiences with whom they had face-to-face contact, now can spread a single story to wider, more dispersed audiences with a click of a mouse.

Moreover, the Internet has become an archiving tool for these tales as Web sites that log them and their development have popped up and become popular authorities on

urban legends and related issues. In some cases, Web authors go so far as to research these tales and offer opinions on whether or not they are “true.”

One popular web site, the “Urban Legends” section of About.com, hosts thousands of these tales and stays busy recording new ones that crop up. On any day, readers can find lists of the newest legends and a list of the twenty-five most popular.

The most well-known urban legends web site, Snopes.com, also features a regularly updated list of new legends as well as an archive of older lore categorized by subject. The operators of the site routinely attempt to make determinations about legends with regard to their truthfulness.

The popularity of these web sites is indicative of the overall popularity of urban legends among the general public. In April of 2009 David Hochman reported in *Reader's Digest* that 6.2 million people visit Snopes.com every month. Of course, the approach of these Web sites and the millions who use them differs somewhat from the approach employed by academic folklorists or other scholars.

Consider, for example, the way About.com defines “Urban Legend:”

An urban legend is an apocryphal, secondhand story, told as true and just plausible enough to be believed, about some horrific, embarrassing, ironic or exasperating series of events that supposedly happened to a real person.

As in the example above, it's likely to be framed as a cautionary tale.

Whether factual or not, an urban legend is meant to be believed. In lieu of evidence, however, the teller of an urban legend is apt to rely on skillful storytelling and reference to putatively trustworthy sources — e.g., “it

really happened to my hairdresser's brother's best friend" — to convince hearers of its veracity (Hochman, 2009).

This definition is similar, no doubt, to the one employed by some scholars but not all.

The definition of urban legend continues to be debated.

Barbara and David Mikkelson, the authors of Snopes.com, are up-front about the difference between their approach and that of the professionals. They write:

Urban legends are a specific type of folklore, and many of the items discussed on this site do not fall under the folkloric definition of "urban legend." We employ the more expansive, popular (if academically inaccurate) use of "urban legend" as a term that embraces not only urban legends but also common fallacies, misinformation, old wives' tales, strange news stories, rumors, celebrity gossip, and similar items (Mikkelson, n.d.).

Even if their approach to the collection, definition and study of this material is less precise than that of professional academics, such sites are enormously useful as sources for data and as a means to track the changing stream of this part of the culture. As a result contemporary legends scholars sometimes find themselves dependent on amateurs such as these for their services, while debate continues to rage among academics about the most basic issues regarding the study of this phenomenon, including the question of what such tales should be called and how the form should be defined.

A note should be included here on terminology. While the term "urban legend" continues to be widely employed by the general public, scholars use it less frequently. The consensus among most scholars is that "urban legend" as a term connotes ideas that

could be misleading, for example that this phenomenon is limited to urban areas being a significant one. Most scholars employ the term, “contemporary legend.” From this point forward, now that both terms have been introduced, I will also use the term “contemporary legend.”

Literature review

Defining Contemporary Legend

Before undertaking further exploration of the topic, it's important to establish an understanding of the contemporary legend. Defining the contemporary legend is not easy in spite of the enormous popularity these tales have enjoyed in recent years. People seem to love hearing and reading about contemporary legends even if they cannot say precisely what a contemporary legend is. While, popular definitions may not have the academic rigor one might expect from a trained folklorist, they do reflect a shared sense of what constitutes a contemporary legend.

Even so, many scholars have struggled to define the genre. Jan Harold Brunvand (1986) began his attempt to define “legend” by distinguishing legend from myth. “Unlike myths,” Brunvand wrote, “legends are generally secular and are set in the less remote past” (p.159). Brunvand adds that legends are distinguished by their migratory character. Specifically, they tend to be “widely known in different places” (p.159). At the same time, they become localized when “texts become rooted and adapted to a particular place” (p.159). Brunvand then moved on to define urban or contemporary legends as legends that are set “in (a) contemporary setting (not necessarily a big city) that are reported as true individual experiences that have traditional variants that indicate their legendary character” (p.165).

Gillian Bennett (2005) reflects the frustration of the ongoing efforts to define the genre when she wrote that she no longer has an interest in this series of debates. Instead, she offered a number of insights she believes constitute a perspective that allows her to engage the field productively. Bennett wrote that the contemporary legend is defined in part by its fluidity.

“For me now, “Bennett wrote, “what makes a legend a ‘legend’ is the difficulty of assigning fixed characteristics to it or placing it forever and always in one category (p.xi). Bennett goes on to argue that a contemporary legend is “situated somewhere on a continuum between myth and folktale at one pole and news and history on the other, moving along this continuum depending on the individual story and the whims or objectives of the individual storyteller who relates it” (p.xi). Finally, Bennett concludes the series of loose observations she weaves together in place of a formal definition with the significant insight that “legend is not actually a scientific term, though scholars attempt to use it as if it were or to make it scientific by complex definitions. It is an evaluation, not a description.... The content is ambiguous enough and important enough to warrant a continuous (re)assessment and (re)evaluation. So, in an ironic way, the question of whether or not a story is a legend is critical to recognizing it as a legend” (p.xii).

Even if the process of defining the contemporary legend remains somewhat problematic, continuing reflection on the boundaries that demarcate the phenomenon is important. Equally important is ongoing work on the interpretation of this body of tales

and the role of the contemporary legend in modern culture. In recent years, a division has surfaced in the discipline about how best to interpret contemporary legends and what the proper focus of academics interested in this area should be. The conflicts have been between those whose view of legends emphasizes their narrative quality and those who emphasize the teller's belief of them and narrative setting, between those who emphasize content and those who emphasize context.

Bennett and Smith (1996) summarize the different perspectives this way:

“There are those whose concept of legend is defined on a primary level by the status of legend as a narrative genre, who tend to be interested in exploring language, storytelling styles, performances, contexts and repertoires. On the other hand, there are those whose concepts of contemporary legend focuses on the belief element and who are interested in exploring the political, social or psychological meanings and contexts of the stories.”

These perspectives are not mutually exclusive. Scholars can be simultaneously interested in both the narrative status and the performative context of contemporary legends without being at cross-purposes or damaging the integrity of their research projects.

Daniel Barnes (1996) seemed to pick up on this insight when he urged scholars to remember the importance of the content of contemporary legends:

I do not for a moment wish to minimize the signal importance of the contextual approach, ...yet in focusing almost exclusively upon such matters, we seem to have abandoned altogether considerations of individual legend texts, the mere description of which we have barely

begun to attempt, let alone come to any agreement about. In short, I think there is still something to be learned from examining the structure of individual urban legend texts” (pg. 6).

In the years since Barnes issued this call to return to looking at the content of contemporary legends, some scholars have taken up the challenge. Most notably, a group of scholars has been active in considering the functions of contemporary legend by looking at how legend content influences real-world behavior. Among the contributions of these scholars has been the development of the concept of ostension.

Bill Ellis (2001) defines ostension as any time a legend finds “dramatic extension into real life” (p.41). Linda Degh (2001) described the role of contemporary legend in some criminal acts. These crimes can be the result of an ostensive process. She wrote, “the text in legend reenactments is the event in which the anti-social act is committed...These narrators perform the content of their legend, doing it by pure ostension” (pg. 423).

Degh (2001) wrote specifically about legends that emerged in the wake of the Tylenol poisoning scare of the 1980’s. The legends that cropped up after that crime caused consumers to alter their behavior thus living out legends they had heard. Degh wrote that a year after the original scare, “ reports of contamination of popular foods...began to trickle into the news and continued to make sporadic appearances. As with all varieties of legend-like rumors or real legends, the reports could identify people who confirmed the “rumor” or “hoax” by claiming to be among the victims (p. 429).

Folklorist Diane Goldstein applied the concept of ostension, which she defines as the relationship of legend to action, to health-related legends. The contemporary legend

contributes to our understanding of health and disease as well as to the way people make healthcare decisions, Goldstein asserts. “As a genre that advises, warns and informs with incredible speed and authority,” she wrote “the contemporary legend can become a formative motivating factor in personal decision making, including decisions related to individual health-seeking and health care provision” (p. 28).

Along these lines, Whately and Henken (2000) looked at the way contemporary legends function to shape understandings of sexuality. The role of contemporary legends in shaping our understanding of social issues, including issues of sexuality is larger, they say, than the voices of official channels.

They write, “folklore is more pervasive than any number of public service announcements or posters and has a greater weight of authority, coming as it does from the collective wisdom and transmitted as it is on a personal, individual level. (p. 8)

Another contribution from this group of scholars is their interaction with memetic theory. Ellis (2001), especially, has interacted with the memetic approach to contemporary legend by arguing that contemporary legend, rather than acting solely as a “mind virus” can also function as a kind of metaphorical inoculation against such viruses.

Memetic theory was adapted to the study of contemporary legend after first being introduced by biologist Richard Dawkins. Dawkins contended that just as genes are self-replicating in a population and just as the traits associated with those genes spread among members of that population, so do ideas. Dawkins called these ideas “memes.”

As an example of this phenomenon, Dawkins pointed to a piece of folklore, specifically a chain letter. Dawkins suggested folklore is an example of a “mind-virus.”

Ellis counters by suggesting Dawkins has not fully captured the situation. “We could see,” he wrote, “ legends not simply as pathogenic but as part of a complex process in which information systems respond cautiously to foreign ideas” (pp. 83-84, 2001) Thus, Ellis suggests, contemporary legend can provoke anti-legend responses. The anti-legend responses created by a single person can be “transmitted in an altruistic way to the rest of his community” (p. 90, 2001). The ensuing struggle between legend and anti-legend form one avenue of social debate over issues affecting a community. In this way, contemporary legends play an important part in defining and constituting our understanding of various phenomena.

Contemporary Legend Study and the Internet

After establishing himself as perhaps the foremost scholarly and popular authority on urban legends, Jan Harold Brunvand pointed to an important development in the field and called researchers to devote themselves to documenting and understanding it.

In an article entitled “The Vanishing ‘Urban Legend,’” Brunvand (2004) noted that with the increasing role of mass media, especially the advent of the Internet in the spread of urban legends. Due to their enormous popularity, encouraged, ironically enough, by Brunvand’s own work, urban legends, Brunvand claimed, were being co-opted by the channels of popular culture.

Specifically, Brunvand (2004) claimed that “as popular culture treatments and electronic transmission of urban legends flourished, the oral tradition that first attracted folklorists’ attention declined. The older oral/folk genre still exists to a limited extent, but now in a modern real-world context dominated by talk shows, news columns, tabloids,

cell phones, faxes, email and websites” (pg. 15). Brunvand’s insight has, unfortunately, not been taken to heart in the discipline as little work has yet been done looking at urban legends and the many avenues of research their existence on the internet has opened up.

The little work that has been done has dealt with the issue at a mostly theoretical level. For example, Jan Fernback (2003) has looked at computer mediated communication and oral culture. Fernback (2003) however offers insights that while helpful on a theoretical level, are not based in an excavation of data from the collected online reserves of urban legends.

Pamela Donovan (2004) also looked at urban legends and the Internet, taking an in-depth look at an online news-group devoted to discussion of urban legends. Donovan chose to investigate three urban legends dealing with crime. She focused on legends about snuff films, or films that show actual sexual brutality and murder, stolen body parts, and abductions. Donovan selected these because she noticed these three legends routinely received the most attention in an online discussion group in which she had been participating. Each of these legends was recurring over the span of a decade, Donovan noted.

Trevor Blank (2009) notes that folklore was present online from the beginnings of the World Wide Web: As the Internet developed as a communications facilitator, folklore emerged as recognizably as it did in ‘the real world.’ “From the earliest moments of the modern Internet’s existence, folklore was a central component of the domain, moderating the intersection of computer professionals with hackers, newfound lingo, and the dispersal of stories, pranks, and legends” (p.2).

In addition to the insights these scholars have produced, it is important to note the advantages the creation of the Internet has made available to contemporary legends scholars that have as of yet gone underutilized. With such archives of legends readily available, scholars now have a more global view of large samples of this data.

In the past, many folklorists devoted themselves to the collection of such stories through intensive field labor, recording, cataloging, and archiving the results of their work. This sort of labor is now less necessary as Internet users around the globe collect this data and submit it to various websites devoted to the topic. While fieldwork remains an important part of the study of this type of communication, its role in a computer-mediated age is already being limited.

It must be recognized that drawing urban legend data from the Internet is not without its limitations however. When transformed into written texts online, such legends are removed from their natural tendency to be shaped by their tellers. Urban legends have been part of a constantly changing oral culture that produced and modified stories for many reasons. Once written and published, it seems reasonable to assume that the rate of modification will slow as these texts become seen as authoritative. As a result, it must be recognized that legends on the net reflect only a calcified version of something that is in fact organic and mutable.

In addition, posting such legends to the net abstracts them from their performative context. All non-verbal communication is lost as is most of the possibility to seek follow-up data from a teller. When these stories are placed on the net, the task of determining the need such legends serve for a particular community becomes more difficult.

Nevertheless, I believe great possibilities remain for learning about these legends given the large data pool the Internet supplies. The aforementioned limitations can be bracketed for some research, if it is understood that they exist and reasonable steps are taken to minimize their effects. Altogether this background shows that online legends might be used as a body of rhetoric that could bear systematic analysis. Unfortunately, too little of this work has been done.

Approaches to Urban Legend Study and Interpretation

In his book, *Encyclopedia of Urban Legends*, Jan Brunvand (2001) outlined the five major approaches to the study of contemporary legend: the Freudian, the Fortean, the Memitic, the Linguistic and the Sociological.

The Freudian approach applies the categories of psychoanalytic analysis to the study of contemporary legend. This approach, Brunvand said, “involves...seeking to identify in the texts and contexts symbolic references to the unconscious needs and desires of the people who invent, tell, and listen to the stories” (p. 161). The folklorist most associated with this approach is Alan Dundes. For example, Dundes’ analysis of “The Hook” is well known for drawing on Freudian themes. Dundes understood this legend as “a sexual fable about the fears of young women concerning the likely intentions of their dates” (p. 161). A scholar in this tradition like Dundes then might suggest that the hook referred to in the title of the legend is a veiled reference to the male’s penis and the loss of the hook by the criminal in the story is a symbolic castration. This approach has never been a dominant one in the field in spite of Dundes’ reputation. In fact, his approach has “attracted strong critics”, Brunvand said (p. 161).

The next approach, the Fortean, is also a minor one in the field. These scholars continue in the spirit of Charles Forte, who dedicated himself to cataloging strange phenomenon that could not be explained by science. Brunvand (p. 157) quotes prominent Fortean Lauren Coleman as summarizing the Fortean approach this way, “I believe in nothing and the possibility of everything.” Since Forteans tend to take contemporary legends as indicative of some sort of historical reality, the Fortean approach does not lend itself to rhetorical analysis and so, for the purposes of this study, will be set aside.

The Memetic approach to contemporary legend, which compares cultural reproduction to biological reproduction and adaptation, has already been discussed. A reminder of the central idea of “the meme” will suffice here A meme is a unit of culture that is repeated and spreads through a culture in a way similar to the way genes are replicated through biological reproduction.

This approach remains relatively new in the study of Urban Legends, Brunvand said. “So far,” he wrote, “folklorists have only produced occasional conference papers” along these lines. “But, memetics should provide a useful tool for deeper understanding of how traditions evolve, spread, and become varied” (p. 255). Heath, Bell, and Sternberg (2001) provide an example of this approach. They contend that memes succeed to some degree because of emotional selection among audiences. These researchers found “it is possible to use the emotional selection process to predict the prominence of legends in the social environment (2001, p. 1038).

The linguistic approach has been advocated by F.H. Nicolaisen and emphasizes the underlying structure of narrative language in these tales (Brunvand, 2001,

p. 242). This approach looks for six structural elements in this narration: Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Result or Resolution, and Coda.

According to Brunvand, (2001, p. 243) Nicolaisen found that contemporary legends were characterized by a pattern in which “a piece of vital information known to the narrator is left out of the Orientation section to be made known to the listener only after the telling of the Complicating Action has been completed” (2001, p. 243).

The sociological approach emphasizes “the central position of social structure of interaction processes” (2001, p. 398). In other words, this approach focuses on the way contemporary legend is a reflection of the way the society in which they are told is structured. This approach has been widely used. One scholar associated with this approach is Gary Alan Fine. Fine (1980) took a sociological approach to understanding contemporary legends in his study of the Kentucky Fried Rat legend in which a customer at a fast food chicken restaurant discovers she or he is eating a fried rat rather than a piece of chicken. Fine used sociologist Roland Warren’s seven characteristics of the “Great Change” in American life as a framework for interpreting this legend. Fine explores how Warren’s characteristics- the division of labor, differentiation of interests and associations, increasing systemic relationships to the larger society, bureaucratization and impersonalization, transfer of functions to profit enterprises and government, urbanization and suburbanization, and changing values are dealt with through the transmission of this legend.

As a result of considering the legend through the lens of Warren’s characteristics, Fine offers some interpretations including that “the impersonalization of the fast food establishment is central to many accounts” (pg. 236) of this legend and that

the tale reflects concerns about changing values. He writes, “fast food chains did not develop without public acceptance. The increased emphasis in American life on leisure and the changing roles of women make the fast food restaurant possible” (pg. 237)

The sociological approach is well-established in the literature. The approach I took in this study could be said to be sociological in the broadest sense. Yet, while my approach to the data has not been bound too tightly by any particular approach or theory, I have drawn on some concepts advanced in the theoretical research to explain my findings.

Theory

For the purpose of this work, I have drawn from the work of Best and Horiuchi (1985) who argue that contemporary legends represent unconstructed social problems. They begin by noting that “urban legends are products of social tension or strain. They express fears of the complexities of modern society that threaten the traditional social order” (pg. 492).

These stresses arise from conditions about which many people feel anxiety but that have not been recognized as legitimate problems by the official sources of cultural authority. Because these problems are left ignored by cultural and political authorities, they are “unconstructed.” Best and Horiuchi (1985) cite Blumer (1971) and Spector and Kitsuse (1973, 1977) as describing the construction of social problems as a product “of claims making activities, in which people call others’ attention to social conditions” (495). The emergence of social problems is really, they say, a “recognition by a society of its social problems (in) a highly selective process, with many harmful social conditions

and arrangements not even making a bid for attention and with others falling by the wayside in what is frequently a fierce competitive struggle”(495).

In short, every society consists of conditions that can range from anxiety inducing to physically harmful. However, these problems only become recognized as legitimate social concerns when they prevail in a cultural contest for official attention. Best and Horiuchi (1985) argue that urban legends are a way for members of a population to talk about social concerns that have not so far been successful in the struggle for cultural and political legitimation.

To understand how these dynamics work, it is important to realize that while social problems have consequences for entire populations, they are experienced on an individual basis as well. Individuals feel anxiety. Individuals worry about many things. The transmission of urban legends is a means for these individuals to work out and to talk about these concerns.

The “Kentucky Fried Rat” is again helpful here. Given that the vast majority of Americans eat fast food with some regularity and that doing so is socially accepted often even expected, an individual who refuses to eat at a fast food restaurant out of a concern that has not been socially constructed will experience some sort of social cost or stigma, like being excluded from social functions that take place in these restaurants or just being thought “weird” for failing to live out the culturally dominant narrative about fast food. Legends like the Kentucky Fried Rat allow these individuals to release some of their anxiety by offering a justification of their point of view and perhaps offering solace for their momentary social isolation.

While I have found the central insights of Unconstructed Social Problems theory helpful. I have not employed it directly in this study. Instead, I have drawn from Best and Horiuchi's application of it to contemporary legends the idea that contemporary legends can function to express indirectly convictions or beliefs. Through this study, I expand this concept to show that this same pattern holds for social problems that have some level of construction. Even though these social problems have been constructed, those who dissent from the way they have been constructed, this study will show, express themselves through contemporary legend. It was with these insights in mind, that I approached the work for this study.

In addition to this idea, a few other assumptions form the basis of my approach. Specifically, I brought to this work the assumption that rhetoric shapes our social reality. The rhetorical environment in which we live shapes both our perceptions of social reality and the actions human beings take to shape that reality.

Moreover, I also brought to this the assumption that the rhetorical choices human beings make give us insight into their underlying beliefs and understandings of the world. I took as my working assumption that close analysis of these texts would reveal something of the worldview behind them, including the desires, beliefs and fears the authors' held.

Method:

During the early months of 2012, I gathered data. I drew it from Snopes.com's "Hot 25" list. This list contains the twenty-five most actively discussed contemporary legends on the site and can change every day. I consulted this list daily over the course of three months. There were days on which the content did not change, presumably because

there were no changes in the ranking of the legends. Still, I printed the list each day from February 1 to May 20, 2012. When a new legend appeared, I printed the list and the content of each new legend. On days when there was no change to the overall list, I printed only the list.

In some cases I have also included other bits of information provided by the authors of Snopes.com that I felt in some way illuminated the legend. Snopes.com routinely attempts to determine whether a legend is “true”. This results in being able to verify or disconfirm some aspect of the narrative in a minority of cases.

Prior to beginning this research I contacted Barbara and David Mikkelsen, the operators of Snopes.com by email. I identified myself as a doctoral student in Communication and explained the study. I requested an interview with either or both of them to discuss the site and related issues. I received a reply from Barbara saying that both of them were so busy that they maintained a policy of turning down all interview request and were declining mine. Consequently, I proceed with my study without their input.

When the 90 day data collection window closed, I began coding the data. To understand the data, I used a grounded theory approach informed by concepts drawn from unconstructed social problems theory. After the data were organized, I analyzed the themes that emerged seeking to identify the social concerns to which they were speaking. I paid special attention to the possible social and psychological functions these legends may have been fulfilling.

The data were ultimately broken into seven groupings. These groupings formed around the obvious surface level content of the narratives. So, for example, several

legends dealt with technology, other with food. I grouped all these together. Organizing the data in this way preserved the most natural association of the legends. Rather than imposing on them some larger thematic structure from the beginning, and grouping them according to that artificial structure, grouping legends by topic allowed that larger structure to grow naturally out of what emerged when legends about the same topic were laid side by side.

The themes of each chapter showed a remarkable consistency. A small group of ideas seemed to be the focus of these legends whether their surface contact was about technology, celebrities or food. In fact, these themes were so similar between chapter groupings, the reader will find a fair amount of repetition. But, the legends in each chapter, though often repeating similar themes as in the prior chapters, develop these themes in different ways. All this, of course, is to be expected if, as I contend, a relatively coherent worldview exists behind all these legend sets.

From each of the organic chapter-level groupings, I extracted what I have called “chapter level” themes. I then grouped these “chapter level” themes into “supra-themes” according to the central concerns present in each group of “chapter level” themes. In this dissertation, the reader will encounter the “chapter level” themes at the end of each chapter. In each chapter I consider each legend on its own merits before trying to place it in the context of an era of globalization. Doing this allows the content of each individual legend to speak for itself and then adds additional layers of insight when placed in the broader context. Finally, I flesh out the supra-themes of danger and protection from danger most fully in the conclusion.

Central Claims and Summary of Findings

Contemporary legends do not argue univocally. In some texts, the reader can detect a “push /pull dialectic”. In other cases, this dialectic emerges when texts are juxtaposed. In some legends for example, the authority of the state may be pictured as a force protecting an individual, while in another that same power may be portrayed as a source of oppression. The presence of this tension does not mean we are unable to get a sense of a dominant reading from the text, but this tension must be acknowledged before we begin looking at this groups of texts in our contemporary context.

In this study, I argue that the themes expressed in this body of contemporary legend data represent concerns, which, if expressed directly, would implicate the teller as one who holds an understanding that has not been legitimated by the cultural authorities responsible for its construction and therefore is likely to incur social penalties.

Furthermore, I argue that one function of contemporary legend is to serve as a means for tellers to talk indirectly about socially controversial issues and that contemporary legends fulfill this function. All of this is consonant with an “unconstructed--social--problems” understanding of contemporary legends.

Based on the results of my study, I contend that the legends popular during the data collection period function for a segment of the American population as a means of discussing concerns that remain otherwise unacknowledged or unlegitimated by cultural authoritative forces. These findings show particularly that the concerns of this segment of the population are playing out in the context of globalization and that the changes concomitant with increasing globalization serve as the source of many of their fears.

Taken as a whole the themes inherent in these legends create an alternative vision of global modernism that differs from the dominant view. This alternative vision emphasizes the losses globalization has occasioned, the risks entailed by increasing movement along the trajectory of globalization and the plight of the victims globalization creates.

This argument obviously entails the assumption that legends with roots in the past, indeed some with ancient roots, can be adapted to express contemporary concerns. Moreover, it entails the assumption that while legends are constantly being reformulated and transmorphing, they retain a universal, archetypal core. It is this core that remains constant across history. To understand the function of any set of legends in a particular time and place, we must look at their context and not regard merely that archetypal core.

In order to better understand our contemporary context, I have identified a list of traits. While this period of increased globalization has many characteristics, the data in this study speak to five which are central. They are:

- increased reliance on technology
- borderlessness and increasing cultural diversity
- the rise of multi-national corporations
- increased distrust of government
- changes in traditional social arrangements

With this background, we are ready to proceed to the legend texts themselves.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Two

Introduction

In this chapter, I will look at the legends that fall into the largest of the textual groups my coding generated. In each chapter I quote extensively from the legend texts so that the reader has a clear view of the data. At the end of each chapter I offer some preliminary analysis of the themes that emerge from the texts in this subset.

The largest sub-group of data is clustered around the idea of “technology.” Eight legends fell into this group. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the texts within this sub-group and then to analyze the themes that emerge from them. We shall see that, when taken together, this group of texts expresses cultural misgiving about various kinds of technology and its increasing role in our lives as citizens of a globalized world..

This group was the largest in part because the term “technology” was taken to have a broad rather than a narrow meaning. A narrow meaning for the term would have relegated the term to machinery or to the gadgets usually referred to as “technology” in popular parlance. In this instance, technology was defined more broadly as any tool for solving problems. As we shall see before this chapter concludes, some legends included in this category could have been excluded if the narrower definition of technology had been used.

The act of using tools has given rise to legends as much as the tools themselves. For this reason this category includes not just legends related to tools used for solving problems, but also to the application of those tools. In other words, some legends relate to problems caused by using tools to solve problems.

The texts of many of these legends contain implications that touch on themes other than technology, like fear of illness and death, fear of danger, and the desire for freedom. Still, they were included in this category because the body of the text of each legend seemed to revolve, in spite of whatever implications could be drawn from the narratives, around a piece of technology. Without the technology component, none of these legends could exist in their current form.

The texts included in this chapter can be grouped into four major subgroups: 1) legends about computer viruses, 2) legends about communication technologies, 3) legends about a car, and finally, 4) legends about health threats and concerns. Legend texts are presented here exactly as they were published on Snopes.com. All errors of spelling and syntax have been left uncorrected.

Sub-Group One

The first major subgroup in this category is legends about computer viruses. Obviously, these legends relate to bits of software capable of doing damage to computers, not to the computers themselves. Still, these two realities are so closely related as to fit well together in this category.

First, in this group is a legend about the “Invitation/Torch Virus.” The first version of this text warns the reader to be alert “during the next few days” for an email with an attached file called “invitation.” Opening it, the reader is told, will release a virus called “Olympic Torch”

which ‘burns’ the whole hard disc C of your computer. The virus will be received from someone who has your email address in you’re his/her contact list, that is why you should send this email to all your contacts. It is better to receive this message 25 times

than to receive the virus and open it. If you receive a mail called invitation though send by a friend, do not open it and shut down your computer immediately.

The message goes on to clarify for the reader the seriousness of the threat by appealing to recognized, culturally authoritative sources.

This is the worst virus announced by CNN, it has been classified by Microsoft as the most destructive virus ever. This virus was discovered by McAfee yesterday, and there is no repair yet for this kind of virus. This virus simply destroys the Zero Sector of the Hard Disc, where vital information is kept.

Finally, the message ends by imploring the reader to help guard others from the dangerous results of this virus. The urgency of this request is made clear from its being typed in all capital letters, the Internet text version of shouting.

SEND THIS E-MAIL TO EVERYONE YOU
KNOW, COPY THIS E-MAIL AND SEND IT TO
YOURFRIENDSAND REMEMBER:IF YOU SEND
IT TO THEM, YOU WILL BENEFIT ALL OF US.

The data from Snopes.com includes a second version of this text. It also begins by warning the reader to be alert during the next few days, though the threat described is slightly different.

Do not open any message with an attached file called “Merry Christmas” regardless of who sent it, It is a virus that opens as on Open Log Fire and will burn the whole hard disc of your computer.

The virus will be received from someone who has your e-mail address in his/her contact list, that is why you should send this e-mail to all your contacts. It is better to receive this message 25 times than to receive the virus and open it.

From this point on, this version resembles the first in its warnings to the reader and appeals to cultural authorities.

If you receive a mail called “Merry Christmas”, though sent by a friend, do not open it and shut down your computer immediately. This is the worst virus announced, it has been classified by Microsoft as the most destructive virus ever.

This virus was discovered by McAfee yesterday, and there is no repair yet for this kind of virus. This virus simply destroys the Zero Zector of the Hard Disc, where the vital information is kept.

A third version of this legend is also included. Oddly enough, it begins by mentioning a British politician.

Emails with pictures of Gordon Brown actually smiling are being sent and the moment that you open these emails your computer will crash and you will not be able to fix it!

If you get an email along the lines of Gordon Brown smiling or Gordon Brown even “looking happy” don’t open the attachment.

This e-mail is being distributed through countries around the globe, but mainly in England, Wales and Scotland.

Be considerate & send this warning to who ever you know. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

The Snopes.com page offers some helpful background on this legend. The legend of an all-destructive computer virus has been circulating since at least 2000 (Snopes.com). It appeared again just before the 2006 Olympics. After the election of Barack Obama, it resurfaced as a warning about a virus called “Black in the White

House.” Snopes.com says no all-destructive virus exists or has ever been identified by Microsoft or by McAfee.

A second, similar legend identified by Snopes.com shows the complex nature of legends. This legend is in the form of an email warning of a virus called “VBmania,” which spreads through emails with the subject line “Here you have” or “Just for You.” The virus eventually replicates itself and sends itself to everyone in the users email address book

VBmania is indeed a real computer virus, however, these versions of the email warning about it have picked up legendary elements. This example includes bits of the wording from another legend about a virus called “Life is Beautiful.”

Anyone-using Internet mail such as Yahoo, Hotmail, AOL and so on. This information arrived this morning, Direct from both Microsoft and Norton Please send it to everybody you know who has Access to the Internet. You may receive an apparently harmless e-mail titled Here you have/Just for you/Here it is If you open either file, a message will appear on your screen saying: “It is too late now, your life is no longer beautiful....”

Subsequently, you will LOSE EVERYTHING IN YOU PC, And the person who originated it will gain access to your Name, e-mail and password. This is a new virus which started to circulate on Saturday afternoon. AOL has already confirmed the severity, and the antivirus softwares are not capable of destroying it. The Virus has been created by a hacker who calls himself ‘life owner.’ PLEASE SEND A COPY OF THIS E-MAIL TO ALL YOUR FRIENDS, And ask them to PASS IT ON IMMEDIATELY. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

This legend is clearly similar to the last one, but employs legendary elements to warn users about a real virus. The development of this legend raises the issue of ostension. One wonders whether the original composer of this warning email simply got confused after hearing a legend about an all-destructive virus, or whether he simply substituted the legendary elements for the facts because he believed the legendary elements would do a better job generating the fear necessary to cause the reader to be adequately cautious. The possibilities for how this came about are countless.

Finally, it is worth noting that few if any technologies have been as hyped in the last three decades as the home computer. In part, because few technologies have expanded the reach of the individual as drastically. As the social understanding of the home computer has most frequently been constructed as a machine that expands users' ability to reach out to the world, the underside of this revolution has gone underreported.

Just as the home computer allows the user to move out virtually into the world to allow individuals to participate in all sorts of activities around the globe from their living rooms, it also allows the world to come into the home. It does not discriminate. The computer allows desired bits of the world in but, these legends remind us, they allow undesired, harmful bits in too. Far from picturing the computer as a tool of liberation alone, these legends represent it as a conduit through which danger enters the home. In this way, these legends express a sentiment that dissents from the popularly accepted construction of the home computer to present another more sinister image.

Sub-group two

Dangerous viruses are not the only computer related legends to turn up in the sample. A legend more loosely related to computers opens the second major subgroup, legends dealing with communication technologies.

This one has to do with the social networking site Facebook.com. In this legend an anonymous writer pleads with the reader to help a sick child. This legend includes the following photograph.



this child's got a cancer. Facebook is ready to pay 3 cent for every share. We don't know is true or not. maybe it's true and then...

>SHARE< for this baby
PLEASE SHARE, THANKS!
By: 999,999,999

Legends claiming that some corporations will pay a set amount for each email or social media posting have been rampant in the years since the advent of the Internet.

Snopes.com says the photo above alone has shown up in multiple situations on the

internet since 2007. Part of what is striking about this legend is that it asks the reader to help the child while simultaneously admitting there may, in fact, be no child to help.

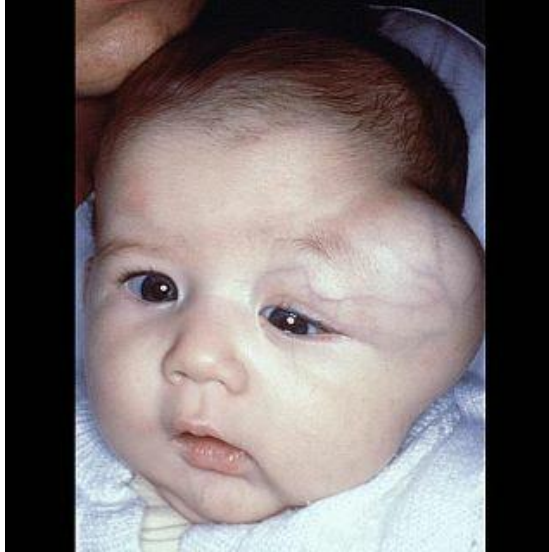
The data from Snopes.com also features another, briefer version of this legend.

The entirety of the text reads:

He is terribly sick :(
Facebook will donate \$1 for every share
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

This one also includes photographs:





Before moving on to analyze these texts, a word should be said about the ethics of incorporating the photos. Some may object to the inclusion of these photos, claiming they are exploitative of these children. Whether they are exploitative or not, is ultimately irrelevant to the question of whether they should be included here. Regardless of whether the reader determines these photos are exploitative or not, leaving them out of this study would have denied the reader a significant portion of the information in these texts on which to judge and understand them.

Though the text of these legends says little, we can tell much about the supposedly sick child depending on which photograph is included with the text. If the first, we know the supposedly sick child is exceptionally small, perhaps born prematurely. We know this because we see evidence of a medical apparatus designed to help him breathe. We see the tiny hep-loc in his hand so he can be medicated intravenously. We also know that this child matters to someone from the hand lovingly laid on his back in the photo.

The second photo tells the story of an older child who, due to his terrible illness, has had both legs amputated. A pair of loving adults, perhaps his parents, attends him. He too is a loved child. His suffering extends to those around him.

In the final picture, we see a child whose forehead is distended, presumably by the growth of a cancerous tumor. We imagine his pain. It pains us to see him.

In all these situations, we gather more information designed to persuade the reader to take action on the child's behalf. The legend extends non-verbally, and becomes all the more bathetic as the viewer is called on to fill in the horrific details of the child's trauma.

While these legends do invite readers to send money, this does not disqualify them from being considered legends. Even if these particular versions of these legends contain calls to contribute money, that doesn't mean the original versions of the texts contained these. Because legends evolve and get transfigured over time, assuming that any single element in one version of a legend disqualifies it from counting as a member of the category "legend" is unwarranted.

Also, even if these legends do involve some element of "scam" that doesn't mean that readers don't treat them exactly as they do legends, repeating them and spreading them. Even if the legends began as a "scam," the original scammers are not the only ones who spread the legend. Because a legend is defined more by the way audiences treat them than whether they contain a plea for money, then these continue to qualify as legends.

Third, it is impossible to know that the pleas for money were not added to the legend text at some point. It is entirely possible that the legends listed here sprang up without the pleas for cash. It is possible they did and then when the legends were heard

by someone, that person added the plea for money. So, the legends could have come first. Since we cannot know if this is the case, we cannot rule them out of the category “legend.”

Finally, it should be noted that while these legends ask for contributions, neither contain any contact information. Even if a reader wanted to make a donation, the necessary information for doing so is missing. The texts above actually contain claims that a corporation, Facebook, will donate money on the users behalf and does not contain a direct appeal to the reader at all. This fact alone seems to suggest that none of these legends is meant to be taken primarily as a “scam.”

Next in this subgroup is a legend claiming cell phone users must register with the national “Do Not Call” list. Snopes.com present four versions of the text. The first collected originally from the Internet in 2006 says:

Greetings To All My Friends and Family

In just 4 days from today all U.S. cell phone number will be released to telemarketing companies and you will begin to receive sales calls. You will be charged for these calls! Even if you do not answer, the telemarketer will end up in your voice mail and you will be charged for all of the minutes the incoming (usually recorded) message takes to complete. You will than also be charged when you call your voice mail to retrieve your messages.

To prevent this, call 888-382-1222 from your cell phone. This is the national DO NOT CALL list; it takes only a minute to register your cell phone number and it

blacks most telemarketers calls for five years.

In case you have friends other than me, pass this on to them.

Though the central claim of this legend is false, it is interesting that it contains an accurate telephone number for the national “do not call” list. The implied suspicion on the part of the writer that her readers may have no friends but her is also interesting.

A second version of this text locates the threat of cell phone number disclosure a little further in the future. Otherwise it conveys essentially the same information.

JUST A REMINDER...31 days from today, cell phone numbers are being released to telemarketing companies and you will start to receive sales calls. YOU WILL BE CHARGED FOR THESE CALLS...

To prevent this, call the following number from your cell phone: 888-382-1222. It is the national DO NOT CALL list. It will only take a minute of your time. It blocks you number for five (5) years.

PASS THIS ON TO ALL YOUR FRIENDS.

A third version adds a detail about the additional involvement of a federal agency.

A directory of cell phone numbers will soon be published for all consumers to have access to. This will open the doors for solicitors to call you on your cell phones, using up the precious minutes that we pay. The Federal Trade Commission has set up a “do not call list”. It is called a cell phone registry. To be included on the “do not call” list, you must call from the number you wish to register.

The number is 1-888-382-1222, or you can go to their website at www.donotcall.gov.

A final version of this legend first appeared in 2004. It claimed the date for making all cell numbers available to telemarketers was even further in the future.

Starting Jan 1, 2005, all cell phone numbers will be made public to telemarketing firms. So this means as of Jan 1, your cell phone may start ringing off the hook with telemarketers, but unlike your home phone, most plans pay for incoming calls. These telemarketers will eat up your free minutes and end up costing money. According to the National Do Not Call List, you have until Dec 15, 2004 to get on the national “Do Not Call List” for cell phones. You can either call 1-888-382-1222 from the cell phone that you wish to have put on the “do not call list” or you can do it online at www.donotcall.gov.

Registering only takes a minute, is in effect for 5 years. All of you will need to register before Dec. 15. You may want to also want to do your own personal cell phones. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

Some additional information included with these texts by the authors of Snopes.com points out that these legends continue to be circulated, springing up routinely in January and June for some reason. They also point out that it has always been the case that cell phone users do not need to register with the national do not call list, though they may do so if they desire.

Much that was said previously with regard to the home computer could be applied here as well. Many communication technologies run in two directions, allowing the user

to reach out, but also to be reached sometimes by nefarious forces, or , perhaps, simply by pranksters.

Some of these legends of course add the extra element of asking for money for what appears to be a worthy cause. In this way, the legends become not just a warning against those who would use the Internet to bring harmful viruses into the home, but about reminding us of a fundamental social reality: that the world is not always as it seems and that there are those among us who delight in deception. These legends tell us to be on guard as much in the virtual world as we are inclined to be in the real one.

Sub-group three

The next subgroup in this series deals with that piece of technology that has become a staple of life in the United States and, consequently, in contemporary legend: the car. The automobile has been such a fixture in traditional contemporary legend content, that it is remarkable that in all the data collected for this study, this is the only legend that deals explicitly with the subject.

This legend raises questions about the energy efficiency of the Chevy Volt, a hybrid vehicle manufactured by General Motors since 2010.

I know, but I want to save our planet---
Cost to operate a Chevy Volt

Eric Bolling (Fox Business Channel's
"Follow the Money") test drove the Chevy
Volt at the invitation of General Motors.

For four days in a row, the fully charged
battery lasted only 25 miles before the Volt
switched to the reserve gasoline engine. Eric
calculated the car got 30 mpg including the
24 miles it ran on the battery. So, the range
including the 9 gallon gas tank and the 16

kwh is approximately 270 miles. It will take you 4 ½ hours to drive 270 miles at 60 mph. Then add 10 hours to charge the battery and you have a total trip time of 14.5 hours. In a typical road trip your average speed (including charging time) would be 20 mph.

According to General Motors, the Volt battery holds 16 kwh of electricity. It takes a full 10 hours to charge a drained battery.

The cost for the electricity to charge the Volt is never mentioned so I looked up what I pay for electricity.

I pay approximately (it varies with amount used and the seasons) \$1.16 per kwh.

-16kwh X\$1.16 =18.56 to charge the battery.

\$18.56 per charge divided by 25 miles = \$0.74 per mile to operate the Volt using the battery.

Compare this to a similar size car equipped with only a 4 cylinder gasoline engine that gets 32 mpg.

-\$ 3.19 per gallon divided by 32 mpg= \$0.10 per mile.

The gasoline powered car cost about \$15,000 while the Volt costs \$46,000.

So Obama wants us to pay 3 times as much for a car that costs more that 7 times as much to run and takes 3 times as long to drive across the country.

REALLY? No wonder GM is having trouble selling the Volt! (Mikkelson, n.d.).

The authors at Snopes.com add to this that while it is true that Bolling test drove the car and reported facts similar to those above, the legend author's argument goes off

the road. The legend contains inaccuracies. For example, charging a 16 kwh battery does not require a full 16 kwh of electricity. The authors at Snopes.com also claim the electricity rate per kwh is not \$1.16 anywhere in the United States. So, like many legends, this one is a mix of truth and falsity.

It seems clear here that this automobile legend is a vehicle for political opinion. The involvement of the American federal government with the production of the Volt is being ridiculed. “See,” this legend seems to say, “the government bungles whatever it touches.”

The scorn for government is intensified here because of the role of the automobile in our lives. Government meddling, it seems, becomes much more difficult to ignore when it directly touches on technology that most of us depend on in our daily lives like our cars.

This legend is unique in this group in that it touches not just on the first of the concern about our era of globalization, increased dependence on technology, but on a second. Here we also see increased distrust of social authorities, especially the federal government, touched up.

Sub-group four

The final subgroup of legends in this set deal with medical threats and technology. The first legend in this group purports to show the results of watering plants with water that has been heated in a microwave and then cooled. Included with the text are several photographs, and the headline, “**Microwaved Water-See What It Does To Plants.**”

Below is a science fair project that my granddaughter did for 2006. In it she took filtered water and divided it into two

parts. The first part she heated to boiling in a microwave. Then after cooling she used the water to water two identical plants to see if there would be any difference in the growth between the normal boiled water and the water boiled in a microwave. She was thinking that the structure or energy of the water may be compromised by microwave. As it turned out, even she was amazed by the difference.





I have known for years that the problem with microwaved anything is not the radiation people used to worry about, It's how it corrupts DNA in the food so the body can not recognize it. So the body wraps it in fat cells to protect itself from the dead food or it eliminates it fast.. Think of all the Mothers heating up milk in the "Safe" appliances. What about the nurse in Canada that warmed up blood for a transfusion patient and accidently killed them when the blood went in dead. But the makers say it's safe.. Never mind then, keep using them. Ask your Doctor I am sure they will say it's safe too. Proof is in the pictures of living plants dying. Remember You are also Living. Take Care. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

The authors at Snopes.com report conducted their own experiment. They also watered a plant with water that had been microwaved and found no change in the plant's health.

The last two legends in this category deal specifically with medical technologies. Given that medical technologies are uniquely intimate, coming, as they do, into regular contact with our bodies and being, at times, responsible for our continued health and well-being, it is not surprising concerns about them would turn up in the legend data. Here is the first.

Precautions re Mammograms and Dental X Rays/A Useful Warning

On Wednesday, Dr. OZ had a show on the fastest growing cancer in women, thyroid cancer. It was a very interesting program and he mentioned that the increase could be related to the use of dental x-rays there is a little flap that can be lifted up and wrapped around your neck. Many dentists don't bother to use it. Also, there is something called a "thyroid guard" for use during mammograms. By coincidence, I had my yearly mammogram yesterday. I felt a little silly, but I asked about the guard and sure enough, the technician had one in a drawer. I asked why it wasn't routinely used. Answer: "I don't know. You have to ask for it." Well, if I hadn't seen the show, how would I have known to ask.

Someone was nice enough to forward this to me. I hope you pass this on to your friends and family. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

The authors at Snopes.com point out that Dr. Oz did a show on thyroid cancer in December, 2010. During the show, he encouraged the use of thyroid guards during X-

rays. The legendary element here is not that the subject was mentioned during a television show devoted to personal health related topics, but the entire story of the anonymous narrator who “happened” to have a mammogram the day after seeing the program.

The final legend in this section deals with the possible negative side effects of an over-the-counter medication.

I need to warn you about a product on the market and hopefully you will pass it on to as many people as possible. I felt like I was coming down with a cold last Friday and because I’m around sick family members so much I wanted possible to head it off. I used Zicam, which is a gel nose spray which claims to keep a cold from becoming “full blown.”

Immediately I had an intense, horrible burning in my nasal/sinus passages. The skin on my face hurt to touch and I had pain and burning so that it hurt to move my head. My husband was here and kept asking if I wanted to go to the ER but the thought of getting in a car was overwhelming. My face was burning hot and my nasal passages were so swollen that I couldn’t breathe through my nose and I could see swelling in the mirror. It lasted about three hours and it was Labor Day weekend and I couldn’t see a Dr. until Tuesday.

I have seen two ENT specialists in the last two days because I have lost, totally all ability to taste or smell. They both told me the same thing and suggested an immediate course of action. This is called “chemical trauma” and most times is permanent. I’m going to have a CT scan on Monday and am on a high dose of the steroid, Prednisone for two weeks. If there is even a thread of the

olfactory nerve left, it will help to rejuvenate what is left.

I have been on the internet (just put in Zicam) and there are hundreds of people who have had this happen. I am so angry and devastated and saddened right now that I don't know how to get through this. I cannot handle the thought of never tasting food again or trying a new recipe or smelling a Thanksgiving turkey. Cooking has been an absolute passion of mine for as long as I can remember and at the moment I don't see the point of even putting a dressing on a salad.

I keep thinking this cannot be happening to me. I suck on a lemon, bite down on a clove of garlic, smell a bottle of ammonia, nail polish remover anything. I' starting by telling people I love. PLEASE don't use Zicam, tell your friends. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

It is peculiar that this legend should show up in this data set collected between February and May, 2012 because Matrixx, the corporation that manufactured Zicam withdrew all Zicam products from the market in 2009. The company withdrew the products after the Food and Drug Administration issued a warning to consumers on June 16 of that year urging consumers not to use the products. The FDA notice said the agency had received more than 130 reports of the loss of the sense of smell among users of the product.

None of this diminishes the legendary quality of the text quoted above. Its anonymous source; the intense, dramatic nature of the narrative; and the pattern of its transmission all qualify it as a legend. Simply having some root in a verifiable historical event cannot disqualify such narratives from contemporary legend study. For all we know, this narrative could have been long after the products discussed were pulled from

the market. Its content could have been modified over time to refer to Zicam. Thus, I have included it in this study.

Analysis of Themes

Within this set of legend texts we see many themes that raise questions about the generally positive view taken of advancing technology within our period of modern globalism. Specifically, all these legends function as a warning about the first of our characteristics of globalization: increasing dependence on technology. Three prominent themes particularly emerge from the legends in this data set showing us in greater details how these warnings function. The first two themes have to do with the structure of the legends. The third has to do with the sub-textual content of the narratives in this group.

The first theme we see in this group is a repeated attempt to establish the credibility of the speaker or of the narrative. Often, this theme arises in terms of appeals to widely trusted media outlets. The speaker in the “Invitation/Olympic Torch Virus” legend announces this virus is “the worst virus announced by CNN.” The author of the Chevy Volt text anchors his argument in a segment aired on the Fox Business Channel. The author of the thyroid guard story begins by telling the reader that she was alerted to the problem because “on Wednesday, Dr. Oz had a show on the fastest growing cancer in women, thyroid cancer.”

In one case, the attempts to establish credibility revolve around attempts to borrow credibility from other generally credible cultural institutions. In the first version of the “Invitation/Olympic Torch Virus” narrative, we readers are told the virus “has been classified by Microsoft as the most destructive ever. The virus was discovered by McAfee.”

The author of the “microwaved water” text attempts to root her credibility in empirical science. The authors of both legends related to medical technology offer their own direct experience as grounds for trusting them.

In addition to attempts to create credibility we see attestations of a desire to help or protect the reader. The protection the legends promise can be extended if only the reader will pass the legend along.

The author of the “Invitation/Olympic Torch Virus” legend begins by encouraging the reader to “be alert during the next days,” and concludes by encouraging the reader to:

SEND THIS E-MAIL TO EVERYONE YOU
KNOW, COPY THIS E-MAIL AND SEND IT TO
YOUR FRIENDS AND REMEMBER: IF YOU SEND
IT TO THEM, YOU WILL BENEFIT ALL OF US.

The author of the cell phone texts urges the reader to get involved in spreading the legend. In one version, he writes “in case you have friends other than me, pass this on to them.” In another version, we are encouraged to “PASS THIS ON TO ALL YOUR FRIENDS.”

The author of the “thyroid guard” narrative concludes by informing us that “someone was nice enough to forward this to me. I hope you pass this on to your friends and family.”

Our Zicam victim opens her story by telling about her “need to warn you about a product on the market and hopefully you will pass it on to as many people as possible.”

The importance of these warnings and attempts to urge readers to protect others by passing the legends on to them can be best seen in light of the single most dominant

theme to emerge from the content of this data: that technology while solving many problems is also a source of difficulty and suffering. Within this overall theme, three sub-themes emerge. The dangers of technology can be seen in that technology is deceptive and inconvenient, technology causes loss, and finally, that technology can be physically disabling or deadly.

That the general consensus of American culture and others involved in the developing global agenda is that technology is generally benign should need no proof. A stroll down the street in any major American city will attest to this. Every other person will be fixated on the screen of a mobile gadget. Examples of the newest transportation technologies will go whipping down the street. The buildings lining the sidewalk will be artificially cooled when the weather is hot, artificially heated when it's cold. Everywhere we look we see a society seemingly enamored with technology. However, the content of these legends suggest this romance may have a darker side.

The content of this set of legends suggest first that technology is deceptive. While on the surface technological innovation seems to be useful, it also creates as many problems as it solves and requires ongoing investment to maintain. Both legend texts about computer viruses imply this. In these we see that the home computer, obviously a useful technological innovation, can become the avenue through which malevolent forces enter the home. The user must then be aware of these dangers and take action to guard against them as these legend texts urge.

This pattern of deception holds in both the "cancer-baby" legend and the "do-not-call-list" legend. In the "cancer-baby" legend the reader is being asked to pass along false information under the guise of helping raise money for the family of a sick child.

This legend seems credible to people because raising funds for victims of tragedy or disease is precisely the kind of good end social networking sites have made easier to achieve. Clearly, in the cell phone legend, the convenience of having a mobile communication device is offset by having to register with a government agency or deal with annoying telemarketers.

The whole point of the Chevy Volt text is to demonstrate the inconvenience of this new technology. This legend has the added element of arguing that the government, more specifically, President Barak Obama is actively foisting this inconvenience on consumers for ideological reasons. Still, the legend clearly fits within this group of data and within this sub-theme.

The sub-themes suggesting the dark side of the modern relationship with technology go further than simply implying technology is inconvenient. These texts imply that for all the gains technology yields, it also threatens or causes losses.

The threat of loss is obvious in both the “Invitation/Olympic Torch Virus” legend and the “Here You Have It/ Just For You/ Here It Is Virus” legend. In every version of the first present in this data pool the legend promises that once the virus is acquired it “burns the whole hard disc C of your computer,” or that it will “burn the whole hard disc in your computer.”

When we think about what kinds of things people use their home computers for, we see the loss being threatened here is much more than just the loss of an expensive gadget. Such a loss could easily entail the loss of hours of work on multiple projects, the loss of family photos, of important preserved documents.

The loss implied in the second computer virus legend is subtler. In most version of this legend, the virus only promises to replicate itself. When the file containing the virus is run, we are told, “the virus installs itself on your computer. Once your computer is infected, the virus attempts to send out the same email message to the addresses in your address book.”

Here the threat of loss moves from the personal to the social. While there is no threat of having one’s computer destroyed, there is a threat of passing along a virus to friends or business associates. A virus that sends a message the user has no control over to everyone in that user’s address book, shapes relationships. Depending on the content of the message, receivers could hold the user responsible and form impressions of her based on the content of a message she did not craft. This could have numerous consequences from simple embarrassment to the loss of relationships depending on the nature of the message. So, when the last reported version of this legend in the data set interjects once again the threat of losing “EVERYTHING IN YOUR PC” it is especially powerful in this new social context.

The “cell phone/ do not call” and the “Chevy Volt” legends imply rather abstract losses as well. In each of these a loss of freedom is implied. In the first, we witness the threat of a loss of freedom from invasive commercial interests. In the second, we see a loss of freedom on the part of a commercial interest, General Motors, from government intervention. The blending of corporate and government interest seen especially in the “Chevy Volt” legend is also a characteristic of our globalized era. Oddly though, it only emerges in this text. Therefore, I did not include it as one of the dominant anti-globalism themes that emerge from these tests.

Finally, the last three legends imply a loss as well. However, the loss they imply is so significant as to warrant its own sub-theme: technology causes loss of well-being or death. Also, these legends detail another kind of loss that is included as one of the recurring themes across all these chapters: a loss of faith in social authorities. While trust in social authorities may never have been unanimous or total, this trust has existed to varying degrees in all populations and often to varying degrees within a single individual. Wherever this trust has existed, and to whatever extent it existed, these legends seek to address that loss. In these legends, the authorities in whom our speakers have lost faith are the government and the medical establishment.

While in the “Zicam” text no one dies, we hear the narrative related by the supposed victim of this technology. She loses her ability to taste and to smell. Since our senses represent our ability to interact with and to know the world, she has, by extension been robbed of a part of her existence in the sensory world, a fate not unlike death.

The “Zicam” text also implies negligence and possible incompetence on the part of corporate officials responsible for the drugs manufacture, government officials charged with protecting the public and medical officials charged with undoing the damage sustained.

In the narrative we read that the victim “can’t believe this is happening to her,” perhaps because government agencies exist to prevent these kinds of problems. She also complains that she couldn’t see a doctor for three days because this happened on Labor Day weekend and that two doctors she has seen have failed to help restore her senses. So, she has sustained a loss of faith in important cultural institutions in addition to her physical losses.

The “thyroid guards” text implies this same loss of confidence in the medical establishment. The speaker of the legend asks for a device to shield her from possibly life threatening radiation and finds that, rather than being kept in a prominent place within easy reach, it is kept in a drawer and that the patient “has to ask for it.” Not only, within the universe of the legend, is the diagnostic tool of the x-ray potentially deadly, so is the negligence and incompetence of the medical staff.

The final legend text is perhaps the most direct in its threat of death. The “microwaved water” legend shows in its series of photographs a plant purportedly water with water heated in a microwave and then cooled. Over the course of photos the plant withers and dies. The reason for this we are told is “that the structure or energy of the water may be compromised by microwave.” That we are likely to suffer a fate similar to the dead plant from our consumption of microwaved goods is made explicit at the end of the text. After making claims that microwaved foods are not safe, the speaker says “proof is in the pictures of the living plants dying. Remember You are also Living. Take Care.”

In this legend as well as in the “Zicam” and “thyroid shield” legends we see the dangers present in an industrialized, globalized world at their most aggressive. Not only are the forces of destruction not remote, operating on some distant horizon, they are as close as possible. They invade our most intimate spaces, our bodies. The dangers of our modern globalized world cannot be escaped according to these texts because they are inside us.

Many themes have emerged from these eight legends. The most significant of these was that technology is deceptive. Within this theme we have uncovered three sub-

themes: that technology is deceptive and inconvenient, technology causes loss, and finally, that technology can be physically disabling or deadly. Whatever else these legends tell us, they seek to make it clear that the adoption of various technologies, far from being a uniform good, often has ambiguous results.

From this examination, we can speculate reasonably that for all the techno-enthusiasm of American culture, an undercurrent of resistance exists. Within the social space opened by this impulse to resist, we see a suspicion that the costs of technology use are not given adequate cultural expression through our official organs of conversation, particularly the mass media. No one imagines the major network morning shows will run a segment on the problems new technologies are causing alongside the perennial “new gadgets for the holidays” feature.

But, the techno-enthusiasm extends beyond American culture. The emergence of ever more powerful technologies has been a chief enabler of all other changes associated with increasing globalism. The effects of communication technologies are perhaps the easiest to identify. Technology now allows people to converse easily who in previous generations could only have communicated at great difficulty and expense.

Even the most devoted techno-enthusiasts have grounds for some skepticism. The darker sides of advancing technology are also obvious. Some of the darker aspects of our global techno-enthusiasm worry us on a large scale. All of us can now be tracked through our online activities. Flying drones wipe out enemies from the sky. Some aspects plague us on smaller scale, a computer glitch at the bank loses our deposit, our office computer on which we are dependent suddenly dies, costing us most of a productive day. Nevertheless, these darker aspects of our global tech fetish do not seem to have

dampened the general love for our increasing technical power. Nor does the discussion of these carry the same cultural weight as the generally positive view of technology put forward by our cultural authorities. Instead, the dark sides are generally simply accepted as the price that must be paid for the benefits of our newest gadgets.

The result is that the skeptic now must not resist simply the weight of American culture, but indeed the cultural weight of the entire industrial, globalized world and the myriad uses to which it puts its technical force. The role of resistor then is not a comfortable one when the whole rest of the world has embraced a view of technology about which one has grave concerns. To see how serious resistance to increasing technological dependence would entail social costs, simply imagine being the only person in your workplace who refuses to have email or a cell phone.

In a global culture of techno-enthusiasts few desire to be cast in the role of the Luddite. And so, these concerns get expressed more quietly, through less official means. The basic ideas expressed in unconstructed social problems theory could have predicted this. One of these is the legend. Legends like these survive and flourish because they connect with concerns that in a techno-enthusiast world are risky to speak out loud.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Three

Introduction

Because the collection of this data occurred in the early part of 2012, a presidential election year, it is not surprising that the second group of legend texts should deal with issues relating to the candidates. The next group of legends will also deal with President Obama, but there is an important distinction between the two sets. Those texts are about him as a governing figure, a duly elected and installed president. The legends in this set treat Obama as a presidential candidate running for re-election to office. The next set treats Obama as a governing figure, as both an actor exercising governmental power and as a symbol for the power of government that will continue to exist long after Obama has left office.

In coding these legends, I created separate categories for narratives dealing with Obama as a person wielding power, and as a candidate, a person vulnerable to rejection by the electorate. Narratives in which Obama's reelection was paramount were put into this group. As a consequence, legends about candidate Obama or his supporters are joined in this legend set by texts regarding now presumptive Republican candidate, Mitt Romney and his supporters. Tales in which Obama was portrayed as a governing official were grouped into the "government action" data set

Legend Texts

The first narrative in this set purports to tell how Mitt Romney responded when an employee's teenage daughter disappeared.

Sometimes, this facet of Romney's personality isn't so subtle. In July 1996, the

14-year-old daughter of Robert Gay, a partner at Bain Capital, had disappeared. She had attended a rave party in New York City and gotten high on ecstasy.

Three days later, her distraught father had no idea where she was. Romney took immediate action. He closed down the entire firm and asked all 30 partners and employees to fly to New York to help find Gary's daughter. Romney set up a command center at the LaGuardia Marriott and hired a private detective firm to assist with the search. He established a toll-free number for tips, coordinating the effort with NYPD, and went through his Rolodex and called everyone Bain did business with in New York, and asked them to help find his friend's missing daughter. Romney's accountants at Price Waterhouse Cooper put up posters on street poles, while cashiers at a pharmacy owned by Bain put fliers in the bag of every shopper. Romney and the other Bain employees scoured every part of New York and talked with everyone they could—prostitutes, drug addicts—anyone.

That day, their hunt made the evening news, which featured photos of the girl and the Bain employees searching for her. As a result, a teenage boy phoned in, asked if there was a reward, and then hung up abruptly. The NYPD traced the call to a home in New Jersey, where they found the girl in the basement, shivering and experiencing withdrawal symptoms from a massive ecstasy dose. Doctors later said the girl might not have survived another day. Romney's partner credits Mitt Romney with saving his daughter's life, saying, "It was the most amazing thing, and I'll never forget this to the day I die."

So here's my epiphany: Mitt Romney can't help himself. He sees a problem and his mind immediately sets to work solving it,

sometimes consciously, and sometimes not so consciously. He doesn't do it for self-aggrandizement, or for personal gain. He does it because that is how he's wired. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

The authors at Snopes.com provide along with this text a helpful bit of historical background. Robert Gray's daughter, Melissa did indeed disappear in 1996. Snopes.com quotes an article that appeared in the New York Times confirming that Bain Capital did shut down and devoted many resources to finding the girl.

Another article from the Boston Globe which quoted Romney saying "Our children are what life is all about. Everything else takes a back seat." According to the Globe article, Romney decided to tell the rest of Bain's managers about the missing girl after her father had confided in him.

While there is an obvious historical root for this legend text, historical accuracy is not the point. The point is that this historical event has taken on legendary proportions. In the legend text, we see Mitt Romney as nearly the sole actor. The purpose of the legend is different from a mere historical recounting of the situation. The purpose of the legend is to draw a picture of Romney as a man of action, devoted to family, and full of empathy for those in distress. The legend speaker then seems to imply that these qualities suit Romney for the presidency.

The narrative related here takes on a legendary tone partially because of the voice in which it is related. Rather than the affectless, distant voice that reporters often attempt to cultivate, the voice of the speaker in this legend text glows with affirmation. The reader senses her admiration of Romney. One imagines this tone of admiration would remain unchanged even if it were clear there was no basis in reality for the story.

Another reason the text has a legendary quality is that the speaker provides us an interpretation of the described events at the story's conclusion. We are told of the speaker's epiphany, "that Mitt Romney can't help himself." Because the text concludes with an obvious persuasive attempt, we can be certain this is more than a news report. Since the narrative is passed between people who, we can guess, make little effort to check its veracity, it clearly counts as a contemporary legend.

The connection between the American presidency and globalism is clear. This legend seeks to present Romney as a man whose personal values harken back to American traditions and to idealized eras prior to globalization. The implied promise is that if a man like that becomes president the changes ushered in by globalism will be reversed, stopped or slowed down.

The next legend concerns Obama and his attitude toward religion.

President Obama has decided that there will no longer be a "National Day of Prayer" held in May. He doesn't want to offend anyone. Where was his concern about offending Christians last January when he allowed Muslims to hold a day of prayer on the capitol grounds. As an American Christian "I am offended." If you agree, copy and paste no matter what religion you are. This country was built on freedom!! (Mikkelson, n.d.).

An additional note from the authors at Snopes.com points out that Obama has not cancelled the National Day of Prayer, but has simply declined to host the ecumenical prayer service in the East room of the White House as his predecessors have done.

Declining to hold the prayer breakfast in the East room is probably not enough to spawn a contemporary legend. However, the move came in a context in which President Obama was already seen as hostile to traditional American religious beliefs and practices. Making changes to the National Prayer Breakfast in this context is, no doubt, more likely to incite legends than such action might otherwise be.

It is worth noting that part of the context which made this action more inflammatory than it otherwise might have been is legendary. Part of the means for carrying along the assumption of President Obama's purported hostility to religion has been contemporary legends. Thus, we find an insight into the production of contemporary legends, especially of those about controversial contemporary public figures. Contemporary legends, it seems, rise most speedily from a social context in which contemporary legends about the public figure in question are already swirling. These previous legends then act as a base from which a teller can construct a new legend.

In this case, legends represent a kind of substitute knowledge. The believing teller repeats a legend as if it represent what he "knows." The absorption and replication of the legend substitutes for the more effective methods of gaining knowledge, like research, dialogue and reflection.

The next legend also deals with Obama and raises questions about his suitability as a candidate/President.

An investigation has revealed the identity of the man whose Social Security number (SSN) has been illegally used by Obama: Jean Paul Ludwig, who was born in France in 1890, emigrated to the United States in 1924, and was assigned SSN 042-68-4425 in or about March, 1977. Ludwig lived most of his adult

life in Connecticut. His SSN begins with the digits 042, which are among those reserved for Connecticut residents. Obama never lived or worked in that state, so there is no reason for his SSN to start with the digits 042.

Now comes the best part, Ludwig spent the final months of his life in Hawaii, where he died. Conveniently, Obama's grandmother, Madelyn Payne Dunham, worked part-time in the Probate Office in the Honolulu Hawaii Courthouse, and therefore had access to the SSNs of deceased individuals. The Social Security Administration was never informed of Ludwig's death, and because he never received Social Security benefits there were no benefits to stop and no questions were raised. The suspicion, of course, is that Dunham, knowing her grandson was not a U.S. citizen-either because he was born in Kenya or became a citizen of Indonesia upon his adoption by Lolo Soetoro-merely scoured the probate records until she found someone who died who was not receiving Social Security benefits, and "selected" that SSN for Obama. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

The authors at Snopes.com write that this legend is incorrect because Ludwig's social security number is not the same as Obama's. According to a search of the United States Social Security Administration's Death Master File Extract Jean Paul Ludwig's actual number was 045-26-8722, not 042-68-4425 which is Obama's Social Security number.

Another legend in this set, questions the reality of an anti-Obama campaign bumper sticker.



My gf who is a crazy Obama fan tells me this picture of a car's bumper sticker is "real". I find it very hard to believe that anyone would put this on their vehicle. Screams photo shop to me...please tell me I am correct!

A second comment asks a similar question.

Someone posted this on Facebook and I am hoping it is NOT real! Who would actually manufacture and sell this thing? (Mikkelson, n.d.).

Snopes.com reports that the origins of this sticker cannot be determined though many websites are now selling similar stickers. Of course, the stickers now being sold could be the result of ostensive action. The original sticker in the photo could have been photoshopped, manufacturers of the real stickers could have been inspired by the photoshopped image, thus could a hoax give rise to real stickers.

Again we are left with the "chicken or the egg" question. In the end, this question is both unanswerable and irrelevant. The fact that this text ended up on Snopes.com shows that someone who encountered it suspected it might be a legend. The legendary

character of the text and in this case, the image, is easily detected by a savvy reader. In situations such as these, it becomes unnecessary to answer the question of whether or not the bumper sticker in the image is real, since the legendary “feel” of the text is enough to cause suspicion, and also, perhaps, imitation in real life.

Many readers might feel the desire to simply dismiss this text as racist or as a reaction to racism. To do so, however would be to miss the opportunity to look more deeply at this text to see if there are other issues being addressed here, even if those issues are being approached in a racist fashion. This same warning goes for other legends in this study that have elements that could be considered racist. Whether we determine in our final analysis that those elements are racist or not, the phenomenon under study here warrants greater attention than a kneejerk dismissal would allow.

The next legend once again deals with Obama and his eligibility and legitimacy as a candidate. It reads:

I read an article where President Obama was subpoenaed to the Court in Georgia, to prove his Citizenship. In order to be in the 2012 Ballot for Presidential election. Is this true? (Mikkelson, n.d.).

According to Snopes.com, this legend arises from a lawsuit filed in Georgia arguing that Barack Obama is ineligible to be president and should not be allowed on the ballot in the state of Georgia. At the time of the report, no decision had been reached in the case. There is no mention of the supposed subpoena.

The next legend text deals with probably the most famous contemporary legend related to Barack Obama.

I read that Obama will not release his birth certificate. Have heard rumors it's because he is listed as white. Or that because he isn't a U.S. born citizen. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

The authors at Snopes.com respond to this by writing, "In April 2011, President Barack Obama sought to put end to rumors claiming that he was not a natural-born citizen of the United States by obtaining and releasing a copy of his long form birth certificate issued by the state of Hawaii."

Analysis of Themes

On one level these legends are about the candidates in the 2012 American presidential election. Yet, when looked at in the context of increasing globalization, a deeper level of meaning appears. More than simply seeing these texts as constituting legends about political candidates, a larger context helps us see these legends are also about America's shifting place in the world and the changes increasing globalization is bringing to the structure of American political operations.

When we consider this group of legends together, a number of themes emerge. Unsurprisingly, these themes highlight the perceived tension between American political sovereignty and cultural traditions and the demands of the greater international interdependency that characterizes periods of globalization. The most prominent of these themes deals with ambivalence about Obama, specifically about the question of his loyalties. The underlying question seems to be about on which side of the conflict between American traditions and globalist values Obama's deepest sympathies fall. While it is hard to speculate about the meaning of a single Mitt Romney-related legend, it is interesting to look at that legend in the context of the Obama related legends accompanying it.

The ambivalence expressed in these legend texts is specifically attached to the question of Obama's loyalty to the American nation, to the Christian religion, to America's political traditions. There is also an implied question in these legends about whether or not Obama is capable of rising above loyalty to his African-American heritage to do what is best for America as a whole.

The issue of race also presents itself in questions about how Obama's race could effect the 2012 election. Specifically, at least one legend seems to raise the question of what kind of discourse is permissible in political discussions that relate to a presidential election in which one candidate identifies as African-American. How much can be said about the candidate's race and how that part of his identity may effect his governing style and in what terms can those questions be framed without being considered racist? These questions lie in the subtext of at least one of the legends in this group.

Ongoing questions about Obama's loyalty to Christianity as America's dominant religion are clear in the legend that deals with the question of his participation in the National Day of Prayer. The claim that "President Obama has decided there will no longer be a National Day of Prayer" because "he doesn't want to offend anyone" makes explicit the author's notion that Obama is an enemy of Christianity or at least of its typical public expression.

Not only is Obama seen as being hostile to Christianity, but he is seen as unfairly solicitous of Islam, a religion outside of the mainstream of American tradition. According to the text, Obama "allowed the Muslims to hold a day of prayer on the capitol grounds." The tension between these purported actions on Obama's part demonstrate how deeply the suspicion of his loyalties runs among the speaker of this text.

The suspicions about Obama expressed in this set of legends go even deeper than simply expressing uncertainty about whether he is hostile to Christianity. The questions these legends raise go all the way to the core of Obama's identity. "Who is this person who has ascended to the most powerful office in the nation?" these legends seem to be asking.

This concern is clear in a number of legends in this set. The question of who Obama is reasserts itself in the legend claiming that he uses the social security number originally assigned to someone else. The legend claims that Obama uses the other's social security number to conceal his real identity. Obama's grandmother, we read in the text, "knowing her grandson was not a U.S. citizen-wither because he was born in Kenya or became a citizen of Indonesia upon his adoption by Lolo Sotero" assigned a dead man's social security number to her grandson.

The willingness on the part of some to believe this kind of charge indicates that this level of suspicion of Obama is for them totally justified. This same suspicion is obvious in other texts as well and echoes the distrust of social authority mentioned earlier as being one of the characteristics of our global period to which these legends speak.

For example, both the legend about Obama's being subpoenaed to appear in court in Georgia to prove his citizenship and the legend related to the ongoing question about his birth certificate both reflect such suspicions as well as work to reinforce them. These two legends taken together with the legend about Obama's social security number reflect multiple aspects of the same concern: that Obama is not who he appears to be.

The next legend also deals with Obama, but with the question of what constitutes acceptable rhetoric with regard to his being as our first president to identify as African-

American. The question of whether the “Don’t Renig in 2012” bumper sticker is real is irrelevant to the question of whether the outrage it generated was real. Much as the legends about the question of Obama’s identity show a willingness on the part of some of his political opponents to believe the worst of him, this legend shows the quickness to assume the worst on the part of his supporters.

The fact that some bumper stickers with the slogan depicted in the pictures exist now does not mean the original sticker wasn’t completely legendary. The real stickers could easily have been produced ostensibly, inspired by the legend. If indeed the original sticker did not exist in reality, the willingness to assume its reality speaks to the polarized political environment in which we now live.

This particular legend also raises the question of the boundaries that define acceptable rhetoric in political discourse, especially with regard to the issue of race. The question of how a mixed racial background could affect a candidate’s decision making while in office is not irrelevant. Perhaps, though, one function of this legend is to recognize this while attempting to set a boundary around what kind of language can be used to address this question. Whether this was the original purpose of the legend can never be known for certain, but it seems reasonable to assume this is the effect the legend actually had during the time it was circulating.

Another legend deals not with Obama but with his rival in the 2012 election, Mitt Romney. The legend draws on what is a known historical incident in which Romney used the resources of a company he was running to find the daughter of a co-worker who had gone missing. While the text draws on a historical incident, it introduces elements that take the story beyond pure history.

The clear implication is that Romney like Obama is not what he seems, a greedy unfeeling corporate tycoon. However, unlike Obama, the reality of Romney turns out to be more positive than it seems at first. Clearly, the legend's speaker is supportive of Romney's candidacy. In this, we see another similarity with the Obama legends. What all the legends have in common is a perspective that sees Obama as unfit for the presidency. One can assume that only some of this animosity is directed toward Obama personally. Much of it is likely directed to him as the incumbent. At this point, because he had been president for four years, he was much more identified with the larger changes happening in American culture. Just as the legends in this study take a dim view of those social changes, it should be expected that they would take a dim view of any candidate perceived to be responsible for encouraging them.

In a politically polarized culture such as ours, discussing one's political opinions openly can come with a cost. Whether those costs can be minimal like a suffering through a simple heated conversation or more serious like losing a relationship completely or perhaps even a job.

Yet, we continue discussing these things. Clearly, one function of the legends in this category is to allow us to discuss these things in ways that deflect some of those costs. Even tellers who repeat these legends while noting their skepticism about them are still engaged in a kind of political dialogue. In fact, by repeating these legends under the disclaimer of disbelief the tellers still participate in the political context in which candidates' claims and personalities are evaluated. In short, telling a political legend is always a political act, though the legends in this category allow tellers to commit those political acts surreptitiously behind a mask of skepticism or ignorance.

The tension and concern which accompany expressing opinions in a highly polarized environment shrink in importance when considered in the larger context of increasing globalization. Clearly, the speakers of these legend texts consider Obama a person inclined to be sympathetic to the program of globalization which relies on shifting power relationships and demographic changes within a population. Obama's perceived openness to non-American cultures and toward traditionally non-mainstream religions marks him, in the eyes of the speakers, as someone more loyal to a vision of global interdependency than to traditional American values and institutions.

Thus do the legends in this set make clear another of the characteristics of periods of globalization mentioned in the list in the beginning chapter: increasing cultural diversity. The anxiety about increasing cultural diversity on a global scale is complicated by Obama's racial background. While increasing diversity is an issue that comes into play increasingly during periods of globalization, we see it explored here through the lens of a conflict between white and black Americans that is uniquely local to the American nation.

The Romney legend in this context speaks on one level to his personal character, showing him to be a loyal friend. The speaker in the legend seems to imply that this personal characteristic would suit him for the presidency. The larger issues of globalization are not mentioned. The speakers in all the legend texts in this chapter appear ignorant of the dynamics driving political decision making in the post-war period of globalization. In the end, many policies pursued by Obama are similar to those that Romney would have pursued since both men are advocates of increasing globalization.

The speakers of these legends and, presumably, the hearers inclined to believe them focus exclusively on the personal qualities of the candidates. While a candidate's personal qualities are always important, in the larger context, governmental decision now appear to be driven by global forces that make a candidates personal character or desires less immediately relevant than they might have been at a previous point in history. The forces of globalization are strong and those who would resist them appear to fail to grasp the reality that they will operate regardless of who occupies the American presidency.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Four

Introduction

A globalized world requires great amounts of administration. This is one reason why governments tend to expand during periods of globalization. This expansion is often greeted with ambivalence, as government becomes a factor even in the most personal issues of citizens' lives. Since the reality of government is now felt at some level in the lives of every citizen, and because government policy has consequences for every member of our nation, it is not unsurprising that government would become the subject of numerous contemporary legends. Such is the case in this group of legends.

In this chapter, I will present the legends and then analyze them for their common themes. The texts in this group of legends will show that contemporary government is often seen as both intrusive and hostile, a sentiment in keeping with the notion that this period of history is marked by a decrease in trust in social authorities of all kinds.

This group of legend texts contains seven legends. The legends in this group came together around the idea of government policy and action. Included in this topic were legends about both past and potential government policy.

As mentioned earlier, because this study was conducted in a presidential election year, there were several legends relating specifically to candidates or to election procedures in the pool of gathered data. I discussed those legends in the previous chapter, since their focus is somewhat different than those included here. Legends analyzed in this chapter are not focused on candidates or elections, but on potential courses of action government agencies might take.

Legend Texts

The first legend in this group deals with the possibility of a government move to grant amnesty to immigrants residing illegally in the United States.

Obama Dictates: AMNESTY NOW!

With the Stroke of a Pen Barack Obama Has
Granted Amnesty to Virtually All Illegal
Aliens

Dear Fellow Patriots,

This is the most important and troubling,
email I have ever been forced to write.

What I am about to tell you is unthinkable. It
is also 100% true. (Check news reports
online to see for yourself!)

Last Friday, with no fanfare, no press
coverage, and with every effort made to hide
his actions from the American people...

Barack Obama enacted the nightmarish
DREAM Act!

Opposed by a majority of the American
people and TWICE defeated in Congress,
the DREAM Act grants amnesty to Illegal
Aliens criminally residing in the United
States if they agree to enlist in the U.S.
military or enter college.

TIME IS UP! Obama Just Enacted
AMNESTY FOR ILLEGAL ALIENS!
FIGHT BACK HERE! FIGHT BACK
NOW!

The Obama Administration memo from
John Morton, Director of I.C.E.

(Immigration and Customs Enforcement) directs I.C.E. agents now to use “prosecutorial discretion” with regard to enforcing immigration laws.

Writes Director Morton of the new Obama Administration policy not to enforce immigration laws “When ICE favorably exercises prosecutorial discretion, it essentially decides not to assert the full scope of the enforcement authority available to the agency.”

You read that right: according to the Obama administration; “favorable” is enforcement is NOT enforcing the law!

According to one of the first press reports to break this important story, the new Obama policy is cut and dry: “federal immigration officials do not have to deport illegal aliens if they are enrolled in any type of education program, if their family members have volunteered for U.S. military service, or even if they are pregnant and nursing.”

**TIME IS UP! Obama Just Enacted
AMNESTY FOR ILLEGAL ALIENS!
FIGHT BACK HERE! FIGHT BACK
NOW!**

Does Barack Obama expect us to stand idly by and watch him grant amnesty to millions of illegal aliens-AGAINST the rule of law, AGAINST recent votes of Congress and AGAINST the express wishes of the American people?
This is the most important message I’ve ever sent! We must unite today! We must speak with one voice!

Barack Obama cannot be allowed to think that his actions will be allowed to go unchallenged. Whether through public pressure, through Congress, or through legal action in America’s courts we will not let

this unprecedented un-American act stand!
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

As we might expect, the author of this legend text gets some of the facts about the “Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act” wrong. The authors of Snopes.com point out that the act would not simply give “illegals” the right to stay permanently in the country but would the cancelling of certain illegal immigrants’ deportation if they met a number of criteria one of which is being enrolled in an institution of higher education. While Congress has not approved this act, the Obama administration announced in 2011 that it would begin using prosecutorial discretion in deportation cases using criteria similar to those outlined in the DREAM act.

The concerns about immigration that this legend describes are too often dismissed as racism. But, this legend reveals more. The suspicion of “illegal aliens” expressed here is most likely to resonate with a certain type of American. Working class Americans, those most likely to be effected economically by an influx of cheap labor from Mexico and other countries, may be more inclined to believe the misinformation presented in this legend. If this is true, the concerns echoed in this text could more charitably be read as an expression of economic anxiety and the loss of traditional culture, than as animosity toward Mexicans or any other group. In short, this text reflects dissatisfaction with the economic realities of globalism more than racial animosity.

The next legend text also concerns an action by the Obama administration.

Seems people will be getting more than they
bargained for in this new health care bill.

The Obama health care bill under Sec. 2521,
page 1,000 will establish a National Medical

Device Registry. What does a National Medical Device Registry mean?

National Medical Device Registry from H.R. 3200 (Healthcare Bill) pages 1,001-1,008:

(g)(1) The Secretary shall establish a national medical device registry (in this subsection referred to as the ‘registry’) to facilitate analysis of postmarket safety and outcomes data on

each device that:

(A) is or has been used in or on a patient;
(B) and is: (i) a class III device

or (ii) a class II device that is implantable, life supporting, or life-sustaining.

A “class II device that is implantable?”

Then on page 1,004 it describes what the term “data” mean in paragraph 1, section B: “(B) In this paragraph, the term ‘data’ refers to information respecting a device described in paragraph (1), including claims data, patient survey data, standardized analytic files that allow for the pooling and analysis of data from disparate data environments, electronic health records, and any other data deemed appropriate by the Secretary.”

Approved by the FDA, a class II implantable device is a “implantable radiofrequency transponder system for patient identification and health information.”

The sort of device would be implanted in the majority of people who opt to be covered by public health care option. With the reform of the private insurance companies, who charge outrageous rates, many people will switch their coverage to a more affordable insurance plan. This means the number of people who choose the public option will increase. This also means the number of people chipped will be plentiful as well. The adults who choose to have a chip implanted are lucky (yes, lucky if you're a GOVT Control Libtard) ones in this case. Children who are "born in the United States who at the time of birth is not otherwise covered under acceptable coverage" will be qualified and placed into the CHIP of Children's Health Insurance Program (what a convenient name). With a name like CHIP it would seem to consistent to have the chip implanted into the child. Children conceived by parents who are already covered by the public option will more than likely be implanted with a chip. And with the price and coverage of the public option being so competitive with the private companies, the private company may not survive. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

The authors at Snopes.com say this legend fits into the "Big Brother" genre of legends. They claim the language quoted in the legend text is not from the bill passed by congress, but from an earlier and now irrelevant version of the bill.

The concern about government intrusiveness takes on an extreme dimension in this legend. Here we see this concern taken as far as it can be taken. In the vision put forward in this text, government intrudes upon the individual at the level of the physical body. The fear, of course, is not simply of government being invasive but of controlling our actions through monitoring and controlling our physical being. It is difficult to

imagine how a fear of government could be taken further than the fear of its violating the integrity of the body.

The next legend once again involves a report of government action the speaker of the text believes to be an inexcusable overreach.

I wanted to give ya'll some disturbing information on our wonderful president. I work with the Catch-A-Dream Foundation (www.catchadream.org) which provides hunting and fishing trips to children with life-threatening illnesses. It is a great program needless to say. This past weeken we had out annual banquet/fundraiser event in Starkville. As part of the program, we had scheduled Sgt. 1st Class Greg Stube, a highly decorted U.S. Army Green Beret and inspirational speaker who was severely injured while deployed overseas and have much chance for survival. Greg is stationed Ft. Bragg and received permission from his commanding officer to come speak at our function. Everything was on go until Obama made a policy that NO U.S. SERVICEMAN CAN SPEAK AT ANY FAITH-BASED PUBLIC EVENTS ANYMORE. Needless to say, Greg had to cancel his peaking event with us. Didn't know if anyone else was aware of this new policy.. Wonder what kind of news we all will receive next? (Mikkelson, n.d.).

Research done by the authors of Snopes.com revealed that the incident described here was real. Catch –A-Dream is a real organization. Sgt. Stube was forced to cancel his engagement with them. The cancellation was not, however, directly related to a mandate by the Obama administration that no members of the U.S. service may speak at faith-based events. Instead, the cancellation was instead forced because of a stricter than

normal interpretation of an existing regulation barring members of the military from speaking at fund-raising events.

Since there is an obvious historical origin for this text, can it be accurately considered a legend? Yes. What matters is that the version of the story passed around is the one with the mistaken understanding. The reason this version was passed along is because it appeals to something in the psyche of readers. The mode of transmission and the motivations for transmitting it qualify this text as a legend.

The next legend in this set of data once again involves the Obama administration.

Dhimmitude is the Muslim system of controlling non-Muslim populations conquered through Jihad. Specifically, it is the TAXING of non-muslims in exchange for tolerating their presence And as a coercive means of converting conquered remnants to Islam.

The ObamaCare bull is the establishment of Dhimmitude and Sharia muslim diktat in the United States. Muslims are specifically exempted from the government mandate to purchase insurance, and also from the penalty tax for being uninsured. Islam considers insurance to be “gambling”, “risk-taking” and “usury” and is this banned. Muslims are specifically granted exemption based on this. How convenient.

Another version of this legend includes a concern not just about Muslims but about active discrimination on the part of the government against non-Muslims.

ObamaCare discriminates against Christians and Jews by denying them special exemptions extended to other religions.

If you are a mainstream Christian or Jew, you need not apply to Opt Out of ObamaCare; that exemption is reserved for Muslims, Scientologists, Amish, Christian Scientists and Native American Indians who have a “conscientious objection” to insurance. A conscientious objection to theft committed by rouge politicians isn’t sufficient in America today to exempt average Americans from the stranglehold of government. Believe it or not, if you are a Muslim you may claim a special exemption to ObamaCare that is denied to main-stream Christians and Jews. Or if you prefer a New-Age religion to Islam, you may become a Scientologist and Opt Out of ObamaCare’s mandatory purchase of health insurance. Or, if you happen to be of Native American Indiana extraction you too can opt out of the insurance laws by which everyone else in America must abide. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

An additional note included with these texts by the authors of Snopes.com indicates that it is true that some members of religious faiths will qualify for an exemption, but that all faiths must meet the same set of guidelines.

The final legend in this section deals not so much with federal government issues, but with another part of the infrastructure of American governance: the court system. This legend purports to report on six lawsuits that demonstrate the need for reform of America’s tort system.

This is what’s wrong with the world:

1. January 2000: Kathleen Robertson of Austin Texas was awarded \$780,000.00 by a jury of her peers after breaking her ankle tripping over a toddler running amuck inside a furniture store. The owners of the store were understandably surprised at the verdict,

considering the misbehaving tyke was Ms. Robertson's son.

2. June 1998: A 19 year old Carl Truman of Los Angeles won \$74,000.00 and medical expenses when his neighbor ran his hand over with a Honda Accord. Mr. Truman apparently didn't notice someone was at the wheel of the car whose hubcap he was trying to steal.

3. October 1998: A Terrence Dickson of Bristol Pennsylvania was exiting a house he finished robbing by way of the garage. He was not able to get the garage door to go up, because the automatic door opener was malfunctioning. He couldn't re-enter the house because the door connecting the house and garage locked when he pulled it shut. The family was on vacation, so Mr. Dickson found himself locked in the garage for eight days. He subsisted on a case of Pepsi he found, and a large bag of dry dog food. This upset Mr. Dickson so he sued the homeowner's insurance claiming the situation caused him undue mental anguish. The jury agreed to the tune of half a million dollars and change.

4. October 1999: Jerry Williams of Little Rock Arkansas was awarded \$14,500.00 and medical expenses after being bitten on the buttocks by his next door neighbor's beagle. The beagle was on a chain in its owner's fenced-in yard, as was Mr. Williams. The award was less than sought after because the jury felt the dog may have been provoked by Mr. Williams who, at the time, was shooting it repeatedly with a pellet gun.

5. May 2000: A Philadelphia restaurant was ordered to pay Amber Carson of Lancaster, Pennsylvania \$113, 5000.00 after she slipped on a spilled soft drink and broke her coccyx. The beverage was on the floor

because Ms. Carson threw it at her boyfriend 30 seconds earlier during an argument.

6. December 1997: Kara Walton of Claymont, Delaware successfully sued the owner of a night club in a neighboring city when she fell from the bathroom window to the floor and knocked out her two front teeth. This occurred while Ms. Walton was trying to sneak through the window in the ladies room to avoid paying the \$3.50 cover charge. She was awarded \$12,000.00 and dental expenses.

Snopes.com notes that this legend originally appeared on the Internet around 2001. There is no evidence any of these cases are real. Some of the oldest versions of this legend contain one more item. The earliest version available, according to Snopes.com concludes with this item:

7. And just so you know that cooler heads do occasionally prevail: Kenmore, Inc., the makers of Dorothy Johnson's microwave, were found not liable for the death of Mrs. Johnson's poodle after she gave it a bath and attempted to dry it by putting the poor creature in her microwave for, "just a few minutes, on low," The case was quickly dismissed.

Another version of the list ended with this item:

In November 2000, Mr. Grazinski purchased a brand new 32 foot Winnebago motor home, having joined the freeway, he set the cruise control at 70 mph and calmly left the drivers seat to go into the back and make himself a cup of coffee. Not surprisingly, the Winnie left the freeway, crashed and overturned. Mr. Grazinski sued Winnebago for not advising him in the handbook that he could not actually do this. He was awarded \$1,750,000 plus a new Winnebago.

According to snopes.com some versions also contain this footer:

PLEASE ASSIST OUR LAW OFFICES IN
A TORT REFORM PROGRAM. WE ARE
ATTEMPTING TO PUT A STOP TO
THESE INSANE JURY AWARDS BY
SENDING THIS E-MAIL OUT TO THE
PUBLIC IN THE HOPES OF SWAYING
PUBLIC OPINION. PLEASE FORWARD
IT TO EVERY EMAIL ADDRESS YOU
KNOW.

Mary R. Hogelmen, Esq.
Law Offices of Hogelmen, Hogelmen, and
Thomas
Dayton Ohio
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

The authors at Snopes.com point out that the first two alternative endings may have been cut since there are well-known contemporary legends at the core of these claims. Anyone recognizing those legends might have immediately become suspicious of the other six stories. Also, research by the authors of snopes.com revealed there is no Hogelman, Hogelman and Thomas law firm in Dayton.

In this last legend, it is clear that the suspicion of government goes far beyond distrust of the power of the executive branch. The court system here is pictured as both corrupt and inept. It is corrupt because it rewards people who do wrong, and it is inept because it is incapable of correcting its corruption. The distrust is deep and pervasive enough to be considered one of the central characteristics of our age to which this body of data routinely point. While these stories are false, the fact that they seem plausible to an audience demonstrates that they resonate with the experiences of Americans when interacting with the court system and other facets of social authority.

Analysis of Themes

As with any set of texts, a nearly endless set of themes could be pulled out of these. I have tried to identify the themes in these that seem most obvious, those that I think most readers would identify upon an examination of this data. I have tried to avoid choosing themes that while arguably present within the text, are minor or idiosyncratic.

Three major themes emerge from this set. First, is the theme of government overreach or invasiveness, a perceived hostility toward traditional American institutions and concomitant unfair treatment of them constitute the second theme. The third theme is the expression of powerlessness and the accompanying anger that perceived lack of power engenders.

All of these themes fit well with the assertion that these legends are expressing dissatisfaction with some of the consequences of ongoing globalization. In this text we see resentment of both the increasing reach of government into individuals lives, and concern that the federal government is using that increased power to discriminate unfairly against those who feel they have something to lose in the social and economic shifts globalization precipitates. So, these legends touch directly on two of the characteristics of periods of globalization mentioned in the first chapter: increasing cultural diversity and increasing government power and a corresponding remoteness of government from the influence of individual citizens. Each of the specific themes of this set deserves to be considered by itself before further reflection on its function in this larger context.

While the theme of government invasiveness serves as the background of all of these legends, this theme is most pronounced in two. First, in the “one percent tax” legend text, we see a legend that reflects this invasiveness in the financial arena. While

the content of this legend may have little grounding in historically verifiable government action, its popularity is telling. To connect with readers and to motivate readers to transmit it would not necessarily require a reader/transmitter to believe the legend (though it seems logical to assume that many would). Some may have been willing to pass the legend along as a means of furthering anti-government sentiment, though it seems unlikely that the majority of transmitters would fall into this category.

Either way, the popularity of this text seems to indicate on the part of a portion of the population a readiness to believe that government would be willing to levy such a tax. In order to appear on the list of the 25 most active legends on the Internet on the world's best known contemporary legend Web site, this legend had to appear plausible to at least some who read it. The fact that many people did not reject it out of hand gives us some insight into how a portion (not an insubstantial one if other political indicators are considered) sees the American federal government.

The second legend in which government intrusiveness is a major theme is the "implantable devices" legend. Here we see government willing to invade the life of the individual at an even more intimate level than in the previous legend. In this text, we see government moving from invading not simply citizens' bank accounts but their very bodies.

This legend could conceivably have been included in a previous chapter as it obviously involves a technological device as well. However, I included here because this text emphasizes not so much the function of the technology or the piece of technology in isolation as much as the motives of the technology's user.

In this case, the user would be the federal government. As with the previous legend, this one indicates a grave distrust of government on the part of the speaker in the text and, likely, on the part of much of the text's audience. A government who would manipulate its citizens into receiving a microchip into their bodies, the concern seems to be, is a government that will do anything.

A note should also be made about the religious undertones present in this legend. "Mark of the Beast" legends have circulated for years about all kinds of innovations from social security numbers to UPC symbols (May, 2009) to RFID chips. Though the idea of "the mark of the beast" (an allusion to the biblical book of Revelation) is not mentioned in this text, this legend's similarity to "mark of the beast" legends bears mentioning. According to some interpretations of the biblical text, every person on earth will be forced to receive a mark on his hand or forehead indicating his allegiance to the anti-Christ in the last days. Legends about this mark have arisen with regard to everything from barcodes to credit cards. This legend seems as if it could fall into that category. Given that, it is possible that some of the fear of government invasiveness expressed here could have a religious motivation. If so, it is even more remarkable that such motivation is not made explicit in the legend text.

The second of these themes, perceived hostility toward traditional American institutions and populations on the part of the federal government, emerges most clearly from other texts in this set. The "health exemptions" legend text is a good example. This legend combines both a concern that the government is offering preferential treatment to populations outside of America's traditional racial, ethnic and religious majorities with a

sense of fear that the government should have the power to do this, power which was acquired through the passage of the health care bill.

These concerns can be seen when the author of the first legend writes that exemptions from the individual mandate supposedly offered to Muslims equates to Dhimmitude. That author writes, “The ObamaCare bill is the establishment of DHimmitude and Sharia muslim diktat in the United States. Muslims are specifically exempted from the government mandate to purchase insurance, and also from the penalty tax for being uninsured.” The “penalty tax” here serves as a proxy for government power in all its forms, not just the power to tax. By exempting Muslims from the punishing power of taxation, the government is clearly offering preferential treatment to Muslims in contrast to its treatment of America’s traditionally Christian majority.

The second version of this legend expands the list of groups preferred over the traditional protestant majority. The extended list includes: “Scientologists, Amish, Christian Scientists and Native American Indians who have a ‘conscientious objection’ to insurance.”

This theme can also be seen clearly in the legend text claiming President Obama has banned members of the military from speaking at religious functions. What makes this text especially interesting is that we have a historical record of the event described. There is little question about the facts. The official explanation for Sgt. Stube’s being forced to cancel his speaking engagement with the Catch-A-Dream foundation is that the government had decided to begin enforcing more strictly a regulation barring members of the military from participating in fund-raising activities.

This text provides us with a clear example of the way legends call into question not just historical facts, but the meaning of those facts. The text implies the reason for the cancelation was hostility on the part of the Obama administration toward traditional religious groups and Christian faith-based charities. This may seem to be a dispute over facts but what the speaker is really contesting is the meaning of those facts. The legend here gives voice to a perspective at odds with the official interpretation. It seems certain the speaker in the text if told the reason for the cancelation was simply a decision to begin enforcing an existing regulation more stringently would wonder why the regulation needed to suddenly be more forcefully enforced at that time. The speaker would likely see the official explanation as simply a cover for the underlying hostility of the administration toward traditional religious groups.

The theme of powerlessness comes through in this set of data as well. This theme can be seen in the “DREAM act” text. In addition to showing evidence of the second theme, hostility to traditional majority populations, the text makes clear the powerlessness some in that demographic feel. Readers are told President Obama is a force so pernicious and powerful that he will do away with the standard democratic process with regard to issues of immigration. Instead he will grant “amnesty to virtually all Illegal Aliens”, thus revealing his perniciousness. The President demonstrates his power by making these laws “with the stroke of a pen.” The speaker of the text is reduced of course to forwarding legend texts on the Internet to try to halt this unstoppable political force.

The theme of powerlessness is most obvious perhaps in the Stella Awards legend. Again and again in this list of people either taking advantage of others through the courts

or being taken advantage of in the same manner, we see the inability of the decent citizen to defend himself. The court system, an institution designed to protect the law-abiding majority, has become, in the world of the legend, corrupted allowing criminals the upper hand and leaving the law-abiding vulnerable.

This is perhaps most starkly illustrated in the third example in which a robber sues a homeowner after trapping himself in the homeowners garage for eight days and is awarded half a million dollars. What greater example of political powerlessness could there be than to have one's home, and with it one sense of self, invaded and then to be punished further by watching a government apparatus rob you further?

The analysis of this group of legends yielded three dominant themes: government overreach or invasiveness, a perceived hostility toward traditional American institutions and populations, and powerlessness. Taken together, these could be said to represent a particular political point of view. The point of view these legends represent is one in which the government is perceived as domineering and threatening to traditional ways of living. Because it is perceived to be intruding into people's personal lives, government is seen as competing with the individual conscience as a decision-making agent. The vision is powered by anger rooted in a feeling of being pushed around.

What the individual is being pushed around by is ultimately not simply government, but the ideas which when translated into policy become the agenda of globalism. Even in the legend texts which do not seem related to the international aspects of globalism, we can see concerns about issues which mark the period: the growth of government and the corresponding diminishment of individual power, increasing cultural diversity and changes to traditional social arrangements and the institutions that created

them. Some legend texts like the “Stella Awards” may not seem directly related to the international aspects of globalization at all, but they still encapsulate these themes by reflecting, for example, a sense of the shrinking importance and influence of the individual, a sentiment is not uncommon in a globalizing period.

Political legends have a particular resonance with the ideas at the heart of unconstructed social problems theory. While clearly problems being debated in the political arena have achieved some kind of social construction, the notion, borrowed from the theory, that marginalized views express themselves in indirect ways seems to offer light on the question of what motivates the creation of these legends.

One final note is worth mentioning before leaving behind legend texts with overtly political content. While it might be easy to dismiss these legends because of the misinformation they contain, or because we disagree with their political content. A more constructive approach would be to look past these inaccuracies to treat with respect the civil and political concerns they represent on the part of our fellow citizens. My hope is that this study, in some small way, helps enable us to do that.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Five

Introduction

Contemporary legend routinely address profound contemporary concerns while appearing to talk about a more superficial or totally unrelated topic. This is true even for those that on one level concern the most mundane parts of human life. The legends in this set of data, for example, are united around the human need to feed ourselves. Texts in this set deal with a single topic: food. A substance that is necessary for human life, and associated with pleasure, nurture and sustenance, is bound to be fodder for the production of contemporary legends.

We might wonder what legends about so pedestrian a topic have to tell us. To assume the answer to that question is nothing would be to judge by appearances. When we look deeper we see these legends raise concerns similar to those we have already examined. Again, we see themes surface that express anxieties common in periods of increased globalization. Specifically, the legends in this chapter speak once again to themes of the rise of multi-national corporations, especially to their perceived indifference to their customers' health and welfare and to the corporatization of every facet of life, including medicine. The theme of increasing cultural diversity is also evident in these legend texts.

Legend Texts

The first legend in this set deals with a substance added to many popular foods in the United States.

Say hello to mechanically separated chicken. It's what all fast-food chicken is made from-things like chicken nuggets

and patties. Also, the processed frozen chicken in the stores is made from it.

Basically, the entire chicken is smashed and pressed through a sieve-bones, eyes, guts, and all. it comes out looking like this.

There's more: because it's crawling with bacteria, it will be washed with ammonia, soaked in it, actually. Then because it tastes gross, it will be re-flavored artificially. Then, because it is weirdly pink, it will be dyed with artificial color.

But hey, at least it tastes good, right?
(Mikkelsen, n.d.).

The Snopes.com page for this legend contains this picture:



The authors Snopes.com point out that while the use of mechanically separated meat is widespread in cheaper meat products, it is not true that every piece of the animal is used. Snopes.com also says the end product of this process is not soaked in ammonia.

We see an element of “stranger danger” in this legend. Rather than other people though the danger in this narrative comes from an unknown substance hiding within our

food. Since we all depend on putting food inside our bodies to survive, the danger here, in a way reminiscent of some of the legends we encountered in the chapter on technology legends, is even more intimate and thus more threatening than strangers outside of us. In fact, we could go so far as to state that “mechanically separated chicken” legend is complaining about a world in which food has become a technology.

The ultimate culprit in this narrative, of course, are the multi-national corporations that produce our food and the global market system which has allowed and even demanded the industrialization of food. In this legend text like no other, we see how invasive the global market system is perceived to be. Globalization and the changes it engenders are pictured not simply as threats external to the person, but as threats capable of invading the hearer as he or she engages in a personal and life-sustaining act. We must eat. By tampering with something as intimate and necessary as food, the global system colonizes the individual’s body in a way that cannot be resisted.

The second legend also deals with stranger danger in a way connected to food, but the emphasis here is more on food as a sign of increased cultural diversity.. This legend combines concerns about food with concerns about practices associated with Islam, a non-traditional religion in America.

The other day I wrote about Costco stocking their meat counters with “Halal” meat.

So yesterday I shopped groceries at my local Walmart. As usual, I bought a bag of frozen chicken breasts, but this time I checked to make sure the meat was not labeled “Halal”. Here’s why.

Halal is the Islamic term that basically means that the meat is lawful to eat for a devout Muslim. What makes it lawful or acceptable is the meat has been processed in a very

specific way. Unlike kosher food, where the physical processing of the meat is the focus, for Islam it is the spiritual component that makes the meat lawful.

For lawful (halal) meat in Islam, the animal must be killed while the butcher faces Mecca, and either the butcher cries “Allah Akbar” or a tape plays the words of a loud speaker.

Ann Barnhardt is a cattle commodities broker, has more about “Halal.” NEVER buy meat that is marked as “Halal”.

I am in the cattle business, and believe me when I tell you that Halal kill plants are CONSTANTLY being cited and shut down by the USDA for horrific, infractions. Most of these plants are in Michigan and upstate New York.

One of the things that halal kill plants are notorious for is putting already-dead animals in the human consumption line. They will go pick up a dead cow off of a farm or ranch and instead of putting it in their rendering tank where the resulting “tankage” is worth pennies on the dollar as pet food or industrial products, they will shackle the dead animal on the normal kill line and process it as human food which is the highest dollar product.

Since Islam teaches dishonesty (taqiyyah) and no regard for one’s neighbor, this kind of sickening behavior is standard. Halal plants are also notorious for general citations for filth and uncleanliness. I have toured normal slaughter plants, and guys, you could eat off the floor.

Everything is white and men walk around with water hoses and steam guns constantly keeping everything in a state of spotlessness.

Halal plants are filthy. A lot of Halal meat is also labeled “organic.”
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Additional information from Snopes.com indicates that there are many inaccuracies in this legend. While halal foods are sold in America and are being sold in greater number, the process for slaughtering animals described in this text is not an accurate depiction of the work. Among the misleading claims Snopes.com points out is

that the kosher process focuses on spiritual issues while halal is more physical and that Islam teaches no regard for the neighbor.

The next legend in this set also seems to attribute pseudo-magical powers to food.

This legend specifically deals with the healing power of food:

A young man sprinkling his lawn and bushes with pesticides wanted to check the contents of the barrel to see how much pesticide remained in it. He raised the cover and lit his lighter; the vapors inflamed and engulfed him. He jumped from his truck, screaming. His neighbor came out of her house with a dozen eggs, yelling : “bring me some eggs!” She broke them, separating the whites from the yolks. The neighborhood woman helped her to apply the whites to the young man’s face. When the ambulance arrived and when the EMTs saw the young man, they asked who had done this. Everyone points to the lady in charge. They congratulated her and said: “You have saved his face.” By the end of the summer, the young man brought the lady a bouquet of roses to thank her. His face was like a baby’s skin.

Healing Miracle for burns:

Keep in mind this treatment of burns that is included in teaching beginner fireman this method. First aid consists to spraying cold water on the affected area until the heat is reduced and stops burning the layers of skin. Then, spread egg whites on the affected area.

A second version of this legend goes like this:

Treating burns.

Egg white

One hopes never to be needing it, but just in case:...

A simple but effective way to treat burns with the help of egg white. This method is used in the training of firemen.

When sustaining a burn, regardless of the degree, the first aid is always placing the injured part under running cold water till the heat subsides.

And next spread the egg white over the injury.

Someone burned a large part of her hand with boiling water, then took two eggs, parted the yolk from the egg white and slightly beat the egg white and put her hand in it. Her hand was so badly burned that the egg white dried and formed a white film. Later she heard that the egg is a natural collagen.

And during the next hour layer upon layer, she administered a white layer on her hand. That afternoon she didn't feel any more pain and the next day there hardly was a red mark to see. She thought she would have an awful scar but to her astonishment after ten days there was no sign of the burn, the skin had its normal color again.

The burned area had been totally regenerated thanks to the collagen, in reality a placenta full of vitamins.

This advice can be useful for everyone.
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Snopes.com points out that with very severe burns putting water on the affected area is not recommended. Also, according to Snopes.com, using egg whites to treat minor burns was a somewhat common practice around the turn of the last century.

Food is not always a healer apparently. The final legend in this set deals with the possibility of illness caused by food.

Spoiled Onions

Written by Zola Gorgon-author of several cookbooks.

Watch out for those spoiled onions...

I had the wonderful privilege of touring Mullins Food Products. Mullins is HUGE and is owned by 11 brothers and sisters and in the Mullins family. My friend Jeanne is the CEO.

The facility is mammoth. We toured about 280,000 square feet! Questions about food poisoning came up and I wanted to share what I learned from a chemist.

The guy who gave us our tour is named Ed. He's one of the brothers. Ed is a chemistry expert and is involved in developing most of the sauce formula. He's even developed sauce formula for McDonald's.

Keep in mind that Ed is a food chemistry whiz. During the tour, someone asked if we really needed to worry about mayonnaise. People are always worried that mayonnaise will spoil. Ed's answer will surprise you. Ed said that all commercially-made Mayo is completely safe. "It doesn't even have to be refrigerated. No harm in refrigerating it, but it's not really necessary." He explained that the pH in mayonnaise is set at a point that bacteria could not survive in that environment. HE then talked about the quint essential picnic, with the bowl of potato salad sitting on the table and how everyone blames the mayonnaise when someone gets sick.

Ed says that when food poisoning is reported, the first thing the officials look for is when the 'victim' last ate ONIONS and where those onions came from (in the potato salad.) Ed says it's not the mayonnaise (as long as it's not homemade Mayo) that spoils in the outdoors. It's probably the onions, and if not the onions, it's the POTATOES. He explained, onions are a huge magnet for bacteria, especially uncooked onions. You should never plan to keep a portion of a sliced onion. He says it's not even safe if you put it in a zip-lock bag and put it in your refrigerator. It's already contaminated enough just by being cut open and out for a bit, that it can be a danger to you (and doubly watch out for those onions you put in your hotdogs at the baseball park!)

Ed says if you take the leftover onion and cook it like crazy you'll probably be okay, but if you slice that leftover onion and put it on your sandwich, you're asking for trouble. Both the onions and moist potato in a potato salad, will attract and grow bacteria faster than any commercial mayonnaise will even begin to break down.

So, how's that for news? Take it for what you will. I (the author) am going to be very careful about my onions from now on. For some reason, I see a lot of credibility coming from a chemist and a company, that produces millions of pounds of mayonnaise every year.'

Also, dogs should NEVER eat onions; their stomachs cannot metabolize onions.

The authors of Snopes.com points to folk ideas about onions drawing dangerous bacteria out of the air that were collected by folklorists Iona Opie and Moira Tatum over a series of years.

[1956]

The onion is cut up in an old tin-plate. Then you place it in the room where the sick child sleeps. The onion draws the complaint into itself, and when the child is better care must be taken to see that the onion is properly burnt.

[1964]

When there's flu about, I puts a plate of cut up onion in every room. That's what keeps colds away...All the cold germs go into they.

[1978]

I fondly remember the smell of my mother's window sill adorned with half onions. She swore by the legends that the onions captured any incoming germs and purified the air.

The Web site lists other folk claims that it is unlucky to keep cut onions around.

[1885]

To have a cut onion lying about in the house breeds distempers.

[1891]

An old servant (Essex)...recently complained that ... Spanish onions...were too big. When an obvious method of getting over that difficulty was suggested, she replied, 'Oh, no! that would never do! It's so unlucky to have a cut onion in the house.'

[1958]

Special small onions are being grown for me as I am liable to keep half a cut onion from one meal or another, which I am assured is highly dangerous.
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Barbara Mikkelson, one of the authors of Snopes.com, writes on the web page containing these legends that no scientific evidence exists to suggest that onions attract germs.

These last two legends emphasize the trustworthiness and efficacy of folk-treatments for injury or for preventing illnesses. I argue that these legends are a means of protest against a medical establishment that is seen as increasingly impersonal and bureaucratic. The changes in the business and social structures that have occurred as a result of increasing globalism have weakened the confidence of some in our cultural institutions. Medicine has not gone untouched by this. The continuing popularity of natural and alternative medical practices may attest to this. These legends, regardless of whether the information they present is true, serve as an attempt to empower hearers against a globalized medical establishment by reconnecting them with the healing powers of a basic and easily accessible part of human life: food.

Analysis of Themes

In this data set, we see a slightly different pattern than we have experienced in previous sets. In this set, only one theme seems to tie each of these legends together. The overarching theme is food as “more.” In each of these legends, food is presented as more than mere sustenance. It is presented as a tool for mercenary multi-national corporations, as an arena for conflict brought about by increasing cultural diversity and the displacement of traditional American modes of living including traditional American religion, and as a healer operating outside the industrialized medical establishment.

First, we see food as a tool for mercenary multi-national corporations. In the text regarding the mechanically separated chicken, the food under discussion is something that can be consumed, but only when made to appear to be something else. So, while the pink slime will do the job of food in terms of maintaining human life, it also presents danger because of the non-food added to it. Since there are dangers added to the food and since those dangers are consumed when they are disguised as something innocuous, the fear factor associated with this danger is higher.

The second legend that deals with food as hidden danger is the legend about the ability of onions to attract germs thus making onions a carrier of invisible threats. Not only can we see that this belief is well established across time, but that the legend has an aura of authority established by the reference to “Ed” the tour guide.

In the legend about egg whites as a treatment for burns we see food as healer. It is not unusual to hear about the health properties of foods when consumed, but this text is unusual in that it extends the healing power of food to its topical application.

In both these legend, we see claims that seek to undermine the power of the industrialized medical establishment thus restoring power to the individual. If indeed individuals can treat themselves with common food substances, the message seems to be, then we are not as beholden to the industrial medical establishment and the corporations that sustain it.

Third, food, in the legend about halal butchering, is presented as the arena of conflict brought about by increasing cultural diversity. The perceived conflict, on the part of some, between Islam and mainstream American culture is presented as extending to food. The very substance that sustains human life has become the site of potentially life

threatening conflict. The conflict is subtle. The claims that Halal plants are “filthy” etc. imply a conflict between non-Islamic and Islamic cultures that extends all the way down to sanitary practices. These differences are made manifest in the implied danger of consuming Halal meat. The possibility of being made sick from Halal meat is a symbol of the possible unseen danger of Islam in our midst.

Clearly, in the universe we see when we look at these legends food is more than just something to consume. Instead, food is a substance occupying a place at the center of a web of meaning and value woven around these substances. Part of the function of legends is to remind us of this web of meaning in a world where our food is increasingly processed and industrialized. We are more and more removed from those things that sustain our lives. Legends, it appears, are one way of re-establishing and maintaining that connection even in an industrialized globalized world.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Six

Introduction

In the normal course of experience, human beings operate under a truth bias (Millar & Millar, 1997). We tend to believe the messages others send until we have cause to doubt them. The legend texts in this set are about people who are attempting to take advantage of this inclination to believe. These texts cluster around the potential for some people to be harmed by others through deceit. Each of these legends deals with the issue of scams.

What we see here is that while technology and the global cooperation it has permitted, have benefited our society, there is yet another downside to both. As much as technology has made information easier to acquire, it has hidden other dangerous bits of reality. More than anything, these legends emphasize the ways danger can be hidden amid the masses of opportunities that contemporary technology makes possible. These legends deal with once again with the themes of the rise of technology, borderlessness, the vulnerability and powerlessness of the individual and the indifference of multi-national corporations, though the emphasis here is somewhat different, as we shall see.

Before we proceed. I should reiterate here something I said in chapter one. Simply because these texts deal with the possibility of criminals defrauding others from their wealth does not rule these texts out of the category of “legend”.

Legend Texts

The first text in this group involves a warning about a scam that claims people can make money working at home posting links on the Internet.

If you live in Canada or the US and you have been wanting to work from home, you might be in luck. Google has now released a new 'Work From Home Program' that will allow American to work for the titan from the comfort of their own homes.

To thousands of North Americans this means that they will soon have a safe and bright future working for one of the fastest growing companies in the world.

In the middle of this recession this country and the world is going through, Google has been thriving and reporting profits consistently every quarter.

Completely innovating the Search Engine industry in the late 1990's, Google has had a history of development and innovation, and another one is about to come.

Google has now opened it's doors and will be hiring everyday people to work from the comfort of their own homes posting links. The way this works is Google will allow people to sign up and receive a package which will contain all the step by step instructions to get setup from home.

This will allow Google to hire talent in places like Canada that would otherwise be unreachable and compensate them based on results on a long term basis.

What you need: A Computer, an Internet Connection and the desire to make a living working from home. No special skills are required other than knowing how to use a computer and navigate the internet.

Mary, a mother from Toronto, who worked with Google in the experimental parts of this program is thriving, in the middle of an economic recession, working in the comfort of her own home with Google.

From her website: "I get paid about \$25 USD for every link I post on Google and I get paid every week...I make around \$5500 USD a month right now"

Google has officially released their new 'work from home' system out to the public. There will be thousands of spots

available that are expected to go very soon in the next few days.

The way this works is very simple, Google says.

First you will need to apply for their work from home kits. Google has release a limited amount of kits, all distributed through local websites in your area throughout the US and Canada, which will cost \$2 of shipping and handling to the public.

Google says this charge is made to cover shipping costs but also to separate the people that are serious about working with them through the program.

Once you have ordered your kit (if you are one of the lucky few to get availability in your area) then you will receive a package that will contain all the instructions you need to start working from home for the online titan.

The kit will show you all you need to know, Google says. You will be performing simple and straightforward tasks such as posting links. ‘Anybody with basic computer skills will be able to perform these tasks’ adding to that they say that ‘We understand the psychology of working from home and want to give our employees tasks that are simple and easy, and reward them generously in order to keep them motivated.’

Is this worth quitting your job? If you’re lucky enough to receive a kit, you might not even have to.

“We start our work from home program requiring only 1-2 hours a day of work, earning a great income from the start. This way our work from home employees will see benefit and start devoting more and more time each day and their salaries will increase accordingly’ Google reports.

Although they are going very fast since their release earlier today, thousands of positions are still available at the time of this writing.

To apply for a job working from home for Google here are three steps:

Step 1: Get the Google Work From Home Kit, only pay \$2.95 for shipping. (The shipping cost allows Google to screen for serious people).

Step 2: Follow the directions on your package and set up a Google account. Then they will give you the website links to post. Start posting those links. Google tracks everything.

Step 3: Google will send out your checks weekly. Or you can start to have them wire directly into your checking account. (Your first checks will be about \$750 to \$1,500 a week. Then it goes up from there. Depends on how many links you posted online.)
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Additional information provided by snopes.com says a version of this story circulated in 2009 only with Yahoo substituted for Google. Otherwise, there is no truth to these claims.

This appears to be a scam trying to get unsuspecting people to send two dollars to whoever is writing the scam. By holding out the possibility of good pay for easy work, it's easy to see why the offer included here might appeal to a reader. Yet, there are clues that the offer detailed is likely false. First, it has a certain "too good to be true" feeling. Also, the speaker in the narrative has no clear connection to the company whose work she is describing. Finally, there is no address to which readers are supposed to send their two dollars. All these indicate that rather than being a simple scam, this text has the qualities of a contemporary legend.

The next text in this section deals with a different sort of scam.

****HIGH PRIORITY****

On Saturday, 24 January 1998, Naval Air Station, Joint Reserve Base, New Orleans' Quarterdeck received a telephone call from an individual identifying himself as an AT&T Service Technician that was running a test on our

telephone lines. He stated that to complete the test on our telephone lines. He stated that to complete the test the QMOW should touch nine (9), zero (0), pound sign (#) and hang up. Luckily, the QMOW was suspicious and refused. Upon contacting the telephone company we were told that by using 90# you end up giving the individual that called you access to your telephone line and allows them to place a long distance telephone call, with the charge appearing on your telephone. We were further informed that this scam has been originating from many of the local jails/prisons. Please “pass the word.”

Another version of the same test moves the scam to the cell phone.

A well known telephone scam is now being used on cellular telephones.

There is a fraudulent company that is using a device to gain access to the Subscriber Identity Module (SIM) Card, which contains all subscriber related data (this is the brains in the phone) in your cellular telephone.

A scam artist places a call to an unsuspecting person and the caller says he or she testing mobile (cellular) telephone circuits or equipment. The called part is asked to press #90 or #09. If this happens END THE CALL IMMEDIATELY with out pressing the numbers. Once you press #90 or #09 the company can access your SIM Card and makes calls at your expense.

(Mikkelson, n.d.).

The next legend text moves the technology even one step beyond the cell phone.

If you receive a text message on your mobile from the number 15477 Indicating that you have won a 2 night stay in the Druid’s Marriott in Wicklow, saying that they you must reply with the text #90 or #09, You Should delete this text immediately and not reply. This is a fraud Company using a device, that once you press #90 or #09 and reply text, they can Access your “SIM” card and make calls at your expense. Forward this message to as many friends as you can to stop it.

(Mikkelson, n.d.).

One more example of this legend introduces some very subtle differences.

Please note the following if you are using the mobile.

If you receive a phone call on your mobile from any person, saying that, he or she is a company engineer, or telling that they're checking your mobile line, and you have to press #90 or #09 or any other number. End this call immediately without pressing any numbers. There is a fraud company using a device that once you press #90 or #09 they can access your "SIM" card and make calls at your expense. Forward this message to as many friends as you can, to stop it.

(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Snopes.com says this legend has been circulating for most of the last decade. There is some truth to this legend, according to the web site, but pressing #90 only applies to organizations still using private branch exchange technology for their phone systems.

While the technology that made the actions described in this text possible is outdated, what doesn't go out of date is the fact that the telephone does not simply facilitate communication over long distances; it also conceals the identity and intentions of those on the other end. Just as in many of the legends we have seen so far, this anonymity, this unknown, has the capacity to hold frightening danger. In this particular legend however that danger comes, as it did in the legends about computer viruses, into the home through technology.

The third legend in this set also deals with a phone scam.

DON'T EVER DAIL AREA CODE 809

This one is being distributed all over the US. This is pretty scary especially given the way they try to get you to call. Be sure you read this & pass it on to all you friends and family so they don't get scammed! Don't respond to Emails, phone calls, or web pages which tell you to call an "809" Phone Number. This is a very important issue of Scam Busters! Because it alerts you to a scam that is spreading *extremely* quickly – can easily

cost you \$24,100 or more, and is difficult to avoid unless you are aware of it. This scam has also been identified by the national fraud Information Center and is costing victims a lot of money.

HERE'S HOW IT WORKS:

You will receive a message on your answering machine or your pager, which asks you to call a number beginning with area code 809. The reason you're asked to call varies, it can be to receive information about a family member who has been ill, to tell you someone has been arrested, died, to let you know you have won a wonderful prize, etc. In each, case, you are told to call the 809 number right away. Since there are so many new area codes these days, people unknowingly return these calls.

If you call from the US, you will apparently be charged \$2,425 per-minute. Or, you'll get a long recorded message. They point is they will try to keep you on the phone as long as possible to increase the charges. Unfortunately, when you get your phone bill. You'll often be charged more than \$24,100.00.

WHY IT WORKS:

The 809 area code is located in the British Virgin Islands (the Bahamas) The 809 area code can be used as a "pay-per-call" number, similar to 900 numbers in the US. Since 809 is not in the US, it is not covered by U.S. regulations of 900 numbers, which require that you be notified and warned of charges and rates involved when you call a "pay-per-call" number. There is also no requirement that the company provide a time period during which you may terminate the call without being charged. Further, whereas many U.S. phones have 900 number blocking to avoid these kinds of charges, 900 number blocking will not prevent calls to the 809 area code. We recommend that no matter how you get the message, if you are asked to call a number with an 809 area code that you don't recognize, investigate further and/or disregard the message. Be wary if email or calls asking you to call an 809 area code number. It's important to prevent becoming a victim of this scam, since trying to fight the charges afterwards can become a real nightmare. That's because you did actually make the call. If you

complain, both our local phone company and your long distance carrier will not want to get involved and will most likely tell you that they are simply providing the billing for the foreign company. You'll end up dealing with a foreign company that argues they have done nothing wrong. Please forward this entire message to your friends, family and colleagues to help them become aware of this scam so they don't get ripped off. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

Snopes.com says the basics of this warning were once true but have changed in more recent years. Still the legend continues to circulate with exaggerated details long after the regulations governing these kinds of exchanges have changed.

The final legend in this text is related not to technology directly, but to a different means for scammers to acquire information about victims.

Here's a new twist scammers are using to commit identify theft: the jury duty scam. Here's how it works:

The scammer calls claiming to work for local court and claims you've failed to report for jury duty. He tells you that a warrant has been issued for your arrest.

The victim will often rightly claim they never received the jury duty notification. The scammer then asks the victim for confidential information for "verification" purposes.

Specifically, the scammer asks for the victim's Social Security number, birth date, and sometimes even for credit card numbers and other private information, exactly what the scammer needs to commit identity theft.

So far, this jury duty scam has been reported in Michigan, Ohio, Texas, Arizona, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington state.

It's easy to see why this works. The victim is clearly caught off guard, and is understandably upset at the prospect of a warrant being issued for his or her arrest.

So, the victim is much less likely to be vigilant about protecting their confidential information.

In reality, court workers will never call you to ask for social security numbers and other private information. In fact, most courts follow up via snail mail and rarely, if ever, call prospective jurors.

Action: Never give out your Social Security number, credit card numbers or other personal confidential information when you receive a telephone call.

This jury duty scam is the latest in a series of identity theft scams where scammers use the phone to try to get people to reveal their Social Security number, credit card numbers or other personal confidential information.

It doesn't matter **why** they are calling; all the reasons are just different variants of the same scam.

Protecting yourself is simple: Never give this info out when you receive a phone call.
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Snopes.com says there is a historical basis to this legend since there is a record of these kinds of calls actually taking place.

Analysis of Themes

The themes that emerge from this set of data continue to reiterate themes we have already seen emerge from other sets. Before elucidating these, it is important to explore more deeply the question of how these texts count as legends if the scams they report have, in fact, been perpetrated by people looking to score some easy money.

First, simply because we see a historical reality to the scams listed here, does not necessarily indicate the legend texts grew from that historical reality. It could easily be the case that the scammers got the idea for their schemes from a legend they encountered. In these kinds of situations, it is impossible to rule out the possibility that whatever

historical record there is for these scams having been enacted is a result of ostensive behavior on the part of the actors.

Second, a legend is not merely a tale that it “untrue.” Rather, a legend is, at least in part, defined by the fact that hearers spread it. That the narrative functions memetically and is reproduced throughout a population by people who themselves cannot say whether the story is “true” or “false.” They still repeat it, and thus these narratives have lives that we can therefore name as legendary.

The themes that emerge from this data set all deal with danger. In these themes, danger is hidden, aggressive, and deceitful. Let’s look at each of these.

First, in these texts the danger presented is always hidden, usually in multiple ways. First, it hides behind technology. In the Google “work from home” scam, we see scammers hiding behind the reputation of a global corporation to lend credence to their scheme. As with many texts in this set, the scammers in this text are hiding behind technology.

The theme of technology as concealer of danger lurks in all of these legends. In each of these legends, we see the scammers hiding their identities by reaching out remotely to their victim either through the Internet or via the telephone. In this way, these legends once again introduce ambivalence about technology.

Technology also introduces a third way that danger, in these texts, is hidden. Technology allows the scammers to be distantly located geographically from their victims. One legend, the “809 scam”, makes clear that the scammers in this case at least route their scam calls through the British Virgin Islands, a location remote from most Americans. Because of the way technology and other forces of globalism have brought

citizens all over the world into closer contact with one another, these texts seem to say, we are more vulnerable to others.

This vulnerability emerges at one level simply because though we are more accessible to one another in a globalized era, we remain distant enough to hide from one another. Thus, in the universe of these legends, we have come close enough to hurt one another, but remain distant enough to avoid accountability for our actions.

At another level, the danger comes not just from being more accessible to others, but from being more accessible to others very different from ourselves. In this way, the theme of the negative consequences of greater contact with strangers re-emerges. This is particularly obvious in the “809 Scam” legend. In this text, we learn that the calls originated in the Bahamas, a part of the world with customs, cultures and ethnic demographics very different from many parts of the United States. Thus, we see not just a warning here against a particular scam, but a warning about the increased connectivity which globalization produces.

In spite of the distance between victim and victimizer in these tales, danger is nonetheless aggressive. Danger is aggressive in these texts because it comes for its victims. This is in contrast to those legends that feature characters venturing into dangerous situations. In the legends in this data set, danger moves into their space, often into their homes. The “809 scam”, the “#-9-0” scam and the “jury duty” scam all involve the invasion of the home by the scammer, even it is only by telephone. In these legends, the reach of danger is long.

Finally, danger in these texts is cruel because it uses deceit to plague people trying to do the right thing. Whether they are merely trying to get a job as in the “Google work

from home” scam or rescue a loved one from suffering as in the “809 scam”, the intended victim in these situations is being taken advantage of because he or she is making an effort to do something beneficial for themselves or others.

The jury duty scam is particularly strong in communicating about the deceitfulness of danger. In this legend, the scam victim is told to show up for jury duty. When the target seeks to obey the authorities and discharge his civic duty, he is victimized. The message of the text, of course, is a rather unsubtle reminder to be cautious when obeying political authorities.

The themes I have outlined here: that danger is hidden, aggressive, and deceitful work together not to recruit victims for the scammers, but to do the opposite. When legends like this circulate, they raise awareness of the possibility of becoming the victim of a scam. In this way, while the legends describe the possibility of danger, they also inoculate against it

A second function is to warn against the shifting realities of globalization, specifically increased technological dependence and increased accessibility to people unlike us. Just as these legends and the themes they contain inoculate against the specific scams under discussion, so do they inoculate against the emerging social conditions of a globalized era.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Seven

Introduction

Human beings all feel some anxiety when confronted with the unknown and unfamiliar. Going to a new place can make us nervous. Walking into a new group of people can fill us with dread. Given the universality of this experience, we should expect that “the unknown” would show up in some form as a subject for contemporary legends.

This set of legend texts came together around a manifestation of the unknown that might specifically be called “stranger danger.” Each legend in this set deals implicitly, often explicitly, with the dangers posed by others who are somehow “other” than the speaker in the text.

More significantly, all these legends deal with the danger that emerges through the shifts in traditional social structures occasioned by or correlated with increasing globalism. In some of these legends we see people using their wit and skills to re-assert traditional values. In others, we see them rescued from danger by hewing closely to traditional sources of authority and traditional social arrangements.

The dangers in these stories are sometimes personal and physical. At other times, the dangers posed by these strangers are to social order and decorum. Either way, the danger is portrayed as being both real and serious. Another element in these stories is the possibility and sometimes actuality of punishment that exists for the person who presents the danger.

Legend Texts

The first legend in this group is a good example of this danger/punishment dynamic.

An award should go to the United Airlines gate agent in Denver for being smart and funny, and making her point, when confronted with a passenger who probably deserved to fly as cargo.

During the final days at Denver's old Stapleton airport, a crowded United flight was cancelled. A single agent was rebooking a long line of inconvenienced travelers.

Suddenly an angry passenger pushed his way to the desk. He slapped his ticket down on the counter and said, "I HAVE to be on this flight and it has to be FIRST CLASS."

The agent replied, "I'm sorry sir. I'll be happy to try to help you, but I've got to help these folks first, and I'm sure we'll be able to work something out." The passenger was unimpressed. He asked loudly, so that the passengers behind him could hear, "Do you have any idea who I am?"

Without hesitating, the gate agent smiled and grabbed her public address microphone. "May I have your attention please" she began, her voice bellowing throughout the terminal. "We have a passenger here at the gate WHO DOES NOT KNOW WHO HE IS. If anyone can help him find his identity, please come to Gate 17."

With the folks behind him laughing hysterically, the man glared at the United agent, gritted his teeth and swore "Fuck you."

Without flinching, she smiled and said, "I'm sorry sir, but you'll have to stand in line for that too."

This legend shows up within the data in multiple versions. The second version changes the location of the action.

The secretary of the Atheneum, London, relates that a noble member, exasperated by the slow service in the dining-room finally asked his waiter indignantly, "Do you know who I am?"

The waiter, contemplating the member with sympathetic concern, replied, "No, sir. But I shall make inquiries and inform you directly."

A third version introduces a racial element to the story.

On a British Airways flight from Johannesburg, a middle-aged, well-off white South African lady has found herself sitting next to a Black man. She called the cabin crew attendant over to complain about her seating.

"What seems to be the problem Madam? asked the attendant. "Can't you see?" she said, "You've sat me next to a kaffir. I can't possibly sit next to this disgusting human. Find me another seat!"

"Please calm down, Madam," the stewardess replied. "The flight is very full today, but I'll tell you what I'll do - I'll go and check to see if we have any seats available in first class."

The woman cocks a snooty look at the outraged Black man beside her (not to mention many of the surrounding passengers). A few minutes later the stewardess returns with good news, which she delivers to the lady, who cannot help but look at the people around her with a smug and self-satisfied grin:

"Madam, unfortunately, as I suspected, economy is full. I've spoken to the cabin services director, and the club is also full. However, we do have one seat in first class." Before the lady has a chance to answer, the stewardess continues ... "It is most extraordinary to make this kind of upgrade, however, and I have had to get special permission from the captain. But, given the circumstances, the captain felt that it was outrageous that someone should be forced to sit next to such an obnoxious person."

Having said that, the stewardess turned to the Black man sitting next to the lady, and said: "So, if you'd like to get your things, sir, I have your seat ready for you..." At which point, apparently the surrounding passengers stood and gave a standing ovation while the Black man walked up to the front of the plane.

The next version also involves air travel.

Shared with us by a USAir pilot, this tale sounded too good to be true and is, according to airline officials who describe it as another urban myth. (A West Coast version has it as a United flight.) Seems a USAir employee with the last name Gay was flying on a company pass. Mr. Gay found a man in his seat and sat elsewhere. Since the plane turned out to be overbooked, a ticket agent approached the man in Mr. Gay's assigned seat and asked "Are you Gay?" When the bewildered man nodded that he was gay, the agent said, "Well, get your things, you'll have to get off."

The real Mr. Gay overheard and quickly interrupted, "I'm Gay." The agent told him he'd have to leave the plane at which another passenger, observing this whole scene, announced defiantly, "I'm gay too. Heck, you can't throw us all off."

The final version of this text puts us once again up in the air.

I once was on a plane where I was served by an obviously homosexual male flight attendant. At one point, he bounced over to where I was sitting and announced, "The captain has asked me to announce that he will be landing the big scary plane shortly, so if you could just put up your trays- that would be great."

I did as he had instructed, but the woman sitting next to me did not. A few moments later, our flight attendant came back and said to her, "Ma'am, perhaps you couldn't hear me over the big scary engine, but I asked you to please put up your tray so that the captain can land the plane."

She still wouldn't comply. Now the attendant was getting rather angry and asked her again to put the tray. She then calmly turned on him and said, "In my country, I am called a princess. I take orders from no

one.”

Our flight attendant replied, “Oh yeah? Well in MY country I’m called a queen and I outrank you, bitch! So put the tray up.
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

The legends in this text have the “feel” of classic contemporary legend texts and are unlikely to have any historical roots. Still, that doesn’t mean they don’t appeal to tellers, especially with their “world-set-right” themes. This theme of seeing, in one way or another, a social situation righted is pervasive in all the versions of this story. In each of them, we see a concern for justice that transcends the details of the narratives invented around this longing.

Shifting social arrangements are obvious in these texts. In the first version we see a man who obviously considers himself part of an elite group who expects the rules bent for him. In this story, we see a member of some elite group likely created by the economic changes globalism has caused put down by a plebian worker. The prejudice of the working class hearer is reinforced. The same dynamic of shifting social arrangements emerges in these texts once with a focus on race, once with a focus on sexual identity. It is interesting to note that the traditional value being defended in all these legends is not racial superiority or some attempt to reinforce antipathy against sexual minorities. Rather, the legends all reinforce the importance of traditional social comportment with an emphasis on kindness and fairness. These legends seem to teach that these old-fashioned virtues are even more important in a global, multi-cultural world,

The next legend text involves danger to female college students and other potential victims of sexual assault. This legend, in all its versions, reinforces the idea that societal authorities have become corrupted. These legends serve as warnings about

dangers from those who falsely present themselves as having authority they do not actually possess. Later we will see at least one version of this legend which holds up the family, specifically parents, as a traditional source of authority which remains uncorrupted by the social changes society has experienced.

This is an actual true story and not one of those Internet stories that are passed on and on. This actually happened to one of my dearest friend's daughter. Her daughter, Lauren is 19 yrs. old daughter. Her daughter, Lauren, is 19 yrs. old and a sophomore in college. This happened to her over the Christmas/New Year's holiday break.

It was the Saturday before New Year's and it was about 1 pm in the afternoon. Lauren was driving from here (Winchester, Va.) to visit a friend in Warrenton. For those of you who are familiar with the area, she was taking Rt. 50 East towards Middleburg and then was going to cut over to I-66 via Rt. 17. Those of you who aren't familiar with this area, Rt. 50 East is a main road (55 mph and two lanes each side with a big median separating East/West lanes) but is somewhat secluded, known for it's big horse farms and beautiful country estates.

Lauren was actually following behind a state police car shortly after she left Winchester and was going just over 65 mph since she was following behind him. An UNMARKED police car pulled up behind her and put his lights on. My friend and her husband have 4 children (high school and college age) and have always told them never to pull over for an unmarked car on the side of the road but rather wait until they get to a gas station etc. So Lauren actually listened to her parents advice, and promptly dialed #77 on her cell phone to tell the dispatcher to tell the dispatcher that she would not pull over right away.

She proceeded to tell the dispatcher that there were 2 police cars, one unmarked behind her and one marked in front of her. The dispatcher checked to confirm that there were 2 police cars where she was. There wasn't

and she was connected to the policeman in front of her. He told her to keep driving, remain calm, and that he had back-up already on the way.

Ten minutes later, 4 police cars surrounded her and the unmarked car behind her. One policeman went to her side and others surrounded the car behind. They pulled the guy from the car and tackled him to the ground...the man was a convicted rapist and wanted for other crimes. Thank God Lauren listened to her parents! She was shaken up, but fine.

I never knew that bit of advice, but especially for a woman alone in a car, you should NEVER pull over for an unmarked car in a secluded area. In fact, even a marked car after dark should follow you to a populated area. Apparently police have to respect your right to keep going to a safe place. You obviously need to make some signals that you acknowledge them (i.e. put on your hazard lights) or call #77 like Lauren did.

I am so thankful that my friend was sitting at our book club meeting telling us this scary story rather than us at her house consoling her had something tragic occurred!

Be safe and pass this on to your friends. Awareness is everything!

Here we see a young woman driving alone on her way home from college.

This image alone suggests a whole host of social changes in the post-war period.

It suggests an increase in women's autonomy. "Lauren" is a symbol here of women's increased autonomy both in terms of travel and in terms of education.

Then, we see that increased autonomy leads to increased vulnerability. "Lauren" who is a symbol of the social changes that have occurred in America especially in the post-war period, is then saved from the danger which is stalking her by a return to traditional modes of thinking symbolized here by her "listening to her

parents' advice.”

A second version of this story also features a “Lauren” as the main character.

A bit of useful advice- verified by the Dorset Police.

The number does work from a mobile.

This actually happened to someone's daughter.
Lauren was 19 yrs old and in college.

The story takes place over the Christmas/New Year's holiday break. It was Saturday before New Year and it was about 1.00pm in the afternoon, and Lauren was driving to visit a friend, when an UNMARKED police car pulled up behind her and put its lights on.

Lauren's parents have 4 children (of various ages) and have always told them never to pull over for an unmarked car on the side of the road, but rather to wait until they get to a service station, etc. So Lauren remembered her parents' advice, and telephoned 112 from her mobile phone. This connected her to the police dispatcher she told the dispatcher that there was an unmarked police car with a flashing blue light on his rooftop behind her and that she would not pull over right away but wait until she was in a service station or busy area.

The dispatcher checked to see if there was a police car where she was and there wasn't and he told her to keep driving, remain calm and that he had back-up already on the way.

Ten minutes later 4 police cars surrounded her and the unmarked car behind her. One policeman went to her side and the others surrounded the car behind. They pulled the guy from the car and tackled him to the ground.....the man was a convicted rapist and wanted for other crimes.

I never knew that bit of advice, but especially for a woman alone in a car, you do not have to pull over for an UNMARKED car. Apparently police have to respect your right to keep going to a 'safe' place. You

obviously need to make some signals that you acknowledge them I.e., put on your hazard lights) or call 112 like Lauren did.

Too bad the mobile phone companies don't give you this little bit of wonderful information. So now it's your turn to let your friends know about 112 (112 is an emergency number on you mobile that takes you straight to the police because 999 does not work if you have no signal).

This is good information that I did not know!

Please pass on to all your friends, especially any females. As far as I am aware, 112 uses a system called triangulation so they can pinpoint exactly where you are phoning from.
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Additional information included by the authors of Snopes.com tells us that a 2002 version of the legend changed the girl's name from Lauren to Lisa. A 2003 version set the story in Australia. The same story set in Canada surface in 2004, and this version set in Dorset, England emerged in 2006.

This story has many of the classic elements of a contemporary legend, and its historicity is impossible to pin down. However, there have been documented cases of women being assaulted by men pretending to be police officers.

Both versions of this legend also involve a distrust of societal authority. In these stories, we see a literal blending of the criminal and the law enforcement officer. One function of these legends then is to describe the way that societal authorities while not completely untrustworthy have become ambiguous as regards their intent and values. This mirrors at a local level what we have seen expressed about the federal government in other legends. Clearly, government and other social authorities have suffered a

breakdown of credibility in recent decades and we see that reflected in these legends.

The next legend text once again deals with a method of deception purportedly being used by criminals to weaken their prey.

And Another Warning... Last Wednesday, Jaime Rodriguez's neighbor was at a gas station in Katy. A man came and gave her a card. She took a card and got in her car. The man got into a car driven by another person. She left the station and noticed that the men were leaving the gas station at the same time.

Almost immediately, she started to feel dizzy and could not catch her breath. She tried to open the windows and in that moment she realized that there was a strong odor from the card. She also realized that the men were following her.

The neighbor went to another neighbor's house and honked on her horn to ask for help. The man left, but the victim felt bad for several minutes. Apparently, there was a substance on the card, the substance was very strong and may have seriously injured her. Jaime checked the Internet and there is a drug called "Burundanga" that is used to by some people to incapacitate a victim in order to steal or take advantage of them.

Please be careful and do not accept anything from unknown people on the street.

A similar version of the story identifies the location more specifically as Katy, Texas.

Incident has been confirmed. In Katy, Tx a man came over and offered his services as a painter and left his card. She said no, but accepted his card out of kindness and got in the car. The man then got into a car driven by another man.

As the lady left the service station and saw the men following her out of the gas station at the same time.

Almost immediately, she started to feel dizzy and could not catch her breath. She tried to open the window and realized that the odor was on her hand; the same hand which had accepted the card from the man at the gas station. She then noticed the men were immediately behind her and she felt she needed to do something at that moment. She drove into the first driveway and began to honk her horn to ask for help. The men drove away but the lady still felt pretty bad for several minutes after she could finally catch her breath.

Apparently, there was a substance on the card and could have seriously injured her. The drug is called BURUNDANGA and it used by people who wish to incapacitate a victim in order to steal or take advantage of them. Four times greater than date rape drug; and is transferable on simple cards.

So take heed and make sure you don't accept card at any given time alone or from someone on the street. This applies to those making house calls and slipping you a card when they offer their services. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

According to Snopes.com, several versions of this legend exist containing a number of further variations. A 2008 version omits the mention of Katy, Texas but attributes the story to a police officer in Louisville, Kentucky. Another 2008 version attributes the story to a police officer in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina. Another version from the same time period included contact information for Sgt. Paul Bevan of the Niagara Regional Police.

A January 2009 version moved the events to West Midlands in the United Kingdom. In March 2009, the Halifax, Nova Scotia police issued a denial about the warning after the name of several of their officer became attached to the legend. Other versions also move the events to other cities and nations. Some of the locations in which the legend has been set are not even real. Burundanga is, however, real, and has been

used in crimes reported mostly outside the United States.

Analysis of Themes

Four themes emerge from these texts when taken together. Half of these themes are perhaps expressed best as tensions or dichotomies since the legends seem, not so much to be commenting directly on these issues in the sense that they contain a clear message about which of the opposing forces in the tensions is “right” or “correct”. Rather, these legends draw on tensions inherent in the social arrangements of this period for narrative and dramatic power. At the same time they serve to highlight these tensions and draw the hearer or reader’s attention to the reality of the inescapable conflict of social goods that underlies globalized society. Before reflecting further on how these themes relate to the larger context of an era of globalization, I want to examine each theme on its own terms.

The first theme that is obvious in this set of texts is not just danger, but danger that once again is hidden, a kind of danger masquerade. Mistaken appearances as the occasion for dramatic action can be found in each of these stories. As I have said, these instances of mistaken identities are not innocent. In the stories, they are often intentional attempts to victimize someone. They also serve as symbols of an increased ambivalence about social authorities.

The first theme, the idea of the masquerade, is present within each of these stories. We often associate the idea of mask wearing with those whose intentions are evil, or who wish to do others harm. That is not so in the first texts we considered in this section. In our first few legends in this chapter, the ones about obnoxious passengers, we see that those who are behaving rudely and upsetting the social order get their desserts

because they have in some way mistaken the true identity of the persons with whom they are interacting.

Consider the first text in that series. In it, an airline customer, angry over a cancelled flight mistreats a gate agent by subjecting her to one of his verbal tirades. His refusal to obey the rules of civility culminates when he reveals himself to be arrogant enough to assume he has the right to treat the agent in this way by using the phrase “Do you know who I am?”

The gate agent’s witty response punctures the man’s inflated view of himself as a person who is important enough not to have to wait in lines. Through her actions, the man who assumed her to be a working class slave, someone who is beneath him in every measure, is suddenly forced to see her as his equal. In response, he insults her, adding to his already tarnished image the inability to take a joke. When the agent responds by pointing out he will have to wait in line no matter what, she reveals herself to be not merely a pawn at the disposal of the powerful, but instead as the preserver of social order and fairness. She has demonstrated a power the angry customer had not reckoned her to have and therefore revealed her true identity, which was quite different from what he had originally supposed.

In this we see the re-assertion of the humanity of someone whose work fulfills a function necessary to the working of the globalized world, but who is not richly compensated for that work. It is no accident that this story takes place in an airport and involves an airline worker. What place serves as a greater symbol of the frenetic activity, often on an international scale, of the globalized world than an airport? In this legend we see someone upon whom the entire structure of globalism depends who is mistaken as

being unimportant. As she reveals herself, we see her as the unique human being she is, rather than simply as the functionary into whom the global economic order has sought to transform her.

The theme of masquerade or misapprehended identity is clear in the last two legends as well, perhaps more obviously. In these legends the theme of doubt about formerly trustworthy social institutions is reinforced. In the first, the dangerous rapist masquerades as a police officer. The assumption of the identity of the police officer is more egregious than any other disguise the criminal could have adopted. By assuming the role of a police officer, the criminal arrogates to himself the authority and cultural power of the state. A simple disguise would not be as shocking or as powerful as a criminal pretending to be a police officer.

In the Burundunga legend, we see a case of mistaken or disguised identity as well. In this case, we see a business card, a symbol of the established social order, used as a means of setting up a crime that would represent a shattering of that social order. The simple act of accepting the card, a means of identification and business networking, becomes an occasion for victimhood.

The second clear theme in this set of texts is the role of wit and knowledge plays in salvation and escape from danger, and in the righting of the social order. This theme can be seen in each of the legends outlined here. In the first version of legend number one, we see the gate agent's quick wit serves the purpose of restoring order. This restoration occurs on more than one level. The gate agent's witty reply to the obnoxious customer's complaints deflates his ego, knocking him down from the social position to which he has attempted to lift himself. On this invisible level of social dynamics, we see

the restoration of the social order that dictates that customers are all equal before the realities of consumer inconvenience.

On a second level order is restored literally and physically. The dramatic conflict in the narrative begins with the obnoxious customer's getting out of line. The line is an example of social order in action. Getting out of line is a physical symbol of rebellion against that established social order. When, at the end of the legend, the gate agent insists that the customer returns to the line, and he does, order is re-established.

In the third version of this legend, the one featuring the South-African lady, we see a similar use of wit, but in this case, it is used as a means to rescue the black man from the lower social position the lady is attempting to put him in. It is not insignificant that the witty hero in this legend is a flight attendant, a person constrained by the rules of customer service. So, we have a legend in which an arrogant customer attacks the established order in which black and white customers are seated together. The response to this attack is the use of wit on the part of the crew to not simply restore that order, but to establish a new and slightly enhanced order in which the victim of this attack is placed in a higher position than the attacker.

In addition to the reward given to the victim, the wit of the crew punishes the offender of the given order, as it did in the first version, with public shame. The source of this shame is, of course, the laughter of others. In an attempt to convince others to accept her estimation of her own social position she ends up shamed publicly, her social status reduced, if only temporarily.

In the last couple of legends, a different kind of wit and knowledge serves as the basis of the salvation enacted in the narrative. In the first version of the disguised

rapist story, we are told the speaker's friend and her husband "have 4 children (high school and college age) and have always told them never to pull over for an unmarked car on the side of the road but rather wait until they get to a gas station etc." Here we see knowledge as a means of escape from danger. Later, we see that the potential victim is saved not merely because of the knowledge her parents imparted to her, but because she trusted them and submitted to her authority. The speaker says, "Thank God Lauren listened to her parents!" It was this listening that protected Lauren as much as her knowledge or officers of the law.

The last two themes are those that must be expressed as dichotomies or tensions. First we see the tension between exclusion and inclusion. Given all the ways we have seen legends warning about the dangers of those who are "other" it is surprising that this theme has not emerged quite this explicitly so far. These sets of competing values permeate the stories in this set of data, providing both the legends' moral dynamic and, often, the occasion for the action. Next, we see the tension between justice and injustice.

The theme of inclusion and exclusion is most obvious in the legends about the obnoxious passengers. In each of these we see people seeking to escape the values of inclusion. The arrogant customer does this by seeking to elevate himself above the normal social processes of waiting in line. The South African lady seeks to exclude the black man not just from her company, but also ultimately from humanity itself.

The theme also runs through the other legends as well. In the legends about the disguised rapist we see Lauren as she must make a decision about whether or not to pull over for the pretend officer. The difficulty of this choice is that by choosing not to obey

what appears to be a legitimate member of the police force, Lauren temporarily excludes herself from the established social order in which people pull over immediately when followed by a police car flashing its lights.

The theme of justice/injustice is closely related to the theme of inclusion and exclusion. In each instance of attempted exclusion, we see an injustice. This is most obvious in the legend of the South African lady who commits an injustice by seeking to exclude the black man from human society. This theme is also clear in the stories about the masquerading rapist and the burundunga tinted cards. In each of these, potential crimes represent exclusion, if only because of rejection of the established social order on the part of the criminals. These narratives also represent obvious injustices.

These themes: mistaken appearances, the importance of wit and knowledge in the restoration of a disturbed social order, and the dichotomies of justice and injustice and exclusion and inclusion make up a vision that emerges from this set of texts. Taken together they weave a pattern of concern about setting right the social order that looks to the exemplary individual to be the agent of that change. There is no appeal to government. In fact, government intervention, at least in the form of the police, seems to be somewhat suspect.

Still, the concern for right and fair social relationships is present. While such a concern might seem to be widely shared, these legends provide a way for talking about righting social relationships, specifically orienting them toward inclusion, fairness and security in a way that dissents from the general cultural view that puts more emphasis on collective action than on the value of the lone, exceptional individual.

It is easy to talk about globalization as if it has been simply a matter of

economics and government. It has not been. Much of the post-war period of globalization has been witness to tremendous changes to social arrangements as new ways of living, relating and forming families have all emerged. Some of these changes have been accelerated by the emerging global order. Some have been precipitated by other factors. Still there is no denying that social issues such as those addressed by these legends are a prominent part of life in our time. And, as these legends show us, these issues constitute, at least for some, a real source of anxiety as well.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Eight

Introduction

The development of celebrity has happened alongside the development of modern media, which in turn have contributed to the development of our globalized world. As the power of the media grew, so did the profiles of those who appeared on screen or on air. The interest in celebrities was an early outgrowth of mass media and continues unabated to this day.

Given the intense interest many people around the world have in the famous, it is inevitable that this interest should creep into the contemporary legend phenomenon. The common theme of the legend texts in this set is the power of celebrities to represent values and actions greater than themselves. This power inspires legends in which opinions and actions that may or may not be accurately attributed to them.

Legend Texts

First, we have this text dealing with controversial actress Jane Fonda.

When I was at Camp Pendleton receiving combat corpsman training, I noticed that the pickup truck belonging to the gunnery sergeant in charge of our training was adorned with bumper stickers containing extremely unflattering remarks about Jane Fonda. I also noticed a few referred to Ms. Fonda and Vietnam, but at the time I honestly had no idea why.

Being an E-5 and close to rank to our E-7 gunny, after a training rotation one afternoon I decided to ask him about those stickers, and what they had to do with Fonda.

He muttered a few obscenities and proceeded to tell me the story. Fonda, he said, became a traitor during the Vietnam War- a war in which “gunny” had served two tours and for which he had received three Purple Hearts (which is why

he enjoyed training Navy corpsmen to be Marine Corps combat corpsmen-they'd saved his life a time or two.)

The following excerpts are not "gunny's" words, but when received them in an e-mail recently, it reminded me of his story. And as ABC's Barbara Walters prepares to honor the traitorous Jane Fonda during Walters' "100 years of great women" program soon, I thought the American people needed to hear this story again. You see, Fonda isn't just exercise videos and the third wheel in "Nine to Five" (the movie).

* * * * *

"There are few things I have strong visceral reactions to, but Jane Fonda's participation in what I believe to be blatant treason, is one of them. Part of my conviction comes from the exposure to those who suffered her attentions.

"In 1978, the Commandant of the USAF Survival School, a colonel, was a former POW in Ho Lo Prison- the Hanoi Hilton. Dragged from a stinking cesspit of a cell cleaned and dressed in clean PJs he was ordered to describe for a visiting American 'Peace Activist' the "lenient and humane treatment' he'd received. He spat at Ms. Fonda, was clubbed and dragged away. During the subsequent beating, he fell forward upon the camp Commandant's feet, accidentally pulling the man's shoe off-which sent that officer berserk.

"In '78, the AF colonel still suffered from double vision-permanently grounding him-from the Vietnamese officer's frenzied application of a wooden baton.

"From 1983-85, Col. Larry Carrigan was 347FW/DO (F-4Es). He's spent 6 [product] years in the Hilton-the first three of which he was listed as MIA. His wife lived on faith that he was still alive. His group, too, got the cleaned/fed/clothed routine in preparation for a 'peace delegation' visit.

"They, however, had time and devised a plan to get word to the world that they still survived. Each man secreted a tiny piece of paper with his Social Security number on it, in the palm of his hand. When paraded before Ms. Fonda and a cameraman, she walked the line, shaking each man's hand and asking little encouraging snippets like, 'Aren't you

sorry you bombed babies?’ and, ‘Are your grateful for the humane treatment from your benevolent captors?’”

“Believing this HAD to be an act, they each paled her their sliver of paper. She took them all without missing a beat. At the end of the line and once the camera stopped rolling, to the shocked disbelief of the POWs, she turned to the officer in charge...and handed him the little pile of notes.

“Three men died from the subsequent beating. Col. Carrigan was almost number four.

“For years after their release, a group of determined former POWs, including Col. Carrigan, tried to bring Ms. Fonda and others up on charges of treason. I don’t know that they used it, but the charge of ‘Negligent Homicide due to Depraved Indifference’ would also seem appropriate. Her obvious ‘granting of aid and comfort to the enemy’ alone should’ve been sufficient for the treason count. However, to date, Jane Fonda has never been formally charged with anything and continues to enjoy the privileged life of the rich and famous.

“I, personally, think that this is a shame on us, the American Citizenry.

“Part of our shortfall is ignorance: Most don’t know such actions ever took place.

“The only addition I might add to these sentiments is to remember the satisfaction of relieving myself into the urinal at some air base or another where ‘zaps’ of Hanoi Jane’s face had been applied.”

A second report goes like this:

“I was a civilian economic development advisor in Vietnam, and was captured by the North Vietnamese communists in South Vietnam in 1968, and held for over 5 years. I spent 27 months in solitary confinement, one in a cage in Cambodia, and one year in a ‘black box; in Hanoi. My North Vietnamese captors deliberately poisoned and murdered a female missionary, a nurse in a leprosarium in Ban Me Thuot, South Vietnam, whom I later buried in the jungle near the Cambodian border.

“At one time I was weighing approximately 90 lb. [My normal weight is 170 lb.). We were Jane Fonda’s ‘war criminals.’”

“When Jane Fonda was in Hanoi, I was asked by the camp communist political officer if I would be willing to meet with her. I said yes, for I would like to tell her about the real treatment we POWs were receiving, which was far different from the treatment purported by the North Vietnamese, and parroted by Jane Fonda, as ‘humane and lenient’. Because of this, I spent three days on a rocky floor on my knees with outstretched arms with a piece of re-bar on my hands, and beaten with a bamboo cane every time my arms dipped.

“Jane Fonda had the audacity to say that the POWs were lying about our torture and treatment. Now ABC is allowing Barbara Walters to honor Jane Fonda in her feature “100 Years of Great Women.” Shame on the Disney Company.

“I had the opportunity to meet with Jane Fonda for a couple of hours after I was released. I asked her if she would be willing to debate me on TV. She did not answer me, her husband (at the time) Tom Hayden, answered for her. She was mind controlled by her husband. This does not exemplify someone who should be honored by ‘100 Years of Great Women.’”

“After I was released, I was asked what I thought of Jane Fonda and the anti-war movement. I said that I held Joan Baez’s husband in very high regard, for he thought the war was wrong, burned his draft card and went to prison in protest. If the other anti-war protesters took this same route, it would have brought our judicial system to a halt and ended the war much earlier, and there wouldn’t be as many on that somber black granite wall called the Vietnam memorial. This is democracy. This is the American way.

“Jane Fonda, on the other hand, chose to be a traitor, and went to Hanoi, wore their uniform, propagandized for the communists, and urged American soldiers to desert. As we were being tortured, and some of the POWs murdered, she called us liars. After her heroes-the North Vietnamese communists-took over South Vietnam, they systematically

murdered 80,000 South Vietnamese political prisoners. May their souls rest on her head forever.”

In the words of Paul Harvey, America, “now you know the rest of the story.”

ABC and Babs Walters will undoubtedly include “Hanoi” Jane in their televised celebration because their black souls are too hardened and too imbued with an anti-American sentiment to do anything else. And ultimately, they will answer for what they have done in their lives. In the meantime, I don’t plan on watching anything that has Jane Fonda’s face anywhere near it. I won’t buy her videos; I won’t rent or see her movies. As far as I am concerned, she’s already dead to me.

Whether or not you agreed with the war in Vietnam, whether you’re a Vietnam vet or a former member of the protest movement, or whether you’re too old or too young to have been there, the behavior of Jane Fonda towards our own military men is reprehensible beyond belief. All I ask is that you think about these accounts the next time you see her. Let your conscience guide your action from there. (Mikkelson, n.d.).

Snopes.com says that while Fonda did indeed visit North Vietnam in 1972, there is no evidence that she took some of the actions reported in the legends, specifically the turning over of the notes to the Vietnamese officer. Nevertheless, given the tensions that surrounded the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam conflict, it’s hardly surprising that Fonda’s trip to visit North Vietnamese troops would spawn reactions in the form of contemporary legends. One wonders however why the creators of this legend felt the need to embellish the actions she took which offended them. It would seem that to those committed to seeing her actions as traitorous, simply recounting the facts of her behavior would be sufficiently damning.

By this point the theme of disloyalty to American traditions in favor of broader, more globally oriented concerns should be obvious. We have seen this theme emerge

from many other legend texts as well. The difference with this text is that its content with regard to this theme is so explicit. In this text, we see the interests of traditional American institutions, specifically the military, in conflict with other global entities. The conflict, of course, stretches beyond simple military conflict. Also in conflict here are traditional American values and global values. Whatever else Fonda may be, she is a person who is not simply committed to recognizing only the humanity of her fellow Americans. She is also open to exploring the concerns of others around the world. If nothing else, this marks her as a person with global sympathies and sensitivities. While that alone might not make her a target for the creation of negative legends, it certainly pushes her into the fray around the ongoing values shifts occurring in the post-war era.

The next legend also deals with the misattribution of words to a celebrity. Snopes.com only published the first two paragraphs of the following column, but linked to the complete text on another Web site. The text is reproduced here in whole because it has most often been passed around in its entirety and been attributed to the famous comedian.

“I’m 76 and I’m Tired”-by Bill Cosby

I’m 76. Except for a brief period in the 50’s when I was doing National Service, I’ve worked hard since I was 17. Despite some health challenges, I still put in 50-hour weeks, and haven’t called in sick in seven or eight years. I make a good salary, but I didn’t inherit my job or my income, and I worked to get where I am. Given the economy, there’s no retirement in sight, and I’m tired. Very tired.

I’m tired of being told that I have to “spread the wealth around” to people who don’t have my work ethic. I’m tired of being told the government will take the money I

earned, by force if necessary, and give it to people too lazy or stupid to earn it.

I'm tired of being told that I have to pay more taxes to "keep people in their homes." Sure, if they lost their jobs or got sick, I'm willing to help. But if they bought McMansions at three times the price of our paid-off, \$250,000 condo, on one-third of my salary, then let the leftwing Congresscritters who passed Fannie and Freddie and the Community Reinvestment Act that created the bubble help them—with their own money.

I'm tired of being told how bad America is by leftwing millionaires like Michael Moore, George Soros and Hollywood entertainers who live in luxury because of the opportunities America offers. In thirty years, if they get their way, the United States will have the religious freedom and women's rights of Saudi Arabia, the economy of Zimbabwe, the freedom of the press of China, the crime and violence of Mexico, the tolerance for Gay people of Iran, and the freedom of speech of Venezuela. Won't multiculturalism be beautiful?

I'm tired of being told that Islam is a "Religion of Peace," when every day I can read dozens of stories of Muslim men killing their sisters, wives and daughters for their family "honor;" of Muslims rioting over some slight offense; of Muslims murdering Christian and Jews because they aren't "believers;" of Muslims burning schools for girls; of Muslims stoning teenage rape victims to death for "adultery;" of Muslims mutilating the genitals of little girls; all in the name of Allah, because the Qur'an and Shari'a law tells them to.

I believe "a man should be judged by the content of his character, not by the color of his skin." I'm tired of being told that "race doesn't matter" in the post-racial world of President Obama, when it's all that matters in affirmative action jobs, lower college admission and graduation standards for minorities (harming them the most), government contract set-asides, tolerance for the ghetto culture of violence and fatherless children that hurts minorities more than anyone, and in the appointment of US Senators from Illinois.

I think it's very cool that we have a black president and that a black child is doing her homework at the desk where Lincoln wrote the emancipation proclamation. I just wish the black president was Condi Rice, or someone who believes more in freedom and the individual and less in an all-knowing government.

I'm tired of a news media that thinks Bush's fundraising and inaugural expenses were obscene, but that think Obama's, at triple the cost, were wonderful. That thinks Bush exercising daily was a waste of presidential time, but Obama exercising is a great example for the public to control weight and stress, that picked over every line of Bush's military records, but never demanded that Kerry release his, that slammed Palin with two years as governor for being too inexperienced for VP, but touted Obama with three years as senator as potentially the best president ever.

Wonder why people are dropping their subscriptions or switching to Fox News? Get a clue. I didn't vote for Bush in 2000, but the media and Kerry drove me to his camp in 2004.

I'm tired of being told that out of "tolerance for other cultures" we must let Saudi Arabia use our oil money to fund mosques and madrassa Islamic schools to preach hate in America, while no American group is allowed to fund a church, synagogue or religious school in Saudi Arabia to teach love and tolerance.

I'm tired of being told I must lower my living standard to fight global warming, which no one is allowed to debate. My wife and I live in a two-bedroom apartment and carpool together five miles to our jobs. We also own a three-bedroom condo where our daughter and granddaughter live. Our carbon footprint is about 5% of Al Gore's, and *if you're greener than Gore, you're green enough*. I'm tired of being told that drug addicts have a disease, and I must help support and treat them, and pay for the damage they do. Did a giant germ rush out of a dark alley, grab them, and stuff white powder up their noses while they tried to fight it off? I don't think Gay people choose to be Gay, but I damn sure think druggies chose to take drugs. And I'm tired of harassment from cool people treating me like a freak when I tell them I never tried marijuana.

I'm tired of illegal aliens being called "undocumented workers," especially the ones who aren't working, but are living on welfare or crime. What's next? Calling drug dealers, "Undocumented Pharmacists"? And, no, I'm not against Hispanics. Most of them are Catholic and it's been a few hundred years since Catholics wanted to kill me for my religion. I'm willing to fast track for citizenship any Hispanic person who can speak English, doesn't have a criminal record and who is self-supporting without family on welfare, or who serves honorably for three years in our military. Those are the citizens we need.

I'm tired of people telling me that their party has a corner on virtue and the other party has a corner on corruption. Read the papers—bums are bi-partisan. And I'm tired of people telling me we need bi-partisanship. I live in Illinois, where the "Illinois Combine" of Democrats and Republicans has worked together harmoniously to loot the public for years. And I notice that the tax cheats in Obama's cabinet are bi-partisan as well.

I'm tired of hearing wealthy athletes, entertainers and politicians of both parties talking about innocent mistakes, stupid mistakes or youthful mistakes, when we all know they think their only mistake was getting caught. I'm tired of people with a sense of entitlement, rich or poor.

Speaking of poor, I'm tired of hearing people with air-conditioned homes, color TVs and two cars called poor. The majority of Americans didn't have that in 1970, but we didn't know we were "poor." The poverty pimps have to keep changing the definition of poor to keep the dollars flowing.

I'm real tired of people who don't take responsibility for their lives and actions. I'm tired of hearing them blame the government, or discrimination, or big-whatever for their problems.

Yes, I'm damn tired. But I'm also glad to be 63. Because, mostly, I'm not going to get to see the world these people are making. I'm just sorry for my granddaughter.
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Snopes.com points out that Cosby's Web site contains an explicit denial of his authorship of this piece. That Cosby would deny authorship of this piece is not surprising since it contains many controversial statements. Over the course of his career, most notably while playing Heathcliff Huxtable on "The Cosby Show," Cosby has cultivated a public image as a gentle performer focused on positive personal values. Given this iconography, it's not hard to imagine why readers might imagine Cosby would author this column that complains about the slipping moral and social order of America.

Again, the anti-globalist themes in this legend ought to be easily seen. The concerns expressed by the author of this column touch on several of the ideas I have identified as marking the anti-globalist mindset typically of this set of legend texts: borderlessness, increasing cultural diversity, and distrust of social authority. All make themselves evident here.

The final celebrity mentioned in this legend set is the controversial sports figure Tim Tebow.

In a recent email, I read about a woman named Pam, who knows the pain of considering abortion. More than 24 years ago, she and her husband Bob were serving as missionaries to the Philippines and praying for a fifth child. Pam contracted amoebic dysentery, an infection of the intestine caused by a parasite found in contaminated food or drink. She went into a coma and was treated with strong antibiotics before they discovered she was pregnant.

Doctors urged her to abort the baby for her own safety and told her that the medicines had caused irreversible damage to her baby. She refused the abortion and cited her Christian faith as the reason for her hope that her son would be born without the devastating disabilities physicians predicted.

While pregnant, Pam nearly lost their baby four times but refused to consider abortion. She recalled making a pledge to God with her husband: “If you will give us a son, we’ll name him Timothy and make him a preacher.”

Pam ultimately spent the last two months of her pregnancy in bed and eventually gave birth to a healthy baby boy August 14, 1987. Pam’s youngest son is indeed a preacher. He preaches in prisons, makes hospital visits, and serves with his father’s ministry in the Philippines. He also plays football. Pam’s son is Tim Tebow.

The University of Florida’s star quarterback became the first sophomore in history to win college football’s highest award, the Heisman Trophy. His current role as quarterback of the Denver Broncos has provided an incredible platform for Christian witness. As a result, he is being called The Mile-High Messiah.

Tim’s notoriety and the family’s inspiring story have given Pam numerous opportunities to speak on behalf of women’s centers across the country. Pam Tebow believes that every little baby you save matters. I pray her tribe will increase!
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

According to Snopes.com, it is true that Tim Tebow was born in the Philippines, and that his mother fell into a coma for the reason given. She was indeed treated with medications resulting in severe placental abruption. She did refuse an abortion. The rest of the stories details appear to have been added in the legend –formation process.

Analysis of Themes

These legends clearly spring from a point of view unified around the central concerns of those seeking to resist the changes that have marked the last several decades. As I have already pointed out, this point of view is marked by concerns about many of the central characteristics of our era of globalization.

However a couple of ideas seem to tie these ideas together that are unique to the subject of celebrity. These are misattribution, and a belief in the power of celebrity.

First, in each of these legends we see some words or actions attributed to the famous subject that are not, in fact, reflective of that person's actual words or deeds. This is obvious in the Fonda legend especially with regard to the very detailed charge of her surrendering the notes passed to her by the POWs. The entire essay above was misattributed to Bill Cosby. I have already speculated about why Bill Cosby might be imagined to be the author of this essay as opposed to any other celebrity. Could anyone seriously believe the article could have been by a celebrity less identified with wholesomeness, like, say, Hugh Hefner? Finally, we see the details around Tim Tebow's birth embellished, including claims that have not been substantiated such as the claim that Tebow's parents promised God they would "make him a preacher."

Without a doubt, each of these legends implies that celebrity is a force that multiplies the reach of a single individual thus rendering him or her more powerful than others in furthering or resisting the modern globalist agenda. Obviously, Fonda could only have had access to the POWs with whom she purportedly met because of her celebrity. The article purportedly written by Cosby was circulated further than it otherwise would have been because its readers attached significance to the sentiments because of the supposed author's celebrity. In this way, celebrity both magnifies the article's readership and the credibility the audience gives to it. The belief in the power of celebrity is perhaps most pronounced in the Tebow legend. Here, the subtext is that even God believes in the power of celebrity. The implication of the narrative is that because his mother decided not to abort her child, God set him apart from other persons for a

special purpose and God's special purpose means making him a celebrity. The further implication also being that God is using Tim Tebow's celebrity to accomplish some special mission.

A coherent vision emerges when we take these three legends together, a vision that sees the social conditions of America's past as normative and that is deeply resistive to changes. We see a vision that is patriotic in the sense that it expects citizens to support members of the armed services even when they disagree with the context of that service. In the "I'm Tired" essay we see many political positions expressed that within the context of American politics generally might be identified as conservative. The general outlook expressed in the piece can be assumed to be one not totally dissimilar to that of many who read and passed this text along. Cosby was no doubt identified as the author in part because his public image is one of a man who encourages personal responsibility and civility. Still, since the viewpoint expressed is one not generally expressed openly by celebrities, let alone African-American celebrities, perhaps this disjunction contributed to the popularity of this legend. The Tebow legend combines sympathy for Evangelical Christianity with a similar political viewpoint.

Given that celebrities represent the height of cultural and mainstream acclaim it seems that they would also represent mainstream constructions of reality. Legends about them, as we would expect based on the central insight of unconstructed social problems theory, are means of dissenting from these mainstream constructions.

One small point remains to be made. Because celebrity is a major part of American popular culture and the striving for celebrity is often seen as a source of meaning. Many people desire simply to be proximate to fame. Perhaps, passing on and

embellishing contemporary legends about celebrities is one way some people, unknown as they are, make contact with the shining stars of the celebrity world.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Nine

Introduction

Heroes deserve to be recognized. Nearly everyone agrees with this. While people may disagree over what constitutes a hero, few disagree that those who earn that appellation deserve to be honored in some way. In a time of shifting values, heroes become symbols. In this set of legends we have two legends that look at former members of the military as symbols for traditional American values. In each of these narratives, the hero is slighted in some way. This slight, from the perspective of the speaker, is considered emblematic of a larger hostility on the part of a society that is perceived to have abandoned those traditional values and intuitions.

The legends in this set take as their starting point the assumption that the heroes of these stories have been inadequately lauded. This final set of legend texts is the smallest, consisting of only two legends. The central theme of these two legends is disrespect for people whose occupations involve what is perceived to be self-sacrifice.

Legend Texts

Here is the first legend:

Ed Freeman

You're a 19 year old kid. You're critically wounded, and dying in the jungle in the Ia Drang Valley, 11-14-1965, LZ X-ray, Vietnam. Your infantry unit is outnumbered 8-1, and the enemy fire is so intense, from 100 to 200 yards away, that your own Infantry Commander has ordered the MediVac helicopters to stop coming in.

You're lying there, listening to the enemy machine guns, and you know you're not getting out. Your family is half-way around the world, 12,000 miles away, and you'll never see them again. As the world starts to fade in and out, you know this is the day. Then over the machine gun noise, you faintly hear that sound of a helicopter, and you look up to see an unarmed Huey, but it doesn't seem real, because no Medi-Vac markings are on it.

Ed Freeman is coming for you. He's not Medi-Vac, so it's not his job, but he's flying his Huey down into the machine gun fire, after the Medi-Vacs were ordered not to come.

He's coming anyway.

And he drops it in, and sits there in the machine gun fire, as they load 2 or 3 of you on board.

Then he flies you up and out through the gunfire, to the Doctors and Nurses.

And, he kept coming back ...13 more times....And took about 30 of you and your buddies out, who would never have gotten out.

Medal of Honor Recipient, Ed Freeman, died last Wednesday at the age of 80 in Boise, ID.....May God rest his soul.....

I bet you didn't hear about this hero's passing, but we sure were told a whole bunch about some Hip-Hop Coward beating the crap out of his "girlfriend."

Medal of Honor Winner Ed Freeman!

Shame on the American Media.
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Snopes.com mentions that shortly after the death of Michael Jackson, a second version of the above legend appeared with a reference to Jackson. This particular version of the legend highlights the media's lack of response to the death of Ed Freeman. It could easily be argued though that the underlying concern here is not with the media's function

or dysfunction, but with a perceived preoccupation among the American population with trivia rather than substance and those who epitomize positive social values.

It should be noted that in this particular version of the legend both the men referenced as receiving too much attention from the media are African-Americans, while Ed Freeman was Caucasian. This doesn't necessarily imply racial animosity on the part of the legend creators or those who repeated it. But, it does signify the growing social changes brought about by the ongoing empowerment of minorities of all kinds. Resistance to and anxiety about these social changes as much as any other factor might go a long way toward motivating the creation and propagation of such a legend.

The second of the two legends in this set also deals with disrespect to members of the armed forces.

I have indeed confirmed the fact that Starbucks charged rescue workers \$130.00 for 3 cases of bottled water on September 11, 2001, so the following info that was passed on to me would not be surprising to me at all!!

Dear everyone: Please pass this along to anyone you know, this needs to get out in the open. Recently Marines over in Iraq supporting this country in OIF wrote to Starbucks because they wanted to let them know how much they liked their coffee and try to score some free coffee grounds. Starbucks wrote back telling the Marines thanks for the support in the business, but that they don't support the War and anyone in it and that they won't send them Coffee. So as not to offend them we should not support in buying any Starbucks products. As a War vet and writing to you patriots I feel we should get this out in the open. I know this War might not be very popular with some folks, but that doesn't mean we don't support the boys on the ground fighting street to street and house to house for what they and I believe is right. If you feel the same as I do then pass this along, or you can discard it and I'll never know. Thanks very much for your support to me, and I know

you'll all be there again here soon when I deploy once more.

Semper Fidelis,
Sgt. Howard C. Wright
1st Force Recon Co
1st Plt PLT RTO
(Mikkelson, n.d.).

Analysis of Themes

Disrespect toward those who deserve better is a major theme in both these legends. The disrespect with which the subjects of these narratives are perceived to have been treated is symbolic of a perceived loss of respect for traditional American values and institutions on the part of the larger society. These legends address the characteristics of a globalizing world in somewhat of a backward way. Rather than critiquing, say, shifting social arrangements and values directly, they set up these characters to serve as a proxy for all traditional social arrangements. The emotional affect of seeing these characters disrespected is more intense than a simple argument would have been. Two aspects of these legend that particularly reflect resistance to the changes of our era are the general sense that traditional social arrangements have shifted for the worse and a distrust of large corporations.

First, it is obvious in both of these legends that the speaker believes members of the armed services are due a level of respect that exceeds that expressed among civilian members of society. The outraged tone of both legends is a sign that its creators expect this higher level of respect, probably as a result of remembering when traditional social institutions like the military were thought by many to be automatically worthy of respect. Presumably, this expectation is also a result of the self-sacrifice members of the armed services are perceived to offer on the behalf of the rest of the citizens of the nations.

The second point is more interesting. These legends also imply that this disrespect is built into the corporate culture in America. This is consonant with other legends we have seen that imply a distrust of large multi-national corporations which are seen as the primary economic driver of globalism. In both, these legends, it is businesses that have put themselves at odds with these members of the armed services and their supporters.

In the first legend, the members of the media industry are seen to have neglected the death of a hero. To exacerbate this negligence, the media instead devoted time and attention to trivial matters. In the second legend, Starbucks, a large beverage corporation, is portrayed as hostile to members of the armed services. What is interesting about this is that typically people who are supportive of the wars America has undertaken in the last decade are often portrayed by the major media as also supportive of big corporations. These legends would suggest otherwise.

Perhaps it could also be suggested that these legends contain a subtext that assumes a general and growing hostility toward the values of duty and self-sacrifice the characters in these legends represent. This subtext comports with the same sentiment that America is in a state of decline that we have seen expressed in other legend text groupings. If there is a thread that ties these groups of texts together it is the conviction that overall a once great culture is slowly being diminished.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

Chapter Ten

Introduction

Over the course of these chapters, I have surveyed and analyzed the themes arising from the contemporary legend texts found on Snopes.com during the early part of 2012. These texts were coded through a process that yielded eight distinct groups, each containing texts that clustered around a particular topic. These topics were technology; government policy and action; presidential candidates; stranger danger; food; scams; celebrities; and disrespect to service members.

In each chapter, I identified themes that arose from within the texts. This practice yielded quite a few of these chapter-level themes. These chapter-level themes have been grouped together in the following list.

1. Credibility claims
2. Technology as deceptive
3. Technology as cause for loss
4. Technology as disabling and deadly
5. Government overreach and invasiveness
6. Perceived hostility toward traditional institutions
7. Expressions of powerlessness
8. Obama's ambivalence
9. The identities of presidential candidates especially Obama
10. The hidden nature of danger
11. The tension between justice and injustice
12. The tension between inclusion and exclusion
13. The role of wit and knowledge in escaping danger
14. Food as danger
15. Food as healer
16. Food as an arena for conflict
17. Misattribution
18. The power of celebrity
19. The respect due to members of the armed services
20. Disrespect inherent in large corporations

Taken together, these themes reveal a somewhat unified worldview that lies behind them. While the individual texts may seem disparate and unrelated, that is an illusion. They are in fact tied together in three ways. First, they are related in that they all showed up on the list of most reported legends at Snopes.com during the data collection period. They are unified as being seen by an audience as especially salient during the first three months of 2012. Second, there is a common reason why these particular legends rose to prominence at this particular time. They were circulated by and perhaps believed by people who share a common worldview that makes these legends seem united in offering a credible vision of reality. Finally, they are unified in that they consistently address one or more themes that are typical of our period of increasing globalization and other kinds of social change. Those themes, once again, are :

- increased reliance on technology
- borderlessness and greater cultural diversity
- distrust of corporations
- distrust of government and other forms of social authority
- resistance to changes in traditional social arrangements.

To begin assessing this vision of reality in some detail, I will break the long list of chapter level themes above into smaller lists. I will combine the chapter level themes that cluster around even higher-level themes. While the themes in the first list arose from looking at individual legend texts, these new, higher-order themes will arise from surveying the chapter-level themes together. Because these new themes are of a higher order of organization, I will refer to them as “supra-themes.”

Combining chapter-level themes

Each of the supra- themes includes multiple chapter-level themes. By enfolding the chapter level themes within two supra-themes I was be able to analyze this content efficiently than . The supra-themes that emerge from an examination of these individual, chapter-level themes are: the dangers of our globalized era and protection from those dangers.

All the themes to have emerged from the study can be reduced to these. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate how this is possible and to offer some reflections on what the concern about danger, and the specific dangers mentioned in these legends, mean. When I have done this, I will explicate the contours of the worldview that lies behind this particular set of legend texts.

Danger is a persistent enough category of human experience. It could easily be argued that danger has always been a central focus of folklore and legend. What then makes the danger represented in this set of texts peculiar to its time? If what we see when we look at the themes listed here is simply a reiteration of the idea that the world is dangerous, has our work been in vain because it rendered to us nothing but an insight so obvious children pick it up from common experience?

By no means. While it is certain that human beings have always expressed concerns about danger in their various legends and other kinds of folklore, the themes extracted from this set of texts tells us more than merely that people are concerned with danger. This study tells us about what the tellers of these narratives believe to be the sources of danger, about the motivations of those whom they consider the source of danger and something about what they believed could be done about that danger during the collection period.

Furthermore, what this study shows us is the specific kinds of danger that a specific segment of the American population was concerned about during the data collection period early in 2012, and likely remains concerned about even now. So, rather than simply reasserting something everyone knows, i.e. that danger is real, this study gives us insight into a particular population during a particular time and the kinds of dangers on their minds. Specifically, it shows us what concerns about aspects of globalized society were being expressed through the medium of contemporary legends during the data-collection period.

A note should be offered too about the population we are examining. Obviously, people tell, read and repeat legends for multiple reasons. Some pass legends along without believing them. Others believe them wholeheartedly. These facts are well established. For the purposes of this study, however the legends have been considered as standing on their own, the voices of their narrators speaking as sincere believers. The narratives in this study all have narrators who seem to believe the story they are telling. It is reasonable to assume that some portion of the audience who encounters them will identify with the narrators of these stories and believe them as well. Therefore, the narrators of these texts are taken as a rough representation of the mind of a certain segment of the population that has encountered the legend or will do so in the future. It is this segment into whose collective worldview our study has yielded us insight.

Finally, the themes identified in each chapter and listed above need to be listed a second time. This time each theme from the chapters will be listed under the supra-theme heading under which it falls. Some chapter level themes fit under the “danger” supra-

theme. Others fit more comfortably under the “protection from danger “supra-theme.” A few fit under both. The reason for this will become clear in the following paragraphs

These are the chapter-level themes that fall under the “danger” supra-theme.

1. Credibility claims
2. Technology as deceptive
3. Technology as cause for loss
4. Technology as disabling and deadly
5. Government overreach and invasiveness
6. Perceived hostility toward traditional institutions
7. Expressions of powerlessness
8. Obama’s ambivalence
9. The identities of presidential candidates especially Obama
10. The hidden nature of danger
11. The tension between justice and injustice
12. The tension between inclusion and exclusion
13. Food as danger
14. Food as an arena for conflict
15. Misattribution
16. The power of celebrity
17. Disrespect inherent in large corporations

The following chapter-level themes are catalogued under the “protection from danger” theme.

1. The identities of presidential candidates especially Obama
2. The tension between justice and injustice
3. The tension between inclusion and exclusion
4. The role of wit and knowledge in escaping danger
5. Food as healer
6. Misattribution
7. The power of celebrity
8. The respect due to members of the armed services

Analysis of Supra-Themes

Supra-Theme One

Now that the two supra-themes have been established, I will review briefly each of the chapter-level themes with an eye toward highlighting its relation to the supra-theme under discussion. When this review is complete, I will draw on it for my discussion of the worldview behind this group of legends.

The first sub-theme included in this section is the theme of credibility claims. This theme is present in many contemporary legends across the scope of the data. In these legends, we see repeated attestations of the trustworthiness of the information being presented.

Often this theme is manifested in comments about the source of the information reported in the legend. Examples of these credibility claims can be found in the previous chapters, especially chapter two. Rather than reviewing those examples here, I will demonstrate the connection between claims to credibility and the supra-theme of danger.

Statements aiming to increase the credibility of the legend are attempts to reduce the readers' tendency to be suspicious of the message contained in the legend. In this way, they are tacit admissions of the expectation that readers, when they encounter the legend, may have a more or less intense sense of danger.

Because the writers of these legend texts anticipate that readers may have a sense of the possibility of danger, they include sentences designed to address these feelings of danger. So, we see that this supra-theme of danger is present in the background of many legends even when the explicit content of the legend is not particularly threatening.

The next theme under this supra-theme is danger represented by technology. This theme reminds us to look at technology not simply as a servant or as a savior, but as a problematic reality of the modern world. In the chapter devoted to this theme, we saw

that this particular danger broke down into four different realms of danger presented by technology: technology as deceptive; technology as cause for loss; and technology as disabling and deadly.

The recognition of these dangers does not come without a cost. In a technology-dominated world, an awareness of the dangers technology can represent can put one at odds with the surrounding culture. Too high an awareness of these dangers can lead one into conflict in interpersonal relationships. To advocate a view of technology so directly counter to that of most of one's culture may require expressing oneself in indirect ways. Perhaps the reason these legends persist is that they speak in this indirect way to dangers many people feel but which would require them to weather too much internal and external conflict to articulate publicly.

The theme of dangers represented by the government also fell under this supra-theme. These could be dangers stemming from government invasiveness or from government's hostility toward traditional institutions and the traditional American culture those institutions sustained. In addition to communicating about the perceived dangers of government, the legends in the data set also communicated the feelings of powerlessness some people feel when confronting a mammoth entity like the federal government of the United States and its potential dangers.

A closely related set of themes emerged dealing with the identities of the candidates in the 2012 political election. Obviously, this set of themes appeared in part because the data was collected in the early part of a presidential election year. Nevertheless, the concerns expressed by these themes endure beyond any particular election cycle. These themes express concerns about the candidate's fitness for office and

the dangers of electing someone unfit for office, a perennial concern for a voting public. The legend texts collected for this study naturally focused on Barak Obama and Mitt Romney, the nominees from each of America's two major political parties. The legends in this set related a narrative in which Romney was portrayed as a powerful businessman who sacrificed profit for the good of a friend, while raising questions about Obama's fitness for the presidency on several grounds.

The next set of themes focused more on the dynamics of social and physical danger. These narratives emphasized thematically the hidden, sometimes invisible nature of threatening forces by illustrating the "hidden" nature of danger. At the same time these texts highlighted the ever-present social tensions between justice and injustice and inclusion and exclusion. Because these tensions exist in every social situation, they constitute a source of constant danger or threat to the established social order in that at any moment the balance between them could shift, disrupting their momentary balance.

We also saw food represented in these texts as a both danger and as an arena in which other dangerous forces might hold sway. Specifically, we saw food as a site for the collection of dangerous, invisible germs and for the cultural conflict between Islam and the more traditional American religious points of view.

In the texts dealing with celebrity we saw the power, and potential danger of misattribution in the media. In both the Bill Cosby and the Jane Fonda legends, these entertainers saw dangers to their own reputations from the misattribution present in these legends. Also, we can see how misattributing a sentiment or an idea to a celebrity can lend power to that idea. In this way, misattribution represents a danger not just to the celebrities, but also to others. By misattributing these ideas to celebrities even anti-social

ideas can be lent credibility and spread. In this way, misattribution represents a danger to the larger society and transforms legend texts that feature this kind of misattribution into a weapon to be wielded to bring about potentially harmful social change. This is the power of celebrity.

In the final chapter, we saw American corporations portrayed as a source of danger. In the texts in this last chapter, this theme is made undeniably explicit, though it emerges as a minor theme in other chapters. Specifically, corporations are a danger because they fail to respect traditional American values and the people and institutions that personify them. Corporations in these texts are pictured as not sharing these values, but elevating profit above all values.

Supra-Theme Two

The second of the two identified supra-themes naturally corresponds with the first. Where the first supra-theme identified was “danger” the second is “protection from danger.” There were notably fewer individual themes that fell under this supra-theme. While the first supra-theme enveloped 17 individual themes, only eight individual themes were coded as belonging under the second supra-theme. These eight individual themes can be grouped together into four intermediate categories.

The first intermediate category contains only one theme. The theme of the identities of presidential candidates was coded as belonging under this supra-theme as well as under the first since the identity of a presidential candidate can be seen as a source of protection from danger. If a candidate proves to be a person of moral integrity and courage, then perhaps that person has the characteristics required to protect the

nation. The legend texts in this sample speak to this issue as well as to characteristics in presidential candidates identity that could pose a danger to the nation.

The second intermediate group contained three themes, two of which were also coded as belonging under the previous supra-theme. In this intermediate group, I have included the themes of the tension between justice and injustice, the tension between inclusion and exclusion, and the role of wit and knowledge in escaping danger.

In the texts from which these themes emerge we see an insight into what protection from danger requires. Such protection requires not just action to bring the tension between these various poles back into balance, but also knowledge and wit.

The third intermediate group contained only one theme. The theme of food as healer stands on its own. Where we have seen food as both a source and an arena for various dangers, now we see food emerge as a healer. This makes intuitive sense. It seems natural that a substance that sustains our lives might also heal and restore our bodies. These legend texts play on that basic intuition.

Finally, we see the power of celebrity, misattribution and the respect due to members of the armed services coded together to form a fourth intermediary group under this supra-theme. In this group we see how the power of celebrity whether it is attached to ideas or quotations that are accurately attributed to a famous person or not, is portrayed as a force for positive social change, including changes which could make life safer by protecting people from danger. This is seen most clearly in the “Tim Tebow” legend. Also, in this sub-grouping the values of America’s military institutions are seen as forces for social good, national cohesion, and safety and are, therefore, entitled to respect.

What these Supra-Themes Tell Us

After such an extensive examination of this data, we can draw a few conclusions. First, after noting the two supra-themes into which these legend texts most obviously broke down were “dangers of globalization” and “protection from danger,” it could be argued that this breakdown indicates that for those who are hearing and passing these tales along, ours is an anxious time. The issue of belief, of course, is relevant here. As I have noted, a person’s passing along a contemporary legend is not evidence of belief. Therefore, the question arises as to whether we can say that those who pass along legends without believing them share in the underlying anxiety this sample of popular legends seems to indicate is a reality for at least part of our population.

While this question cannot be answered with an absolute affirmative, it is reasonable to assume that even those who passed such legends along without believing them passed them along because their themes touch an emotional and cultural reality the passers-along sense is a reality for them or for the audience to whom they are passing the legend. Without being in contact with the emotional texture of the time, it seems they would have little incentive to pass these particular legends along, even if they are doing so with full knowledge that some of them may contain a substantial fictional element.

Another insight arises from the simple observation that the themes falling under the supra-theme “danger” significantly outnumber those falling under the “protection from danger” supra-theme. The sheer preponderance of themes dealing with danger indicates that a sense of anxiety and a corresponding relative lack of confidence about being protected from threatening forces is alive and at work among the legend repeating public.

Of course, legend texts have always warned audiences of dangers. This is not new. So, while noting that such anxieties are alive and that contemporary legends currently being passed around mirror these fears is interesting, it is hardly novel. What is new and important is what these legend texts reveal about the particular anxieties of our time. Notice that in all the texts considered in this study, none deals with a fear of the supernatural, of violent criminals, or of social humiliation, all common themes in older contemporary legend texts.

In these texts, the sources of danger are much different. In these texts danger comes not from ancient primordial supernatural threats, but the threats inherent in advancing modernity, particularly in an era with an increasing emphasis on various aspects of globalism. In fact, taken as a whole the legends in this data set can be said to be a somewhat coherent reminder of the dangers concomitant with the development of modern globalism. More than a simple reminder though, these texts go so far as to elucidate and name several of those dangers and to identify the avenues through which they may approach the unsuspecting individual.

All the chapter- level themes in the list of “dangers” above describe an aspect of late modernity and its accompanying globalism. Technology, the growing power of racial and religious minorities in America, the breakdown of traditional social order and the tension that breakdown creates, the rise of celebrity culture and the multinational corporation are all characteristics of developing globalism. These attributes come together to create an interlocking set of conditions to which the creation of these legend texts is a response.

As I said earlier, these themes when taken as a whole offer an alternative vision of global modernism that differs from the dominant view. This alternative vision emphasizes the losses modern globalism has occasioned, the risks increasing movement along the trajectory of modern globalism entails and the plight of the victims global modernism creates.

Because increased technological capacity has been a mark of modernity from the beginning we would expect to see in this data set legends dealing with the vulnerabilities technology creates. We also ought not be surprised to see legends that deal with the fear of government overreach and insensitivity since globalism requires tremendous amounts of administration. Because of this need for administration, government has grown over the course of the last fifty years and will likely continue to do so until it reaches a financial or other limit. We also could predict finding in this sample legends that deal with the conflicts that arise as people of different classes, races, and religions come together in modern, globalized cities since globalism by its nature shuffles populations and increases diversity of all kinds. We ought not be surprised to see legends related to celebrity and the multi-national corporation since both of these transcend the traditional boundaries of the nation-state and thus are indicative of our increasingly globalized civilization.

So, if these legends express a worldview that encompasses much more skepticism about global modernism than the dominant cultural worldview in America, it is reasonable to ask why the contemporary legend has become a vehicle for the expression of this point of view. To understand the answer to that question, a brief survey of the contemporary American political landscape is required.

The unquestioned goodness of globalism has been a political given in America in recent years across the political spectrum. This position has had its advocates in both of the two major American political parties. Republicans have tended to favor the international business and free market aspects of global modernism. In spite of some rhetoric about curbing illegal immigration during the administration of George W. Bush, this issue was not high on the administration's priority list. Regardless of some minor differences between the parties on this issue mainstream Republicans and Democrats are both generally warm to the idea of permeable national borders.

Democrats have tended to emphasize other aspects of modern globalism, especially the need to expand government to provide social services to those displaced by the industrial and economic changes global modernism has created. In recent years, both have favored interventionist foreign policies that have involved American forces in conflicts around the globe.

Given that the mainstream of both political parties are generally in favor of increased global modernism, it seems likely that those who dissent from this dominant view might feel the need to express their views with caution for fear of risking social isolation or other censure. Therefore, it is not unexpected that the contemporary legend would be one vehicle for expressing dissenting sentiments without risking direct confrontation.

One reason those who dissent from the general political enthusiasm for globalism may feel they must express their dissent indirectly is that their views are rarely represented in mainstream political and media vehicles. Debates on talk television talk shows tend to be between leftist and rightist advocates of modern globalism. Candidates

for major national elections tend to be drawn from supporters of globalism. Therefore, since the views of dissenters from modern globalist ideology tend to be excluded from the most official venues of debate in our society, the political and social problems to which these dissenters are attuned tend to remain if not unconstructed, then certainly unlegitimated. Because they remain unconstructed through mainstream and official channels, these sentiments find their way into the minds of members of the population through alternative means, one of which is contemporary legends.

It would be a mistake to identify these dissenters as occupying a marginal position on only the right or left of the American political spectrum. They do, in fact, inhabit the margins on both sides. On the left, we might look for them in the most deeply committed corners of the environmental movement. Skepticism about technology and concern about the effects of global industry are not uncommon ideas in this movement. Even as mainstream an environmental organization as the Sierra Club has, in recent years, faced division in its membership over some members advocacy of strict immigration laws out of concerns about the ecological impact of over-population.

(Barringer, 2004)

On the right, these dissenters are perhaps most recognizable among the members of the Tea Party and their sympathizers. In spite of their otherwise deep philosophical differences, these dissenters from the program of global modernism agree with those on the left who support immigration restriction, and who are concerned about the restriction of civil liberties which the managerial state often necessitates. Their skepticism of technology is perhaps best seen in their resistance and resentment of that technology that

automated much of America's manufacturing sector that once required massive amounts of human labor.

Admittedly, this particular sample of contemporary legend data has a bit of a rightish flavor with its concerns about President Obama's fitness for leadership and other issues that fall more typically within the political agenda of the marginal right. However, this is likely no more than an accident of timing. Because the sample for this study was collected during the early part of an election year in which Obama was running for a second term it is understandable that contemporary legends about his fitness for office would emerge among the most reported legends of that time. Also, with Obama's first election to the office in 2008, it was clear that America's political pendulum had swung to the left. Given their new status being represented in the highest positions of power, perhaps those leftist dissenters from global modernism felt less need to engage in indirect cultural expressions of their ideas and values, while those on the right did feel this need more intensely. Thus, the rightish slant of the legend texts in this sample.

Some readers might be inclined to dismiss these texts as examples of a far-right wing mind set characterized by paranoia and hostility to mainstream culture. TO do this would be a mistake. Not only would this kind of dismissal rener learning from these texts impossible, it would also be to act on a shallow analysis. Because these texts are outside of any personal or performative context, we cannot know what the teller or tellers political agenda is if any. Instead, we must treat these texts as existing in a milieu of political conflict where the tellers could come from any one of many political points of view.

With this understanding of the function of this set of contemporary legends within this context, it is valuable to consider the role and content of the chapter-level themes that fell beneath the second supra-theme “protection from danger.” Again, the relative scarcity of these likely reflects a general sense that the threats of modern globalism are not easily resisted. What resistance is possible seems to come primarily from the individual, especially from the individual who is especially talented, clever, or knowledgeable. The absence of the hope of resistance through community building or union is conspicuous. While it is impossible to say conclusively what the absence of an idea means, it is reasonable to surmise that joining forces to combat global modernism was not, at least at this time, on the minds of those whose worldview is represented by this legend sample.

Instead, we see the hope held out that the uniquely gifted person might offer moments of resistance through the exercise of his gifts. The “Tebow” legend is a good example of this, Tim Tebow, celebrity quarterback, is pictured as a person who, because of the unusual circumstances of his birth and the celebrity his athletic talent has garnered him, might be able to strike a blow against the program of global modernism, especially with regard to the more libertine moral values global modernism has encouraged.

On the other hand, some legends center on an ordinary person who, through her keen wit, doesn’t so much strike a blow of resistance against global modernism, as comfort those troubled by the conditions it has created. In the legend where the racist South African woman is complaining about sitting next to a black man, we see working people (a pilot and a flight attendant) restoring order to a situation in which the diversity created by globalization is not being respected. This lack of respect for a major modern

value needs to be addressed for the comfort of all aboard the plane. It is the wit and savvy of the ordinary working people in the story that restore the social order and in this way protect other passengers.

A similar idea is present when we see legends about the military being disrespected. Military institutions as a whole are not coming under assault here, but they are being attacked through the acts of disrespect focused on one person. The person seeking to address this wrong is often the narrator of the legend who, by relating his narrative, a sign of his unique gifting, is seeking to expose the modern insensitivity to the perceived sacrifices members of the armed services make.

So, then what do these texts tell us about our current political and social situation in America? They tell us that in spite of our active and often boisterous public debate, some members of our society continue to perceive themselves as unwelcome to join in. Their sense of exclusion, particularly their sense that the problems which concern them, the problems with global modernism, remain unlegitimated leads them to speak about their concerns indirectly, probably through multiple means, one of which is the creation of contemporary legends.

This point touches on the central value of this study for the Communication discipline. Much contemporary legend scholarship focuses on the psychological and social functions of legends. Only a minority of scholarship really looks at contemporary legends as a communication phenomenon. This study seeks to begin a wider discussion about these texts within the Communication discipline. Whether that goal will be achieved remains to be seen.

In addition, this study, while not dependent on unconstructed social problems theory, has expanded the usefulness of the central insight of this theory. By applying this idea to contemporary legends, I have demonstrated that the idea of indirect expression applies not only to unconstructed problems, but as a means of dissenting against mainstream constructions of social issues.

Contemporary legends will never go away. They are an inherent part of human social processes. Because every regime, every philosophy of governance and every possible societal pattern excludes some members from full expression of their views, contemporary legends will always be a vehicle for those who feel themselves to be marginalized. Yet, as political actors as well as scholars, we can listen with empathy to the marginalized concerns these legend texts put before us, and use what influence we have to make sure the table at which society meets to debate its future is as large as possible.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Study

This study is constrained by three major limitations, first there is a lack of context for the legends considered, second the legend texts themselves remain open themselves to multiple and alternative interpretations, and third the study has focused on legends as expressions of a worldview while ignoring contemporary legend as a factor in the formation of personal and shared worldviews.

First, because the legends for this sample were gathered online without a personal context, it is impossible to include in the analysis of them any of the information that could have been included had they been gathered in a performative situation. Greater access to their performative context would have allowed follow up questions with regard

to their meaning for the teller and their function within the teller's worldview. As it is, I have had to rely on treating the online versions of these legend texts as objects for rhetorical study which places this study within the confines of all rhetorical studies, namely that the researcher is limited to consideration of data that exists within the texts themselves to try to work backward to the worldview of the teller.

This approach is particularly difficult with legend texts because they differ from many kinds of rhetorical artifacts in that one cannot always assumed sincerity or belief on the part of the teller. In this study, I have assumed that since these texts showed up in a list of the 25 most prominent legends for the collection period, many people who forwarded them must have believed them. I have also operated on the assumption that looking at these texts together could give us insight into the contemporary, popular mind. Other scholars could differ with these assumptions, and I acknowledge that my making them shaped the outcome of this research. Still, I do not believe that the conclusions I have drawn are illogical or unsupported by evidence found within the legend texts. However, other scholars, beginning with different assumptions, could come to other conclusions.

Second, the legend texts in this sample could be interpreted in yet more ways than I have been able to conceive of. In my interpretation of these texts, I tried to focus on themes within them that I felt would be generally agreed upon to be present by most readers. However, I am a reader with a particular social position and with particular biases some of them known, many probably unknown. These factors doubtless influenced my understanding of these texts. It is possible these blinded me to some important

themes within the texts. To correct for this possibility I sought to rely heavily on textual data from the legends to support my hermeneutical assertions.

Third, in this study I have looked at this set of legend texts as an expression of a political and social worldview. This is, in part, a result of the abstracted method of gathering the texts outside of their social contexts. In actual lived social contexts, it is likely these legends serve as both a source for worldview formation and an expression of those worldviews. Because of the method for gathering my data here, I was limited to only one side of this process. While this study has yielded useful insights into that half of the process, it remains only part of the entire picture of the function of these texts.

Future scholars interested in building off this work may seek to take this approach beyond these limitations. To do this, some may consider replicating the analytical methods used in this study, but substituting fieldwork for the collection method. Doing this would allow future researchers to address all three of the limitations discussed here. They could gather more data about the social context, and the role of the legends in the tellers' lives. They could consider the tellers' social positionality and how it intersects with their own as interpreters. Finally, they would have opportunity to examine the ways that these legends or legends like them contribute to the formation of dissenting worldviews. In actual performative contexts, researchers would be able to devise questions to illuminate these effects and eventually present a theory of how contemporary legend creates, and not just expresses, worldviews.

It is my hope that some researchers in the future will undertake these or similar projects. There is more to be done. The contemporary legend and the impulse to believe and spread them, in spite of the study that has been conducted of the phenomenon,

remains something of a mystery. The human attraction to their creation and distribution is a multi-faceted aspect of our being that bears more examination and reflection than this one study, or perhaps thousands like it, could ever provide.

Copyright © Gerald Dean Abbott Jr. 2013

References

- Barnes, Daniel. (1996). Interpreting Urban Legends. In G, Bennett & P. Smith (Eds) *Contemporary Legend: A Reader* (pp. 1-13). New York: Garland Books.
- Barringer, (2004, March 16). Bitter Division for Sierra Club on Immigration. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/16/us/bitter-division-for-sierra-club-on-immigration.html>
- Bennett, G. & Smith, P. (1996). Introduction. . In G, Bennett & P. Smith (Eds) *Contemporary Legend: A Reader* . New York: Garland Books.
- Bennett, G. (2005). Bodies: Sex, violence, disease and death in contemporary legend. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Best, J. & Horiuchi, G. (1985). The Razor Blade in the Apple: The social construction of urban legends. *Social Problems*. 32, (5). 488-499.
- Blank, Trevor J., (2009). "Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World" All USU Press Publications. Paper 35.
- Brunvand, J. (1986). The study of American folklore. . New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Brunvand, Jan. (2001). Encyclopedia of Urban Legends. ABC-CLIO. Santa Barbara.
- Brunvand, Jan. (2004). The Vanishing Urban Legend. *Midwestern Folklore*. 30, (2). 5-20.
- Degh, Linda. (2001). Legend and Belief: dialectics of a folklore genre. Indiana University Press: Bloomington.
- Donovan, Pamela. (2004). No Way of Knowing: Crime, urban legends, and the internet.

New York: Routledge.

Ellis, Bill. (2001). *Aliens, Ghosts and Cults: legends we live*. University Press of Mississippi: Jackson.

Emery, D. (n.d) What is an Urban Legend? Retrieved on Nov. 1, 2011

<http://urbanlegends.about.com/cs/urbanlegends/f/urbanlegends1.htm>

Emery, D. (n.d.) The Hook. Retrieved on June 24, 2009 from

http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/horrors/a/the_hook.htm

Emery, D. (n.d.) Biscuit Brain. Retrieved on June,24, 2009 from

http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/horrors/a/the_hook.htm on 6/24/2009

Fernback, Jan (2003) Legends on the Net: An examination of computer mediated

communication as a locus of oral culture. *New Media & Society*. 5, (1). 29-45.

Fine, G. A. (1980) The Kentucky Fried Rat: Legends and modern society. *Journal of the*

Folklore Institute. 17 (2/3). 222-243.

Goldstein, Diane. (2004). Once upon a virus: Aids legends and vernacular risk

perception. Utah State: Logan, Utah.

Heath, C., Bell, C. & Sternberg, E. (2001). Emotional selection in memes: The case of

urban legends. *The Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 81,6, 1028-

1041.

Hochman, D. Rumor Detectives: True story or online hoax? *Reader's Digest*. Retrieved

June, 29, 2009 from [http://www.rd.com/your-america-inspiring-people-and-](http://www.rd.com/your-america-inspiring-people-and-stories/rumor-detectives-true-story-or-online-hoax/article122216.html)

[stories/rumor- detectives-true-story-or-online-hoax/article122216.html](http://www.rd.com/your-america-inspiring-people-and-stories/rumor-detectives-true-story-or-online-hoax/article122216.html) on 6/29/

2009.

May, D. M. (2009). The empire strikes back: the mark of the beast in Revelation. Review & Expositor, 106(1), 83-98.

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) Urban Legend. Retrieved Nov. 1, 2011 from <http://www.snopes.com/info/glossary.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Invitation/Torch Virus". Retrieved Feb. 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/computer/virus/invitation.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Here You Have/ Just for You/ Here It Is". Retrieved March 3, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/computer/virus/heryouhave.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Cancer Baby". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/inboxer/medical/cancerbaby.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Celling Your Soul". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/business/cell411.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Chevy Revolt". Retrieved March 8, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/business/chevyvolt.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Boiling Point". Retrieved March 8, 2012 from www.snopes.com/science/microwave/plants.asp

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Thyroid Guards". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/medical/toxins/thyroidguards.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Zicam Warning". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/medical/drugs/zicam/asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Dream Act". Retrieved March 17, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/immigration/dreamact.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Microchip Off the Old Block". Retrieved March 8, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/medical/microchip.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Faith No More". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/religion/faithbased.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Health Insurance Exemptions". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/medical/exemptions.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Stella Awards". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/legal/lawsuits.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Star Search". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/romney/search.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "National Day of Prayer". Retrieved March 8, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/prayerday.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Georgia on My Mind". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/birthers/georgia.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Stolen Security". Retrieved March 8, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/birthers/ssn.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Sticker Shock". Retrieved March 17, 2012 from <http://snopes.com/politics/obama/photos/dont2012.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Birth Certificate." Retrieved March 8, 2012 from <http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/birthers/birthcertificate.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Obnoxious Passengers". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from [http://www.snopes.com/travel/airline/Obnoxious .asp](http://www.snopes.com/travel/airline/Obnoxious.asp)

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "The Knockoff Pullover". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/crime/warnings/fakecop.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “Burundanga”. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/crime/warnings/burundanga.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “Legal Separation”. Retrieved March 17, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/food/prepare/msm.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “Halal Meat”. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://snopes.com/politics/religion/halal.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “Infernal Egguinox”. Retrieved March 8, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/science/equinox.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “The White Albumen”. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/medical/homecure/eggwhite.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “Cut Onion Contamination”. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/food/tainted/cutonions.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “Work from Home Scam”. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/fraud/employment/goole.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “#-9-0 Phone Scam”. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/fraud/telephone/jailcall.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “809 Area Code Scam”. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/fraud/telephone/809.com>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “Jury Rigged”. Retrieved March 8, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/fraud/identity/juryduty.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) “Hanoi’d with Jane”. Retrieved February 1, 2012 from

<http://www.snopes.com/military/fonda.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "I'm Tired". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/soapbox/imtired.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Tim Tebow". Retrieved February 1, 2012 from
<http://www.snopes.com/glurge/timtebow.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "Ed Freeman". Retrieved March 17, 2012 from
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/military/freeman.asp>

Mikkelson, Barbara. (n.d.) "G.I. Joe". Retrieved March 17, 2012 from
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/military/starbucks.asp>

Milar, M.G. & Millar, K.U. (1997) The Effects of Cognitive Capacity and Suspicion on
Truth Bias. *Communication Research*, 24, 556-570.

Whately, M. & Henken, E. (2000). Did You Hear About the Girl Who: Contemporary
legends, folklore, and human sexuality. NYU Press: New York.

G. Dean Abbott, Jr.

Education

Master of Arts in Theology
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts
May 2003
Master of Arts in Speech Communication
Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana
December 2000
Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy and Psychology
Anderson University, Anderson, Indiana
May 1994

Courses Taught

Introduction to Public Speaking
Introduction to Literature
Media and Society
Introduction to Film and Television Arts
Introduction to Video Production
Advanced Video Production and Performance
Video Practicum
Advanced Video Practicum
Media Writing
Mass Media Theory
Interpersonal Communication

Employment History

Assistant Professor of Communication
Mount Vernon Nazarene University, Mount Vernon, Ohio

Visiting Assistant Professor of Media and Communication Studies
Georgetown College, Georgetown, Kentucky
August 2007–August 2010

Owner and Operator
Daisyfield Media, Georgetown, Kentucky

Reporter
Georgetown News-Graphic, Georgetown, Kentucky

Studio Manager
Spotlight Video, Hooksett, New Hampshire

Staff Writer
Foster's Sunday Citizen, Dover, New Hampshire

Adjunct Professor
North Shore Community College, Danvers, Massachusetts

Adjunct Professor
Gordon College, Wenham, Massachusetts

Correspondent
Community Newspaper Company, Danvers, Massachusetts

Reporter
WHBU/WAXT Radio, Anderson, Indiana

Awards and Professional Achievements

World Journalism Institute Fellow, 2003
New Hampshire Press Association Writer of the Year Nominee, 2003
Kentucky Press Association 2nd Place Winner for Best Feature Community Newspaper, 2005
Founding Member and Contributor, The Culture Alliance, 2007
Midwest Scholars Conference, Panelist, March 2009
Contributing Columnist, Small Town Living Magazine, April 2009-Present
New Media Consultant, Small Town Living Magazine, January 2009-Present
Private Student in Documentary Studies, Florentine Films, July 2011
Executive Producer, First Place Winner, Promotional Spot Category iNRB Competition, February 2012.
Faculty Mini-Grant Recipient, April 2012
Producer, Writer, Director, "The Highest Point" Documentary Short April, 2012

Publications

"Games Men Play", feature story on video game addiction, *Charisma Magazine*, May 2008
"Tuneful Truths", interview with Pierce Pettis, *WORLD Magazine*, October 2004
"Messianic Jews and 'The Passion of the Christ'", news feature, *WORLD Magazine*, 2004
Numerous newspaper and online articles