

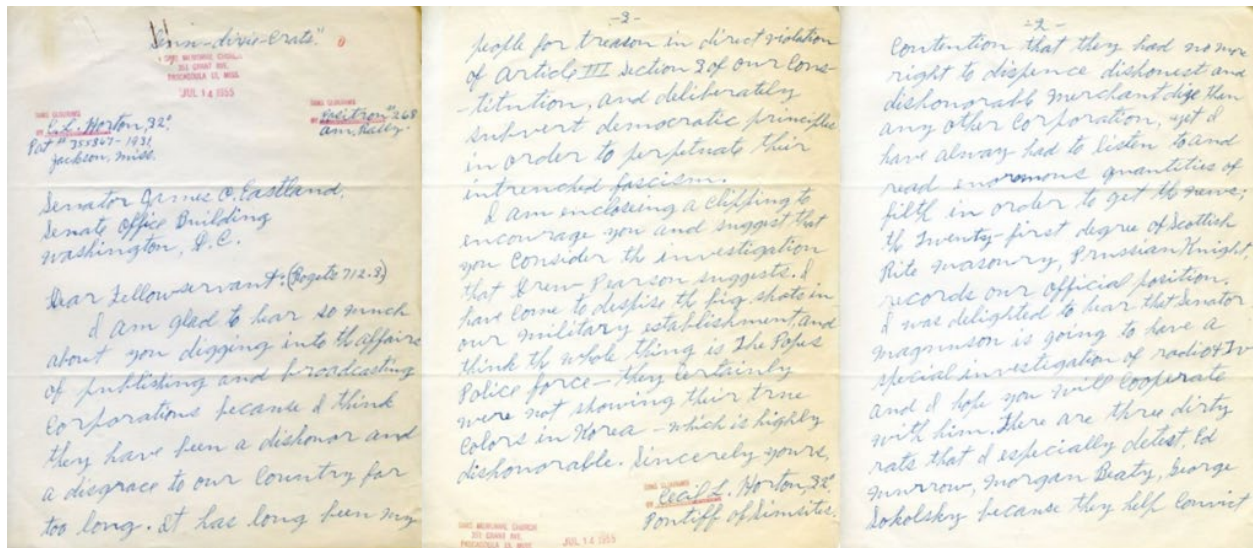
# Select Materials from Archives and Special Collections: Fake News, Not Old News

While fake news has undoubtedly exploded in recent years, the relationship between the public and the media has always been tumultuous when it comes to spreading information.

These materials, from our Department of Archives and Special Collections, represent concerns about media bias and fake news in previous decades.

Contents come from the Jamie L. Whitten Collection and the James O. Eastland Collection.

For more materials like these, visit the [Journalism and Mass Media \(Archives\) research guide](#).



Handwritten letter dated 14 July 1955 from Cecil L. Horton to U.S. Senator James O. Eastland. James O. Eastland Collection (File Series 3, Subseries 1, Box 123, Folder 68). Archives & Special Collections, University of Mississippi.

## Discussion Questions: Accountability and Investigation – War on News

At what point does fake news become the responsibility of the public? Can we trust news outlets to regulate each other?

How has the relationship between the media and the government changed over time?

General

Mr. and Mrs. Prentiss Spurgeon  
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Individual bringing action would probably have to show personal damage. Also, any case which goes to the courts would end up with the Supreme Court, a majority of whom seem to be in sympathy

Mr. and Mrs. Prentiss Spurgeon  
Rt. #4, Box 33A

Gretna, Mississippi that I 38901 continue to do my best in behalf of our District, State and Nation. I wish it were possible to correct many things. Mississippi, of course,

Dear Friends: I am sorry to have been delayed in replying, but I have just been swamped with work and conferences on appropriations measures. Still far short of turning everything.

Your letter has been received, and I am sorry to have been delayed in replying, but I have just been swamped with work and conferences on appropriations measures. Still far short of turning everything.

I can appreciate your feelings with regard to the appointments in connection with investigation of President Kennedy's assassination. However, this was a Presidential designation; and the Congress had nothing to do with it. In any way I can be of help along the line, please let me hear from you.

I, too, have been greatly disturbed at the biased and prejudiced viewpoint of many newspapers and radio and television commentators in connection with the real facts in the South, as well as other matters. Unfortunately, sale of air time, or the magazine, or newspaper, is such a large factor that I feel far too many are putting that ahead of accurate or objective reporting. This is a problem we have had to face here for many years. We all realize that a controlled press, controlled by the government, that is, would be dangerous. But a press which is prejudiced can be equally dangerous; frequently we do not even know by whom it might be controlled, since the owner of record may be far removed from those who actually dominate the news media.

While it is generally accepted that we need freedom of the press, as a lawyer I sometimes think we should do something to make it a "responsible" press, which includes radio and television, of course. This might be done by making it easier to hold them to account. One of the problems here, however, is that any

*Carbon typed letter dated 17 December 1963 from Mr. & Mrs. Prentiss Spurgeon to "Dear Friends." Jamie L. Whitten Collection (Series 35, Folder "Media/Press 1963"). Archives & Special Collections, University of Mississippi.*

### Discussion Questions: Media Bias in the 1960s

Whitten makes several key statements regarding media bias.

How many of these points still hold up today? What has changed about the media and their portrayal of news?

March 30, 1965

Editor  
The Washington Post

Sir:

The Pearson-Anderson column which appeared in your issue of March 29, 1965, contained misstatements and distortions of the facts concerning me and my record of government service. I request that you publish this letter in such a manner as to provide me an equal opportunity to present the truth.

Neither the F.B.I., Justice Department nor Attorney General Katzenbach "blackballed" me with the Judiciary Committee of the House, as suggested by the article. Congressman Celler was the only one involved in this "blackball" operation.

I am not a "private investigator" nor have I ever been.

I am not being paid "out of private funds" - I am paid monthly out of Government funds by U. S. Treasury check through the House Disbursing Office. I have never been on Congressman Feighan's private payroll, or paid out of his private funds.

I was not "the source of the vicious rumor that \*\*\* Oswald had been in the pay of the F. B.I." and the charge that I "blatantly explained" that I picked the rumor up from C.I.A. is equally false. I have never made either statement in public or otherwise. I did learn that a Communist in Texas was circulating such a rumor, and I reported this to the proper authorities. This hardly made me the "source" of the rumor.

The charge that "not a single Judiciary member supported Feighan's demand to put Corso on the public payroll" is false. The truth is that the only vote taken on the recommendation was in Subcommittee #1 of the Judiciary Committee and it was endorsed - without a dissenting vote - by the quorum then present.

The charge that I was recommended as Chief Counsel of the Immigration Subcommittee at \$20,000 a year is false. I was recommended for another position on the Subcommittee staff.

I am a Lieutenant Colonel of the U. S. Army, retired, and I retain that rank in the retired reserves. Over the course of 21 years of military service as troop commander and intelligence officer in two wars, I have received 17 decorations and over 50 written citations including four from Cabinet Members during my tour of duty with the National Security Council. This undoubtedly is offensive to Pearson-Anderson since they continuously attempt to discredit the military.

The last time my character was attacked in a newspaper was on April 30, 1947, by "Unita", the leading communist newspaper in Italy. The same kind of misstatements and distortions that appeared in the Pearson-Anderson column were used against me then. Incidentally, I was then chief of U. S. Intelligence in Rome.

Sincerely,

*Phillip J. Corso*  
Phillip J. Corso  
Lt. Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired

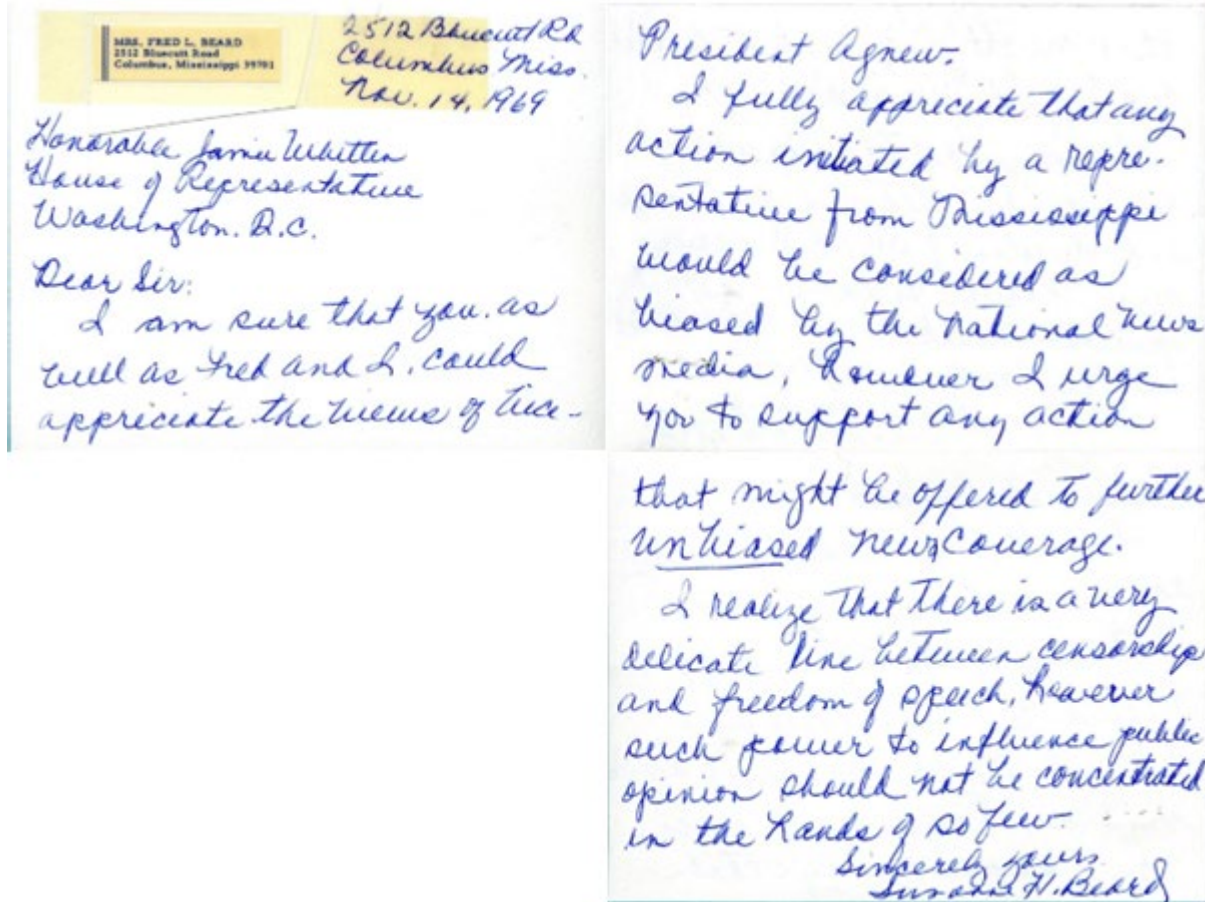
1805 Glenbrook Road  
Fairfax, Virginia

*Typed letter dated 30 March 1965 from Phillip J. Corso to Editor, Washington Post. Jamie L. Whitten Collection (Series 35, Folder "Media/Press 1965"). Archives & Special Collections, University of Mississippi.*

### Discussion Questions: Corrections and Retractions

How has the internet (particularly social media) made the process of tracking and correcting false statements more difficult? Has it made the process easier in any way?

How do prominent public figures address these issues today? Do news sources still publish corrections or retractions?



Handwritten letter dated 14 November 1969 from Mrs. Fred L. Beard. Jamie L. Whitten Collection (Series 35, Folder "Media/Press 1969"). Archives & Special Collections, University of Mississippi.

(See Rep. Whitten's response on the next page.)

#### Discussion Questions: More Sources = Better News?

Does having a greater number of news outlets automatically improve the quality or objectivity of the content?

Do you think there are still a few large corporations controlling most of our news? What or who comes to mind?



Gen. G. Govt. Controls

November 18, 1969

Mrs. Fred L. Beard  
2512 Bluecutt Road  
Columbus, Mississippi 39701

Dear Mrs. Beard:

I am glad to have your letter of November 14th, and I want to assure you that our Mississippi Delegation is doing everything we can in support of the views expressed by Mr. Agnew and yourself.

The situation is deadly serious. As you know, we have clearly shown that the news media is operated on such a basis that you have to make a real search in order to find objective reporting. I am trying to get two or three conferences behind me so that I may press further my measures offered in connection with the hunger investigation, the attacks on our State and area, as well as a number of other things. One of the major problems we have here is being spread so thinly.

I heard Vice President Agnew personally twice, and have followed him other times, and he strikes me as speaking straight from the shoulder. We must find some way while retaining what was intended to be "freedom of speech" to require responsibility for the proper exercise of that freedom; and all of this must be done without getting under the control of government, which itself can and has frequently gotten out of line, in recent years primarily by the Supreme Court but all too often concurred in by the Executive and a majority of the Legislative branch.

Assuring you of my continuing efforts; and with very best wishes, I am

Sincerely,

Jamie L. Whitten, M.C.

JLW/weg

*Carbon typed letter dated 18 November 1969 from U.S. Representative Jamie L. Whitten to Mrs. Fred L. Beard with attached handwritten letter dated 14 November 1969 from Mrs. Fred L. Beard. Jamie L. Whitten Collection (Series 35, Folder "Media/Press 1969"). Archives & Special Collections, University of Mississippi.*

### **Discussion Questions: Needle in a Haystack**

Here, Whitten asserts that citizens have to make a point of searching for objective news, relying on their own efforts and capabilities to find unbiased reporting.

Is that still true today?

What are some factors of our information environment that make it easier or harder to find real news?