Twitter Thread by Jane C. Timm



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1/ Today, @nbcnews published my latest feature on the falsehoods and conspiracy theories that have defined Donald Trump's presidency.

It's the culmination of many years of reporting, so I thought I'd take you on a little trip through fact check history...

2/ But first, please read the story! https://t.co/Tn8XRi7VAG

3/ I started this work as a campaign reporter — watching the now-president come down the escalator at Trump Tower in 2015 — and realizing that this beat would be different, that this candidate was different, and he was frequently not telling the truth.

4/ I chased Trump and other candidates all around the country for 18 months. By the time we reached the fall of the general election, the falsehoods were coming fast and furious

5/ I'd cut my teeth as a young reporter fact checking other reporters' stories at major magazines for $.

And it had been several years since, but I couldn't really shake the instinct to print all the speeches and debates and take my trusty red and black pens to them.

6/ So, backstory: I was taught to fact check by striking through each accurate word (each letter with names) with the black pen, noting primary sources, and flagging and correcting falsehoods with red pens.

Old fashioned, maybe, but it worked.

So, I started printing speeches.

7/ And I launched a blog, fact checking both Trump and Clinton for the final 100 days of the 2016 general election. We called it Tall Tales from The Trail.

(And while this thread is about fact checking Trump, you can Google my stories: I fact check *everybody*)

8/ And away we went blogging! I remember vividly holing up in a hotel on my sister's 30th birthday after everyone had gone to bed, listening to some campaign ad and filing a short dispatch around midnight.

That was just the start.

9/ After Trump's inauguration, it became clear to me that fact checking was going to be important. He was making false claims about everything from his crowd size to tax reform.

The president had access to the best information in the world, but false claims were driving policy.

10/ Conspiracy theories — which could quickly be catapulted into the mainstream by the president — kept coming: Obama bugged Trump Tower, millions of illegal votes cost Trump the 2016 popular vote

11/ I started reporting a lot on voting rights, which is a very good example of false claims can grow legs. Voter fraud is quite rare in the US, yet the fear of it has driven restrictive voting laws for decades. Many of those laws have the real effect of making it harder to vote.

12/ By 2018, fact checking was becoming my full-blown beat, with fundamental questions like this one that needed reporting https://t.co/szOtRwq2Am

13/ I started investigating some of the central claims of Trump's politics. Like the idea that undocumented immigrants are ripping off America.

https://t.co/fOLRvbXGim

14/ (People still find that story on Google two years later, because people do want to see the receipts.)

15/ For years, Trump falsely claimed he was building a brand new border wall when he was really replacing older sections of wall (the kind of thing Obama had done too). In 2019, he finally started building new sections of border wall. Due was given! https://t.co/Eds3Dc0lIX

16/ Mexico did not ever pay for the border wall, though.

17/ Trump constantly misled about his trade war, so I constantly called smart economists to ask questions about trade and tariffs. Crash course in international trade? Yup, that's my job. https://t.co/KVAIf4B2Is

18/ In 2019, Trump seized on a really big conspiracy theory: that Ukraine had framed Russia for the meddling. There's absolutely no evidence of this.

His own Russia expert, Fiona Hill, said it was a "politically driven" falsehood that played into Russian interests.

19/ "I refuse to be part of an effort to legitimize an alternate narrative that the Ukrainian government is a U.S. adversary, and that Ukraine — not Russia —attacked us in 2016," Hill said.

20/ Sometimes the fact checks weren't so big and impeachment-triggering.

Windmills cause cancer. (They don't.)

Americans are flushing their toilets 10, 15 times. (DM me if you're doing this, I have questions)

The moon is a part of Mars. (Def not.)

https://t.co/SMdQH5pHOd

> For all of the money we are spending, NASA should NOT be talking about going to the Moon - We did that 50 years ago. They should be focused on the much bigger things we are doing, including Mars (of which the Moon is a part), Defense and Science!
>
> — Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) June 7, 2019

21/ Then the pandemic hit, and fact checking started consuming my every waking hour.

(This is a good time to say follow my editor, the other half of this operation: @etjohnstone!)

22/ “It’s going to disappear. One day — it’s like a miracle — it will disappear. And from our shores, we — you know, it could get worse before it gets better. It could maybe go away. We’ll see what happens. Nobody really knows,” Trump said Feb 28, when there were no known deaths.

23/ “We’re doing a great job with it. And it will go away. Just stay calm. It will go away,” Trump said on March 10, when there were just over a thousand known infections and 30 deaths.

24/ He likened it to the flu (it is much more severe), he said he inherited empty national stockpiles (he didn't), he said things were getting better when they weren't, he said testing was to blame for rising numbers.

25/ He said hydroxychloroquine might work (unproven at the time, it's since been disproven) and that it might be a prophylactic; he said he was taking the drug, too.

A run on the drug made it hard for people with rheumatic diseases like Lupus to fill their prescriptions.

26/ He said bleach injections might work (hard no), and he questioned the efficacy of masks (masks work.)

27/ And of course, while this work drove the indefatigable @lizjohnstone and I prematurely gray, don't forget it was also an election year!

We fact checked many debates these last two years. I spent basically every weekend before each fact checking everything that might be said.

28/ We wrote briefing books longer than novels to prepare, we did not sleep very much. A bajillion thanks are due to the beat reporters I tapped with wonky fact checks in the days before.

29/ I wrote for months about mail voting, while Trump claimed it was vulnerable to fraud and foreign interference (there are numerous safeguards to prevent this kind of thing.)

30/ But when Election Day stretched into a week, and Trump claimed victory while ballots were still being counted, we were there and ready.

Time stamp 4:39 am: https://t.co/2mBFyEDLqQ

31/ My husband woke up the next day before I went to bed that night. I have never been so tired.

32/ Today's feature has dozens and dozens of links, to so many more stories than I've mentioned here. I hope you'll read it.

(reposting last three tweets to fix the thread break)

33/ We won't know for awhile what the longterm effects of the president's mendacity will be — on the country and on the presidency as an institution — though
@BeschlossDC offered some wise thoughts in the story https://t.co/Tn8XRi7VAG

34/ But, I can tell you: no matter where we go from here, I'll be there with my black and red pens.

See you all in 2021. ✒■■■