

The Hoax and the President: Historical Perspectives on Politics, Truth, and Academia

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Presenters:

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ABSTRACT

McQueen recounts the sensational “Great Moon Hoax” of 1835, reported in six daily installments in *The Sun* in which Sir John Herschel, renowned British astronomer, discovered life on the moon—life so strange and marvelous that it almost defied belief (Copeland, 2007). The story caused a sensation around the country, and around the world. Within a few decades, “sensationalism” became known as a style of journalism meant to excite and entice the public with misleading headlines, faked pictures, faked interviews, and faked stories (Mott, 1950). Elements of the Moon Hoax remain in our current news landscape. This sociocultural history traces instances of fake news throughout history, examines commonalities, delineates major themes, and explores what the long history of fake news has to teach us today, ultimately asking how studying the history of fake news might assist today’s librarians.

Peterson discusses the changing practices of librarianship in early research institutions in the United States and the role that libraries played in important political decisions of the early 20th century. A new model of inquiry and also library collection development arose in the last decades of the nineteenth century with the establishment of Johns Hopkins University, followed by the Ivy Leagues. Their influential students included Woodrow Wilson, twenty-eighth president of the United States whose administration included politicians, bankers, and academics whom he met as a history professor and then president of Princeton University. Peterson will discuss how library practices in these early research institutions supported, but also limited, Wilson’s most influential ideals and accomplishments, such as the Paris Peace Conference and the League of Nations.

REFERENCES:

- Copeland, D. (2007). “A Series of Unfortunate Events: why people believed Richard Adams Locke’s ‘Moon Hoax,’” *Journalism History* 33(3): 147.
- Mott, F.L. (1950). *American Journalism: a history of newspapers in the United States through 260 years, 1690 to 1950*. New York: Macmillan Company.