

FAQ: Can this be true?

I can't think of a question that I'm being asked very frequently lately, so let me go back to about 2009-2012, when my mother and sometimes my mother was forwarding me emails of anonymous origin forwarded by some friend, and asking "Can this be true?" They were in their late 70s at the time, and had retired to a gated community in South Carolina where they admitted they were sometimes shocked by the overt racism of some of their friends and neighbors.

One of the emails was called "Dinner with Obama, a parable", about a businessman being asked to lunch by Barack Obama. As he tries to eat, food is snatched from his plate to feed other people, and finally we get:

"By the way," He added, "I have just signed an Executive Order nationalizing your factories. I'm firing you as head of your business. I'll be operating the firm now for the benefit of all mankind..."

I also would receive, from someone very close to me pieces less well known right wing blogs pieces that said Obama just got an \$85M stock market windfall due to knowing about the BP oil disaster before it happened.

Typically it would take 15 minutes internet research to debunk these items. Sometimes they claimed as evidence and linked to opaque documents that weren't what they were said to be but which at a quick glance looked somewhat like what they were supposed to be.

There were emails and/or web links to supposedly current news clips, e.g. of sharp debate in congress over an outrageous immigration bill that Obama was promoting, but the footage turned out to be from 2007, and the bill was being pushed by George W. Bush.

One email was called "To My Thinking Friends", from Lee Iacocca, briefly famous in the 90s for "saving" Chrysler Motors in the 90s. It contained scathing observations of the "newly elected president". The writings were in fact excerpts from Iacocca's book, *Where Have All the Leaders Gone*, written in 2007 (it must have been a good year), all genuine except for the phrase "newly elected president" which was added. It contained some stemwinders like

"Where the hell is our outrage? We should be screaming bloody murder! We've got a gang of clueless bozos steering our ship of state right over a cliff, ...

But it purposely omitted

“**Bush** has shown a willingness to take bold action on the world stage ..., but he shows little regard for the grievous consequences. He has sent our troops (not to mention hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi citizens) to their deaths -- for what? ... To show his daddy he's tougher?”

Whoever wrote this was walking a fine line, apparently believing that if anyone caught onto the fakery, it wouldn't matter. And they were right.

There were also plenty of pieces of “evidence” that Obama was a Muslim, because he wore his wedding ring on his right hand (photoshopped), or didn't wear his watch on a certain day, and this was explained as due to some arcanery of Muslim society. An [article by Chris Hayes in *The Nation*](#), showed awareness already in October 2007 of the power of anonymous lies. He pointed out an email with a brief “bio” of Obama including:

“Obama takes great care to conceal the fact that he is a Muslim.... Lolo Soetoro, the second husband of Obama's mother...introduced his stepson to Islam. Osama was enrolled in a Wahabi school in Jakarta. Wahabism is the radical teaching that is followed by the Muslim terrorists who are now waging Jihad against the western world.”

“Let us all remain alert concerning Obama's expected presidential candidacy.”

August (2007) “CBS poll found that when voters were asked to give Obama's religion, as many said Muslim as correctly answered Protestant.”

The Nation, however, is little read, and left-wing, and no mainstream media, as far as I could tell, ever paid attention to the phenomenon. In fact, I spent a week or more trying to get NPR's “On the Media” interested in it, but the gatekeeper there claimed they had already dealt with that sort of thing, but the conflated it with something quite different, which included Christopher Hitchens' claim that Sarah Palin was lying and claiming her daughter's baby was hers, to protect the (supposedly promiscuous) daughter.

In the past few years I've read dozens of books related to the history of the right in America, and they are massive, forward looking, and well integrated through a number of yearly or more than yearly conferences. And there is quite a bit of evidence that in the view of their leaders, we are in an emergency that justifies dirty politics, and anyway, the left is worse, they claim.

Various liberal cliques have their own problems, and can be afraid of certain sorts of facts, such as those they believe could point in the direction of eugenics or racism. Other socially liberal academic cliques are completely shameless, as related in the book *Galileo's Middle Finger*. Lenin's followers had no use for “bourgeois” concerns about the truth.

I don't believe the academic left followed his lead, whereas Steve Bannon did speak admiringly of Lenin's tactics. As the Chris Hayes article notes "Snopes lists about fifty e-mails about George W. Bush, split evenly between adulatory accounts of him saluting wounded soldiers or witnessing to a wayward teenager, and accounts of real and invented malapropisms. In contrast, every single one of the twenty-two e-mails about John Kerry is negative."

The discernment of truth and the cultivation of a society in which it flourishes should not be partisan. If one ideology gets sloppy with the truth, my hope is that we can all some day understand its high cost for all of us.