

President Trump Meets George Orwell

If you're looking for a handy rule-of-thumb to make sense of the nascent presidency of Donald J. Trump, try this: If his lips are moving there's at least a 50-50 chance that what's tumbling out isn't true.

Harsh? You decide.

One month after he won he told Chris Wallace on Fox that, "We had a massive landslide victory, as you know, in the Electoral College." Fact: Trump's victory ranks a paltry 46th out of 58 Electoral College results.

After his inauguration, he said it looked like a million to a million and a half people were on hand to witness the event in person. Fact: Independent estimates say the crowd was much smaller, perhaps only 250,000.

The other night he told congressional leaders at the White House that 3 million to 5 million "illegals" voted in the presidential election. Fact: He made it up. There's no evidence to support his claim. None. Did some illegal immigrants vote? Probably. Good chance some dead people voted too. But he concocted the 3 to 5 million number in an effort to explain why he didn't win the popular vote against Hillary Clinton.

But if millions of illegal immigrants really did vote, wouldn't that require an investigation by the new president? Yes, it would. And so President Trump announced he would launch a "major investigation."

Prediction: That too will prove to be a false statement (and so will his promise to release his tax returns as soon as the audit is completed.)

But while Donald Trump is often wrong, he isn't necessarily lying. That implies knowledge that he knows what he's saying is wrong; that he's intentionally trying to mislead the American people. As I've argued before, there may be another explanation for his many misstatements: Donald Trump – now President Donald Trump – may simply be delusional.

Take his first full day in office when he visited the Central Intelligence Agency. "I have a running war with the media," he told several hundred members of the intelligence agency. "They are among the most dishonest human beings on earth, and they sort of made it sound like I had a feud with the intelligence community."

"The reason you're the No. 1 stop is, it is exactly the opposite," President Trump added. "I love you, I respect you, there's nobody I respect more."

Fact: He said nothing about how he belittled the CIA and other intelligence agencies saying they were, "The same people that said Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction."

He said nothing about how he accused the intelligence community of leaking an unsubstantiated report that Russia had damaging personal information about him, saying the leak was an attempt to take "one last shot at me" and then comparing the intelligence community to Nazi Germany.

He said nothing about how for months he refused to believe the intelligence community's determination that Russia had meddled in the presidential election. Or how, in a tweet, he put quotation marks around the word "intelligence" to further mock the community.

Yet he blames the media for starting the feud. This is revisionist history at best, and the aforementioned delusions of Donald J. Trump at worst.

None of this will matter, of course, to his most loyal

supporters; such is the admiration they hold for their hero, the new president.

But maybe Donald Trump isn't actually wrong when he makes statements that are factually incorrect. Maybe those false statements are just "alternate facts," to use a memorable phrase his advisor Kellyanne Conway came up with to defend administration statements that were untrue.

By the way, sales of George Orwell's dark classic, *1984*, soared after Ms. Conway's "alternate facts" observation. Mr. Orwell knew something about alternate facts and something he called "doublethink" – the art of government officials putting out two contradictory statements and calling both of them true.

And we've got at least four years to go.