

Governing in Crisis Teaching Guide

David Shribman, Executive Editor Emeritus of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette
Yes, the Truth Still Matters

Interview Summary

As we move through a highly contentious campaign season, David Shribman, the Executive Editor Emeritus of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, examines democracy's need for truthfulness from elected officials and accuracy from the media. Drawing upon his decades of work as a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist, as well as his extensive experience as an editor, Mr. Shribman reflects on the responsible practices that promote integrity in journalism. As one who has covered both Presidents and presidential campaigns, he also discusses the historical relationship between the press and the President and draws distinctions between various forms of "untruth" that have come from Presidents over time.

Video Topics

- (0:00) Introduction
- (5:01) The importance of truth in governance and reporting
- (20:41) Exploration of current examples of untruthfulness and their consequences
- (45:15) Gov. Thornburgh's lessons in credibility and public stewardship from the Three Mile Island crisis
- (54:40) Conclusion

Potential Uses:

- Post a governance series video on Canvas and ask students to respond to a discussion question about the video, as well as comment on 1-2 of their classmates' posts.
- Show a clip of the video during class to enrich learning, emphasize a point, and/or contextualize a topic.
- Create a resource folder on Canvas that includes governance series videos, accompanied by "learn and do more" documents, as well as other links to support student growth related to current events.
- Incorporate a governance series video into pre-class readings for a live discussion using or adapting the questions below.

Suggested Written Reflection Questions

- According to David Shribman, what is the difference between spin and a lie? When is spin justifiable?
- David Shribman states that in October 1962, President Kennedy told a forgivable lie to protect

the country from needless alarm. Do you believe that this was a forgivable lie? If so, please find an example of what you would consider an unforgivable lie to compare it to. If not, please find an example of what you would consider a forgivable lie to compare it to.

- Gov. Dick Thornburgh's experience of Three Mile Island provided several lessons useful not only in managing unforeseen crises, but some of the normal problems of governing as well. Among these lessons was the need to "[s]earch for and evaluate the facts and their sources again and again, and communicate those facts truthfully and carefully to the people, remembering that credibility can be as fragile as it is crucial under the heat of a genuine public emergency." How do leaders establish credibility? What are the consequences when leaders are not able to be credible?
- What did you find interesting in the interview? What is something that you disagreed with?

Suggested Classroom Discussion Questions

- Why is the truth important? Are there instances where the truth is more harmful than it is helpful? Should political leaders be permitted to tell lies when it is the public's best interest?
- What is the relationship between intent and impact? Should political leaders and media sources be held accountable for unintentional fake news?

Related Reading

- Read more about *A Hierarchy of American Presidential Lies* in our country's history.
- Look into *RAND's Truth Decay Initiative* to identify factors and drivers of misinformation
- View the Pew Research Center's *Americans See Skepticism of News Media as Healthy, Say Public Trust in the Institution Can Improve* to explore the public's lack of confidence in the media to act in their best interest and their desire for a closer personal connection with news sources.
- See how Europe is *Combating disinformation and foreign interference in democracies*.
- Watch Duke University's virtual event *Navigating Fake News: How Americans Should Deal with Misinformation Online*.
- Visit *How Digital Disinformation Sows Hate, Hurts Democracy: QuickTake* for information on disinformation, how it harms society, who creates it, and what tech companies and governments are doing to combat it.

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