



11-2018

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Recommended Citation

Carson, Thomas. Lying and History. *The Oxford Handbook of Lying*, , : 541-552, 2018. Retrieved from Loyola eCommons, Philosophy: Faculty Publications and Other Works, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198736578.001.0001>

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Lying and History

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I begin by discussing views about the permissibility of lying by political leaders. Sections II and III address historically important lies and lies about history and the historical record. These two categories overlap - some lies about the historical record were historically important events. In section IV, I discuss the related notion of half-truths and give examples of misleading/deceptive half-truths about history. In the final section of this chapter, I briefly discuss the obligations of historians to give truthful accounts of historical events.

I. Views about the Permissibility of Lying by Leaders

In *The Republic*, Plato famously says that in an ideal society the guardians/leaders of a state will frequently need to make use “of falsehood and deception for the benefit of those they rule” (459c). He justifies leaders telling “useful falsehoods” and calls them “noble lies” (414 b-c). Plato was a bitter opponent of democracy. He thought that the great majority of people were much too ignorant, intemperate, and irrational for democracy to be a good form of government (see *Republic*, 560e-562 and 435a). Plato holds that states should be ruled by wise intelligent philosopher kings who will sometimes need to deceive the

common people for their own good. He thinks that the wise, knowledgeable, and virtuous should rule the foolish, ignorant, and intemperate.¹

Another defender of the frequent use of lying by leaders is Averroes who writes the following in his commentary on Plato's *Republic*:

The chiefs' lying to the multitude will be appropriate for them in respect in which a drug is appropriate for a disease.... That is true because untrue stories are necessary for the teaching of the citizens... this is something necessary for the multitude to reach their happiness (quoted in Melzer, 122; for references to other defenders of political lying, see Melzer, 122-123).

Melzer says that, because almost all societies have their origins in conquest and the displacement of other peoples, this "harsh reality... must be covered over by a myth of just origins... it is the Promised Land given to us by God, or we are owed it by Manifest Destiny" (Melzer, 193).²

Lies told by leaders to the public about important matters relevant to public policy are contrary to the ideals of democratic societies. Democracies are unlikely to accurately express the will of the people unless the people have information

¹ On Plato's views see Lane and Schofield.

² Comment: such myths might be necessary for national pride, but they have the potential to aggravate conflicts with other peoples.

adequate for them to vote in ways that further the goals and policies that they support. In democracies, lies told by leaders to members of their own societies are great betrayals of trust that subvert the will of the people. Given that democracy or government by the people is a worthy ideal to which societies should aspire, there is a very strong moral presumption against lying and deception by the leaders of democratic societies.³ Deceiving other countries or the leaders of other countries is rarely a comparable breach of trust or harm to democratic ideals, but lies told to other countries often deceive one's own people as well (Mearsheimer, 21). Lies told by the leaders of non-democratic societies are also often morally wrong; they are often used to manipulate people into supporting immoral policies that are contrary to their best interests.

But leaders can be justified in lying to their own people to protect vital state and military secrets. Mearsheimer gives several examples:

During WW I, Britain secretly developed the tank to help break the stalemate on the Western front. To help conceal that weapon from the Germans... British leaders told a series of lies... they said it was a water tank designed to transport water to the front lines.... this is how the tank got its name (Mearsheimer, 33).

³ Cf. Lynch, Chapter 10, Mearsheimer, 55, 64, 69-70, and Carson (2010), 209. Bok, 175 discusses the indirect bad consequences of lying by politicians.

In 1980 President Carter's press secretary was asked whether the US was planning a military operation to free the American hostages held in Iran. He lied and said that this was not true to avoid tipping off the Iranian government about US plans to try to free the hostages (Mearsheimer, 35). In principle, such lies can be morally justified (assuming that the actions and policies that they protect are morally permissible). And surely lying could be morally permissible if it were necessary to prevent a nuclear war or some other very great catastrophe (see Mearsheimer, 31).⁴ If we grant that nations are sometimes morally justified in fighting wars that kill large numbers of people in order to protect the lives of their citizens, it seems very implausible to say that lying and deception can never be justified for the purpose of saving lives (Cf. Sidgwick, 315 and Carson (2010), 85-86).

II. Historically Important Lies (Told by Leaders)

Sometimes leaders lie and deceive the public in order to gain support for wars when they believe that the public is unwilling to give adequate support for the wars unless it is deceived. During 1940-1941, President Franklin Roosevelt lied to the American public in order to try to get the US involved in a war with Germany. During the 1940 presidential campaign and on many other occasions,

⁴ But for a dissenting view see Griffiths, 229-230.

he assured the public that their sons would not be sent off to fight in “foreign wars.” Just before the election on November 2, 1940, Roosevelt declared “Your president says your country is not going to war” (Dallek, 250). Later he privately expressed very different intentions. During mid-1941, his Cabinet was debating whether Roosevelt should ask Congress to declare war on Germany. Roosevelt rejected this idea.

Instead, he “said that he would wage war, but not declare it, and that he would become more and more provocative.... Everything was to be done to force an ‘incident’ which would justify him in opening the hostilities” (Dallek, 285).

Winston Churchill reports that Roosevelt said almost exactly the same thing to him during their meeting in August 1941. According to Churchill,

The President... said he would wage war but not declare it... and that he would become more and more provocative. If the Germans did not like it, they could attack American forces.... Everything was to be done to force an ‘incident’ that could lead to war (LaFeber, 381-382).

On September 4, 1941, the US Navy ship the *Greer* followed a German submarine for three hours and signaled its location to the British Navy. A British

airplane dropped depth charges on the submarine. After this, the German submarine turned and fired a torpedo at the *Greer* (Mearsheimer, 46). A week later, Roosevelt gave a radio address to the American people. According to Mearsheimer, Roosevelt told three lies about the *Greer* incident during his radio address. First, he said that the German submarine “fired first” on the *Greer* and implied that the attack on the *Greer* was unprovoked. But he omitted to mention that the *Greer* was tracking the German submarine together with the British Navy and that the submarine had been attacked by a British airplane before it fired on the *Greer* (Mearsheimer 46-47). Second, he claimed that the crew of the German submarine knew that the *Greer* was an American ship. “In fact, Navy officials had told Roosevelt two days earlier that there was ‘no positive evidence that [the] submarine knew [the] nationality of [the] ship at which it was firing’” (Mearsheimer, 47). Finally, Roosevelt lied when he said “we have sought no shooting war with Hitler and we do not seek it now.” Mearsheimer cites Roosevelt’s statement to Churchill, quoted above, that he was trying to force an incident which could lead to war (Mearsheimer, 47; also see Carson (2010), 211). Roosevelt’s almost identical statement to his cabinet quoted above is also very strong evidence that he lied when he said that he did not want a war with Germany.

Robert Dallek claims that Roosevelt's lying and deception were justified:

In light of the national unwillingness to face up fully to the international dangers facing the country, it is difficult to fault Roosevelt for building a consensus by devious means. Had he directly presented his view to the public of what it must do... it would have won him few converts and undermined his popularity and ability to lead by confronting ambivalent Americans with choices they did not want to make. Further, if he advised the public of the fact that the U-boat had fired in defense and that Hitler did not then seem intent on attacking America's Atlantic traffic, as Churchill had reported, he would have risked having to wait for the collapse of Russia and Britain's near demise before gaining broad national support for a call to arms... that would have been a failure of his responsibility as Commander in Chief (Dalleck, 289; also see, 530).

It is widely believed that George W. Bush, Richard Cheney, and other members of the Bush administration lied to and deceived the American public in order to gain support for the 2003 Iraq War. The charges against the Bush Administration include the following:

1. On the basis of very little evidence, members of the administration falsely

claimed that there were close ties between Iraq and al Qaeda. Among other things, they said that there was “bulletproof” evidence that Saddam was closely allied with Osama bin Laden,” (Mearsheimer, 50).⁵

2. The Bush administration made numerous false claims to the effect that it was *certain* that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction. In August 2002 Cheney said “there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction. There is no doubt that he is amassing them to use against our friends, against our allies, and against us” (Mearsheimer, 51). On February 5, 2003 Secretary of State Powell told the UN “There can be no doubt that Saddam Hussein has biological weapons and the capability to produce many many more” (Mearsheimer, 51). On September 20, 2002, Cheney claimed that there was “irrefutable evidence” that Saddam Hussein was trying to build a nuclear bomb (Carson (2010), 212).

⁵ Mearsheimer clearly shows that the Bush administration deceived the public by encouraging the false belief that Iraq was involved in the 9-11 attacks on the US. “The Bush administration made numerous statements before the war that were designed to imply that Saddam was in part responsible for the attacks on September 11... The aim... was to lead the American public to draw a false conclusion. It is no accident that when the war began in mid-March 2003, about half of the American people believed that the Iraqi dictator had helped bring down the World Trade Center” (Mearsheimer, 52). Mearsheimer’s evidence is as follows. In his letter to Congress on March 18, 2003, just before he started the 2003 Iraq War, Bush stated that it was necessary to take action against nations... “who planned authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001” (Mearsheimer, 53). In September 2003, Cheney said that if the US prevails in Iraq “we will have struck a major blow right at the heart of the base, if you will, the geographic base of the terrorists who have had us under assault for many years, but most especially on 9/11” (Mearsheimer, 53-54).

3. In early 2003, Bush and Rumsfeld falsely claimed that they were seeking peace and that it might still be possible to avoid a war when, in fact, Bush had already decided to go to war (Mearsheimer, 55; also see Carson (2010), 218).⁶

For additional evidence and details supporting these three charges see Rich, Carson (2010), Mearsheimer, and Korn. Carson and Mearsheimer stress that claims to the effect that it was *certain* that Iraq possessed or was actively seeking to acquire nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction were lies. In fact, the evidence was mixed and members of the administration knew of many reasons to question the factual claims that they made with such confidence (see Mearsheimer, 50-52, Carson (2010), 216-217, Rich, 187, 190, 216-217, 246-247, 249-254, 256-257, and 264, and Roberts). To take just one example, while it might not have been a lie for Cheney to say that Iraq was actively seeking to acquire nuclear weapons (he might have believed this), his repeated claim that this

⁶ Herring and Robinson claim that the British government deceived the British public in much the same way. They contend that, contrary to what it said publicly, the British government had no intention of avoiding war when it took complaints about Iraq's WMD (weapons of mass destruction) to the UN in early 2003. A leaked British Cabinet office briefing from July 2002 titled *Iraq: Conditions for Military Action* said the following:

It is just possible that an ultimatum could be cast in terms which Saddam would reject (because he is unwilling to accept unfettered access) and which would not be regarded as unreasonable by the international community, but failing that (or an Iraqi attack) we would be most unlikely to have a legal basis for military action by January 2003 (Herring and Robinson (2014), 224).

Herring and Robinson tartly observe “This framing is not what one would expect from a sincere effort at disarming Iraq peacefully through the UN” (224).

was certain was a lie. He was aware of reasons to question these claims and his evidence for them. Further, many people in the intelligence community reported being pressured by Cheney and other members of the Bush Administration to give reports favorable to the case for war (Korn, 213-214).⁷

Carson also argues that members of the Bush administration were guilty of deception by failing to correct false claims (including claims in Bush's 2003 State of the Union Address) that they later had reason to think were false (Carson (2010), 216-217). Most people frequently make statements that they later discover to be false. This doesn't necessarily involve either lying or deception if one believes what one says when one says it. However, if one later discovers that what one said is false, failing to correct one's earlier mistakes sometimes

⁷ According to Herring and Robinson (2014-2015), the British government of Tony Blair was involved in a similar kind of deception in its manipulation of intelligence reports about Iraq's WMD to gain support for its participation in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The British government thought that the only legal basis for initiating a war with Iraq was Iraq's alleged development of WMD in defiance of the UN (Herring and Robinson (2014) 223, and (2014-2015), 564). For this reason it thought that intelligence reports needed to make a case for saying that Iraq was actively developing WMD (Herring and Robinson (2014-2015), 559). But Herring and Robinson give careful and detailed evidence that the key intelligence document, Dossier X, which was made public in September 2002 and used to justify the war to the British public, was deliberately modified to deceive the public and provide a justification for attacking Iraq. Here is one particularly striking example. An earlier draft of the document listed Iran, Lybia, North Korea, and Iraq as WMD threats. On March 11, 2002, British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw said "the paper has to show why there is exceptional threat from Iraq. It does not quite do this yet." Four days later a minute from John Scarlett (Chair of the Joint Intelligence Committee) suggested that the document omit mention of the other countries saying that "This would have the benefit of obscuring the fact that in terms of WMD, Iraq is not that exceptional" (Herring and Robinson (2014-15), 561-562).

constitutes deception. Suppose that I make an honest mistake and tell you something that I later discover to be false. Further, I know that you now accept and rely on what I told you earlier. If I realize my mistake and clearly have the opportunity to correct it, then by failing to correct it, I am intentionally causing you to persist in believing something that is false. This is especially clear in cases in which I state something important *on the record* and ask others to rely on it for making very important decisions about matters of life or death. These conditions are clearly satisfied in the case of some of the false claims that the Bush administration used to generate support for the 2003 Iraq War (Carson (2010), 216-217).

Bush's memoirs very briefly address the charge that he lied as a pretext for the 2003 invasion of Iraq. He admits that after the war "the WMD stockpiles everyone expected were not found" (Bush, 292). He continues:

The left trotted out a new mantra: "Bush Lied, People Died." The charge was illogical. If I wanted to mislead the country into war, why would I pick an allegation that was certain to be disproven publicly shortly after we invaded that country? The charge was dishonest. Members of the previous administration, John Kerry, John Edwards, and the vast majority of Congress had all read the same

intelligence that I had and concluded that Iraq had WMD. So had intelligence agencies all around the world (Bush, 262).

Bush did *not* lie when he said that Iraq had WMD (as he used this term). He and many others believed that Iraq still possessed some of the chemical weapons that it had used earlier against Iran and the Kurds. But *he and his administration lied and deceived the public about many other things*, e.g., that it was *certain* that Iraq was actively seeking to acquire nuclear weapons and that Iraq helped to bring about the September 11 attacks on the US. So, his memoirs give a plausible answer to the charge that he lied when he said that Iraq had WMD but he completely (and misleadingly) ignores numerous other charges of lying and deception and gives no reason whatever for thinking they are ill-founded or dishonest.

I choose these two examples of lying as a pretext for war because of their historical importance. There are many cases of lying by leaders for other reasons. Leaders often lie to gain support for other policies they support. Sometimes leaders lie to deny blame for their own failed or immoral policies. In 1960, President Eisenhower and other members of his administration lied when they said that the U-2 spy plane shot down over the Soviet Union was a weather reconnaissance plane that had flown off course. They said this thinking that the

pilot of the plane had been killed. Their lies were exposed when the pilot was put on trial in the Soviet Union. In response to harsh international criticism of the Israeli's Army's massacre of more than 60 civilians (mostly women and children) in the West Bank village of Qibya in October 1953, Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion lied and blamed the massacre on vigilante Jewish civilians who lived near Qibya (Morris (1997), 257-259).⁸ At the time of this writing (Fall 2015), some Palestinian leaders are inciting people to violence against Israeli Jews by propounding the lie that the Israeli government is planning to tear down the Dome of the Rock Mosque in Jerusalem (one of the holiest sites in Islam). This has led to the murder of many Israeli civilians in a series of knife attacks.

III. Lying and Deception About the Historical Record

In 1939 Hitler lied and claimed that Poland had attacked Germany as a pretext for Germany's invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. He went beyond lying about it and ordered the SS to fabricate phony evidence of a Polish attack on Germany and a German radio station in Gleiwitz near the Polish border.

⁸ This attack was a reprisal for a series of attacks from Jordan between May and October 1953 which resulted in the death of six Israelis (Morris (1997), 244). The attack on Qibya was led by Ariel Sharon (later Prime Minister of Israel) and approved by the Israeli government. The Israeli military units in question were ordered "to attack and temporarily occupy the village, carry out the destruction and maximum killing, in order to drive out the inhabitants of the village from their homes" (Morris (1997), 245).

Concentration camp inmates dressed in Polish Army uniforms were murdered and left as “casualties” of the alleged attack. A Polish speaking German gave a brief anti-German speech on the radio in Polish to give credibility to the story. This fabrication was designed to deceive the German people into thinking that Germany had justification for its war with Poland. It was claimed that Poland had earlier rejected the Fuehrer’s “generous peace offer” (Shirer, 518-520 and 594-595).

Lying about history often poisons relations between peoples and nations and can generate and aggravate hatreds and conflicts.

Lying and deception by German leaders during and after WW I helped to create the *Dolchstosslegende* - the myth that the German military was defeated by traitors on the home front who “stabbed their country in the back.” This myth denies the plain facts of history. Germany was defeated because it was overwhelmed by a large coalition of enemies whose population and economic power greatly exceeded its own. The widespread acceptance of the myth of the stab in the back by the German people was one of the principal causes of the rise of Nazism and the Holocaust; indeed Hitler’s fervent belief in the myth (and his belief that Jews were largely responsible for the stab in the back) were arguably the principal causes of his murderous anti-Semitism. By Hitler’s own account, his acceptance of the *Dolchstoss* story was a decisive event in his life that caused him

to passionately hate Jews and Marxists (Carson (2010), 238-240).

Lying by German leaders whose press reports flatly denied the disastrous military defeats suffered by Germany in August 1918⁹ made Hitler and many other Germans completely unprepared for the news of Germany's defeat in November 1918, just four months after the seemingly victorious German army was advancing on Paris after having defeated Russia. Learning the news of Germany's defeat while convalescing in a military hospital was a shattering and life-altering experience for Hitler - he describes this experience vividly in *Mein Kampf* (see Carson (2010), 238 and Hitler, 204-206).

In addition, evasive and deceptive testimony by the greatly loved and revered war leader Field Marshal von Hindenburg to the Reichstag Commission of Inquiry on the causes of Germany's defeat lent support to his claim that Germany was not defeated on the battlefield but rather defeated by traitors on the home front. In the eyes of public opinion, he successfully shifted blame from himself and other leaders of the wartime government and military to leftists on the home front. Hindenburg refused to answer questions about the German government's disastrous decision to begin unrestricted submarine warfare in 1917 which caused

⁹ As early as August 10, 1918, the German high command realized that these defeats meant that Germany no longer had any hope of winning the war and communicated this to the Kaiser (Carson (2010), 233-234).

the United States to enter the war - a decision that Hindenburg supported and helped to make (Carson (2010), 233-237 and von Goltz, 67-68).

Sometimes people lie about history to defend the honor of their countries and paint an inspiring view of its history. Two clear examples of this are Turkey's denial of its genocide against the Armenians in the early Twentieth Century and the lies and fabrications by the Daughters of the Confederacy to try to put the Confederate States of America in a favorable light. Among other things, they claimed that the Confederacy didn't fight the American Civil War to defend slavery and that it was planning to end slavery (see Carson (2010), 243-248). The total fabrications of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion (a document created in Czarist Russia) were intended to justify and incite hatred and animus against the Jewish people.

IV. Half-Truths or Partial-Truths

Half-truths or partial-truths are narratives consisting of true statements or sets of true statements that selectively emphasize facts that support a particular assessment of an issue and selectively ignore or minimize other relevant facts that support contrary assessments. For example, a politician might "spin" the interpretation of recent events to support the claim that her policies were successful

if she describes the good consequences of those policies in considerable detail and omits any mention of the bad consequences. A man's description of his marriage is a half-truth or partial truth if it contains a long and accurate account of unkind and hurtful things that his wife has said and done to him but mentions only a few of the equal (or greater) number of unkind and hurtful things he has said and done to her. The use of half-truths that selectively omit certain information to make a certain view seem more plausible than it would otherwise is a very common way of making deceptive/misleading claims about history (Cf. Herring and Robinson, 558-559). Those who espouse half-truths frequently intend to deceive others, but not always or necessarily.

The public discussion of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian people includes many partial truths. Many of the parties to this conflict and their supporters in other countries endorse partial-truths. They are able to cite a long list of injuries inflicted by one of the parties against the other, but, at the same time, they downplay, ignore, or deny injuries caused by the party with whom they sympathize. Here are some salient truths that are downplayed, ignored, or denied by many Palestinian critics of Israel who have a detailed knowledge of Palestinian grounds for complaint against Israel: the numerous Arab riots and murders of Jewish residents of Palestine in the 1920s and 1930s, including the massacre of 64

Jews in Hebron in August 1929, the killing of 69 other Jews in Palestine during the same week, and 143 different attacks on Jewish settlements in 1937 (Morris (1999), 114,116, and 145), the killing of roughly 200 Israeli civilians and scores of Israeli soldiers by Arab attacks across Israel's borders from 1948-1956 (Morris (1999), 271), widespread violence against and persecution of Jews in many Arab/Islamic countries after 1948 (850,000 Jews left Arab/Islamic countries after 1948 - many of them fled violence and persecution, many were expelled, and many were dispossessed of their property; in 1948 76 Jews were slaughtered in Aden, dozens were killed in Morocco, 13 were killed in Libya, and anti-Jewish riots in Cairo killed at least 50 people¹⁰), and the pronouncements of many Arab and Islamic leaders calling for the destruction of Israel.

Some salient truths ignored, downplayed, or denied by many Israelis and supporters of Israel are the following: the terrorist attacks by the Jewish groups the Irgun and Lehi against Arabs, the British, and UN officials prior to the independence of Israel, the leadership role of Menachem Begin (who was later Israeli Prime Minister) in the Irgun and the leadership of Yitzhak Shamir (who was also later Prime Minister of Israel) in Lehi, the massacre of 254 Arab villagers in

¹⁰ Wikipedia, and Morris (2008), 412-415.

Deir Yassin by the Israeli Army in 1948,¹¹ the slaughter of more than 200 Arab civilians in the town of Lydda in July 1948 (Shavit, 107), the Israeli army's massacre of more than sixty civilians in the Arab village of Qibya in 1953 (Morris (1997), 227-262), the fact that Israel did not allow the 700,000 Arabs who left what is now Israeli territory during the 1948 war to return to their homes or retain their property,¹² and the large number of Arab civilians killed by the Israeli military in retaliation for Arab attacks on Israel.

Both of these lists could be greatly expanded. The anti-Palestinian partial-truths are widely accepted in the US. The anti-Israel partial-truths are widely accepted in much of the rest of the world.

I do not venture a view as to the overall balance of injuries and grounds for complaint among the two parties to this conflict. I claim only that the facts I have listed are salient truths the knowledge of which is necessary for a well-informed moral assessment of this conflict. Clearly, many people have very strong views about the conflict that are based on ignorance or denial of one set of these salient facts. Their views and attitudes are ill-informed and based on a one-sided

¹¹ Benny Morris (1999), 207-209. The number of victims is in dispute. Morris puts the number of Arabs murdered at 100-110.

¹² There is considerable controversy about how many of the 700,000 were forcibly expelled by Israel, but many of them were expelled (see Morris, (1999), 252-257 and Shavit, 108). On the most charitable interpretation, Israel dispossessed 700,000 Palestinians of their homes and property without due process of law and has never compensated them or their descendants.

knowledge of relevant information.

Many examples of half-truths can be found in Lerone Bennett's book *Forced into Glory*, a harsh indictment of Abraham Lincoln which alleges that Lincoln was a racist who cared little about slavery and, contrary to popular belief, was not a good or admirable person. Bennett cites many facts that are *prima facie* evidence that Lincoln was a racist who was not sufficiently concerned with ending slavery or promoting the welfare of African Americans. But his book abounds with half-truths and what would be more aptly called one quarter-truths or one eighth-truths that are very unfair to Lincoln.¹³

Here is one example. Bennett claims that Lincoln always favored the immediate deportation of freed slaves (Bennett, 415).¹⁴ He attributes this to Lincoln's racism and dislike of blacks and says that Lincoln wanted to carry out an "ethnic cleansing" of America (Bennett, Chapter 10).

Lincoln was a long-time supporter of colonization. Bennett documents this, but he fails to report any of the abundant evidence that Lincoln changed his mind and did not actively support colonization during the latter part of his presidency. Bennett also fails to mention the very strong grounds for thinking that Lincoln's

¹³ See Barr, 277-282 for evidence of Bennett's use of partial truths and selective omissions.

¹⁴ Bennett's use of the word "deportation" is misleading — Lincoln only supported the voluntary colonization of freed slaves. On this point see Carson (2015), 97-100).

support for colonization was motivated largely by his desire to stem opposition to the Emancipation Proclamation (see Carson (2015), 95-110). One very important piece of evidence of his waning enthusiasm for colonization is that, although the preliminary version of the Emancipation Proclamation (September 22, 1862) states that “the effort to colonize persons of African descent, with their consent... will be continued” (Lincoln, II, 368) the final version of the proclamation 100 days later (January 1, 1863) makes no mention of any plans for colonization. After his proposed Constitutional Amendment in December 1862¹⁵, he never again publicly proposed any measures calling for large-scale colonization. Bennett also fails to mention the fact that, as President, Lincoln did *almost nothing* to implement colonization apart from a small settlement on an island off the coast of Haiti and that he soon abandoned this venture (Carson (2015), 105). Late in his life, Lincoln made preliminary statements about the place of blacks in the post-war United States (including statements about education and voting rights) that *clearly* presuppose that they would remain in the country after the end of slavery (see Carson (2015), 106, 118). Bennett also fails to acknowledge John Hay’s well-known diary entry from 1864 which reports that Lincoln had “sloughed off

¹⁵ This amendment included plans for ending slavery and the voluntary colonization of freed slaves in tropical lands outside of the United States.

the idea of colonization” (Carson (2015), 100).¹⁶

V. Obligations of Historians to Be Truthful and Accurate

Historians have very serious obligations to be truthful, accurate, and fair in their accounts of the historical past. Public opinion and public policy need to be informed by full and accurate understandings of the historical past. Historical knowledge and understanding arguably also possess intrinsic value. Because academic history is a highly specialized field, progress in overall historical understanding depends on the honesty of individual historians who do primary research and help explain parts of the larger historical narrative. People debate the possibility or desirability of historians being completely objective and unbiased, but clearly lying, deception, and the fabrication of evidence by historians are *prima facie* very wrong. They violate the public trust and authority that their status as historians accords them (for discussions of these issues see Hoffer, and Jaeger).

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¹⁶ Hay was Lincoln’s personal secretary.

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