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QAnon

THE
DECEPTION

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS
CONSPIRACY THEORY

JAMES A. BEVERLEY

THE QANON DECEPTION: EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT
THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS CONSPIRACY THEORY

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INTRODUCTION

On October 15, 2020, just a few weeks before the U.S. election, President Donald J. Trump had a famous exchange about QAnon with Savannah Guthrie of NBC. Here is a slightly edited version of their encounter. The tangle provides a glimpse into the wide divide over QAnon and the need for sustained and careful investigation of the controversial movement.

Savannah Guthrie: “Let me ask you about QAnon. It is this theory that Democrats are a Satanic pedophile ring and that you are the savior, of that. Now can you just, once and for all, state that that is completely not true, and disavow QAnon in its entirety.¹”

President Trump: I know nothing about QAnon.

Savannah Guthrie: I just told you.

President Trump: I know very little. You told me, but what you tell me, doesn’t necessarily make it fact. I hate to say that. I know nothing about it. I do know they are very much against pedophilia. They fight it very hard. But I know nothing about it. If you’d like me to-

Savannah Guthrie: They believe that it is a Satanic cult run by the deep state.

1. For a full transcript of the townhall, see <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-nbc-town-hall-transcript-october-15>

President Trump: ... study the subject. I'll tell you what I do know about. I know about Antifa, and I know about the radical left, and I know how violent they are and how vicious they are. And I know how they are burning down cities run by Democrats, not run by Republicans.

Savannah Guthrie: Republican Senator Ben Sasse said, quote, "QAnon is nuts and real leaders call conspiracy theories, conspiracy theories."²

President Trump: He may be right.

Savannah Guthrie: Why not just say, it's crazy and not true?

President Trump: Can I be honest? He may be right. I just don't know about QAnon.

Savannah Guthrie: You do know.

President Trump: I don't know. No, I don't know. I don't know. You tell me all about it.

Savannah Guthrie: Let me ask you another thing.

President Trump: Let's waste the whole show. You start off with white supremacy. I denounce it. You start off with something else. Let's go. Keep asking me these questions. But let me just me just tell you. What I do hear about it, is they are very strongly against pedophilia. And I agree with that. I mean, I do agree with that and I agree with it very strongly.³

Savannah Guthrie: But there's not a Satanic pedophile cult being run by-

President Trump: I have no idea. I know nothing about them."

2. The remark by Sasse infers that conspiracy theories are false by their very nature. However, many scholars adopt the position that a conspiracy theory can be true. I share this position though recognize that most people probably use "conspiracy" as a negative to dismiss a theory. For a charming overview of conspiracies and secret societies, see Jon and Sam Atack at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-JFudk8l3nM>.

3. Followers of QAnon believe Trump was chosen by military figures to fight the pedophile ring. Q Post 153 from November 14, 2017 said this of Trump's rationale for running for the White House: "Perhaps he could not stomach the thought of children being kidnapped, drugged, and raped while leaders/law enforcement of the world turn a blind eye." See <https://qagg.news/?q=%23%23153>

This rather brief encounter captures four major realities about the debates over QAnon. First, QAnon is a topic that is enormously divisive. Guthrie and Trump represent different universes of belief and they are not really listening to one another. Second, their encounter shows how readily people question the other person's honesty when it comes to controversy. In this example, it is evident that Guthrie is convinced that Trump knows all about QAnon and is just being evasive. Third, their moments on QAnon show how quickly logic and reason go out the window under the heat of debate and attack. The president, for example, states that it is a waste of time to deal with QAnon. Not true. If Guthrie is right in her perspective, then the president does need to denounce it. Alternatively, if the president is right to simply applaud QAnon as a platform against pedophilia, then Guthrie should back down.⁴ It is not a waste of time to solve the division between the two.

This book is built on belief that the world needs a careful study of QAnon. Beyond the matters clear from the Townhall, there are other reasons behind my investigation and that of my team of researchers. QAnon has become a worldwide phenomenon. Reports are coming from all over the planet of the emergence of QAnon beliefs in dozens of countries. One QAnon supporter has documented QAnon believers in over 100 countries of the world.⁵ This is not simply an American reality. Further, QAnon involves a multi-faceted belief system so there are many more issues than just pedophilia to process.⁶ QAnon views have also been a source of deep division within families and they also constitute part of the divide between Republicans and Democrats.

It is also clear to me that the public are often misinformed about the infamous Q (said to be a military figure working with Trump), aspects of Q's teaching or even how to interpret the movement in a general way. (Most scholars refer to Q as male so I will adopt that practice in this book, even though, as we will see, the identity and reality of Q is up for grabs.) In relation to QAnon, faulty views abound.

CNN had a panel of observers to respond to the Townhall. In their analysis of the QAnon topic, Chris Cuomo said that the president was "dead wrong

4. This was the president's second encounter with the press about QAnon. The first was on August 19, 2020 when he made positive remarks about the movement's campaigns against pedophilia. For transcript of that exchange see <https://www.rev.com/blog/transcripts/donald-trump-press-conference-transcript-august-19>

5. See the data at <https://joyinliberty.com> The site even shows a QAnon follower at the South Pole.

6. Shayan Sardarizadeh of the BBC calls QAnon "a beast of a conspiracy...having a couple of central narratives...the rest of it is a sort of mish-mash of different issues and conspiracies. It's sort of a tent that allows people from different backgrounds, views, political perspectives to come in and either put whatever they like into it, or take from it whatever they like, rather than it being about just one or two narratives." See <https://medium.com/our-news/our-q-a-with-qanon-reporter-shayan-sardarizadeh-c00ecf25ccbc>

about QAnon being against pedophilia. What they're against is Catholics and they have decided that pedophilia is a cabal run by the Democrats." Cuomo shows a shallow knowledge of QAnon since there should be no doubt whatsoever that the movement is against pedophilia. While the anti-Catholic element is part of QAnon, this should not be used to ignore the clear evidence that millions of QAnon followers are passionate opponents of pedophilia.⁷

While I have no delusions that this book will change all minds to adopt my conclusions, one of my chief goals is to illustrate how to process topics, especially divisive ones, in terms of figuring out veracity of views, integrity of beliefs, and rationality of a worldview. Yes, of course I realize that it is difficult for people to admit they might be wrong or see that they are in fact wrong about particular items or even their entire belief system.

One day while I was working on this book, a lady from the Jehovah's Witnesses called our house asking for my wife. She was not available so even though part of me wanted to keep writing, I thought it was more important to try and share with this woman. Truthfully, based on prior interaction with Witnesses, I did not expect her to really listen. I briefly shared some important matters about the dark side of the Watchtower. For example, I told her about proof that the leaders of the organization were corrupt in the way that they treated Ray Franz, onetime member of the Governing Body. She had not heard of him and was not interested in knowing about his book *Crisis of Conscience*. She was not interested in any evidence that would threaten her belief system. In the end, I was disappointed in her closeted views, but I took comfort that I had planted some seeds in her mind.

Well, my hope is that this book will plant some seeds on all the various topics analyzed in relation to QAnon. The exchange between Trump and Guthrie brought up the issue of processing topics rationally. I raised this with the J.W. lady as well. How can she encourage my wife and me to be open to Witness evidence if she is not open to contrary material?⁸ Deciding about specific beliefs

7. See CNN Breaking News, October 15, 2020. One indication that Cuomo is overstating the negativity of QAnon towards Rome is the fact that Q referenced a letter from a Catholic Archbishop in Q Post 4941 on October 30, 2020. Cuomo's remarks begin at 2:28 in the tape. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=enyp7yAKxY>

8. For readers who want to accuse me of obviously not being open to the J.W. worldview (just like the Witness woman who called me was not open to my critique of her religion), there are two points of difference. First, I am willing to engage in extended conversation. She is not. Second, I have studied her belief system, but she has never seriously examined critique of the Witness world. My first book was on Jehovah's Witnesses and the case of Jim Penton, Canada's most famous ex-J.W. See James A. Beverley, *Crisis of Allegiance* (G.R. Welch, 1986.)

or figuring out what one's overall attitude should be to any group or philosophy or idea should involve careful thinking.

Thinking Guidelines on Q and QAnon

I would like to offer fifteen principles of thought that will assist in sorting through the various issues that come up in the fight over the Q drama, not to mention President Trump.⁹ Please keep these in mind as you read this book and as you continue to probe the issues about QAnon.

- 1. Emotion does not settle the truth.** Truth is not determined by who shouts the loudest. Given that the issues are important, a calm mind and spirit helps. Let me give a personal example. I have had open heart surgery twice. Thankfully, I was under the care of Dr. Tirone David, one of the most famous heart surgeons in the world. Both times it was amazing to see how he and his team were very calm in the operating room, even though it was a life-threatening reality. Truth, like healing, is easier to reach with a calm mind.
 - 2. Avoid uncritical allegiance to authority figures.** Whether it is Q or Donald Trump, Joe Biden or Nancy Pelosi, none of them are infallible. Therefore, work hard to figure out where they are telling the truth or to what degree they are misinformed. Look carefully at any evidence of moral failure or political incompetence.
 - 3. The popularity of something does not make it right.** The fact that millions of people now believe the Q teachings does not make them true. Likewise, the reality of huge opposition to Q does not make the worldview false. Truth is not settled by numbers.
 - 4. Be careful of “guilt by association.”** This is done all the time in debates about QAnon. Trump gets dismissed *in toto* because some of his fans are racists. Likewise, QAnon gets dismissed totally because some Q devotees have broken the law.
 - 5. Tradition is not always right.** This applies both to the Republican party and the Democratic Party, as well as to whatever views have become traditional in the Q platform.
-
9. Thinking more effectively comes as we read and listen to others who are superb in rational analysis. I think here of C.S. Lewis and Martin Gardner, for example. Gardner, author of over seventy books, was adept in mathematics, philosophy, religion, science, politics, and literature. He was also a great magician. One of the great fortunes in my life is that I became friends with Martin some years before his death in 2010. His *The Whys of a Philosophical Scrivener* (New York: Quill, 1983) is a model of rationality and knowledge.

6. **Watch out for leaps in logic.** This happens when we make a false inference that does not necessarily follow from a specific claim or truth.
7. **Remember that the truth is not always in the middle.** The balanced view is not always correct or true. If someone says you have 10 fingers and another person says you have 2 fingers, does this mean you have six? In relation to QAnon, the argument that the worldview is 100% right versus 100% wrong, does not mean it is 50% accurate.
8. **Do not take ideas or people out of context.** This is so easily done in heated debate. President Trump, for example, has been blamed for being a racist for comments he made after the riot in Charlottesville. However, his remarks were taken out of context and distorted. Likewise, Joe Biden gets taken out of context by his Republican enemies.
9. **Assertion of a claim or being dogmatic about it does not prove its truth.** I just read a very strident claim that General John Kelly and Vice President Pence attempted to assassinate President Trump. The author is very certain about his statement, but I will not let the bravado and certainty settle the claim.
11. **Name-calling does not settle truth issues.** Whatever your political persuasion, you know that the level of verbal animosity over Trump, Sean Hannity, Tucker Carlson, Lindsey Graham, Biden, Obama, Hillary Clinton, Rachel Maddow and related individuals is toxic and not conducive to truth and rational decision making.
12. **Do not be too preoccupied with whether something is possible in a theoretical way.** Generally, we should give weight to what is probable and highly likely and be skeptical of claims that are very unlikely.
13. **Try to be precise in your judgement and analysis on topics.** Generalizations are necessary, of course, but can be misleading. Precision is a necessary ingredient in discovering truth. For example, to what degree do the allegations about Hunter Biden's laptop harm his father's integrity? Or, to what degree does Trump not releasing his tax details hurt his credibility? As we all know, both Biden's enemies and Trump's accusers do not mind overstatements.
14. **Look for proof.** Check things out. So, Q is a high military figure. Have you examined the evidence? Trump has been great for the economy. Do you really know this?
15. **Don't be unnecessarily skeptical.** One time I was visiting my identical twin brother Bob when he was a student at Princeton Seminary. I met

one of his friends in the library who said “hi Bob” to me. I told him that he had a case of mistaken identity and that I was really Jim. The amazing thing here is that he knew my brother had a twin, but he was not convinced by my statement of fact. When I showed him my driver’s license, no kidding, he accused me of making up a false license. It was only when I showed him a picture of me with my brother and our respective wives that he realized his doubts were misplaced.

- 16. Remember that extravagant claims demand greater proof than ordinary claims.** This is an especially important point about QAnon since so many of its claims are extraordinary.

An Important Note about Donald Trump

It is clear from my book’s subtitle that I am no fan of QAnon. Many will take this to mean that I must favor the Biden/Harris ticket. This is not a necessary conclusion since one can be anti-QAnon in general and still pro-Trump. I learned this from my friend Rodney Howard-Browne. He is simultaneously an advisor to the President, close friend of Paula White (Trump’s pastor) and one of the most famous Pentecostal ministers in the world.

Rodney’s book on COVID devotes a whole chapter to QAnon. Rodney is a strong advocate that various elites have ruined society, as he has argued in *Killing Uncle Sam*, *Killing the Planet* and *The Phantom Virus*. Given this, I absolutely expected that he might be pro-QAnon. I was stunned that he, in fact, refers to “the barnyard of bull manure issued from the bowels of Q.”¹⁰ Rodney believes that his disdain for QAnon is no threat to his advocacy for President Trump.

Part of one chapter in this book argues that if Anons (referring to individuals who follow QAnon beliefs) want to help Trump they should abandon the unique central teachings of Q. As much as Anons love Trump, the QAnon movement hurts him and brings discredit to him, even if they do not know it, even if the president does not know it.

For the record, I have a mixed opinion about Trump’s presidency, as anyone should, even if believing he has been a great president overall. When I was on various national radio programs in the spring of 2020 about my book on Trump and charismatic Christians, I encountered only one person who said Trump had

10. See Rodney Howard-Browne, *The Phantom Virus* (Tampa: River Publishing, 2020), p. 130. Not incidentally, readers should be wary of distorted media reports about Rodney’s arrest in March related to his church opening after the virus struck. Charges were later dropped but only after death threats were directed towards Rodney, his wife Adonica and staff at his River Church. See Rodney’s statement at <https://lc.org/newsroom/details/040220-statement-of-dr-rodney-howardbrowne-1>

no major faults.¹¹ Ironically, I have found it easier to get pro-Trump voices to admit his weaknesses than to get anti-Trump voices to recognize his strengths. On this, I admire Thomas Friedman, the famous NYT writer, who, despite his constant and sometimes nasty critique of Trump, recently praised Trump's successes in the Middle East.¹²

The balance illustrated by Friedman does not mean, of course, that a 50/50 approach to Trump must be correct or that Friedman holds that split. As noted, the truth is not always in the middle.

On the bottom line, while it is impossible to believe in QAnon while repudiating Trump, a basic repudiation of QAnon does not demand rejection of a Trump presidency.

Some Caveats on QAnon

The Talmud has a great line: "Whoever judges a judgement of truth, true to the truth of the matter, causes the glory of God to dwell in Israel." With that in mind, there are some nuances that I want the reader to note:

1. As much as this book is critical of a lot of the QAnon belief system, I do not want to question the motives of most Anons. After spending my entire career studying many religions, I believe that most religious people are sincere in their beliefs. Likewise, I am sure most followers of Q are sincere, and their motives do not deserve ridicule and suspicion.
2. The above does not demand, of course, uncritical acceptance of QAnon or any religion or philosophy just because adherents are sincere. Some sincere religious people deserve to go to jail. As we will see later, some Anons are rightly in prison due to their criminal actions.
3. I invite Q Teachers and Anons to write me if they believe I am wrong on various items. Unlike many people, I do not find it that hard to change my mind if the evidence is clear. Linking back to the rules on thinking, avoid personal attacks if you write. You can reach me at professorjimbeverley@gmail.com.
4. My negativity about various Q theories is not meant to imply that followers have low intelligence. It is obvious from the ability of Q

11. The dominant view among white Pentecostal and charismatic prophets is that Trump is God's chosen one. See James A. Beverley with Larry Willard, *God's Man in the White House* (Castle Quay, 2020). The title of the book reflects what various Christian prophets believe about Trump.

12. See Friedman, "A Geopolitical Earthquake Just Hit the Mideast" at <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/13/opinion/israel-uae.html>

teachers to handle the social media complex that there are highly intelligent people in leadership. The massive errors in the Q system usually come from prior epistemological failure. For example, the careless and misguided adulation of Q, the Jesus figure of QAnon, has led to unthinking adoption of his lies or careless judgments. Likewise, naive trust in various Q teachers leads to blind acceptance of some of their blatant untruths.

All things being equal, please note again that my critique of QAnon is not meant to ridicule most Anons or most Q Teachers as if they are beneath contempt. John Daniel Davidson has picked up on the tendency to treat Anons as the “deplorables” of 2020. He writes: “It’s worth noting that the mainstream press loves to publish long-winded essays holding up QAnon as evidence that Trump supporters are conspiracy-addled rubes while ignoring the extent to which outlandish conspiracy theories like the Russia collusion hoax are still accepted by the liberal media.”¹³

The Polls Say

Interest in QAnon has exploded since August 2020 when President Trump said some kind words about QAnon followers. This has led to a number of very significant polls that provide important information so that we avoid speculation or simply basing our views on anecdotal material. The data below is gathered from (1) HopeNotHate, (2) Pew research, and (3) YouGov.¹⁴

- 55% of registered voters have heard of QAnon (YouGov poll)
- 77% of Democrats who have heard of QAnon say it is a “very bad” thing for the country while only 26% of Republicans who have heard of QAnon feel it is very bad for the country (Pew poll)
- 50% of Trump supporters said they think Democrats are involved in elite child sex-trafficking rings.
- Of those surveyed, upper income people were twice as likely as lower income people to say they have heard about QAnon (Pew poll)

13. See Davidson at *The Federalist* via <https://thefederalist.com/2020/08/03/americans-are-turning-away-from-religion-toward-dangerous-secular-cults/>

14. Hope poll at <https://www.hopenothate.org.uk/2020/10/21/qanon/> The Pew poll is at <https://www.journalism.org/2020/09/16/most-americans-who-have-heard-of-qanon-conspiracy-theories-say-they-are-bad-for-the-country-and-that-trump-seems-to-support-people-who-promote-them/> Lastly, the YouGov poll is at <https://today.yougov.com/topics/politics/articles-reports/2020/10/20/half-trump-supporters-believe-qanon-theory-child-s>

- “Over three-quarters of strong QAnon supporters think their lives are better than five years ago, considerably higher than in society as a whole – and yet they are more pessimistic about the future.” (Hope poll)
- Adults under age 30 are the age group most likely to say that QAnon is a good thing. (Pew poll)
- 76% of strong QAnon supporters think Jews have an unhealthy control of powerful institutions. (Hope poll) This is a point to remember as we deal with Anti-Semitism in a later chapter.

The November 3, 2020 Election

As I write, the United States is wrestling with an enormous divide on the integrity of the election. While Republicans are taking solace in the ways that the pollsters were wrong about a Biden/Harris landslide, the possible loss of the White House is a heartbreak to many Republicans and a total disaster for many Anons. How is Q reacting, what are the major QAnon teachers saying and how are regular Anons handling things?

On October 31 Q asked his followers: “Are you ready to take back control of this Country?” Earlier that day he also queried: “Are you ready to finish what we started?”¹⁵ At 1.27 a.m. on election day Q posted a picture of the American flag but he went silent for nine long days.

The absence of any Q Post for over a week led to speculation that Q was finished. However, on November 12, he posted another picture of the flag and stated: “Nothing can stop what is coming. Nothing. Q.” The same day another Post included the remark: “Sometimes you must walk through the darkness before you see the light.” On November 13 he offered one word: “Durham.” This is an obvious reference to the investigation that John Durham is carrying out on alleged attempts to spy on the Trump campaign and Trump presidency.¹⁶

The main Q Teachers are maintaining allegiance to Q and pushing followers to stand their ground and not lose heart. Dave Hayes (aka Praying Medic) stated: “Trump is going to be re-elected for three reasons: 1) The Democrats cheated. 2) Trump’s attorneys can prove it. 3) We have Justices on the Supreme Court who will rule fairly as these cases are litigated.”¹⁷

15. For the Q Posts, see <https://qagg.news/>

16. See Jonathan Turley’s opinion piece at *The Hill* about Durham and other probes at <https://thehill.com/opinion/judiciary/525634-transition-marks-precarious-period-for-russia-and-hunter-biden-probes>

17. See Hayes at <https://twitter.com/prayingmedic/status/1324351192697196550>

As one would expect, the evangelists for QAnon share Trump's views about a faulty election process. RedPill78 calls it "the greatest fraud ever perpetrated."¹⁸ Voter fraud is also echoed by Sarah Westall, Linda Paris, Lori Colley, and Paul Furber, who tweeted: "'Trump saw this coming a long time ago and let the Democrats do exactly what they always do. That is stuff ballots. They cannot control themselves.'"¹⁹ Tracy Beanz asked: "Message to the Democrats who are guilty of cheating in this election: As you sit there doing this behind the scenes, don't you feel that nagging twinge of guilt? Don't you feel that horrible feeling in your gut?"²⁰

Given the depth of QAnon commitment, it is also no surprise that followers in general have stuck with Trump and have adopted the explanation of the Q Teachers. On Tracy's twitter feed, we see the following, for example. "They [Democrats] have already been completely compromised. They have to support at-birth abortion just to stay in the herd, so voter fraud is easy," notes Emily Wellman.²¹ Chris Bennett replies by stating that the Democrats generally have no sense of guilt. "Rather, the cognitive dissonance in which they have engaged for the past 4 years leaves most of the left truly believing that the right is just making this all up and that a Biden win would be legitimate."²²

There is no total uniformity in response, however. The apparent Trump defeat has caused some Q followers to question the credibility of the QAnon enterprise. One person who goes by "Angry American" wrote on one site: "What the hell Q? Red Wave, Red Tsunami. No. None of that. WTF over? I thought we had this? Trust the plan you said? Now what? Litigation for months? Sorry, I am just pissed off at what we are seeing and there are NO FREAKING ARRESTS!!!!!!"²³ The writer is responding in part to regular claims by Q over three years that there will be mass incarceration of those in the evil cabal. Aaron Janx wrote: "If we lose this election then 'Q' must ultimately be seen as a debunked hoax propagated by desperate content creators in order to monetize an audience."²⁴

18. This is from a post at RedPill78's Gab platform. See <https://gab.com/redpill78>

19. See Furber at https://twitter.com/paul_furber/status/1324487690696462338 Furber also claims that the Democrats had 1.6 million fake ballots to sway the vote in the battleground states. See https://twitter.com/paul_furber/status/1324486501581860864/photo/1

20. Like Furber, Tracy is one of the earliest prominent Q supporters. See her tweet at <https://twitter.com/tracybeanz/status/1324441674852937729>

21. See <https://twitter.com/ElectaWing/status/1324449585629155335>

22. See https://twitter.com/chip_bennett/status/1324451863283044352

23. See https://twitter.com/Robin_of_Anira/status/1324141203957420032/photo/1

24. See <https://twitter.com/rothschildmd/status/1324378905084452864/photo/3>

Messages of Anons losing their faith in Q are met with both empathy and derision.²⁵ Of course, the pattern so far is that QAnon is holding together as a worldview, political platform, and community. This has led to more division within families already torn apart by QAnon.²⁶ This means the drama will continue as America heads for the Inauguration. As with Donald Trump, the future for QAnon remains uncertain.²⁷ In the meantime, examining QAnon begins with understanding Q and the QAnon world. The next chapter offers the basics.

25. For everything from empathy to ridicule see https://twitter.com/Robin_of_A/status/1324141203957420032

26. QAnon critics like Mike Rothschild, Travis View and Marc-André Argentino have been reporting on family troubles since election day. Argentino cites one case of a female QAnon supporter committing suicide because of Trump's loss. See https://twitter.com/_MAArgentino/status/1325275756054843392

27. On December 11, 2020 the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the Texas case involving claims of electoral fraud. Even with this defeat, various QAnon teachers are calling for steadfast commitment. Tracy Beanz said on Twitter: "It may seem some days as though things are bleak—but do you think POTUS is acting like a little baby right now?" In another tweet she stated: "Breathe. Focus. This isn't over."