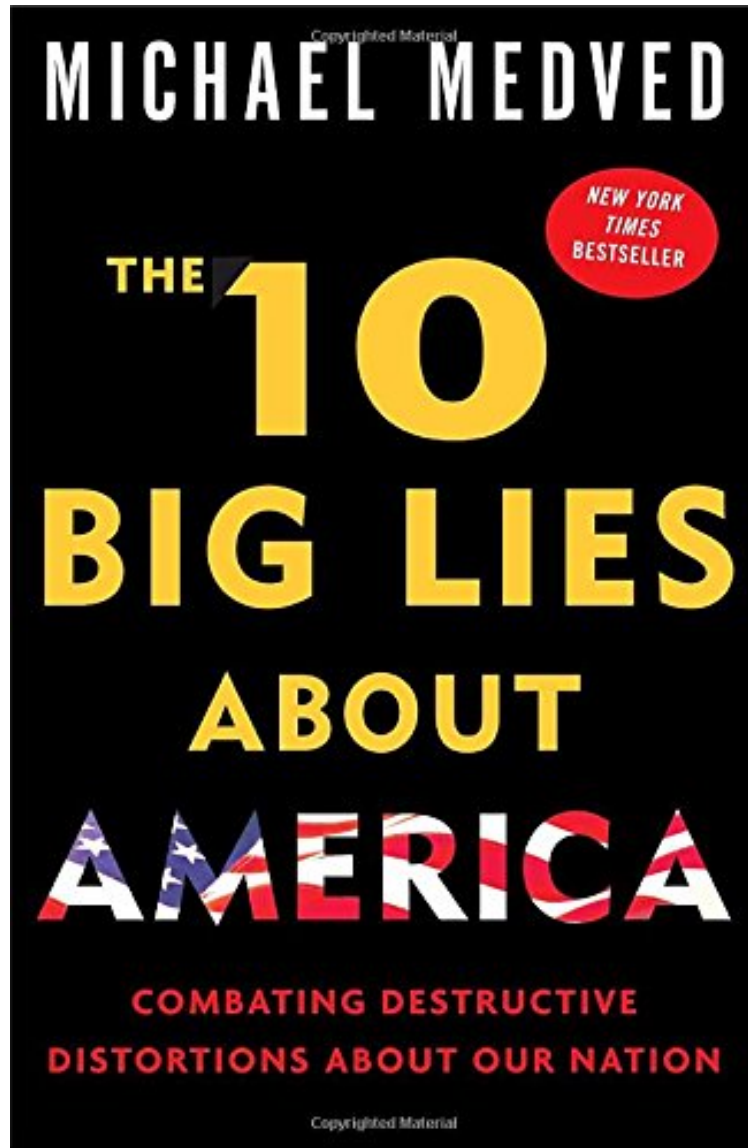


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The 10 Big Lies About America: Combating Destructive Distortions About Our Nation

Michael Medved

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"It aint so much the things we dont know that get us into trouble," nineteenth-century humorist Josh Billings remarked. "Its the things we know that just aint so." In this bold New York Times bestseller, acclaimed author and talk-radio host Michael Medved zeroes in on ten of the biggest fallacies that millions of Americans believe about our country in spite of incontrovertible evidence to the contrary. The Big Lies exposed and dissected include: America was founded on genocide against Native Americans. The United States is uniquely guilty for the crime of slavery and built its wealth on stolen African labor. Aggressive governmental programs offer the only remedy for economic downturns and poverty. The Founders intended a secular, not Christian, nation. Each of the ten lies is a grotesque, propagandistic misrepresentation of the historical record. Medved's witty, well-documented rebuttal supplies the ammunition necessary to fire back the next time somebody tries to recycle destructive distortions about our nation.

About the Author MICHAEL MEDVED is the host of one of the most popular talk-radio programs in the country, reaching more than four million loyal listeners. He is the bestselling author of ten other books, including *Right Turns*, *Hollywood vs. America*, and *What Really Happened to the Class of 65?* A member of USA Today's board of contributors, he also writes a weekly column for *Townhall.com*. For more than a decade he served as cohost of *Sneak Previews*, PBS's weekly movie-review show. Medved graduated from Yale with departmental honors in American history and attended Yale Law School as well. He lives with his family in the Seattle area.

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A Tainted Legacy NO CAUSE FOR CELEBRATION Why do so many Americans find it so difficult to celebrate their nations achievements and blessings? How did cherished occasions of joy and gratitude become the focus of anguish and controversy? I confronted these uncomfortable questions in my own backyard when Seattle's notorious Thanksgiving Letter became a brief, embarrassing media sensation. On November 8, 2007, the stern missive went out to all teachers and staff of the city's public schools insisting that they should struggle with these complex issues surrounding the yearly celebration and avoid, at all costs, teaching about Thanksgiving in traditional ways. The bureaucrats who signed the letter worried that without their timely intervention, thoughtless educators might arrange precisely the sort of outmoded, one-dimensional observance of Turkey Day that emphasized inappropriate elements such as pride and reverence. With so many holidays approaching we want to again remind you that Thanksgiving can be a particularly difficult time for many of our Native students, warned the officials (led by a school district honcho who identified herself with the intimidating title of director of equity, race, and learning support). To achieve a more appropriate perspective, they directed all staff in the Seattle public schools to consult a list of Eleven Thanksgiving Myths prepared by the radical Native Web site *Oyate.org*. The letter urged the educators to take a look??.?.? and begin your own deconstruction, specifically citing Myth #11: Myth: Thanksgiving is a happy time. Fact: For many Indian people, Thanksgiving is a time of mourning, of remembering how a gift of generosity was rewarded by theft of land and seed corn, extermination of many from disease and gun, and near total destruction of many more from forced assimilation. As currently celebrated in this country, Thanksgiving is a bitter reminder of 500 years of betrayal returned for friendship. As soon as I read this alarming letter, I began to wonder how earnest teachers might take its suggestions to heart and begin to commemorate this festival of destruction and betrayal with, say, their kindergarten charges. My own appallingly innocent 1950s childhood offered shamelessly sentimental Thanksgiving pageants, complete with tacky Pilgrim and Indian costumes and, on one occasion, a live turkey. On my nationally syndicated radio show I speculated on the way such sweet but silly extravaganzas might be updated to accommodate the hip sensibility of contemporary Seattle. Perhaps the nervous kiddies could now parade onto the stage, appropriately costumed as little Pilgrims and Pilgrimettes, and then, after enumerating the countless crimes of their forebears, they could lash themselves (or each other) with miniature leather whips and wail together in regretful agony. The proud parents would no doubt rise and applaud in tearful, self-righteous appreciation. Much to the humiliation of those of us who choose to raise our children in the Great Northwest, the story of Seattle's idiotic effort to turn Thanksgiving into a day of mourning became a subject for national debate. After I discussed the issue on the air, the Fox News Channel contacted me to provide a local perspective, and they also sent camera crews to interview local Indian tribes. The Tulalips, who occupy a prosperous, well-organized reservation about a half hour north of downtown (complete with high-end shopping center, resort hotel, and, inevitably, casino), emphatically affirmed their pride in the annual November holiday. Tribal spokesman Daryl Williams explained that most Native Americans celebrate Thanksgiving in the same way that many other Americans do as a way to be thankful for abundance and a chance to spend time with families. The Tulalips love to stage festive communal Thanksgiving feasts at which, in a bow to regional traditions, they serve alder-smoked salmon rather than turkey. Williams told the

press: The spirit of Thanksgiving, of people working together to help each other, is the spirit I think that needs to grow in this country, because this country has gotten very divisive. He's right, of course. The divisiveness, shame, and self-hatred have spread far beyond the damp and moody precincts of Seattle. In fact, the year before our Emerald City launched its controversial assault on Thanksgiving, the Associated Press featured an account of an innovative educator at an elementary school in San Francisco, yet another city known for brain-dead trendiness: Teacher Bill Morgan walks into his third-grade class wearing a black Pilgrim hat made of construction paper and begins snatching up pencils, backpacks and glue sticks from his pupils. He tells them the items now belong to him because he discovered them. The reaction is exactly what Morgan expects. The kids get angry and want their things back. Morgan is among elementary school teachers who have ditched the traditional Thanksgiving lesson. He has replaced it with a more realistic look at the complex relationship between Indians and white settlers. Stealing backpacks and glue sticks provides a realistic look at a complex relationship. Across the country, too many Americans have developed a complex, even tortured relationship with their own past. And like all deeply dysfunctional bonds, this frayed connection rests on a series of destructive liesweeping distortions that poison our sense of who we are and what our country means. Consider, for example, the oddly apologetic May 2007 commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the first permanent British settlement in the New World. With both the queen of England and the president of the United States journeying to Virginia to mark the occasion, federal officials took grim pains to tamp down any sense of merriment in the festivities. The National Park Service invested taxpayer money in new exhibits at its Historic Jamestowne visitor center, and these displays explicitly shunned the congratulatory messages of prior tributes. Past Jamestown anniversaries were referred to as celebrations, warned a prominently posted introduction to the Park Service exhibition. Because many facets of Jamestown's history are not cause for celebration, like human bondage and the displacement of Virginia Indians, the Jamestown 400th Anniversary is referred to as the Jamestown 2007 Commemoration. Another display in the same facility struck Edward Rothstein of the New York Times with its remarkably unbalanced approach: The Indians, we read, were in harmony with the land that sustained them and formed an advanced, complex society of families and tribes. English society the society that gave us the King James Bible and Shakespeare along with the stirrings of democratic argument is described as offering limited opportunity in which a small elite were landowners; in London, we are told, life was difficult, with social dislocation, low wages, unemployment, etc. While official observances scrupulously avoided any overtly festive messages, small crowds of protestors denounced even the subdued themes of the commemoration. Demonstrators from groups such as Black Lawyers for Justice and the New Black Panther Party announced their intention to crash this illegitimate party and pursue the overdue case for Reparations and Justice for the victims of slavery, mass murder and genocide. The protest leader, Malik Zulu Shabazz, cited crimes committed at Jamestown which resulted in America being originated on the corrupt foundation of racism, population removal, mass murder, slavery and a litany of crimes against divine law and humanity. Mr. Shabazz not only rejects the long-cherished view that American society arose in fulfillment of some powerful, providential purpose but proudly advances the opposite perspective: that the nation's origins involved a litany of crimes against divine law and humanity. It's not just Jamestown, he told the Associated Press. It's what started in Jamestown. And what started in Jamestown? Our distinctive civilization. Malik Shabazz and other America haters view the nation itself as a vicious, criminal enterprise that requires radical transformation if not outright termination. In June 2006, Jake Irwin, a student at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and an outspoken supporter of Venezuelan demagogue Hugo Chavez, told the Wall Street Journal: My political belief is that the U.S. is a horrendous empire that needs to end. POISONING THE PRESENT Though few of our fellow citizens share this overt hostility to our national project, the big lies about America still circulate so widely that they feed an insecure and angry public mood. Grotesque distortions about the nation's origins and institutions poison our present and threaten our future. But any attempt to challenge the prevalent slanders will draw scorn as a sign of simple-minded jingoism, while those who teach or preach the worst about America earn fulsome praise for their sophistication or courage. As a result, our universities and public schools eagerly endorse the cynical assumptions about the country, and alarmist mass media recycle hysterical accounts of imminent doom and corruption. We worry over anti-Americanism abroad but parrot its primary charges here at home. While objective indications identify residents of the United States as among the most fortunate people in human history, much of the public refuses to acknowledge our blessings because, according to the logic of widely accepted America-bashing lies, we don't deserve them. Those who embrace the idea that the USA came into being through vicious genocide against native populations, built its wealth on the unique oppression of African slaves, promoted corporate exploitation of powerless workers, and damaged countless other nations with its imperialist policies will naturally assume that we're paying the price for such sins and abuses viewing an allegedly dark present as the inevitable product of a dark past. Bleak assumptions about our guilty ancestors allow contemporary Americans to wallow in self-pity while blaming our brutal forebears for our supposed sorry state. In one typical aside, New York Times book reviewer William Grimes laments that American success came at a price for the descendants of the colonists, who have inherited a tainted legacy. This supposedly soiled and shameful heritage, this exhaustively analyzed burden of embarrassment and apology, now pollutes our most contentious public debates. In the presidential campaign of 2008, Democratic contender Barack Obama deflected attention from the anti-American rants of his

longtime pastor, Jeremiah Wright (Not God bless America, God damn America!), by calling for a solemn reconsideration of this nations original sin of slavery invoking the familiar notion that America bears unique guilt for its monstrous oppression of African captives. Whenever President George W. Bush spoke of spreading democracy around the globe, his critics clamored that his visionary rhetoric actually cloaked the latest chapter in a long, bitter history of reckless imperialism. In addressing economic hardships for middle-class Americans, politicians (of both parties) regularly demonize the very entrepreneurial energies and corporate organizations that deliver a level of comfort and opportunity inconceivable to prior generations. In any discussion of faith and family, the Right bemoans and the Left often applauds the same phony idea: that our society has abandoned its traditional unifying values and entered a brave new world of chaotic relativism. While we still speak wistfully of the American dream, our popular culture prefers to peddle an assortment of American nightmares. For more than a generation weve been bombarded with these charges and warnings about our sick society (in the loathsome phrase of the 1960s), and the easiest way for hardworking people to respond to the scolding has been to keep quiet and mind their own business. In place of the picnics, parades, and brass bands of yesterday, we now celebrate both Memorial Day and Veterans Day with a melancholy focus on the grim elegance of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in the nations capital. In fact, the Vietnam experience and the associated dislocation of the 1960s and 70s helped to dissolve the patriotic consensus that had endured for two centuries. The unprecedented U.S. failure in Indochina gave credibility, if not confirmation, to those protestors who had decried our imperialist foreign policy, and chose to identify their nation as Amerikathe Germanic spelling meant to evoke the Nazis, while the inserted k recalled our homegrown KKK. Once youve associated your native soil with genocidal fascists and white supremacist thugs, its tough to return to singing the praises of the land of the free and the home of the brave even after ultimate victory in the Cold War and the evanescent surge of unity following the terror attacks of 9/11. By that time the tribalism and identity politics of the 1960s had become a well-established feature of our national life, with jostling interest groups largely taking the place of homogenizing notions of Americanism. African Americans, feminists, Latinos, gays, Asians, the disabled, hippies, Native Americans each aggrieved segment of society demanded justice and redress, competing for recognition as the most victimized and gyped. Amid this clamor of suffering subgroups, the old national motto E pluribus unum Out of many, one sounded intolerant, disrespectful of difference and diversity, as the ideal of a melting pot gave way to a gorgeous multicultural mosaic. The concept of an overarching, non-ironic definition of American identity looked less and less plausible. In 1904, Broadway giant George M. Cohan jauntily identified himself as a Yankee Doodle dandy who had been born on the Fourth of July. Eighty years later, Ron Kovic appropriated the latter phrase for a book and movie about his shattering experience as a paralyzed, abused, deeply disillusioned Vietnam vet. At the time of the films release in 1989, everyone who encountered the title Born on the Fourth of July received it with a snicker or smirk, understanding Cohans high-stepping glorification of flag and homeland as an embarrassing relic of ignorant and insular nationalism.