



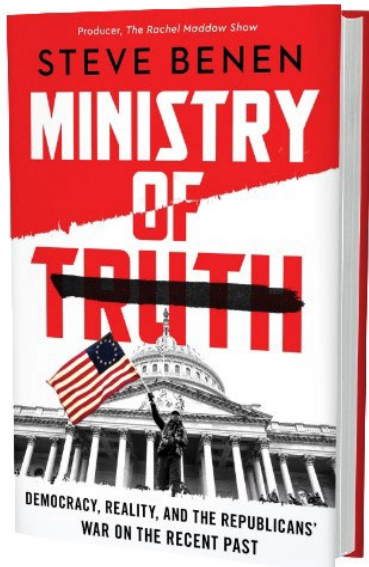
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**"There is nobody who is writing in an episodic way who has more influence on how I think about politics than Steve Benen." – Rachel Maddow**



# MINISTRY OF TRUTH

Democracy, Reality, and the Republicans'  
War on the Recent Past

By **STEVE BENEN**

Bestselling author of *The Impostors*  
Producer, *The Rachel Maddow Show*

Mariner Books | Hardcover | August 13, 2024 | \$32.50

**\*\* Audio edition read by Rachel Maddow \*\***

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"A fierce takedown of right-wing mendacity committed in the service of a bigger lie." — *Kirkus Reviews*

"Illuminating... well sourced and covers a lot of ground. This cogent survey of the Trumpist lie factory is worth checking out for more than just fans of *Maddow*." — *Publishers Weekly*

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On August 13, Mariner Books is proud to publish **MINISTRY OF TRUTH: Democracy, Reality, and the Republicans' War on the Recent Past** by **Steve Benen**—a searing, vital investigation of the Republican Party's dangerous campaign to rewrite recent history in real time. In this timely and essential new book, Benen—a critically acclaimed author and Emmy Award-winning producer on *The Rachel Maddow Show*—offers a powerful lens through which to view recent GOP misinformation campaigns, contextualizing aggressive partisan efforts to convince people not to believe their lying eyes. Shining a spotlight on the degree to which these campaigns have succeeded, their dangerous consequences, and how they can be fought, **MINISTRY OF TRUTH** is vital reading for anyone concerned with the preservation of truth and the viability of our democracy.

You may recall Benen's 2020 bestseller *The Impostors*—a devastating indictment of how Republicans quit governing and seized American politics which received high praise from the *Washington Post* and helped crystalize public understanding of the GOP's willful dysfunction. Now, Benen again displays his talent for combining absorbing storytelling with deep analysis to offer a concise and accessible, yet powerful read that decodes the Republicans' new playbook.

To be sure, authoritarian regimes have long seen history as a malleable propaganda tool and rewritten it to suit their own purposes. But today's Republican Party has taken this practice to an entirely new level, Benen argues, with its war on the *recent* past. Now, the party wages frantic gaslighting campaigns to rewrite the stories that have unfolded in plain sight over the past few years—from the 2020 presidential election to Covid to the events of January 6 and the Trump impeachments—and reshape them into unrecognizable new accounts. In George Orwell's prophetic novel *1984*, he immortalized this relentless assault on reality with his creation of a fictional government department known ironically as the Ministry of Truth.

"To see such authoritarian tactics in American democracy as anything less than dangerous would be a mistake," Benen writes. "The more Republicans take aim at the public's understanding of recent events, the more dramatic the impact on everything from the public discourse to policymaking to the integrity of democracy itself. . . The more recent events can be altered to fit a political agenda, the easier it becomes to present failures as triumphs and fiction as fact. What's more, scandals and investigations can be made to disappear just as soon as a party agrees to tell its supporters that it's been exonerated—even when the opposite is true."

As Benen explains, the campaign of rewriting recent history is built on a foundation of four pernicious pillars:

- *The first is a wholesale indifference toward reality*, including what the public already knows to be true or what independent fact checkers are going to say when the dust clears.
- *The second is the absence of shame*. Republicans who intend to replace a factual series of events with fictional ones must fully commit to the new narrative without any hint of sheepishness or embarrassment, no matter how ridiculous it is.
- *The third is the role of allies*. The GOP's war on the recent past relies on conservative media allies like Fox News and like-minded partisans willing to echo the preferred made-up story.
- *Finally, there is the importance of repetition*. Recent history isn't rewritten overnight. It takes a sustained effort reinforced over time, so the lies are repeated ad nauseam, from Trump on down.

GOP voices have so grown dependent on this approach, according to Benen, both because they must so often defend the indefensible, and because they have also found it to be extraordinarily effective. By the end of 2023, national public opinion surveys found that a majority of Republican voters believed that Trump made no effort to overturn the 2020 election; that the former president did not keep classified documents at Mar-a-Lago; that the January 6 attack on the Capital was not an insurrectionist riot; and that the January 6 assault was not perpetrated by those intent on keeping Trump in power, but rather by Antifa or other “false flag” actors.

“It's not an accident,” Benen writes, “that such an enormous chunk of the American electorate would get each of these issues so completely wrong. To grasp why so many GOP voters have gotten reality backward, it's important to understand the strategy that left them misinformed.”

To that end, Benen dismantles piece by piece seven of the GOP's most outrageous, successful, and consequential efforts to rewrite recent history, with clarity and context that will prove eye-opening to even the most well-informed citizens:

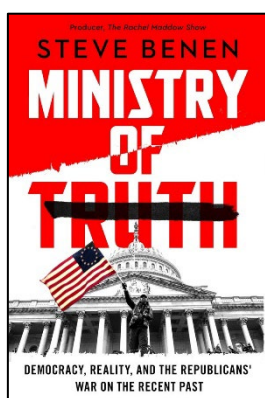
1. **The Trump/Russia Scandal:** Why “Russia, Russia, Russia” was anything but a hoax, as Trump and his allies incessantly proclaim, and how it has invited foreign actors to intervene in our elections for their own ends.
2. **The 2020 Presidential Election:** How Trump and the Republicans became “increasingly detached from reality,” and willing to accept election results only when GOP candidates prevail.
3. **The January 6 Attack on the U.S. Capitol:** By recasting the attack as “a normal tourist visit,” the GOP abandoned democracy and accountability in ways that invited future violence.
4. **Trump's Ukraine Scandal and First Impeachment:** Arising from his allegedly “perfect phone call” with President Volodymyr Zelensky, the impeachment ultimately taught Trump not that he would be held accountable, but that the GOP would tolerate his abuses, no matter how brazen.
5. **Trump's Failed Border Wall Gamble:** By bolstering Trump's obviously preposterous claim that “I did finish the wall,” Republicans have committed themselves to an unnecessary infrastructure boondoggle that doesn't work.
6. **The Federal Response to Covid:** Despite the “nuclear-grade bananas” theories that Trump spun about a pandemic that killed a million Americans, the end result of this rewrite of history has been to push Republicans further away from scientific expertise and lifesaving preventive measures, including vaccines for polio, measles, and hepatitis.
7. **The Trump-Era Economy:** Notwithstanding Trump's ridiculous claim of having presided over “the greatest economy in the history of the world,” his alternate version of reality will likely have a direct effect on which party prevails in the 2024 presidential election.

Such barefaced assaults on reality have become a scourge on the body politic, Benen contends. It's bad enough that they leave the public misinformed, confused, and disoriented about critically important events. But even more far-reaching are the ways in which they weaken the foundations of democracy, which rest largely on a shared understanding of current events. When that understanding is deliberately corrupted by unabashed partisans, the consequences can be dire. Moreover, Republicans increasingly see the tools that the electorate relies on to make sound decisions—facts, memories, records, and ability to apply lessons learned—as little more than annoyances to be brushed aside. In so doing, they are pushing our political system to the breaking point.

There is no simple solution to this dilemma, Benen acknowledges. But recognizing the true nature and full scope of Republican misinformation campaigns is undoubtedly the first step to defeating them. “To understand the Republican Party's propaganda campaigns is to help strip them of their potency,” Benen writes. “Like a magic trick that becomes less impressive after an audience knows how it's done, voters are less likely to believe rewritten stories once they're exposed as part of a pathological sham. With this in mind, this book is intended to pull back the curtain, effectively inoculating readers from would-be illusionists trying to undermine their democracy through rhetorical sleight of hand.”

## TALKING POINTS

- **The stakes, Benen argues, couldn't be higher:** The future of democracy hinges on both our accurate understanding of events and the end of alternative narratives that challenge reality. Benen pulls back the curtain, exposes the sham, and makes the case that recognizing GOP misinformation campaigns is key to stripping them of their potency.
- **The scope of GOP misinformation:** Benen gives concrete examples of this rewriting of recent history, including: the Trump/Russia scandal, the 2020 Presidential election, January 6<sup>th</sup>, Trump's Ukraine scandal and first impeachment, the failed border wall, the federal response to Covid, the Trump-era economy, and more.
- **The Gaslighting of America:** The Republican war on the recent past is about more than routine lying. The party's radical strategy relies on manufacturing narratives, hoping to replace accurate stories the party finds inconvenient, embarrassing, or both, through a multifaceted brute-force rhetorical strategy. What matters isn't what happened; what matters is what the GOP can get people to believe happened by rewriting, fabricating, and saturating (through willing propaganda outlets) the public's understanding of recent events. It's an effort predicated on the assumption that our memories can be bullied into submission, forced to give way to manufactured stories the GOP prefers.
- **The Republican's efforts have been astonishingly effective, with disastrous results:** At issue are critically important events that most Americans saw, remember, and experienced first-hand. Republicans have nevertheless taken on the bold challenge of convincing people that their eyes have deceived them; their memories are wrong; independent sources of information are not to be trusted; and partisan changes to the recent past deserve to be embraced without question. To grasp why so many GOP voters have embraced a backward version of reality, it's important to understand the strategy and the tactics that left them misinformed.
- **Key context around the DNC and general election:** Publishing just before the Democratic National Convention, Benen provides a critical perspective on what will inevitably be a flurry of discussion about the threats to our democratic system and Republican attempts to poison the country's national discourse.
- **Echoes of Orwell:** In George Orwell's classic dystopian novel, *1984*, the story's protagonist works for a powerful propaganda agency known as the Ministry of Truth, which is responsible for rewriting history in order to satisfy the ruling party's demands. "The party told you to reject the evidence of your eyes and ears," Orwell wrote. "It was their final, most essential command." It's a principle the contemporary Republican leaders have embraced with far too much vigor, indifferent to the fact that Orwell's story was a cautionary tale.



### ABOUT THE BOOK

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**STEVE BENEN** is a producer on *The Rachel Maddow Show*, the author of [The MaddowBlog](#), and an MSNBC contributor. Benen's articles and op-eds have appeared in the *New York Times*, *Washington Monthly*, *The American Prospect*, *Salon.com*, and other publications. For his work on TRMS, he has received two Emmy Awards, and has been nominated for four more. He is the author of *The Impostors: How Republicans Quit Governing and Seized American Politics*, a national bestseller. He lives in Vermont. Follow him [@stevebenen](#).