**Ownership and Financing**

AmericanThinker.com was founded in 2003 by conservative former academic Thomas Lifson, lawyer Ed Lasky, and health care consultant Richard Baehr. All three remain involved with the site, according to its About page, which identifies Lifson as founder, editor, and publisher, but does not state who owns the site.

The website runs advertising and offers readers an option to pay a monthly subscription fee to avoid ads. The site also solicits donations, while noting that it is not a nonprofit, so it can “reserve the right to be partisan.”

**Content**

AmericanThinker.com’s About page states that “There is no limit to the topics appearing on American Thinker. National security in all its dimensions — strategic, economic, diplomatic, and military — is emphasized. The right to exist and the survival of the State of Israel are of great importance to us.”

The site frequently publishes articles criticizing Democrats, liberalism, feminism, Islam, climate change concerns, and homosexuality. (A September 2018 article was headlined “Christians Who Oppose Conversion Therapy Need a Reality Check.”) The site publishes approximately a dozen opinion and commentary articles a day, organizing content into “blogs” and “articles.” Although the two categories appear similar, the site’s Contact page states that blogs offer a quick analysis of “breaking news” while articles contain “analysis and new information.”

The website is unwavering in its support of U.S. President Donald Trump. One 2018 article published on the site described the president as a “culture leader changing the world,” and another argued that he was “winning over blacks, Hispanics, millennials, and even gays.”

In February 2020, after President Trump was acquitted on two articles of impeachment, AmericanThinker revived a September 2019 story that linked Republican Senator Mitt Romney to Burisma, the Ukrainian energy company criticized for bringing Hunter Biden, the son of Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden, onto its board. The matter was at the heart of President Trump’s impeachment, after he asked the Ukrainian president in a July 2019 phone call to announce there would be an investigation into the Bidens regarding Burisma.

After Romney became the only Republican to vote to convict President Trump in his Senate trial, AmericanThinker claimed that Romney was trying to shield his ties to a former adviser who once served on Burisma’s board. The website suggested that Romney wanted to hide his relationship with Joseph Cofer Black, who advised Romney during his failed 2012 presidential campaign, and by extension, the Bidens. A Romney spokesperson described Black to POLITICO as one of “hundreds of informal policy advisers to the Romney campaign.”

**Credibility**

AmericanThinker.com gained a wide conservative readership in 2008, thanks to its strong criticism of then-presidential candidate Barack Obama. The New York Times reported. Critics say that the site boosted the “birther” conspiracy claiming that President Obama was not born in the United States, pointing, for example, to a 2011 article that referred to Obama’s “$100 souvenir version” Hawaii birth certificate.

In response to NewsGuard’s question about its apparent support for the discredited notion that Obama was not born in the U.S., the site’s editor, Thomas Lifson, told NewsGuard in an email that “The sustained refusal to release Obama’s long form birth certificate is reason to be suspicious. We have examined the evidence. That is reasonable to do when a candidate or office holder withholds documentary evidence.”

NewsGuard found numerous other examples of false claims on the site.
For example, in March 2020, the site published a story with the false claim — stated in the headline — that “The Wuhan Virus Escaped from a Chinese Lab.” The site offered no evidence for this beyond the location of a bioresearch laboratory in Wuhan, China, where the COVID-19 virus originated. “Initially, a live animal market in Wuhan, where exotic animals are sold for food, was blamed as the source of the virus. It may yet be proven to be the epicenter of the outbreak, but it was not the source of the virus,” the site claimed. “That honor goes to the Wuhan National Biosafety Laboratory, housed at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, a scant 20 miles away from Wuhan’s live animal market.”

There is no basis for the allegation that the COVID-19 virus was created in a laboratory. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that the virus “is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus.” An earlier study, published in February 2020 in the journal Nature, found that the COVID-19 virus is “99.6% percent identical at the whole-genome level to a bat coronavirus.”

The site has also made misleading claims that downplay the severity of the COVID-19 disease, which has been classified by the World Health Organization as a pandemic. For example, the site claimed in the March 2020 story headlined “Super Flu or a Mild Cold?” that “COVID-19 is shaping up to be a mild cold, and potentially a very mild one at that.” The article cited statistics supposedly showing that the disease is far more widespread than has been reported, which, coupled with the known number of deaths from the disease, means the mortality rate is tiny. “COVID-19 is nearly harmless,” the article stated.

It is not clear where the article’s statistics came from, but in fact, the mortality rate of COVID-19 was estimated to be approximately 1%, based on early data. That is approximately 10 times more deadly than the flu.

Another March 2020 article, headlined “Did China Panic the World and Steal Our Wealth with a Common Cold?”, claimed that the virus was the result of a Chinese plot to create worldwide panic in order to profit. “Amid the panic, China is profiting as it buys up stocks at bargain-basement prices” the article stated. The story also stated falsely that “China owns large portions of our media companies, and China virtually controls the World Health Organization (WHO).” Moreover, the article repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as a “common cold.”

Asked about these articles, Lifson, the site’s editor and publisher, said in an email that the site’s coverage reflected opinions rather than news. He also said that a scientific consensus had not been reached about the virus. “Considerable uncertainty still surrounds the entire issue, driven by many factors, not least of which are the unreliability of Chinese data, and the low levels of testing,” Lifson said, adding, “None of the material that we publish is intended to be regarded as scientific conclusions from a refereed medical journal,” he concluded.

In August 2018, the site suggested that former Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton “allowed” the Chinese government to access classified national security information on her email server. The article stated that “Given the Clintons’ pattern of behavior, one must assume they were being paid for giving the Chinese access.” No evidence has emerged to support this claim.

The same article stated that government rules for server use “don’t apply to the Clintons.” Former FBI director James Comey admitted as much in his famous July 2016 press conference when he explained in detail how Mrs. Clinton negligently and illegally handled national security materials but that she would be given a pass based on her last name and her presidential candidacy.” Comey never said he would give Clinton “a pass” because of her name and candidacy.

Asked about the Clinton server claim, Lifson stated, “It is perfectly reasonable to consider possible explanations given her familiarity with State Department regulations forbidding a private server.” Asked about the claim regarding Comey’s press conference, Lifson stated, “This was satirical sarcasm, quite justified because Comey’s explanation made no sense at all.”

Because AmericanThinker.com frequently publishes inaccurate and misleading information, NewsGuard has determined that it repeatedly publishes false news and deceptive headlines and that it does not gather and present information responsibly.
The main section of AmericanThinker.com's About page does not explicitly disclose its conservative perspective, stating that it operates "out of concern for the complex and morally significant questions on the national agenda." In a fundraising appeal at the bottom of the About page, the site states that it intends to be "a strong conservative voice." But this language does not appear in the general site description or in another easily accessible part of the site.

Because AmericanThinker.com does not clearly disclose its orientation and yet infuses its perspective into its content, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

The site regularly posts corrections on articles. However, multiple stories with false information remain on the site uncorrected, including the articles cited above. Therefore, NewsGuard has determined that AmericanThinker.com does not have effective corrections practices.

Lifson did not comment specifically on the site's corrections policy, but told NewsGuard that the site's articles about COVID-19 were expressing opinions and were therefore not inaccurate.

Transparency

AmericanThinker.com provides a full list of its management, along with detailed biographies, but does not identify owners.

In an email to NewsGuard, Lifson confirmed that he owns American Thinker, but he did not comment on why that is not disclosed on the website.

Articles name the writer and sometimes include biographical or contact information, but many only link to an archive of the author's previous work. Because of that inconsistency, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not meet the standard for providing information on content creators.

In response to NewsGuard's inquiry about content creators, Lifson wrote in an email, "Some authors prefer to keep their identifying characteristics private. As you may have heard or read, conservatives are unpopular or persecuted in many circumstances in this country. We are happy to identify those writers who are willing to share."

Advertising and sponsored content are distinguishable from editorial content.

History

AmericanThinker.com was founded in 2003.

*Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on March 23, 2020, to add examples of the site's content related to COVID-19 and to reflect that the site does not regularly correct errors and does not avoid deceptive headlines. New comments from the site's editor were also added. Earlier, this label was updated to reflect that the site clearly labels sponsored content. The criteria checklist was adjusted accordingly.*

Written by: Jon Allsop, Anna-Sophie Harling, Kendrick McDonald
Edited by: Anna-Sophie Harling, Eric Effron, Peggy Ackermann

Send feedback to NewsGuard: Click Here

Sources

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