

smobserved.com

A Santa Monica, California-based site that has published false claims on U.S. politics, including the claim that Hillary Clinton was replaced by a body double during her 2016 presidential campaign.



Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic journalistic standards.

Score: 12.5/100

Ownership and Financing

The ownership of the Santa Monica Observer is unclear. The site's domain name is registered to Santa Monica Observer Newspaper Inc., a private company that registered with the state of California in February 2000, but is now listed as suspended in state business records. A copyright notice on the Santa Monica Observer's site credits SMMC LLC. This could refer to Santa Monica Media Company, which registered with the state in 2008 and is also listed as suspended.

Santa Monica Media Company was registered by David Ganezer, who is named as the Observer's publisher on the site's About page. Ganezer ran unsuccessfully for a seat on the Santa Monica City Council in 1988 and 2010.

The site carries advertisements and links to a similar-looking site, SMObserved.com, which charges for publishing legal notices. A free print edition of the Observer is published weekly.

-  Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
-  Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
-  Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
-  Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
-  Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
-  Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
-  Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
-  Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
-  The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

Content

According to the site's About page, "The Newspaper and its content website, www.smobserved.com, do not shy from controversy. In general, we look at Santa Monica's neoliberal politics with skepticism. Our motto is 'Community, Diversity, Sustainability and other Overused Words.' But we do not adhere to any party line."

SMObserved.com publishes a mix of local and national news. Local stories often cover crime and politics in Santa Monica. Sections on the site include Opinion, Lifestyle, Politics, and Events.

"Trump Strikes Blow at Critical Race Theory for Anti-American Curricula, Threatens to Cut Federal Funding;"
"Goodbye, California Zoning Laws, as Legislature

Criteria are listed in order of importance.

[More information.](#)

Makes Authoritarian Grab for Land Control with 9 Proposals;" and "Santa Monica Plaza Project Moves Forward."

Credibility

SMObserved.com often publishes false and misleading content, including about the COVID-19 pandemic.

For example, an April 2020 article headlined "Ayyadurai: Coronavirus Was Created by China to Control Hong Kong, & Spread by the Deep State to Control You," quoted a YouTube video from Shiva Ayyadurai, an engineer who ran unsuccessfully for a U.S. Senate in Massachusetts in 2018 and 2020. In the video, Ayyadurai promoted sunlight as a remedy for the COVID-19 virus, based on the low number of COVID-19 cases in the African nation of Chad. "If you just get out in the sun like they do, you will beat this and many other viruses," Ayyadurai said.

In fact, there is no evidence that exposure to sunlight can kill the coronavirus in people, according to the American Academy of Dermatology. Penny Ward, a visiting professor in pharmaceutical medicine at Kings College London, said on BBC.com in April 2020: "UV irradiation and high heat are known to kill virus particles on surfaces," but "neither sitting in the sun, nor heating, will kill a virus replicating in an individual patient's internal organs."

In the same SMObserved.com article, Ayyadurai claimed that the pandemic was part of a plan. "Coronavirus has been well planned to achieve all the aims of the deep state," he said. "Eliminate borders, cashless society, go to negative interest rates so they own all our money. Everything is monitored, in a 5G rule to put capers everywhere so you can understand what people are saying and suppress free speech." The article provided no evidence for any of these claims.

In a May 2020 article, titled "Robert Kennedy accuses Bill Gates of Using Covid19 to Further a Nefarious Vaccine Agenda for World Domination," SMObserved.com republished false claims about

Microsoft co-founder and multibillionaire Bill Gates that were made in an Instagram post by anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

The article quoted Kennedy's post as stating, "Promising to eradicate Polio with \$1.2 billion, Gates took control of India's National Advisory Board (NAB) and mandated 50 polio vaccines (up from 5) to every child before age 5. Indian doctors blame the Gates campaign for a devastating vaccine-strain polio epidemic that paralyzed 496,000 children between 2000 and 2017." The article did not include any information that refuted Kennedy's claim about the polio vaccine program in India.

There is no evidence that the polio vaccine program in India funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation caused widespread paralysis, according to articles from fact-checking websites Full Fact and PolitiFact. Contrary to Kennedy's claim that the vaccine caused a "vaccine-strain polio epidemic," the World Health Organization reported 17 cases of vaccine-derived poliovirus cases in India between 2000 and 2017.

In an August 2020 article, the site reported that Robert Trump, the younger brother of President Donald Trump, had died "after a fall and a cerebral hemorrhage. He also developed COVID-19 and complications of coronavirus while in the hospital."

The site provided no source for the claim that Robert Trump had developed COVID-19, and there is no evidence that he did. Robert Trump's cause of death was not made public.

In 2018 and 2019, Santa Monica Observer published a mix of false claims and unfounded speculation about the health of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. In a September 2018 article headlined "Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Will Retire from the US Supreme Court in January 2019," the site claimed that Ginsburg "has had a re-occurrence of malignant melanoma," and would retire in January 2019.

Ginsburg did undergo surgery to remove a cancerous growth from her left lung in December 2018, which the Santa Monica Observer cited to boast that it was the first to break the story. In fact, its initial report mentioned a different type of cancer and incorrectly asserted that Ginsburg would retire.

In an update to the Ginsburg article posted on Jan. 15, 2019, the site claimed that Ginsburg's cancer "has come out of remission" and that she has been "stricken with pneumonia," again predicting incorrectly that she would retire by the end of the month. Another article, posted on Jan. 19, 2019, said Ginsburg "remains in a hospital fighting pneumonia."

In fact, Ginsburg was released from the hospital on Dec. 25, 2018, according to a Supreme Court spokesperson, who said that her "post-surgery evaluation indicates no evidence of remaining disease, and no further treatment is required." While Ginsburg missed two weeks of oral arguments in the wake of her surgery, she continued to perform her duties by reading briefs at home, according to the Court.

Despite these inaccuracies, the website continued to promote its original September 2018 story on the site. When the Supreme Court announced in August 2019 that Ginsburg was being treated for pancreatic cancer, the website republished the September 2018 story under the headline "Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's Office Announces She Has Pancreatic Cancer. US Supreme Court Fight Looms," even though the article did not state that she was being treated for pancreatic cancer.

An editor's note on the version of the article republished in August 2019 stated: "We first posted this story in September, 2018. Sadly we were correct, as Justice Ginsburg underwent surgery on December 15th to remove a cancerous growth from her lungs. We are reposting it since so many people contacted us to ask if it was true that she has pancreatic cancer, which sadly, it is."

As of September 2020, SMObserved.com's About page was claiming that the website "broke the story of US Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg's cancer surgery."

Other false claims published by the site include a December 2016 article headlined "Kanye West Appointed Under-Secretary of the Interior After Meeting at Trump Tower." West did meet with Donald Trump, then the president-elect, in December 2016, but Trump did not nominate West to any position in his administration. Technically, there is no "Under-Secretary of the Interior," as the title of that position was changed to U.S. Deputy Secretary of the Interior in November 1990.

The site also published numerous stories promoting false claims related to Hillary Clinton's health during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. A September 24, 2016, article titled "Hillary Clinton Died on Sept. 11, Actually. That was her Body Double in Front of Chelsea's," recounts multiple conspiracy theories, including the notion that Donald Trump was a "plant" to ensure that Clinton would be elected. Those plans were abandoned, the article states, after Clinton died on September 11, 2016. The article stated: "What spoiled it, was Hillary's untimely death on 9/11. Now, it is being reworked to ensure a third term of Barack Obama."

In a story posted four days later, titled "Bedridden, Sick Hillary Clinton Sends Body Double to Debate Donald Trump," the site did not repeat its claim that Clinton had died, but instead falsely claimed that Clinton "will send one of her famous body doubles to Hofstra University to debate" Donald Trump.

The site also has published false stories that are not related to politics. A November 2018 article headlined "#conspiracytheory: Did Borderline Shooter Also Set the West Hills and Woolsey Fires?" suggested that Ian David Long, who allegedly killed 12 people at a bar in Thousand Oaks, California, was also responsible for a wildfire in the area because the timing "seems too coincidental." The Woolsey and Hill Fires (no 2018 fire in California appears to have been called the "West Hill Fire"), were both first reported around 2 p.m. on Nov. 8,

2018, according to the San Jose Mercury News. Long had been found dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound earlier that morning.

In 2019, one of the site's speculative stories ended up being proven accurate. According to a July 2019 article from entertainment news site Deadline, Santa Monica Observer reporter Stan Greene suggested in an article that Los Angeles Angels pitcher Tyler Skaggs had died of an opioid overdose, stating that police had found drugs in the pitcher's Texas hotel room. Angels spokesperson Marie Garvey released a statement saying the article was "categorically incorrect" and that the cause of death of Skaggs was still under investigation.

Skaggs' autopsy later determined that he died by choking on his own vomit after taking a combination of opioids and alcohol, according to an August 2019 article in the Los Angeles Times.

Because the Santa Monica Observer has promoted numerous false claims, often presenting unfounded speculation as fact, NewsGuard has determined that the site has repeatedly published false content, fails to gather and present information responsibly, and does not avoid deceptive headlines.

The site does not have a posted corrections policy. NewsGuard found one correction on the site, noted in bold text at the end of the article, that was published in July 2020. However, because numerous other articles with false or unsubstantiated claims remain uncorrected on the site, SMObserved.com does not meet NewsGuard's standard for having effective corrections practices.

The About page on SMObserved.com states that "In general, we look at Santa Monica's neoliberal politics with skepticism. Our motto is 'Community, Diversity, Sustainability and other Overused Words.' But we do not adhere to any party line."

While the site has a separate Opinion section, articles outside that section often include opinion. For example, a September 2020 article published in the site's Politics

section, headlined “Let's Divide Everyone into Tribes and Examine Why White People are So Awful: CA Approves Marxist Ethnic Studies Requirement,” criticized a state law in California requiring high school students to take an ethnic studies class. According to the article, “Santa Monica lost its progressive cred as the state surpassed the school district in shoving radical left indoctrination down our students' throats by passing AB 331, a law requiring a semester of ethnic studies for high school graduation, together with a model curriculum that sounds more like a Marxist manifesto than a public school resource.”

A May 2020 article, also published in the site’s Politics section, titled “‘Mr. Gorbachev, Tear Down This Wall!’ Santa Monica Residents Lose Patience With Irrational Continuing Shutdowns,” criticized restrictions on businesses reopening in the city of Santa Monica during the COVID-19 pandemic. “All we’re accomplishing with the current stage of the lockdown is putting people out of work, creating poverty, and germinating a seed of growing fury,” the article said.

Because SMObserved.com often publishes opinionated content outside of its dedicated Opinion section, NewsGuard has determined that the site does not handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

The Santa Monica Observer did not respond to three emails, including one sent in 2020, and two phone calls from NewsGuard seeking comment on its editorial practices, approach to corrections, and lack of separation between news and opinion.

Transparency

The site does not disclose its ownership. Ganezer is identified as the Observer’s publisher on its About page. The site provides the Observer’s mailing address, a general email address, and a general contact form.

Articles are inconsistent in identifying their authors. Some stories include no byline or credit only “Observer staff,” while others name the author and include a

photo, without providing any biographical or contact information.

SantaMonicaNext.com, a liberal-leaning local news blog, reported in a December 2016 article that photos provided for the site's content creators may not be legitimate. SantaMonicaNext.com found that articles credited to Sarah Storkin, identified as the site's editor and designer, appeared to use a photo from the resume of a Straffordshire, England, college student with a similar name. The same photo continued to accompany articles credited to Storkin in February 2019. Fact-checking site Snopes.com reported in November 2018 that Ganezer acknowledged that Observer writers can use pseudonyms.

Advertisements and sponsored content are distinguishable from editorial content.

The Santa Monica Observer did not respond to three emails, including one sent in 2020, and two phone calls from NewsGuard, seeking comment on its lack of disclosure about its ownership and content creators and whether its writers are masking their identities.

History

The Santa Monica Observer was founded by publisher David Ganezer in 1998, according to an older version of the site's About page. According to the State Bar of California, Ganezer gave up his law license in 2001, after a Bar review concluded that his handling of client funds was "grossly careless and negligent."

Editor's Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on Sept. 8, 2020, with new examples of the site's content.

Written by: [John Gregory](#)

Edited by: [Kendrick McDonald](#), [Eric Efron](#)

Send feedback to NewsGuard: [Click Here](#)

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