

Former CIA Boss John Brennan Tweets Fake Lincoln Quote, Won't Take It Down

It's become a running joke that Abraham Lincoln didn't actually say half the things attributed to him.

Lincoln historians will tell you this phenomenon began almost as soon as the sixteenth president's life was claimed by John Wilkes Booth, if not before. Yet the problem has only grown more acute in the internet age.



The most recent public figure caught misattributing words to Lincoln was former CIA Director [John Brennan](#). During the recent congressional testimony of FBI agent Peter Strzok, Brennan tweeted that he was reminded of a famous Lincoln quote.

"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves," Brennan ominously wrote.

Watching the spectacle of the House "hearing" with Peter Strzok today, I was reminded of the words of Abraham Lincoln:

"America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves."

– John O. Brennan (@JohnBrennan) [July 13, 2018](#)

The problem? Lincoln never said this, a fact we pointed out in [a 2016 piece](#) on famous Lincoln misquotes. [Here is what we said](#) of that particular Lincoln quote at the time:

“A fine quote to be sure, especially to freedom-loving Americans. Alas, there is no indication Lincoln ever said this. I’ve heard some contend that Lincoln said something along these lines during his [1838 Lyceum Address](#), but if you look at the actual text you will see it’s more than a bit of a stretch.”

Kyle Kashuv, a survivor of the Stoneman Douglas High School shooting, used our article to point out to Mr. Brennan that the quote he shared was false.

Sorry, dude, Lincoln said no such thing. You’re just upset that the kakistocracy you were a part of that was collapsing after its lamentable journey is no longer collapsing because we don’t have HRC as POTUS.

5 ‘Lincoln’ Quotes Old Abe Never Said <https://t.co/2NKmesZaZ6>
<https://t.co/CCjLrjJZRo>

– Kyle Kashuv (@KyleKashuv) [July 14, 2018](#)

Kashuv [was not](#) the only commentator [to point out](#) the error. Brennan, however, appears unfazed by his mistake. His tweet of the false Lincoln quote, which has been retweeted 27,000 times and liked 77,000 times, still stands.

To make sure that our 2016 article was correct, we checked with two additional sources.

[Wikiquote](#) gives the Lincoln quote Brennan shared a status of “misattributed.”

“First attributed to Lincoln in 2002, this seems a paraphrase of a statement in the Lyceum address of 1838, while incorporating language used by Thomas E. Dewey (c. 1944), who said ‘By the same token labor unions can never be destroyed from the outside. They can only fail if they fail to lend their united support to full production in a free society.’”

Researchers at the answers website [Quora](#) concur.

“This is a simplification of an actual quote from a speech by Lincoln titled ‘[The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions](#),’ known as the Lyceum Address based on the location of its giving,” they write.

We even asked experts at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library. They confirmed the quote is fake.

“The quote is not something President Lincoln said specifically,” said Chris Wills, Director of Communications and Public Affairs at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. “It may be adapted from this quote: ‘At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.’”

Brennan, who has emerged as a fierce critic of the president, is hardly the first public person to share a fake quote. Still, his refusal to correct the record is puzzling and disappointing.

Critics of the president, who are legion, often bemoan his stubborn refusal to admit he’s wrong and his tendency to mangle basic facts. These criticisms are not without foundation, evidenced by the fact that Trump, too, has tweeted the false Lincoln quote.

America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves. A. Lincoln

– Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) [April 16, 2015](#)

The problem is that, as Brennan demonstrates, the critics who savage the president often are guilty of the very same sins against truth.

The ultimate costs of this disregard for truth can be found in a tale by the biographer [Diogenes Laërtius](#) (3rd century A.D.), who writes that the great philosopher Aristotle once was asked what a person gains by telling a lie.

“That when they speak truth they are not believed,” Aristotle [answered](#).

This—[the erosion of truth](#)—is the great problem of our times. If John Brennan wants to be part of the solution and not the problem, he should consider some ancient advice: “Physician, heal thyself.”

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