

AN ANALYSIS OF RUMOR

BY GORDON W. ALLPORT AND LEO POSTMAN

As old as human society itself, rumors have flourished in wars and depressions, in peace and prosperity. Why do they exist? What motives do they satisfy? Can they be scientifically understood, and possibly controlled?

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at Harvard University, present answers to some of these questions. They seek to state the basic law of rumor. Such factors as projection, distortion, and self-justification are discussed, and illustrated with case material. The study is based in part on the authors' forthcoming book, entitled *The Psychology of Rumor*.

RUMOR became a problem of grave national concern in the frenzied years 1942 and 1943. At that time a high official in the Office of War Information gave a reason for rumor and a recipe for its control that were partially—but only partially—correct. “Rumor,” he said, “flies in the absence of news. Therefore, we must give the people the most accurate possible news, promptly and completely.”

It is true that rumor thrives on lack of news. The almost total absence of fear-inspired rumors in Britain during the darkest days of the Blitz was due to the people's conviction that the government was giving full and accurate news of the destruction and that they, therefore, *knew the worst*. When people are sure they know the worst, they are unlikely to darken the picture further by inventing unnecessary bogies to explain their anxieties to themselves.

At the same time, it would not be hard to prove that rumor also flies thickest when news is most *plentiful*. There were few rumors about our desperate losses at Pearl Harbor until the papers themselves had published an official report on the disaster. Although there were scattered rumors of Hitler's death before the papers told of the assassination attempt in the summer of 1944, there were many more immediately afterward. The deluge of peace rumors in late April and early May, 1945, coincided with the open discussion of the approaching collapse of Germany in the press. Similarly, a flood of rumors swamped the country during the final hours before V-J Day. Premature stories of the war's end spread faster than they could be officially denied. One of the odd episodes in the history of rumor was the fact that, within a few hours after the release of the news of President Roosevelt's sudden death on April 16, 1945, tales spread regarding the death of many

notable persons, including General Marshall, Bing Crosby, and Mayor La Guardia. If public events are not newsworthy, they are unlikely to breed rumors, and under certain circumstances the more prominence the press gives the news—especially momentous news—the more numerous and serious are the rumored distortions this news will undergo.

The OWI official made his error in assuming that rumor is a purely intellectual commodity, something one substitutes, *faute de mieux*, for reliable information. He overlooked the fact that when events of great importance occur, the individual never stops at a mere acceptance of the event. His life is deeply affected. In his mind the emotional overtones of the event breed all sorts of fantasies. He seeks explanations and imagines remote consequences.

And yet the official did state, inexactly and too simply, a part of the formula for rumor-spreading and rumor-control. Rumor travels when events have *importance* in the lives of individuals and when the news received about them is either *lacking* or *subjectively ambiguous*. The ambiguity may arise from the fact that the news is not clearly reported, or from the fact that conflicting versions of the news have reached the individual, or from his incapacity to comprehend the news he receives.

THE BASIC LAW OF RUMOR

The two essential conditions of importance and ambiguity seem to be related to rumor transmission in a roughly quantitative manner. A formula for the intensity of rumor might be written as follows:

$$R \sim i \times a$$

In plain words this formula means that the amount of rumor in circulation will vary with the importance of the subject to the individuals concerned *times* the ambiguity of the evidence pertaining to the topic at issue. The relation between importance and ambiguity is not additive but multiplicative, for if either importance or ambiguity is zero, there is *no* rumor. For instance, an American citizen is not likely to spread rumors concerning the market price for camels in Afghanistan because the subject has no importance for him, ambiguous though it certainly is. He is not disposed to spread gossip concerning the doings of the people in Swaziland, because he doesn't care about them. Ambiguity alone does not launch or sustain rumor.

Nor does importance. Although an automobile accident in which

I lose my leg is of calamitous significance to me, I am not susceptible to rumors concerning the extent of my injury because I *know* the facts. If I receive a legacy and know the amount involved, I am resistant to rumors that exaggerate its amount. Officers in the higher echelons of the army were less susceptible to rumor than was GI Joe, not because coming events were less important to them, but because, as a rule, the plans and strategies were better known to them. Where there is no ambiguity, there can be no rumor.

MOTIVES IN RUMOR-MONGERING

When we say that rumor does not circulate unless the topic has importance for the individual who hears and spreads the story, we are calling attention to the *motivational factor* in rumor. Any human need may provide the motive power to rumor. Sex interest accounts for much of gossip and most of scandal; anxiety is the power behind the macabre and threatening tales we so often hear; hope and desire underlie pipedream rumors; hate sustains accusatory tales and slander.

It is important to note here the complex purpose that rumor serves. The aggressive rumor, for example, by permitting one to slap at the thing one hates, *relieves* a primary emotional urge. But at the same time—in the same breath—it serves to *justify* one in feeling as he does about the situation, and to *explain* to himself and to others why he feels that way. Thus rumor rationalizes while it relieves.

But to justify our emotional urges and render them reasonable is not the only kind of rationalization. Quite apart from the pressure of particular emotions, we continually seek to extract *meaning* from our environment. There is, so to speak, intellectual pressure along with the emotional. To find a plausible reason for a confused situation is itself a motive; and this pursuit of a “good closure” (even without the personal factor) helps account for the vitality of many rumors. We want to know the why, how, and wherefore of the world that surrounds us. Our minds protest against chaos. From childhood we are asking why, why? This “effort after meaning” is broader than our impulsive tendency to rationalize and justify our immediate emotional state. Curiosity rumors result. A stranger whose business is unknown to the small town where he takes up residence will breed many legends designed to explain to curious minds why he has come to town. An odd-looking excavation in a city inspires fanciful explanations of its

purpose. The atomic bomb, but slightly understood by the public, engenders much effort after meaning.

PROJECTION

When a person's emotional state is reflected, unknown to himself, in his interpretation of his environment, we speak of *projection*. He is failing to employ exclusively impartial and objective evidence in his explanations of the reality surrounding him.

In dreams everyone projects. Only after we awaken do we recognize that our private wishes, fears, or revengeful desires have been responsible for what came to pass in our dream-imaginings. The child asleep dreams of finding mountains of candy; the inferior youth asleep triumphs on the athletic field; the apprehensive mother dreams of the death of her child.

Daydreams too are projective. Relaxed on a couch, our minds picture events that actualize our hopes, desires, fears. We find ourselves in fantasy successful, satisfied, or sometimes defeated and ruined, all according to our temperament or type of emotion that is for the time being steering the associational train of thought.

Rumor is akin to the daydream at second hand. If the story we hear gives a fancied interpretation of reality that conforms to our secret lives, we tend to believe and transmit it.

A GENERALIZATION OF THE RUMOR FORMULA

We may summarize our discussion thus far in the following way: Rumor is set in motion and continues to travel in a homogeneous social medium by virtue of the strong interests of the individuals involved in the transmission. The powerful influence of these interests requires the rumor to serve largely as a rationalizing agent: explaining, justifying, and providing meaning for the emotional interest at work. At times the relationship between the interest and the rumor is so intimate that we must describe the rumor simply as a projection of an altogether subjective emotional condition.

THE BASIC COURSE OF DISTORTION

It is a notable fact that the same pattern of distortion is found in both the changes which an *individual's* perceptions and memories suffer in the course of time, and in the transformations a tale under-

goes as it travels *from person to person*. This pattern of change in both social and individual memory has three aspects: *leveling*, *sharpening*, and *assimilation*.

As a rumor travels, it tends to grow shorter, more concise, more easily grasped and told. In successive versions, more and more of the original details are *leveled* out, fewer words are used and fewer items are mentioned. In our laboratory experiments on rumor we found that the number of details retained declines most sharply at the beginning of a series of reproductions. The number continues to decline, more slowly, in each successive version. The trend is the same as is typically found in individual retention, but "social memory" accomplishes as much leveling within a few minutes as individual memory accomplishes in weeks of time.

As leveling of details proceeds, the remaining details are necessarily *sharpened*. Sharpening refers to the selective perception, retention, and reporting of a few details from the originally larger context. Although sharpening, like leveling, occurs in every series of reproductions, the same items are not always emphasized. Much depends on the constitution of the group in which the tale is transmitted. Those items will be selected for sharpening which are of particular interest to the reporters. There are, however, some determinants of sharpening which are virtually universal: for example, items distinguished by unusual size, and by striking, attention-getting phrases.

What is it that leads to the obliteration of some details and the pointing-up of others? And what accounts for all transpositions, importations, and other falsifications that mark the course of rumor? The answer is to be found in the process of *assimilation* which has to do with the powerful attractive force exerted upon rumor by habits, interests, and sentiments existing in the listener's mind. In the telling and retelling of a story, for example, there is marked assimilation to the principal theme. Items become sharpened or leveled to fit the leading motif of the story, and they become consistent with this motif in such a way as to make the resultant story more coherent, plausible, and well-rounded. Assimilation often conforms to expectation. Things are perceived and remembered the way they *usually* are. Most important of all, assimilation expresses itself in changes and falsifications that reflect the agent's deeply rooted emotions, attitudes and prejudices.

Leveling, sharpening, and assimilation, even though distinguished

for purposes of analysis, are not independent mechanisms. They function simultaneously, and reflect the singular subjectifying process that results in the autism and falsification that are so characteristic of rumor.

THE FUSION OF THEMES IN RUMOR

To enumerate the emotions which launch and sustain rumors is a difficult task because the motivational pattern is always complex and often runs very deep. One scheme of classification, however, based on the dominant type of motivational tension reflected in rumors, was attempted during the war.¹ The analysis of 1000 wartime stories current in 1942 indicated that nearly all seemed to express either hostility, fear, or wish. To sort rumors in terms of their motivational main-springs was probably much easier in wartime than in peacetime. But even in wartime the hate-fear-wish trichotomy is much oversimplified. Actually a fear rumor (e.g., concerning an enemy atrocity) may have elements of sexual interest, of adventure, and feelings of moral superiority, to sustain it. The complex of motives to which a rumor is assimilated is a personal matter, and to find out why a given individual falls for a certain story would require a clinical study of that individual. Because of the diversity of motivational blends that may nourish a given rumor, any psychological classification will be inevitably oversimplified and crude.

Thus we must not expect to find any one rumor correlated with only a single emotion or with only a single cognitive tendency. Assimilation does not work on a unit basis. Even an apparently simple story may serve as explanation, justification and relief for a *mixture* of feelings.

ANTI-NEGRO RUMORS

Fusion of hatreds, of fear, guilt, and economic bewilderment is found in the curious tales of the "Eleanor Clubs" circulating in large numbers in southern states in 1943. The theme of these stories was that large numbers of Negro women, especially domestic servants, were banded together under the spiritual sponsorship of Eleanor Roosevelt, their purpose being rebellion against the existing social order. Here the most obvious fusion is of antagonism against New Deal liberalism and traditional anti-Negro feeling. But the complex of motives goes even deeper.

¹ Robert H. Knapp, "A Psychology of Rumor," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1944, 8, 22-37.

There were many versions of the rumors pertaining to the Eleanor Clubs, which sometimes were called "Daughters of Eleanor," "Eleanor Angel Clubs," "Sisters of Eleanor," "Royal House of Eleanor." These fanciful titles represent, of course, assimilation to stereotype concerning the religiosity of the Negro or his supposed flair for pompous institutional names. It was widely told that the motto of these groups was, "A white woman in every kitchen in a year." A typical Eleanor story runs as follows: "A white woman was away for a while, and when she returned she found her colored maid sitting at her dresser combing her hair with her comb." Another represented the Negro servant as bathing in her employer's bathtub or as entertaining her friends in the parlor. One rumor had it that a white lady called her cook to come and prepare dinner for her guests. The cook turned the tables by demanding that her mistress be at her home by eight o'clock Sunday morning to fix breakfast for the cook's guests. One Negress was reported to have offered to pay a white woman to wash her clothes. Occasionally the stories hinted at coming violence, charging that the clubs were saving icepicks and butcher knives for a rebellion.

All of these versions, besides reflecting anti-Roosevelt and anti-Negro feeling, show a distinct fear of *inversion of status*. The colored people are represented not merely as nursing resentment beneath the surface, but as being on the verge of revolt. They threaten to take over, to reverse the social scale. Why? Because the white rumor-spreaders find their feelings of economic and social insecurity to some extent explained and relieved by these stories. Suffering a vague anxiety, they justify their jitters by pointing to Negro aggression, and derive a melancholy consolation from alerting one another to the menace.

But we must probe still further. A rumor of inversion of status admits in a circuitous way that a relationship other than the *status quo* between the races is conceivable. And according to the American creed, the *status quo*, being essentially unjust, should not be permanent. Every American, as Myrdal points out, believes in and aspires to something higher than the present plane of race relations.² At heart he agrees with Patrick Henry, the slave owner, who as long ago as 1772 wrote, "I will not, I cannot, justify it." At the same time most whites permit them-

² H. W. Odum, *Race and Rumors of Race: Challenge to American Crisis*. University of North Carolina Press, 1943.

³ G. Myrdal, *An American Dilemma*. Harper Brothers, 1944.

selves only a squint-eyed insight into their moral dilemma. A century and a half after Patrick Henry the conflict still persists. Were whites to face the issue squarely, they would be torn asunder by their conflicting loyalties: to the American creed and to their convenient belief in white supremacy.

Rather than face this pointed and irreconcilable conflict between two cherished loyalties, many white people twist and squirm and rationalize. The guilt-evasion rumor is eagerly seized upon as a means of escape. If, as the Eleanor Club stories hold, the Negro is overly-aggressive, illegally plotting, vulgarly menacing, then he has no *right* to equal status. He must expect no more consideration than we give to trespassers, marauders, blackmailers. He must be kept in his place. Suppose there are instances of injustice, do not our patience and indulgence more than make it up to him? After all, he is only an unruly child (as the Eleanor stories show) and must be treated as such—kindly but firmly. By this devious mental maneuvering the bigot is able to escape his feelings of guilt.

Guilt-evasion is likewise detectable in innumerable rumors detailing incidents of the Negro's criminal and disloyal tendencies. One wartime story had it that Negroes were not being drafted as rapidly as whites because authorities were afraid to let them get their hands on guns. Even humorous yarns concerning Negro stupidity, gullibility, laziness, have the same functional significance; so too the myriad tales of Negro sexual aggression. All of these tend to allay the white man's sense of guilt, for what can we do with a black man who is disloyal, criminal, clownish, stupid, menacing, and immoral—except to keep him in his place just as we are now doing? The ideal of equality may be all right in theory, but it was never meant to apply to criminals, imbeciles, or black men.

The ultimate ally of anti-Negro prejudice is the sex rumor. Negroes are repeatedly represented as plotting to cross the color line and commit the sin of miscegenation. The stories invariably concern the relations between Negro men and white women, not the far more frequent liaisons of white man and Negress. There are stories of rape and attempted rape, or less lurid versions representing Negroes as approaching white women, following them on the streets, trying to hold their hands, and so on. One wartime story told that Negroes who were not drafted (the disloyalty theme) were saying to the white men who

left for the war that Negroes would "take care" of the white women back home (the sex theme). Though especially common in the south, Negro sex rumors are frequent also in the north. In a New England city, known for its relatively peaceful race relations, a local story circulated to "explain" why the washroom in a certain restaurant had been boarded up. The reason alleged (wholly fictitious) was that two Negroes had taken a white woman into that particular washroom and raped her.

The motivational current here runs deep. All matters pertaining to sex in the American Puritan tradition are likely to have a high emotional charge, and for this reason to spill over easily into other regions of strong passion. Sex, as a proposition for topical interest, is a never failing target for rumor. Like the matter of status it is also a source of heavy guilt-feeling. To blame ourselves for our sexual sins (as for our sins against the American creed) is never agreeable. Better by far blame someone else for his real or imagined lapses. The resemblance between the sex and the minority-group rumor is close: projection in the interest of guilt-evasion being common to both. This resemblance facilitates fusion. Why not escape guilt by heaping blame for sexual lapses upon the very same persons who threaten our social position?

Deep inside, many people feel secure neither in their status nor in their economic future, nor in their own sexual morality. All of these matters are intimate and central in their lives. Such intense and pivotal interests cannot well be kept separate. A threat to one is a threat to the others. Hence the Negro scapegoat is seen not only as being arrogant socially, but as pressing upon us vocationally, and as being sexually more potent and less inhibited than we. In him we perceive all the grabbing, climbing, lewd behavior that we might indulge in if we let ourselves go. He is the sinner. Even if we are not blameless, yet his misdeeds (as recounted in rumor) are more overt and worse than ours. Hence why should we feel guilt at our peccadillos?

While all this rationalizing is going on, we may, perversely enough, find the Negro's "animal" qualities darkly fascinating. If so, we must severely repress this satanic attraction, and through "reaction formation" (i.e., by turning against the fascination that we disapprove of), fight the devil even harder.⁴ We do so by adopting the most sacred

⁴ H. V. McLean, "Psychodynamic Factors in Racial Relations," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 1946, 244, 159-166.

of taboos, undeviating opposition to racial amalgamation. The very thought fills us with horror (or does it?). Were it violated, the way would be opened for a collapse of all our moral and economic standards. I would admit defeat at the hands of the black and evil stranger whom in my unconscious I regard in part as my own unhallowed alter ego.

Complicated as this analysis of anti-Negro rumors is, it does not exaggerate the intricacy of the emotional and cognitive fusions that account for their appeal. It seems to be the rule for people to *personify* the forces of evil, and to center them in some visibly different, nearly lying, *minority group*. The commonest, but by no means the only, "demons" today are the Communists, the Jews, and the Negroes. Since the blame ascribed to them is certainly in excess of their just deserts we technically call them "scapegoats."

CASE STUDIES IN RUMOR

We invite the reader to examine selected samples of rumor-discourse. The fact that some of the samples seem out-of-date is itself a demonstration of the *ephemeral* quality of rumor. "Propositions for belief" are likely to be short-lived simply because the panorama of human interest changes rapidly. Much may be learned, however, from a study of standard examples drawn from varied social atmospheres, even if some of them are dated.

The analysis of any given tale cannot be as perfect as we should like for the reason that the precise psychological and social conditions under which a rumor is told are known only in part and often through inference alone. Further, no single story can be expected to illustrate all the principles of rumor, although the basic formula should be detectable in every case.

CASE ONE. Immediately following the San Francisco earthquake, April 18, 1906, the wildest rumors were afloat in the city. Four of these, as recounted by Jo Chamberlain in the Baltimore *Sunday Sun* (March 31, 1946), follow:

- (a) That a tidal wave had engulfed New York City at the same time as the San Francisco quake
- (b) That Chicago had slid into Lake Michigan
- (c) That the quake had loosed the animals in the zoo, and that these were eating refugees in Golden Gate Park

- (d) That men were found with women's fingers in their pockets, not having time to take the rings off. In these stories the ghouls were always strung up to the nearest lamp post.

Comment. The suspicious reader may wonder whether rumors recounted forty years after their circulation may not have suffered considerable additional sharpening and other distortion in the interim. An example, perhaps, might be the word "always" in Rumor (d). It would certainly be difficult to prove that this ghoulish story *invariably* was accompanied by the denouement of summary justice. It is true, however, that the rumors circulating after the catastrophe were recorded at the time and we may assume, for purposes of our analysis, that they did not differ greatly from those listed above.

1. One obvious principle illustrated in this series is the *fecundity of rumor*. Prodigious *importance* and vast *ambiguity* conspired in the manufacture of one wild story after another, many of which were merely slight variations of others. The chain of associations is simple: one big city has been destroyed, why not others? The fecundity makes for *sharpening* through a *multiplication* of catastrophes.

2. The disturbed population is trying to gauge the importance of the event as one phase of its *effort after meaning*. Metaphorically they were saying "things just couldn't be more horrible." Having lost home and perhaps loved ones, the feelings of anxiety and desolation are underlined by adding the ravages of wild beasts, or ghouls, and the destruction of an additional metropolis or two. Through these embellishments the sense of total disaster is metaphorically conveyed.

3. In their effort after meaning people likewise drew many inferences, some plausible. Among the more reasonable of the inferences is the possibility that the quake in Rumor (c) might have liberated animals from the zoo. Whether there was a kernel of truth in this statement we do not now know, but even if shattered cages permitted *some* animals to escape, it is likely that in the telling many qualifying phrases were *leveled* out. The extent of the stampede was sharpened, and it seems probable that *condensation* brings in the gruesome fate of the refugees. Animals were in Golden Gate Park; refugees were in Golden Gate Park. The latter are "condensed" into the maws of the former. Imagination (in rumor as in dreams) often unifies discrete events, drawing simplicity out of multiplicity and a specious order out of confusion.

4. The hanging of the ghouls in Rumor (d) represents a *moralized closure* and a fantasied revenge. The vast frustrations engendered by the catastrophe had no personal cause. The despoiler of the dead was the only accessible *scapegoat* in a cataclysm brought on by an Act of God.

5. Panic-rumors such as these correspond to the *final stage* of riot-rumors. Nothing is too wild to be believed provided it somehow explains or relieves the current excitement. But unlike riot-rumors the tales nourished by panic do not have preceding stages of build-up, unless, of course, the panic itself is a gradual development—a rather unusual situation.

6. There is no evidence here for *rumor-chains*. The catastrophe forged so complete a unity of interest that we can well imagine a survivor telling these stories to a complete stranger. We cannot, however, imagine a citizen of New York or of Chicago believing the tales of destruction of his own city. Dwellers in each metropolis had their own *secure standards of evidence*, making such tales impossible. It is doubtful too that the press published any of the rumors that could be so readily checked. Yet many of the *unverifiable* stories were published on hearsay evidence alone and were believed widely throughout the country until the quake was no longer a subject of topical interest.

7. One can easily imagine *prestige* accruing to the teller of such horror stories. The whole nation was in a state of agitation and eager for news of any kind. As soon as the outlines of the catastrophe became known, details to fill in the picture were greedily grasped, and a neighbor who supplied latest bits of “news” was welcomed and eagerly listened to.

CASE TWO. The following story circulated during the visit of Madame Chiang Kai-shek to America in 1943. The scene of the incident was usually said to be Baltimore. One day, the story goes, a gentleman entered a jewelry store and asked for a \$500 watch. The jeweler did not carry such expensive stock, but finally managed to find several high-grade timepieces for his customer to choose from. The purchaser selected in all \$7000 worth of watches and jewelry. When asked by the proprietor how they were to be paid for, the customer replied that he was Madame Chiang’s secretary and requested that his purchase be charged to Chinese lend-lease.

Comment. This was typical of the World War II *wedge-driving*

rumors, whose effect was to divide the United States from its allies. It was such stories that gave government officials grave concern. (Of the same stamp was the tale that the Russians were using lend-lease butter to grease their guns with, and that the British were using the aid to purchase in the United States nylon stockings and other scarce and luxurious articles, thus depriving our own citizens of the coveted goods.)

1. Evidence shows that we can expect such stories to circulate only among a limited *rumor-public*. The Madame Chiang scandal would appeal to people possessing a pre-existing grudge against China or, more probably, against the Democratic Administration in Washington.

2. Like hostility rumors generally, this one is a product of *frustration*, much of the resulting aggression being *displaced*. Wartime shortages were annoying and high taxes aggravating. If short goods are going abroad and tax revenue is being squandered recklessly by a prodigal Administration, why should we not feel annoyed? Oh, of course, we are willing to make sacrifices for the war—but, after all, it is not the war we are complaining about, it is the scandalous inefficiency of that radical set of long-haired professors and “that man” in Washington. The rumor represents a subtle *fusion of antipathies* and frustrations, and serves to *explain* and *justify* our political animosities.

3. The motivation may also entail *guilt-evasion*. During the wartime boom many people indulged in luxuries which they could not afford in peacetime and which were hardly compatible with the wartime emphasis upon self-sacrifice and the purchase of war-bonds. But our petty extravagances could easily be forgotten and forgiven in the face of the blatant self-indulgence of one of the most prominent wartime personages, wantonly wasting *our* national funds in the purchase of fabulous luxuries.

4. There may be an element of *assimilation* to the widely current belief in the waste and corruption of high officials in China. But this factor, if present, is minor since the victims of the animus are more apparently the American than the Chinese officials.

5. We find the use of *concreteness* to lend plausibility to the story. The precise amounts—\$500 and \$7000—are mentioned. Part of the *rationalizing* process is to surround the item with the *pseudo-authority* of detail.

6. Although the locale of this story was not always given as Baltimore, yet we know that when a scene is set, the *label* conferred upon

the incident (especially if the label introduces the story and thus benefits from the *primacy* effect) tends to remain unchanged.

7. Had the story been told without introducing the name of Madame Chiang its essential function would have been unchanged. But to specify a well known individual is a common device for *personalizing* a rumor and for *assimilating* it to common and conventional subject-matter, of *current* interest.

GUIDE FOR THE ANALYSIS OF RUMOR

The reader is now invited to make his own analysis of additional cases, selected if he chooses from the following section entitled "Additional Cases for Analysis," or if he prefers from his own daily intake of rumor. In undertaking his analyses he may find the following guiding questions helpful. Each question is based on an established principle of rumor. Needless to say, not all of the questions are applicable to all samples of rumor.

1. Is the story a proposition for belief of topical reference?
2. Do teller and listener lack secure standards of evidence for its verification?
3. Are ambiguity and importance both present? Which factor is more prominent?
4. In what way does the rumor reflect an effort after meaning?
5. Does it offer an economical and simplified explanation of a confusing environmental or emotional situation?
6. Does it explain some inner tension?
7. Is the tension primarily emotional or non-emotional?
8. Is the tension anxiety, hostility, wish, guilt, curiosity, or some other state of mind?
9. Does it justify the existence in the teller of an otherwise unacceptable emotion?
10. What makes the story important to the teller?
11. In what sense does the telling of the rumor confer relief?
12. What elements of rationalization are present?
13. Does it contain possibilities of projection?
14. Does it resemble a daydream? If so, how?
15. May it serve the function of guilt-evasion?
16. Does it reflect displaced aggression?
17. In telling it, is the teller likely to acquire prestige?

18. Might it be told to please a friend or confer a favor?
19. Might it serve in phatic communication?
20. Can one detect the kernel of truth from which it probably developed?
21. Is it a home-stretch rumor?
22. Might there have been errors in the initial perception?
23. What might have been the course of the creative embedding?
24. Is it likely that it contains elaboration; if so, of what type?
25. Does it probably suffer from a distortion of names, dates, numbers, time?
26. Does its label or locale persist?
27. Is there likely to have been a complete shift of theme?
28. Is there evidence of conventionalization? moralization?
29. What cultural assimilations does it seem to reflect?
30. Does it partake of the character of a legend?
31. Could it conceivably contain a reversal to truth?
32. Does it contain tendency-wit?
33. Do the conditions underlying its circulation illustrate the fecundity of rumor?
34. What may have become leveled out?
35. Have oddities or perseverative wording persisted in the telling?
36. Has there been sharpening through multiplication?
37. Have movement, size, familiar symbols, played a part in sharpening?
38. Has there been concretization or personalization?
39. What closure tendencies may be illustrated?
40. Does it deal with current events?
41. Does it contemporize past events?
42. Primarily does it seem to reflect relatively more intellectual, or relatively more emotional, assimilative tendencies?
43. Are all details assimilated to the principal theme?
44. May condensation of items have occurred?
45. Is there evidence of good-continuation?
46. In what way is assimilation to expectancy shown?
47. Is there assimilation to linguistic habits?
48. Has there been assimilation to occupational, class, racial, or other forms of self-interest?
49. Is there assimilation to prejudice?

50. Is it conceivable that any part rests on verbal misunderstanding?

51. What is the expressive (metaphorical) signification of the rumor?

52. Does it perhaps represent a fusion of passions or antipathies?

53. Does it probably travel in a rumor-chain? What is its public? Why?

54. Are people suggestible to this particular tale because their minds are "unstuck" or "overstuck"?

55. Could it be classified as a bogey, wedge-driver, pipe dream?

56. Could it be part of a whispering campaign?

57. What relation, if any, does it bear to news? to the press?

58. Is the story labelled rumor or fact, or ascribed to an authoritative source? With what effect?

59. What might be the best way to refute it?

60. Does it perhaps represent a stage in crisis (riot) rumor-spreading?

ADDITIONAL CASES FOR ANALYSIS

The reader may wish to try his hand at analyzing the following "originals":

CASE THREE. Twenty-four hours before a sizable contingent of Navy men were to receive their honorable discharges from the service, a rumor spread among them that the Commanding Officer had announced that they must wait two weeks longer for their discharges until the ship they were working on had been de-commissioned.

CASE FOUR. The Russians, it is said, "nationalize their women."

CASE FIVE. Every few years a story reappears to the effect that a sea-serpent has been seen in Loch Ness, Scotland.

CASE SIX. In the early days of the war it was rumored that the Philippine Islands (also the Panama Canal) had been attacked by the Japanese a whole week before the Pearl Harbor assault, but that the news of this attack had been withheld from the public.

CASE SEVEN. Before taking off on a combat mission, many squadrons were plagued with rumors to the effect that their equipment was in some way defective, that the target was almost inaccessible because of anti-aircraft protection, that the enemy had recently perfected a new and dreadful defense weapon that would almost certainly be employed against the squadron.

CASE EIGHT. Workers in a New England manufacturing town during the darkest days of the depression in the 1930's believed that the rich were running over the children of the poor in their elegant cars and never caring; also that the whole depression was some sort of plot by the upper classes to cut the wages of the workers.