



# ENQUIRY

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## The World's Greatest Illusionist

By ERICH WOHL  
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

Many may not appreciate Kellyanne Conway's rhetoric, but there should be no doubt that she is the greatest illusionist since Harry Houdini. Her ability to justify what many people consider Donald Trump's most deplorable actions has resulted in more popularity for him. Furthermore, Conway's ability to redirect the media, as well as her perceived missteps, seem to aid the administration more than hurt it.

Conway successfully ran a campaign for one of the least electable candidates in history. During the election cycle, Trump spouted bigoted language more often than any other candidate, yet Conway was able to mitigate damage by communicating

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with the American people via the media. In fact, she appeared on cable television more frequently than any campaign manager in U.S. history.

In addition, though Trump was among the least qualified candidates, Conway used her years of political experience to facilitate his campaign's penetration of what many thought were Democratic strongholds. She is also the first female campaign manager of a winning presidential race in history. She added a much-needed dose of femininity to the Trump campaign's misogynistic image and helped increase his appeal among conservative women.

Conway also has a certain ability to skirt around direct questions and leave listeners bewildered. She is particularly adept at shifting commentators' focus from the personalities of members of the Trump administration to the issues at hand. Once she begins talking about tangible issues, Conway

seems to sneak in references to the atrocious mistakes supposedly committed by the previous administration. When that appears to be a dead end, she seamlessly switches back to talking about how hard Trump is working. Conway also succeeds in portraying negative coverage of her as sexist, especially when questions seem too disparaging. Though interviewers call for her to 'answer the question,' she can effortlessly avoid doing so. Despite criticism, she continues to make public appearances.

Even Conway's missteps seem to be intelligently calculated. When she infamously referred to White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer's verifiably false information as 'alternative facts,' she clogged the news cycle, effectively drawing negative media attention away from Trump. Her reference to alternative facts was far less egregious than President Trump's or Spicer's unsubstantiated claims of mass voter fraud and inauguration attendance numbers, but with just two words she was able to avert the media's attention from their lies. I suspect what some people may consider one of Conway's greatest missteps was actually a calculated effort to help the administration.

*continued on back page*

## Fire Watch

By CLAIRE ANASTASIA KITZ  
STAFF WRITER

For a time, Thomas Merton was of the world. He was funny, brilliant, passionate, faithless, contemporary in his thinking, fluent in French, athletic, shallow, drank too much, smoked too much, dabbled in communism, loved jazz, and loved women. He unexpectedly converted to Catholicism in 1938 while attending Columbia University for his master's degree, then inexplicably and quietly left the world behind forever when he joined the cloistered Abbey of Our Lady of Gethsemani in Kentucky at age 26 in 1941. Merton left New York a different man.

He wanted to gather up his disjointed existence and weave it into something less chaotic, more coherent, and more meaningful. He no longer wanted to live with "the abyss that walked around in front of [his] feet ..." He chose a life of deprivation and silence,

## This Week's News in 140 Characters

### EDITORIAL REPORT

-  **Ben Shapiro Quotes** @BenShapQuotes · 50m  
"It's a little bit galling to hear these limousine socialists talking about how vilified they are." #Oscars 📌  
↳ 22 ↻ 122 ❤️ 358
-  **Ben Shapiro** @benshapiro · 27m  
Which movie nobody has ever seen will be given an award by industry members who fell asleep during the screeners? #Oscars 📌  
↳ 47 ↻ 137 ❤️ 484
-  **Bill O'Reilly** @oreillyfactor · 6h  
New Dem boss slams Trump as 'worst president' ever fb.me/6uzklmxc6  
↳ 941 ↻ 114 ❤️ 523
-  **James Woods** @RealJamesWoods · 6h  
This is the United States of America. We live by the rule of law. If you don't like a law, change a law. Until then, it will be enforced.  
↳ 430 ↻ 4.3K ❤️ 12K
-  **Garry Kasparov** @Kasparov63 · 3h  
If you can convince people that real news is fake, it becomes much easier to convince them that your fake news is real.  
↳ 126 ↻ 3.7K ❤️ 5.1K

### FIRE WATCH cont.

entirely consecrating his life to God in order to settle his restless heart. It was, for him, a quiet rebuke to the modern world with its constant noise and distraction, emptiness, fake rebellion, and self-satisfied conceit.

Life in the monastery in the farmlands of Kentucky was the polar opposite of his bohemian lifestyle in New York. Merton now lived on the edge of civilization. He had only two sets of garments, slept on straw for a mattress and a pallet for a bed frame, ate bland food, shaved once a week, lived with 70 to 80 other monks

*"To be a watchman also meant to be an intermediary, an advocate, perched on the rooftop between heaven and earth, leaning outward in order to best communicate with God."*

(which swelled to more than 270 after World War II). He prayed every four hours, worked outside even in the winter, did hard manual labor, studied philosophy and theology, and did not speak to anyone except "spiritual directors" or the "superiors" in charge of the monastery. It was a difficult life with a myriad of

## Anti-Semitism in Trump's America

By ALLISON ZUCKERMAN  
STAFF WRITER

On Tuesday, February 21, 2017, more than 150 Jewish graves were knocked over and desecrated at the Chesed Shel Emeth Cemetery in University City, Missouri, just west of St. Louis. This act of anti-Semitic crime happened amidst a growing number of bomb threats directed at Jewish centers across the country. New York Governor Andrew Cuomo has declared these threats a "national crisis" due to their frequency. When asked to address anti-Semitism in America, President Trump and the White House issued a lackluster and reluctant response.

This increasing anti-Semitic sentiment begs the question: What place does anti-Semitism and hate now have in our society, and are Americans feeling more emboldened to express such sentiments? And what will the president do in response?

President Trump's election campaign is partially to blame for the growing audacity of anti-Semitic vandals, like those who scrawled anti-Semitic and pro-Nazi graffiti on New York City subways on February 6. Trump's virulently nationalistic, us-versus-them rhetoric could only have encouraged such people to

Conway demonstrated this same evil genius of sorts when she mentioned the non-existent “Bowling Green Massacre” at about the same time that Trump was under fire for his unpopular and unconstitutional travel ban. It seems implausible that someone with political experience dating back 20 years would accidentally refer to an event that didn’t occur. It is much more likely that she intentionally redirected the media in order to draw attention away from Trump.

Whether one thinks Kellyanne Conway is an evil genius or just plain evil, it is hard to ignore her effectiveness at making President Trump look better than he otherwise would. Economic algorithms suggest that Conway’s popularity and exposure made her financial value to the campaign several times more than her \$2 million salary. Future campaign managers can learn a thing or two from her.

*FIRE WATCH cont.*

deprivations. Merton took vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and lived in silence as demanded by the austerity of his order. And he wrote. He wrote movingly, candidly, and beautifully about the spiritual life for the world to read and appreciate.

Merton became one of the most widely read spiritual writers of the 20th century. His first book, *The Seven Storey Mountain* published in 1948, was an autobiography of sorts. It was the story of his early life in France, England, and then America and his conversion to Catholicism. He did not flinch from writing about the broken parts of his life before his conversion. It was engaging, humorous, eloquent, venturesome, moving, and spiritually insightful. He pointed to something lost in the culture. It was a runaway bestseller, selling millions of copies over the years. It has been translated into at least 20 languages. He went on to write more than 70 books, along with countless essays, journals, letters, and reviews.

Many readers believe his most beautiful and deeply personal writing came from the journals he wrote leading up to his ordination to the priesthood. Some of his journals over this five-year period were compiled for his book *The Sign of Jonas*, published in 1953. The final chapter was titled “Epilogue: Fire Watch, July 4, 1952” and discussed his role as a temporary watchman in the monastery. He walked the levels of it that summer night, while everyone was asleep, to ensure there were no fires — one could engulf the building in minutes — from the many candles used, or a defective furnace, a faulty fuse box, or an electrical glitch. He described his solemn, silent journey — the sights, the people, the sounds, the history of the place, and even the smells — from the bottom of the monastery all the way up to the bell tower.

For Merton, it was not just a physical journey but a spiritual one as well, from descent to ascent to the mountaintop. His insights were haunting and poetic. To be a watchman was to be the monastery’s early warning system to alert the community to danger. To be a watchman also meant to be an intermediary, an advocate, perched on the rooftop between heaven and earth, leaning outward in order to best communicate with God. It was a powerful image and meditation on the monastic life. This experience, as you can read in the journal, brought him to a deeper relationship with God and a better understanding of his vocation and his place within his community.

One cannot read “Fire Watch” without being inspired by the poetry and imagery of Merton’s language: “Will You open a door upon the great forest and set my feet upon a ladder under the moon, and take me out among the stars?” But to see his work in that context alone is a disservice to the breadth and range of his talent and teaching.

The writing of Thomas Merton was and is relevant because he asked his readers, in “Fire Watch” and elsewhere, to be alert, to pay attention to the small details, to contemplate God even in the persistent darkness, and to not fail to recognize the potential for ordinary human experiences to be theophanies or signs of grace, “life within life and of wisdom within wisdom.”

*ANTI-SEMITISM cont.*

publicly express their hate. Trump has relied on Steve Bannon as a leading campaign advisor and now White House chief strategist. In 2007 Bannon’s ex-wife said in a court declaration that he did not want his daughters attending a specific Los Angeles girls’ school, because it had too many Jews in it. Bannon’s former home, Breitbart News Network, has also featured such headlines as “Hoist it High and Proud: The Confederate Flag Proclaims a Glorious Heritage.” Hate groups such as the Ku Klux Klan support Trump, although he later disavowed them, and seem to use his presidency as a license for expressing prejudices.

And what has Trump said of these crimes or of anti-Semitism in general? The simple answer is: not enough. On International Holocaust Remembrance Day on January 27, the White House issued an official statement from the president that did not once mention Jews. At a press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, an Israeli journalist asked President Trump about the rise in anti-Semitic incidents in the United States and what he would say to the American Jewish community. Trump used that question as an excellent opportunity to brag about his electoral victory, state that he has Jewish grandchildren, and reassure the Jewish community that “[t]here’s a lot of bad things that have been happening over

a long period of time ... [but] you’re going to see a lot of love.”

Trump’s avoidance of addressing the question of anti-Semitism continued the next day at another press conference. A Jewish reporter asked Trump about how the government planned to address anti-Semitism and the rising number of bomb threats against Jews. President Trump interrupted the man, demanded he sit down, and simply stated that: “I am the least anti-Semitic person that you’ve ever seen in your life.” This was an especially weak response because the reporter explicitly said that he was not accusing Trump of anti-Semitism.

After the February 21 vandalism at the Jewish cemetery in Missouri, the White House issued its official statement: “Hatred and hate-motivated violence of any kind have no place in a country founded on the promise of individual freedom. The President has made it abundantly clear that these actions are unacceptable.”

The president has not, however, made it abundantly clear that these actions are unacceptable. It is striking that in this official statement, once again, the White House never states the words “Jewish,” “anti-Semitism,” or even “Jewish cemetery.”

This message that “hate is bad” is elementary at best. What prevents President Trump from simply stating that anti-Semitism is incongruent with American values, that perpetrators will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law? Why is he incapable of outright condemning anti-Semitic acts and violence?

Jewish leaders themselves, like the Jewish president of the Interfaith Alliance, are worried about President Trump’s disappointing response to anti-Semitism. Steven Goldstein of the Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect called Trump’s statement “a pathetic asterisk of condescension after weeks [of] grotesque acts and omissions reflecting anti-Semitism.” These “grotesque acts” presumably include, but are not limited to: the desecration of the Chesed Shel

Emeth Cemetery on February 21, the anti-Semitic graffiti on New York subways on February 6, the desecration of 100 or more Jewish gravestones in a Philadelphia Jewish cemetery January 25 or 26, and the fifth wave of bomb threats directed at Jewish community centers this past Monday, which brought the total to more than 100 incidents at a comparable number of locations in 30 or more states since Donald Trump was sworn into office.

President Trump’s refusal to address the problem of anti-Semitism in America will only continue to encourage anti-Semitic acts of vandalism and violence. His general statements about hate and prejudice will do nothing to

*“President Trump interrupted the man, demanded he sit down, and simply stated: ‘I am the least anti-Semitic person that you’ve ever seen in your life.’”*

prevent further minority groups from enduring similar hate crimes. Violent bigots may use his policies, like the travel ban and his revocation of the White House’s support of transgender rights in public schools, as an excuse or as encouragement to expand their list of targets for hate. It seems the president will not defend vulnerable populations like refugees or transgender teenagers from discrimination or attack, but only time will tell.

At the moment, however, anti-Semitic acts are becoming more frequent. In light of the bomb threats to Jewish community centers and vandalism of Jewish cemeteries across the country, the president, in his role as leader of the American people, must serve as an example and straightforwardly and substantively condemn and address anti-Semitism in America.

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