

How did we get to an era where things like “alternative facts” and “fake media” are so common? How is it that a commonly held belief can be the subject of a “hot take” which attempts to challenge it or make it the subject of some huge conspiracy?

Are we all living in a fantasy world nowadays?

Kurt Andersen thinks so, if there’s anyone who signifies this fantasyland, it’s Donald Trump. This is a man who dismisses any fact or any news he doesn’t like. He casually claims that the whole races or religions threaten American values. Also, he throws tantrums when things don’t work the way he expects.

Andersen claims that Donald Trump’s behavior isn’t something new. His delusional beliefs and man-child attitude are typical of an age-old trend in the United States in which individuals are very happy to reject reality and hold on to a fantasy that fits their skewed worldview.

## Jealous of Spain’s new wealth, early English colonists fantasized about discovering gold in North America.

Christopher Columbus embarked on a journey in 1492 in order to discover a better shipping path between Europe and Asia, however, he failed woefully. Although he didn’t return home empty-handed, rather he gave the Americas, a “New World” that promised huge wealth and splendor for the big European powers.

Immediately after Columbus’s discovery, the king of Spain sent more explorers across the Atlantic and as they journeyed down into Mexico and South America, they finally discovered what everyone wanted: gold.

The Spanish explorers precisely came across the Aztec and Inca empires and their remarkable gold supplies, which they quickly started stealing and mining on a huge scale. These ill-gotten gains instantly made Spain into a powerful transatlantic empire, much to the seething jealousy of England.

Shortly, the English court was fantasizing its own American discoveries, with dreams of huge boats full of gold arriving in the Thames.

During the late 1500s, the English aristocrat Sir Walter Raleigh commissioned a report JUST to convince Queen Elizabeth I that the soil in North America was really full of countless amounts of gold. Though the report was nothing more than a gathering of untrue rumor and secondhand information, it was all Elizabeth required to establish different English gold-seeking expeditions.

A lot of English colonists' ships were sent in order to look for gold and send it back. However, they discovered nothing but death. During their first mission of looking for gold, a lot of people died in their futile search for gold; however, during their second journey, the entire last colonist died.

England's next leader, King James, fearless about this calamities wasn't going to let England's dreams of gold go unachieved. Therefore, he sent more colonists to set up a base on the east coast of North America and send back any riches they found.

These were the colonists who created Jamestown in Virginia and after half of them died a sad deaths they finally discovered one successful product to ship home which is tobacco.

## The creation of Mormonism exploited the American trend toward fantasy.

If we were to look at an interesting tale in ancient fiction of the Bible, one could consider the Book of Mormon as one of the greatest illustrations of Christian fan-fiction ever written.

However, when the Book of Mormon was first seen; it became the source for a new religion known as Mormonism.

It all started in 1830 when a young New Yorker named Joseph Smith claimed to have seen an angel who showed up to him one night with news about a formerly unknown part of the Bible.

According to the angel, this biblical text had been engraved onto gold plates and buried near Smith's house.

As a matter of fact, it was said that Smith found these plates, which he transcribed into his Book of Mormon. Some of the book's message is that there was a group of Israelites who had sailed from Jerusalem to America during the sixth century BC. They formed a civilization that Jesus Christ later visited and he appointed some of them as his new apostles.

Although this may sound a little too imaginative, a huge number of Americans joined Smith's Mormon church. Andersen the author, refers to this as an ancient illustration of just how willing Americans are to indulge in fantasy.

In particular, Americans loved the impression that their land could be seen as an old holy place such as Jerusalem which is special enough for Jesus Christ to have visited.

Whatever your beliefs are, the fact is that approximately 20,000 Americans converted to Mormons within the first ten years of the religion's creation. That number nearly doubled a few years after. Finally, during the mid-nineteenth century, there were enough members for them to leave the west and create their own state, Utah.

## Troubling fantasies of benevolent slavery and white reign denoted the turn of the twentieth century.

When you think about the life of a slave, there's a possibility that you don't imagine a happy-go-lucky person who has everything he required. Surprisingly, this is the fantasy that a lot of Americans enjoyed; sometimes even decades after slavery had been forbidden.

Thirty years after slavery was ended by the Civil War, there were white Americans such as Nate Salsbury, who entertained the fantasy that slavery hadn't been really bad for African-Americans.

Salsbury converted his fantasy into a delusional theme park in Brooklyn, New York in the year 1895 which was dedicated to the entire charms of slavery. Thousands gathered just to see Salsbury's perform, which included a huge re-enactment of how slaves allegedly lived on

Southern plantations. Hundreds of African -Americans were paid to perform this fantasy life of living in cabins and picking cotton.

The New York Times even applauded the theme park for its portrayal of the “happy, careless” life of the Southern slave, and Salsbury would later tour his show across the American Northeast.

Another outrageous fantasy happened again in the early twentieth century known as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK) which promoted its twisted version of white supremacy.

At that time, 1.5 million black Americans had been freed from the South and they established themselves in other parts of America. Although the KKK wasn't a new thing, its popularity increased greatly between the years 1910 and 1925. With African-Americans moving into what had been fully white neighborhoods, there was an unpleasant push-back in the form of an encouraged KKK.

The KKK's fantasies aren't restricted to ideas of black inferiority; also, they have fantastical costumes which include big pointy hats and ghostly robes, and names such as “Imperial Wizard” and “Grand Goblin”.

By the early 1920s, 5% of the white male population became members of this terrible creation. One of the most famous pieces of recruitment publicity was the 1915 movie titled *The Birth of a Nation*, which was the first movie to get a screening at the White House.

## During the 1960s, young Americans used mind-bending drugs and took part in the occult.

Between the 1960s and 1970s, a lot of cultural changes were happening in America. In 1962, the word “hippie” caught on as the sexual revolution started. The number of students going to college exceeded those from previous generations, and recreational drug use started becoming common on several campuses. Even professors at esteemed Harvard University were following this trend alongside their students.

But, this new culture of liberty and experimentation showed that Americans were spending more of their time in drug-fuelled fantasies and less in reality.

In 1965, the number of Americans who had supposedly smoked marijuana was only under a million, however, in 1972, that number increased to 24 million. Also, in 1967 only 5% of college students reported having smoked marijuana. In 1971, four years after, the majority of students reported having toked up, and approximately a third of them said they smoked doobies every day.

Currently, Americans smoke between two to four times more marijuana than Northern Europeans.

Psychedelic drugs such as LSD also became popular. Currently, the number of Americans who have used psychedelics is reportedly about 32 million. To put that number into perspective, if they come together to create a religion, it would be America's second-biggest!

Indeed, this nation-wide outburst in the usage of drugs blurred the line between fantasy and reality for a lot of American youths. It doesn't take a lot for the mind-altering effects of LSD to bleed beyond the real "trip" and into the daily life of the user.

Due to this, there was a visible rise in college students who believed in magic, mysticism, and anti-rationalism. In 1969, the New York Times Magazine did a report on students who were interested in séances, UFOs, witchcraft and tarot cards.

## Over the last few decades, American adults have turned into children.

Between the years 1980s and 1990s, something strange occurred to American culture. At some point, the majority of the adults decided that growing up was optional.

A lot of 30-year-olds adults were dressing up for Halloween, whereas forty-somethings years adults were dancing with teenagers at music festivals. For the baby-boomer generation, and to other generation since life turned into continuous adolescence.

In the 1980s, the type of leisure activities that were once limited for children only turned into activities that adults also actively pursued.

It was during this time that adults started purchasing 50% of all the comic books and half the tickets to watch superhero movies. Also, the main reason why video games are now a multi-billion-dollar industry is that the average buyer of games is now men in his thirties. At a time, the industry was promoting their shoot-em-up games to teenagers who enjoyed pretending to be adult action heroes. Currently, these games are now played by men pretending to be boys.

This childlike attitude also applies to adult clothing, food, and work habits.

During the 1990s, "schoolgirl chic" became a fashionable look for women which involved socks that reached the knee, backpacks, and tight sweaters. Meanwhile, men changed from wearing suits and ties to wearing the polo shirt and jeans combination that boys used to wear.

It would be difficult to imagine the type of adult who lived during the 1950s playing video games while eating a container of Ben & Jerry's cookie dough ice cream. However, this manner is probably playing out all over America currently. Also, the workplace has transformed a lot and with beanbag chairs, foosball tables, as well as video game consoles becoming common features in order for employees to get some playtime or naptime into their working day.

## Americans are buying more guns even though they have lesser reasons to do so.

One of the most dangerous American fantasies includes something the author has done several times: this is the use of guns. Andersen only used guns to hunt down turkeys and other games however, increasingly; millions of Americans are now buying guns for a different and delusional reason.

We've experienced a huge number in the increase of guns purchased in recent decades; also at the same time, the real reasons for buying all these weapons have significantly reduced.

During the 1970s, the average American gun owner had a single firearm, and 30% of the population said they were active hunters. Currently, the average gun owner has about three to four firearms, and in 2017, just 15% of people claimed to hunt.

Hence, what are people doing with all of these guns, if they are not hunting? According to polls, the major reason is for personal protection, even though crime statistics demonstrate that this threat is nothing more than a widespread fantasy.

Surveys that have been conducted over the past few decades display that claims that guns are important or personal protection have doubled since the 1990s. Also, during that same period, the probability of ever facing a dangerous criminal has been halved!

In New York City, which has some of the toughest limits on both ownership and the carrying of guns, the probability of being murdered reduced by 82 percent since 1990.

Obviously, the notion of needing a gun particularly automatic weapon, for safety is only another dangerous, delusional fantasy.

## Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire: A 500-Year History by Kurt Andersen Book Review

For several years, millions of Americans have surrendered to mutual delusions. From the English colonists who wrongly traveled to America with the belief of finding gold, to the acid heads of the 1960s, to the gun-supporters of today. America has continually been a country of fantasists, whether seemingly benevolent or deeply abhorrent.

<https://goodbooksummary.com/fantasyland-by-kurt-andersen-book-summary/>

