

January 2, 2012

[Charles Krauthammer](#) wonders if we are alone in the universe.

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And [WSJ Reviews](#) a book claiming we are alone.

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[Karl Rove](#) makes predictions.

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House seats in seven contests and lost them in three. The average gain has been 12 seats. The largest pickup was 24 seats in 1944—but President Barack Obama is no FDR, despite what he said in his recent "60 Minutes" interview.

- *Republicans will take the U.S. Senate. Of the 23 Democratic seats up in 2012, there are at least five vulnerable incumbents (Florida, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Pennsylvania): The GOP takes two or three of these. With the announcement on Tuesday that Nebraska's Ben Nelson will retire, there are now seven open Democratic seats (Connecticut, Hawaii, North Dakota, New Mexico, Virginia, Wisconsin): The GOP takes three or four. Even if Republicans lose one of the 10 seats they have up, they will have a net pickup of four to six seats, for a majority of 51 to 53.*
- *Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Sen. Harry Reid or both will leave the Democratic leadership by the end of 2012. Speaker John Boehner and Senator Mitch McConnell will continue directing the GOP in their respective chambers.*
- *This will be the fourth presidential election in a row in which turnout increases. This has happened just once since 1828, from 1928 through 1940. ...*

Jennifer Rubin lists the year's disasters for the president.

President Obama has had the worst year of his presidency. Or, to be more precise, his performance this year has been the worst of his presidency. Pundits and pollsters will say that his "numbers are up," but let's look at what he's done or not done.

If you can recall, back in February his State of the Union address was a bore-a-thon stocked with spending ideas (on everything from light rail to salmon), with only glancing reference to the debt. His grand proposal: Freeze discretionary spending at the astronomically high level he had presided over in his first two years.

The next few months were spent bashing the only man to author a serious budget plan and put real Medicare reform on the table. He not only rebuffed Rep. Paul Ryan's proposals but invited him to a speech, put him in the first row and then delivered a hyper-partisan attack, accusing the Republicans of taking Pell grants from college kids so fat cats could get a break on corporate jets.

Throughout the spring and summer the president failed to present his own entitlement reform plans. ...

Here's a myth that is a delight to have debunked; by a translator who was on the scene, no less. **Media Myth Alert** blog has the story.

The nod for the most notable debunking of 2011 goes to retired U.S. diplomat Charles W. (Chas) Freeman Jr. for puncturing the popular tale about Zhou Enlai's remark in 1972 that it was "too early to say" what the effects would be of the French Revolution.

Freeman told a panel in Washington, D.C., in June that the Chinese premier was referring to the turmoil in France in 1968, not the years of revolutionary upheaval that began in 1789.

His remarks debunking the Zhou misinterpretation were first published by London's Financial Times.

Zhou's "too early" comment was made during President Richard M. Nixon's historic visit to China in February 1972. Freeman, then 28-years-old, was the president's interpreter on the trip and heard Zhou's remark.

Freeman said during the panel discussion in June that the misinterpretation "was too delightful to set straight" at the time.

In a subsequent interview with me, Freeman said it was "absolutely clear" from the context of the conversation that Zhou's comment was a reference to the turmoil of 1968.

Freeman described Zhou's remark as "a classic of the genre of a constantly repeated misunderstanding that has taken on a life of its own."

Washington Post

Are we alone in the universe?

by Charles Krauthammer

Huge excitement last week. [Two Earth-size planets](#) found orbiting a sun-like star less than a thousand light-years away. This comes two weeks after the stunning announcement of [another planet](#) orbiting another star at precisely the right distance — within the "habitable zone" that is not too hot and not too cold — to allow for liquid water and therefore possible life.

Unfortunately, the planets of the right size are too close to their sun, and thus too scorching hot, to permit Earth-like life. And the Goldilocks planet in the habitable zone is too large. At 2.4 times the size of Earth, it is probably gaseous, like Jupiter. No earthlings there. But it's only a matter of time — perhaps a year or two, estimates one astronomer — before we find the right one of the right size in the right place.

And at just the right time. As the romance of manned space exploration has waned, the drive today is to find our living, thinking counterparts in the universe. For all the excitement, however, the search betrays a profound melancholy — a lonely species in a merciless universe anxiously awaits an answering voice amid utter silence.

That silence is maddening. Not just because it compounds our feeling of cosmic isolation, but because it makes no sense. As we inevitably find more and more exo-planets where intelligent life *can* exist, why have we found no evidence — no signals, no radio waves — that intelligent life *does* exist?

It's called the Fermi Paradox, after the great physicist who once asked, "Where *is* everybody?" Or as was once elaborated: "All our logic, all our anti- isocentrism, assures us that we are not unique — that they *must* be there. And yet we do not see them."

How many of them should there be? The [Drake Equation](#) (1961) tries to quantify the number of advanced civilizations in just our own galaxy. To simplify slightly, it's the number of stars in the galaxy .".

multiplied by the fraction that form planets .

multiplied by the average number of planets in the habitable zone .

multiplied by the fraction of these that give birth to life .

multiplied by the fraction of these that develop intelligence .

multiplied by the fraction of these that produce interstellar communications ..

multiplied by the fraction of the planet's lifetime during which such civilizations survive.

Modern satellite data, applied to the Drake Equation, suggest that the number should be very high. So why the silence? Carl Sagan (among others) thought that the answer is to be found, tragically, in the final variable: the high probability that advanced civilizations destroy themselves.

In other words, this silent universe is conveying not a flattering lesson about our uniqueness but a tragic story about our destiny. It is telling us that intelligence may be the most cursed faculty in the entire universe — an endowment not just ultimately fatal but, on the scale of cosmic time, nearly instantly so.

This is not mere theory. Look around. On the very day that astronomers rejoiced at the discovery of the two Earth-size planets, the National Science Advisory Board for Biosecurity [urged two leading scientific journals not to publish](#) details of lab experiments that had created a lethal and highly transmittable form of bird flu virus, lest that fateful knowledge fall into the wrong hands.

Wrong hands, human hands. This is not just the age of holy terror but also the threshold of an age of hyper-proliferation. Nuclear weapons in the hands of half-mad [tyrants \(North Korea\)](#) and radical apocalypticists (Iran) are only the beginning. Lethal biologic agents may soon find their way into the hands of those for whom genocidal pandemics loosed upon infidels are the royal road to redemption.

And forget the psychopaths: Why, a mere 17 years after Homo sapiens — born 200,000 years ago — discovered atomic power, those most stable and sober states, America and the Soviet Union, came within inches of mutual annihilation.

Rather than despair, however, let's put the most hopeful face on the cosmic silence and on humanity's own short, already baleful history with its new Promethean powers: Intelligence is a capacity so godlike, so protean that it must be contained and disciplined. This is the work of

politics — understood as the ordering of society and the regulation of power to permit human flourishing while simultaneously restraining the most Hobbesian human instincts.

There could be no greater irony: For all the sublimity of art, physics, music, mathematics and other manifestations of human genius, everything depends on the mundane, frustrating, often debased vocation known as politics (and its most exacting subspecialty — statecraft). Because if we don't get politics right, everything else risks extinction.

We grow justly weary of our politics. But we must remember this: Politics — in all its grubby, grasping, corrupt, contemptible manifestations — is sovereign in human affairs. Everything ultimately rests upon it.

Fairly or not, politics is the driver of history. It will determine whether we will live long enough to be heard one day. Out there. By them, the few — the only — who got it right.

WSJ

The Loneliest Planet

by Alan Hirshfeld

Aliens invaded my life one Sunday night in 1957 when I was 6 years old. As I pulled close to watch Walt Disney's "Wonderful World of Color," the screen of our old black-and-white Admiral TV seemed to bleed into rainbow hues. Disney introduced the evening's program: "Mars and Beyond," a meditation—in retrospect, an entertainment—on the possibility of life on other worlds. "Will we find planets with only a low form of vegetable life?" Disney wondered, then nodded genially toward his towering, metallic co-host. "Or will there be mechanical robots controlled by super-intelligent beings?" To my juvenile mind, these questions were an invitation to a living-room ride into outer space.

The program featured a wry, animated history of ideas about otherworldly beings, interrupted by scientific testimony from dark-suited experts like Wernher von Braun. With the rush of a Disneyland roller coaster, it launched full-tilt into speculation about alien life forms. I sat riveted by a succession of Dalí-esque landscapes, overrun by writhing, python-thick vines and nightmarish carnivorous creatures, all waging the brutal business of survival to an eerie electronic score. The import of these scenes was clear, at least to a callow 6-year-old: There must be life out there; we must find it.



The earth as seen from the moon during the Apollo 11 mission.

Alone in the Universe: Why Our Planet Is Unique

By John Gribbin

Wiley, 219 pages, \$25.95

The hothouse of 1960s space exploration whetted my taste for all things extraterrestrial. I read a book called "Intelligent Life in the Universe" (1966), written by Russian astronomer Iosif Shklovsky and expanded upon by a rising planetary scientist from Harvard named Carl Sagan. Gustav Holst's "The Planets" became the theme song of my adolescence. Like Walter Cronkite, whose muted narration betrayed his own disappointment, I was crushed by the grainy photos of the desolate, utterly lifeless surface of Mars sent back by Mariner 4 after a flyby in 1965.

Gradually my youthful certitude about the imminent discovery of life on other worlds tempered. New information corralled the broader reaches of speculation. Martian landers found no sign of microbes in the soil, while probes to Venus crisped in that planet's sulfurous hothouse. Radio telescopes, which have now spent decades on the lookout for transmissions bearing the telltale signature of an advanced civilization, have received not a single one.

Recent discoveries might seem to boost the likelihood of life elsewhere in the galaxy. We have confirmed the stunning ubiquity of extrasolar planets in other star systems, the latest a possible Earth-analog orbiting right in the habitable sweet spot—not too close, not too far—from its central sun. Biologists have encountered bacteria underneath a mile of Antarctic ice and nestled within rocks in a Yellowstone geyser; it's only a modest stretch to imagine that the next generation of robotic spacecraft might find simple biota in equally hostile havens on Mars or on one of Jupiter's moons.

But as John Gribbin points out in his grimly plausible book, "Alone in the Universe," there is a world of difference between *habitable* planets and *inhabited* planets. Mr. Gribbin's narrative reduces the vision of Disney's documentary into the counterfactual fever-dream it really is. The author's conclusion: Earth is the sole abode of intelligent life in the galaxy, the product of a profoundly improbable sequence of cosmic, geologic and climatic events—some thoroughly documented, some inferable from fragmentary evidence—that allowed our planet to become a unique refuge where life could develop to its full potential.

Chief among these, paradoxically, was a near-cataclysmic planetary collision during Earth's infancy, which gave birth to the moon. Such encounters were relatively common in the harum-scarum chaos of an early solar system that teemed with veering planets and asteroids. In its suicidal blow against our world, the Mars-size impactor generated enough heat to liquefy both itself and Earth's exterior. Its dense, metallic core plunged inward to join our planet's existing metallic center, while the rest swept up part of the fiery terrestrial shell to form the moon.

One consequence of Earth's tumultuous youth was the thinning of its rocky crust. This has provided the planet with a lively tectonic existence, complete with vapor-spewing volcanoes, continents that divide and drift, and an ecologically advantageous global-temperature-regulation system. Earth's swollen metallic core remained liquid; its constant churning gives rise to electrical currents that generate a far-flung magnetic cocoon that shields us from dangerous solar particles. (The creation of Eden is far more complex than one might have heard.)

Another fortuitous coincidence on Mr. Gribbin's checklist is the moon's large size relative to Earth, a ratio unique in the solar system. Without such a gravitational partner to restrain the disrupting tugs of the sun and Jupiter, our planet might suffer paroxysms of axis-tilting. (Try to run a civilization when your once-temperate hemisphere suddenly heels over to an Arctic orientation.) Mr. Gribbin outlines how a series of climate-altering Ice Ages and tectonic shifts benefited human ancestors roaming the grasslands of East Africa.

These events are real; the conclusions are speculative, but plausible. But speculation is part of the fascination (and the fun) of the extraterrestrial-life debate and part of the reason it has percolated since antiquity. The Greek philosopher Epicurus, in the fourth century B.C., envisioned a plurality of worlds, some of which, he claimed, harbored living beings. Plato demurred, holding that a unique Creator would form a unique cosmos; thus, the central Earth must be the sole harbor of life. Early Christian scholars, including Thomas Aquinas, tended toward this view. (After all, what God would deliver Earthlings from sin yet abandon his creations elsewhere?) But the issue intensified in 1277, when Étienne Tempier, Bishop of Paris, condemned arguments that seemed to restrict God's ability to seed the cosmos with life, if he so chose. Why would God be so profligate with cosmic habitations yet so miserly with occupants?

The prevailing "lonely Earth" outlook eventually encountered fierce opposition from a tract titled "Of Learned Ignorance" (1440), published by Nicholas of Cusa. Here readers discovered that among the numerous inhabited worlds in the cosmos are our own moon and sun. In 1543, Nicholas Copernicus recast Earth as a common planet, circling but one of a vast population of much more distant suns, and from then onward a stream of planetary-voyage fantasies and broader speculative works emerged.

Readers eagerly flung off life's sober reality and flirted with far wilder prospects of imagination. In a best-selling 1686 confection, "Conversations on the Plurality of Worlds," French fabulist Bernard le Bovier Fontenelle describes Venusians as "little black people, scorch'd with the Sun,

witty, full of Fire, very Amorous," while their glum counterparts on Jupiter "are so very grave, that were Cato living among 'em, they would think him a merry Andrew."

The line between science and speculation has long been muddled. As late as 1800, William Herschel—the same man who discovered the planet Uranus and mapped the boundaries of our galaxy—charted vast forests on the lunar surface and claimed sunspots to be windows into a temperate solar interior. By the time the New York Sun perpetrated its Great Moon Hoax in 1835, the public was primed to believe fictitious news reports of telescopic sightings of otherworldly creatures—as it would be a century later when H.G. Wells's murderous Martians invaded New Jersey via the radio.

Mr. Gribbin admits the possibility—even probability—that elementary life forms have arisen elsewhere in the galaxy. But the object of his scientific and statistical scrutiny is *intelligent* extraterrestrial life. While he cannot prove a galaxy-wide absence of other civilizations, he presents an array of modern, research-based evidence that renders that conclusion eminently reasonable. He even suggests a decades-long survey of infrared emissions around stars (possibly arising from planetary atmospheres, even water vapor). This would yield the true number of "wet-Earth" planets in the galaxy—in his estimation, zero.

One leg of Mr. Gribbin's argument rests on the theorized life expectancy of advanced civilizations, which he claims is much more fleeting, on a cosmic timescale, than we care to admit. Our species has inhabited this planet for about one hundred-thousandth the age of the galaxy, and it was merely a century ago that we began to transmit radio waves. If technological civilizations did arise before ours, they might have succumbed to war or environmental degradation well before our primate ancestors stood upright.

The rosy alternative—a long-surviving society—seems even less plausible. With millions of years of technological advancement, why haven't they migrated throughout the galaxy by now? Or why haven't we picked up the least shred of their radio-wave chatter? Of course, Mr. Gribbin dismisses such questions: These purported civilizations never existed.

Our civilization's own halting steps into outer space so far suggests an uncertain future for the exploration or colonization of extrasolar worlds. The idea that we—or our robotic avatars—might be the first species to traverse the galaxy presumes a fundamental change in space propulsion, which at present (except in Hollywood) is unsuited to cosmic distances. Looming environmental disaster might yet provide the impetus to send aloft a select segment of the population in a one-way space ark. But an escape-pod scenario is a far cry from true interstellar migration.

Which brings us back to Mr. Gribbin's essential point. Given the 13 billion years or so that our galaxy has existed, whatever fate will befall us here has already befallen "them" out there. In this, the extraterrestrial-life question has always been a mirror of humanity, a reflection of our own limits and dreams as a species.

One needn't sign on to Mr. Gribbin's conclusions to appreciate his logic. Humans are a miracle of blood, bone, and brain, a volatile mixture of compassion and brutality whose most enduring accomplishment—besides self-propagation—is the acquisition of knowledge about our world. We occupy, according to Mr. Gribbin, a unique position in the cosmic scheme of things. Having crowned humanity as the apex of galactic intelligence, Mr. Gribbin warns that there is no second

chance: If we destroy ourselves, we will have done a grave injustice to the universe, removing perhaps the only means it has to ponder itself.

Mr. Hirshfeld is the author of "Eureka Man: The Life and Legacy of Archimedes."

WSJ

Political Predictions for 2012

Nancy Pelosi, Harry Reid or both will leave the Democratic leadership by year's end.

by Karl Rove

As New Year's approaches, here are a baker's dozen predictions for 2012.

- Republicans will keep the U.S. House, albeit with their 25-seat majority slightly reduced. In the 10 presidential re-elections since 1936, the party in control of the White House has added House seats in seven contests and lost them in three. The average gain has been 12 seats. The largest pickup was 24 seats in 1944—but President Barack Obama is no FDR, despite what he said in his recent "60 Minutes" interview.
- Republicans will take the U.S. Senate. Of the 23 Democratic seats up in 2012, there are at least five vulnerable incumbents (Florida, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Pennsylvania): The GOP takes two or three of these. With the announcement on Tuesday that Nebraska's Ben Nelson will retire, there are now seven open Democratic seats (Connecticut, Hawaii, North Dakota, New Mexico, Virginia, Wisconsin): The GOP takes three or four. Even if Republicans lose one of the 10 seats they have up, they will have a net pickup of four to six seats, for a majority of 51 to 53.
- Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Sen. Harry Reid or both will leave the Democratic leadership by the end of 2012. Speaker John Boehner and Senator Mitch McConnell will continue directing the GOP in their respective chambers.
- This will be the fourth presidential election in a row in which turnout increases. This has happened just once since 1828, from 1928 through 1940.
- In 2008, voters told the Pew Poll that they got more election information from the Internet than from daily newspapers. Next year, that advantage will grow as the Internet closes in on television as America's principal source of campaign news.
- After failing to win the GOP presidential nomination, Ron Paul will not run as a third-party candidate because that would put his son, Rand Paul, in an untenable position: Does the Republican senator from Kentucky support his father and effectively re-elect Mr. Obama, or back his party and defeat him?
- Mr. Obama's signature health-care overhaul, already deeply unpopular, will become even more so by Election Day. Women voters are particularly opposed to ObamaCare, feeling it threatens their family's health.

- Mr. Obama may propose tax reform, attempting to use it to appeal both to his liberal base (a question of fairness) and independents (a reform to spur economic growth). This will fail, but not before boosting Mr. Obama's poll numbers.
- The Obama campaign won't corral high-profile Republican endorsements—as it did in 2008 with former Secretary of State Colin Powell—with the unimportant possible exception of former Nebraska Sen. Chuck Hagel. It will also make a special effort to diminish the GOP's advantage among military families, veterans and evangelicals, with the last a special target if Republicans nominate Mitt Romney.
- Despite an extraordinary amount of presidential time and involvement, Team Obama will fall as much as \$200 million short of its \$1 billion combined fund-raising target for the campaign and Democratic National Committee. Even so, Mr. Obama and Democrats will outspend the GOP nominee and Republicans. This won't necessarily translate into victory: John Kerry and Democrats outspent President George W. Bush and Republicans in 2004 by \$124 million. Groups like American Crossroads (which I helped found) will narrow the Democratic money advantage.
- Scandals surrounding the now-bankrupt Solyndra, Fannie and Freddie, MF Global and administration insider deals still to emerge will metastasize, demolishing the president's image as a political outsider. By the election, the impression will harden that Mr. Obama is a modern Chicago-style patronage politician, using taxpayer dollars to reward political allies (like unions) and contributors (like Obama fund-raiser and Solyndra investor George Kaiser).
- To intimidate critics and provoke higher black turnout, Democrats will play the race card more than in any election since 1948. Witness Attorney General Eric Holder's recent charge that criticism of him and the president was "both due to the nature of our relationship and . . . the fact that we're both African-Americans."
- The economic recovery will continue to be anemic, leaving both unemployment and concerns about whether the president is up to the job high on Election Day. Because of this, Mr. Obama will lose as his margins drop among five groups essential to his 2008 victory—independents, women, Latinos, young people and Jews. While he will win a majority from at least three of these groups, he won't win them by as much as he did last time.

Predicting the future is always dangerous but conservatives believe in accountability, so let's see how well I do a year from now.

Right Turn

Obama's annus horribilis

by Jennifer Rubin

President Obama has had the worst year of his presidency. Or, to be more precise, his performance this year has been the worst of his presidency. Pundits and pollsters will say that his "numbers are up," but let's look at what he's done or not done.

If you can recall, back in February his [State of the Union address](#) was a bore-a-thon stocked with spending ideas (on everything from light rail to salmon), with only glancing reference to the debt. His grand proposal: Freeze discretionary spending at the astronomically high level he had presided over in his first two years.

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Throughout the spring and summer the president failed to present his own entitlement reform plans. He [caved on the continuing resolution](#) and on [the debt ceiling deal](#), upsetting the left because he hadn't hiked taxes on the rich. In the fall it was time for his taxpayer-paid bus tour on which he bashed Republicans using some of the most egregious language of his presidency. (According to the president, the GOP wants you to breathe dirty air and won't put country above party.) His own "jobs" bill was a feeble retread of his stimulus plan. It was largely ignored, save the payroll tax cut. The president insisted on a two-month deal to embarrass the GOP. We passed the \$15 trillion mark on the debt. Unemployment remains at historically high levels.

It was a year of shocking irresponsibility and demagoguery. He denounced the Ryan-Wyden Medicare plan as he had Ryan's original Medicare reform plan. He let the Simpson-Bowles debt reduction plan wither on the vine. He lifted not a finger to make use of the supercommittee he had agreed to create. He put forth no tax reform plan. If there has been a more slothful performance in and hyper-partisan use of the Oval Office in recent years I am hard-pressed to recall it. Frankly, Congress should run against the do-nothing president.

Foreign policy was even worse. He devised an Afghanistan withdrawal timetable to suit his election needs and pulled all troops out of Iraq, leading to the immediate unraveling of what had until then been a reasonably successful part of his foreign policy. He dawdled on Syria. He dawdled on Libya. Thousands died as "leading behind" became the watchword of his presidency. He arm-twisted Georgia to let Russia into the WTO, while Vladimir Putin, in his best imitation of the czars, imprisoned political opponents and ran a phony election. Obama stumbled through the Arab Spring without articulating any U.S. policy. If honest, he would have admitted that we had none.

With regard to Israel, his entire policy collapsed. Direct talks ended. Mahmoud Abbas publicly attacked him on the pages of the New York Times and humiliated him by going to the United Nations for a declaration of statehood after Obama pleaded that he not do it. He ambushed the Israeli prime minister with a surprise declaration of U.S. policy on "1967 borders."

Meanwhile, Iran marches ever closer to acquisition of nuclear weapons, China has engaged in a brutal crackdown. The Post editorial board [asks](#) why the West has done nothing about it. ("The human rights crackdown has drawn relatively little attention or condemnation from the West.") But Obama specializes in doing nothing when it comes to the oppressed. In Cuba, Alan Gross rots in prison while Obama refuses to reverse the relaxation of sanctions.

The year was not a complete waste, however. Navy SEALs killed Osama bin Laden, Libyans killed Moammar Gaddafi, Kim Jong Il died, and some Iranian nuclear scientists had auto accidents.

Media Myth Alert

[The debunking of the year, 2011](#)

by W. Joseph Campbell

The nod for the most notable [debunking](#) of 2011 goes to retired U.S. diplomat [Charles W. \(Chas\) Freeman Jr.](#) for puncturing the popular tale about Zhou Enlai's remark in 1972 that it was "too early to say" what the effects would be of the French Revolution.

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Zhou's "too early" comment was made during President Richard M. Nixon's historic visit to China in February 1972. Freeman, then 28-years-old, was the president's interpreter on the trip and heard Zhou's remark.

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In a subsequent [interview](#) with me, Freeman said it was "absolutely clear" from the context of the conversation that Zhou's comment was a reference to the turmoil of 1968.

Freeman described Zhou's remark as "a classic of the genre of a constantly repeated misunderstanding that has taken on a life of its own."

(In an [oral history interview in 1995](#), Freeman said Zhou possessed "enormous grace and charm.")



Freeman

The conventional interpretation of Zhou's "too early" comment [lives on](#) because it suggests that Chinese leaders are inclined to a long and patient view of history.

Freeman said:

"I cannot explain the confusion about Zhou's comment except in terms of the extent to which it conveniently bolstered a stereotype (as usual with all stereotypes, partly perceptive) about Chinese statesmen as far-sighted individuals who think in longer terms than their Western counterparts," he said, adding:

"It was what people wanted to hear and believe, so it took" hold.

Indeed, [it did](#). The [misinterpretation persists](#) — and even has been invoked when it's [acknowledged as apocryphal](#).

The puncturing of the Zhou misinterpretation rates as the "debunking of the year" not only because of its significance but because of its relevance to busting [media myths](#), those delicious but [dubious tales](#) that masquerade as factual and offer distorted views of historical events.

In designating Freeman's disclosure as the "debunking of the year," I'm reminded of high-minded observations [offered in 1998](#) by Max Frankel, formerly the executive editor of the [New York Times](#).

In observations that go to the heart of the importance of [busting media myths](#), Frankel wrote:

"What's wrong with a little mendacity — so goes the theory — to give a tale velocity? It is unforgivably wrong to give fanciful stories the luster of fact, or to use facts to let fictions parade as truths."

Puncturing the Zhou misinterpretation seems in keeping with that objective. The [debunking](#), moreover, offers us a more accurate, more telling, and more realistic view of history and historical figures.

[Media Myth Alert](#)'s first "debunking of the year" went in 2009 to the Spanish researchers who [challenged the authenticity](#) of Robert Capa's iconic "Falling Soldier" image, taken in September 1936 during the Spanish Civil War.

Capa's photograph purports to show a charging loyalist militiaman at the instant he is fatally death.

No "debunking of the year" was designated in 2010, the year of publication of my latest book, [Getting It Wrong](#), which punctures 10 prominent [media-driven myths](#).



