



WHY GREAT LEADERS MUST BE GREAT LIARS

A chance conversation between Richard Nixon, Henry Kissinger
and Chandler 'Chancey' Haste

as reported in *Chancey On Top*, by John Wareham

“Great leaders must be great liars, Mister President.” Those guttural words are coming from the street. He slips to the window. Two patricians are deep in conversation. They look familiar. Could they possibly be who they seem?

“You’re right, Henry, deception is the currency of public service.”

Yes! That ski-nosed fellow in charcoal flannels and red cashmere jacket is Richard Nixon. But why’s the notorious former United States President on the loose at two in the morning? He strides to the door and heads out onto the street.

The cool, misty April air tastes of stale exhaust fumes. The president and his gray-suited sidekick, the robotic Dr. Henry Kissinger, are standing under a streetlamp, beside a chauffeured limousine. The light is surreal, the shadows dark.

“I mean, consider the life of the ordinary citizen, Henry.” The president glances over his shoulder. The eyes are deep, the lids heavy, the complexion sallow. “Candor would destroy it.”

This is Manhattan, right? Opportunities must be seized.

“Excuse me, gentlemen.” The duo halts. “I’m Chancey Haste. I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation, and I have a question;”—the president’s bony fingers accept his hand— “are you *really* in favor of lying?”

“What Mister President is saying”—Henry presses his black-framed spectacles into the square forehead beneath his homburg hat—“is that lying is vital to making the world tolerable.”

“How does that work, exactly?”

Henry pushes a middle finger to his pudgy nose. “The vulgar masses are unfit for truth or liberty, Mister Haste. Their natural human condition is subordination. So those in power must make the rules in their own interests and call it justice.”

“That’s why wise leaders appreciate the necessity of secrets and lies, Chancey.” There’s an engaging cello timbre to the presidential voice. The chauffeur cracks the passenger door and the president cocks an eye. “Can we tempt you to a spin around the block, Chancey?”



Why not?

They hunker into soft velvet seats, facing one another. Henry fails to remove the homburg. The air-conditioned vehicle glides as if on a cloud, and a glass shield ascends to shut out the chauffeur.

“So, do I have it right? A culture of lies is the justice of the wise?”

“Plato himself gave us the concept of the noble lie, Chancey.”

“The noble lie?”

“A falsehood that justifies a laudable goal, Mister Haste.”

“Such as?”

“Well, Chancey, political leaders must inevitably invent false reasons for unpalatable but worthy wars.”

“Right. The unwashed masses have numbers on their side.” Henry spits his consonants. A burst of breath freshener might not go amiss. “So whatever we do to gull and guide them is legitimate.”

“Think of it this way, Chancey: using democracy to turn the masses against their own liberty, then lead them to a laudable goal represents a philosophical, intellectual, and moral triumph.”

“Really? But what, exactly, would be the laudable goal?”

“To overthrow the vulgar, Mister Haste.”

“It’s a terrible thing, Chancey, but right now the vulgar masses have triumphed—”

“They have everything their misguided hearts desire, Mister Haste.”

“They do?”

“Wealth, pleasure, endless, mindless entertainment—everything they think they want, but nothing that truly matters.”

“But how bad is money, fun and amusement?”

“They’re reducing America to embecility.”

“Europe, too. England has become a nation of napping nitwits, Chancey. The global reach of American culture threatens to trivialize all of humankind.”

“So, what’s the cure?”

“The glory of global war in the pursuit of the illusion of democracy.”

“Nobody’ll buy into yet another war, surely?”

“That’s why we need noble lies, Chancey.”

“Virtuous deceipts to portray imminent catastrophe and the urgent need to secure ourselves against evil external enemies.”

“Only panic inspires people to forgo contentment, Chancey.”

“Only war motivates the masses to rise above self-indulgence.”

“But will a couple of noble lies persuade authentically vulgar people to send their kids to war? I mean, how will that work, actually?”

“We’ll enroll the media—fear and frenzy sell papers, so they’ll be delighted to play along—and we’ll spike the cocktail with religion and patriotism.”

“Fear, faith, and jingoism,”—a stubby doctoral forefinger pokes the air—“that’s the elixir that transforms hedonists into patriots prepared to fight and die for God and country.”

“But doesn’t it all seem kind of, well, uh, immoral?”

“Not at all, Chancey. Remember, we use noble lies precisely because our values are sacred.”

“All other cultures and values pale by comparison, Mister Haste. Supply-side economics and the illusions of liberty and democracy are grand, galactic, universal conceptions.”

“So our goals must extend beyond myopic, so-called national security—we are *world* powers, Chancey.”

“That is our destiny.” Henry’s tone is simultaneously somber and exultant. “We are the Zion that will light up the planet.”

“But we must act quickly—”

“A new order is unfolding. A newer and more cunning breed of enemy is emerging. A clash of civilizations is inevitable.”

“We’ll need to strike decisively—”

“And preemptively! If we fail the trivialization of life will proceed unchecked, the animalization of man will become complete, and the night of the world will be at hand.”

“That’s why we need a brave new breed of noble liars, Chancey.”

“Wow! You gentlemen have given me lot to think about. Do noble lies have a place in personal life, too?”

“Of course, Chancey. A man who won’t lie to his wife has very little consideration for her feelings.” The smile’s conspiratorial. “And, anyway, women intuitively understand the need to sprinkle extra sugar where the tart is burned.”

“The best liars are the best human beings, Mister Haste.”

“As a corporate headhunter I empathize with the sentiment. But how does it all work, actually?”

“Well, to begin with, since he couldn’t even tell a lie, George Washington was a failure as a



boy.” The president offers a half grin. “Most kids understand that”—he pauses—“and good lying calls for empathy and judgment, so the skilled liar is less likely to fall prey to the lies of others.”

“And never forget, Mister Haste”—Henry’s forefinger attempts to erase a fog from the inside of the left lens—“that lying is just another way of presenting the truth.”

“But don’t liars pay a price? Don’t they finally feel rotten?”

“Well, the knowledge that he is prepared to lie isolates him from the oxymoronic moral majority”—the president grins at his own linguistic coinage—“but it also renders him a winner and ameliorates his loneliness.”

“When the battle is won, Mister Haste, the victor will never be asked if he told the truth.”

The cabin’s suddenly still.

“We’re back at your door, Chancey.”

“So there’s no downside to lying?”

“Let me put it this way, Chancey,”—the chauffeur cracks the door—“some say a liar’s punishment, like the boy who cried wolf, is loss of credibility.” A film of perspiration covers Mr. President’s upper lip. “But an effective liar never gets caught, so that’s a nonissue.”

The pavement’s firm beneath his feet. The limousine door’s still ajar. He leans his head back into the cabin. Mr. President and Henry have spread themselves across the velvet like huge spiders.

“So there’s absolutely no downside at all?”

“Well, you’re asking me to be honest, right, Chancey?”

“Yes.”

“Then I shall confess.” The cello-voice drops a quaver. “The punishment for the outstanding liar is that he ultimately can’t believe anyone.”

Henry cranes forward, catching his lenses in the overhead streetlight. “But that’s a nonissue, too, Mister President.”

The chauffeur snaps the door shut and repairs to the driver’s seat. The president’s tinted side window descends.

“Henry’s right, Chancey.” The smoldering Nixonian eyes remain in shadow but the teeth and index finger flash. This time the tone’s pugnacious. “For the truth of the matter is that every last one of the cocksuckers that you and I are going to meet around a conference table”—the limousine pulls away from the curb and the window slowly ascends—“is going to be a goddamned fucking liar anyway.”§

