

Separating Truth from Lies
Posted On:December 31, 1969

One of the most dangerous things facing representative government is that there must be a common acceptance of what is real. Intelligent people think, seek accurate information, and have good character. They expect good character in their representatives, which is the basis for trust. Without trust in our institutions and governments, democracy cannot survive.

We are already on the cusp of what is called "illiberal democracy," characterized by widespread distrust in government and blatant bad character among our elected officials.

Fortunately for us, the illiberals among us are still the minority: perhaps one third versus the two-thirds of us who still live our lives with decency and intelligent behavior.

One little remembered quality of character is honesty: telling the truth. Facts are the building blocks of truth. We can all agree with the fact that we can see: that the sun rises in the east and sets in the west. The more educated among us can agree that we live on a global planet, something that we take on faith (or see the curving earth for ourselves at the ocean or from an airplane or space).

Yet we do have among us the stupid who still insist that the Earth is flat. Those with that view cannot understand science. A now minority of human beings still believes in witches, magic, snake-oil unproven medicines, and lies and conspiracy theories over truth and reality.

The biggest lie accepted by this one-third of Americans is that Donald Trump won the presidential election. Reality cannot enter their psyches. One elected representative who promotes this lie also adds one of her own: that Israelis used lasers to change the votes in the voting machines. Others promote the idea that Venezuela and China were somehow the manufacturers of our voting machines. The reasonable two-third of us cannot make a dent in this stupidity.

How can we then bridge the gap between the reasoning two thirds and the dupes who swallow big lies?

Some interesting things are happening across the country in this regard. People talk to their neighbors and find issues they can agree on. Then very gently, events start to swing their way. When a rabid opponent of vaccination finds himself near death in the hospital (90% of such near-death patients) he tells everyone he knows to get vaccinated. Also, at funerals of the unfortunate anti-vaxers, relatives urge rethinking of this issue on the still living.

Third president Thomas Jefferson once noted that if he had to choose between a free press and a republic, he would choose the press. The press is not a perfect institution, but it is the best we have for investigating and disseminating true information, facts, and statistics. One of the most valuable press services is the local newspaper which prints news of what is happening in their community. Readers can verify many of these facts themselves, and can keep a critical eye on this institution through letters to the editor.

Local newspapers are facing extinction. The Biden Administration is attempting to help such papers survive with an infusion of funding. However, we must all personally support this project with our own subscriptions and the few minutes it takes to read the paper.

How many of you remember the Weekly Reader? I recall that as an elementary school student, each of us received a copy of the Weekly Reader, our own newspaper, that ran articles we could understand at about age 10. It had puzzles and games as well. A good addition to this paper would be articles submitted by children themselves, future journalists.

Another essential institution is Civics, taught in elementary all the way through high school. My school held a mock presidential election with students representing delegates. We also had a mock United Nations, in which students represented countries. These are exceedingly useful learning experiences in truth, research, and process.

And to save our democracy, we must never again elect a person who lies, is dishonorable, and scorns the norms of honest behavior. We are flawed human beings, but we can try to do better if we want to govern ourselves.

Honor public service again.

687 words

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