

Last week, we discussed a danger to Democracy: a flood of disinformation. Disinformation is not misinformation (not getting it right): it is deliberate lying. Whoopy Goldberg was misinformed when she said the Holocaust was a religious, not racial issue, and that Jews are White. However, the Nazis considered it a racial issue. They didn't care if a Jew was practicing their religion or not; they believed in "blood" identity, and were willing to trace Jewish origins for several generations.

Disinformation is lying. The Anti-Vaxers spout baloney that vaccinations implant computer chips to control minds, or are an evil government plot to poison recipients. The ignorant are ready to believe anything nasty about government, but the sowers of these lies know exactly what they are doing. Fox News and other pretend news services do not do news. They do entertainment and make up news. These hypocrites are fully vaccinated but egg on the ignorant with lies about vaccination.

Election loser, Donald Trump, is endlessly lying to his followers that the election was fake and that his victory was stolen from him. But like all authoritarians or wannabe dictators around the world, he knows that if you lie loudly and repeatedly, the stupid will believe you. They believed him so much that they were ready to take over the Capital and lynch elected lawmakers. These deluded dupes are now going to prison.

I recently wrote a column on the weaponization of words, words that are "dog whistles" (hidden messages) of racial and class hatreds. One reader responded that I was a dupe of the "lying mainstream media" (a Donald Trump "enemy") and that she got the real truth from Tucker Carlson at Fox News, whom she mistakes for a journalist. He is an entertainer, as was the late Rush Limbaugh, whose rants were directed at the educated, experts, and "uppity women" (he called them FemiNazis). With these choices for authority, she sees "Mainstream" as false and believes "alternate facts" instead.

It seems that this woman does not know what the Mainstream Media is, how its investigations and reporting are done, and what are the credentials of reliable sources. Many otherwise good people formerly respected authorities, their elected government, and the dedicated civil servants that make democracy work.

There have always been outliers, a small number of stubborn skeptics of anything official, but the danger to our country today is that this sector has burgeoned to about one-third of the population. They are still a minority, but many are very dangerous and threaten violence.

So here is my brief tutorial on how one finds reliable sources for information, how we know they are reliable, and how to support these new resources to undo the damage of the lying demagogues spewing hate and mistrust.

The Mainstream Media is not a single entity, but it is a fraternity of journalists with the same professional training. They are taught as journalists that their duty is to speak truth to power and inform the public accordingly.

In China and Russia, speaking truth to power gets a journalist locked up or murdered. In democracies, those in power know that they are being watched and their work analyzed. Because of our free press, we suffer less from corruption than banana republics or strongman governments. In Russia, half the economy is under-the-table bribery or barter. Ask refugees from that country if this is so.

A new factchecking service on Internet is NewsGuardTech.com. It is run by trained journalists with no axes to grind. They offer their biographies for all to see. A strong "ethics and conflict of interest policy" is transparent and available. Another source is: The Factual. Both are excellent.

They rate most news and information sites in the US, UK, Canada, France, Germany, and Italy. News sources analysis is their only business, and depends on being trustworthy and reliable.

American high schools are starting to teach students to use a nonprofit called the News Literacy Project to assess news articles credibility.

The weekly CNN program, "Reliable Sources," is run by one of the NewsGuardTech

founders. Check it out.

680 words

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