

The Delray Democrat

Weaponizing Ignorance¹

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We seem to be in an era of pervasive ignorance sweeping the US; at least I hope this is unprecedented, suggesting it is temporary and fixable. School curricula throughout K-12 overwhelmingly fail to include sufficient education on American history and government. Many adults then choose willful ignorance rather than to be informed citizens. At best many carefully select and limit their news sources to avoid even considering differing views, options, and a more accurate factual background. Consequently, we are currently suffering through a persistent, incredibly dangerous period of divisiveness wherein Americans, who would otherwise be good neighbors, resort to baseless and foolish demonization of anyone who even thinks slightly differently.

This period of dehumanizing those with different views, ignoring their more important positive qualities to treat them as an enemy that must be destroyed presents a bigger threat to our democracy and future as a nation than any enemy we have faced. These sinister forces also mix in racial and religious differences, not just politics. Extremist militias and supremacist groups are widely responsible for this perilous climate. They, and they alone, thrive on this divisiveness. The Republican Party, in lockstep with these groups and ongoing Trumpist domination, has effectively weaponized this ignorance. They no longer stand for any ideology or set of political principles to govern the nation. It is all about absolute power and control.

They have one goal – to obtain and maintain power at all costs, even going so far as to steal elections, disenfranchise eligible voters, and use violence. Their base voters blindly believe every baseless lie and conspiracy theory presented to them and worse, they act accordingly, to include violence, election fraud, and obstructing the workings of government at all levels. Although all sides have engaged in negativity and vitriolic rhetoric, Republicans for decades have shamelessly attempted to falsely portray Democrats as enemies of the state, people who do not value freedom or the Constitution. In so doing, this “dehumanizing” effect makes it easier to control their voters, have them resort to violence, and disenfranchise those who they have been misled to believe do not deserve to have their votes counted. To accomplish this, they keep in power such underserving, incapable representatives, and reprehensible liars as Marjorie Taylor Greene. They will take anyone who supports their authoritarian aims. The key for them is fomenting chaos to enable eroding democracy and establishing their power.

Donald Trump’s “Big Lie” about the 2020 Election being stolen from him is a clear example. Biden won the Presidency, both popular and electoral vote. He won even without Georgia and Arizona, but those states joined the repudiation of Trump’s anti-American authoritarianism. The message should have been to eliminate Trumpism from the Republican Party and the nation. Instead, Republican legislatures in multiple states are engaging in widespread efforts to support

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the Big Lie. They use it to enact obvious voter suppression laws to make sure they do not lose again by preventing communities who normally would oppose them from even voting. They held hearings and phony recounts to perpetuate this fraud on the American people.

Over two thirds of Republicans believe, at least what they say in polls, Trump won reelection, despite the fact that there is no evidence whatsoever that was true. Every one of the many claims and court cases was dismissed because they had no factual basis at all. Yet these voters choose to be ignorant. They choose to ignore the facts, they shun any effort to provide them with the truth, all in blind servitude to a charlatan with a life history of defrauding people. More importantly, at least for many, the extremists oppose American values and seek to institute an alternate regime. You cannot make this up. However, instead of watching the dystopian future of Gilead on “A Handmaid’s Tale,” these groups are trying to establish something very similar here in the real world, at least as far as authoritarian control. Even the non-Trumpist Republicans seem to prefer this future to keep power rather than to uphold the Constitution they swore to protect and the principles they claimed to serve.

For our democracy to survive, we must find the cure to this “illness of ignorance.” The Trumpist Republican Party relishes the hate, division, and willful ignorance of its voters. Not everyone has to closely follow the news, but we cannot tolerate the abject dishonesty tactically being used to manipulate people, not only for their vote, but to commit violence and criminality in the name of their cause. There is a difference between opinion, with which we are all free to agree or disagree, and falsehood, which is not subject to debate. The hate, prejudice, bias, and division permeating society all stem from ignorance and are drastically enhanced by those perpetrating its weaponization and the spread of lies. We can and should have honest debate; we should soundly reject the escalation of ignorance. Our future depends on it.