

Mainstream Media as Arbiters of Truth

Exclusive: An angry mainstream U.S. media is shaking its fist at anyone who won't clamber onboard the Russia-gate groupthink bandwagon, reports Robert Parry.

By Robert Parry

The mainstream U.S. media is never more unctuous and unprofessional as when it asserts that it alone must be the arbiter of what is true and what is not, regardless of what the evidence shows or doesn't show.

For instance, New York Times columnist Charles W. Blow declared on Monday that the public can no longer debate whether Russia leaked to WikiLeaks the emails from the Democratic National Committee and Hillary Clinton's campaign chairman John Podesta despite the failure of the U.S. government or private researchers to present evidence that establishes that claim as fact.

Blow acknowledged that "We are still not conclusively able to connect the dots on the question of whether there was any coordination or collusion between members of Donald Trump's campaign and the Russians ... but those dots do continue to multiply at an alarming rate."

But Blow also asserted that "It is absolutely clear that the Russians did interfere in our election. This is not a debatable issue. This is not fake news. This is not a witch hunt. This happened."

Blow chastised people who still wanted evidence of this now non-debatable issue, seeing them at fault "because this fact [of the Russian meddling] keeps getting obscured in the subterfuge of deflection, misdirection and ideological finger-pointing about what has yet to be proven."

So, if you insist on asking for proof of the core allegation in Russia-gate, you are guilty of "subterfuge..., misdirection and ideological finger-pointing."

And if that indictment doesn't quiet you up, there's the column by The Washington Post's E.J. Dionne Jr. who explains that the real victims in Russia-gate are the accusers who have promoted this guilt-by-association scandal that has impugned the integrity of a growing number of Americans who either talked to Russians or who expressed doubts about the investigation.

While the Russia-gate accusers have essentially deemed these Americans "traitors" or the Kremlin's "useful idiots" or some other derogatory phrase, Dionne sees the much greater offense coming from the people so accused who have

complained about what they see as McCarthyism. Dionne writes:

“These days, any liberal who raises alarms about Trump’s relationship with Russia confronts charges of McCarthyism, hysteria and hypocrisy. The inclination of many on the left to assail [Russian President Vladimir] Putin is often ascribed to partisan anger over his success in undermining Clinton’s candidacy.

“There’s no doubt that liberals are angry, but ask yourself: Shouldn’t everyone, left, right and center, be furious over Russia’s efforts to inject calumny and falsehood into the American political bloodstream?”

So, Dionne suggests that people who question the credibility of the Russia-gate allegations are somehow un-American by favoring the injection of “calumny and falsehood into the American political bloodstream.” But that mainstream hostility toward skepticism has been at the heart of the Russia-bashing campaign that we have witnessed for the past several years.

Blacklisting Journalists

And, that campaign indeed has been replete with McCarthyism. You even have The Washington Post promoting a blacklist of 200 Internet news sites (including Consortiumnews.com and other prominent independent-minded outlets) as guilty of “Russian propaganda” for reporting skeptically on some State Department claims about the New Cold War.

But Dionne also is dishonest in claiming that the alleged leaks blamed on Russia are false. The central allegation in Russia-gate is that the Russians obtained two batches of Democratic emails and released them to the American public via WikiLeaks. Even if that is the case, nothing in those emails was fabricated.

The emails represented real news including evidence that the DNC displayed improper bias against Sen. Bernie Sanders’s insurgent campaign; excerpts of Hillary Clinton’s paid speeches to Wall Street that she was trying to hide from the voters; and revelations about pay-to-play aspects of the Clinton Foundation’s dealing with foreign entities.

So, even if the Russians did give the emails to WikiLeaks – although WikiLeaks denies that the Russians were the source – the core reality is that the emails provided real information that the American people had a genuine right to know. But Dionne and the mainstream U.S. media have conflated this truth-telling with cases of “fake news,” i.e., made-up stories that investigations have shown had no connection to Russia, simply to sleazy entrepreneurs seeking to make some money via lots of clicks. In other words, Dionne is lying or engaging in “fake news” himself.

Such phony journalism is reminiscent of other shameful chapters of the mainstream media's history of serving as propaganda conduits and marginalizing independent reporters who displayed professional skepticism toward the dangerous groupthinks of Official Washington.

A pivotal moment in the chaos that is now consuming the planet came on Feb. 6, 2003, when The Washington Post's editorial and op-ed pages presented a solid phalanx of misguided consensus that ruled out any further dissent about the existence of Iraq's WMD after Secretary of State Colin Powell presented his slam-dunk case before the United Nations the day before.

The Post's editorial board – led by editorial page editor Fred Hiatt – judged Powell's WMD case “irrefutable,” an opinion echoed across the Post's op-ed page.

“The evidence he [Powell] presented to the United Nations – some of it circumstantial, some of it absolutely bone-chilling in its detail – had to prove to anyone that Iraq not only hasn't accounted for its weapons of mass destruction but without a doubt still retains them,” wrote Post columnist Richard Cohen. “Only a fool – or possibly a Frenchman – could conclude otherwise.”

The Post's senior foreign policy columnist Jim Hoagland then demanded the surrender of any WMD-doubting holdouts: “To continue to say that the Bush administration has not made its case, you must now believe that Colin Powell lied in the most serious statement he will ever make, or was taken in by manufactured evidence. I don't believe that. Today, neither should you.”

This enforced WMD consensus contributed to arguably the most disastrous U.S. foreign policy decision in history as President George W. Bush launched an illegal invasion of Iraq that got nearly 4,500 U.S. soldiers killed along with hundreds of thousands of Iraqis and spread bloody chaos across the Middle East and now into Europe. There was also the problem that no hidden caches of WMD were discovered.

So, you might assume that editorial-page editor Fred Hiatt and other prominent mainstream journalists who pushed the bogus WMD claims and pushed the few dissenters to the fringes of the public debate, received some appropriate punishments – at least being unceremoniously fired in disgrace. Of course, if you thought that, you don't understand how the U.S. mainstream media works. To this day, Fred Hiatt is still the editorial-page editor of The Washington Post.

Slandering Dr. King

One might note, however, that historically the mainstream U.S. media has performed no better than it has in recent years.

Fifty years ago, on April 4, 1967, at Riverside Church in New York City, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. gave one of the most important speeches in U.S. history, taking to task American militarism and the Vietnam War. Famously and courageously, King denounced his own government as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”

King, whose life was increasingly at risk, was then put at even greater risk by being denounced by The New York Times and The Washington Post. The Post blasted King for spreading what today we might call “fake news,” accusing him of “sheer inventions of unsupported fantasy.” The Times chimed in that King’s words were “facile” and “slander” while urging him to focus instead on “the intractability of slum mores and habits,” i.e. those lazy and immoral black folks. (Exactly a year later, King was shot dead.)

But you might ask, don’t the Post and Times at least get the big investigative stories right and thus warn the American people about abuses to their democratic process? Well, not exactly.

Take, for example, the case of Richard Nixon conspiring with South Vietnamese leaders to sabotage President Lyndon Johnson’s Paris peace talks in fall 1968 so Nixon could eke out a victory over Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Nixon’s manipulation of that election – while half a million American soldiers were in the war zone – was treated by the Post and Times as a conspiracy theory for nearly half a century, even as honest journalists chipped away at Nixon’s denials by uncovering evidence of the deal that continued the war for another four years.

Some reporters, such as the Christian Science Monitor’s Beverly Deepe, were onto the story in real time. Others, including Seymour Hersh, advanced knowledge about these events over the decades. Five years ago, I uncovered a top secret file that Johnson’s National Security Adviser Walt Rostow dubbed “The X-Envelope” which contained wiretap proof of what Johnson called Nixon’s “treason.” Besides writing up the details, I posted the documents on the Internet so anyone could see for themselves.

Yet, as recently as last October, The New York Times ignored all this evidence when referencing the supposed “October Surprise” of 1968, citing – instead of Nixon’s peace-talk sabotage – the fact that Johnson had ordered a bombing halt of North Vietnam. In other words, the Times was still promoting Nixon’s version of the story nearly a half century later.

Only early this year, when a scholar uncovered some cryptic notes by Nixon’s chief of staff H.R. Haldeman that seemed to reference Nixon’s instructions regarding the sabotage did the Times finally deign to acknowledge the reality

(because the Times published the finding on its op-ed page, which I guess makes it true). But the Times did so without acknowledging all the hard work that journalists had done over the years so the cryptic notes would fit into a complex puzzle that made sense.

Nor did the Times acknowledge its own role in obscuring this history for so long.

Rumor-Mongers

To add insult to the historical injury, the Times pretended that it was right to have ignored the earlier work. Times columnist Nicholas Kristof dismissively treated those decades of investigative journalism by writing: “Nixon’s initiative, long rumored but confirmed only a few months ago, was meant to improve his election chances that year.”

“Long rumored”? The reality was that Nixon’s perfidy had long ago been proven by independent-minded journalists but their work was ignored by The New York Times and pretty much everyone else in the mainstream media until the self-proclaimed truth monitors decided that the discovery of one new piece of the mosaic was the appropriate time to proclaim that the reality could now be accepted as a reality.

To explain the near half-century gap in the Times’ failure to investigate this historic act of treason, the Times then smeared the journalists who had done the investigating as rumor-mongers.

So, in light of the mainstream media’s dismal performance over the decades, what is one to make of the dictate now that we must accept that the Russians did leak the emails to WikiLeaks even if no one is showing us the evidence? It also appears that we are supposed to dismiss the contents of the emails as “fake news” (even though they are genuine) so that will buttress the narrative that Russia is undermining our democracy by disseminating “fake news.”

Perhaps getting people to accept this false narrative is crucial to giving credibility to the Times’ full-page ads professing the newspaper’s undying love of the truth and to The Washington Post’s new melodramatic slogan, “Democracy Dies in Darkness.”

While there’s no doubt that truth is important to an informed electorate, there is something scary when the mainstream media, which has such a checkered history of misreporting the truth, asserts that it is the one that gets to decide what the truth is.

Investigative reporter Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories for

The Associated Press and Newsweek in the 1980s. You can buy his latest book, *America's Stolen Narrative*, either in [print here](#) or as an e-book (from [Amazon](#) and [barnesandnoble.com](#)).
