

The media should remember key lessons from the Trump era | The Washington Post

By Jennifer Rubin

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The Trump era saw some marvelous investigative reporting, including The Post's David A. Fahrenthold's investigations of President Trump's finances and voluminous coverage of impeachment and other Trump scandals. However, mainstream media remained flummoxed for most of the Trump presidency by his and his followers' willful lying and denial of reality. Many outlets took only baby steps forward during the pandemic and the final run-up to the election in covering the Trump campaign and his supporters.

It took until the election itself before news anchors would cut away from Trump's news conferences or report he was lying (in this case about nonexistent voter fraud). For most of the preceding four years and during the critical months in which covid-19 was spreading, TV news networks turned their platforms over to the president and his press secretary to lie to the American people. They lied about masks, about quack cures, about social distancing, about what the president knew and when he knew it, about the danger to non-elderly Americans and about the risk of reopening schools for in-person instruction. Giving a propaganda machine free rein did not serve the public and, in fact, enabled those who would endanger lives and our democracy.

Even if it does not come from the lips of their own hosts and anchors, networks inflict the same conspiracies and falsehoods on viewers when they invite onto their programs known liars who even now lie about the election results (e.g., Mike Huckabee and Newt Gingrich). There is no excuse for allowing them to traffic in blatantly false conspiracies. If outlets are going to put elected Republicans on air, it is incumbent on them to correct the guests in real time when they attempt to undermine the legitimacy of the election or misinform the public about the pandemic. Break in, cut them off, correct them and then say goodbye if they refuse to adhere to reality.

This might mean no Republican guests appear on many shows, but that says more about the current state of the Republican Party than it does about news coverage. We must come to terms with an unpleasant political reality: One party often lacks elected officials able to advance its views without resorting to lies, slurs, race-baiting and other hate speech.

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