

Insidious Deceptions

Nobody asked but ...

A parallel phenomenon was a growing lack of faith in the mainstream media on both sides of the spectrum. Conservatives' and liberals' alike accepted unquestioningly the proposition that the stories put out by network news broadcasts and major daily newspapers amounted to little more than a stream of untrammelled, insidious deceptions.

— Matt Taibbi, in *Insane Clown President*

I agree with Taibbi, but then I also disagree. The accusation of “insidious deceptions” is based on a premise that the media was ever a source of valid information. None of my favorite reporters make any claim to factualness. Mark Twain once reported on his own drowning because it was a slow news day. Ambrose Bierce delighted in delivering the Devil’s version of a dictionary. A. J. Liebling transcribed that “Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one.” and “People everywhere confuse what they read in newspapers with news.” and “I can write better than anybody who can write faster, and I can write faster than anybody who can write better.” H. L. Mencken opined that “For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong.” Andrew Sullivan said, “I can barely remember what I wrote yesterday, let alone 10 years ago.” Edwin Newman advised “Language is in decline. Not only has eloquence departed but simple, direct speech as well, though pomposity and banality have not.” John McPhee wrote “No one will ever write in just the way that you do, or in just the way that anyone else does.” Robert Higgs cautioned “Without popular fear, no government would endure more than twenty-four hours.” Sheldon Richman held that “People with an investment in government power will torture logic like a medieval inquisitor rather than face the facts.”

I could go on. The biggest problem with expecting information is that we mistake what we actually get for information.

— Kilgore Forelle