

# Get wise to the perils of social media

OPINION

We've got to grow more vigilant about sharing subversive and false postings



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In 1838, Abraham Lincoln said of the possible destruction of the United States, "If it ever reach us it must spring up amongst us; it cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot we must ourselves be its author and finisher."

Those words are still apt, even considering they came from a guy who'd never heard of Facebook and didn't fear foreign interference in elections.

We are being manipulated, and skillfully so, but we are ripe for it. Our enemies are accused of sowing division, but in truth, they are trying to reap divisions we've already sown.

Facebook announced Tuesday it had identified and was stamping out a coordinated campaign to influence the politics of the United States via dozens of inauthentic, inflammatory social media accounts.

Separately, a Russian govern-

ment agency was at the center of a federal indictment earlier this year on similar interference in the 2016 election, and evidence again points to Russia.

The acts Facebook exposed Tuesday were devilishly clever. The ploys centered on mobilizing the left, rather than the supporters of President Donald Trump whom Russia favors, in a way that discredited progressives and their cause.

In one case, the accounts promoted a counterprotest to disrupt a gathering that white supremacists are planning in Charlottesville, Virginia, this month to mark the anniversary of last year's Unite the Right march that turned deadly.

The fake page was soon connecting with users on many real pages to plan this counterprotest, which easily could contribute to more carnage, and by this week, more than 2,000 Facebook users had indicated interest in attending.

Facebook also found fake pages promoting the #AbolishICE campaign that seeks to

disband the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency, a push that has infuriated conservatives and alienated plenty of Democrats. The tactic is similar to Russia's promotion of #antifa and Black Lives Matter in the past, which inflamed tensions around police shootings of unarmed black men and incensed white nationalists.

Just after typing that sentence, I flipped over to Facebook for a mental break, as I do 937 times a day. There, I was informed, with a roundup of past posts and pix and family history and old columns, that July 31 was the 10th anniversary of creating my Facebook account.

Social media took over our lives so quickly and expansively that neither the companies, the government nor we users were able to keep up.

Now Facebook and its peers are struggling to keep their content honest and legal. Govern-



An image from Facebook shows an example of an account possibly intended to incite U.S. discord.

ments have yet to define what ought to be allowed online. And many of us consumers are easily moved by what we consume online, because we are so ready to believe posts that confirm our sense of the world.

The enemies of the United States are many and clever. The interference is real and frightening. But it can work only if we take the bait, behave badly, and

make fierce enemies of each other over issues we ought to debate passionately but civilly.

Facebook and its ilk must get better about vetting content and users. The United States must crack down on internet companies that don't. The Russians must understand that their manipulation is very nearly an act of war against a far more powerful foe.

And Facebookers and Instagrammers? We have to be as quick to fact-check a post we agree with as one we do not. And we need to default to courtesy and tolerance.

When it comes to what enemies of the United States can do to us, there is not much to be frightened of. But when it comes to what we can be persuaded to do to each other, there is our destruction to fear.

Lane Filler is a member of Newsday's editorial board.



KATHLEEN MALONE-VAN DYKE

New York Liberty forward Tina Charles defends Washington Mystics guard Elena Delle Donne at a WNBA game on July 21.

## Hoops star is a great example for all

What a great story about Liberty basketball player Tina Charles ["A beacon of light for Liberty," Sports, July 22].

This woman donates her full

salary to needy causes and is an icon to be followed in all sports.

You don't need to donate your whole salary; just do things to make an impact with your celebrity. It will go a long way.

Lisa Gloffke, Levittown

## MTA board member looks at greater good

I read with interest the suggestion by Suffolk County's MTA board member that the agency should think twice before raising some Long Island Rail Road fares ["MTA official: Spare Suffolk," News, July 26].

Mitchell Pally said at a Metropolitan Transportation Authority board meeting that Suffolk commuters unfairly pay more because of their distance from New York City, but come from an area with a lower average incomes.

I don't think there is much simpler math than saying that the people on the train (or bus or anything else) for a longer time incur the most costs and therefore should pay the most. Taxis, buses, Uber, etc., all run on this principle.

However I applaud Pally for his position, because it represents a much more appropriate

way to view these things, one that is based on its effects on society as a whole, not simple math.

Aaron Stein, Babylon

## Librarians' expertise is invaluable

I was absolutely flabbergasted while reading the July 25 news story "Defending libraries," in which Professor Panos Mourdoukoutas of LIU Post says public libraries should be closed and replaced by Amazon bookstores.

As an avid nurse researcher who holds a PhD, I could not conduct the level of professional-literature scrutiny necessary for my work by simply going to Amazon.

At libraries, professionals with master's degrees in library science shepherd me through a maze of databases and websites to identify the most timely and pertinent scholarly sources.

They also have helped me obtain difficult-to-secure source materials.

If an academic such as myself relies so heavily on this support, imagine how much more these services are needed by students and the intellectually curious public. Libraries, whether school based or public, provide these services.

Although I frequently also use Amazon and believe it is a great asset, it cannot replace the one-on-one guidance of the professional librarian.

Lois Biggin Moylan, West Hempstead

**Editor's note:** The writer is a professor of nursing at Molloy College.

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