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Civic Literacies, Despair, and Hope: Our Current Information Moment Unfolding

An interview with Jennifer Hofmann, professional writer and creator of the *Americans of Conscience Checklist*

Tara Lockhart and Jennifer Hofmann

In this interview, a professional writer, social media strategist, and activist discusses mis- and disinformation in journalism, arguing that finding common ground can combat the dehumanization, fear tactics, and lack of empathy that have too often characterized politics and information-sharing in recent years.

Tara Lockhart: Welcome, Jennifer Hofmann! I'm a huge fan of the checklist. It's really important work, and I'm delighted that you have found a way to make that your life's work. Let's start with that: please tell us a little bit about yourself, your work, and your professional standpoint; then we'll move into talking about misinformation and disinformation; we'll conclude by talking about how the climate around information has changed and about literacy and activism.

Jennifer Hofmann: I'm a professional writer, and I've created the *Americans of Conscience Checklist* [https://americansofconscience.com/], through which I, along with the collaboration of fifty volunteers, create citizen actions for people who value democracy, regardless of party. I am also a social media strategist and a website content creator, so in addition to creating the checklist, I manage the Facebook accounts and websites for different clients around the country. Because I'm a social media strategist, I think that that's actually where I encounter the bulk of misinformation. I tend to think of it as an old school video game where you only have one button, and your task is to shoot down the misinformation as fast as possible: it sounds like this—Pew! Pew! Pew!

Lockhart: I love that image! From your professional standpoint, would you distinguish between mis- and disinformation? How would you define those?

Hofmann: I think they are different. In my own experience, misinformation is unintentional, and disinformation is intentional. Misinformation sells newspapers, sells subscriptions, sells ads; or it's shared through the grapevine. It's worded in a way that's evocative so that people will read it or have an emotional

response and at the same time see the ads on the sidebar. But disinformation is more strategic; it's more deliberate.

I'm one of those nerdy social media people who read the entire Mueller indictments of the different Russian companies that were involved in the campaign to compromise our democracy and our trust in our institutions. Those tactics were so deliberate. I mean, it was one of the most brilliant social media strategies that I've ever seen—and I've written many—so to me disinformation has a particular agenda and a particular outcome in mind.

Lockhart: Can you talk to me a little bit about how, in your different roles of both creating the checklist and working on social media strategy and web content, you've used particular strategies to identify and counter—or in your words, shoot down—that misinformation or disinformation?

Hofmann: When it comes to finding sources for the checklist, I'm often referencing credible, paid journalism. I have a lot of peers that balk at paywalls, but in my opinion the paywall is the litmus test for credibility. If it doesn't have a paywall, then there's another mechanism by which that organization is getting paid. That means I have a healthy skepticism about free journalism and reporting. Generally, I use a website called *Media Bias/Factcheck* [www.mediabiasfactcheck.com—also a chrome extension], which is a decent resource to look up the publication that you're reading and see what bias it has. It looks at terminology used to provoke a response or be a dogwhistle to a particular part of the population.

I would add that we often apply George Lakoff's recommendations about saying what an issue IS rather than what it is not. For example, misinformation persists about voting security because people continue to refer to "voter fraud"—even when it's a proven non-issue. I saw a well-known national voting organization post a list of 10 myths about voter fraud. It's subtle, but in referencing this two-word term, they're solidifying the misperception that it exists—when it doesn't. Ideas need to be as clear as possible. Be pro-voting instead. Be about restoring the right to vote. Be about ballot access. All of these are better than rehashing myths.

Lockhart: Does that mean it conducts some actual language analysis and rhetorical analysis about that terminology?

Hofmann: Yes. That way I know that if I'm reading something that is regarded as science, at least I can look at it from that angle. Another strategy is that I often avoid using as a source anything from the opinion section. Although sometimes opinion pieces are really illuminating about a particular person or a particular group's experience, oftentimes there are unsupported conclusions or unsupported angles that can be misleading.

As an example, I was reading an article in *The Guardian* about the impact of Brexit on the Republic of

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Ireland, and at the end of this insightful, balanced article that looked at both sides of the equation was this little jab: a backstabbing sentence that was complete opinion. It was really disrespectful of one of the groups discussed in the article, and that's the stuff that really gets me mad, because otherwise the article was fine.

Lockhart: Do you think that casts a shadow on that kind of journalism for you, or why does it get you fired up?

Hofmann: Well, it gets me fired up because I'm fine with reading an article that is balanced journalism even if it doesn't represent my worldview or what my core values are. However, when it presents itself as an unbiased article but then throws in an editorial comment at the end, it's like you're either editorializing *or* you're presenting unbiased journalism the best you can. It makes me mad when something presents itself as journalism instead of editorialism. I'm a purist.

Lockhart: I want to ask you a sort of ideological question related to that. I'm wondering how a field like journalism thinks about truth, or the values that are shared in that field, and if there is any difference in those values given the multiple hats that you wear? Are those values different between journalism or curating of resources that you do for the checklist, versus something like social media strategy?

Hofmann: I don't think it's terribly different. I tend to run pretty honest; I still have to live with myself at the end of the day. To me if you're going to use a source, it's important to use one that is doing their best to hold themselves to a high standard. That means that their sources are primary, not secondary; it means that they're quoting their sources rather than summarizing what the source says; it means that they're integrating relevant data, statistics, or research that is well supported research—not a sample size of ten. To me, I have pretty high standards about "truth." I think like someone who has done some statistics; I think like someone who understands what a good sample size is and what credible research looks like. Even though we live in an age when people have "opinions" about science, science can still present itself convincingly because of the strategies that those data come from. The strategies are far more supported and well regarded than opinions are.

For example, I take for granted that if a field of science does a survey or an experiment and the number of people who are subjects within that experiment or that survey is low, it's predictable that you are going to get questionable results. The larger the sample size, or the more time an experiment has been run and attained similar data, the more trustworthy that is, and that's established as a standard across disciplines, across cultures. The findings achieved through those methods are generally considered true. And someone's opinion doesn't negate that.

There are some great quotes out there that 98% of scientists believe that the climate is changing as a result of human activity. If you're a thinker, if you understand how science works, you know that the

2% that don't believe the climate is changing are not really that respected, because they're not using the same standard. Even if you don't understand all of the mathematical stuff behind it, the important thing is to know enough about different types of science to realize that there are strategies that are well regarded and others that are not.

Similarly, take the issue of how many people say that polls are biased. If you read the fine print, you will actually see what strategy was used and what margin of error it's given. If the margin of error is too large, people disregard the science, and justifiably, because it's not considered rigorous enough.

To answer the question, then, truth exists. Is it perfect? No. Is there a hard and fast truth? Probably not. But there are likelihoods. Most scientists will say that you can only disprove something, not prove it. But even the likelihood of proving something can be greater or lesser. It gets pretty abstract, and I think most people that either aren't taught to think this way or don't have any exposure to this kind of worldview, kind of brush it off as elitist, snobbish, too academic. But we have to find our common understanding about things somehow, and I don't think opinion is strong enough.

Lockhart: Given that you've been writing professionally for eleven years, I want to hear your thoughts about whether you think the spread of misinformation and disinformation has gotten worse, and what factors might be driving those changes from your perspective?

Hofmann: Yes, it continues to get worse—especially as the Trump administration created its own false and inciting narratives that many citizens ran with and used to justify harassment and violence. One thing that I come back to again and again is that when we look at the strategies that dictators around the world use to gain what appears to be popular support, we can see their deliberate decisions play out around whether things are true or credible, especially when people with the most influence are playing on people's fears.

We can see that happening in Russia, we can see that happening all over Europe, we can see it happening in the US; we see it especially around the issue of immigration, for instance, but also around all issues. Taking the issue of immigration as a focus for a minute, humanity has encountered that problem many, many, many times. When you've got a new group of people coming into a place that's established and settled and homogenous, there's a tightening—there's a fear that arises that the way of life will change. A lot of the messaging we see now, especially in the United States, is around lack of acceptance of people immigrating to the United States. There is now much more acceptance of hate messages, there's much more condoning of—especially from the president and his cabinet—a lack of acceptance of people who are different, even people who have been here for a couple of generations. There are blatant displays of white power symbols; it's truly disturbing.

When you play on people's fears, that exposes the underbelly of a culture. It condones those messages being more visible, and it makes it normalized, even though it's definitely not normal. What I

see happening in terms of a trend in the last ten years—especially when you think of Congress, for example—is just the lack of collaboration and the vilification of "the other." I remember seeing, about fifteen years ago, a Republican National Convention event in which one of the speakers referred to the Democratic Party as the enemy. And I remember thinking, even at the time, before all of the stuff that's happening in our culture now, that that was a truly disturbing word choice. Because if you see your neighbor as your enemy, you're not going to seek to collaborate with them. And democracy requires collaboration.

Lockhart: Yes, I think this is a really interesting way of connecting what we see in the political and cultural climates bubbling to the surface. If the rhetoric is fear-based, that's going to necessarily color how information is shared and perceived and interpreted.

Hofmann: Exactly. I'm a big fan of Dr. John Gottman, who has done a lot of research around what makes marriages work or survive; he's able to predict divorce within five minutes of watching a couple argue about something. He uses science to substantiate this: he looks at heart rate, blood pressure, and the amount of moisture on skin that captures stress response. He combines behavioral analysis with physiological information.

One of the four behaviors that he says predicts divorce is contempt. To me, the misinformation that I see is just dripping with contempt for the other, whoever the other is. I think that when you have that sort of contempt, that misinformation feeds off of that kind of hostility. Suddenly it dehumanizes your neighbor rather than you just disagreeing with your neighbor. That's the sort of trend I see, and it's truly disturbing, because I think, oh my god, where are we going as a country? If in relationships it predicts divorce, what does it mean for society?

As for misinformation, I'm on Twitter all the time; I'm on Facebook all the time. I see a lot of commentary that is dripping with contempt for another person, and it makes the leap to dehumanize people. For example, statements such as "Hillary should go to prison" skip the step of having to provide support, and instead go right to our most fearful beliefs. They skip the logic and go right to conspiracy theories.

Lockhart: How then has this bled into your work? I mean, your work is largely shaped by this context, so how do you do your work in the face of this? How do you keep advocating for expertise, support, logic, those kinds of things?

Hofmann: I'm a lifelong student of psychology. I really think a lot about the words that I use and the word choices that I make, in my writing for my clients as well as my work with the checklist. There are some words that will trigger our fight or flight response. Some words make us feel calmer and safer.

Especially around activism, if I want to engage people, I'm going to choose words that make them less fearful and more empowered. That means that when I introduce ideas, or introduce concepts, I'm going to be choosing words that make people feel informed, rather than terrified or enraged. You know, it's one thing to be angry and use that anger for action; it's another thing to be so enraged that people withdraw. We're not equipped to feel rage all the time; it's meant to be episodic and not constant. For me, it's really about choosing words that are informative, without being overwhelming.

Lockhart: That's one thing I appreciate in the checklist. I can see exactly what you're talking about, and thinking about, when I'm reading the checklist. There's talk about self-care, talk about kind of pacing yourself, talk about stepping back when you need to; there's a clear acknowledgement that activism work is going to go on, and we're in it for the long haul, so it's not going to do any good to become so overwhelmed or so burnt out that you can no longer engage. I think that really resonates with a lot of activist work: that it can be really challenging and painful and draining and acknowledging that—having some patience with that, and some self-care—is really important. I see those activist principles in your work, and I love how you're describing that rhetorically, in the way that it speaks to this very different climate that we're facing in which people are making the opposite rhetorical decision in terms of *trying* to make people fearful and scared and worried and anxious, and encouraging them to act on those impulses.

Hofmann: Exactly. I think cumulatively, those strategies cause people to withdraw. I often think a lot about what Nazi Germany was like in the years leading up to that regime. People got complacent, people got overwhelmed, people got scared; and no one is useful if they're in fight-flight or freeze mode. They're not useful to the movement; they're not useful to their democracy.

But even with the actions that I'm writing, I think a lot about how I frame things so that people are informed and act. Every now and then my editor will rein me in a bit, because I'll use something really triggering or pokey because I'm really upset about it. In general, though, I really do think a lot about what words are going to freak people out, and I don't use them because they're a form of editorializing.

Lockhart: I think that's an important connection, actually. I wonder if this also connects to how some people think about the narrowing of common ground we are experiencing in our society. I'm thinking about what you were talking about in terms of how we understand truth or your examples of how we understand science: that there are certain kinds of baselines that we agree to as a society. That if we have certain kinds of evidence, that that is moving closer towards truth.

We can also think about this narrowing of common ground in terms of some of the cultural fracturing we're seeing in terms of race, in terms of the political partisanship we now have. It seems like we're losing touch with our neighbors, or anyone who's different than us; we're in our social media bubbles. Any of those phenomena where we don't have larger values or shared social fabric to draw

upon.

Hofmann: All of those things are on my mind. Anecdotally, I had a really interesting conversation with a friend of mine who has been a lifelong Republican; he's totally progressive, but a Republican. He told me, "I'm really fed up with my party, and I'm thinking about becoming a Democrat, but on the other hand, I have a really hard time with identity politics."

Now, "identity politics," as you probably know, is a phrase that Republicans use to minimize otherness: anybody who's not white, straight, and male. It's a shorthand expression that is intended to silence anyone who's different. I get really mad when people use this phrase—so I had to take a deep breath in this conversation—but I said, "I'm curious if you would like to know what it's like to be a part of that group." I think that question surprised him—he said, "Sure!"

So I just explained, you know I'm a lesbian, and legally I can be denied housing because I'm gay. He looked at me like a deer in the headlights and said, "No you can't!" My response was, "I absolutely can; it's not a federally protected status." It was hard for him to believe that I could be evicted or denied housing, but after we talked it was like a light had gone off for him. I went on to explain that I could also be legitimately fired from any job because I'm gay. His wife, who was listening in on the conversation, said "No" in disbelief. I explained that, similarly, the reason was that sexual identity was not a federally protected status.

This exchange allowed me to say: "I want you to know that when you talk about identity politics, you're actually talking about me. I think your intention is to create simplicity in working toward equality. But until I'm equal, I have to keep speaking up about what it's like to be gay." His response was, "Well, you deserve equality. You deserve to be treated equally. I totally get it. I never thought about this before."

It was one of those moments where we came together, and where we saw eye to eye was on our values. We both believe in equality. He was chafing at the term "identity politics," but when I framed it as "I'm not equal yet, and I need to keep advocating for my equality," he agreed. And that's where the common ground was: we agree on our values.

Lockhart: I think that reframing is crucial. I think, also being willing to have that conversation instead of walking away from it, as you might have wanted to do, is crucial. I think that within those personal relationships, it's much more difficult for him to perhaps say something like "I don't really care as much about the fact that you're not equal," given the relationship that you have.

Hofmann: Yes, for me the common ground was about the fact that we might disagree on policy, but we can agree on the value. We can agree on values like respecting people who serve our country, even if we disagree on how that looks in terms of policy. I don't think everybody is prepared to have

those kinds of conversations, but if they are, talking about values is often a place where people can find common ground. People may argue about facts or argue about statistics, but they'll agree on the underlying value. That's why I use the word *neighbor* in the checklist; people understand being a good neighbor.

Here's another example: I had a conversation with a Republican man in upstate New York who was totally pro-Obamacare because his neighbor had breast cancer and they couldn't afford treatment. He was almost in tears as he told me that it was just wrong, that she was a good person and she deserved to have medical care without it ruining her financially. He understood what it meant to look out for your neighbor. He understood what it meant to be safe and free from financial ruin. When we can find that common ground the policy stuff matters less—but it does mean having to see our neighbors as humans.

Lockhart: That makes me think about the strategy we see in your checklist at times, and that we also see in coverage like Dave Pell's *NextDraft* [nextdraft.com]. That is, taking moments to have Feel Good Friday kind of news to build or access those connections or to just give us a respite of sorts. Do you think that has become more important?

Hofmann: I really do. I'm sure you've heard of Better Angels [https://www.thebetterangelssociety.org/]—an organization that facilitates bipartisan conversation. There's another group called Bridging Our Divide [https://www.bridgingourdivide.org/] that's based in Portland. Both of these groups are doing the same kinds of things. I participated in a Bridging Our Divide event recently, and it's really heartening when we can see that we do have a lot more in common than we might think.

Just to illustrate, at this event I was on a panel as the moderate Democrat, along with a far-left Democrat, two Republicans (one moderate and one far-right), and a middle-of-the-road panelist. I found myself nodding in agreement with the far-right guy; some of what he said I totally agreed with. The moderate Republican was talking about his lifelong passion for helping the homeless, an issue I connected with as well. Conversations like these help us see how people can defy labels, and that is so heartening to me. I think those conversations are more crucial than ever.

Lockhart: This part of our conversation makes me wonder if there is anything you want to say about your affective relationship to your work, given the misinformation and disinformation that you come up against and how you work against those patterns in terms of the checklist.

Hofmann: I think that anything that we can do to support credible reporting is really the best thing that we can be doing for democracy. It concerns me when the President makes anti-media or anti-journalist statements. Such resistance to credible journalism is threatening to our democracy.

Anti-journalism rhetoric also makes people mistrust our institutions. Because I know that Russia's

intent is to make us mistrust our institutions, I really call out my progressive peers if they're saying something like "that paper's a rag." I counter with "actually, you need to be paying for that rag, because it's a bastion of our democracy to be supporting journalism." It's too easy to repeat those things that we hear: that journalists are awful, and they're biased, and the like. So, I am often calling out my own friends to be more mindful about that anti-journalism bias.

Lockhart: Yes, I want to talk a bit more about that kind of practical literacy activism. Part of this book project is to think through how the literacy landscape has changed, including becoming more networked, driven by a faster speed of information, and with algorithms generating and curating how we see information. You and I have been talking a bit so far about ways that misinformation, and systems of disinformation, can aim to tap into our vulnerabilities or our fear.

From your perspective, then, what are the key practices, perspectives, or approaches that people in our democracy need in such a climate? That might include literacy resources that people aren't often taught in schools or haven't encountered in their schooling.

Hofmann: As a pertinent aside, my niece Laura is fourteen, and I asked her to do a little research project on how to how to avoid Russian propaganda, and it's published on the checklist website [https://americansofconscience.com/8-ways-avoid-russian-propaganda/]. She loves to research, so I asked her if she'd be willing to do a little research to come up with eight things that people could do to avoid propaganda online. She texted her response to me, saying, "Sure, we're covering this in school." And I thought, "Oh, my God, that's fantastic—I feel so much better about the world knowing my middle-school-aged niece is learning this stuff in school."

Personally, if I read something that causes that kind of visceral response, my first step is to check the sources. Another discipline that I encourage for my volunteers is to read past the headlines, since headlines are evocative and a lot of people just take the headline's word for it, even though headlines are often aimed to be click bait. Even credible sources do this. For example, *The Washington Post* has incredible reporting, but their headlines are sometimes really click-baity. And it causes a visceral response. I like their reporting, but I don't always agree with their strategies in terms of how they title their columns.

Lockhart: Yes, so how do we teach students to engage in these practices? How do we teach them to recognize and reflect on those moments when they have that visceral response?

Hofmann: It's such an important question. I think that more importantly, students learn when they care. If it's possible to tie these unethical, manipulative practices to an issue they care about (suppressing the youth vote, for example), they become more relevant. There are also good resources about how to recognize troll and bot accounts that misinform the public. It's possible to gamify reporting these accounts on social media as a motivation to be more thoughtful rather than passive

in online spaces.

Speaking more broadly, I can also offer some of what I do personally as a partial answer. One strategy that I employ is to use Google to look for a topic; then I click the "news option" and read all the various headlines. This search gives me all different kinds of papers, not just the ones I prefer: I'll still get *The Intercept* article, or I'll still get *Breitbart*—those will appear in my results. For me, especially if I'm looking for an article about a very specific thing, I can see all the different ways that the same piece of news is written about from just looking at the titles. Then I can go to a source that actually has a better reputation as being more even or more centrist, like *The Associated Press* or *The New York Times*.

I think underneath your question, we circle back to "How can we get people to care?" A lot of people know there is misinformation but for some reason don't really care. That's the part that concerns me, because I don't know how to get people to care. It's one thing to know the strategy, it's another thing to know the motivation behind it. I don't think that we're taught to look critically.

Lockhart: I agree that caring, being curious, is a central challenge. Are there other ideas or strategies that come to mind in practicing the critical "looking" you're thinking about?

Hofmann: One of the websites that I mentioned I use is *Media Bias/Fact Check*. I like this better than that diagram that went around that's got all of the different publications in a grid; I think that that glossed over some important differences. The other thing that I think is useful is asking key questions: what does this publication get out of publishing this article? And how does this publication make its money? Does it make its money by selling advertising; does it make its money by pointing you to a different page for each of the twenty-one best hacks for your kitchen? If that's the case, chances are pretty good that they're selling advertising that way: they're getting you to click to twenty-one pages, and half of those have an ad on them or an ad in the sidebar.

Those questions of "how does this company make its money?" and "who owns this publication?" are crucial. That's a key strategy I use in finding the publications that have the fewest conflicts of interest. Additionally, I think it's important to cross reference. I find it really fascinating to see what foreign papers say about events in the US. I'll read papers out of London, Dublin, occasionally Australia, but certainly most English-speaking papers. I will occasionally read, like, *Le Monde*, which is a moderate French paper.

Lockhart: All of these strategies are helpful, and I especially like the idea of skimming down how one news item is covered across the whole spectrum. We've all heard a lot about the challenge of reading news in a bubble, which means you're not seeing the range of how something is covered. With this strategy, you have a little more context, and then you can dig in deeper from there.

Hofmann: Yes, I will occasionally take a screenshot of the different headlines that I see on a particular

search and post it to Facebook as a graphic. People always get a rise out of that; people like it, they click on it, and they comment on it because it's so surprising how differently things are presented. I like this kind of awareness-raising. For example, I have friends who are very politically active, but they tell me that they get all their news from Facebook. Even one of the suggestions that my niece Laura made was to not get news from social media—go straight to the publication. Visit their home-page or even subscribe: subscribe to the actual printed version so that you can read it, underline it, think about it, or go back to it to read again. I'm very old school; I'm not ashamed of that. I subscribe to several printed newspapers because of how it enables me to interact with information in a different way.

Lockhart: That brings me to your thoughts and resources on dealing with the proliferation of bots—key actors in spreading misinformation and disinformation.

Hofmann: We did a limerick contest on how to recognize trolls and bots on my Twitter account, and it was pretty hilarious. A few ideas that came up are good things to look out for:

- Uneven proportions of following/followers (especially if they are following significantly more people than follow them in return).
- They have no image, or no background image (on Twitter, in particular).
- They are being really persuasive or trying to "bait" you.
- Trolls also comment on highly popular posts, adding blatantly contrarian views just to get a rise out of people.

Any of these signs means they are bots: you report them. Shoot them down and get them out of your feed! But, and this is important I think, a lot of people just block; I think it's important to report and block. I'm glad that some social media platforms are starting to get more strategies for tracking and removing fake accounts.

Nevertheless, if you find someone who is just harping on the same thing over and over again, in the same thread, or often in the comment sections of articles online, that's a troll. Russia is spending $1.5 million dollars per month to jam our culture, to jam our democracy. Trolls are present. And they have to be native English speakers in order to even get the job.

Trolls basically take the fractures that are already present in our culture and amplify them. Fractures around race, around guns, around abortion, whether to wear a mask during a pandemic: they amplify all the things that people disagree about and explode them beyond the norm. A test I use on myself: if I really feel pissed off, it's probably a troll.

In terms of resources that can be helpful, one tool called TinEye [tineye.com] allows you to take an image and find out if it's being used on other people's accounts. This is helpful because often bots will find a random photo online and use that as their account photo. Another tool is called BotOMeter,

which can analyze a twitter account and assess how likely it is to be a bot; it skims your Twitter and Facebook accounts and tell you how many bots are following you [https://botometer.iuni.iu.edu/#!/].

Lockhart: I have one last question, and it's a vital one: what role does diversity have to play in recognizing, combating, and calling out misinformation and disinformation?

Hofmann: When I think about this question, I think of the strategy that we're using on the checklist. We follow well over one hundred groups on Twitter that are on the frontlines of activism around the different types of equality that we are speaking up for: ability and gender and race and religion; people who are inspiring Americans around voting and voter disenfranchisement; we're following minority groups, we're following grassroots groups. And I think more than anything, I take it on as a very important responsibility as a white person to amplify those groups and what *they're* advocating for.

I'm only activated because of the outcome of an election and my sense of justice, but those groups have been around for decades advocating for their rights, advocating for equality, advocating for fairness and equal rights representation—whether it's in the media or politics or whatever arena. I have a responsibility to be amplifying the priorities and perspectives of those groups who have been on the front lines for 40 years. They know what works for their community; they know what's right for them; they know what fairness looks like; they know what their truth is. That's really important to me. Engaging with that, even when I've put my foot in my mouth, has brought me much closer to the kind of world I want to live in—the kind of country I want to live in—where I'm speaking up alongside my peers who are fighting for their own rights.

Lockhart: I couldn't echo that more. Before we go, any last words of wisdom?

Hofmann: The one last thing I'd encourage other people to do is to slow down their consumption of information, however that might look. Whether it means you take a day off from media, or you leave the TV off for a day, or you switch to reading instead of watching the news, using some slowness around the way that you engage information is probably the best defense against misinformation and disinformation. We don't really do leisure much in our culture anymore, but I'd encourage folks to be a renegade and consume news leisurely! This can help bring some mindfulness to engaging with news, providing time to think about it, instead of just being a sponge.

Lockhart: I love that advice. It's been such a pleasure to talk with you, and that's a great note to end on. Thank you for your work on the *Americans of Conscience Checklist*, and I'm hopeful that your niece Laura's generation is going to save our world.

Hofmann: Me too! Thank you for doing this, I think this project is really timely, important, and relevant.