

January 20, 2023

Trump accused white evangelical Protestant leaders of disloyalty

It wasn't a sign of division between them. It was an order.

In politics, if you're looking for something, you'll find it. Washington's newsspeakers and opinion talkers have been searching, since last year's congressional elections, for evidence underscoring the suspicion that, for the Republican Party and the criminal former president, the thrill is gone.

Specifically, that Trump's relationship with white evangelical Protestants, the hardest of his hardcore supporters, is soft. The occasion was his appearance Monday on Real America's Voice. The evidence was his mewling about white evangelical Protestant leaders, who have been withholding support, he said, for his third campaign.

"It's a sign of disloyalty," Trump told the host, David Brody. "There's great disloyalty in the world of politics and that's a sign of disloyalty."

If you're looking for something, you'll find it. For Vanity Fair's Caleb Ecarma, Trump's deathless remonstrations suggested that "several high-profile evangelical leaders and activists have signaled that they want a new standard-bearer to lead the Republican Party into 2024."

No. Yeah, no.

Get in line

It might not be what you're looking for.

Monday's complaint has been taken to mean there's a growing divide between white evangelical Protestants who labored to bring down Roe and the president who made that gothic dream come true.

But just as possible, Trump's remarks could be a warning.

The interview brought up Robert Jeffress, the Texas pastor whose sermon at Trump's inauguration focused on "When God Chooses a Leader." According to the Religion News Service, Jeffress will endorse Trump only if he wins the forthcoming Republican primary race.

"That's a sign of disloyalty," Trump said.

Thing is, he never asked for it.

Jeffress said "evangelicals would ultimately coalesce

around him as the GOP nominee for 2024 and I would happily and enthusiastically support him." He hoped Trump "doesn't think of me as being disloyal for not volunteering a primary endorsement he has not requested from me."

In that hope is a recognition.

Recognition of authority.

If you're looking for division between Trump and white evangelical Protestants, you'll find it. But what you've really found is a Republican leader ordering the hardest of his hardcore supporters to get in line.

There can be only one

The idea, popular in Washington, that the thrill is gone has been made possible by Ron DeSantis's inborn talent for getting attention from the rightwing media apparatus without drawing Donald Trump's ire.

Businessweek's Josh Green summed up "the DeSantis formula": "create a cultural imbroglio that outrages liberals and that is Trump-adjacent but features himself, not Trump, in the role of alpha male."

The DeSantis formula is giving Republicans, who desire victory more than they desire owning the libs, the impression that the Florida governor is an option. The problem? The option is a media fiction.

If you're looking for something, you'll find it.

But it might not be what you're looking for.

Larry Hogan, the former governor of Maryland whose name comes up sometimes in conversations about the 2024 presidential election, told CNN's Jake Tapper that sure, DeSantis is great – when he's on Fox.

Would DeSantis be good at "reaching out to the middle?" Tapper asked.

"He hasn't done it so far," Hogan said. "He's done a good job of getting on Fox News and he's capturing a lot of attention. ... He's doing well with the base, but he's going to have to figure out a way, if he wants to have a political future beyond Florida, to appeal to a broader

The Editorial Board.

audience.”

Republicans who desire victory more than owning the libs appear to be looking for options. They have searched and found Ron DeSantis. But DeSantis might not be what they're looking for, because they are looking for an alternate alpha male. Great, there's just one problem.

There are no alternates.

There can be only one alpha male.

“Old-standby rationalizations”

For Republicans who desire victory more than owning the libs, the midterms demonstrated conclusively the liabilities of Donald Trump. These Republicans tend to be older, more educated and richer.

But the rest of the party never got that memo, wrote Alex Theodoridis, a political scientist at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

His new poll shows the GOP's floor of less affluent and white working class voters has yet “to fully receive the post-2022-midterms memo about quitting Trump and his election denialism, and seeing him and his ilk as an albatross fettered to the Party's electoral fortunes.”

Theodoridis said only 10 percent “blame Trump for the party's lackluster midterm.” They cited the “old-standby rationalizations,” such as media bias (30 percent) and voter fraud (21 percent).

Would things be better if Trump bowed out, as some Republicans would seem to believe in their search for an alternate alpha male?

Maybe, Theodoridis said, but most Republicans still don't think so. Sixty percent of them “think it would be better” for the Democrats, though.

Still in the grips

If you're looking for something, you'll find it.

But it might not be what you're looking for.

Theodoridis found that:

- DeSantis has made up ground, “but Trump still gets

most first-choice votes and is among the top three choices for almost two-thirds. Nobody else appears to draw meaningful support.”

- Two years after the J6 insurrection, Theodoridis's poll shows a Republican electorate that's still “in the grips of the Big Lie and intent on minimizing the seriousness” of it.

- Only a quarter are willing to “recognize the legitimacy of Biden's election.” That's unchanged since before the midterms.

- “The vast majority continue to characterize the events of January 6, 2021 as a ‘protest’ and those involved as ‘protesters.’”

- Only 13 percent blame Trump for insurrection, with most choosing to blame the Capitol Police, the Democratic Party or Antifa” for it.

- Fewer than one in five believe Trump should be charged for inciting J6, a proportion unchanged since pre-midterms.

What you'll find is Trump

The newsspeakers and opinion talkers have been searching, since last year's midterms, for evidence underscoring the suspicion that, for the Republican Party and the criminal former president, the thrill is gone.

Thrill has nothing to do with it.

Trump commands a vast Republican audience. They are in thrall to the party's alpha male, despite some longing for an alternate in DeSantis.

He has the authority to order white evangelical Protestant leaders, who are the most indebted to him, to get off the fence. You're going to support me and you're going to like it, Trump said, basically.

If you're looking for something, you'll find it.

But what you'll most likely find is Donald Trump. ♦

The Editorial Board.

John Stoehr -- Editor and Publisher

Tony Sutton -- Designer

Website: www.editorialboard.com

Contributing writers – Lindsay Beyerstein,

Mia Brett, Rod Graham, Magdi Jacobs,

Issac J. Bailey, Kaitlin Byrd, Jason Sattler,

Noah Berlatsky, Matt Robison

January 23, 2023

Political extremism of America's most lucrative media properties

The radical ideology no one talks about.

Why do this country's most lucrative media properties spend so much time and money covering the "dangers" of political extremism?

It's not because of the fear of Donald Trump and his redhat fascism. It's not because of the fear of Bernie Sanders and his cosplay socialism (or Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's, for that matter).

It's because political extremes reveal something about this country's most lucrative media properties that they'd rather not have revealed.

Their own political extremism.

None the wiser

Bullshit? Not when you think about it.

The difference between the country's two major political parties is cavernous, deeper and wider than it has ever been in our lifetimes.

The Democrats, as I said, have grown to become under Joe Biden the party of statecraft. The GOP has grown to become under Trump the party of stagecraft. The Democrats have ideas. The GOP has Fox.

Yet this country's most lucrative media properties, in their coverage and in their choices in determining coverage, treat the parties, which they take to represent one half each of this country, as if they were equal in nature, theory and practice, though the differences are huge.

Taking two things that are not the same and making them appear the same is an act of political extremism, too. There is no other credible way to describe taking two things that are not the same and making them appear the same for the purpose of manufacturing, by comparison with the two parties, an imaginary "center" of politics?

How else can we describe this country's most lucrative media properties presenting themselves as impartial arbiters of the status quo despite that they go to extreme lengths to persuade their audiences that a particular worldview (theirs) is normal and "centrist."

That's what an act of politics looks like.

That's what a warped reality, and our understanding of it, looks like.

This country's most lucrative media properties do not want to appear to be political entities, but nevertheless, they are. They are invested in defining, controlling, defending and maintaining a political status quo that has made them this country's most lucrative media properties.

So they focus on the far right.

They focus on the far left

You're none the wiser.

"The way things are" is never natural

My point here is that "centrism" is a radical political ideology that often turns observable reality upside down, backwards and prolapsed.

It makes unequal things seem equal for the purpose of appearing to be normal, moderate and "centrist." A consequence is that the "political center" overlaps with their particular kind of extreme politics.

And "natural."

The people who benefit most from the maintenance and advancement of "centrism" – the beneficiaries of the hierarchies of power that constitute a status quo – want us to believe that their radical political ideology is a product of nature. It's the politics of "the way things are."

"The way things are" is never natural.

"The way things are" is the product of history, contingency and choice. It's the progressive accretion of decisions made for a particular time, for a particular place for reasons particular to those times and places.

Choices were made. Choices can be made to unmake those choices.

That's the truth beneath "just the way things are."

The people who benefit most from the maintenance and advancement of "centrism" want us to believe "the way things are" is natural and politically neutral, as a result of being just "the way things are."

But "the way things are" is never politically neutral. The proof is the insistence by the beneficiaries of a radical political ideology called "centrism" that says the way things are is just "the way things are."

Beneficial incoherence

My second point is that an observable reality turned upside down, backwards and prolapsed is beneficial to those who maintain and advance a radical political ideology centrists call "the way things are."

An incoherent status quo, for them, is a good thing.

As I said last week, false equivalence is the art of forcing unequal things to seem equal and making the morally better of the two seem not so good, the morally worse of the two seem not so bad.

The Editorial Board.

Those people who benefit most from the status quo are most likely to insist that politics has nothing to do with their being the people who benefit most from the status quo. That, again, is a political act, a choice made among others that together constitute “the way things are.”

Apply this to Joe Biden’s documents “scandal.”

It is not equal to Donald Trump’s documents scandal.

The former lost some government secrets, found them, returned them and conceded to an official review to ensure everything’s above board.

The latter stole government secrets, lied about stealing them, refused to give them back after his theft was revealed, gave back a few, lied about giving back all, had to be forced, and then cried about the injustice of an official review to ensure everything’s above board.

Apply this to shooting massacres.

At least 10 people were shot to pieces during the Chinese Lunar holiday in a Chinese-American neighborhood in Los Angeles County. It is among many shooting massacres targeting minorities.

In Charleston, it was Black people. In El Paso, it was Hispanics. In Pittsburgh, it was Jews. In Colorado Springs,

it was LGBT-plus people. The pattern is clear to anyone who’s willing to see it.

But this country’s most lucrative media properties don’t want to.

They regularly find ways to even mass death and constitutional rights, as if one is related to the other, as if one is as important as the other, as if one balances the other, as if this country’s most lucrative media properties are politically neutral arbiters of a status quo pre-disposed to rationalizing this country’s most lucrative media properties.

Mass death is not equal to constitutional rights.

Only adherents of a radical political ideology would say they are.

And here we are.

Apply this to any “issue” with “two sides.” *USA Today’s* Michael Collins:

“Biden said he was ‘surprised’ to learn of the discovery of the records. He had branded his predecessor ... ‘irresponsible’ for *storing classified documents* at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida.”

The italics are mine.

The radical political ideology is theirs. ◆

January 24, 2023

With maximal transparency, Joe Biden goes on offense

No regrets needed in the center.

The *Post’s* editorial board (not to be confused with the *Editorial Board*) does not know, or pretends not to know, the difference between *transparency* and *defensiveness*. This group of highly educated, highly experienced and highly connected public intellectuals thinks you can’t have both.

I don’t know about you.

To me, that’s naivete verging on pandering.

No-no, even so

In yesterday’s edition, the *Post’s* unsigned editorial said the president really ought to have demonstrated more “regrets” last week after a new cache of government documents was discovered in his Delaware home. (The FBI conducted a 13-hour search at the behest of his attorneys.)

Joe Biden said he has “no regrets” about when he chose to inform the public about the initial batch in which some documents were marked classified. Before this year’s congressional elections, they were found, locked and secured, in a think-tank office that Biden used after leaving the

White House. CBS News broke the story in early January. There’s been five rounds of discovery so far, a couple dozen documents in total. All date to Biden’s time as a senator or the vice president.

Even so, that’s a no-no, the *Post* editorial said.

Authority figures, it said, should “try to follow the rules and own up to their mistakes when they make them ... Maximum allowable transparency is vital. Mr. Biden needs to ditch the defensiveness. Acknowledging that he has grounds for regret would be a good start.”

Un-hun.

The president must pay

Such admonitions would carry more weight had the president done the things the *Post* editorial admonishes him for doing – had Biden refused to try to follow the rules (“there is no evidence of intentional wrongdoing”), refused to own up to his mistakes, and refused to be transparent, legally and politically. Biden has done all three.

Yes, he’s been defensive, too. Why the hell not?

From the beginning, this country's most lucrative media properties have equated the "Biden document scandal" with the potential crimes of Donald Trump, making Biden's mistakes seem more criminal than they are and Trump's unlawful actions less criminal than they are.

What incentive does Biden have for showing regret?

If there is one, it doesn't stem from the need for accountability to the American people. If there is one, instead, it stems from the "need" for "accountability" to this country's most lucrative media properties.

Biden's attorneys alerted the National Archives, returned the documents fast, and collaborated, not just cooperated, with authorities. But the White House didn't tell this country's most lucrative media properties until it confirmed reporting on the first discovery.

For that, the president must pay.

He won't pay

If "accountability" to this country's most lucrative media properties is the incentive Biden to show regret, that's no incentive at all, given the radical political ideology of this country's most lucrative media properties. "There's no there there," the Biden sniffed, and he's right.

The only there was put there.

With respect to government secrets, Trump has never been transparent. He has always been defensive. Biden has always been transparent. He has rarely been defensive, until now. Yet his country's most lucrative media properties make both men's actions look equal.

False equivalence minimizes the president's integrity as well as the criminal former president's total lack of it. Biden's "defensiveness has chipped away at the credibility of his claim that 'people know I take classified documents and classified material seriously,'" the Post said.

"Bullshit" is what I imagine Biden saying.

Why didn't he tell us?

Though defensive, the president has done things right.

The White House says that was the plan all along.

"With his actions," the AP reported, "Biden is doing more than simply complying with federal investigators assigned to look into the discovery of the records. The president is aiming to show that, unlike Trump, he never intended to retain classified materials — a key distinction that experts say diminishes the risks of criminal liability."

I don't know if that was the plan all along, or if it became the plan after the documents were discovered, but the gambit appears to be working.

With maximal transparency, the president's team takes the focus off the timing of the "document scandal" and puts it on how he's "handling it." The AP report: "They didn't acknowledge the first discovery before the elections, though they swiftly notified the National Archives, returned the documents the day after they were found

and coordinated subsequent searches and discoveries with the Department of Justice."

Maximal transparency achieves something else.

It makes politics acceptable.

Why didn't Biden reveal, before the midterms, the initial discovery of classified documents? Well, probably because Biden is a politician.

His attorneys did what they were morally and legally obligated to do. They did not do what they were not morally and legally obligated to do, namely sabotage the Democrats by revealing the news beforehand.

That was a political decision.

One that any president is entitled to.

No need for regrets

The White House says maximal transparency was the plan all along.

I doubt it.

I suspect these documents were discovered in the process of doing something else. What that something is, however, we may never know.

But with their discovery certainly came memories of 2016 when Donald Trump and the Republicans collaborated, knowingly and not, with Russian saboteurs to destroy the candidacy of Hillary Clinton.

Biden's plan was probably not maximal transparency so much as maximal strategy — find all the documents that Biden misplaced during his time as vice president, get them out there, and mount a dog-and-pony performance about working with the special counsel.

That does more than neutralize their liability.

That allows Biden to defend himself against the radical political ideology of this country's most lucrative media properties. They want to be in "the center." So they put Biden and Trump on even ground. There is no there there, Biden said. So a there was put there.

By saying that he has no regrets, however, he's saying to this country's most lucrative media properties, move over. I am the center, not you.

In the center, he can be transparent and defensive.

No need for regrets. ♦

January 19, 2023

On the debt ceiling, the Democrats are the party of no

The Republicans, meanwhile, pretend to possess leverage.

The Republicans seem ready to reelect Ronna (Romney) McDaniel as head of the Republican National Committee. The *Wall Street Journal* said Monday that party elites hope to place a rival in the position she's filled since Donald Trump appointed her in 2016. But, in a vote to be held next week, Mitt Romney's niece remains favored to win.

That could suggest that the criminal former president's influence over the Republicans is as strong as ever. It could also suggest something more obvious – namely, the Republicans' inability or unwillingness to learn from failure. McDaniel is running for a fourth term after three elections that most say were lost to the Democrats.

I don't mean to overstate the importance of the RNC leader, but McDaniel does symbolize, I think, the triumph of hubris over experience. Despite repeated losses, the GOP appears to believe that they need to keep doing what they've been doing. They appear to believe that doing what they've always done will give them leverage.

On January 9, Donald Trump said the House Republicans shouldn't budge on the debt ceiling. (That's the cap on the amount of money the US government can borrow. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the government will likely reach that threshold at some point today.)

Trump said that the House Republicans should play "tough." He said that standing firm on the debt ceiling would reverse "almost everything" that Joe Biden and the Democrats have accomplished.

It would be, Trump said, "a beautiful and joyous thing."

It would be an ugly and joyless thing.

Every time Donald Trump thinks he and the Republicans have an advantage over the Democrats, their fortunes collide with calamity. But this time, it won't be a calamity for them alone. If the US defaults on its debt, which would be the result of failing to raise the debt ceiling, probably by June, here's what would happen to the world.

Fifteen trillion dollars would go *poofthph*.

Doing what they've been doing is bad.

For everyone.

No, and no

Kevin McCarthy seems to understand that attempts at extortion – which are Trump's forte – are not attempts

at bargaining, in good faith or bad. The House speaker asked Tuesday to begin negotiations over a fiscal agenda in which the Democrats compromise on federal spending in exchange for the House GOP raising the debt ceiling.

"I would like to sit down with all the leaders and especially the president and start having discussions," said McCarthy Tuesday, adding that about six months remain before the US runs out of cash. (Yellen has enacted "extraordinary measures" to provide more time.)

No, the White House said.

"This is something that should be done without conditions," Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. "We've been very, very clear about that. We are not going to be negotiating over the debt ceiling."

But wait! McCarthy said: "Let's sit down and find a place where we can protect Medicare and Social Security for the future generations."

I don't like repeating myself, the White House said.

"Congressional Republicans are threatening to hold the nation's full faith and credit — a mandate of the Constitution — hostage to their demands to cut Social Security, to cut Medicare and to cut Medicaid – brinkmanship that threatens the global economy," Jean-Pierre said.

It was as if the president were saying to McCarthy that, "I know you think you have the advantage here, but listen, jack, you really don't."

Speak for yourself, Mr. Speaker

If there were any doubt about Kevin McCarthy's weakness after the 15 votes it took for him to become House speaker, there was not an echo of a shadow of doubt after Biden shut down his opening bid.

Matter of fact, that opening bid itself told the tale. If McCarthy had any real strength – say, a 40-plus majority – he'd be dictating the terms of negotiations. As it is, with a five-seat majority, he's forced to ask if Biden would *maybe perhaps kinda sorta* consider talking to him.

McCarthy's weakness provides an additional reason for the president to shut down his opening bid. If Biden were to enter into good-faith negotiations, how could he trust a bargaining partner who sold his institutional power as speaker to a grunt of Republican insurgents?

As it is, Biden's incentive would be to throw McCarthy against the wall, forcing him to choose between seeing \$15 trillion in global wealth going *poofthph* and turning to

the Democrats to save him, infuriating the same mutts threatening to depose him posthaste.

“Who wants to put the nation through some type of threat at the last minute with the debt ceiling?” McCarthy said. “Nobody wants that.”

Speak for yourself, jack.

Acting without permission

It’s not clear to me, or clear to anyone, as far as I can tell, whether these Republicans are capable of adjusting to a political landscape in which they do not have, and likely never will, in the short term, anyway, the bargaining power they currently pretend to possess.

Adjusting would require acknowledging the authority of their lived experience (ie, losing), but acknowledging would require a level of humility the GOP has not demonstrated since no one remembers.

The crazier they act, the more they drive away the respectable white people who are central to any majority. And the more they drive them away, the crazier they act. It’s a doom loop in which they believe doing what they’ve

always done is the definition of sanity.

That doom loop has created conditions in which the president and the Democrats can do what they haven’t done in my lifetime, not since Richard Nixon was run out of town. They can set the terms.

They can set the terms even in the unlikely event of the House Democrats refusing to save McCarthy from his grunt of insurgents. According to Professor Garrett Epps, the Constitution empowers Biden to pay government debts despite the GOP’s intransigence.

“The Constitution bars the federal government from defaulting on the debt — even a little, even for a short while,” Professor Epps wrote in November for the *Washington Monthly*. “There’s a case to be made that if Congress decides to default on the debt, the president has the power *and the obligation to pay it without congressional permission*, even if that requires borrowing more money to do so” (my italics).

The House GOP is unlikely to stop doing what they do. Hopefully, on this issue, doing what they do goes *poofthph*. ♦

January 17, 2023

Everyone blames the liberals

No one blames the institutions for getting the liberals’ ideas wrong.

Everyone blames the liberals. That should be the American motto. Put it on the money. Put it on the national monuments. Everyone blames the liberals and their ideas about liberty, even other liberals.

But everyone should blame the institutions that get the liberals’ ideas wrong, and everyone should blame the *il-liberals* for blaming the liberals for the institutions that get the liberals’ ideas all wrong.

Of course, everyone doesn’t.

The teacher isn’t the problem

Case in point is a controversy at Hamline University in Minnesota. An adjunct professor of art history taught a class on global religious art. She warned students in advance that, among other things, they’d be studying a canonical painting depicting the Prophet Muhammad. Total time in class focused on the painting was about 10 minutes.

At least one Muslim student was offended by it.

The administration called it Islamophobia.

The adjunct professor was fired.

According to *Inside HigherEd*: “The image shows Muhammad receiving instruction from the angel Gabriel. The original painting is in a collection at Edinburgh University Library in Scotland. The reaction to the lesson surprised

the instructor and many others. One or more students complained about the image, believing (as many, but not all, Muslims believe) that showing the image was wrong.”

The image might be wrong, but the teacher wasn’t.

Her institution was.

But the illiberals blame the liberals for the institutions that get the liberals’ ideas all wrong. By getting the liberals’ ideas all wrong, the institutions end up affirming what the illiberals say about the liberals.

The story begins with blaming the liberals.

It ends there, too.

The institution is the problem

For most people, the Hamline story begins in the wrong place.

The real beginning was a university administration’s decision to protect the institution’s image and interests against possible accusations of Islamophobia by throwing under the bus an adjunct professor who did what any professor of religious art would be expected to do.

The story really began with characterizing 10 minutes of discussion of a canonical work of Islamic art as an act of Islamophobia. It really began with the administration’s abominable claim that “respect for the observant Muslim

The Editorial Board.

students should have superseded academic freedom.”

But for most people, that’s not where the story began.

Rather, the Hamline story began with an adjunct professor’s decision to discuss a canonical work in the global history of religious art. The story began with at least one Muslim student being offended by it. For most people, the story began with questions about whether freedom of thought should bend to the dictates of religious sects.

In other words, the story began with what the enemies of liberalism say liberals say about liberal values after the institution, by protecting its image and interests, warped those same values of liberalism.

The result was a bunch of false binaries – defenders of free speech against defenders of religious liberty; defenders of academic freedom against defenders of “wokeness.” None had any bearing on the story.

The problem wasn’t liberalism. It wasn’t “wokeness.”

It wasn’t religious views, extreme or otherwise.

The problem was the institution using liberal values to cover its ass and in the process, impugning public trust in the liberals’ ideas, which in turn fed into the established belief that college campuses are hotbeds of “wokeness,” “cancel culture” or some other totally made up thing.

The problem was the illiberals looking at an institution, which got liberalism wrong, and seeing proof of what they already believed to be true about liberalism. The problem was the story starting there.

Aligning with the illiberals

Seeing an image of Muhammad was probably offensive. It was probably insulting. But the adjunct professor made allowances for that by warning students in advance before discussing an artifact that “depicts the beginning of Islam’s holy book and the onset of Muhammad’s divinely ordained apostleship,” said Christiane Gruber.

It was not an act of Islamophobia, the historian of Islamic art said.

It was the opposite:

The painting no doubt was produced to extol Muhammad’s prophecy and Quranic revelations, making it an Islamophilic artistic endeavor for its painter and viewers. The painting thus falls on the other side of the Islamophobia coin, in both intent and impact.

Liberalism is the force in politics and society that aims to flatten entrenched hierarchies of power in order to advance liberty, equality and justice for all, not merely the

few. But liberalism gets the blame when something like this happens – when an institution claiming to embrace liberal values uses them cynically to protect itself.

The result is not only false binaries. It’s cynicism of the liberal goal of flattening the hierarchies of power, as if the liberals don’t mean to reform the status quo, but instead usurp those who benefit from it.

That’s how the illiberals view the liberals. To them, after institutions warp and distort the liberals’ goals – making the goals seem like less a moral undertaking than a power play – that’s proof they’re right.

In effect, the institutions align with the illiberals to not only undermine trust in the liberals’ goal but also undermine freedom of thought, freedom of speech, the education of the republic and the advancement of knowledge. The illiberals stand athwart history, yelling stop. The institutions, in shirking their moral responsibilities, join them.

Getting liberal ideas wrong

This pattern repeats itself ad nauseam.

After the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer, the liberals advanced antiracism into the public sphere to such a degree that institutions around the country – whether universities or corporations – embraced antiracism, or at least gave the appearance of it.

But a true embrace is complicated, difficult and probably disruptive of institutional needs. In the face of internal resistance, institutions tended to go halfway. That, in turn, redoubled internal resistance as well as increased cynicism by the public about the liberals’ real intentions, which the illiberals have already said is not a moral undertaking. It’s swapping who gets the upper hand in society.

These conditions can give rise to an upside down, backward and prolapsed view of the world in which the liberals are illiberal, because, for instance, “respect for the observant Muslim students should have superseded academic freedom,” and the illiberals are liberal, because they stand with freedom of thought and freedom of speech.

This is a backlash.

The pattern repeats itself over and over when the liberals manage to advance their values. A backlash can fuel the candidacies of (Republican) illiberals as well as the political movements that bring them to power so they can stand athwart history, yelling stop.

Liberal ideas aren’t the problem.

Getting them wrong is. ◆

**Subscribe for just \$6 a month.
Go to www.editorialboard.com**