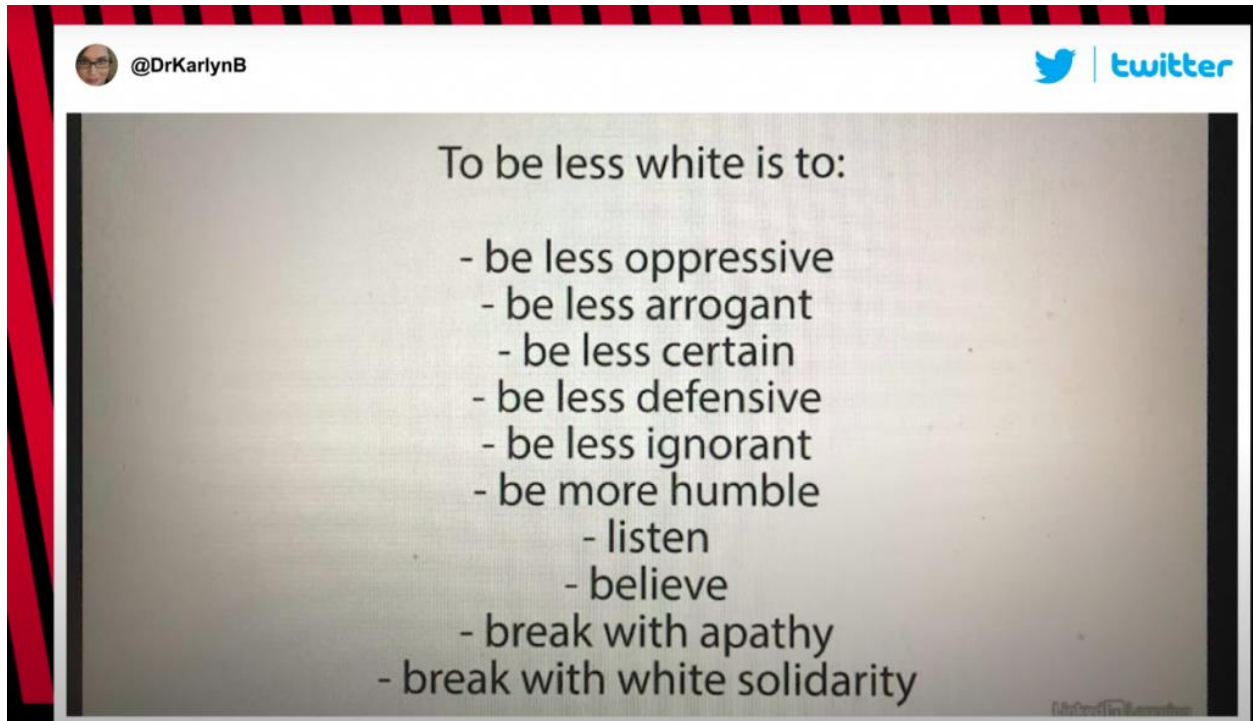


Woke March Through The Institutions



An image from internal diversity training by Coca-Cola, one of the world's biggest corporations. This woke mentality rules the corporate world ([NYPost screengrab](#))

February 26, 2021

|

11:07 am

[Rod Dreher](#)

A common complaint I get from people on the Left when I talk about [Live Not By Lies](#) is that I overstate the threat from the Woke. *How can you say that we are in danger of soft totalitarianism when Donald Trump is the president and the Republicans hold the Senate? Or, more recently, You have some nerve, saying the threat is from the Left, when on January 6 a pro-Trump mob invaded the Capitol!*"

Well, look, it would be absurd to claim that the Right has no power. Even today, with the White House and the Congress in Democratic hands, Republicans remain powerful. But these objections from the Left are superficial, because they focus on superficial manifestations of power. As appalling as the January 6 attack was, it represented only a tiny fraction of Americans on the Right, and it had zero chance of overthrowing the government of the United States. If you think it did, then you are telling yourself a lie.

Second, Trump certainly was a powerful man in the presidency, but his power was sharply mitigated by the fact that he did not know what to do with it. All of the totalitarian trends I document in [Live Not By Lies](#) accelerated under Trump. He made a few gestures towards stopping them — his late-term ban on Critical Race training in federal agencies, for example — but these were minor, and easily overturned once Trump was gone. Trump’s ardent supporters are just as deluded about his power as his ardent critics. His opposition to wokeness was mostly performative. Again, if he had been interested in how to use power, we might have seen something different, but he wasn’t, and we didn’t.

Besides, to be fair to him, a president is not an absolute monarch. He can’t order private industry to do what he wants them to do. And the Republican Party has no stomach for culture war. In the first two years of Trump’s presidency, the GOP held both houses of Congress, and the presidency. It could have passed legislation that Trump, however disengaged, would have signed, legislation that would have struck meaningful blows against the march of wokeness. It did not; the Republican Party focused on a tax cut for business.

The real power in this country, and in most countries, resides in institutions, and in the networks of elites that run them. The sociologist James Davison Hunter, in his 2010 book *To Change The World*, addressed his fellow Evangelicals, and told them that they are mistaken to believe that convincing the masses is the way to change the world. In most instances, you have to convert elites and their networks; change follows that. In other words, elites and their networks are the ones who lead the masses.

You maybe read [my bit yesterday about the new Gallup numbers showing a skyrocketing number of Gen Z Americans identifying as LGBT](#). Most of that, it turns out, is young women calling themselves bisexual. Even so, this is not a natural occurrence. This is the result of two decades of media propaganda about sexual orientation and gender identity. Elites in the media and the academy moved the Overton window to where it became possible for the masses to think of themselves as sexually fluid. This aspect of the Sexual Revolution didn’t happen on its own.

I remember exactly where I was, and what I was doing, when I knew that gay marriage was going to win. It was the spring of 2003, and I was unpacking boxes in the living room of our new house on Sudbury Street in Dallas, from the move from New York. We had the TV on, watching *Prime Time Live* as we worked. Diane Sawyer dedicated the entire episode to telling the story of a gay male couple that had worked with a surrogate to have a baby. By the end of the show, everything had gone badly, then men wanted out of the deal with the surrogate, who was left mothering a fatherless child. Everything about this was grotesque and cruel (to the baby) — but Diane reported it in a lighthearted, “hey, that’s life!” way, as if to say you have to expect things like this to happen on the road to equality.

I turned to my wife after the show was over and told her that us conservatives were going to lose the gay marriage battle, because we can’t compete with that kind of messaging. On the face of it, what happened there was terrible. At least a fair-minded examination of it would have brought some criticism to what those three adults had done. But none of that was there. It was all advocacy. This is how broadcast and print media have covered gay issues for at least 25 years, and it is how they have covered trans issues for almost as long. The greatest allies the LGBT

movement have had has been the media, because it is the media who have framed the issue — that is, determined the terms in which the masses think about it.

Anyway, the black Columbia University linguist John McWhorter, who is one of the bravest men in America, [says in his new Substack newsletter that the belief on the Left that the Right is all-powerful is a fallacy, precisely because of the institutional nature of power](#). Excerpts:

Extremists from the right are more of a problem? It's on.

1.

First let's try roughly summer 2020. Remember the idea from the hard left that it was alarmist to think there was a woke takeover afoot?

Please know – I don't mean “woke” as in “good lefty.” I mean “woke” as in “woke” in a way that makes you feel like it's okay to be mean. As in what I call The Elect. And The Elect, interestingly, tend to resist the idea that they are making inroads. This is because they see it as a defining trait that they are Speaking Truth to Power.

As such, they will always have a hard time allowing that they actually have any Power, which is why it is wrong to think they level their brickbats out of a desire for power – they definitionally will never admit that they have any, which makes them this much more challenging to exist among.

Anyway, this idea that The Elect have no real power is – despite that they will object — now officially obsolete.

It's been deep-sixed by 1) basic intuition from anyone who takes a look at the news every day and 2) things like, if I may, my *Atlantic* [piece](#) on academics writing me from all corners sick to death at watching religious “antiracist” ideology (as opposed to pragmatic, fact-based antiracist ideology rooted in grass-roots activist reality) take over their institutions.

Yep, that was based on only a hundred-odd “anecdotes” – but just three “anecdotes” about white cops killing black people (or landlords preying on black tenants, or doctors thinking of black people as more tolerant of pain) are accepted as portraits of America writ large. We must be consistent.

Especially since my Substack comrade Bari Weiss reports [almost daily contacts](#) from people desperate about the same thing, as does my sparring partner on the Glenn Show. Then also organizations such as FIRE, devoted to fostering genuine free speech in academia, as well as Heterodox Academy and FAIR (stay tuned) hear from similar legions of people with the same burdens (and you don't even need to ask whether I am connected to all of those organizations).

More:

2.

So – there is a house on top of the idea that someone like me is just whining. But now there’s a new distraction – that the racist, roiling alt-right who just invaded the US Capitol building and lurk menacingly here and there, often even with guns, threatening to take “America” back by force, are more of a problem.

So, I wring my hands about somebody holding a copy of *How to Be an Antiracist* close to his chest while some asshole storms the Capitol holding a Confederate flag.

Okay. Violence is scary. Gruesome. And I am unaware of anyone with a copy of *White Fragility* in their pocket storming into some government building with a gun asking for antiracist justice.

But the question is this.

The optics of that Capitol takeover were hideous. And we can know that people of those sentiments are gabbing incessantly in repulsive manner 24/7 on line.

Yet – *what institutions are such people infecting?*

Really. I will put it again.

What institutions are people like this taking over? Yes, they have websites. Yes, they summon *one another* to travel to Washington and make a big, vicious noise. Which then ended, with most of the perpetrators being arrested.

Which institutions are those boobs taking over? Which persons have seen them coming and yielded, such that now we say that an institution that once was fostering the Good is now marching to the tune of right-wing idiots?

What’s different now because of how they wanted things to go?

Because if you pause to answer that, you need to consider that The Elect are transforming institutions.

And:

I ask: is the loony right having the same effect on institutions as what we might, intemperately, term the loony hard left? Note, to the extent the that latter enjoy victories – and note that they do – they confirm that they are winning over the loony right. Because the loony right changes nothing; they merely alarm.

[Read it all.](#) I subscribe, but I don’t know if it’s behind a paywall. You should subscribe if you don’t.

In just about any mainstream institution you can think of, if you held woke beliefs, and weren’t shy about advertising that, not only would it not hurt your job application, but it would likely

help it. If you held even mainstream conservative beliefs — not alt-right ones, but mainstream ones, such as being one of the 70+ million Americans who voted for Trump last fall — you had better know that you should make sure that is scrubbed from your online profile before you apply for a job at a university, a media outlet, or a corporation.

As McWhorter avers, the Left has a powerful need to see itself as always the victim, always the underdog. Twenty years ago, when people like me, conservatives who actually worked in mainstream media newsrooms, would say that the media was biased powerfully to the Left, you could always find a leftist who didn't know jack to say, "Well, maybe, but media companies are run by rich people, who are conservative." OK, I'll give you Rupert Murdoch, but who else? Besides, on the neuralgic culture war points, the rich today are solidly on the side of the Woke.

Yet, the myth persists. Here, Yale's Nicholas Christakis responds sarcastically to a leftist history professor at UMass who, [in his thread](#), argued that Smith College is not run by the Left, because universities are *really* run by trustees, who, he says, are always center-right:



Nicholas A. Christakis 
@NACChristakis

Apparently, Smith, like virtually all colleges, is run by run by the Right, according to this thread. This is a claim I'll have to consider carefully in light of the evidence.

Asheesh Kapur Siddique @AsheeshKSi · 12h
The notion that this is somehow leftism run amuck is hard to square with the fact that Smith is not governed by the left, but by the right. The "woke" ideology being indicted is not truly of the Left because nobody on the Left runs Smith twitter.com/nachristakis/s...
[Show this thread](#)

10:02 PM · Feb 25, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

3 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 112 Likes

The claim made by Leftists that they are always and everywhere speaking for the powerless, against power, is necessary to their self-understanding, and key to the woke justifying their belief that, in McWhorter's words, "it's okay to be mean." It's why my woke ex-friend ended our friendship of 40 years this week, over my letter to the editor praising one of our US senators from Louisiana for voting to impeach Trump, but in so doing I acknowledged that Trump had

done some good things. She felt justified in doing so because anyone who does not hate Trump with perfect purity is too evil to associate with.

This is what we face. There has, so far, been no meaningful political opposition to it. By “meaningful,” I mean politicians who are willing and capable of doing something about it. Don’t insult me by claiming Trump was that politician. Judge him by the results. If we on the Right put our trust in a champion shitposter, as opposed to political leaders who know how to get things done, we will keep getting our heads handed to us. And if we keep thinking that the problem is essentially political, as opposed to cultural and economic, we will make no progress. We will elect ineffective performers like Trump, while the doers on the Left continue to march through institutions and change them — and by changing institutions and networks, change America.

about the author



Rod Dreher is a senior editor at *The American Conservative*. A veteran of three decades of magazine and newspaper journalism, he has also written three *New York Times* bestsellers—*Live Not By Lies*, *The Benedict Option*, and *The Little Way of Ruthie Leming*—as well as *Crunchy Cons* and *How Dante Can Save Your Life*. Dreher lives in Baton Rouge, La.