

Factions Are Dividing America

A Divided America Cannot Stand

Unrestrained factionalism may do significant damage to the fabric of government—warning of impetuous mobs or factions united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community.—**James Madison**, Federalist No. 10, 1787

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THE FACTIONS PROBLEM – Almost daily news accounts tell of disordering factional forces that are hard at work—leading to a potential political crackup feared by our founding fathers in Federalist No. 10 as seen in the epigraph.

To get a better sense of the problem, we begin with an example. It's Nicole Hannah-Jones' Pulitzer-Prize winning paper "The 1619 Project."¹ The paper became a back story for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) faction, a movement that gained considerable momentum after the murder of George Floyd. Non-violent BLM protests—espousing racial justice—were soon co-opted by violent, anarchist-like factions

HISTORICAL CONTEXT – To be sure, much happened in America before and after the year 1619. As a matter of fact, recent research indicates that the first Americans came from East Asia some 30,000 years ago.² These indigenous peoples were the ancestors of today's Native Americans. So, "The 1619 Project" covers less than 2% of humankind's history in America---albeit a small but important piece of a complex mosaic of human behavior in America.

To be complete, this historical mosaic must also include the ignoble treatment of Native Americans during the era of Manifest Destiny as well as the past and still ongoing prejudicial treatment of racial, ethnic, and sexual minorities, immigrants, and women.

Sad to say, human history, evolutionary and socio biology, as well as the physics of entropy tell us that the arc of human behavior bends toward disorder, tribalism, oppression, and poverty.

THE AMERICAN EXCEPTION – America's liberal democratic republic, with all of its past faults and present imperfections, has proven to be somewhat of an aberration, the best known exception to this brutal course of human behavior and affairs.

Nonetheless, America is a country still struggling to become a more perfect union—to live up to the ideals expressed in its Declaration of Independence, Constitution, and to the system of laws, liberties, rights and obligations that flow from these documents written by imperfect human beings who were subject to the mores and political pressures of their times.

IMPEDING FACTIONS – Impeding the struggle for unity are fringe alt-left and alt right factions. The alt-left is attempting to move the Democratic Party far left of center. It is characterized by wokeness, cancel culture, and connections to Antifa and Sunrise factions. The

extreme alt-right factions such as QAnon, Boogaloo Bois, Rise Above, and Proud Boys embrace white supremacy and conspiracy theories while attempting to move the Republican Party far right of center. Both of these extreme factions work at cross purposes to sharply divide America. For information on some of these factions see Sardarizadeh,³ Gilbert,⁴ and Wibawa.⁵

There is also a faction that challenges the work of America's founding fathers—attempting to wholly rewrite American history as a litany of racial transgressions. For example, “The 1619 Project” challenges America's founding on principles of freedom—rather considering it a founding designed to maintain a system of slavery without mentioning that it was a painfully difficult compromise made to secure ratification of the U.S. Constitution.

The divisive illiberal faction does not respect free speech. It apparently has its roots in America's academic institutions that ostensibly claim to have a mission primarily focused on the creation, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge, all based on freedom of inquiry. Instead we see strong evidence that these institutions are being roiled by cancel-culture and speech-code enthusiasts that try to empower students to be progressive problem solvers rather than helping students develop their critical thinking skills enabling them to use their own judgements to discern the problems they choose to address.⁶

Something is amiss when non-faculty administrators expand their school's mission by placing over-the-top emphasis on social justice issues such as diversity, inclusion, and equity, as important as these issues are and always have been. As a consequence of this inordinate and distorting emphasis, faculty hiring based on disciplinary merit is bound to diminish—leading to a further dumbing down of higher education in America. Where is the outrage and where are the governing boards?

WHAT TO DO? – We can begin by coming to understand that alt-left and alt-right disordering fringe factions are dividing America and that intellectual honesty in our educational institutions, from K-12 through higher education needs to be restored. Both efforts could lead to important corrective actions that would help reverse the fragmentation of America by political factions. We can provide honest accounts of current events and past history at all levels—with the aim of understanding both its good and bad parts in the context of the times the events took place. For examples, see Oliver,⁷ Treuer,⁸ and Splitt^{9, 10}

Likely the most important thing that can be done will come this November. Hope for a viable future of America's democracy will rely on a well-informed electorate that can help place experienced as well as competent and trustworthy men and women at all levels of government no matter their political affiliation. Moderates from both political parties will then have to work to find common ground to reunite America.

CONCLUDING REMARKS – Today, we find ourselves at a defining, if not perilous, moment in America's history—bringing to mind the memorable line from Abraham Lincoln's June 1858 address in Illinois at the Republican State Convention in Springfield. To wit: "A house divided against itself cannot stand." Lincoln also had this advice concerning leadership: "Be with a leader when he is right, stay with him when he is still right, but, leave him when he is wrong." A divided America cannot stand.

NOTES

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4. Gilbert, Ben, "What is QAnon? Trump supporters embrace far-right conspiracy movement," *Business Insider*, July 23, 2020, <https://www.businessinsider.com/what-is-qanon-explaining-the-far-right-conspiracy-theory-2020-7>
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6. Zubia, Aaron Alexander, "Universities Abandon Reason for a False Idea of 'Empowerment,'" *The Wall Street Journal*, Opinion, August 16, 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/universities-abandon-reason-for-a-false-idea-of-empowerment-11597441181>
7. Oliver, John, "We need to upgrade the way we teach our history," <https://www.newsandguts.com/video/john-oliver-we-need-to-upgrade-the-way-we-teach-our-history/>
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