

Woke Extremism

Fuels Resentment and Tears the Fabric of American Democracy

By Frank G. Splitt

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Introduction and Background – It is my contention that no matter their rationale, extremists on the far left and the far right of their political parties impede our progress as a nation. There for all to see is the divisive headline-grabbing behavior of anti-fascist groups in the antifa movement on the far left and that of high-profile, white-supremacist hate groups such as QAnon, and the Proud Boys on the far right.

On the other hand, moderates in both political parties believe there must be an end to extremism with its associated rancor—hoping that our politicians will somehow become patriots and start doing what’s best for all Americans, not just for themselves and their base of hard-core supporters.

What will it take to end divisive partisan bickering and selfish behavior? Seemingly, both sides are stuck while the country faces major foreign and domestic problems that need bipartisan solutions. Is cooperation even possible when animosity and resentments are so ingrained?

This commentary does not aim to provide answers to these vexing questions, but rather, it seeks a better understanding of extremism in the relatively low profile divisive behavior of those in the far left woke culture who seemingly have no sense of the adverse political consequences of their activities as well as unrealistic expectations based on an apparent lack of understanding of the interests of the American electorate that can lead to lost elections.[1, 2]

Extreme measures seen in the woke culture can be characterized as overly zealous actions to resolve contentious issues surrounding social and racial justice such as aspirational ideals of inclusion, diversity, and equity. These actions render the culture susceptible to derogatory, anti-woke political labeling, for example, see Scott.[3] Worse yet, these actions fuel resentment and thus contribute to widening of political divisions with a potentially dire consequence—an irrevocably divided America that cannot stand.[4]

The following narrative covers various forms of woke behavior where well-intended actions generate resentment with examples of how overdoing a good thing can have adverse political consequences. It concludes by asking still another question: When will the America electorate and the politicians in both political parties ever learn that extremism is not only a sure-fire recipe for ineffective government, but extremism in any form tears the fabric of American Democracy as well?

A Penetrating Question and a Woke Response – Thanks to a recent *Daily Herald* editorial that focused on George Washington in light of cancel culture we have an example of a ripe source of resentment and how it can build and flourish.[5]

The editorial’s subtitle came in the form of a penetrating question, to wit: “How should Washington’s slave ownership affect our reverence for his role in the birth of our country?” The same type of question could be asked writ large over previously respectable people such as Christopher Columbus, Junipero Serra, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison.

In the judgmental era of the day, the names of Washington and all these other notables are considered inappropriate, not worthy of naming opportunities for memorials, because their lives and actions could be related to charges of racism, sexism, and/or colonialism. So say reassessments by

woke extremists who tell a horror-like story of our nation's complicated development with emphasis on its sometimes sordid behavior—writing history as a litany of racial transgressions.[6] Clearly, certain elements of our cultural memory cry out to be recognized, however, this unbalanced telling and retelling of American history is undoubtedly deeply resented by many if not most of the American electorate.

An Alternative Response – There is an urgent need to have Americans reminded that Washington and the others were, like all of us imperfect, persons immeasurably shaped by their place and the social norms (mores) of their time that were substantially different than those of our own. In that light, a true and balanced history of America would reflect the good and the bad while still providing numerous reasons to honor the significant roles played by Washington and all the others in the complex birth of our nation. In a larger sense, despite being an imperfect people, America's aspiration of seeking a “more perfect union” should be something all of us can agree on and work to achieve.

Other Questions and Examples of Resentment – In line with the above, there are related questions that should also be asked, such as: What is the objective end to this woke business, this sometimes hypersensitivity to issues surrounding social and racial justice? What long-term good can come of overbearing measures that build a solid foundation for long-lasting resentment that can, in turn, foment anger and bitter hatred?

Consider first the resentment felt by Americans of Italian and/or Catholic heritage with the January 2019 cave of Notre Dame University to the extreme left by covering murals that were painted in the 1880s. The murals were meant to empower embattled Italian-Catholic immigrants by portraying Columbus, seen by Americans as a heroic figure at the time, bringing the Catholic faith to this hemisphere.[7]

Next, consider the resentment felt by past graduates of Madison, Wisconsin's James Madison Memorial High School. It was triggered when the school board approved a name change from Madison, one of America's Founding Fathers, to that of a notable Black graduate of the school, thus Vel Phillips Memorial High School.[8] The change was based on the fact that Madison once owned slaves, a common practice in Virginia in his time. It was argued that Black students would feel uncomfortable attending a school named after a slaveholder notwithstanding the fact these very same Black students were likely living in a city by that very same name.

Also consider the following two non-memorial-related woke measures: First, the 2005 elimination of (Indian) Chief Illinwek as the symbol of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the Warrior Chief at Maine West High School—eliminations that are still deeply resented by Illini and Maine West alumni;[9] and second, the fairly recent history of non-faculty administrators at our nation's colleges and universities placing ever outsized emphasis on diversity, inclusion, and equity—diminishing faculty hiring based on disciplinary merit.[10]

Lastly, consider Peggy Noonan's recent *Wall Street Journal* op-ed.[11] Noonan opined on parental countermeasures against the far left's woke atonement measures: “The problem wasn't whether the kids were getting an education. It was whether the boarded up schools had unfortunate names. They spent months researching the question and proposed renaming a third of the system's 125 schools many of which were named for a previously respectable people like Abraham Lincoln Thomas Jefferson George Washington Francis Scott Key and Robert Louis Stevenson.”

Anticipated Adverse Consequences – According to Noonan: “The landslide recall of three Board of Education members will have major national repercussions.” The recall was attributed to the board's focus “on issues of woke antiracism and oppression.” It is anticipated that overreach via

atonement measures by the woke left- wing of the Democratic Party will foment resentments, turn-off moderates, and likely fragment the Party as well as repulse Independents. As Noonan stated: “A cultural rebellion within the Democratic Party has begun.”—all but assuring a return to power of the Republican Party that has been crusading against ‘woke’ as, for example, with its 2022 CPAC theme of “AWAKE NOT WOKE.”[12]

Concluding Questions – Are all the measures and countermeasures discussed herein steps on a slippery slope which, if followed to the end, will make us into devils where we wish to always see things far worse than they really are? C. S. Lewis proffers an answer in his 1952 book, *Mere Christianity*: “Finally, we shall insist on seeing everything—God and our friends and ourselves included—as bad, and not be able to stop doing it: we shall be fixed forever in a universe of pure hatred.” So, when will the America electorate and the politicians in both political parties ever learn that extremism is not only a sure-fire recipe for ineffective government, but extremism in any form tears the fabric of American Democracy as well?

NOTES

1. Dowd, Maureen, “Can Dems Dodge Doomsday?” *The New York Times*, Opinion, Feb. 20, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/19/opinion/democrats-biden-voters.html>

An informative excerpt: (James) Carville, reiterated points he has made in a Vox interview and elsewhere: Democrats should not be defined by their left-wing or condone nutty slogans like “Defund the police.” They should work not to seem like an “urban, coastal, arrogant party” indulging in “faculty-lounge politics” that appeal to reason rather than emotion and use “woke” words like “Latinx.”

“Seventy percent of the people in San Francisco” tried to warn us he said of the battle that ended up with voters firing three far-left school board members who mandated a long break from in person learning during the pandemic but wanted to rechristen schools named after Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. “They’re not popular,” Carville said of such far-lefties, adding in a line spoken directly to them: “People don’t like you.”

2. Kamarck, Elaine and Galston, William, “Will Democrats Throw It All Away in the 2024 Presidential Election?” *The Wall Street Journal*, Feb. 26, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/democrats-2024-presidential-election-republicans-trump-biden-approval-voting-crt-hispanic-swing-white-working-class-blue-collar-voters-11645801008>

3. Scott, Rick, “Why I’m Defying Beltway Cowardice,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Opinion, Mar. 4, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/amp/articles/beltway-cowardice-tax-cut-hike-social-security-medicare-mmt-inflation-deficit-2022-midterms-rick-scott-elites-woke-11646339706>

In this pejorative-loaded op-ed, Senator Scott (R, FL), claims: “The elites atop our nation’s institutions are working hard to redefine America. They want to end the American experiment and replace it with a woke socialist utopia.”

4. Splitt, Frank G., “A Divided America Cannot Stand,” *Daily Herald*, Guest View, Aug. 24, 2020, <https://www.dailyherald.com/discuss/20200824/guest-view-a-divided-america-cannot-stand>

5. “The Father of the Nation,” *Daily Herald*, Editorial, Feb. 20, 2022, <https://www.dailyherald.com/search/?query=The%20Father%20of%20the%20Nation%20%20> The editorial provided the inspiration for writing a brief forerunner to this essay that was submitted on Feb. 27 for consideration by the *Daily Herald* as a Guest View.

6. Hannah-Jones, Nikole, *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*, One World, Nov. 16, 2021.
7. Miller, Harley, "Notre Dame To Cover Up Christopher Columbus Murals," *HuffPost*, Jan. 22, 2019, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/notre-dame-christopher-columbus-murals_n_5c471653e4b0bfa693c71e29
8. Tornabene, Juliana, "School board votes to change James Madison Memorial High School name to honor Vel Phillips," Nov. 22, 2021, <https://www.nbc15.com/2021/11/23/school-board-votes-support-madison-memorial-name-change-honor-vel-phillips/>
9. Splitt, Frank G., "Educational Opportunities Lost When Schools Ban Native American Symbols," *Daily Herald*, Guest View, May 29, 2018, <https://www.dailyherald.com/discuss/20180528/educational-opportunities-lost-when-schools-ban-native-american-symbols>
10. Thompson, Abigail, "The University's New Loyalty Oath: Required 'diversity and inclusion' statements amount to a political litmus test for hiring," *The Wall Street Journal*, Opinion, Dec. 20, 2019, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/the-universitys-new-loyalty-oath-11576799749>
11. Noonan, Peggy, "San Francisco Schools the Left," *The Wall Street Journal*, Opinion, Feb. 19, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/san-francisco-school-board-teachers-elections-recall-vote-racist-woke-closures-remote-learning-crt-11645130926/?mod=ANLink>
12. Crilly, Rob, "P***ed off' conservatives gather in Orlando for 'awake not woke' CPAC conference," *Daily Mail*, Feb. 24, 2022, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-10548321/amp/Conservatives-gather-Orlando-awake-not-woke-CPAC-conference.html>

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