The Labour Party is being pulled apart by its two main constituencies.
Sir Keir Starmer is struggling to hold them together.
Bagehot, *The Economist*, May 15th 2021

Harold Wilson once said that "if you can't ride two horses at once you shouldn't be in the ruddy circus." To judge from his recent performance, Sir Keir Starmer, the Labour Party's leader, can't ride a pet donkey, let alone two horses. He declared that he took full responsibility for the May 6th massacre in local elections and a by-election, only to turn on the party's popular deputy leader, Angela Rayner. The resulting outcry united the squabbling party against him and forced him to give her several new roles.

With Labour's two driving forces parting company, equestrian skill is increasingly important in Sir Keir's job. The Labour Party has always depended on a "progressive alliance" between two very different groups—what were once called "workers by hand" and "workers by brain". The first provided the numbers and the second the intellectual élan. The party's founding commitment to nationalisation, Clause Four, was drafted by two professional scribblers, Sidney and Beatrice Webb. Labour's most radical prime minister, Clement Attlee, was educated at a public school, Haileybury; his cabinet included four old Etonians.These two groups didn't always get on. Beatrice Webb confessed to her diary that "we have little faith in the 'average sensual man'. We do not believe that he can do much more than describe his grievances, we do not think that he can prescribe his remedies." Hugh Dalton, Labour's postwar Eton-and-Cambridge-educated chancellor of the exchequer, once told G.D.H. Cole, the party's leading intellectual, that Labour needed to do more to appeal to "the football crowds". Cole "shuddered and turned away". But the two groups agreed on the essential things: building the welfare state and expanding opportunities.The relationship is now in ruins. One reason is the shift in the balance of power.The "workers by hand" feel that they have had their party—and indeed their country—stolen from them. In 1951, 70% of voters were manual workers. Today that figure is less than 40%. In 1945 only a few thousand school leavers went to university. Today more than half do. The proportion of Labour mps who have done a working-class job at some point has declined from 33% in 1983 to less than 10% today. Almost 80% of Labour Party members fall into the official definition of middle-class.Suzy Stride, who stood for the party and lost in 2015, compares the attitude of middle-class activists trying to get out the working-class vote to Ryanair passengers "having to stomach a couple of hours' flight with people they shared little in common with: it could be uncomfortable but it got you where you needed to go." Now the two groups can no longer agree on the destination. In their recent book "Brexit Land" two academics at the University of Manchester, Maria Sobolewska and Robert Ford, argue that today's political divide is cultural rather than economic. The university-educated classes define themselves by their cosmopolitan values—their enthusiasm for immigration and fierce hostility to racial and gender-based prejudice. Voters from the old working-class define themselves by their fealty to "traditional values" of flag, family and fireside. And a large new Labour block—immigrants and the children of immigrants—usually sides with the first group despite being more culturally conservative. Originating in long-term changes such as the expansion of the universities and the rise of a multicultural society, the division has been supercharged by Brexit. What is a leader riding these two diverging steeds to do? Sir Keir's decision to appoint Deborah Mattinson, the author of "Beyond the Red Wall", as his chief strategist suggests that he wants to focus on the old working class. But the strategy isn't working. The progressive vote in the south is fragmenting among Greens and Liberal Democrats while the Conservatives are continuing to make gains in the North.Many people in the party, from Blairites to young progressives, favour a different approach. They want to embrace the "coalition of the ascendant" in the form of university-educated professionals, young people and ethnic minorities. Tony Blair did exactly this to bring about the longest winning streak in Labour history. Joe Biden defeated Donald Trump by mobilising the same coalition, stretching from Black Lives Matter activists to suburban mothers. The rise of the Greens in Germany suggests that the old progressive coalition is capable of reorganising itself around new problems and new values.But this strategy is also risky. Mr Blair's politics had a downside: about 5m mainly working-class voters gave up voting during his long period in power, and many of them are now voting Tory. It is doubtful whether he could win in today's circumstances. Labour has lost its vote-vault in Scotland and the culture wars are far more divisive than they used to be. Mr Biden won only narrowly, even though he was up against an opponent who had suggested, among other idiocies, that people should fight covid-19 by injecting themselves with bleach.

Cabinet Office blocks publication of Lord Mountbatten's diaries. University of Southampton spends 'hundreds of thousands' on legal battle preventing access due to government veto

Haroon Siddique, Legal Affairs correspondent, *The Guardian*, Sat 15 May 2021

When the diaries and letters of Lord and Lady Mountbatten were "saved for the nation" in 2010, it should have created an invaluable public resource. Instead, a writer has spent four years and £250,000 of his own money in an ongoing – but still frustrated – attempt to force Southampton University and the Cabinet Office to allow the public to view them.The university bought the Broadlands archive, named after the Mountbattens' Grade I-listed house, for £2.8m in 2010, attracting funding by stating it would "preserve the collection in its entirety for future generations to use and enjoy" and "ensure public access". However, Andrew Lownie, the author of a 2019 book about the Mountbattens, has been fighting unsuccessfully since 2017 for their correspondence and diaries to be released. This is despite freedom of information (FoI) requests and an order by the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) that the material be released.The university has said it was directed by the government to keep a small number of the papers private until told otherwise. "They've spent hundreds of thousands of pounds and brought in two top QCs, and this fight has been going on for four years so I can only imagine there's something [interesting] there otherwise why would they bother?" said Lownie. Lownie began his quest when researching his book. Although it has since been published, he is determined to continue the fight, and is now trying to raise £50,000 on Crowdjustice to help fight an appeal by the university and Cabinet Office against the ICO decision.The academic believes the documents could shed light on the royal family and the independence and partition of India. Lord Mountbatten was the uncle of Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, confidant of Edward VIII (Duke of Windsor) and the last Viceroy of India, while Lady Mountbatten had a close relationship with the Indian leader Jawaharlal Nehru. He said: "I just feel what they're doing is wrong ... And they just think they've got deeper pockets and they can just see me off. And this is why I'm hoping I can at least shame them and maybe we can get the release of these diaries, which I think are important sources for any 20th-century story but also we can make the point that this is not the way that governments and universities should behave ... This is opening up, what potentially could be another Chips Chapnon diaries_[which contained scandalous revelations about the powerful in interwar London] for other historians." The university bought the archive, which also included the papers of the Victorian prime minister Lord Palmerston, with the help of grants of almost £2m from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and £100,000 from Hampshire county council. It was also subject to the "acceptance in lieu" scheme under which art works and archives are accepted by the nation in lieu of inheritance tax, taking the total cost to about £4.5m, according to Lownie.When he found omissions relating to the Mountbattens from the university's inventory, he made an FoI request but the university refused to release the materials, citing a Cabinet Office power of veto under a ministerial direction. After he complained to the ICO, it contacted the university, which failed to respond for 12 months, prompting the commissioner, in the interim, to issue what it described as "unprecedented" contempt of court proceedings against the university because it "continues to flout its statutory duty".After the university responded, in December 2019, the ICO ordered it to publish the Mountbattens' diaries and letters. An appeal against that decision is due to be heard at the first tier tribunal in November. At a case management hearing in March, lawyers for the university said it intended to release Mountbattens' diaries up to 1934 in early April. But this was only done on Thursday – and some of the online links appeared to be broken – the day after the Guardian approached the Cabinet Office and university about the matter.A University of Southampton spokesperson said: "As part of the allocation of the archives in August 2011, the university was directed to keep a small number of the papers closed until we were otherwise advised. The university has always aimed to make public as much of the collection as is possible whilst balancing all its legal obligations."The Cabinet Office said it would not comment while proceedings were ongoing.

The GOP Now Stands for Nothing By Tom Nichols *THE ATLANTIC* MAY 28, 2021

The Republicans in Congress are blocking a bipartisan investigation into the January 6 insurrection. Their spines crushed by years of obedience to Donald Trump, the members of the GOP have once again retreated from civic responsibility, with one more humiliation of those last few in the party who thought that the Senate Republicans might mimic something like statesmanship.

However, this effort is more than the usual cynical mendacity and crass careerism (or, as one might say, "Elise Stefanik") that characterize the current Republican Party. This latest insult to the rule of law and the Constitution was possible only because the Republicans have already lost confidence in their own principles. The GOP now stands for nothing. The party of Lincoln has become, in every way, a political and moral nullity.

American conservatism once meant something definite and tangible. You could fight those beliefs and policies; you could argue with them, admire them, or hate them. But they existed. Strom Thurmond, Ronald Reagan, Howard Baker, and Edward Brooke were not necessarily deep thinkers, and they didn't all agree on everything. But the GOP held clear lines of thought that stood as alternatives to liberalism.

Most of those ideas were predicated on some basic beliefs about human beings themselves, including the conviction that human nature is fixed rather than malleable, that intellect is a better guide to action than emotion, that tradition is valuable, and that religious faith is a cornerstone of a healthy society. On policy, too, the conservatives moved along broad but common lines. They believed that incrementalism is better than sudden change, that America is exceptional, that patriotism is honorable, and perhaps most important, that government is a necessity to be controlled, rather than a teacher to be revered.

These principles gave the Republican Party several decades of an almost preternatural self-confidence in the eventual triumph of their ideas. After all, if human nature is eternal and rationality is unassailable, then emotional schemes and government overreach that deny these realities are bound to fail. America is exceptional, and therefore America can do what its citizens believe they can do—especially if they treat government as an instrument rather than a master.

This confidence once attracted young voters (such as me, back in the late 1970s) to the party. The country then seemed to be falling apart—faced with riots, political assassinations, bombings overseas and at home. My colleague David Frum has called the '70s "strange, feverish years," a time of "unease and despair, punctuated by disaster." The liberal Columbia University professor Mark Lilla would later write about how difficult it is "to convey to anyone who wasn't alive and politically aware at the time what a dreary place America seemed in the late 1970s, how lacking in direction and confidence."

The Republicans stepped forward in 1980 as optimistic warriors. Joined by some disaffected Democrats, they were certain that they had the intellectual and moral strength to claim victory over domestic chaos and foreign challenges. Reagan and the resurgent Republicans fought the narrative of an America in decline after years of "stagflation," urban decay, and rampant Soviet aggression. (The Cold War was still raging then.) Republican solutions—including laissez-faire economics at home and a confrontational foreign policy abroad—were born from an ideological conviction that led a prominent liberal Democrat, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, to warn his colleagues in 1981 that the GOP "has become a party of ideas."

The self-assurance of the Republicans who emerged from the post-Watergate wilderness might seem impossible to comprehend now that the modern GOP is rife with know-nothings and apocalyptic hysterics. But their confidence in their own ideas was unassailable—indeed, often to an unhealthy degree.

All of that is gone. Today's Republicans exist only to stay in power, not least so that their elected officials can avoid what they dread most: being sent home to live among their constituents. The conservative writer George Will is right that the Republican Party in 2021 has become "something new in American history," a "political party defined by the terror it feels for its own voters."

Republican legislators *should* be scared. Their base is an angry white minority that cares nothing about government; its members want their elected officials to rule by hook or by crook, the Constitution and democracy itself be damned, and they don't want any guff about namby-pamby ideas or policies. They want the elections controlled, the institutions captured, and the libs owned. The rest, to them, is just noise.

The survival instinct that this white-minority rage has triggered in craven Republican politicians is how the GOP mutated from a party championing individual liberty into a movement pushing monstrously statist authoritarianism. […]

The Republicans, facing an investigation into an insurrection provoked by their own leader, have armored up and gone into armadillo mode. They will protect their own—rather than their nation and the Constitution they swore to defend. This behavior should serve as a warning: A party that doesn't believe in anything ends up believing only in its right to rule. And a movement that believes only in its own power is a deadly enemy of constitutional democracy.

Winning the peace Why Boris Johnson is recreating Tony Blair's "delivery unit"
The prime minister promises a more muscular, interventionist state
The Economist, May 15th 2021

Michael Barber helped Tony Blair to get stuff done. In 2001 he established a "delivery unit" that translated lofty ambitions into measurable goals—regarding children's literacy, say, or hospital waiting times—and pursued them relentlessly. This was not always popular. Reflecting a common gripe, one *Daily Telegraph* columnist raged against the "grinding and dehumanising imposition" of targets reminiscent of Soviet central planning.

That columnist, now prime minister, has come round to targets. Following a request from Boris Johnson, Sir Michael has since Christmas been hard at work recreating the delivery unit. Brexit and covid-19 are starting to take up less time, and Mr Johnson wishes to reshape the country to the tastes of his new electorate: northern, non-graduate and Brexit-leaning. In the Queen's Speech on May 11th, the prime minister promised more housebuilding, more technical education, new train lines, new free ports and a new post-Brexit subsidy regime—brought into being by a more interventionist government. Covid-19 has left Mr Johnson in charge of a wartime state. Some £303bn ($430bn) went on combating the pandemic in the year to March, driving public debt from 84% of GDP to nearly 100%, its highest ratio since the 1960s. A government quite unprepared for the crisis scrambled to build field hospitals, buy protective equipment for medics and devise a vast logistical operation to deliver vaccines. The civil service, pared back under David Cameron, has grown to its largest since 2011.The success of the vaccine programme helped propel the Conservative Party to victory in a by-election in the once-safe Labour seat of Hartlepool on May 6th. It has also changed ministerial thinking about state capacity. "Six months ago, everyone was taking the piss because we were talking about moonshots," says a cabinet minister. "Now we're actually doing it." Mr Johnson's manifesto in the 2019 election promised to improve public services, and to do so in a manner the electorate would notice. The government would build 40 new hospitals, hire 50,000 nurses and fix social care. Now just getting back to pre-pandemic performance levels will be tough. The passport office warns of delays from a glut of renewals. Justice is under strain, with a record 58,000 Crown Court cases delayed. Nearly 400,000 people have been waiting more than a year for hospital treatment, up from fewer than 2,000 before the pandemic. This is stuff that loses elections, and solving it is only partly a matter of funding. Doctors and nurses take time to train, for instance. "You can end up putting a lot more money into these things and not end up getting more sausages," warns a senior Tory. Mr Johnson's flagship policy, of "levelling up" Britain's provinces, aims to address weak productivity, and correct a sense of loss and cultural neglect, by creating proper jobs, done by proud people in purposeful towns. Large sums of money will be used to smarten up high streets, bandstands and libraries—all intended to act as a down-payment to show the Tories' new voters they are serious. But while the vision is clear, much of the agenda is still hazy. It lacks a theory of how towns get richer, and measures of progress. As well as Sir Michael, Mr Johnson has drafted in Neil O'Brien, an MP who argues that decline of manufacturing in such towns can and should be reversed, to impose discipline on the programme. Folk close to the process expect a "gradual substantiation" of what the agenda means.

Sir Michael's delivery unit will help both with long-standing agendas such as levelling up and with the covid-19 backlog. It will employ 30 or so officials under the command of Emily Lawson, the former head of the National Health Service vaccine programme, and will report directly to the prime minister, providing him with a line of sight into departments. Mr Johnson's broad goals (such as achieving net-zero emissions) will be split into measurable chunks (such as keeping tabs on electric-car charging-points), and will be pursued using his authority to overcome obstacles. Along with net-zero, levelling-up and the covid-19 backlog, the unit will also focus on jobs and skills. The original delivery unit succeeded in cutting hospital waiting times and raising school standards, and has since been copied by governments across the world, from Canada to Sierra Leone. But it drew opposition from critics like Mr Johnson who saw it as an example of Labour's top-down management style, and others who focused on the potential for poorly designed targets to lead people astray—as when GPS responded to a 48-hour treatment target by denying patients the ability to book appointments further ahead.

Trump's 'Big Lie' imperils Republicans who don't embrace it

By CALVIN WOODWARD, AP, 19 May 2021

Allegiance to a lie has become a test of loyalty to Donald Trump and a means of self-preservation for Republicans.

Trump's discredited allegations about a stolen election did nothing to save his presidency when courtrooms high and low, state governments and ultimately Congress — meeting in the chaos of an insurrection powered by his grievances — affirmed the legitimacy of his defeat and the honesty of the process that led to it.

Now those "Big Lie" allegations, no closer to true than before, are getting a second, howling wind.

Republicans are expected to believe the falsehoods, pretend they do or at bare minimum not let it be known that they don't. State Republican leaders from Georgia to Arizona have been flamed by Trump or his followers for standing against the lies.

Only a select few Republicans in Washington are defying him, for they, too, know that doing so comes with a cost.

Liz Cheney, lifelong conservative and daughter of a vice president once loved by the Republican right while earning the nickname Darth Vader, was willing to pay it. "History is watching," the Wyoming congresswoman wrote as House Republicans prepared to strip her of her No. 3 leadership position this coming week over her confrontation with Trump. "Republicans need to stand for genuinely conservative principles, and steer away from the dangerous and anti-democratic Trump cult of personality."

Everyone enmeshed in Trump's relentless election claims agrees a "Big Lie" is at the heart of the matter. President Joe Biden says so. Cheney said so. Dominion Voting Systems alleges in a massive lawsuit that Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani "manufactured and disseminated the 'Big Lie.'"

Trump tried to appropriate the phrase by turning it against his accusers, a pattern from his presidency when he railed against "fake news" after having his own called out.

"The Fraudulent Presidential Election of 2020 will be, from this day forth, known as THE BIG LIE!" he said in a statement last week, delivered as if by force of proclamation.

Trump led his party in an election that cost Republicans the presidency and their Senate majority while leaving them short of taking over in the House. For all that, the party's brute-force Trump faction is ascendant as Republicans place their bets on the energy and passions of his core supporters in the approach to the midterm elections next year.

That bet requires a suspension of disbelief when Trump makes his fantastical claims about a rigged election.

"This message is working," said former Republican Rep. Denver Riggleman, driven from Congress by a Trump-aligned opponent in the party's nomination race in his Virginia district last year. Riggleman pointed to strong local fund-raising success and poll numbers for Trump loyalists.

"If you've got to say things you don't believe in, as long as that leads to a win, that's what's most important," he told MSNBC. "If you think you can win by fanning these flames of disinformation, why wouldn't you do that?" He added: "If you have no integrity."

In the running to replace Cheney in the House GOP leadership, Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York in recent days endorsed Trump's false claims of voting fraud and of a ballot recount being conducted in Arizona's Maricopa County by a company whose leader has shared unfounded conspiracy theories about the election.

Artifice unfolded in Florida as Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis staged a fake signing ceremony Thursday on Fox News for a bill he actually signed elsewhere. The bill imposes new voting restrictions to fix problems state officials acknowledged haven't really been found, but might be in the future.

Republicans are pushing voting curbs in multiple states as well as the federal level even as state leaders have pronounced Trump's case baseless.

"They can't change the 2020 election but they can use it as a predicate for new restrictive voting laws," election law scholar Richard Hasen of University of California, Irvine, said of the Trump loyalists. "It's extremely troubling for American democracy and undermines voter confidence in the integrity of the election process. Very dangerous."

Trump has been busy resurfacing election claims he's aired countless times before. They've been systematically debunked. [...]

In one of his broadsides last week, Trump assailed Cheney, Pence and labeled Sen. Mitch McConnell "gutless and clueless" in one go. McConnell, the Senate Republican leader, voted for Trump's acquittal but pronounced him "practically and morally responsible" for provoking the Jan. 6 insurrection, drawing the ex-president's enduring enmity.

Since then, McConnell and Pence have turned the other cheek. Darth Vader's daughter didn't. But at the moment, the force seems to be with Trump.

100 days in: Biden vs. Trump By DOYLE MCMANUS *THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE* APR 26, 2021

A president's first 100 days are an arbitrary bench mark, a point of measurement journalists are fond of because it allows us to draw comparisons between the current officeholder and Franklin D. Roosevelt, the last chief executive whose first three months were truly momentous.

But in recent times, the 100-day trope has also been taken seriously by presidents — including both Donald Trump and Joe Biden.

During his 2016 presidential campaign, Trump promised that in his first 100 days he would repeal Obamacare, build a wall on the border with Mexico and persuade Congress to pass term limits.

None of those things happened, but Trump did outdo former holders of the office in one regard: producing unshirted chaos. The headstrong new president imposed a ban on immigrants and travelers from Muslim countries, but it was quickly reversed by federal courts. He stripped federal funding from sanctuary cities, but that, too, was quickly challenged. His national security adviser resigned amid a scandal over secret contacts with Russian officials.

Soon enough, however, Trump disavowed his own self-proclaimed three-month deadline as a "ridiculous standard," while at the same time insisting: "I've done more than any other president in the first 100 days."

Biden, too, pledged quick action. He promised to deliver 100 million doses of COVID-19 vaccine in his first 100 days; when that proved too easy, he doubled the goal to 200 million (and reached it).

He promised pandemic relief, and managed to push a massive $1.9 trillion bill through Congress without a vote to spare. He has proposed a $2.3 trillion infrastructure plan. And his approval in public opinion polls stands at about 54%, a higher level than his predecessor ever touched.

If Biden were simply being compared with his immediate predecessor, he'd be declared the winner of the 100-day race. But for all Biden's unexpected boldness, his record doesn't reach Rooseveltian standards. FDR passed 15 major pieces of legislation in his first 100 days; Biden has passed exactly one. More important, while Biden's relief bill is enormous in terms of dollars, most of its emergency provisions are only temporary. Unlike FDR's New Deal laws, its programs — notably the family tax credit that promises to cut child poverty in half — won't last a single generation unless the president persuades Congress to extend them. "These have been emergency measures, justified by the pandemic," noted Elaine Kamarck, a Brookings Institution scholar of the presidency. "We'll know how durable this is when we see the fate of the infrastructure bill."

Here's another way Biden's restoration of New Deal-style government has been limited: The new president's energy has focused relentlessly on four priorities — the pandemic, the economy, climate change and race relations. Other Democratic priorities — immigration reform, gun control, a $15 minimum wage — have received moral support, but not much more. That narrow focus is one of the reasons for Biden's success (unlike Trump, whose attention span was notoriously short), but it has produced frustration among progressives who hoped for more help.

Those who hoped Biden would produce a renaissance of bipartisanship have been disappointed too. The president has held affable meetings with Republican senators, only to opt for bills that could be passed without them. He's made a hard-nosed choice that passing bills comes first; bipartisanship comes second.

And Biden has trouble on the horizon. A surge of underage migrants on the southern border has caused a crisis that the new administration, for all its vaunted experience, has struggled to surmount. In addition, some economists worry that Biden's huge spending bills could increase inflation. And if Democratic majorities in Congress don't survive the midterm election in 2022, Biden's agenda will be stopped dead.

For all those cautions, Biden has succeeded in his first step: He has revoked dozens of Trump's policies through executive orders and ended Trump's crusade to defund and dismantle large parts of the federal government.

"He's restored normal governance — and it's amazing how quickly," Kamarck told me. "This administration is almost boring some of the time. That was never the case under Trump."

Merely by fulfilling that first promise and undoing much of Trump's legacy in three months, Biden has made a significant impact. He's already been a more ambitious and more consequential president than some Democrats expected. But he has a long way to go.

FDR's most memorable achievements didn't come in his first 100 days of emergency measures. The bills that established Social Security and the National Labor Relations Board weren't passed until after his first midterm election, when he helped elect nine more Democrats to the Senate.

If Biden can emulate that trick, he might begin to qualify for Roosevelt's league — but not until then.

Brexit stems from a civil war in capitalism – we are all just collateral damage

George Monbiot, *The Guardian*, Tue 24 Nov 2020

Where there is chaos, the government will multiply it. Where people are pushed to the brink, it will shove them over. Boris Johnson ignored the pleas of businesses and politicians across the UK – especially in Northern Ireland – to extend the Brexit transition process. Never mind the pandemic, never mind unemployment, poverty and insecurity – nothing must prevent our experiment in unassisted flight. We will leap from the white cliffs on 1 January, come what may.

Perhaps, after so much macho bluster, the government will take the last of its last chances and strike a deal this week. If so, with scarcely any time for refinement, the agreement is likely to be rushed and bodged. In any event, pain will follow. Disruption at the border is likely to be felt across the nation. Why are we doing this to ourselves? The answer is that Brexit is the outcome of a civil war within capitalism.

Broadly speaking, there are two dominant forms of capitalist enterprise. The first could be described as housetrained capitalism. It seeks an accommodation with the administrative state, and benefits from stability, predictability and the regulations that exclude dirtier and rougher competitors. It can coexist with a tame and feeble form of democracy.

The second could be described as warlord capitalism. This sees all restraints on accumulation – including taxes, regulations and the public ownership of essential services – as illegitimate. Nothing should be allowed to stand in the way of profit-making. It fetishises something it calls "liberty", which turns out to mean total freedom for plutocrats, at society's expense.

In unguarded moments, the warlords and their supporters go all the way. Hayek said he preferred a "liberal dictatorship" to "a democratic government devoid of liberalism". Peter Thiel, the cofounder of PayPal, confessed: "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible." Last month, Mike Lee, senior Republican senator for Utah, claimed that "democracy isn't the objective" of the US political system, "liberty, peace, and prosperity are".

Brexit represents an astonishing opportunity for warlord capitalism. It is a chance not just to rip up specific rules, which it overtly aims to do, but also to tear down the uneasy truce between capitalism and democracy under which public protections in general are created and enforced. In Steve Bannon's words, it enables "the deconstruction of the administrative state". Chaos is not a threat but an opportunity for money's warlords. Peter Hargreaves, the billionaire who donated £3.2m to the Leave.EU campaign, explained that after Brexit: "We will get out there and we will become incredibly successful because we will be insecure again. And insecurity is fantastic."

The chaos it is likely to cause will be used as its own justification: times are tough, so we must slash regulations and liberate business to make us rich again. Johnson's government will seek to use a no-deal or thin-deal Brexit to destroy at least some of the constraints on the most brutal forms of capitalism.

Housetrained capitalists are horrified by Brexit. Not only does it dampen economic activity in general, but it threatens to destroy the market advantage for businesses that play by the rules. Without regulatory constraints, the warlords would wipe them out. The Confederation of British Industry warned that leaving Europe would cause a major economic shock.

Johnson's government is what warlord money buys. It could be seen as the perfect expression of the Pollution Paradox: the dirtier or more damaging an enterprise is, the more money it must spend on politics to ensure it's not regulated out of existence. As a result, political funding comes to be dominated by the most harmful companies and oligarchs, which then wield the greatest political influence. They crowd out their more accommodating rivals.

It isn't just about pollution. Damaging enterprises with an interest in buying political results include banks developing exotic financial instruments; property developers who resent the planning laws; junk food companies; bosses seeking to destroy employment rights; and plutocrats hoping to avoid tax. It's why we'll never have a healthy democracy without a radical reform of campaign finance.

Understood in this light, Brexit is scarcely about the UK at all. Oligarchs who have shown great interest in the subject tend to have weak or incomplete ties to this country. By far the biggest individual donors to the Brexit party are Christopher Harborne, who is based in Thailand, and Jeremy Hosking, who has businesses listed in Dublin and Delaware. The newspaper owners who went to such lengths to make Brexit happen are domiciled offshore.

None of this is what we were told we were voting for. Brexit, treading on the heels of the pandemic, is likely to harm the lives and freedoms of millions of people in the UK. But it's not about us. We are just caught in the crossfire of capitalism's civil war.

Senate votes against bipartisan probe of Jan. 6 Capitol riot, By Mary Clare Jalonick and Lisa Mascaro *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR May 28, 2021*

Senate Republicans on Friday blocked creation of a bipartisan panel to study the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, turning aside the independent investigation in a show of party loyalty to former President Donald Trump and an effort to shift the political focus away from the violent insurrection by his GOP supporters.

The Senate vote was 54-35 – six short of the 60 votes needed to take up a House-passed bill that would have formed a 10-member commission evenly split between the two parties. It came a day after emotional appeals from police who fought with the rioters, the family of an officer who died afterward, and lawmakers in both parties who fled Capitol chambers as the rioters broke in.

Six Republicans voted with Democrats to move forward, and 11 senators missed the rare Friday vote, some of whom said they had scheduling conflicts. The vote is likely to mean that questions about who should bear responsibility for the attacks will continue to be filtered through a partisan lens rather than addressed by an independent panel modeled after the commission that investigated the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Though the Jan. 6 commission bill passed the House earlier this month with the support of almost three dozen Republicans, most GOP senators said they believe the commission would eventually be used against them politically. And Mr. Trump, who still has a firm hold on the party, has called it a "Democrat trap."

Speaking to his Republican colleagues, Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer said after the vote they were "trying to sweep the horrors of that day under the rug" out of loyalty to Mr. Trump.

He left open the possibility of another vote in the future on establishing a bipartisan commission, declaring, "The events of Jan. 6 will be investigated."

Friday's vote was emblematic of the profound mistrust between the two parties since the siege, especially among Republicans, as some in the party have downplayed the violence and defended the rioters who supported Mr. Trump and his false insistence that the election was stolen from him.

The attack was the worst on the Capitol in 200 years and interrupted the certification of Democrat Joe Biden's win over Mr. Trump. The protesters constructed a mock gallows in front of the Capitol and called for the hanging of Vice President Mike Pence, who was overseeing the certification of the presidential vote. Lawmakers hid on the floor of the House as they tried to break in, and senators evacuated their chamber mere minutes before it was ransacked.

Four of the rioters that day, and Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick collapsed and died afterward of what authorities said were natural causes. Dozens of police officers were wounded, some with permanent injuries, and two police officers took their own lives in the days after the riots.

While initially saying he was open to the idea of the commission, Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell turned firmly against it in recent days. He has said he believes the panel's investigation would be partisan despite the even split among party members.

Mr. McConnell, who once said Mr. Trump was responsible for provoking the mob attack on the Capitol, said of Democrats, "They'd like to continue to litigate the former president, into the future."

Still, six in his caucus defied him, arguing that an independent look is needed. A seventh, Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, missed the vote because of a family commitment but would have also voted to move forward with the legislation.

Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski said Thursday evening that she needs to know more about what happened that day and why.

"Truth is hard stuff, but we've got a responsibility to it," she told reporters. "We just can't pretend that nothing bad happened, or that people just got too excitable. Something bad happened. And it's important to lay that out."

Of her colleagues opposing the commission, Ms. Murkowski said some are concerned that "we don't want to rock the boat."

GOP opposition to the bipartisan panel has revived Democratic pressure to do away with the filibuster, a time-honored Senate tradition that requires a vote by 60 of the 100 senators to cut off debate and advance a bill. With the Senate evenly split 50-50, Democrats need support of 10 Republicans to move to the commission bill.

The Republicans' political arguments over the violent siege – which is still raw for many in the Capitol, almost five months later – have frustrated not only Democrats and some of their Republican colleagues but also those who fought off the rioters. […]

Mr. Biden, asked about the commission at a stop in Cleveland, said Thursday, "I can't imagine anyone voting against" it.

Let attrition commence. Nicola Sturgeon's nationalists retain power in Scotland.
The nationalists won, but not as convincingly as they had hoped to.
The Economist, May 15th 2021

In a phone call on May 9th, Boris Johnson congratulated Nicola Sturgeon, leader of the Scottish Nationalist Party, and said how much he was looking forward to Glasgow hosting the UN climate conference later this year. There is much to congratulate her on. The SNP is once again the largest party in the Scottish Parliament, and is embarking on its fourth term in power. Ms Sturgeon, who has had high office since the days of Tony Blair, Mr Johnson's predecessor bar three, is once again first minister. Ms Sturgeon's response was blunter. A second referendum on Scotland's independence, she told the prime minister, is now a matter "of when, not if". In fact, a long and gruelling stalemate awaits. Mr Johnson's government claims that, falling one seat short of a majority, the SNP lacks a mandate for a referendum. But the Scottish Parliament's proportional voting system is intended to encourage coalitions, and together the SNP and the Scottish Green Party, which also backs independence, can pass a referendum law. Still, Scots are split on whether that is a mandate, and many are undecided. The British government argues that whatever its composition, the Scottish Parliament does not have the power to organise a referendum. The Scotland Act, which underpins devolution, stipulates that the union is the exclusive preserve of Westminster. David Cameron, then prime minister, granted permission for a vote in 2014, when Scots plumped by a margin of more than ten points to stay in the union. Ms Sturgeon hopes Boris Johnson will do the same, in order to put a second referendum beyond legal doubt. A refusal, she says, would be a defiance of the will of the Scottish people and in itself an argument for independence.

Mr Johnson refuses, saying Scotland must focus on recovering from covid-19. He previously said that no referendum should take place for decades, but has recently adopted a softer, "not now" approach, which seeks to deflate rather than confront separatism. On May 8th he invited Ms Sturgeon to approach the "difficult journey" of recovery in a "spirit of unity and co-operation". At the same time, the British government has little appetite for granting Scotland more powers. Instead, Mr Johnson plans to relocate more civil servants there and to allocate more funding for Scottish infrastructure directly from London. Ms Sturgeon is opposed to "illegal, wildcat" referendums, knowing they would throw away the chance at independence and would alienate undecided Scots. But she will seek to jolt Mr Johnson's hand, and test the limits of the Scottish Parliament's powers, by daring the British government to block a referendum law in the Supreme Court in London. (A legal challenge could alternatively come from unionist campaign groups.) The nationalists would be likely to argue that the Scottish Parliament has the power legislate for a purely advisory referendum that did not automatically trigger independence, though politically it would be hard to ignore. Britain's Brexit referendum of 2016 was in principle advisory, having no binding legal effect. The court is increasingly serving as a forum for confrontation between Ms Sturgeon and the British government. Ms Sturgeon described a challenge over a law to entrench the un convention on children's rights in Scotland as "morally repugnant". Even if the nationalists lose, cases can provide them with handy propaganda for their claim that their parliament is impotent. Eve Hepburn, co-editor of "Scotland's New Choice", a new study on independence, argues that if the British government takes an "aggressive or dismissive" approach, reminiscent of Spain's rejection of Catalan separatism, it will risk fuelling support for independence. But Mr Johnson's deflection has some hope of working. Polls suggest roughly half of Scots favour independence in principle, but only 30% want a referendum within two years as Ms Sturgeon proposes. Scotland's debate often echoes St Augustine: Lord make me independent, but not yet. Mr Johnson has one overwhelming reason to hold firm against a referendum until after the next general election, expected in 2023 or 2024. In elections in 2015 and 2019, his party told voters in England, with some success, that the alternative to a Conservative government in Westminster was an unstable coalition between a weak English Labour Party and a rickety SNP. Nationalism endangers the union, but sustains the Tories. The SNP is just weak enough for the Tories to resist, but strong enough for them to claim the union is in peril with any other prime minister.

Many Americans don't trust elections. What can be done? By Peter Grier, *CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR May 21, 2021*

America's democratic process has been severely tested in the aftermath of the 2020 presidential election. Former President Donald Trump's personal push to overturn results in key states revealed vulnerabilities in the nation's electoral system – including how many important aspects of voting are defended not by laws, but by norms of official behavior.

Nor has the testing ended, despite the Trump campaign's dozens of losses in election-related lawsuits, the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, and Congress' ultimate certification of President Joe Biden's Electoral College win. Despite no evidence that Mr. Trump's loss in Arizona was fraudulent, 16 Republicans in the state Senate voted to subpoena ballots from Maricopa County, for an examination that has been widely criticized as a partisan ploy. Trump supporters are now seeking Arizona-style "audits" in Georgia and other swing states.

Can elections be armored against disgruntled efforts to subvert them? Perhaps more important, can changes to the electoral system regain trust that has been lost on both sides?

Complete trust in election outcomes is likely an impossible goal in today's polarized political environment. But it is possible to have trustworthy elections, ones that impartial observers can agree are free and fair, experts say.

Election audits could be akin to financial audits – activities that occur regularly, follow established professional procedures, and are largely the same in all 50 states, says Charles Stewart III, a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

"If we weren't in the middle of partisan wrangling over the whole 2020 election, with crazy things happening in Arizona, we could have a reasonable discussion about making things better," Professor Stewart says.

Americans have mixed feelings about elections, according to polls. Overall, they are not confident in their honesty. Heading into the 2020 vote, 59% of Americans said they did not trust the outcome to be fair, according to a Gallup survey.

But trust in specific elections can be higher. Sixty-five percent of Americans are confident in the outcome of the 2020 vote, according to a Morning Consult survey. There is a wide disparity in attitudes between members of the two big U.S. political parties, though: Ninety-two percent of Democrats said the election was free and fair, while only 32% of Republicans agreed.

In general, there are really only two major factors that affect voter trust in an election, says Professor Stewart. The first is whether their candidate won or not. The second is whether they personally had to wait in a long line to cast their ballot.

According to many of the Republican state legislators currently pushing for restrictions and clarification in voting laws around the nation, one of their primary motives is to make GOP voters feel more secure about election results. The irony is that those bills may be unlikely to affect confidence at all.

"There is no evidence passing new laws affects voters' perceptions of election integrity," Michael McDonald, a professor at the University of Florida who specializes in American elections, tweeted last month.

A roundtable on restoring trust in the American electoral process hosted by Election Law Journal last month produced a variety of medium- to long-term solutions for the problem.

The United States might take elections out of the hands of partisan entities and use nonpartisan experts to run them, suggested Guy-Uriel Charles, a professor at the Duke University School of Law. He used the analogy of a NASA for elections.

Congress might pass a law requiring the winners of congressional elections to get a majority of the vote in their districts, not just a plurality, said Ned Foley, a professor of election law at the Ohio State University. This could strengthen moderates in both parties and make it more difficult for extremists to squeak into office, Professor Foley said.

The country could also begin the long-term process of strengthening the kind of intermediaries that help with truth-telling and fact-checking in politics, such as the press, the judiciary, and opposition parties, said Rick Hasen, a professor of law and political science at the University of California, Irvine.

There really needs to be a cross-discipline, cross-partisan effort to stop political disinformation, said Professor Hasen. Many of the efforts to pass new voting regulation laws stem from the success that Mr. Trump has had hammering home the false "Big Lie" that the 2020 election was stolen.

"If there's going to be 30% of the population that doesn't agree with truth, we're not going to get out of this situation," Professor Hasen told the roundtable. […]

But in the end, it may be more than laws that hold together confidence in elections and democracy itself.

"It's the expectations, the norms, the willingness to concede," says Professor Stewart of MIT.

These problems did not start with the 2020 election, and they won't end by 2024, either. Election administration can't necessarily constrain bad-faith actors or even just highly disappointed losers, he says.

"We have to be mature enough to recognize there are no perfect elections. ... There becomes a margin at which even the best-executed rules and procedures will leave some room for doubt. That's where the norms of the political process have to kick in," says Professor Stewart.

Erasmus: what the Turing scheme must do to ensure UK students don't miss out

Johanna L. Waters , University College London, *The Conversation UK*, 5 January 2021

Following Brexit, the UK will no longer take part in the Europe-wide student exchange programme, Erasmus+. Instead, some UK students will have access to a new programme, the Turing scheme. This overseas study and work placement initiative is intended to offer young people a period abroad at a range of global, rather than European, destinations.

The individual benefits of international student mobility are well known. Young people who study abroad – either short term or for a whole degree – develop a cosmopolitan, open and more rounded outlook, and increased independence. They improve language skills and develop empathy for and understanding of cultures beyond their own. They are far more likely to travel and live overseas in later life, pursuing an international career. More immediate and specific benefits include improved job prospects, increased salaries and lower unemployment. One study found that people who had taken part in Erasmus went on to earn a 7–9% higher salary than those who did not.

Other research showed that disadvantaged students, specifically, were likely to earn more if they had studied internationally. This report also found that student mobility benefited Black and Asian graduates, who were less likely to be unemployed than their peers who had not studied abroad. An argument against overseas study for students has been that it benefits only the most privileged. Although young people from more disadvantaged backgrounds have historically been less likely to take up an Erasmus placement, they nevertheless did participate, and their involvement has been on the increase. There has been a notable shift in recent years towards widening participation in Erasmus through extra grant support. Additional money has been made available to young people from low-income households or with disabilities. Work placements through Erasmus have been particularly attractive to less privileged students, who have been able to earn a salary whilst overseas. Losing these opportunities is likely to have a negative impact on the number of disadvantaged students travelling internationally for study or employment in the future, who will face financial and other constraints.

The proposed new scheme to replace Erasmus for the UK – the Turing scheme – will start in September 2021 and will include study and work placements. It has an initial budget of £100 million, to be reviewed annually. This is less than the nearly €145 million (£130 million) that the UK received in Erasmus grants in 2019.

The Turing scheme is intended to encourage mobility globally, but no mention has been made of how tuition fees – which vary considerably, internationally – will be covered. Under Erasmus, students paid no tuition fees to their overseas university, and received a grant for living expenses. The UK government has emphasised that the Turing scheme will target students from disadvantaged backgrounds, although it is currently unclear how this will take place.

Under the Turing scheme, organisations are expected to bid for funding to carry out the scheme. The administrative burden on individual institutions to set up exchange arrangements to replace Erasmus is likely to be huge.

In order to work effectively, the Turing scheme needs to be coordinated centrally in order to relieve the burden on individual institutions, and ensure that outgoing students are not liable for fees in the host country.

The climate impacts of the new scheme, encouraging travel to more distant destinations which are unreachable by train, have not yet been discussed either.

The new scheme must also cater for incoming students. At the moment, it makes no discernible provision for this, neglecting the substantial value – social, cultural and economic – that international students on short-term placements bring to higher education and society more broadly.

Over 30,000 students and trainees have come to the UK through Erasmus each year, spending money on food, accommodation and leisure. This is likely at least to offset the costs to the taxpayer of educating them. But the spending power of international students is rarely discussed. This highlights a wider problem – that international students, their contributions and worth to the UK, remain largely invisible.

Future incoming students will rely on arrangements between institutions, and will not receive the financial incentives, including the tuition fee waiver, that Erasmus provided.

Initial indications suggest that scrapping the UK's involvement in Erasmus will have negative impacts on students' experiences in the short and longer term. Study abroad can be life changing for students. The proposed Turing scheme must address these losses if it is to replicate or even improve upon the opportunities that the Erasmus programme provided for UK students.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg: US Supreme Court judge and liberal icon dies aged 87 *By* Josh White
THE DAILY TELEGRAPH 19.09.2020

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the US Supreme Court judge who became one of America's great liberal icons, has died aged 87. Ginsburg died of metastatic pancreas cancer at her home in Washington, DC on Friday evening, the Supreme Court said in a statement.

"Our Nation has lost a jurist of historic stature," Chief Justice John Roberts said in a statement. "We at the Supreme Court have lost a cherished colleague. Today we mourn, but with confidence that future generations will remember Ruth Bader Ginsburg as we knew her - a tireless and resolute champion of justice."

Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader in the Senate, vowed to hold a vote on Donald Trump's nomination to succeed Ginsburg. That was expected to set off a titanic battle between Republicans and Democrats in the run-up to the election on Nov 3.

Ginsburg became a feminist hero and an social media icon, becoming fondly known as "The Notorious RBG", a riff on the rapper, The Notorious B.I.G.

She had endured a number of health issues. In July she announced that she was receiving chemotherapy treatment for a recurrence of cancer, a few months after being hospitalised with a gall bladder infection. In 2018, she fractured three ribs in a fall in her Washington office. She had pancreatic cancer in 2009 and colon cancer in 1999.

She had clung to her position despite her age and health, knowing that if she retired it could change the landscape of US justice.

Her health had in recent years become a major political issue. Supreme Court justices hold their seats until they die, or choose to retire, which Ginsburg refused to do.

The vacancy left by her death could be seized upon by the Republicans: Donald Trump will now have the opportunity to appoint a third judge to the nine-member court, and could move it even further to the right.

Mr Trump called Ginsburg an "amazing woman" and did not mention filling her vacant seat when he spoke briefly to reporters on Friday night.

The court, which has a 5-4 conservative majority, includes judges Brett Kavanaugh and Neil Gorsuch, both of whom were appointed by Mr Trump.

US liberals will now fear an unpicking of rights and causes that Ginsburg dedicated her life trying to protect.

Ginsburg had helped the court to prevent a reversal of abortion rights, stronger executive powers for the president and a growing involvement of religion in public life. She provided significant votes in landmark rulings that secured equal rights for women and expanded gay rights.

Supreme Court judges can dramatically shape US law on issues such as LGBT rights, guns, the death penalty and the powers of the president. In 1973, the court legalised abortion in the US in the landmark *Roe v Wade* case, and in 2015 the court voted to allow same-sex marriage.

According to US radio service NPR, days before her death she dictated a statement to her granddaughter Clara Spera: "My most fervent wish is that I will not be replaced until a new president is installed."

Despite her wish, the Republicans are poised to act. On Friday night, Mr McConnell said he would be ready to hold a Senate vote if Mr Trump nominates a replacement.

But Joe Biden, Mr Trump's election challenger, said on Friday that the next president should nominate Ginsburg's successor.

Ginsburg died surrounded by her family, the Supreme Court said in a statement. […]

Ginsburg was seen by many as an inspirational figure. Her exercise regime was turned into a workout book and she inspired Ginsburg halloween costumes. Clips of her lifting weights became a popular meme.

Shana Knizhnik, one of the creators of the Notorious RBG blog, said her appeal crossed the generations. "She's fought for ideals that even today may seem pretty radical, and at the time were simply unheard of," Ms Knizhnik said.

The 2018 legal drama *On the Basis of Sex* told the story of her battles against sexism in the American legal system. *RBG*, a documentary about her career, was nominated for an Oscar.

Even with a 5-4 conservative majority on the court, Mr Trump lost several key rulings this year, including a decision that rejected his claim of presidential immunity from criminal investigation.

The court also ruled against Mr Trump by expanding LGBT rights, struck down a Louisiana abortion law and blocked him from repealing an immigration scheme set up by the Obama administration.

But Ginsburg's replacement will be nominated by Mr Trump, a man she attacked for his "ego" and whose impact on the court she said she did not "even want to contemplate".

Female leaders make a real difference. Covid may be the proof
Jane Dudman, *The Guardian*, Wed 16 Dec 2020

What do Erna Solberg, Sanna Marin, Katrín Jakobsdóttir and Mette Frederiksen have in common apart from all four being female prime ministers (of Norway, Finland, Iceland and Denmark, respectively)? The answer is that their countries have much lower rates of Covid-19 infection than male-led neighbouring nations such as Ireland, Sweden and the UK.

Are those facts connected? There's a growing body of evidence to suggest they may be.

Alongside an overview of gender parity in 100 countries by digital bank N26, it has also noted that Finland, with a population of 5.5 million, has had just over 370 deaths, a rate of around 60 deaths per million people. The UK death rate is more than 10 times that. Of course they are very different countries, but there have been similarly low Covid death rates in the other female-led northern European nations. Norway has seen 57 deaths per 1 million, Iceland 73 and Denmark 135 compared to 412 in Ireland, 626 in Sweden and 820 per 1 million in the UK. Other countries with a female leader, notably Germany and New Zealand, have also kept Covid infections low. The difference is real and may be explained by the "proactive and coordinated policy responses" adopted by female leaders.

If there is a correlation between managing Covid and having a woman at the helm, the world would be a better place for knowing that and for other leaders being able to learn from it. The truth, as with everything to do with Covid, is that it is probably too early to make any firm assertions. Daily cases and deaths from the virus in Germany, led by chancellor Angela Merkel, are now rising. The country is closing its non-essential shops and imposing a harsher national lockdown from 16 December.

Those sceptical that individual women in positions of power are very different from men don't have too far to look. The legacy of Margaret Thatcher as the first female UK prime minister continues to be fiercely debated; but it's widely agreed that she did little for women's rights per se. Former home secretary Theresa May created the toxic "hostile environment" that ended in the Windrush scandal. The present UK home secretary, Priti Patel, avows an authoritarian stance that is even harsher than the law and order policies of the 1980s, while her personal style as a leader has led to the resignation of the government's own independent adviser on ethics. Not much of an advert for female leadership. Depressingly, as Catherine Bennett has written, there are always women prepared to do men's dirty work.

What really counts is getting to what used to be called the tipping point, generally reckoned as having more than a third of positions of power held by women in any organisation.

UK public services, as in many other countries, still have more women lower down the pay scale and fewer women in senior positions. Research shows that the glass ceiling is still firmly in position for civil servants, NHS staff, local government workers and charities. Even in Finland, for instance, where most government ministers are women, activists wanting reform on cultural issues have said that having the youngest female leader of a country – prime minister Sanna Marin – counts for little until change has the support of the system behind the prime minister.

This isn't, in the end, just about women. It's about parity and about politicians of all genders creating systems that are fair and just for their citizens. This year has highlighted more than any other how existing inequalities, whether gender, race or class, leave people vulnerable to crises. Across Europe, domestic abuse has risen during the pandemic, and Covid has also had a huge impact on the lives of working women. That's because unpaid care and family responsibilities still fall overwhelmingly on women. More women than men work part-time, creating not just a gender pay gap but a gender pension gap as well. Many women know how hard they still have to work to attain equality with men. And many will also acknowledge that it's networks, peer support, mentoring, mothers, sisters, friends that enable them to get through.

There are signs of change. The N26 equality survey notes that despite many losses for women this year, Germany has approved landmark legislation setting a legal quota for gender in boardrooms, while more recently (and visibly) Kamala Harris becomes the first female US vice-president on 20 January, 2021, not to mention that more than 23% of US congress members are now female. There is still clearly room for improvement, but all is not lost. Politicians have the opportunity to move in the right direction

Joe Biden calls for US to confront its past on 100th anniversary of Tulsa massacre David Smith *THE GUARDIAN* Wed 2 Jun 2021

Joe Biden has used the centenary of the Tulsa race massacre as a rallying cry for America to be honest about its history, insisting that great nations "come to terms with their dark sides".

On Tuesday Biden became the first sitting US president to visit the site where, on 31 May and 1 June 1921, a white mob murdered up to 300 African Americans and burned and looted homes and businesses, razing a prosperous community known as "Black Wall Street".

In an emotional speech punctuated by intense applause, Biden pleaded for America to confront its past and admit that a thread of hatred runs from Tulsa through more recent displays of white supremacy in Charlottesville, Virginia, and at the US Capitol in Washington on 6 January.

He also drew a connection to a Republican assault on the voting rights of people of colour and announced that Kamala Harris, the first woman of colour to serve as vice-president, would lead the White House effort to resist it.

Biden began by speaking directly to the last three survivors of the massacre, centenarians Viola "Mother" Fletcher, Hughes "Uncle Red" Van Ellis and Lessie "Mother Randle" Benningfield Randle, who received a standing ovation from an audience of around 200 made up of survivors and their families, community leaders, and elected officials.

"You are the three known remaining survivors of a story seen in the mirror dimly but no longer," said Biden, a comparatively youthful 78. "Now, your story will be known in full view."

Knowledge of this violent attempt to suppress Black success in Greenwood, Tulsa, fell victim to a decades-long conspiracy of silence. The atrocity was not taught in schools, even in Tulsa, until the mid-2000s and was expunged from police records. Those who threatened to break to the taboo faced disapproval or death threats. Even many Black residents preferred not to burden their children with the story.

Biden said: "For much too long the history of what took place here was told in silence, cloaked in darkness. But just because history is silent it doesn't mean that it did not take place and, while darkness can hide much, it erases nothing. Some injustices are so heinous, so horrific, so grievous, they can't be buried, no matter how hard people try. So it is here: only with truth can come healing and justice and repair."

The argument was a striking contrast from his predecessor, Donald Trump, who promoted a heroic vision of American history. On the massacre's 99th anniversary, Trump had posed with a Bible outside a historic church after security forces teargassed protesters outside the White House. He headed to Tulsa later that month for a campaign rally that breached coronavirus safety guidelines.

After studying an exhibition on this lost "boom town" at the Greenwood Cultural Center, Biden's message appeared to be the opposite of "Make America great again" – an acknowledgment that America's history includes slavery and segregation, and that only looking that fully in the face can allow it to move forward.

Challenging the language used to describe the one of the worst chapters in the country's history of racial violence, the president followed a moment of silence with a pointed statement: "My fellow Americans, this was not a riot. This was a massacre." The hush gave way to prolonged applause inside the room.

He went on: "Among the worst in our history. But not the only one and for too long, forgotten by our history. As soon as it happened, there was a clear effort to erase it from our memory, our collective memory…

"We can't just choose to learn what we want to know and not what we should know," he continued. "We should know the good, the bad, everything. That's what great nations do. They come to terms with their dark sides. And we're a great nation."

The president noted that, while Greenwood's Black community recovered, it was marginalised again by housing "red lining" and urban renewal projects including highways – a pattern seen in many American cities.

He promised that his administration would address racism at its roots, expanding federal contracting with small, disadvantaged businesses, investing tens of billions of dollars in communities like Greenwood and pursuing new efforts to combat housing discrimination.

Notably, Biden also used the platform to condemn efforts in recent months by Republican state legislators to impose voting restrictions – likely to have a disproportionate impact on people of colour – as a "truly unprecedented assault on our democracy".

Biden said he had asked Harris to lead his administration's efforts to protect voting rights. "With her leadership and your support, we're going to overcome again, but it's going to take a hell of a lot of work," he said.

Harris released a statement that noted almost 400 bills have been introduced at the state level since the last presidential election to make it more difficult for some people to vote. "The work ahead of us is to make voting accessible to all American voters, and to make sure every vote is counted through a free, fair, and transparent process," she said. "This is the work of democracy." […]

Could England's future be a left-leaning south facing off against a conservative north?
John Harris, *The Guardian*, 16 May 2021

London is changing, and so is the south of England. Whether recent predictions of a lasting drop in the capital's population and emptied-out office districts will come true is still unclear. But something has definitely been happening, for the best part of a year: thanks to Covid and its disruptions, a sizeable number of people are deciding to leave the city and head elsewhere, chasing space, greenery – and, in many cases, the company of like minds.

Former Londoners, it seems, have recently set up home as far afield as Devon and Cornwall. At the same time, people seem to be pitching up in and around places associated with a liberal, remain-ish view of the world: Oxford, Brighton, Bath, the more affluent parts of Bristol.

All of this is accelerating a change that was starting to become clear before the pandemic: in many places once seen as conservative with both a big and small C, signs of a shift towards a different kind of politics. For people on the left, this is good news. In the suburbs, the fact that one aspect of the story centres on a long-term move into greater racial diversity should also be a cause for celebration. But as England enters a new age of political polarisation, those endless lifestyle articles about whichever places beyond the capital are now held to have the correct mixture of artisan cafes and organic food markets also suggest other social changes that are much narrower, and introverted: what some people call "clustering".

More than ever before, the mobility enabled by affluence and the chance to work from home are allowing some people to put down roots alongside neighbours with similar – or, increasingly, identical – views and values, who live in much the same material circumstances. And after a year of lockdowns shutting us away in filter bubbles and tight social networks, what may be taking shape in parts of the shires and suburbs threatens something just as monocultural: a kind of economic and political uniformity that might be built on the politics of virtue, but can easily seem inward-looking and intolerant.

What is happening looks set to deepen the sense of England as a whole being an ever-more imbalanced country. If you want a possible vision of the future, picture a liberal, university-educated middle class concentrated – by choice – in the affluent south, while a reactionary conservatism speaks for more deprived parts of the country, and the tensions that surfaced around Brexit burst forth again and again.

In 2008, the American writer and journalist Bill Bishop published a very prescient book titled *The Big Sort,* sub-titled "why the clustering of like-minded America is tearing us apart". He painted a picture of people settling into "extremely homogenous communities – not just by region and state, but by city and town", and set out his anxieties about things that would later explode so spectacularly between 2016 and the beginning of this year. He wrote about "segregation by way of life: pockets of like-minded citizens that have become so ideologically inbred that we don't know, can't understand, and can barely conceive of 'those people' who live just a few miles away".

As they stoke the so-called culture wars, the Conservatives are deliberately exacerbating comparable tensions. Meanwhile, Labour is led by people who do not know what to do in response.

In parts of the country that are often sneered at, there is an England that feels more inclusive, egalitarian and increasingly diverse: the more successful parts of the new towns built between the 1950s and 1970s, and the starter-home developments that now ring towns and cities.

There is also, I think, a conversation to be had about the media. Certainly, if "public service broadcasting" is to mean anything, it should ditch the kind of output that plays up our divisions (the weekly uproar that was pre-pandemic Question Time, or the anger that pours forth from radio phone-ins), and rediscover the importance of a kind of social and political reporting that reminds people of how the other half – seen from both sides – actually lives.

In any functioning democracy, we all need to understand that there are lots of people who aren't just like you. They don't live like you, they don't have families like yours, and they don't think like you. They may not live in your neighbourhood, but this is their country too. Amid shifts and changes that are only just beginning, this is a truth we all need to swallow. If we do not, we risk a future that will be not just bleak, but politically impossible.

Break-up of UK is likely to be accelerated by Tory dominance

Peter Geoghegan

IRISH TIMES May 10, 2021

Boris Johnson likes to talk about his commitment to the United Kingdom's "precious union". But last Thursday's elections call into question the future of his increasingly divided country.

In England, Johnson is master of all he surveys. Indeed, a 30ft inflatable blimp of the Conservative prime minister looked down over Hartlepool as the Tories won a stunning byelection victory in Labour's once blood-red northern heartlands.

A few hours later, and less than a hundred miles up the road, Scottish National Party leader Nicola Sturgeon effectively declared victory, and an unprecedented fourth consecutive term in office for the SNP in Edinburgh.

Even in Wales, long the forgotten son of British politics, the stridently pro-devolution Labour party confounded polls to consolidate its power in Cardiff Bay.

Such political promiscuity might be held up as evidence that devolution works: different electorates in different parts of the country voting for different parties. But in reality, the results of Thursday's elections are likely to herald a crescendo in the UK's mounting constitutional crisis.

Unionist tactical voting helped ensure that the SNP fell just short of outright victory, but the pro-independence majority in the Scottish parliament has increased. Sturgeon hailed it as an "emphatic" mandate for a second referendum. This "battle of the mandates" between London and Edinburgh could end up in the courts.

None of this is likely to sway Boris Johnson. The prime minister said at the weekend that he would invite the devolved leaders to a "Team UK" summit – but only after confirming that he would not countenance another Scottish independence vote.

Johnson's "muscular unionism" is proving to be catnip for English voters, particularly in Leave constituencies. Many of Britain's right-of-centre newspaper columnists lap it up, too.

But the Tories' electoral success comes at a potentially great cost to the union itself. The post-war – and post-empire – United Kingdom was held together in large part by social democratic reforms. The welfare state, particularly the NHS, bound Britain's "nations and regions".

Now British unionism comes in a single shade of red, white and blue. A Union Unit has been set up in Downing Street, overseen by Michael Gove. When not beset by in-fighting, most of the unit's proposals for "strengthening" the union have revolved around "better branding" for projects financed by the British treasury. Last November the unit reportedly asked for vials of the AstraZeneca Covid vaccine to be labelled with the union flag. This is not how unionism has traditionally prospered. For centuries, unionism has taken on different forms in different places, from Orange walks in Ballymena to bake sales in Berwick. In Scotland the once dominant Tories, then Labour, were essentially nationalist unionists: each were pro-UK but won votes on promising to defend local interests. Such heterogeneity was key to the union's success.

In trying to force a unionism into a single form, Johnson and his colleagues are inadvertently flagging up its weaknesses. The union has always worked best when nobody talked about it. Johnson's muscular unionism increasingly serves to highlight – and accentuate – the union's underlying tensions.

The devolution settlement that saw the establishment of Scottish and Welsh parliaments at the end of the 20th century radically changed all British politics – except at the centre. While Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast became seats of new-found power, London remained the same.

Many voters came to see their devolved parliaments as the primary source of sovereignty – even if legislative power technically rests in Westminster. The UK's place in the EU papered over many of these tensions. Powers that might otherwise have been contested between different layers of government were often devolved to Brussels.

Brexit brought this constructive ambiguity to a shuddering halt. Since becoming prime minister in 2019, Johnson has sharply increased the power of the executive. In the name of parliamentary sovereignty – and better regulating the UK's "internal market" – power has been centralised in Westminster.

Far from strengthening the UK, the Conservatives' political dominance will likely hasten its break-up. The Tories have realised that there are votes to be won by being seen as standing up for English interests against the rest of the union.

Ever since David Cameron's election posters of then Labour leader Ed Miliband in Alex Salmond's pocket propelled Cameron to victory in 2015, successive Tory leaders have pushed this once-taboo message. It is no coincidence that the better the Conservatives do in England, the stronger the SNP performs.

Meanwhile, English views on the union are increasingly defined by ambivalence. Polls in 2019 suggested the vast majority of Conservative voters would happily see the UK break up if it meant delivering Brexit. […]

Telling Scots there is no democratic route out of the union is not a long-term solution, much less the basis for a thriving partnership. Yet, with no solid majority for Scottish independence – or Irish reunification – Johnson's "precious" union could yet limp on for years. History, however, suggests such a divided country is unlikely to stay united for ever.

Prince Harry Finally Takes On White Privilege: His Own. By Salamishah Tillet, *NYT* March 8, 2021

It was well worth the wait. The first joint interview with Prince Harry and Meghan Markle since they stepped down from royal life last year (a process that became officially permanent last month) did not disappoint.

I, for one, watched this tell-all with Oprah Winfrey while texting with many of the same Black women with whom I watched their wedding in 2018. Back then, we shared OMG emojis because we were pleasantly surprised by the way Black culture was so powerfully celebrated and Markle's African-American identity so thoughtfully integrated into their ceremony at St. George's Chapel.

Now, we were aghast at the couple's allegations that racism toward Markle and its various consequences were a primary reason they fled their home to find freedom in sunny California.

Based on Markle's deep commitment to women's rights and the interview's promo clip — Winfrey asks her, "Were you silent or were you silenced?" — I went into this assuming it would be a feminist revision of the couple's fairy-tale romance. "The latter," Markle responded in the interview. Later, she'd compare her life as a royal to Princess Ariel losing her voice after falling in love with a human in "The Little Mermaid." In that analogy, this interview is the final breaking of that spell, with Markle now fully in control of her voice. It reminded us that she never needed a Prince Charming to rescue her, while showing us that their very modern marriage is what saved and ultimately liberated them both from the trappings and the trap that is the Crown.

But therein lies the true catalyst for their radical reinvention: Harry's racial awakening. Here, I do not just mean the accusations from the couple about the deep anxiety some royals had about the potential skin color of their son, Archie — which resulted, they said, in his not being offered the traditional rituals of the royal hospital picture, the title "Prince" and the security that comes with that status. Rather, the second hour of the interview was a culmination of a process that Harry had been undergoing since their first date in 2016, when he was becoming more cleareyed, confrontational and emboldened to take on the British monarchy into which he was born, and the white privilege that holds it up and has benefited him his entire life. […]

Back in 2005, when Harry wore a Nazi uniform to a costume party, it would have been impossible to predict his trajectory. By last fall, however, his awakening was well underway, with him talking about how his marriage to Markle immediately changed his understanding of race. "I had no idea it existed," he said of unconscious bias in British GQ. "And then, sad as it is to say, it took me many, many years to realize it, especially then living a day or a week in my wife's shoes."

Last night, he took it a step further. First, he noted how "the race element" distinguished the tabloid frenzy surrounding Markle from others in the past. "It wasn't just about her, it was about what she represents," he said. Next, he indicted his family for not taking on the racist attacks hurled at their own, and then linked their institutionalized reticence or refusal to intervene in Britain's much longer history of imperialism.

"For us, for this union and the specifics around her race, there was an opportunity — many opportunities — for my family to show some public support," he told Winfrey. "And I guess one of the most telling parts and the saddest parts, I guess, was over 70 female members of Parliament, both Conservative and Labour, came out and called out the colonial undertones of articles and headlines written about Meghan. Yet no one from my family ever said anything. That hurts."

With this provocation, Harry suggests the Royals were not merely unwilling to accept his biracial Black wife and their multiracial child but also what Markle embodied: the millions of Black people throughout Britain and the Commonwealth who finally saw themselves in the monarchy through Markle's existence, finding optimism in this interracial union.

And with that confession, Harry declared his independence from British racism — whether he realizes it goes beyond his family's treatment of his son and is an essential ingredient to the monarchy itself, I don't know. But I turned off the interview wondering how American race relations will further change him.

That the couple landed in the United States during a pandemic that has disproportionately harmed African-American and Latino families, and in a period of racial protest and rising white nationalism, feels a bit like jumping out of the frying pan into the fire.

But, maybe that's the point.

Freed from the constraints of not being able to confront racism head-on might mean that he will dedicate his life to dismantling it, not just out of necessity, but also as a way of writing a new chapter in his family's history and bequeath his children a legacy of antiracism.

And if that is the case, it really will be better than any fairy tale ever imagined.

HOW THE DEBATE OVER HOLDING INTERNET PLATFORMS ACCOUNTABLE IS CHANGING UNDER BIDEN By BRIAN CONTRERAS *THE LOS ANGELES TIMES* MARCH 1, 2021

Two people were dead; one was injured; and Jason Flores-Williams wanted to hold Facebook responsible. But after filing a lawsuit in September alleging that the website's lax moderation standards led to 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse killing two protesters in Kenosha, Wis., over the summer, Flores-Williams withdrew the suit in January. His fight for accountability had collided with a law the activist attorney came to see as a "brick wall."

"You have no levers of control, no leverage," he told The Times. "You're up against Section 230."

A snippet of text buried in the 1996 Telecommunications Act, Section 230 is the regulation under which websites enjoy broad freedom to choose if and how they moderate user-generated content. Flores-Williams had alleged that a Facebook post by the Kenosha Guard militia summoning armed civilians to the city had laid the groundwork for Rittenhouse's violence there; but as Section 230 is written, Facebook and its peers are rarely liable for what their users post — even when it results in death.

Flores-Williams isn't alone in seeing the law as outdated. President Biden, former president Donald Trump and a long list of Democrats and Republicans have all pushed for the law to be restructured or scrapped entirely amid increasingly bipartisan criticism of Big Tech.

But if liberals and conservatives are united in their calls for reform, they're split on what that reform should look like — leaving internet companies stuck in a limbo where a massive forced change to their business model is constantly discussed yet never quite materializes.

Meanwhile, those who seek to hold the platforms accountable for the harms caused by content spread there are left searching for new approaches that might offer a greater chance of success — which is to say, any at all.

Section 230 takes a two-pronged approach to content moderation: not only does it absolve websites of liability for user content they don't moderate, but it also says they *can* moderate user content when they choose to. That lets social networks, chat forums and review websites host millions of users without having to go to court every time they leave up a post that's objectionable, or take one down that's not.

Online platforms usually, though not uniformly, support leaving Section 230 the way it is. In a congressional hearing last fall, Alphabet Chief Executive Sundar Pichai and Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey warned that the internet only works thanks to the protections afforded by the law; Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg broke ranks to say the law should be updated, citing a need to promote transparency around moderation practices.

Of the law's critics, conservatives typically lean toward unrestricted speech. A Trump executive order sought to modify the law so users could sue platforms if they restricted content that wasn't violent, obscene or harassing, although legal experts said the order was unlikely to hold up in court and it appears to have had little impact on how the platforms conduct themselves.

On the left, critics have called for a version of Section 230 that would encourage more rigorous moderation. Reforms targeting sex trafficking and child abuse have also garnered bipartisan support in the past.

Both sides have only gotten louder in recent weeks: the Jan. 6 siege of the U.S. Capitol prompted concern from the left about the role unregulated social media can play in organizing real-world violence, while the subsequent banning of Trump's Facebook and Twitter accounts gave the right a striking example of how easily tech platforms can silence their users.

With Democrats now controlling the presidency and both houses of Congress, the party has an opportunity to rewrite Section 230, but it has yet to achieve consensus, with members floating multiple differently calibrated proposals over the last year.

The latest of those is the SAFE TECH Act, proposed last month by Sens. Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii), Amy Klobuchar (D-Minn.) and Mark R. Warner (D-Va.). The bill would increase platforms' liability for paid content and in cases involving discrimination, cyberstalking, targeted harassment and wrongful death.

Flores-Williams said that last item in particular, which the sponsors say would allow "the family of a decedent to bring suit against platforms where they may have directly contributed to a loss of life," opens the door for future cases along the lines of his withdrawn suit.

It could also bolster suits over deaths such as that of Brian Sicknick, the Capitol police officer who died after defending the Capitol on Jan. 6. The official cause of Sicknick's death has yet to be determined, but the case is cited by the bill sponsors in their argument for the carve-out.

The implications could extend well beyond high-profile deaths, too.

"Talk about floodgates, right?," said Daniel Powell, an attorney at the internet-focused firm Minc Law. "Floodgates to millions in liability for lawsuits where people have died for any reason that has any tangential relationship to social media."

It's not clear how broadly lawmakers and prosecutors would try to interpret SAFE TECH's provisions, but if passed, the bill could force tech companies to rethink how they engage with user-generated content. […]

Cancelling exams in England will hit poorer children hardest
Lee Elliot Major, *The Guardian,* Wed 6 Jan 2021

If education is a race, those from poorer backgrounds start with huge handicaps. And at every hurdle, they face a bigger fall.

The closure of schools and cancellation of GCSEs and A-levels as a result of England's third national lockdown risks tilting this playing field even further towards advantaged students. Let's be clear: lockdown will deepen education inequalities. Research that I've been involved with has shown how poorer pupils have suffered the largest learning losses from school absences during the pandemic. Outside the school gates there lies a stark home-learning divide. Disadvantaged pupils are less likely to benefit from quiet study space, home computers and internet connectivity, let alone the luxury of extra teaching from private tutors.

Without exams going ahead this summer, we face a huge decision: how to create a fair system for awarding grades that will shape the life prospects of more than a million teenagers, many of whom will have missed out on large chunks of education this year. The exam regulator for England, Ofqual, has been tasked with coming up with "alternative arrangements". It seems likely that teacher-assessed grades will replace GCSE and A-level exams.

But the challenge with any assessment system will be catering for the larger learning loss suffered by some pupils. Doubtless teachers will do their best to ensure their assessments are fair. But the evidence suggests that teacher predictions and assessment can unwittingly penalise pupils from poorer backgrounds compared with their more privileged counterparts. At the very highest A-level grades, poorer students can suffer from being underpredicted in their results. This explains why the government is so keen not to rule out any final end-of-year examinations at this stage.

Many individual schools have been shocked to find that their attainment gaps widened in 2020, when teacher assessments were used for final grades. Grading students on the basis of the work they completed in school and their previous results doesn't cater for late surges in the exam hall. We know the group of pupils who pull up their grades through end-of-year exams – and defy their predictions – is often made up of boys, and those who come from disadvantaged families.

For some time, exam regulators at Ofqual have been aware of inconsistencies among external moderators, whose job is to equalise standards across schools. Many don't sufficiently challenge or change grades, even if they're wide of the mark. Research shows moderators have an "anchoring effect", where a first marker's grade acts as an "anchor" that moderators seldom deviate from.

I've previously argued for a one-off flagging system that could be used alongside exam grades in 2021 to identify those pupils who have been most seriously affected by Covid-19. Teachers could produce a contextualised system, flagging the results of students whose grades were judged lower than those they would have received had the pandemic not happened. At the very least, universities will need to consider how to lower the offer grades for disadvantaged applicants who have faced particularly difficult circumstances during the crisis.

But this may also be a good time to ask whether exams, as they currently exist, can ever really level the playing field. Over the last decade, as assessed coursework has largely disappeared from GCSEs and A-levels, England's system for evaluating pupils' progress has become overly focused on high-stakes testing. The flaws of this model become clearer with every passing school year. High-stakes testing distorts and narrows the school curriculum, with teachers teaching according to what will be tested. Most alarmingly, every year a "forgotten third" of pupils fail to get standard passes in English and maths GCSEs. A system that labels 30% of pupils as failures before they've even reached A-level hardly seems fair.

Whatever replaces exams in 2021, we'll need to ensure that children from poorer backgrounds aren't further disadvantaged. Giving evidence to the education select committee last summer, I urged MPs to closely monitor any use of predicted grades and teacher assessment to ensure they didn't unfairly penalise disadvantaged pupils. Ideally, we would have some consistency across the different assessment systems in Wales, Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. They should have similar grade distributions, in line with the more generous grading for pupils in 2020.

One Trial Can't Change American Policing. By NATHALIE BAPTISTE, *MOTHER JONES*, APRIL 14, 2021

Just 10 miles away from where the state of Minnesota is prosecuting former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd, officer Kim Potter, who is white and a 26-year veteran of the Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, force, killed a 20-year-old Black man. Last weekend, Daunte Wright was pulled over for driving with expired plates, when police found a warrant for unpaid fines. When Wright tried to get back in the car, Potter fired one shot, killing him. She claimed she was reaching for her Taser and pulled out her gun instead. The juxtaposition is jarring: While one police officer stood trial for the death of a Black man, another cop kills yet another Black man.

The Chauvin trial has been making extraordinary headlines, with law enforcement colleagues testifying that Chauvin's actions were not justified when he kneeled on Floyd's neck for approximately nine minutes until he died. A few headlines declared that these admittedly powerful testimonies represented a "crack in the blue wall," a euphemism for the culture of secrecy surrounding policing, especially when it comes to violence. But after Wright was killed nearby, the police department flew a Thin Blue Line flag at their station to demonstrate not their service to the public but their solidarity with each other. There are no cracks in that blue wall; it's firmly intact. Police officers rarely end up on trial for killing civilians. But if the jury finds Chauvin guilty and the judge doles out punishment, it won't be because society has reckoned with the problematic and pervasive realities of policing. It's time to stop framing the trial of Derek Chauvin as a precedent or a symbol of change; it's merely an aberration.

The fact is that for every Black person whose life is cut short and hashtagged, there are hundreds more, of every race, whose deaths go unnoticed by anyone other than their loved ones. According to the *Washington Post* database, police shot and killed 1,021 people last year. So far in 2021, 213 people were fatally shot by police. (Floyd—and who knows how many others—was not included in that database, because Chauvin's knee, and not a gun, was the weapon.)

The state of Minnesota has insisted in court that police officers and their methods are not on trial, just the actions of one. Technically, they're right—but their argument is missing the point. Police violence can't be treated as a problem involving various individual officers. The issue isn't *just* that Chauvin kneeled on Floyd's neck until he died, or that Potter shot Wright during a so-called routine traffic stop, but rather that since its inception, the system of policing in America was designed to enable this kind of violence.

A look back at the history of American policing shows how its purpose has always been to enforce the racial order. And that goes a long way to explaining why, even after every unfortunate video of police violence goes viral, police violence continues. The genesis of law enforcement as we know it today can be found in the system of slavery. In the 17th century, slave patrol units were created to police enslaved people, so if they were caught outside of their master's plantations without a "pass" or permission from their owners, they were subject to beatings and torture. After the Civil War and the end of the formal system of slavery, white vigilantes like the Ku Klux Klan continued this reign of terror on freedmen. The Jim Crow era brought about Black Codes, which were racist and discriminatory laws enforced by police officers. After the civil unrest during the summer of 1967, President Lyndon B. Johnson organized the Kerner Commission to study violence in Black neighborhoods. The 1968 report concluded that the problem was racial injustice, poverty, and police brutality. White America, however, was not sympathetic to the commission's findings, and a few months after its release, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, leading to more uprisings. The federal government responded by sending more heavily armed police into Black neighborhoods to crack down on the unrest. Today, police are in our neighborhoods and schools, and on our streets—with essentially the same purpose. [...]

A system such as this, that is so deeply embedded in society and extends back to one of its original sins, will not be undone by the trial of one violent man in uniform. This country has built an entire system dedicated to maintaining the racial hierarchy, often at the expense of marginalized people. Nor will this one trial be a referendum on policing. The parade of cops testifying that Chauvin was wrong in his actions is not a harbinger of a transformed approach to policing. It is merely law enforcement officials correctly wanting to distance themselves from the mockery Chauvin made of Floyd's rights. It allows police, and society as a whole, to make Chauvin the problem, instead of traditions and deeply embedded practices of American policing. For every cop who told the court that Floyd's death at the hands of police was unjust, many more will kill or inflict needless suffering on another Black man. And, as usual, there won't be a trial, much less a reckoning.

Cuts to UK foreign aid budget are shortsighted and could damage British interests
Victoria Honeyman, *The Conversation UK*, 25 November 2020

As part of his spending review, chancellor Rishi Sunak has announced a cut to the UK's foreign aid budget, which will be reduced from 2021 from 0.7% of gross national income to 0.5%.

The saving of approximately £4 billion will surely be welcome in some quarters. The impact of dealing with COVID-19 has caused the British economy to contract and Britain is facing an economic crisis which is likely to dwarf the impact of the 2008/9 banking crisis.

Despite the Conservative party manifesto promising to maintain aid spending at the 0.7% level, there has been huge pressure on the spending promise. It is not a popular policy, particular among Conservative voters, and the merging of the Department for International Development (DfID) with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) had made a reduction likely even before the impact of COVID was entirely apparent.

However, critics of the cut argue that it is shortsighted and that the UK's overseas development aid (ODA) budget is money which is very well spent. In fact, foreign office minister Baroness Sugg has announced she intends to resign in protest at the move. So what benefits does Britain's ODA budget provide – not simply for developing nations, but for Britain as the donor nation, and how might this cut impact on those?

The 0.7% spending target for overseas development aid was established by the United Nations in the Pearson Commission report, published in 1969. For critics of that spending target, the 0.7% figure is outdated and arbitrary and only a very small number of nations actually achieve it year on year. The largest aid donor in the world, the United States, donates approximately 0.2%-0.3% of its gross national income each year, but the size of its economy dwarfs all other donors.

For the UK, this commitment was made by Tony Blair's government and was then enshrined in law in 2015. The foreign aid budget was a way of buying influence and friends.

By investing in developing nations, the UK could help to develop emerging markets, and that investment allowed them to reap the financial rewards of close trading links with developing nations. In addition to developing and accessing new markets, the ODA spend allowed Britain to encourage developing nations to engage with the international community in ways the UK thought was beneficial, whether that was encouraging free trade or democratic practices.

Money talks a language universally understood. Supporters of Britain's ODA budget have suggested that it has been a wise investment by UK PLC. They point to the fact that the majority of the money "invested" in developing nations has led to subsequent gains for the UK treasury although the diffuse nature of that relationship makes empirical evidence difficult to come by.

For their part, many of those developing nations were former British colonies – much of the UK ODA budget is spent in former British colonies and Commonwealth member states – and the aid budget allowed the British to create new, friendly relationships with nations which didn't have the most positive view of dealings with the UK.

Additionally, as Britain struggles to maintain a position of international power (particularly post-Brexit when it is no longer part of the EU), a leading role as defender of the developing world gives the UK an influential role and a voice once again in global governance. If you wish to punch above your weight you need to have something to help you land the punch – and in the 21st century, Britain's role as a leading foreign aid donor has been a key factor.

The savings that Sunak is expected to make from this cut are approx £4 billion, but the impact could be immense. As many charities will tell you, the key to donation is sustainability. A one-off donation can only do so much, but repeated donations can achieve so much more.

The reduction of Britain's gross national income because of the impact of the pandemic meant that aid spending was already expected to fall sharply in the next financial year. By cutting the ODA budget further, the government will cut off important development projects. Fewer children in developing countries will go to school, more women will die in childbirth, more people will go hungry.

If Rishi Sunak needs to cut spending – and everyone agrees that money needs to be saved – there are many other places he could sensibly begin. Cutting the ODA budget is shortsighted and potentially damaging – not just to the UK's collective conscience but our bank balance.

As Biden Confronts Vaccine Hesitancy, Republicans Are a Particular Challenge By Annie Karni and Zolan Kanno-Youngs *THE NEW YORK TIMES* March 15, 2021

As President Biden pushes to vaccinate as many Americans as possible, he faces deep skepticism among many Republicans, a group especially challenging for him to persuade.

While there are degrees of opposition to vaccination for the coronavirus among a number of groups, including African-Americans and antivaccine activists, polling suggests that opinions in this case are breaking substantially along partisan lines. A third of Republicans said in a CBS News poll that they would not be vaccinated — compared with 10 percent of Democrats — and another 20 percent of Republicans said they were unsure. Other polls have found similar trends.

With the Biden administration readying television and internet advertising and other efforts to promote vaccination, the challenge for the White House is complicated by perceptions of former President Donald J. Trump's stance on the issue. Although Mr. Trump was vaccinated before he left office and urged conservatives last month to get inoculated, many of his supporters appear reluctant to do so, and he has not played any prominent role in promoting vaccination.

Asked about the issue on Monday at the White House, Mr. Biden said Mr. Trump's help promoting vaccination was less important than getting trusted community figures on board.

"I discussed it with my team, and they say the thing that has more impact than anything Trump would say to the MAGA folks is what the local doctor, what the local preachers, what the local people in the community say," Mr. Biden said, referring to Mr. Trump's supporters and campaign slogan "Make America Great Again." Until everyone is vaccinated, Mr. Biden added, Americans should continue to wear masks.

Widespread opposition to vaccination, if not overcome, could slow the United States from reaching the point where the virus can no longer spread easily, setting back efforts to get the economy humming again and people back to a more normal life. While the problem until now has been access to relatively tight supplies of the vaccine, administration officials expect to soon face the possibility of supply exceeding demand if many Americans remain reluctant.

But many conservative and rural voters continue to point to a variety of worries. Some conservatives harbor religious concerns about the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which uses abortion-derived fetal cell lines.

Republicans often cite distrust of government as a reason to not be vaccinated, the CBS poll found. They worry the vaccines were produced too quickly. And in some communities, so many people have already had the coronavirus that they think they have developed herd immunity and do not need the shots.

Other supporters of Mr. Trump believe Democrats exaggerated the toll of the pandemic to hurt the former president. That presents a major challenge to a Democratic administration whose success depends on persuading Americans who did not vote for Mr. Biden to trust that the vaccines are safe, effective and necessary.

"We are not always the best messengers," Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary, said last week.

That has meant outsourcing a crucial piece of the administration's coronavirus response.

"It's not an easy undertaking," said John Bridgeland, a founder and the chief executive of the Covid Collaborative, a bipartisan group of political and scientific leaders working on vaccine education, who has regular meetings with the White House on the issue of vaccine hesitancy.

"The good news is the White House has been all over all these populations, including recognizing that they're not beautifully positioned to reach conservatives," he said. "That's why they're reaching out to us and others."

Governors have pressed the Biden administration on the need for clear communication about the vaccines.

White House officials said their research showed that making the vaccines more accessible and having local buy-in from doctors and pharmacists was the best way to sway skeptical conservatives to sign up for a shot. They are planning an advertising blitz on television, radio and the internet to target problem areas: young people, people of color and conservatives, an administration official said.

Even as they are working to ramp up vaccine availability across the country, administration officials are also working with groups like the N.T.C.A. — the Rural Broadband Association and the National Farmers Union to reach rural communities on their behalf. […]

Joshua DuBois, the former head of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, under Mr. Obama, said he had been impressed by the Biden administration's efforts to reduce vaccine hesitancy. He said top advisers for Mr. Biden, like Marcella Nunez-Smith and Cameron Webb, had led calls for the religious community to answer questions about the vaccines. The calls included Black and Hispanic organizations and white evangelicals.

Mr. DuBois acknowledged that the hesitancy in minority communities was rooted in history. When coronavirus vaccines were introduced in the past year, researchers tracked a rise in social media posts about the infamous Tuskegee study in which health officials followed African-American men infected with syphilis and did not treat them.

"There's a history of distrust, but a present devastation happening around us," Mr. DuBois said, "and in response to that devastation, people are choosing to be vaccinated."

Importance of being Eton. How just one school has ended up with such a grip on British politics

By Andrew Adonis, Prospect, May 26, 2021

George Eliot was right: "Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the most gratuitous." Proof positive are my political predictions, which often as not are wildly off beam. Among my worst, as a young politics lecturer at Oxford in the 1980s, was that there would never be another Etonian in No 10. Thatcher's Tories were too canny for that, since Lord Home, the third out-of-touch Etonian prime minister in a row after Eden and Macmillan, was defeated by meritocratic Harold Wilson in 1964. "Alec" Douglas-Home made a good joke in reply to Wilson's jibe about being a 14th earl—"I suppose when you think about it Mr Wilson is the 14th Mr Wilson"—but he was rapidly replaced by a grammar school boy, Ted Heath. Heath in turn was succeeded by the most famous grammar school girl in history and the coup de grace, so it seemed, was the Tory leadership election after Thatcher's defenestration in 1990. John Major, a Brixton grammar school boy who hadn't even gone to university, aced it over both Michael Heseltine (Shrewsbury and Oxford) and Douglas Hurd (Eton and Cambridge). William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Howard all attended state schools of different types.

Even when the Tories elected Cameron as leader in 2005, I thought Eton might be his undoing. He half suspected so too, hence the elaborate steps to buy the copyright of the famous Bullingdon Club photographs, and the announcement that the little Camerons were all being sent to state schools. Gordon Brown's government, two years later, is the only government in British history not to have contained a single Etonian. But then history slammed into reverse, as it is wont to do. In 2010 Cameron squeezed into No 10, courtesy of Nick Clegg (Westminster and Cambridge, famously portrayed in Brookes's cartoons as Cameron's Eton fag). Then Boris. Floreat Etona ("May Eton Flourish") turns out to have been more a command than a motto. And if there is a vacancy at No 10 any time soon, Rishi Sunak (Winchester and Oxford) only looks down-market to, well, an Etonian. So what happened?

Poring over the data, I now realise that even in the supposedly meritocratic 1980s, the Etonians never actually left the Tory high command. They were just tactically moved away from front of stage. Even as I was predicting their demise, an astonishing 61 Etonians served as ministers in the Thatcher/Major governments, about the same number as under all those Etonian prime ministers in the 1950s and 1960s. This included three of Thatcher's five foreign secretaries. "Thatcher didn't mind toffs as long as they did not attempt to patronise her," says William Waldegrave, Etonian younger son of the 12th Earl Waldegrave and a minister for almost the entirety of the Thatcher/Major era. Waldegrave is now provost of Eton—a post unique to Eton, a kind of full-time "chancellor" of the school with a palatial residence in its medieval quad, where he gives delightful dinners and receptions to the boys with political and distinguished guests. (A fellow guest when I was kindly invited was Lord Carrington, Thatcher's first foreign secretary, who fascinated me with stories of Eton in the 1930s). Waldegrave's own recently published memoir frankly parades that "ever since I could remember one consciously constructed goal [to become prime minister] had been the magnetic pole around which everything I did was centred." Eton's leadership in the 1960s and 1970s could see the meritocratic grammar school threat all too clearly. So having previously been essentially a comprehensive school for the aristocracy, they decided to turn Eton into an oligarchical grammar school instead. In practice this mostly meant recruiting the same sort of boys—no girls, even now—but they had to work harder and pass exams with top grades. Given the quality of the teaching at Eton and its feeder prep schools, this wasn't hard to pull off. About a third of Eton's staff now have PhDs, recruited directly from the cream of Russell group universities.

Just as Eton made this meritocratic transition, the state grammar schools were abolished, so its competition left the political field. It wasn't just the Tories who had no successor to the post-war grammar school generation. Nor did Labour – and since the Etonians remained overwhelmingly deep blue, they had to look elsewhere. Ironically, or maybe logically, Labour's only successful leader since Wilson went to Fettes, dubbed "Scotland's Eton," although far less elitist and Establishment. Tony Blair's headmaster there was Eric Anderson, who went on to become the modernising headmaster of... you guessed it.

Queen's consent is a constitutional outrage – parliament must abolish it

Norman Baker, *The Guardian,* Wed 10 Feb 2021

The practice of Queen's consent, on which the Guardian has shone a welcome light in recent days, is a constitutional outrage. It gives an unelected person the opportunity to require changes to draft legislation in order to benefit herself financially, or to exempt herself from laws she does not like, and to do so in secret without any public accountability. If an MP or peer sought to secretly influence a draft bill to advantage themselves in this way, it would be called corruption. It could lead to a criminal charge.

The palace likes to pretend that the practice of Queen's consent is all ceremonial, somehow rather quaint. "Any assertion that the sovereign has blocked legislation is simply incorrect," they say. This is both accurate and entirely misleading. The Queen does not block legislation because she does not need to. The draft bill is sent to the palace and to her legal advisers. If they have objections, they will ring the Cabinet Office and relay these. Nothing is normally put in writing these days, to avoid a written record. The bill is then altered to meet the Queen's wishes and the revised version is then sent back and gains her consent. You see? Nothing has been "blocked".

The palace also says the process is "purely formal". So why is the Queen given two weeks or more to comment? And why are her legal advisers involved? Royal assent, which is indeed purely formal and brings a bill passed by parliament into law, is given in less than five minutes.

The Guardian has identified more than 1,000 instances when the Queen has been given an opportunity to shape draft legislation to suit her private wishes – far more occasions than had been previously imagined.

We do not know for certain what changes have been asked for by the palace for recent legislation. The palace prefers to operate in darkness, away from the prying eyes of those who pay the royal bills. But I would bet good money that the impact of new agricultural legislation on the Queen's vast, private Sandringham estate will have been considered carefully.

You might think the Freedom of Information Act would help establish the facts. But, in a very British catch-22, that also required Queen's consent, and the upshot of that is that the ability to extract information about the royals is subject to exemptions and restrictions that apply to no other part of the public sector. And they are part of the public sector. They carry out public duties (well, some of them do) and are lavishly funded by the public purse.

The original terms of the Act as they applied to the royals were more than tight, but they were tightened further in response to pressure from the palace after the Guardian published details of Prince Charles's "spider letters", which demonstrated that the heir to the throne had been improperly applying pressure to ministers in political matters.

But then the response from the royal family to embarrassing facts is not to change behaviour to prevent a recurrence but always to paint over rotten wood. Nowhere is this truer than when it comes to money.

As I set out in my recent book, *And What Do You Do?,* the House of Windsor less than 20 years ago secured a court ruling in secret that all royal wills should henceforth be closed to the public. The reason is clear: it would be very embarrassing to have to reveal just how much money they have accumulated thanks to the largesse of the British public. And how much they are not paying in death duties, thanks to another unique tax exemption.

Back in the 1970s, Queen's consent was used to arm-twist the government into exempting the Queen from having to reveal the nature and extent of her investments. The convoluted creation of an artificial structure called the Bank Of England Nominees had as its sole raison d'etre a method to keep the truth from the public.

We got a glimpse into the nature of these investments from the emergence in 2017 of the Paradise Papers, which showed that a great deal had been invested in offshore tax havens, including the notorious Cayman Islands. One beneficiary was BrightHouse, a retailer accused of exploiting thousands of poor and vulnerable individuals.

But it is the fear that the Queen might have to reveal the enormous extent of her wealth that really worries the palace. I estimate that the Queen has a private wealth of well in excess of £1bn.

Yet Queen's consent is simply a convention. It is in fact simply a matter of parliamentary procedure and could very easily be abolished by an Address to the Crown and resolutions from the Commons and the Lords. It would not even require legislation. Parliament could end it in a day if it chose to do so. It must do.

Why can't Britain handle the truth about Winston Churchill?

Priyamvada Gopal, The Guardian, Wed 17 Mar 2021

A baleful silence attends one of the most talked-about figures in British history. You may enthuse endlessly about Winston Churchill "single-handedly" defeating Hitler. But mention his views on race or his colonial policies, and you'll be instantly drowned in ferocious and orchestrated vitriol.

In a sea of fawningly reverential Churchill biographies, hardly any books seriously examine his documented racism. Nothing, it seems, can be allowed to complicate, let alone tarnish, the national myth of a flawless hero: an idol who "saved our civilisation", as Boris Johnson claims, or "humanity as a whole", as David Cameron did. Make an uncomfortable observation about his views on white supremacy and the likes of Piers Morgan will ask: "Why do you live in this country?"

Not everyone is content to be told to be quiet because they would be "speaking German" if not for Churchill. Many people want to know more about the historical figures they are required to admire uncritically. The Black Lives Matter protests last June – during which the word "racist" was sprayed in red letters on Churchill's statue in Parliament Square, were accompanied by demands for more education on race, empire and the figures whose statues dot our landscapes.

Yet providing a fuller picture is made difficult. Scholars who explore less illustrious sides of Churchill are treated dismissively. Take the example of Churchill College, Cambridge, where I am a teaching fellow. In response to calls for fuller information about its founder, the college set up a series of events on Churchill, Empire and Race. I recently chaired the second of these, a panel discussion on "The Racial Consequences of Mr Churchill".

Even before it took place, the discussion was repeatedly denounced in the tabloids and on social media as "idiotic", a "character assassination" aimed at "trashing" the great man. Outraged letters to the college said this was academic freedom gone too far, and that the event should be cancelled. The speakers and I, all scholars and people of colour, were subjected to vicious hate mail, racist slurs and threats. We were accused of treason and slander. One correspondent warned that my name was being forwarded to the commanding officer of an RAF base near my home.

The college is now under heavy pressure to stop doing these events. After the recent panel, the rightwing thinktank Policy Exchange, which is influential in government circles – and claims to champion free speech and controversial views on campus – published a "review" of the event. The foreword, written by Churchill's grandson Nicholas Soames, stated that he hoped the review would "prevent such an intellectually dishonest event from being organised at Churchill College in the future – and, one might hope, elsewhere".

It's ironic. We're told by government and media that "cancel culture" is an imposition of the academic left. Yet here it is in reality, the actual "cancel culture" that prevents a truthful engagement with British history. Churchill was an admired wartime leader who recognised the threat of Hitler in time and played a pivotal role in the allied victory. It should be possible to recognise this without glossing over his less benign side. The scholars at the Cambridge event – Madhusree Mukerjee, Onyeka Nubia and Kehinde Andrews – drew attention to Churchill's dogged advocacy of British colonial rule; his contributing role in the disastrous 1943 Bengal famine, in which millions of people died unnecessarily; his interest in eugenics; and his views, deeply retrograde even for his time, on race.

Churchill is on record as praising "Aryan stock" and insisting it was right for "a stronger race, a higher-grade race" to take the place of indigenous peoples. He reportedly did not think "black people were as capable or as efficient as white people". In 1911, Churchill banned interracial boxing matches so white fighters would not be seen losing to black ones. He insisted that Britain and the US shared "Anglo-Saxon superiority". He described anticolonial campaigners as "savages armed with ideas".

Even his contemporaries found his views on race shocking. In the context of Churchill's hard line against providing famine relief to Bengal, the colonial secretary, Leo Amery, remarked: "On the subject of India, Winston is not quite sane ... I didn't see much difference between his outlook and Hitler's."

Just because Hitler was a racist does not mean Churchill could not have been one. Britain entered the war, after all, because it faced an existential threat – and not primarily because it disagreed with Nazi ideology.

It is worth recalling that the uncritical Churchill-worship that is so dominant today was not shared by many British people in 1945, when they voted him out of office before the war was even completely over. As recently as 2010, Llanmaes community council opposed the renaming of a military base to Churchill Lines. Critical assessment is not "character assassination". Thanks to the groupthink of "the cult of Churchill", the late prime minister has become a mythological figure rather than a historical one.

A necessary national conversation about Churchill and the empire he was so committed to is one necessary way to break this unacceptable silence.

Why Facebook's Decision On Trump Could Be 'Make Or Break' For His Political Future

DOMENICO MONTANARO *NPR* May 6, 2021

Facebook's Oversight Board on Wednesday essentially punted the decision back to the company on whether to eventually allow former President Donald Trump back on Facebook and Instagram. What the social media giant decides in the coming months will likely have major consequences for Trump's political power. "It could be a make-or-break moment for Trump's political future," said Eric Wilson, a Republican political technologist.

That's because being on Facebook is crucial for modern-day political campaigns, as a majority of Americans use the platform and those who do log into it multiple times daily. Facebook has become crucial for raising money and for targeting supporters and swing voters, something the Trump campaign did in unprecedented ways.

The majority of online ad dollars go to either Facebook or Google. "Even with all the resources Donald Trump has," Wilson said, "Facebook is so much bigger than that, that you can't get around it."

In a statement responding to the Oversight Board's non-decision decision, Trump, who remains banned on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, called the stances of the social media giants a "total disgrace and an embarrassment to our Country." He also promised a degree of retribution, threatening that they "must pay a political price."

Trump's frustration is with good reason. Since the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, his ability to communicate directly with the public has been limited. On Tuesday, Trump added a blog-like feature — with no comments section — to his post-presidency website. He is still promising to launch his own social media platform.

The board's decision also comes as Trump's popularity seems to have softened further since leaving office. An NBC News poll released last week found that just a third of Americans had a favorable opinion of him, which was down several points from January. The survey also showed, for the first time, 50% of Republicans said they considered themselves more supporters of the GOP than Trump.

Still, Trump's grip on the party is clear. Republicans on Capitol Hill appear ready to oust Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., from her House leadership post — and it's largely about Trump. Cheney voted for Trump's impeachment and continues to be critical of Trump for his role in the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Facebook has been particularly important for Trump. In the months after he was elected president in 2016, Brad Parscale, Trump's digital director for that winning campaign, called the platform "the highway in which his car drove on."

Trump's campaign used Facebook to fundraise and spread its message — at times with false and odious information — in extraordinary ways to help win in 2016 and come close in 2020. Trump has the strongest fundraising list of any Republican, operatives say, and so much of how Trump was able to raise small-dollar donations was through Facebook. And Facebook's tools for microtargeting are like no other platform.

Without Facebook, a significant revenue valve would be shut off for Trump, imperiling a 2024 presidential bid, if he decides to run again. While the Trump team spent more than $100 million combined on Facebook ads in his two campaigns, it generated hundreds of millions more in campaign contributions — and who knows how many votes.

"It's very important for Trump and his political future, and his allies' political futures, to get back on the platform," Wilson, the political technologist, said. He added that Facebook is the best resource for "identifying people who have expressed interest, are engaged in the content, who donate and volunteer on campaigns. It gives the ability to target them and in a specific way. It's so fine-tuned. ... It's a great asset for campaigns and political advertisers."

A permanent Trump ban from Facebook would almost certainly have ramifications for next year's midterm elections as well. It could mean that candidates he endorsed wouldn't be able to use videos and possibly statements from the former president. That could significantly hamper the strength of a Trump endorsement.

But, in another way, Republicans overall are likely to benefit from the extended decision period because they have been gaining attention and fundraising relentlessly off of "Big Tech" and what they see as social media bias. Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., has even written a book called *The Tyranny of Big Tech*.

There has also been a conservative backlash at the state level. Just last week, the GOP-controlled Florida Legislature passed a measure aimed at limiting social media companies' ability to censor candidates that stand for election in Florida and prevent them from deplatforming candidates.

Trump's YouTube channel is still down, and he is permanently banned from Twitter. Twitter has said it's not going back on its decision, and that's significant for Trump because that's how he was able to drive the news narrative. Trump has reportedly said he wouldn't go back on Twitter even if he were allowed back, but that may be a little like telling people you quit when you were fired.

And while Trump was able to get lots of attention for his tweets, Twitter can't compete with Facebook's reach, targeting and potential for raising money.

In response to Wednesday's ruling, Facebook said it would "determine an action that is clear and proportionate." In the meantime, a significant piece of Trump's political fortunes hangs in the balance.

The government is hell-bent on diluting the Human Rights Act. We must protect it
Kate Allen, director of Amnesty International UK, *The Guardian,* Wed 3 Mar 2021

The Human Rights Act is like serious injury insurance, or perhaps an action plan for a global pandemic: you hope you never need it.

The problem is that you might do, and it seems this horrific past year has reminded people in the UK that it's wise to foresee potential trouble ahead. In new polling we at Amnesty commissioned this week, more than two-thirds (68%) of people thought it was important to have a safety net to hold the government to account when things go wrong, while more than half (53%) believed the coronavirus pandemic had illustrated the importance of human rights protections. The government's appalling handling of Covid in care homes, including the horror of the blanket imposition of do-not-resuscitate orders without proper process, has really brought home to people that you never know when you might find yourself or your loved ones in an unexpected position of vulnerability. So much of the past year was seemingly unthinkable until it happened, and it has demonstrated the fragility of our way of life without guarantees and protections when we are failed.

That knowledge is significant, as today is the final day of submissions to the government-appointed panel conducting a controversial review of the Human Rights Act. With the events of the pandemic reinforcing the importance of basic human rights protections in people's minds, it's extremely worrying that the government is apparently still hell-bent on tinkering with or diluting this vital piece of legislation.

The Human Rights Act has been in the crosshairs of successive Conservative governments despite the fact that public polling has routinely shown such a move to be of little interest to voters. Indeed, our polling unsurprisingly saw issues such as proper funding for the NHS (67%), guaranteeing post-lockdown economic recovery (54%), and getting children's education back on track (53%) to be the most pressing issues for the public. Reviewing human rights legislation was right at the bottom of the list, with just 18% of people thinking it should be a priority over coming years.

So why is this government so fixated on the Human Rights Act? Well, it has shown it is no fan of scrutiny across the board, and has set about dismantling checks on its power – from launching a "review of judicial review" to granting itself unfettered powers in the 'spy cops' bill. And now comes this attempt to water down the Human Rights Act. It seems this administration would rather mark its own homework. The problem is the public may not agree. More than half of people we polled (59%) said they thought human rights protections should be considered permanent and not subject to change by politicians. It took ordinary people a long time to win these rights and we cannot allow politicians to take them away with the stroke of a pen. The Human Rights Act has been central to many key justice fights since it came into force 20 years ago, from Hillsborough to equal rights for gay couples or cases involving modern day slavery. And there's every reason to suspect we're going to need it even more over the years ahead.

We should all be wary of the very people the Human Rights Act holds to account seeking to strip it back. In addition, it's clear that many people think tampering with the act presents a real threat to the union of the UK, as well as the fragile peace in Northern Ireland. This, in the end, was what a review of human rights legislation in the UK back in David Cameron's tenure warned of. It ultimately concluded that the threat was too great. The government of today must decide if it is happy to take those risks now.

We are determined to oppose such a move, and as our poll findings show, it seems that most people in the UK will be standing with us. It should not be up to the government of the day to redraft, recast or remove human rights protections. They are not in the gift of politicians to bestow.

Not on Facebook? You're Still Likely Being Fed Misinformation.

By Nicholas A. Ashford// THE NEW YORK TIMES March 29, 2021

The plague of misinformation — false rumors about the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election, the ineffectiveness of face masks and the safety of 5G, to name a few examples — is usually blamed on social media. But false and damaging information isn't just available online. It's also abundant in broadcast media, and as politicians debate whether or how to regulate technology companies, they should also consider creating systems to address the dangers implicit in allowing and enabling the spread of misinformation, wherever it's published.

The Constitution safeguards the freedom of speech from direct government interference, but lawmakers also recognize the need for thoughtful intervention. Politicians have been concerned about the power of online platforms for years. Last week, leaders of Google, Facebook and Twitter were again asked to answer questions from members of Congress about how their platforms handle false or harmful material. Both the House and the Senate are considering legislation that would revise Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which currently exempts technology companies from being held responsible for the material they publish. Facebook has been advocating the law's reform. Technology companies are also facing congressional scrutiny for potential antitrust violations.

But it is not at all clear that reducing the dominance of technology companies will go far enough. And oversight boards run by tech companies themselves, such as the one that Facebook created to hear issues of online safety and free speech, are not sufficient, as those efforts can never be truly independent if they are assembled by, and are financially tied to, the very companies they are tasked with overseeing. Furthermore, addressing only the technology industry won't cure the problem, because misinformation that is spread in one medium is reinforced and amplified by falsehoods spread on another. A phrase that's based on a lie and trends on Facebook and Twitter — "Stop the Steal," for example — becomes fortified and legitimized when it's picked up by television and radio reporters or commentators, whose words then reappear on social media, fueling a tornado of misinformation.

Television and radio are often full of misleading information, both on news programs and in advertisements, and the broadcast gives the information a whiff of legitimacy. Underfunded governmental agencies have failed to do their jobs monitoring activities of the private sector. While in some cases increased funding for government enforcement would help, regulatory efforts might be appropriate in others. But there is another way government can reduce the spread of inaccurate information.

Decades ago, long before there was a technology industry to regulate, the Federal Communications Commission instituted the Fairness Doctrine, a policy that required broadcasters to present diverse points of view on controversial topics. The law, which was designed to ensure that all sides of an issue were presented, was dismantled in 1987 under President Ronald Reagan.

Congress should seriously consider revitalizing the Fairness Doctrine. This effort would be premised on the public's right to be informed, rather than on the government controlling free speech. And it should be coupled with the appointment of public commissions or citizen juries that would provide independent oversight to confront misinformation in both online and broadcast media. These independent bodies would include respected experts, could be appointed by the government and would be funded by industry.

Public trust in the media industry has been declining for years. It can be restored by securing media companies' commitment to practicing fact-checking and presenting contrasting perspectives on issues important to news consumers.

Psychology, behavioral science and neuroscience have helped teach us why people are susceptible to misinformation and what influences how they view facts. Individuals gravitate toward news sources that reinforce their prior impressions, values and opinions. Exposing people to more balanced sources might help expand their perspectives, but science tells us that this can also serve to strengthen current beliefs. The purveyors of misinformation need to be confronted with — and must not able to escape responding to — opposing views and facts, in the manner common to some media interviews and the cross-examinations in legal proceedings.

The Fairness Doctrine required media companies to present alternative points of view on sensitive issues. A reimagined and expanded version of this policy could enable independent bodies to review inaccurate material and require that technology platforms and broadcast media publish and respond to criticism.

Government proposals to reform Section 230 or break technology companies into several smaller companies will not solve the misinformation problem. But increased fact-checking by independent bodies and mandates to present more reliable perspectives will help. Because of the reinforcing influence one medium has on another, reforms must include both the platform and broadcast industries.

There is clearly a need for more accountability of both the private sector and the government in matters of abuse and the proliferation of misinformation. A new Fairness Doctrine, coupled with independent oversight of broadcast and technology platforms, would help.

Can You Believe This Is Happening in America? By Thomas L. Friedman

THE NEW YORK TIMES Feb. 23, 2021

In the last six months I've heard one phrase more often than I had in my previous 66 years: "Can you believe this is happening in America?"

As in: "I spent the whole day hunting online for a drugstore to get a Covid vaccination. Can you believe this is happening in America?"

"Fellow Americans ransacked our Capitol and tried to overturn an election. Can you believe this is happening in America?"

"People in Texas are burning their furniture for heat, boiling water to drink and melting snow to flush their toilets. Can you believe this is happening in America?"

But, hey, all the news is not bad. We just sent a high-tech buggy named Perseverance loaded with cameras and scientific gear 292 million miles into space and landed it on the exact dot we were aiming for on Mars! *Only in America!*

What's going on? Well, in the case of Texas and Mars, the basic answers are simple. Texas is the poster child for what happens when you turn everything into politics — including science, Mother Nature and energy — and try to maximize short-term profits over long-term resilience in an era of extreme weather. The Mars landing is the poster child for letting science guide us and inspire audacious goals and the long-term investments to achieve them.

The Mars mind-set used to be more our norm. The Texas mind-set has replaced it in way too many cases. Going forward, if we want more Mars landings and fewer Texas collapses — what's happening to people there is truly heartbreaking — we need to take a cold, hard look at what produced each.

The essence of Texas thinking was expressed by Gov. Greg Abbott in the first big interview he gave to explain why the state's electricity grid failed during a record freeze. He told Fox News's Sean Hannity: "This shows how the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of America. … Our wind and our solar got shut down, and they were collectively more than 10 percent of our power grid, and that thrust Texas into a situation where it was lacking power on a statewide basis. … It just shows that fossil fuel is necessary."

The combined dishonesty and boneheadedness of those few sentences was breathtaking. The truth? Texas radically deregulated its energy market in ways that encouraged every producer to generate the most energy at the least cost with the least resilience — and to ignore the long-term trend toward more extreme weather.

"After a heavy snowstorm in February 2011 caused statewide rolling blackouts and left millions of Texans in the dark," The Times reported Sunday, "federal authorities warned the state that its power infrastructure had inadequate 'winterization' protection. But 10 years later, pipelines remained inadequately insulated" and the heaters and de-icing equipment "that might have kept instruments from freezing were never installed" — because they would have added costs.

As a result, it wasn't just Texas wind turbines that froze — but also gas plants, oil rigs and coal piles, and *even one of Texas' nuclear reactors had to shut down* because the frigid temperatures caused a disruption in a water pump to the reactor.

That was a result of Abbott's Green Old Deal — prioritize the short-term profits of the oil, gas and coal industries, which provide him political campaign contributions; deny climate change; and dare Mother Nature to prove you wrong, which she did. And now Texas needs federal emergency funds. That is what we capitalists call "privatizing the gains and socializing the losses." I don't know what they call it in Texas.

But to disguise all that, Abbott trashed his state's trendsetting wind and solar power — power it pulls from the sky free, with zero emissions, making rural Texans prosperous — in order to protect the burning of fossil fuels that enrich his donor base.

Abbott's move was the latest iteration of a really unhealthy trend in America: We turn everything into politics — masks, vaccines, the weather, your racial identity and even energy electrons. Donald Trump last year referred to oil, gas and coal as "our kind of energy." When energy electrons become politics, the end is near. You can't think straight about anything.

"For a healthy politics to flourish it needs reference points outside itself — reference points of truth and a conception of the common good," explained the Hebrew University religious philosopher Moshe Halbertal. "When everything becomes political, that is the end of politics."

Just look at Texas and you'll know what I mean. And just look up at Mars, and think of the mind-set that got us there, and you'll know what needs to change.

It's not 'censorship' to question the statues in our public spaces

Charlotte Higgins, The editorial board, *The Guardian*, Wed 20 Jan 2021

According to Robert Jenrick, communities secretary, "baying mobs" have been seeking to erase British history by pulling down monuments and statues. A "revisionist purge" even has Nelson's column in its sights, he claims. The angry throng of "mindless" destroyers includes Labour councillors, who love nothing better, in the communities secretary's fantasy, than "ripping down heritage".

Have you seen any mobs ripping down British monuments or statues lately? Nor I. The only heritage- and democracy-disrespecting mobs I've heard tell of recently are those in the US who attacked the Capitol, vandalising its artworks – and they are not really the kind of crowds I believe the Tories have in mind. In the UK, precisely one prominent public sculpture was toppled by a crowd of protestors during last summer's Black Lives Matter protests. This statue – Bristol's monument to the slave trader Edward Colston – was always an outlier. It had been the subject of unsatisfactory, unresolved community debate for decades.

The toppling of the statue was, of course, illegal: four people will appear at Bristol magistrates' court this month on charges of criminal damage. Jenrick, though, writes as if bands of statue-topplers were roaming the lands untouched by the law. "It is absurd and shameful that the statue of Winston Churchill should be questioned," he writes, too, referring to the sculpture in Parliament Square.

Really? I thought we did questioning, in a democracy. Of course, the statue still stands, determinedly untoppled. The most distressing desecration of a monument last summer came not from BLM activists, but from far-right protesters who, while claiming to protect the Cenotaph from supposed (but actually nonexistent) "woke" attackers, chillingly performed Nazi salutes. Still, it is to protect monuments against leftwing mobs and radical Labour councillors that the communities secretary is bringing forward new regulations that will oblige anyone seeking to remove or alter a historic plaque or monument to seek planning permission – which is already required, of course, if the monument is listed. The only real effect of this, I suspect, will be to create in planning departments an enormous tangle of red tape of the kind that Tories supposedly dislike so heartily. What is happening in reality – and to a greater or lesser extent has been happening for years – is a reappraisal of what and who is celebrated in Britain's public realm, as Britain gradually, painfully, and often inadequately, examines its colonial and imperial past. This is mostly being undertaken by the opposite of angry mobs – by incredibly worthy, rather dull committees set up by mayors and local authorities.

Doubtless it is annoying to some on the right that London's Labour mayor, Sadiq Khan, has had the temerity to set up a Commission for Diversity in the Public Realm. One of its jobs will indeed be to look at contested heritage. But there is absolutely no suggestion that this will involve ripping down a whole lot of monuments; in fact, the body will be more focused on commissioning new works. Indeed, the creation of "counter-memorials" is precisely what Historic England, the public body that protects England's heritage, suggests as a possible strategy in the case of contested monuments.

What the Conservatives doggedly refuse to acknowledge is that a community deciding – or even a pressure group demanding – that a figure should no longer be revered on a plinth in the public realm has nothing to do with "censoring" history or pretending the events of the past did not happen. They also fail to grasp that the past exists in dialogue with the present, and that our relationship with it is not static, but dynamic and contextual.

The Tories claim to love history and to embrace complexity, but they seem attached to a peculiarly simplistic and moralistic vision of it. History isn't something that you are either (or only) "proud of" or "ashamed of". Nor is it some dead, unchanging object. It is rich, deep, contradictory, and contains multitudes. To do history is to contest history. History is inquiry. That's what the word means, from the ancient Greek verb historeo, to learn by inquiry. Anything else is myth.

Stop it With 'Gun Control.' Enough Already, By Frank Bruni *NEW YORK TIMES* March 27, 2021.

The words tumbled readily from Josh Hawley's lips as he argued for doing little in the wake of the Atlanta and Boulder, Colo., massacres.

That's reason enough not to let them tumble from the rest of ours.

They were Tom Cotton's chosen term for the laws that reasonable Americans are calling for and that he, in all his trademark compassion, opposes. That makes me triply determined to latch on to different language — and to urge other journalists to do the same.

I'm talking about "gun control," a phrase whose day should be done. Its day *is* done, to judge by many prominent Democratic politicians, who have rightly recognized the prejudicial aspect of "control," with its ring of repression, and moved away from it. You don't hear Joe Biden talking about "gun control," not anymore. The same holds true for other Democrats urging "gun safety," a preferable coinage, if not a perfect one.

But "gun control" still appears frequently in this newspaper, in The Washington Post, on the CNN website and throughout the news media. It remains as pervasive as guns themselves. It was there — "gun control," just like that — in the first question put to Biden on Thursday during his first full-fledged news conference as president. And in the second question. And in yet another question later on. It's like some reflex we can't shake, a tic we can't trick.

Or maybe we just don't care to. There's an argument for "gun control," absolutely. It's accurate: The legislation in question entails more government control over who can purchase guns and when and how. "Gun control" is probably the most instantly and widely recognized shorthand for the debate over such laws, and journalism depends on verbal economy, my own columns notwithstanding.

But it's off key. It's unhelpful. And it's an example of the loaded language that often shapes our discourse on important matters.

Is vocabulary destiny? It certainly plays its part. I don't think "gun control" is the main thing standing in the way of additional measures to protect Americans from gun violence and to diminish the number and near-instant availability of guns in a country crazily saturated with them. But how we write and talk about this issue is inevitably consequential.

How we write and talk about any issue that engenders passionate disagreement is.

Remember "death panels"? That was the chillingly worded — and wildly inaccurate — specter with which Sarah Palin and many other Republicans whipped up alarm over the Affordable Care Act. The mainstream media avoided the expression, except to note its audacity and challenge it, but it circulated widely and with blunt effect.

Talking about some immigrants as "illegal aliens" or "illegals" casts them in a dehumanizing, sinister light. Calling them "undocumented" doesn't. That's why Americans of divergent bents diverge in their language.

"Pro-life" and "pro-choice" are ideologically stacked labels, with currency for that reason. "Gay marriage" and "same-sex marriage" morphed into "marriage equality" among many of its supporters, who wanted to make clear that they weren't proposing some special or separate right but addressing an injustice. At various points along the way, their opponents waved the banner of "family values," with its ludicrous assertion that one group of committed relationships was somehow anti-family.

The verbiage attending the battle over gun laws has a similarly fraught history. Robert Spitzer, a professor at SUNY Cortland who has written five books on gun policy, told me that the phrase "gun control" goes back more than a half-century. It's present, he pointed out, in the very name of a law passed after the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Gun Control Act of 1968.

And it seemed relatively anodyne in the absence of a lobby against gun regulations as well organized and funded as the one that exists today. "There were thousands of gun laws of every imaginable variety" for hundreds of years, Spitzer said. "Only recently has it been thrown into reverse."

In the 1970s, he said, people opposed to new and even existing restrictions on firearms began to talk about them "in apocalyptic terms," with "the imagery of jackbooted thugs coming to your door." They cast their fight against that in terms of liberty. "It was freedom-loving Americans versus the gun grabbers," he said.

The war of words went both ways. Spitzer noted that in the 1990s, when the Clinton administration was promoting legislation to prevent gun violence, Clinton spoke of "child-safety locks" on guns, though those locks weren't exclusively for the protection of kids. Subsequently, more and more proponents of better gun laws came to the conclusion that "gun control" might be hurting their cause. […]

I've inadvertently used "gun control" in several columns over the past two years. In my weekly newsletter several days ago, I wrote "more stringent firearm restrictions" in its stead. I was steering clear of "gun control" only to land in another ditch by the side of the road.

Stringent? *Restrictions*? Unduly negative, especially for an opinion columnist with more license to use the language of his choice.

"Safety" is accurate but bland, so I'm in the market for a snazzier vocabulary. All suggestions welcome.

Eastern European migrants stop coming to Britain
The Economist, Dec 3rd 2020

Olena Hrabovenska who owns several Polish food shops in Huntingdon and Peterborough, shudders to remember the Brexit referendum in 2016. The campaign to leave the EU had unleashed ugly prejudices. Cards about "Polish vermin" were posted through letterboxes. Her customers seemed despondent, asking: "what's the point of being here if we're not appreciated?" Soon afterwards, eastern Europeans' numbers started to decline, but not because they rushed for the exit.

Eight Baltic and eastern European countries joined the EU in 2004: the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Many of their citizens moved to Britain, which, unlike most European countries, imposed no transitional controls. But according to the Labour Force Survey, the number of adults in England and Wales born in those countries has fallen from 1,139,000 in 2016-17 to 926,000. Other data tell a similar story. Last year fewer than 17,000 babies were born to Polish women—down from almost 23,000 in 2015.

The Brexit vote caused sterling to fall, reducing the purchasing power of remittances sent from Britain. Two years later the government told people who wanted to settle to prove they had been mostly resident for five years in a row—a test that some found offputting. "You are treated as a number," says Aga Dychton, a Polish immigrant who is now chairman of Watford borough council. Yet all Europeans face these problems. The number of French, German and Italian immigrants has not fallen much; nor has the number of Bulgarians and Romanians, who have been able to work in Britain since 2014.

The countries that joined the EU 16 years ago have changed in a way that makes Britain seem less attractive. Marius Vainauskar, who moved to Britain in 2005 to take a job sticking labels on vegetables, remembers that he used to feel rich when he went back to Lithuania. Today he has a better job, as a driving instructor, but no longer feels so flush. Over the past 16 years the average wage in Lithuania has risen from 41% of the British level to 61%, at purchasing-power parity. And many eastern Europeans are underemployed in Britain. The Oxford Migration Observatory, a think-tank, finds they have the lowest pay of any migrant group and are the most likely to be overqualified for the jobs they do.

Ruta Dalton, an accountant originally from Lithuania, suspects that Brexit itself persuaded few eastern Europeans to depart. Some have left—but most of them would have gone anyway, pulled back by family obligations or simply because they had saved as much money as they wanted to. The big change is that many fewer eastern Europeans are coming. Last year only 77,000 people from the 2004 accession countries received a British National Insurance number. In 2015, the year before the Brexit vote, 185,000 did so.

This is not exactly a ringing endorsement of the "global Britain" that Boris Johnson boasts about. But attracting eastern Europeans would be getting harder even if sterling and the economy were strong and Britain went easy on the immigration paperwork. A baby bust after the fall of the Iron Curtain and years of emigration means there are fewer potential migrants left in eastern Europe. The United Nations estimates that the number of 18-year-olds in Poland has fallen from 598,000 to 340,000 since 2005.

Some immigrants are still arriving in Lincoln Road, the traditional starting-off point for newcomers in Peterborough. Shops that once specialised in Polish food now sell Romanian products. And Petr Torak, a former police officer who now runs a community centre, says that Roma from the Czech Republic and Slovakia are settling in the area. Unlike the Poles and Lithuanians who came before, they are fleeing persecution as well as looking for jobs. He struggles to imagine them returning to their homelands.

Ms Hrabovenska's shops are doing fine for now. But, like a good businesswoman, she worries about the future. What will happen if Britain enters a prolonged economic slump and unemployment soars? If everyone ends up counting their pennies, she thinks, the eastern Europeans really will leave in a hurry. "They can count pennies in their own country," she says.

'Bipartisanship' Is Dead in Washington. That's Fine. By JACK SHAFER *POLITICO*
05/28/2021

Washington this week has been obsessed with the hunt for the elusive thing known as "bipartisanship." Is there a bipartisan deal to be had on China? On Infrastructure? When Senate Republicans filibustered the investigation into the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol—physical security surely being a bipartisan concern if there ever was one—our own Playbook moaned that "Dreams of a bipartisan, independent investigation into the Capitol insurrection are probably dashed for good."

What dreams were those? Joe Biden ran for president as the "apostle of bipartisanship," as the *New York Times* put it, and ever since has been romancing Republicans at the White House hoping to convert them. But the two parties seem unable or unwilling to agree on anything substantive. The $1.9 trillion pandemic measure that Congress passed, and Biden signed, collected not a single Republican vote in either chamber. Today, Republicans and Democrats remain at partisan loggerheads over the "infrastructure" bill. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell has stretched his 5-foot, 9-inch frame as far as it can extend to block H.R. 1, the bill that would expand voting rights.

Speaking for the bipartisans who don't seem to exist, Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) lamented the current lack of congressional bipartisanship in a December farewell speech to the Senate and gloried in the times he had crossed the aisle to help Democrats rescue a bill. "I think the people elected me to go to work with the president who was elected at the time," Alexander said.

Why all the anguish over a lost ideal of cooperation? While it's not necessarily a bad thing when the two parties harmonize, it's not automatically a good thing, either. Often, terrible, awful things can also happen when Republicans and Democrats agree to agree. Other times, virulently partisan legislative solutions are the best policy. And if you look closely enough at the rosy, hazy past, you'll find plenty of times when what looks like the pure ideal of bipartisanship turns out to be pure political horse-trading, as one party concedes a vote that's not important to them to persuade the opposing party to forfeit a position they don't particularly care about. […]

You should reach for your wallet every time a politician makes a plea for bipartisanism in the name of seeking "common ground" or "rising above politics" or to "reject cynicism." There's nothing more political than asserting that your position is above politics and that your foes' positions are drenched in it. As you do, keep a watch on self-proclaimed "centrists" who claim, as keepers of compromise, to be the guiding spirit of bipartisanship. Centrism is a position no less distinct than liberalism or conservatism. Also beware of the so-called bipartisan presidential commissions that various White Houses have convened. As the *Chicago Tribune*'s Steve Chapman observed in 2014, they're usually a strategy designed not to bring the warring sides together, but to give a shroud of credibility to kicking the can down the road a little further. "The documents are a glorious feast for editorial writers but a bowl of day-old dog food to the people who make policy," Chapman concluded.

To anyone who has watched Washington change over the years, it's clear the bipartisan credo represents a nostalgia for a time—which started fading in the late 1960s—when what passed for bipartisanship was extreme partisanship by another name. Back then, the two parties still embraced more ideological diversity within their ranks: There were liberal Republicans like John Lindsay, whom political taxonomists would now peg for a Democrat (he eventually became one) and conservative Democrats like Strom Thurmond, who acted like a Republican (he eventually became one, too). The jockeying for votes in those days created an illusion of Republicans and Democrats working together, when what was often happening was the natural liberals from both parties ganging up on the natural conservatives on the Hill.

But by the 1970s, politicians were aggressively sorting themselves into the party closest to their position, ending easy accommodation with the "other side." It's not just from a failure of character that 1960s-style bipartisanship doesn't exist today: It can't exist. All the liberals have deposited themselves into the Democratic Party, and all conservatives are Republicans. The species that made those "bipartisan" deals is as extinct as the ivory-billed woodpecker. Call it a cryptozoological search.

None of this analysis is to suggest that the two parties should never work with one another to pass laws. But as news consumers and voters, we need to remember that the halo that reporters and pundits, and politicians themselves, hoist over "bipartisanship" is a shuck. And when it isn't a shuck, it's a rhetorical cudgel that politicians use to brand themselves as noble and reasonable while slamming their opponents as petty and vindictive.

Despite their moans of protests about the end of bipartisanship, members of Congress understand what's going on: Old-school accommodation is mostly dead, and Congress has evolved into a defacto parliamentary system in which the majority takes all. The best way to pass legislation is to win more seats. If you believe in majority rule, forget about making converts: Assemble a majority and start ruling with it.

Down With the British Monarchy

Hamilton Nolan, *The New York Times*, March 9, 2021

A recent interview you may have heard about revealed that the British monarchy is a toxic den of backbiting and racism. And who would doubt it? There is nothing easier to believe than that an institution created to be the physical embodiment of classism is awash in inhumanity. Where the public response to this humdrum revelation has gone astray is in the widespread conviction that we should make the monarchy better. Not at all. You cannot turn a bottle of poison into a refreshing drink, no matter how much sugar you pour into it.

A just and proper response to what we have learned would be for the entire United Kingdom to come together, join hands in a great circle around the institution of the monarchy and burn it to the ground. Then the members of the royal family can sweep up the ashes and deposit them neatly in the bin, a ceremonial beginning to a new life of working for a living. The existence of a monarchy is an admission that a government can't, or doesn't care to, solve people's problems. It has always been easier to elevate one family to a fairy-tale life of luxury than to do the dreary work of elevating every single family to a decent standard of living. The common people fund the lifestyle of a tiny, exalted and thoroughly unworthy elite, rather than the other way around. Any nation that still has a monarchy in 2021 is proving itself to have a mortifying lack of revolutionary gumption.

America is guilty of many crimes against humanity, but this is one thing we got right. Our presidents may be national embarrassments, but at least Americans are not required to scrape and bow before some utterly random rich wastrel whose claim to legitimacy is being the child of the child of the child of someone who was, centuries ago, the nation's biggest gangster. Yes, we have our own hypnotic capitalist addiction to celebrity, but monarchy is something altogether more twisted — as if the Bush family and the Kardashians were all rolled into one bejeweled quasi-religious fame cult, topped off with a bracing dose of imperialism.What is a monarchy if not the highest veneration of inequality? Based not on moral worth but on accidents of heredity, a small group of people are lavished with millions of dollars skimmed from the public till and are worshiped as sentimental nationalist gods, in exchange only for performing the duty of "being pleasant in public," which they do with mixed success.

More than 60 million citizens, many of them living in poverty, are instructed to celebrate rather than to loathe this tableau of excess. They are told to be happy that someone has a dream life, even if it is not them, and to live vicariously through this soap opera cast of royals, rather than demanding equality for everyone else. The crown would greatly appreciate if you tune in to this show rather than spending your time reading Karl Marx. And that plan appears to be working: More than four in five British adults have a positive view of the queen. The appeal of fancy hats is hard to overcome. The stars of this insipid show will change with time. New princes and princesses will be born, opulent weddings will be had, different coddled butts will get their turn to sit on the cushioned throne. These machinations, each of them designed to occupy the public's attention for a while, are just the scrambling of termites atop the enormous nest that is the monarchy itself. It feeds on the vigor of the working people and regurgitates it into a giant home for itself. Abolishing the monarchy shouldn't be too tricky. First you take away their homes. Then you take away their wealth. Then you take away their titles. All of those things properly belong to the public, and those squatters have held them for far too long. The good news for the royal family is that the economy seems to be on the rebound. It shouldn't be too hard for them to find jobs, even considering their lack of practical experience. They could get honorable jobs at a Tesco market. What a wonderful opportunity for them to earn an honest living, for the first time in their lives. As our social betters often tell the rest of us, hard work is good for self-esteem. I expect that they will soon be happier than ever.

Rick Santorum and CNN's 'Trumping Heads' Problem

By JACK SHAFER, *POLITICO*
05/25/2021

Pity the poor producers at CNN. There are at least 74 million Trump voters out there, and many of them watch TV and want to hear their man and his position defended. But no matter which Trump-adjacent person the producers hire for the job—a political strategist, an out-of-office politician, a radio talk-show host, a campaign veteran—these appointments tend to end in a publicity crack-up.

Just a few days ago, Rick Santorum, the former Republican senator from Pennsylvania, engaged in the sort of self-demolition that has come to distinguish CNN's designated Trumpian voices. Speaking at a conservative event, Santorum stubbed his tongue and bruised it all the way back to the hyoid bone by saying there was "nothing here" when white settlers arrived on America's shores and "there isn't much Native American culture in American culture." His attempt to reverse his rhetorical nosedive with an explanation on CNN's "Cuomo Prime Time" failed, and the network lifted his contract.

Santorum joins a shortlist of other Republican "analysts" who have lost their CNN contracts after speaking their minds: Jeffrey Lord; Jack Kingston; and Ed Martin. Lord, as mentally disciplined as Santorum and much more the Trump toady, got the hook in 2017 after tweeting "Sieg Heil!" at one of his critics. Kingston's contract was not renewed in 2019 after he said Parkland shooting survivors were being used by gun-control leftists. Martin's gig ended in 2018 after four months when he called some of his fellow CNN panelists "Black racists" on his radio show. (Martin had been brought in as a Lord replacement, proving that CNN producers know how to go from bad to worse.)

Other Trumpian commentators have been de-CNNed after becoming the targets of damaging accusations (Paris Dennard; Jason Miller), recycled themselves from CNN back into politics (Marc Short; Ken Cuccinelli), drifted away from the position for vague or unstated reasons (Cory Lewandowski; Scottie Nell Hughes) or bailed to accept or seek new jobs (Kayleigh McEnany; Stephen Moore). There's probably more job security rolling burritos at Chipotle than serving as a Trump surrogate at CNN.

If you're feeling generous to CNN, you can give them credit for flooding the zone to find people who would defend the Trump presidency and will continue to defend the current trajectory of the Trump Republican Party. MSNBC has felt no such compunction, as Jeremy Barr wrote in 2018 for the *Hollywood Reporter*, preferring to stock its designated-conservative slots with Never-Trump Republicans. If you're feeling ungenerous to CNN, you can damn the network for lowering its journalistic standards to the point where practiced liars and propaganda artists lounge on the payroll.

Because so much of what passes for news on CNN is actually talk and opinions, the CNN formula commands its producers to find Trump-friendly sources who will volley with the network talent and the Democratic analysts they recruit to give the Democrats' point of view. The flaw in that formula during the Trump era, an era that shows no sign of ending, is that while it's been easy for Trump to be cruel, arbitrary, authoritarian, inconsistent, ignorant yet confident, bullying and crude in his performance as a candidate, a president and a party leader, it's another challenge entirely to find a person who can reliably go on TV several times a week to mop up the water damage—and somehow remain a credible public figure.

Trump gets away with it because he's Trump, somebody who has sloughed off the normal rules of conduct. But a commentator on a mainstream TV channel has to operate largely within those rules, while still defending the guy who breaks them. On Fox News, pro-Trump commentators have thrived for years because nobody challenges them. But not so for CNN defenders. Imagine your higher cognitive functions getting knotted up after you're asked to defend Trump's "shitholes" as not being racist and actually taking that position, as Santorum did, or excuse Trump's refusal to denounce white supremacists because Trump doesn't like to "say something bad about people who support him," as Santorum did, or to defend Trump's Russia lies because "the president doesn't tell the truth about a lot of things fairly consistently," as Santorum also did. You might start saluting your enemies on Twitter with sarcastic "Sieg Heils" and mouthing inanities about Native Americans—or, at the very least, plan a quiet exit from the network.

Explaining why Trump surrogates burn out so reliably on CNN is like trying to explain why polonium-210 has a half-life of only 138 days before it decays to lead-206. Trump defenders arrive on CNN in an energetic state, vibrating with loyalty to their leader, but disintegrate as if commanded by the laws of physics, either escaping or suffering ejection. With the recent past as our guide, the only thing Santorum's departure presages is the hiring or promotion of another Trump-philic Republican to his slot—and his eventual unseating. It's a radioactive position.

Donald Trump Is Still Banned on Facebook (but Maybe Only for Six More Months) BY AARON MAK *SLATE* MAY 05, 2021

On Wednesday, Facebook's independent Oversight Board upheld the company's Jan. 7 decision to block former President Donald Trump from posting content to his Facebook and Instagram pages. At the same time, the board said that Facebook's move to "impose the indeterminate and standardless penalty of indefinite suspension" was inappropriate and insisted that the company review the case to come up with a proportionate response. In effect, the board validated the initial decision to restrict Trump's account but put the ball back into Facebook's court for determining whether he should be permanently kept off the platform.

The board stated, "In applying a vague, standardless penalty and then referring this case to the Board to resolve, Facebook seeks to avoid its responsibilities. The Board declines Facebook's request and insists that Facebook apply and justify a defined penalty." It further demanded that Facebook come up with this clearer penalty within six months.

At the heart of the case are two posts that went up on Trump's account on Jan. 6 while the Capitol was being overrun by a violent mob of his supporters. One was a video in which Trump told rioters in part, "We have to have peace. So go home. We love you. You're very special." The other was a post that read, "These are the things and events that happen when a sacred landslide election victory is so unceremoniously viciously stripped away from great patriots who have been badly unfairly treated for so long. Go home with love in peace. Remember this day forever!" The American Center for Law and Justice, a Christian organization run by one of Trump's lead lawyers in his first impeachment, and an unidentified "page administrator" submitted a statement to the board on the former president's behalf arguing that it is "inconceivable that either of those two posts can be viewed as a threat to public safety, or an incitement to violence." Trump's representatives further claim that he was calling for peace and blamed the violence on "outside forces" like the Oath Keepers. (Some of the insurrectionists, though, claim they thought they were following Trump's orders.)

The Oversight Board didn't buy this argument and ruled that the two posts "severely violated" Facebook's policies around dangerous individuals and organizations. It found that Trump "praised and supported people involved in a continuing riot where people died, lawmakers were put at serious risk of harm, and a key democratic process was disrupted." The initial decision to restrict the account, according to the board, was appropriate to address the threat of violence at that moment. The board now wants Facebook to decide on a more clearly defined penalty, giving the examples of just removing the dangerous content, specifying a "time-bound" suspension period, or permanently banning Trump. In addition, while Facebook says it did not consult its vague exception for rule-breaking content that is "newsworthy" or "important for the public interest," the board called on Facebook to be more transparent on how it applies this policy and ensure that it does not take priority over preventing "significant harm." […]

A number of other social-media companies like Snapchat, YouTube, and—perhaps most crucially—Twitter also suspended Trump from their platforms, where he remains banned. Facebook is alone in having a purportedly autonomous body make a final ruling. The board delayed the release of the ruling in mid-April to give itself more time to read through the more than 9,000 public comments it's received about Trump's ban.

Conservatives were predictably livid in the immediate wake of the ban, with many seeking out alternative "free speech" platforms like Parler and Gab. At the same time, other world leaders like German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador also expressed their dismay at major social media companies exiling Trump because of the precedent it would seem to set.

Facebook launched its Oversight Board in October 2020 to hear cases from people who'd had their content removed by Facebook and exhausted their appeals with the company's moderators. Before the Trump case, the board had ruled on seven others, reversing Facebook's decision to take content down in five of them. A group of five unnamed individuals from the board's approximately 20 members—which include journalists, academics, and activists—reviewed Trump's suspension.

Academics and policy experts have been pushing for Facebook and other social media companies to permanently ban the former president. University of Virginia School of Law professor Danielle Keats Citron and University of California, Berkeley, computer science professor Hany Farid wrote in Slate in February:

The decision around Trump's ban will be among the first the Facebook Oversight Board will make, but it is hard to imagine a more consequential case. The world is watching to see if the board is capable of speaking truth to power, to both Zuckerberg and Trump. In saying enough is enough, the board will show that certain lines cannot be crossed. It is a privilege to use these online platforms—they don't owe us their service. Serial violations that cause lasting, widespread harm to public health and the body politic warrant the permanent revocation of that privilege.

For the time being, Trump still has a janky, makeshift Twitter clone that he launched on Tuesday, where he can post to his heart's content.

My pandemic comfort? Google reviews. They can be as compelling as any TV drama
Louise Benson, *The Guardian*, 15 May 2021

Human connection can often be found where you least expect it. Google Maps, started as a straightforward navigation tool, has become in recent years an unlikely treasure trove of humour and intrigue. With many businesses in my area closed for much of the pandemic, I took to exploring them through the reviews that others had left online. I have traversed foreign cities from my sofa, idly dreaming of future holidays via a one-line description of the perfect snack bar.

From reviews of a local bistro to the dry cleaner, I have stumbled on snatches of city life that seem as compelling as any sitcom. Entire sagas are played out in a few sentences, and I have read elaborate tales of love, fights, breakups and makeups. "The owners created a drama around them, and chose us to express all their violence," begins one particularly ominous review of a bar, which ends with: "We spent the night in hospital and my friend had to get surgery to fix his nose."

Some reviewers hold businesses to impossible standards. Common complaints include not being allowed in without a reservation on a busy night, brisk service from overworked staff, and even not being able to find the venue. Luckily, it's not just the patrons who get the chance to express themselves. Proprietors can respond with their side of the story, too. One employee is unapologetic in a succinct reply to an unfavourable assessment of their service: "I'm like a mirror, you get what you give." Another states: "You have one review on your account; my conclusion is you are a stingy git", along with the advice to "get your tastebuds tested". Owners often give lengthy explanations in their own defence or profusely thank those who have left positive feedback, a reminder of the power that these reviews can have.

In the last year I have chatted with the three brothers who run my local corner shop in Hoxton Street, east London, more regularly than I have any family member or friend. Their shop was the first business that I took the step of reviewing myself on Google Maps, a glowing assessment of both their tinned goods and welcoming manner. More recently I returned to my review and discovered that the local vicar had responded with a poignant reflection on the community spirit of the neighbourhood, with particular reference to another former regular of the shop – my mum, whose funeral he presided over four years ago. It was an unexpected connection that brought me close to tears.

Since then I have written reviews for several of my favourite spots both near and far, short treatises that are as casually hyperbolic as they are genuinely emotional. I hope that these offer some small support to the businesses that have suffered most during the pandemic, when the precarious nature of our relationship with them has never been clearer.

It is now rare to find a business that is not listed on Google Maps, a darker sign of just how entangled the US company has become with every step we take out in the real world. The reputations of small, family-run businesses are on the line, while their numerous critics are largely invisible and unaccountable. Google has often portrayed itself as a friend to small businesses, offering them the tools to reach new patrons, but the balance of power is starkly tipped only one way.

An article in style magazine the *Cut* last month described how New Yorkers have been championing their own neighbourhood joints by buying and wearing branded souvenirs and merchandise from diners and bodegas (the city's equivalent of corner shops) alike. Since the pandemic began, the writer argues, these items have gone from fashion statement to something more political – "wearing the shirt may mean saving that bar". I feel similarly about Google Maps reviews, which perform a function that is both practical and symbolic.

I know there are others like me out there. I can see them in the hundreds of reviews posted each day. There is something vaguely embarrassing about the online versions of ourselves not intended for those who know us, away from the curated feeds of social media. Like eBay seller listings, Gumtree ads or posts on Nextdoor, I write my reviews with the freedom that comes with relative anonymity. I enjoy the fact that even the owner of a business with whom I exchange pleasantries on a daily basis will probably never know it was me. More than a transaction, these reviews speak of the chance encounters and fleeting intimacies of our daily lives.

Caught in crosshairs, Fauci calls GOP descriptions of his emails 'profoundly misleading'
By Michael Warren, Kaitlan Collins, Gabby Orr and Daniella Diaz, *CNN* June 5, 2021

President Joe Biden had just finished delivering remarks on the latest jobs report and left the room Friday when a reporter shouted one last question."Mr. President, do you still have confidence in Dr. Fauci?" Poking his head back into the room several seconds later, Biden delivered an unequivocal response: "Yes, I am very confident in Dr. Fauci."

It was a public show of support that Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, seldom received from Biden's predecessor, and it came as the disclosure of hundreds of his emails put him in the crosshairs of his Republican critics.

A day earlier, former President Donald Trump had blasted Fauci over the emails in a statement released by his leadership PAC, saying, "After seeing the emails, our Country is fortunate I didn't do what Dr. Fauci wanted me to do. There are a lot of questions that must be answered by Dr. Fauci."

Trump's statement was just the latest missive in a renewed Republican effort to turn Fauci into a top political enemy of the party. GOP lawmakers, many of whom have been suspicious of what they see as Fauci's outsized influence and unwarranted authority as a public health official, are now overtly calling for him to be fired.

Some of Fauci's Republican critics claim that his emails, which were released to the public this week as part of a Freedom of Information Act request by news outlets including CNN, BuzzFeed News and The Washington Post, provide evidence that he acted improperly last year. […]

In an interview with CNN on Friday, Fauci defended his communications and said that his critics have taken them out of context. "The emails were taken deliberately and egregiously out of context and therefore are profoundly misleading," Dr. Fauci told CNN. "That's just it. There is no doubt about it."

On accusations he lied under oath, Fauci responded, "Are you kidding me?"

Despite Fauci's decades of work at the National Institutes of Health under presidents of both parties, he has been viewed with everything from suspicion to hostility by Republicans, who now see his policy recommendations -- on school closures, crowd limitations, mask mandates and social distancing -- as both wrong and politically damaging to Trump. Now, the Biden administration's full embrace of Fauci -- even bringing him into the White House in an official role as chief medical adviser -- has given Republicans license to treat him as a political rival, despite Fauci having served as a top Trump adviser.

Critics have latched on to one email in particular, sent to Fauci in April 2020. An executive at EcoHealth Alliance, the global nonprofit that helped fund some research at China's Wuhan Institute of Virology, thanked Fauci for publicly stating that scientific evidence supports a natural origin for the coronavirus and not a lab release. (The origins of the virus remain unclear.)

Fauci called the Republican criticism "misrepresentation in its greatest form" and labeled their comments "disgraceful" and "slanderous." "There is not a single thing in there that I could not explain."

But for Trump and other Republicans, it's fodder to go after Fauci as an out-of-touch and potentially compromised bureaucrat. "The correspondence between Dr. Fauci and China speaks too loudly for anyone to ignore," Trump said on Thursday.

Expressing opposition to Fauci has become an easy attack line for conservative Republicans to score points with the party's base. Members of the House Freedom Caucus, including Chairman Andy Biggs, an Arizona Republican, and Rep. Jim Jordan, an Ohio Republican, have been tweeting that the White House is "protecting" Fauci. And Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a controversial Georgia Republican who is known to promote conspiracy theories and racist rhetoric, introduced a bill called the "Fire Fauci Act" that would reduce Fauci's salary to $0, which will undoubtedly go nowhere in the Democratic-majority House.

After the email leak, several more House conservatives, such as Reps. Matt Gaetz of Florida and Buddy Carter of Georgia, signed on to the legislation as co-sponsors.

When it comes to the optics of conservative attacks on Fauci, a spokesman for the Democratic campaign committee told CNN that Democrats don't care.

"In four months they've used everything from Dr. Seuss to hamburgers as an attack that has fallen flat. If this is what they want to spend their time on while Americans get back to work and return to normalcy, they can be our guest," the aide said.

Conservative media outlets, meanwhile, are ramping up their scrutiny of the contradictions between Fauci's privately expressed viewpoints during the first few months of the pandemic, when he became a prominent member of the Trump administration's Covid-19 task force, and the evolving understanding of how the virus worked and how it originated.

These news channels have also given platforms to Fauci's most ardent critics. Appearing Wednesday on Fox News, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo claimed Fauci was echoing the Chinese Communist Party line that it's unlikely the coronavirus originated from the lab in Wuhan.

Pompeo said some of Fauci's comments "were the exact same words, the exact same excuses, the exact same theories the Chinese Communist Party has presented for a year now."

The man who created President Donald Trump by Nicole Hemmer *CNN* Feb. 18, 2021

When the news broke last October that Donald Trump had been diagnosed with Covid-19, legendary conservative talk radio host Rush Limbaugh immediately swooped in to help the campaign. He offered to hold a "radio rally" for the benched President, and Trump took him up on it. Though the resulting two-hour diatribe was not particularly effective radio, it highlighted just how important the radio host was to Trump's political career, even at that moment when both Limbaugh's show and Trump's presidency were nearing their end.

Limbaugh, who announced last February that he was battling advanced cancer, died Wednesday at age 70.

At the center of most discussions of right-wing media's role in propping up the Trump presidency, Fox News looms largest. But talk radio played just as big a role. And Limbaugh's show was the most important of all, not only because he was an ardent Trump supporter, but because, over the course of three decades, his show also laid the groundwork for Trump's presidency.

In swearing fealty to Limbaugh's popularity with conservative voters among their base, Republican leaders essentially transformed Limbaugh into the de facto leader of their party -- and turned conservative media into a powerful political institution that carried as much weight as the party itself.

From nearly the moment his national radio show debuted in 1988, Limbaugh was a media phenomenon. Having started as a disc jockey and sports commentator, he blended his knowledge of audio entertainment with his conservative politics, creating a new format that wrapped right-wing political talk in humor and satire.

His high ratings quickly translated across media platforms: In the early 1990s he published two best-selling books, and from 1992 to 1996, he had a syndicated television show produced by Roger Ailes. Within just a few short years, he became not only a multi-millionaire, but he began to radically change the Republican Party.

At the end of the Reagan presidency, the GOP had no popular leader. George H.W. Bush, though elected by wide margins and immensely popular during the first Gulf War, soon slumped in the polls. By 1992, he had been rejected by conservatives and was facing a right-wing challenge from Pat Buchanan in the presidential primaries. Casting about the political landscape, Bush landed on Rush Limbaugh as a possible savior: The popular broadcaster had been promoting Buchanan on his show; if he instead threw his weight behind Bush, perhaps his millions of listeners would come along, too.

It was not to be. Limbaugh, after being invited to stay over at the White House, did lavish Bush with praise, but Bush ultimately lost the presidency to Bill Clinton. Yet in singling Limbaugh out as a powerful figure in control of millions of votes, Bush further empowered him. Republican politicians were soon knocking down his door trying to win a few minutes of airtime or an endorsement that would shore up their conservative bona fides. When Republicans took the House of Representatives in 1994's landslide election, they gave Limbaugh the credit.

But in elevating Limbaugh, Republicans also elevated a particular type of politics that would become the core of their party, one that looks awfully familiar after four years of Donald Trump. Limbaugh came to talk radio during the era of the shock jock, when hosts competed to see who could be the most outrageous. So he would level vicious attacks on people suffering from AIDS, or on the poor and homeless, and then, when greeted with outrage, say that his critics just weren't in on the joke.

That was the case with his oft-hurled epithet "feminazi," which he used against feminists, a term that filtered through the culture in the 1990s and was used by people who likely never heard his show. When critics called out the misogyny of the term, he said they simply didn't understand: He meant only "the most obnoxious feminists."

He used the same technique when critics pointed to the racist satirical song "Barack the Magic Negro," which Limbaugh aired repeatedly throughout the 2008 campaign. Limbaugh defended it by saying it was based on a Los Angeles Times editorial by a Black writer who used the phrase when describing Barack Obama. The problem, he assured his audience, was that he was being taken literally, not seriously.

That kind of just-kidding racism and misogyny, aimed at providing plausible deniability, has become a staple of conservatism today. [...]

That fear of crossing Limbaugh revealed a politics of loyalty that superseded both ideological commitments and the party's political fortunes -- something that has come to the fore in recent weeks as state Republican parties censure the conservative politicians who voted to impeach Donald Trump.

Limbaugh's reliance on insults, nicknames, racism and misogyny didn't just prefigure the rise of Donald Trump. He created the politics that enabled Trump to rise to power. While much of the rest of the country saw Trump's campaign announcement speech in 2015 as a bizarre mash-up of conspiracy theories, racism and lies, for Limbaugh's listeners, it wasn't so strange: It was, in fact, a manifestation of the hours of radio they listened to each day. And while Limbaugh's show will now go dark, his pernicious influence -- on media, on politics, and on the precarious state of American democracy -- will long outlive him.

Working from home has offered people a glimpse of how things could be different

Rhiannon Lucy Cosslet, *The Guardian*, Wed 18 Nov 2020

I had begun to forget the sensation of hope. This is the year that I scaled hopefulness back: it became bread in the oven or bulbs in the ground – small packages of potential, just significant enough to give the soul a little lift. Then, the news of not one, but two pioneering vaccines, and hope rustled its feathers again. After months of making future promises for "when this is all over", it seems that it could, one day, be over.

There's relief, of course. But there are also mixed feelings at the thought of a return to "business as usual". At the onset of the first lockdown there was much talk about how we could build a better, more compassionate world. But when lockdown ended, the air and road traffic returned, and the birds retreated.

This year millions of people have learned what it is to work from home, many for the first time. They have seen a better work-life balance unfurl before them, and they've enjoyed it. They have contemplated a life working more remotely, perhaps outside of the big cities. Many have already made the move to the coast or the country, gambling that their companies won't want them back full-time soon, if ever.

According to a YouGov survey, most workers want to be able to work from home at least some of the time once coronavirus is over. Prior to the outbreak, 68% of British employees never worked from home. Among those who did so for the first time this year, a massive 91% now say they would like to carry on at least some of the time once the pandemic ends. It is the thought of that prospect going down the drain, and a return to the nine-to-five, that will be intruding on the hopes of many.

But battle lines have been drawn, and I know that just laying down these facts will provoke grumbling. Yes, many people are struggling with working from home, whether because they are parents or because they don't have the right tech, or because they are in unsatisfactory, cramped accommodation, or because they are lonely. Some miss the office desperately, or have sought special dispensation to go back early. Others have never been able to work from home, and it is this group who maintain that they would never want to.

It's easy to pit workers against each other – the homebodies against the office-lovers – but that's a false dichotomy. This isn't a case of parents versus the child-free: parents might not want to be in the office full-time, but they still stand to benefit from more flexibility. According to a survey by Working Families, just 1% said that they did not want any flexibility at all in the future.

Capitalism can be a ruthless, stubborn beast, and while there has been much talk of the decline of the office, I am cynical about whether or not that will actually happen. Tech companies in particular have adapted quickly and embraced remote working. But many companies remain wedded to an office-based culture even when it is to the detriment of their staff's mental wellbeing and the diversity of their potential hires. Insisting that your staff live in or around an expensive city, where only a privileged minority can expect to own their own home, amounts to discrimination on the basis of class and age. I suspect that companies that attempt to reinforce a rigid ban on working from home will become less and less popular, and as the economy improves people will seek out more progressive workplaces.

The status quo is a powerful drug. It may be that it will take another generation for working-from-home culture to fully take hold. The boomers of the briefcase and the 6.45am train are reaching retirement age now; Gen Z will find the concept of sitting in a cubicle all day ridiculous and dated. That's not to say that young people will want to switch entirely to remote working: they are more likely to have cramped living conditions, and might crave the human connections of the office. It's about balance, flexibility and choice. The pandemic has seen many offices adapt policies where those who are fed up can choose to go in, while those who find it more productive to be at home continue to work there – could this be the blueprint?

When it comes to the future of work, do we waste energy fighting the inevitable, or do we embrace the change? Whatever happens, I suspect all the articles and government statements agonising about the shift will come to look very old-fashioned.

America saw and heard January 6 all over again this week Opinion by Ruth Ben-Ghiat
CNN February 13, 2021

For many Americans this week, myself included, the traumatizing videos the House managers presented during the impeachment trial elicited a visceral response. Rarely has the American public experienced such a compelling example of the power of images and sound to communicate in ways that written texts cannot. That wrenching emotional punch needed to land with us. It's a reminder that unless we hold leaders like former President Donald Trump accountable for their dangerous and manipulative uses of misinformation, they will be free -- or worse, emboldened -- to repeat such actions in the future.

The history of strongmen rule bears that out. Looked at through the lens of the history of authoritarian leadership, January 6 could be viewed as a trial run, as failed coups often precede successful ones, as in Chile in 1973. "That's what we f**king need to have, 30,000 guns up here," said one man in the crowd, depicted in the video shown on the first day of proceedings, frustrated that the group was not entering the Capitol more rapidly. "Next trip," someone answered him.

The videos we saw and heard from the House managers this week were an unequivocal statement: We must not let this happen again. The video montages presented by the former President's defense told quite another story, one that revolved around the attempt to paint Democrats, especially Democratic women, as bloodthirsty revolutionaries who victimized Trump throughout his presidency.

First, let's take the footage the Democratic impeachment managers showed to the nation and the world over three days. It had a legal rationale. It is an integral part of the evidence presented to argue that former President Trump incited the violence by his followers on January 6, an intentional disruption of the counting of Electoral College votes. The ultimate goal: subverting the election results and maintaining himself in office by illegal means. As Rep. Ted Lieu succinctly stated, "President Trump ran out of non-violent options to remain in power." [...]

My heart broke for our democracy as I took in the contrasts between the decorum that accompanied the proceedings in the Chamber and the auditory anarchy outside from individuals who intend to "fight for Trump!" and "take the Capitol" for him and him alone. I won't soon forget the sight of Trump's primary enabler for years, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, standing in the quiet, saying "we're debating a step that has never been taken in American history," as the mob, closing in, broke glass, hooted, chanted and assaulted police officers.

I have long warned that Trump is an authoritarian who poses a threat to the survival of our democracy, and was not surprised that he resorted to inciting violence as part of his attempts to remain in power. But at that moment, while I watched and listened, particularly to Trump's speech to the rally crowd that preceded its march to the Capitol, the terrifying truth of Trump's oneness with that mob, and his absolute scorn for the protocols and procedures of democracy became even more real.

The footage provides convincing documentation of Trump's incitement. The inclusion in the first day's film of his inflammatory tweets against former Vice President Mike Pence while the assault was in progress, with insurgents hunting for Pence inside the Capitol -- and with the threat of an actual hanging made real by the gallows that had been erected just outside -- was highly damning. It highlights Trump's skill at weaponizing Twitter, which he has done for years to disseminate authoritarian-style propaganda -- including threats against an ever-widening circle of enemies.

The video presented by the defense on Friday had no story arc or sense of chronology: narrative was not its point. But one 11-minute sequence showed a mastery of one principle of propaganda -- repetition -- and an understanding of how to weaponize language and sound. "We need to show you some of their own words," the defense stated, but one word dominated: fight. To relativize Trump's history of incitement of violence, the defense presented a montage of Democratic politicians, women in particular, talking about fighting, without any context for their words. The word fight or fought is uttered almost two hundred times in the clips, with the rapid-fire editing in individual sequences featuring Elizabeth Warren or Kamala Harris so forced as to seem cartoonish.

Overall, the video footage of the defense pursued the Trumpian method in litigation and life: be relentless to wear down the adversary's defenses, leaving them exhausted.

GOP Senators are unlikely to vote to convict Trump. Tellingly, some key senators who have supported the blatant lies undergirding the violent assault, like Ted Cruz and Josh Hawley, did not attend the Democrats' final presentation of their case.

Yet there was another, far larger, audience for this filmed body of evidence: the American people. These images provide a foundation for public memory about January 6, starkly countering the GOP's attempt to minimize the violence, even that directed at its own leadership. Former Vice President Pence, for example, has been conspicuously silent about his experience.

They also issue a clear warning, one reiterated by the Democrat impeachment managers: if Trump is not convicted, he will feel empowered, increasing the chances that he will return to finish the job of wrecking our democracy.

Boris Johnson ignoring instructions to tighten anti-corruption laws, Council of Europe says

Concerns about independence of sleaze watchdog and lack of controls to stop lobbyist 'revolving door' , Jone Stone,Policy Correspondent, *The Independent*, 7 June 2021

The British government has ignored instructions to strengthen UK anti-corruption laws, Europe's integrity watchdog has said – in a scathing report published after series of scandals. The Council of Europe, which oversees the European Court of Human Rights and keeps tabs on corruption in states, said the UK failed "to demonstrate an acceptable level of compliance" after being told to toughen up sleaze laws. It said weak points left unaddressed by Boris Johnson's government include a lack of independence for the government's standards watchdog – who can only take action on the orders of the prime minister – and non-existent controls to stop the revolving door between the government and private sector.In a new report, the council's corruption monitoring arm GRECO said just five out of 12 recommendations previously handed to the UK government in 2018 had been "dealt satisfactorily with". It comes after revelations about cash-for-peerages and concerns over the access and influence granted to lobbyists and Tory donors. "Further progress is necessary to demonstrate an acceptable level of compliance with the recommendations within the next 18 months," the report's conclusions state, setting a new deadline of 30 September 2022 for the UK to provide evidence it has acted. The UK is still a member of the Council of Europe, which is separate from and predates the European Union, and monitors the human rights and rule of law situation in states. The 42 per cent compliance rate in the report represents a significant backsliding on the UK's previous record, representing the worst rating the UK has ever achieved a GRECO's evaluation rounds, which started in 2000. Successive British governments have previously always met between 75 per cent and 100 per cent of previous recommendations.

Aside from the weakness of the ministerial employment watchdog ACOBA and the limited autonomy of the PM's ethics adviser, the report says the government is insufficiently transparent about meetings by senior civil servants – some of whom have been implicated in affairs such as the Greensill Scandal. It also warns that the government's lobbying register "gives a very partial view of the total number of lobbyists actively engaging with the government to influence decision making" because it does not require in-house lobbyists to register and does not require clients to be declared in the case of meetings with special advisers and senior civil servants.

It also criticised the limited powers of and refusal to reform ACOBA, the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments meant to stop ministers from cashing in on their government contacts to do jobs in the private sector. Boris Johnson has in recent months rebuffed calls to toughen up the laws after a series of scandals around the financial services company Greensill Capital, the secret financing of his Downing Street flat by a Tory donor, and questions over how he paid for a luxury Caribbean holiday. George Havenhand, senior legal researcher at Spotlight On Corruption, said it was "extremely disappointing" that the government had "failed to implement measures aimed at preventing corruption and promoting integrity". "Calls for meaningful reform grow louder by the day; the government must start listening and take steps to fix the regulation of ethical standards," he said. Steve Goodrich, head of research and investigations at Transparency International UK told *The Independent*: "It seems everyone apart from the UK government thinks there's a problem with how standards are safeguarded in public life. "The Council of Europe's report confirms our long-held view that the UK's protections against abuse of high office are threadbare and not fit for purpose." Arguing that the government needed to act "before trust in their probity is damaged beyond repair", he added: "Until the independent adviser can initiate its own investigations without request from the prime minister, with the full backing of the law and dedicated resources to conduct these inquiries, its wings will be clipped." A government spokesperson said: "The report recognises that lobbying is well regulated in the UK with a solid legal framework for public affairs transparency."Since 2010, we have significantly increased the transparency of the workings of government – from extensive transparency publications on contracts, spending and meetings, to a statutory register of consultant lobbyists.

"We will also consider any relevant findings of the Boardman review, once it has concluded."

How Is The GOP Adjusting To A Less Religious America? BY DANIELLE KURTZLEBEN, *NPR*
June 4, 2021

When Ronald Reagan accepted the 1980 Republican presidential nomination, he ended his speech with a pious request. "I'll confess that I've been a little afraid to suggest what I'm going to suggest — I'm more afraid not to — that we begin our crusade joined together in a moment of silent prayer," he said. It was the preface to a presidency that would help make white evangelicals the staunchly Republican voting bloc they are today.

Fast-forward to a 2015 campaign event, when Republican consultant Frank Luntz worked to pin down soon-to-be-President Donald Trump on a simple question of faith:

"Have you ever asked God for forgiveness?" Luntz asked Trump twice, before getting this answer: "I'm not sure I have. I just go and try and do a better job from there. I don't think so."

Trump benefited from the white evangelical support that Reagan helped solidify, but he also presided over a country that, religiously, looks far different from the one Reagan took over after 1980. Trump's presidency is one early case study in how the Republican Party — which has long associated itself with conservative Christian values — may attempt to deal with a country that's less and less religious.

In fact, the U.S. recently passed a religious milestone: For the first time, a majority of Americans are *not* church members, Gallup found this spring.

Over the last decade, the share of Republicans who are church members fell from 75% to 65%, according to Gallup. That's a solid majority but also a sizable fall. The key bloc of white evangelicals is also shrinking as a share of the population, while the share of religiously unaffiliated Americans grows. This makes religion one key part of a looming, long-term demographic challenge for Republicans, says Whit Ayres, a Republican pollster.

"Republicans clearly have a stronger hold among the religiously affiliated, especially evangelical Protestants. And consequently, any decline in evangelical Protestant affiliation is not good news for the GOP," he said.

The upshot, to Ayres, is that a party still deeply entwined with conservative Christianity and, particularly, white evangelicals will eventually have to win over more Christian conservatives — for example, among the growing Hispanic electorate — or make gains among substantially less-religious groups, like young voters.

For now, it's fair to say that in the Republican Party, overtly religious rhetoric is being replaced by broader culture war issues, Ayres said.

"While religiosity may be declining, people attracted to culturally conservative causes may not be — cancel culture, TV shows and movies that exalt more left-wing values, that cast aspersions on right-wing values," he said.

That dovetails with another trend in American politics — of people increasingly centering their identities on their partisan affiliations. It's a trend that can give pastors headaches that have nothing to do with whether church attendance is rising or falling.

Christian Gaffney, pastor at Expectation Church in Fairfax, Va., says congregation members have pushed back when he has preached about things like masks, as well as race.

Gaffney said that conflict arises for him when congregants center their lives on their partisan identities rather than their Christian beliefs.

"I think it goes back to the idea of culture wars — the idea that everything is so polarized — and because there's this trajectory of polarization, Trump kind of gives a lightning rod for one of those poles, one of those sides to really rally around and adhere to," he said. "My job as a pastor is to show people it's not about rallying around either side; it's about rallying around the person Jesus Christ."

Though he considers himself conservative, Gaffney said that right-leaning congregation members have accused him of being "liberal" when he has questioned Republican orthodoxy.

Gaffney's church has been growing. But on the whole, the shrinking American Christian church may, counterintuitively, tighten the bond between the Republican Party and conservative Christianity.

"These kinds of data about the shrinking share of the population of white evangelicals or declines in church membership actually intensify the relationship [between the GOP and conservative Christians]," said Sarah Posner, author of two books critical of white evangelicals' politics.

"As those numbers shrink, the demography is not in [the GOP's] favor. And so intensifying their relationship becomes ever more important, in terms of winning elections and so forth," she said.

Through statements like saying he had never asked for forgiveness, as well as infamously referring to the biblical book typically called Second Corinthians as "Two Corinthians," Trump showed that he didn't have the churchgoing bona fides of rivals like Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, who invoked God regularly at his campaign events.

Indeed, Trump early in the 2016 primaries appealed more to Republicans who identified as Christian but weren't regular churchgoers. More observant Republican Christians preferred Cruz.

But Trump did eventually win over stauncher Christian conservatives. In the process, he wrapped more traditionally conservative Christian issues like abortion in with his own particular cultural fixations, such as race and grievance politics.

At this point, Posner added, Christianity and politics can be so muddled together on the right that they can be hard to separate. […]

Lilibet Diana, The name may turn out to be more of a curse than a blessing

By giving their daughter such a name, Harry and Meghan have ensured there will be heightened interest in her as she grows up

Sean O'Grady, *The Independent*, 7 June 2021

What's in a name? Quite a lot, if you're royal. There's always plenty of sensitivity and "meaning" in the chosen names of offspring, nods to history and politics as much as family affection and the usual soppy stuff about something sounding nice or, less often, being trendy. Harry and Meghan, who are in the celeb fame game properly now, for good or ill, have layered another consideration onto the usual ones for their daughter. Little Lilibet Diana Mountbatten-Windsor is certainly charming and her name seems well chosen, both on sentimental grounds, with her famous gran and great gran memorialised. However, her name will always remind people who she is. Less trouble booking a table at a fashionable restaurant, getting a ticket for the must-see musical or, you never know, a job. The downside, of course, as with all celeb stuff, is that giving her such a name will merely heighten interest in her as she grows up and, though it seems unkind to remark on it now, will inevitably attract the kind of media intrusion that Lilibet Diana's wider family are only too familiar with. Her name may turn out to be more of a curse than a blessing, if the poignant experience of the past is anything to go by. The papers will be doubly interested in who she resembles as she grows up, whether she inherits Diana's sense of style or the Queen's sense of duty and, of course, who she'll be dating.

The public appetite for the habits and doings of even the most minor royal family member is astonishing, and probably unprecedented. It does leave some of us who are less obsessed with the Windsors a bit bewildered, however, something best satirised in a *Viz* comic quiz entitled: "Which Kent Are You"? We've become so old-fashioned about venerating our royal traditions – abetted by a government intent on weaponising them in our culture wars – that I'm only surprised Boris Johnson hasn't reinstated the convention that the home secretary attend a royal birth to ensure no imposter is substituted for a genuine royal child. It would have meant Priti Patel flying to California to observe Meghan and Harry in the maternity room, which would have entertained all concerned. Patel might have taken the opportunity to give Lilibet Diana a special, points-based UK visa, seeing as she would be in the skill shortage category of "semi-estranged royal personality", a category of worker which post-Brexit Britain is of course crying out for. You might argue, for what it's worth, that "Lilibet" is anyway a confected name, which is true, but it's not like they've called her "Chardonnay" or "Renault Clio" or something. "Lilibet" seems to have grown out of the way the Queen, as baby Princess Elizabeth of York, was unable to quite pronounce her name, and so "Lilibet" caught on as a family sobriquet. It wasn't on her birth certificate, or how she was known publicly, but the same might be said of Prince Henry of Wales, who, of course, has been universally referred to as Harry since his red head popped out at the Lindo Wing in 1984. Once upon a time, the gin-soaked super-snob Princess Margaret was the sweet Princess Margaret Rose of York, until somewhere along the line the rose wilted in its acidic soil.

Lilibet is charming enough, and might itself be contracted to Lily, or she might prefer Diana, or "Diana the Second", as she'd no doubt be dubbed by the media if she ever dared to emulate her paternal granny's love of fashion. I happen to think it's a shame that Doria Loyce and Jeanette, on the maternal line, didn't get a look-in, but it's none of my business. Maybe, one day, the royal family will be enlightened enough to see what a tremendous asset they have in the American branch of the family, and how much Harry, Meghan, Archie and Lilibet – a new Fab Four – can contribute to the work and duties of a modernised British monarchy. Society has changed so much in recent decades that the Windsors have found it difficult to keep up, and they now find themselves being seen as symbols not so much of the nation and Commonwealth as a whole, but of tradition and resistance to "woke" values – hence the insane decision by the government to press on with a new £200m royal yacht, the main point of which is to wind up the left of the Labour Party and to get patriotic voters in the Red Wall to vote Tory. There are even signs that William and Kate are being lined up, in effect, to lead the campaign against Scottish independence. This politicisation will not end well.

The 'Trump Won' Farce Isn't Funny Anymore. By Jamelle Bouie, N.Y. Times, Dec. 11, 2020

To tell a joke to a crowd is to learn a little something about the people who laugh.

For our purposes, the "joke" is President Trump's ongoing fight to overturn the election results and hold on to power against the wishes of most Americans, including those in enough states to equal far more than the 270 electoral votes required to win the White House.

"#OVERTURN," he said on Twitter this week, adding in a separate post that "If somebody cheated in the Election, which the Democrats did, why wouldn't the Election be immediately overturned? How can a Country be run like this?"

Unfortunately for Trump, and fortunately for the country, he has not been able to bend reality to his desires. Key election officials and federal judges have refused his call to throw out votes, create chaos and clear a path for the *autogolpe* he hopes to accomplish. The military has also made clear where it stands. "We do not take an oath to a king or a queen, a tyrant or a dictator. We do not take an oath to an individual," Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said in a speech not long after the election.

But there are others who — out of partisanship, opportunism or a simple taste for mayhem — have chosen to support the president's attack on American democracy. They refuse to acknowledge the president's defeat, back lawsuits to throw out the results, and spread lies about voter fraud and election malfeasance to Republican voters. They are laughing at Trump's joke, not realizing (or not caring) that their laughter is infectious.

What was a legal effort by the Trump campaign, for instance, is now one by the state of Texas, which has petitioned the Supreme Court to scrap election results in Georgia, Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, depriving Joe Biden of his victory. Filed by Ken Paxton, Texas's attorney general, the suit says it would be a violation of due process to accept the outcome in those states, on account of "election irregularities" and "interstate differences in the treatment of voters" that disadvantage Republican voters in areas with stricter voting rules.

This lawsuit rests on the novel argument that the Constitution gives exclusive and unquestioned authority to state legislatures to appoint presidential electors as they see fit and renders any action to expand voting without direct legislative consent unconstitutional. The Supreme Court already rejected that argument once this week when it turned away a similar lawsuit by the Trump campaign to overturn the results in Pennsylvania.

Regardless, on Wednesday, 17 Republican attorneys general filed a brief in support of Texas, urging the court, in essence, to cancel the election and hand power back to Trump. "Encroachments on the authority of state Legislatures by other state actors violate the separation of powers and threaten individual liberty," reads the brief, which also claims that "States have a strong interest in ensuring that the votes of their own citizens are not diluted by the unconstitutional administration of elections in other States." The next day, more than 100 Republican members of Congress filed a brief in support of this lawsuit, in effect declaring allegiance to Trump over the Constitution and urging the court to end self-government in the name of "the Framers."

There's a paradox here. This sloppy, harebrained lawsuit has no serious chance of success. Granting Texas (and, by extension Trump, who joined the lawsuit) its relief would plunge the country into abject chaos, with violence sure to follow. That this quest is quixotic is, in all likelihood, one reason it has so much support. It is only with the knowledge of certain defeat that Republican officeholders feel comfortable plowing forward with an effort that would tear the United States apart if it succeeded. They can play politics with constitutional government (Paxton, for instance, hopes to succeed Greg Abbott as governor of Texas) knowing that the Supreme Court isn't going to risk it all for Donald Trump.

(And indeed, on Friday night, after this column was published online, the Supreme Court rejected Texas's lawsuit because Texas lacked standing to sue in the first place.) […]

Still, we've learned something from this game, in the same way we learn something about an audience when it laughs.

We have learned that the Republican Party, or much of it, has abandoned whatever commitment to electoral democracy it had to begin with. That it views defeat on its face as illegitimate, a product of fraud concocted by opponents who don't deserve to hold power. That it is fully the party of minority rule, committed to the idea that a vote doesn't count if it isn't for its candidates, and that if democracy won't serve its partisan and ideological interests, then so much for democracy.

None of this is new — there is a whole tradition of reactionary, counter-majoritarian thought in American politics to which the conservative movement is heir — but it is the first time since the 1850s that these ideas have nearly captured an entire political party. And while the future is unwritten, the events of the past month make me worry that we're following a script the climax of which requires a disaster.