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The rise of Britain's new nanny state

The Economist, 10 October 2023

Protecting the state from the people rather than people from themselves

Nothing annoys a certain type of Briton more than the government standing between him and a painful death. The phrase "nanny state" first appeared with the introduction of a 70mph speed limit on England's motorways in 1965. Iain Macleod, a former Conservative minister who invented the term, lampooned the transport minister responsible in the Spectator: "Why doesn't he follow his own logic and…go back to where we started with a 5 m.p.h. limit and the man with the red flag?"

Macleod would not have enjoyed this year's party-conference season. Nanny has been busy. The Conservative government plans to make it illegal for anyone born after 2009 to buy tobacco, in a policy proposed on an apparent whim by Rishi Sunak, the increasingly presidential prime minister. There is no opposition. "It's a good New Zealand Labour policy, which I was planning to steal," says Wes Streeting, Labour's shadow health secretary. Nor did nanny stop there. Labour wants three- to five-year-olds to have tooth-brushing lessons. Under a Labour government, a crackdown on vaping is coming, with bans on some flavours and rules on advertising likely. Although a proposed junk-food advertising ban has been pushed back by the Tories, it will be enthusiastically approved by a future Labour government. Outside Westminster, people want to go further. Sir Tony Blair's well-funded think-tank, which has the ear of Labour's leaders, lobbies loud and hard for a tax on junk food itself. In a political pincer movement, so does George Osborne, a former Conservative chancellor.

What has changed since Macleod's day is that politicians now see the nanny state as a necessity, rather than a nice-to-have. The old nanny state was paternalistic, protecting people from themselves. In the new nanny state, policy is aimed at protecting the state from the people. Cigarettes are to be banned because smokers heap pressure on the nhs, says Mr Sunak. Toddler teeth must be brushed because tooth decay can land children in hospital, which costs taxpayers money, says Mr Streeting. "You can't run a modern health-care system where people are going to live much longer unless they take some responsibility," says Sir Tony. This is a mentality best exemplified by a sign spotted in Devon: "Cyclists. Exton Village. NOT Racetrack. For nhs sake. Slow down!" For politicians, the new nanny state still retains all its old attractions. Governing is often hard. Railways come in late and over budget; pandemics and wars disrupt plans. In contrast, banning things is easy. A single piece of legislation can sweep a product from shelves or whack up the price of an unhealthy snack. It is also cheap. Neither party has much fiscal leeway. A policy with a low price tag is a valuable thing.

And whereas most politicians have to watch as successors unpick their hard work, bans are rarely undone. New Labour's public smoking ban was controversial when it was introduced in 2007. Sir Tony fretted that working-class voters would desert the party (he waited until he was almost out of office to introduce it). Although some MPs worried, the majority of voters supported it from the off. Banning cigarettes means Mr Sunak will have at least one lasting policy from his (probably brief) tenure. This intoxicating mix of ease, price and instant legacy means even libertine politicians become statist in power. For years Boris Johnson, a former editor of the *Spectator*, took aim at the fusspot nature of New Labour. It was the inalienable right of an Englishman to stuff his face with chocolate, crisps and cheese if he so chose. "Face it: it's all your own fat fault", ran one of his columns in 2004. But once in power, it was Mr Johnson who pushed an anti-obesity scheme that would ban daytime advertising of junk food. Outside a few columnists and the occasional Tory MP, there are few libertarians in British politics.

Intrusion in one area can lead to intrusion elsewhere. Despite the wishes of Sir Tony and many public-health academics, neither party will touch junk-food taxes while inflation remains high. Whether that will hold once inflation is tamed is another matter. Steep taxes on unhealthy food appear reasonable when compared with, say, straight prohibition of tobacco. And although few lobby for an outright ban on certain foods now, not many were pushing for a ban on cigarette sales until recently.

A spoonful of sugar? Help the waiting list go down!

Expectations of the state have increased dramatically since 2020. It is not enough for it to fend off invaders and protect personal property. Nor is the post-war welfare state, with health care and welfare on tap, sufficient. Both parties now pledge comprehensive free child care. Each promises to protect elderly voters from the cost of social care. Voters benefited from gigantic energy subsidies when gas prices shot up in 2022. Theresa May, a former prime minister, once complained that voters think their own rainy-day funds must not be touched, even on rainy days. Whatever the problem, she despaired, voters now expect the state to step in. […]

The Potency of Trump's 'Lost Cause' Mythmaking

The New York Times, 20 March 2024

At an Ohio rally this month, Donald Trump saluted the insurrectionists who stormed the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, calling them "unbelievable patriots" and referring to those who've been locked up for their involvement on that terrible day as "hostages." This was a continuation of Trump's "Lost Cause" mythmaking that began during his successful presidential campaign in 2016 and was ramped up in service of his efforts to remain in power despite his 2020 loss and the deadly riot that those efforts stoked. More than 1,200 people have been charged related to Jan. 6. And though it shouldn't have to be said, let's be clear: Those who've been tried, convicted and imprisoned for storming the Capitol aren't hostages, they're criminals.

But Lost Cause narratives aren't about truth. They're about negating the truth.

Which is what happened when the Lost Cause mythology was constructed after the Civil War. The cause of the war was framed as "Northern aggression" rather than slavery. A lore about happy slaves and benevolent enslavers proliferated. The narrative valorized those who seceded from and fought against the United States. And it has survived to some degree for over 150 years, tucked into the cracks of our body politic. It still surfaces in ways that may seem remote from the Confederate Lost Cause myth, but that definitely promote it.

It manifested itself last year when Florida changed its African American history standards to say that the enslaved "in some instances" benefited from their enslavement, and in Nikki Haley's hesitance on the campaign trail to state the obvious, that slavery was the cause of the Civil War. It manifested itself in the infamous torchlight march in Charlottesville and in the bitter resistance to removing Confederate monuments. Trump has his own version of the Lost Cause, one that's not completely untethered from the old one, but one that's miniaturized, personal and petty.

The Confederate Lost Cause narrative came after enormous loss: Hundreds of thousands of soldiers had died, the South was decimated and its economy was hobbled. Trump's Lost Cause, on the other hand, is about the grievances he promotes, his inability to accept losing to Joe Biden and his utter disregard for democratic norms. Trump's version grows out of a more recent vintage of the Lost Cause narrative, one that has been around at least since George Wallace's first presidential campaign in the 1960s. One in which a sense of displacement and dispossession is driven by a lost cultural advantage.

David Goldfield, a historian at the University of North Carolina Charlotte and the author of "Still Fighting the Civil War: The American South and Southern History," told me that many of Trump's supporters feel that they've lost something similar to what white Southerners felt they had lost after the Civil War: "They were no longer relevant. They were no longer listened to. And on top of that, there were lots of other voices that were in play in public that were not there before."

The Pulitzer Prize-winning Yale historian David Blight, who has written on several occasions about Trump's Lost Cause, told me that Trump's iteration has all the necessary elements: a story of loss, culprits, ready-made villains and "an enormous narrative of grievance."As Blight explained, Trump "feeds on this imagined tale of what could have been, should have been, might have been and once again can be retrieved; the glory can be retrieved."

And Trump invokes his Lost Cause in combination with another false telling, one of unprecedented happiness and unity — in which all the glory belongs to him. As he told a crowd at Mar-a-Lago on Super Tuesday, "African American, Asian American, Hispanic American, women, men, people with diplomas from the best schools in the world and people that didn't graduate from high school, every single group was doing better than ever before." He continued, "Our country was coming together." What he ignores is that his presidency began with the Women's March, the day after his inauguration, and ended not long after the 2020 summer of protests, driven by outrage over the murder of George Floyd. Trump didn't bring the country together; he tore it further apart.

Unlike previous Lost Cause appeals, Trump's has the advantage of a modern communications environment: 24-hour cable news, an internet replete with partisan news sites and social media — an octopean virtual world that reaches deep into the darkest places of our politics. And Trump's appeal is getting a do-over, a chance not to simply recast history — to win the narrative — but to win the actual contest and convert an electoral loss into an electoral victory.

In this election, disciples of the MAGA movement not only have an opportunity to enshrine Trump's fallacies. MAGA also might rise again.

Claudine Gay: What Just Happened at Harvard Is Bigger Than Me

Claudine Gay, *The New York Times*, Jan 3 2024

Dr. Gay is a former president of Harvard University, where she is a professor of government and of African and African American studies.

On Tuesday, I made the wrenching but necessary decision to resign as Harvard's president. For weeks, both I and the institution to which I've devoted my professional life have been under attack. My character and intelligence have been impugned. My commitment to fighting antisemitism has been questioned. My inbox has been flooded with invective, including death threats. I've been called the N-word more times than I care to count.

My hope is that by stepping down I will deny demagogues the opportunity to further weaponize my presidency in their campaign to undermine the ideals animating Harvard since its founding: excellence, openness, independence, truth.

As I depart, I must offer a few words of warning. The campaign against me was about more than one university and one leader. This was merely a single skirmish in a broader war to unravel public faith in pillars of American society. Campaigns of this kind often start with attacks on education and expertise, because these are the tools that best equip communities to see through propaganda. But such campaigns don't end there. Trusted institutions of all types — from public health agencies to news organizations — will continue to fall victim to coordinated attempts to undermine their legitimacy and ruin their leaders' credibility. For the opportunists driving cynicism about our institutions, no single victory or toppled leader exhausts their zeal.

Yes, I made mistakes. In my initial response to the atrocities of Oct. 7, I should have stated more forcefully what all people of good conscience know: Hamas is a terrorist organization that seeks to eradicate the Jewish state. And at a congressional hearing last month, I fell into a well-laid trap. I neglected to clearly articulate that calls for the genocide of Jewish people are abhorrent and unacceptable and that I would use every tool at my disposal to protect students from that kind of hate.

Most recently, the attacks have focused on my scholarship. (…) Despite the obsessive scrutiny of my peer-reviewed writings, few have commented on the substance of my scholarship, which focuses on the significance of minority office holding in American politics. My research marshaled concrete evidence to show that when historically marginalized communities gain a meaningful voice in the halls of power, it signals an open door where before many saw only barriers. And that, in turn, strengthens our democracy.

Throughout this work, I asked questions that had not been asked, used then-cutting-edge quantitative research methods and established a new understanding of representation in American politics. This work was published in the nation's top political science journals and spawned important research by other scholars.

Never did I imagine needing to defend decades-old and broadly respected research, but the past several weeks have laid waste to truth. Those who had relentlessly campaigned to oust me since the fall often trafficked in lies and ad hominem insults, not reasoned argument. They recycled tired racial stereotypes about Black talent and temperament. They pushed a false narrative of indifference and incompetence.

It is not lost on me that I make an ideal canvas for projecting every anxiety about the generational and demographic changes unfolding on American campuses: a Black woman selected to lead a storied institution. Someone who views diversity as a source of institutional strength and dynamism. Someone who has advocated a modern curriculum that spans from the frontier of quantum science to the long-neglected history of Asian Americans. Someone who believes that a daughter of Haitian immigrants has something to offer to the nation's oldest university.

Having now seen how quickly the truth can become a casualty amid controversy, I'd urge a broader caution: At tense moments, every one of us must be more skeptical than ever of the loudest and most extreme voices in our culture, however well organized or well connected they might be. Too often they are pursuing self-serving agendas that should be met with more questions and less credulity.

College campuses in our country must remain places where students can learn, share and grow together, not spaces where proxy battles and political grandstanding take root. Universities must remain independent venues where courage and reason unite to advance truth, no matter what forces set against them.

True identity is the key to resisting propaganda

Blaze Media, 24 May 2024

With the relentless demand for reparations, land acknowledgements, and gender-fluid pronouns, it can be easy to understand why conservatives are burned out on the concept of identity. The left has used identity politics as a weapon to mercilessly bludgeon foes and extract material and political capital that are then used to bribe the client classes of the Democrat Party. This progressive obsession with an artificial and hollow collectivism can easily drive the right to assume that radical individualism is the only answer, but that would be a mistake. The lack of a true, organic, and meaningful identity lies at the heart of our nation's ills, and to fight back, we must understand the role identity plays in creating a healthy and prosperous social order. Human beings are more clearly defined by their limitations than by their freedoms, and it is in the limitations of our identities that we find true meaning.

While modern Western culture is obsessed with the notion of individuals choosing their own identity, it is important to recognize that none of us construct ourselves from the ground up. All of us are born into families and communities that serve as the substrate from which our individual person arises. Identity is never formed in a vacuum; we define ourselves by our relationship to others and our place in broader society. Father, son, mother, daughter, elder, child: These are our most fundamental identities and the ones that will inform all other relationships we encounter.

These organic familial structures also introduce us to key formative concepts that shape our world, like language, religion, tradition, and custom. These concepts give us a sure footing and help us to understand how we should order our lives, how we should treat others, and what common moral vision guides our community. Most people do not deeply interrogate these beliefs because they form the bedrock of the social order. These unquestioned axioms serve as pillars of identity that hold the broader civilization aloft and help it to maintain its particular character. To be a member of one culture is to be defined by the pillars of identity that set your way of being apart from the many other societies across the world.

Human beings are more clearly defined by their limitations than by their freedoms, and it is in the limitations of our identities that we find true meaning. The spirit of the strong, independent individual is burned deep into the Americans psyche. The courageous pioneer carving out a new piece of civilization on the Western frontier remains the ultimate American archetype, even after all those lands have long been settled. But what we often forget about those brave frontiersmen is that their ultimate goal was to bring civilization, to create a community where none existed before.

The first structures built to mark the transition from trading post to frontier town were the church, courthouse, and schoolhouse. Even the most rugged individuals knew from their own cultural upbringing that religion, education, and law were fundamental to the continuation of the way of life they held dear. Conservatives are often blown away by the speed at which culture now shifts. New ideological trends seem to burst forth from nowhere, dominate our society, and then recede as quickly as they emerge.

Parents watch their children adopt alien forms of speech and dress, chanting strange slogans and spouting ideological pronouncements with no connection to reality. The constant drip of social media, state education, and algorithmically curated entertainment has the capacity to create entire social movements seemingly out of thin air. These social movements often present themselves as forms of identity. Transgenderism, arcane sexualities, and protest movements all become costumes that young people try on and wear for a time before discarding them and consuming the next round of memetic contagions. […]

In the preamble to the Constitution, the founders remind us that the United States is not just a vision for the current generation but a heritage to be handed down to our posterity. If conservatives want to fight back against the putrid identity politics of the left, they must instill the organic identity that the founders relied on to make America great: the Christian faith, the regional traditions that came predominately from Europe before taking on a distinctly American flavor, and the voluntary communal associations that defined so much of day-to-day life. This also means taking back the responsibility to educate our children and carefully select the media we consume. We cannot hand the minds of the next generation over to those who seek to destroy us and expect them to be returned intact.

In a sea of ideological propaganda and social conditioning, only the organic network of faith, family, tradition, and duty can bind against the raging tides. In the battle against identity politics and social programming, the answer is not radical atomization of the individual, but the healthy and powerful identity that our founding fathers promised as the birthright of this great nation.

Scotland's spring of discontent

The New Statesman, 24 April 2024

Doubts are growing over Humza Yousaf's leadership of the SNP. Will he be ousted before the next Holyrood election in 2026?

Next month marks 17 years since the Scottish National Party's first Scottish Parliament election victory. The result was the beginning of a remarkable period of political hegemony. Few parties in the Western world can match its record of four consecutive victories – one that would have astonished the founding fathers of devolution.

But for the SNP, there is little cause for celebration. Its opinion poll ratings have plummeted, its former chief executive Peter Murrell has been charged with embezzlement and its power-sharing agreement with the Greens is close to collapse. The political tensions and contradictions that First Minister Humza Yousaf sought to contain have erupted iwnto the open.

On 19 April, the Scottish Greens announced that they would hold a vote on the future of the Bute House Agreement, which was signed in 2021 and led to Green ministers holding office. The trigger was the administration's decision to abandon its unfeasible pledge to cut carbon emissions by 75 per cent by 2030. Other policy disagreements include the pause in the use of puberty blockers at Scotland's only gender clinic and the freeze in council tax.

The Bute House Agreement has served as a proxy for the wider struggle over the SNP's future. In an interview with the New Statesman last December, Kate Forbes, who narrowly lost to Yousaf by 52 per cent to 48 per cent in the 2023 leadership contest, called for the agreement to be repealed. "We were elected on a SNP manifesto, not a Green Party manifesto or the Bute House Agreement," Forbes said. She dislikes the ultra-progressivism of the Greens. "Nearly all the issues that have lost us support in the last year are found in the Bute House Agreement and not in the SNP manifesto."

The SNP has long been an umbrella under which different political interests and factions have sheltered: socialists, liberals, conservatives. All have been united by the overriding aim of Scottish independence. But the Greens have upset this delicate balance. Ms Forbes cited their desire to "overregulate rural communities" and to "hike taxes to a rate that will ultimately reduce public revenue" as issues that had cost the government support. (All those earning over £28,000 pay more tax in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK.).

The Greens' absolutist position on transgender rights has alienated another crucial section of the SNP coalition. They championed the doomed Gender Recognition Reform Bill and have refused to accept the recommendations of the evidence-based Cass Review into children's gender care.

Rather than allowing the Scottish Greens to take the initiative, Mr Yousaf should salvage some dignity and end the agreement himself. He should further repeal the new hate crime law, which threatens free expression and betrays the liberal ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment.

As the former first minister Nicola Sturgeon writes in her piece on Salman Rushdie on page 30, "Rushdie argues that the abandonment by progressive forces of the right of individual free speech in favour of the protection of the sensibilities of vulnerable groups has allowed its weaponisation by the far right – it has become 'a kind of freedom for bigotry'. In the midst of our modern-day debates about the rights and limits of free speech, we should pay attention to his words."

But Mr Yousaf, whose approval rating has fallen to minus 32, is not a nimble politician. "I really, really value the Bute House Agreement," he said after the Greens' announcement of an emergency vote.

As internal discontent with Mr Yousaf's leadership grows, the question is whether he will be ousted before the next Holyrood election in 2026. Scottish Labour, which once appeared politically moribund, is now tied with the SNP in Westminster polling and will aim to recapture Bute House.

But unionists should not draw false comfort from the SNP's struggles. In spite of the party's malaise, support for Scottish independence has remained largely consistent (at around 44 per cent). There is no prospect of a return to the pre-2014 referendum status quo.

Antipathy towards the SNP does not amount to a Westminster endorsement. As Labour seeks to repair the fragile Union, it must remember this lesson above all.

Peers know the Rwanda bill is flawed and dangerous. We must use every power to oppose it

The Guardian, 14 April 2024, Simon McDonald [Lord McDonald of Salford was permanent secretary at the Foreign Office, 2015-2020, and is now a crossbench peer]

So far this year, the House of Lords has debated the safety of Rwanda bill for more than 40 hours. Immediately before Easter, the Lords passed a second set of seven amendments and returned the bill to the Commons (which had earlier rejected the first set of 10 amendments). The Commons will consider those amendments when parliament returns from its Easter recess tomorrow. The debate in the Lords has highlighted the fundamental flaws of the legislation, legally and constitutionally. But the government believes that "stopping the boats" is important enough to override the UK's traditional respect for human rights; it argues that the scheme will have such a powerful deterrent effect that potential asylum seekers won't cross the Channel.

Deterrence works in one of two ways. The more powerful is the certainty of unpleasant consequences when you do something. The UK-Albania communique, signed in December 2022, falls into that category. Albanians who claim asylum in the UK now know that they will be returned to Albania; they have substantially stopped coming.

Being uncertain that unpleasant consequences will not follow exerts a less powerful but sometimes still effective deterrent effect. The government hopes the Rwanda scheme falls into this category. And yet debate has revealed facts that undermine their case. First, the Home Office minister, Lord Sharpe, revealed that about 55,000 asylum applications were lodged in the last nine months of 2023. Second, ministers failed to deny reports that Rwanda has agreed to take just 300 refugees in the first three years of the scheme's operation. So, a refugee's chances of deportation are minimal. Very few potential asylum seekers would be deterred by such odds, having already journeyed thousands of miles and overcome numerous challenges.

The scheme would also be astronomically expensive: the National Audit Office puts the costs at £541m. The cost for each refugee sent to Rwanda would be about £1.8m over three years. As Lord Carlile has observed, it would be cheaper to put them up at the Ritz.

For this doomed venture, the government is asking parliament to pass legislation that is extraordinary in two ways. First, the bill declares as a fact that Rwanda is safe enough to provide shelter for vulnerable people fleeing persecution in their home countries. It is true that Rwanda has seen astonishing progress since the genocide that began 30 years ago this month. But it is not safe. President Kagame does not tolerate dissent. And the best our government can manage when challenged over the treatment of the LGBTQ+ community is that Rwanda does better than its neighbours, some of the world's most notoriously hostile countries towards LGBTQ+ people. Rwanda is also embroiled in the civil war in eastern Congo; no one in Kinshasa considers Rwanda a safe country to do business with. […] From time to time, governments set out controversial facts in legislation. To date, it has been possible to test such facts in court; that happened, for example, with the Asylum and Immigration Act (2004) when the courts upheld the government's view that Rwanda could be considered a "safe third country".

This time is different. The courts will be told unequivocally that they cannot question the government's view. This is unusual but not unprecedented. Lord Hoffmann reminded the Lords of the last such case, the Acte for Poysoning (1531). Henry VIII had a pathological fear of poisoning. Originally the bill had two provisions: to treat all cases of poisoning as treason and to stipulate death by boiling for anyone found guilty. At the last minute, he added a third clause, after two people died following a dinner party given by the bishop of Rochester in February 1531. The bill found Richard Roose, the cook, guilty of poisoning. Royal assent was given on 31 March and Roose boiled to death on 15 April. Even at the time, parliamentarians were uneasy; the act was used in only one other case before its repeal in the first year of the reign of Henry's successor. But the stain on the country's reputation is remembered 493 years later. The government wants to repeat Henry's error.

Hypocrisy is the worst failing of diplomats. Throughout my career in the Foreign Office, British diplomats used to lobby governments about the importance of the rule of law, respect for the independence of the courts, and the balance of power between different branches of government. With this act, the UK undermines the case we have traditionally made. Labour has undertaken to repeal the act should it be elected, but the damage will have been done. Last month, the president of the European court of human rights said the behaviour of three European countries was causing her concern: Russia, Turkey and the United Kingdom. That's not a club the UK should belong to.

A mug's game: the politics of Rishi Sunak's crockery choices

The Guardian, 26 April 2024

Patriotic teaware was on show from the prime minister this week – the latest round of his mug-based messaging.

Rishi Sunak appeared on his Instagram feed on Tuesday morning holding a mug emblazoned with the St George's flag. "Perfect way to start the day," was the caption: "Happy St George's Day!" It is not the only time the prime minister has raised a symbolic piece of teaware. On the same day he appeared *en route* to Warsaw holding a white mug marked only with the number "10", presumably a reference to his current home address. Last year one enveloped in a union jack print was his choice for a trip to a Nato summit in Lithuania. Personal branding clearly pays no mind to international airspace. On other occasions, Sunak has been photographed with a gamut of branded company mugs, from a Selco one on a visit to a builders' warehouse in London to a National Gas mug on a visit to the Bacton terminals in Norfolk.

What is Sunak saying with these mugs? Because even on site visits, it is a deliberate choice to leave in frame a hot drink receptacle. "There is an imperative to signal that he is somewhat normal," says the political journalist, and political mug collector, Stephen Bush, whose most recent acquisition was the "In Liz we Truss" mug that remained very much in stock at the end of the Tory party conference in 2022. "He's signalling he's an everyday person by doing something people do every day." Mugs are also, says Bush, a relatively low-key way of signalling patriotism where an outright flag "would be quite try-hard". "They're a good way of being like: 'Oh yeah, look, I'm a normal guy. I love this country. Look at me drinking from my normal guy cup.'"

Sunak's mugs have shifted tone. Last year the half-pint mug on his desk, alongside a celebratory slice of cake to mark one year in office, depicted five interlocked red Labradors; the work of the squarely middle-class brand Emma Bridgewater. As chancellor in 2020 it was a tech-bro-ish £180 smart mug that can set an exact drinking temperature. Bush thinks he is now trying to signal he is both more "everyman" and, "crucially, more manly". His newer mugs are perhaps the crockery equivalent of the Timberland boots he wore to call for small-boat crossings of the Channel to be stopped.

He wasn't the first politician to mobilise teaware. Tony Blair was regularly pictured with a mug, using his casual appearance sipping from it to semaphore the sort of modernising tendencies upon which New Labour set out its stall. Bush notes that before the Blair years, in pictures of politicians meeting in Downing Street, everyone would be using cups and saucers. The mug, he says, was "part of a visual language of early New Labour … we're modern and we're different".

And mugs have long been the site of political slogans and campaigning – almost everyone uses them and it's a low-stakes way of signalling allegiance. That doesn't mean they always hit the mark. In 2015, Ed Miliband's Labour released one promising "Controls on immigration", which Bush wrote was "condemned as unspeakably naff at best and outright racist at worst". He collected it as a "great physical reminder of the problems of that election campaign".

For most British politicians, the idea that even their most ardent supporters would wear a T-shirt declaring that support is a pipe dream – "Tony Blair in 1999 is maybe the last time that you might have been able to wear a T-shirt with a British politician on it without a derogatory slogan and still pull," says Bush – a mug is a less full-throated mouthpiece. Boris Johnson is one former prime minister who knows what's at stake with the wrong mug, having had a single-use plastic one snatched out of his hand by an aide worried about the optics at the Tory party conference in 2019. Michael Gove finally switched to reusables for his walks into Downing Street in 2019, remarkably late for a then-environment secretary supposedly waging war on plastic.

In most cases it is impossible to tell what Sunak's mug holds, unless he helpfully captions it, as he did on a trip to meet Ben Bradley MP in November last year, saying: "Met up for a cuppa in Worksop yesterday. We both agree that when the East Midlands succeeds, the whole country succeeds". Tea feels like a safe assumption.

"Tea itself carries a message of bringing people together, calming everybody down," says the tea expert Jane Pettigrew, who points out that it contains L-theanine, "an amino acid, which actually calms us and de-stresses us". It is "very much a drink of the people" and, with an election on the horizon," she says, "he's trying to win the public vote".

How could Sunak better leverage the power of the mug to win the heart of the nation? Considering the polls, Bush thinks he would be better off going back to Emma Bridgewater, instead of "trying to convince us all that he's like some kind of gritty man of the people who uses the word 'cuppa'".

Zombie anti-abortion laws are menacing American women

The Hill, 17 April 2024

The Arizona Supreme Court issued a shocking ruling last week that revived a moribund state law from 1864 that banned abortions unless necessary to save the life of the mother. That statute, which carries up to five years in prison for violations by both doctors and patients, is now the law of the land in Arizona. Especially stunning is that the court simultaneously invalidated a 2022 law that protected abortion access in Arizona until 15 weeks of pregnancy (or later in the event of a medical emergency).

Yet the 4-2 Arizona Supreme Court majority can hardly be blamed for picking the old law over the new one — it was merely following the directives laid out by the U.S. Supreme Court. The manner in which Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization killed Roe v. Wade means that, when it comes to abortion, the law — along with the tens of millions of American women and girls who are capable of becoming pregnant — will continue to be hijacked back to a time where women had few, if any, meaningful rights.

The irony here is twofold. The first is that the Texas law originally struck down in Roe banned abortions except to save the life of the mother. What Roe deemed unconstitutional is now the law again, this time in Arizona. The second irony is that the Dobbs majority, in an opinion authored by Justice Samuel Alito, specifically ruled that "we … return the power" over how abortion may be regulated by the states "to the people and their elected representatives." "Our decision returns the issue of abortion to those legislative bodies," he further explained, "and it allows women on both sides of the abortion issue to seek to affect the legislative process by influencing public opinion, lobbying legislators, voting, and running for office. Women are not without electoral or political power."

But here's the thing: In 1864, not only was slavery still legal in many parts of America, but women could not vote anywhere, including in Arizona — which was not even a state yet. Women could not legally vote until the 19th Amendment gave them that right in 1920. They could — and did — vote in 2022, yet those votes were rendered meaningless by the Arizona decision, which nullified them in favor of those cast by a class of white men 160 years prior. Back then, those were the only people eligible to resolve "the basic legality of pre-viability abortions for all 330 Americans" through "their representatives in the democratic process in the States or Congress," to borrow from Justice Brett Kavanaugh in his concurring Dobbs opinion.

The Arizona Supreme Court said it preferred the old law to the new one because of Dobbs: "In June 2022, the Supreme Court overturned Roe, thereby eliminating the federal constitutional right to abortion and returning 'the authority to regulate abortion … to the people and their elected representatives.'" Because Dobbs intervened, the court essentially reasoned, the newer law from 2022 is now obsolete.

The Arizona court followed Dobbs's lead in other ways. In that case, the Supreme Court majority unveiled a revised test for determining whether fundamental rights that are not specifically enumerated in the Constitution nonetheless exist: history and tradition. Because "abortion was criminal in at least some stages of pregnancy and was regarded as unlawful" around the time the 14th Amendment was ratified, Alito reasoned, under the history-and-tradition test, it enjoys no constitutional protection against government control now.

Inexplicably, Alito traveled as far back as 13th-century England to dispel the existence of abortion rights, citing a legal treatise by the English judge Henry de Bracton, who died in 1268. That's 600 years before the 14th Amendment — which Roe v. Wade interpreted to protect a woman's right to decide for herself without governmental coercion or punishment whether and when to have children — was even ratified. Against that backdrop, the Arizona Supreme Court's focus on a law enacted shortly before the post–Civil War amendments, which included the 14th, seems downright modern.

But there's more. The primary flaw in Alito's reasoning was his utter disregard for the interests of women in the face of governmental intervention in family planning decisions. A rights-based legal question under the 14th Amendment's Due Process or Equal Protection clauses typically identifies both sides of a scale — the individual's interest on one side, and the government's regulatory interest on the other — and then balances them. Roe and the cases that came after it gave weight to the woman's side of things. Alito ignored that altogether, introducing in its place the interests of "fetal life," which the Mississippi law that Dobbs upheld called an "unborn human being."

Justice Stephen Breyer's dissenting opinion, which was joined by Justice Sonia Sotomayor and Justice Elena Kagan, stated that the court "says that from the very moment of fertilization, a woman has no rights to speak of." By taking women back to a time when they had no rights to speak of, the Arizona Supreme Court conformed to this aspect of the Dobbs decision, too. […]

Today's Teenagers: Anxious About Their Futures and Disillusioned by Politicians

More than previous generations, they are concerned about their mental health and educational prospects, new surveys show.

Claire Cain Miller, *the New York Times* Jan. 29, 2024

Although it has never been easy to be a teenager, the current generation of young Americans feels particularly apprehensive, new polling shows — anxious about their lives, disillusioned about the direction of the country and pessimistic about their futures.

Just one-third of respondents ages 12 to 17 said things were going well for children and teenagers today, in a survey published Monday by Common Sense Media, a children's advocacy group. Less than half said they thought they would be better off than their parents when they grew up — a downbeat view shared among teenagers in many rich countries, other data shows.

It's not just about teenage angst. A different survey, by Gallup and the Walton Family Foundation, the latest installment of which was also released Monday, has asked questions of young people over time and looked at how their answers have changed. Members of Gen Z, ages 12 to 27, are significantly less l,ikely to rate their current and future lives highly than millennials were when they were the same age, it found. Among those 18 to 26, just 15 percent said their mental health was excellent. That is a large decline from both 2013 and 2003, when just over half said so.

Together, the surveys offer an unusually detailed look at the perspectives of teenagers, who are rarely surveyed in high-quality polls.

"The data is pretty stark: Our kids are not all right," said James P. Steyer, founder and chief executive of Common Sense Media.

These impressions among young people could be contributing to a challenge for the presidential campaigns with the country's newest eligible voters: Youth turnout and engagement, which helped President Biden in particular in 2020, appear to be down.

"For young people, the options that have been available to you your entire lifetime have been either Trump or Biden," said Kristen Soltis Anderson, a founding partner of Echelon Insights, a Republican polling firm, and one of the pollsters who conducted the Common Sense Media survey. "You may be looking at that and saying, 'No thanks.'"

It's not that soon-to-be voters are apathetic about public policy — this generation tends to be passionate about issues including climate change, abortion and the war in the Middle East, pollsters said. But in the Common Sense Media survey, nearly two-thirds of respondents 12 to 17 said politicians and elected officials did not reflect the needs and experiences of young people. Boys and white respondents were slightly more likely to say so. Only 7 percent of teenagers said politicians represented young people very well.

"Young voters, while they're very issue oriented, they're not specifically tied to either party and they think the entire political system is failing," said Celinda Lake, president of Lake Research Partners, a Democratic polling firm, and another pollster behind the new survey.

An issue of prime importance to teenagers across surveys is education. Asked an open-ended question by Common Sense about the most important thing that could be done to improve the lives of children, a plurality, one in five, said improving or reforming the education system. More than half of teenagers said public K-12 schools were doing a fair or poor job. Just 8 percent said they were doing an excellent job. Sixty percent said pandemic learning loss was a problem. Margaret Spellings, the chief executive of the Bipartisan Policy Center and a secretary of education under President George W. Bush, said teenagers are "absolutely right." (…)

A related issue was mental health. In the Common Sense survey, 65 percent said the mental health of children and teenagers in their community was poor or fair. Girls were more likely than boys to say so. The responses were largely consistent across race.Young people have more awareness of mental health issues today, and face less stigma in talking about it. Their concern is reflected in increasing hospitalization and suicide rates.

Other measures of well-being and ambition have declined slightly. Compared with millennials when they were that age, children 13 to 17 are a bit less likely to say that they have a friend they can confide in, that they exercise regularly or that they plan to attend college, Gallup found.

A major driver of the mental health crisis, said Dr. Matthew Biel, the chief of the division of child and adolescent psychiatry at Georgetown University Hospital, is “the digitization of our lives, and social media in particular.”

Together, Ms. Lake said, the surveys suggest that the causes of teenagers’ pessimism — their concerns about politics, education, mental health, social media and their financial futures — are interrelated, a message she said she wants the politicians she serves to understand.

“Right now, if I said to clients that investing in kids is the No. 1 issue, they would say, ‘No, the economy is No. 1,’” she said. “And what we would say to them is: You are missing what people want in this economy. Investment in children is central to the economy, both to young people and to adults.”

Pay attention: Britain did not get rich from slavery

The Times, 5 May 2024

A few years ago a minicab driver hailing from somewhere arid, benighted and aggressive informed me that the English were the most wicked people on God's earth because we had invented slavery. Intrigued, I asked him when we had done this and he replied, "A few hundred years ago." I wondered for a moment if he meant that we had invented cutlery, and had used "wicked" in its modern, counterintuitive sense. But I don't think that was the case. He sat there, hands gripping the steering wheel too tightly, in a miasma of infuriated stupidity.

"Quite ingenious of us, though, you must admit," I said to him. "Imagine how powerful the Roman empire might have become if it'd thought of using slaves. Not to mention the Egyptians, the Ottomans and the Umayyads. Bet they're absolutely kicking themselves." I half thought of saying, when he asked for a tip, "Yeah, here's one — don't diss your customers, you halfwit. Also, those red lights on poles are not generally intended as an injunction for drivers to speed up." But he was bigger than me so I gave him two quid instead.

I suspect an awful lot of people share my driver's berserk conviction about slavery, probably including several million young British people. It is one of those easily disprovable lies that, having been granted official sanction, have become a modern truth. That we were the first country to abolish slavery, that we exploited slaves for only a couple of hundred years or so and were preceded in doing so by more civilisations than there is space here to record and that slavery continued unabated among Africans and Asians cuts no ice at all. It is preferable to believe that we were not merely wicked — which our involvement in slavery undoubtedly was — but uniquely wicked.

There are many other idiotic shibboleths about slavery that are similarly disprovable by empirical means, but to advance them risks bringing about a howl-round of wounded outrage and almost certainly a bellow of "white supremacist", if the person advancing the argument is white, or "Uncle Tom" if the person happens to be black. The reason these empirical arguments arouse such ire is simple. You start demolishing these lies, one by one, and the whole Jacob's ladder of acquired victimhood eventually collapses, taking a fraudulent, corrosive and divisive ideology with it. The greater the truth, the greater the fury in response to it.

So good luck to the historian Kristian Niemietz and the Institute of Economic Affairs for having ventured into this fraught territory with a book entitled *Imperial Measurement: A Cost-Benefit Analysis of Western Colonialism*. It is a fascinating exploration of the economics of colonialism, which, as Adam Smith pointed out as early as 1776, was of no great benefit to the British crown or its people: "Under the present system of management … Great Britain derives nothing but loss from the dominion which she assumes over her colonies."

Niemietz concludes that colonial trade contributed only a "small proportion" of Britain's economy — at its absolute zenith, between 7 and 15 per cent of our GDP — and that much of that trade might have occurred anyway without the imposition of British rule. Slavery was even less lucrative for the nation as a whole. At its peak, the income from our sugar plantations contributed no more than 2.5 per cent to the economy of the UK — substantially less than that accrued from sheep farming, as Niemietz points out.

The notion, then, that our present comparative wealth is the direct consequence of thieving and oppressing, or enslaving, is utterly untrue. One might point to good governance, entrepreneurship, a rapid improvement in general education and literacy, the Protestant work ethic and a primacy placed upon inventiveness as being far, far more important to the success of our nation.

The trouble for Niemietz and the IEA is that, while his account is entirely factual, it will be ignored, because to engage with it is to risk the complete demolition of the victimhood argument. If we didn't make our wealth primarily by thieving from other countries, then why are we so well off? It gnaws away at the generally believed assumption that the poverty and chaos of much of Africa is a direct consequence of our imperial perfidy — an assumption easily refuted by examining the cases of Ethiopia and Liberia, two countries that were not formally colonised (Italy was driven out of Ethiopia after just five years) and that today face exactly the same problems as their neighbours, which were.

But this is the problem with an institutionally approved sense of resentment: it cannot be banished by truth, because the only truth is one's "lived experience", which is of course one of unrelieved subjugation.

Do you remember Lord Sewell's report of three years ago, which suggested there was little structural or institutional racism in the UK? Never heard of since. I fear Niemietz's excellent work will meet the same fate.

‘Chestfeeding’ to be banned in NHS crackdown

The Telegraph, 27 April 2024

The NHS is to crack down on transgender ideology in hospitals, with terms like “chestfeeding” set to be banned. Victoria Atkins, the Health Secretary, will this week announce a series of changes to the NHS constitution which sets out patients’ rights. Referring to “people who have ovaries” rather than “women” will also be prohibited under plans to ensure hospitals use clear language based on biological sex.

The new constitution will ban transgender women from being treated on single-sex female hospital wards to ensure women and girls receive “privacy and protection” in hospitals. Patients will also be given the right to request that intimate care is carried out by someone of the same biological sex. It follows concerns from patients about biological men being allowed in women’s hospital wards. NHS guidance has previously stated that trans patients could be placed in single-sex wards on the basis of the gender with which they identified.

Kemi Badenoch, the women and equalities minister, has backed calls for a public inquiry into the “pervasive influence” of transgender ideology in the NHS. The new NHS constitution will emphasise the importance of using “sex-specific” language in the health service after references to women were expunged from advice on the menopause and diseases such as cervical and ovarian cancer. “Our proposed updates to the NHS constitution will give patients the right to request same-sex intimate care and accommodation to protect their safety, privacy and dignity.”

The document sets out the rights of patients and medical staff. All NHS bodies, as well as private and third-sector providers that supply NHS services, are required by law to take it into account when making decisions. The changes proposed this week will be subject to an eight-week consultation. The updated constitution will state that placing transgender patients in single-room accommodation does not contravene equality laws as long as it is for an appropriate reason, such as respecting a patient’s wish to be in a single-sex ward.

Maya Forstater, chief executive of the campaign group Sex Matters, said the changes represent a “major step” towards reversing NHS England’s “capitulation to the demands of gender extremists, which has damaged policies and practices, created widespread confusion and harmed patient care”. She added: “These much-needed changes to the NHS constitution will help secure essential sex-based rights in healthcare across England.

“Clear language, single-sex wards and access to intimate care provided by a health professional of the same sex are crucial to the wellbeing and safety of female patients. They should never have been compromised.”

Last year a report by the think tank Policy Exchange said NHS trusts were compromising women’s rights by providing same-sex intimate care based not on their biological sex but their self-declared gender identity.

In 2021, Brighton and Sussex University Hospital became the first NHS trust in the country to formally implement a gender-inclusive language policy for its maternity services department – which will now be known as “perinatal services”.

Midwives have been advised to use gender-inclusive language and staff were provided with a list of alternative terms to use when addressing patients, including “mothers or birthing parents”, “breast/chestfeeding” and “maternal and parental” in all general communications. Instead of saying “breastmilk”, they can choose from “human milk” or “breast/chestmilk” or “milk from the feeding mother or parent”. There has been fierce debate around attempts to reduce the use of the word “woman” in discussions on subjects including pregnancy and childbirth, and any move to do so has provoked ire from some feminists. Author JK Rowling was vilified after she questioned a decision to use the term “people who menstruate” in a headline.

Earlier this month, a group of more than 130 MPs, peers, doctors, psychiatrists and academics wrote to the Prime Minister to demand a public inquiry into transgender ideology in schools and the NHS. They argued that the treatment of “confused and vulnerable” children by medical professionals has been a “major scandal”.

It came after a report by Dr Hillary Cass, a leading paediatrician, which found that the evidence for allowing children and young people to change gender is built on “shaky foundations”. The landmark review said that social transitioning should be approached with “extreme caution” because “we simply do not know the long-term impacts”. In response, the NHS is to review all transgender treatment it provides, including to adults, and treatment for any new patients aged 16 and 17 seeking to change gender at adult clinics will be paused immediately.