

The Politicization of Everything

What do Anheuser-Busch InBev, Grubhub, New Balance, Kellogg's, and the HGTV show *Fixer Upper* have in common? On the surface, not a whole lot—except that, over the past several weeks, each one has been the subject of a political controversy.

On October 28th, *Adweek* [reported](#) that Anheuser-Busch InBev was ending its parodic “Bud Light Party” commercials “a little earlier than expected,” following a significant quarterly drop in Bud Light sales. Many of these commercials—which featured comic stars Amy Schumer and Seth Rogen—delivered liberal political messages on issues like same-sex marriage, gender identity, and the ([mostly mythical](#)) “wage gap,” all under the guise of spoofing 2016 election advertisements.

Shortly after the Bud Light ads got yanked, Donald Trump won the U.S. presidential election—and Grubhub CEO Matt Maloney responded by sending an [email](#) to employees that declared, “I absolutely reject the nationalist, anti-immigrant and hateful politics of Donald Trump and will work to shield our community from this movement as best as I can.” Maloney went a step further: “If you do not agree with this statement,” he wrote, “then please reply to this email with your resignation because you have no place here. We do not tolerate hateful attitudes on our team.”

In case you're wondering, Grubhub is not a left-wing magazine, think tank, or activist group. It's an online and mobile food-ordering service.

Around the same time that Maloney fired off his dyspeptic missive, New Balance spokesman Matthew LeBretton [told](#) the *Wall*

Street Journal that his company was encouraged by Trump's opposition to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal. Unlike its major competitors, New Balance manufactures its sneakers in the United States, and the company's leaders fear the TPP would make this business model harder to sustain. "The Obama administration turned a deaf ear to us," LeBretton told the *Journal*, "and frankly, with President-elect Trump, we feel things are going to move in the right direction."

His comments ignited a firestorm on social media, with many liberals posting photos and videos of their New Balance shoes being trashed or burned. "I back your stance on the TPP but to support a hate monger like Donald Trump is disheartening," one critic [wrote](#) on Instagram. "I believe I've bought my last pair." Another angry owner—or former owner—of New Balances dumped them in the garbage and [excoriated](#) the company "for publicly endorsing a racist, sexist, hate mongering President elect."

Then things really got batty, with a white-supremacist website [calling](#) New Balances "the official shoes of white people." As the craziness mounted, New Balance posted a [statement](#) online:

"New Balance does not tolerate bigotry or hate in any form. One of our officials was recently asked to comment on a trade policy that was taken out of context. As a 110-year old company with five factories in the U.S. and thousands of employees worldwide from all races, genders, cultures and sexual orientations, New Balance is a values-driven organization and culture that believes in humanity, integrity, community and mutual respect for people around the world. We have been and always will be

committed to manufacturing in the United States.”

More recently, Kellogg’s announced that it would no longer let its advertisements appear on the conservative website Breitbart News, pointing to its corporate “values” as the reason. “We regularly work with our media-buying partners to ensure our ads do not appear on sites that are not aligned with our values as a company,” Kellogg’s spokeswoman Kris Charles [explained](#) to the *Washington Post*. “We recently reviewed the list of sites where our ads can be placed and decided to discontinue advertising on Breitbart.com. We are working to remove our ads from that site.” According to the *Post*, the other U.S. companies now shunning Breitbart include Allstate, EarthLink, Nest, SoFi, and Warby Parker. (A number of prominent German companies, including BMW, have [done the same](#).)

Meanwhile, on November 29th, *BuzzFeed* correspondent Kate Aurthur published an [article](#) on Chip and Joanna Gaines, the husband-and-wife hosts of HGTV’s popular show *Fixer Upper*. Noting that the Gaineses attend Antioch Community Church in Waco, Texas, Aurthur informed readers that Antioch’s pastor is a staunch opponent of same-sex marriage. “So are the Gaineses against same-sex marriage?” she asked. “And would they ever feature a same-sex couple on the show, as have HGTV’s *House Hunters* and *Property Brothers*?” Aurthur did not answer these questions in her initial piece, because she published it without hearing back from the Gaineses’ PR representative or from HGTV.

A few days later, HGTV sent an [email](#) to *BuzzFeed* that said: “We don’t discriminate against members of the LGBT community in any of our shows. HGTV is proud to have a crystal clear,

consistent record of including people from all walks of life in its series.”

What’s the common theme that ties all these stories together? Simply put, liberals are finding it increasingly difficult to separate politics from . . . well, just about everything else.

Some of the examples cited above may seem trivial. Yet it was not trivial when, earlier this year, Bruce Springsteen [canceled a concert](#) in Greensboro to protest North Carolina’s transgender bathroom law, or when the National Basketball Association lodged its own protest of the law by [moving its 2017 All-Star Game](#) from Charlotte to New Orleans. And it certainly was not trivial when, in 2014, Brendan Eich was [forced to resign](#) as CEO of Mozilla merely because he had donated money to support a statewide ban on same-sex marriage in California.

If these trends continue, and the political sphere keeps engulfing more and more areas of American life, it will be harder to maintain the type of vibrant civil society that Alexis de Tocqueville [identified](#) as crucial to our democracy.

Just to be clear: The issue at stake is not whether, say, same-sex marriage is a good idea or a bad idea. For the record, I happen to favor same-sex marriage. So does writer Brandon Ambrosino; indeed, he is planning his own same-sex wedding right now. Yet Ambrosino also recognizes the troubling implications of what *BuzzFeed* and others are doing. Here’s what he [wrote](#) in the *Washington Post* in response to the article on Chip and Joanna Gaines:

The minds at BuzzFeed are not naive: They know that the Gaineses and HGTV are going to have to come out with a public statement on same-sex marriage. They

also know that if the statement is not 100 percent supportive of same-sex marriage, the network will be pressured to drop them.

Think about that for a moment. Is the suggestion here that 40 percent of Americans are unemployable because of their religious convictions on marriage? That the companies that employ them deserve to be boycotted until they yield to the other side of the debate—a side, we should note, that is only slightly larger than the one being shouted down?

The Left understands that winning ideological victories through cultural coercion is easier than winning through democratic persuasion. Put differently: It understands that delegitimizing people is the quickest way to nullify their arguments.

As Mark Steyn [noted](#) after the Kellogg's announcement regarding Breitbart: "The real target here is not Breitbart so much as the incoming President of the United States, who has appointed Breitbart honcho Steve Bannon as a senior counselor. The losing side in the election wants to 'de-normalize' Trump and his administration, by in effect de-legitimizing his voters and their electoral victory."

The irony, of course, is that liberals previously expressed fears that *Trump* would seek to delegitimize the election outcome. Instead, they are the ones ratcheting up America's political and cultural polarization in hopes of undermining the president-elect before he even takes office.

There's also a deeper irony: The same people who constantly extol the benefits of diversity are now demanding mass *conformity* on a growing number of public-policy issues. In that sense, they've become far more anti-intellectual than the Trump voters they love to scorn.

The scorn and derision backfired on November 8th, and the relentless politicization of everything will backfire too. Unfortunately, it's already done serious damage to America's civic health and social cohesion.

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