

Epitaph for a Dying Culture

The Kavanaugh confirmation hearings and their endless sequelae have ended up as an epitaph for a spent culture for which its remedies are felt to be worse than its diseases. Think 338 B.C., A.D. 476, 1453, or 1939.

The coordinated effort to destroy Brett Kavanaugh's nomination to the U.S. Supreme Court required the systematic refutation of the entire notion of Western jurisprudence by senators and much of the American legal establishment. And there was no hesitation in doing just that on the part of Senate Democrats, the #MeToo movement, and the press. And I write this at a moment in which conservatives and Republicans still control the majority of governorships, state legislatures, the U.S. Senate, the House of Representatives, the Supreme Court and the presidency—a reminder that culture so often is far more powerful than politics.

So, here we were to be left with a new legal and cultural standard in adjudicating future disagreements and disputes, an utterly anti-Western standard quite befitting for our new relativist age:

1. The veracity of accusations will hinge on the particular identity, emotions, and ideology of the accuser;
2. Evidence, or lack of it, will be tangential, given the supposed unimpeachable motives of the ideologically correct accuser;
3. The burden of proof and evidence will rest with the accused to disprove the preordained assumption of guilt;
4. Hearsay will be a valuable narrative and constitute legitimate evidence;
5. Truth is not universal, but individualized. Ford's "truth" is as valid as the "Truth," given that competing narratives are adjudicated only by access to power. Ford is a victim, therefore her truth trumps "their" truth

based on evidence and testimony.

6. Questionable and inconsistent testimony are proof of trauma and therefore exactitude; recalling an accusation to someone is proof that the action in the accusation took place.
7. Statutes of limitations do not exist; any allegation of decades prior is as valid as any in the present. All of us are subject at any moment to unsubstantiated accusations from decades past that will destroy lives.
8. Assertion of an alleged crime is unimpeachable proof. Recall of where, when, why, and how it took place is irrelevant.
9. Individual accusations will always be subservient to cosmic causes; individuals are irrelevant if they do not serve ideological aims. All accusations fit universal stereotypes whose rules of finding guilt or innocence trump those of individual cases.
10. The accuser establishes the conditions under which charges are investigated; the accused nods assent.

Our cultural traditions are being insidiously rewritten in this new Dark Age. We know now that Euripides's *Phaedra* should have been believed, as a female accuser of rape. Perhaps university presses can either reissue properly corrected editions or ban the *Hippolytus* entirely. No doubt we will ban Racine's *Phèdre* as well. Harper Lee's *Tom Robinson* deserved his fate because his female accuser should have been believed—and perhaps *To Kill a Mockingbird* should be rewritten as well. In our time, we have finally and only now belatedly realized that Tawana Brawley's voice was stifled.

History as Melodrama

In an iconoclastic age, when statues are toppled, and when street names at Stanford University are renamed (but, mysteriously, not the politically incorrect name Stanford itself), the past is captive to the present. Realities are erased according to current ideological agendas.

Our pastime is to blame those of the technologically backward and impoverished past. In most cases, they accomplished things that our present generation lacks the courage and resilience to do—whether navigating the Atlantic in a leaky boat without accurate navigation, homesteading on the prairie in an age without machines or modern medicine, or flying a B-17 without fighter escort over 1943 Germany. Is it our envy of their courage or own self-hatred for our manifest inferiority that forces us to judge figures of the past in our modern courts on the basis of their purported race, class, and gender crimes?

So, history has become melodrama, not tragedy. Figures of the past who were human and not perfect, and who prove, according to today's value systems, not good progressives are thus deserving of historical annihilation. The affluence and leisure of the present creates the luxury of such pampered intellectual indulgence in a way the existential crises of Civil War, the Great Depression, and World War II did not.

In our own age, the disproven but still legendary tales of "Hands Up, Don't Shoot," the Duke Lacrosse fantasies, the *Rolling Stone* folktales, or Lena Dunham's fictive memoir won out and became fact, inasmuch as such lies were not real lies given their service to progressive aims. And that is where we are now headed—the world of the Athenian popular court, the Inquisition, the Salem Witch Trials, the Star Chamber, the cycles of the French Revolution—except that in all those cases, reason and sanity eventually returned. Perhaps not now. We are entering a new Dark Ages.

If we to look to the universities for truth and courage we find increasingly medieval darkness, where in matters of alleged sexual harassment there is no due process for the accused.

Free speech on campus vanishes if minority views are dubbed "hate" speech or declared merely "hurtful."

There is little diversity of opinion and even less tolerance of any dissent from majority dogma. Obsequiousness so often is redefined as courage; real courage condemned as a crime against the people. Campus segregation becomes desirable, if privileged by “safe spaces.” Censorship is sensitivity and justified by “trigger warnings.” The apparent absence of bias becomes proof of bias if dubbed a “micro-aggression.” Racial discrimination in admissions affirms liberality.

The sensuality, personal indulgence, and even recklessness of the 1960s still continue, but become criminal, if *post facto*, one party finds his or her immoderation unfulfilling or in retrospect embarrassing. Woodstock is now married to the Victorian parlor, the common denominator for our self-absorbed generation seems to be to enjoy the refuge of shame and honor when gratification proves not gratifying.

Welcome to the Progressive Church

If we look to the media, there is an overarching dogma that governs the veracity of all other “truths.” “Fake News” is a misnomer, given that the general force of prejudicial media coverage is not just falsity, but the effort to substantiate progressive agendas.

The embryo of modern journalism is either progressive graduate schools or past progressive political campaigns and service, and so the media is an extension of the progressive movement. The trivial to the substantial are all invented to advance narratives, whether a greedy U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley’s supposedly ordering self-indulgent \$50,000 drapes or Mark Judge purportedly recalling, and thus *de facto* corroborating, Christine Blasey Ford’s accusations.

If we look to our brave, new technologies—social media, the Internet, the linked world of instant communication devices—they prove entirely missionary and ideological. Their reason to be is accelerating social and cultural change—albeit with the assumption that their the masters who run these

technologies assume that their own privilege and vast wealth have insulated themselves from any unwelcomed ramifications following from their own ideology and advocacy.

So everything from Facebook and Twitter censorship to politically recalibrating the order of Google searches serves the larger collective "good." Even ancient ideas of wealth and poverty fade before our current ideology. If riches are used for social change, even if cynically and for careerist and self-interested reasons, then how they were obtained or otherwise used is irrelevant; if not, then they are proof of greed in their acquisition. Multibillionaire George Soros might be a wanted felon in France or have attempted to break the Bank of England and thereby ruin small depositors. But his wealth is welcomed because he invests a small percentage of it in progressive causes and thereby purchases his own progressive insurance and protection. As did the Catholic Church in the Dark Ages of yore, the Progressive Church now sells indulgences.

If we look to consensual government for hope, we see instead the courts and the permanent administrative class more often as the new governance. Their directives are to obstruct or overturn residual popular forces of tradition and custom, whether that consists of overriding bothersome federal immigration law, or advancing states' rights ideas of nullification such as "sanctuary cities."

Few Escape Routes Left

In this growing Dark Age, nothing is at is was. We have only faint memories of what was normal just decades ago. Professional sports become vehicles for promulgating progressive versions of social justice. Athletic excellence is increasingly adjudicated on the basis of ideology, despite the dark lessons of totalitarian societies that have done just that in the past.

Hollywood has run out of ideas, reduced either to making pale

imitations of classic films or flat psychodramas about courageous, perpetually 30-something social justice warriors. Late-night comedy, indeed all comedy, has disappeared and turned into boring regurgitation of progressive themes or safe situational banality—reminiscent of the decline of Old Comedy of Aristophanes to the psychodramas of Hellenistic New Comedy. Even left-wing comedians such as Lenny Bruce, Richard Pryor, or George Carlin could not now exist.

In science, we are back to the age of silencing Galileo. Dare suggest that human efforts to address purported man-caused global warming are not cost-effective, and one's academic career, his funding and status are imperiled. Suggest that research shows not all the accusations of sexual harassment of females are to be believed without corroborating evidence, and one is damned as a retrograde sexist if not a closet assaulter himself. Imply that the greatest health crisis facing black youth is the violence on the streets of a Baltimore or Chicago, and one is a supporter of police misconduct. Hint that our sex is almost always innate and biologically determined and not usually socially constructed, and one becomes a "-phobe" of some sort.

Language is in service to the state and progressive agendas, either by the creation of new words or refining old ones. "Homosexual" and "transvestism" are not any longer clinical vocabulary, but slurs. "White" is not descriptive so much as pejorative. "Liberty" and "freedom" are synonymous with selfishness, if not conspiracy. To join "overseas contingency operations" to thwart "man-caused disasters" and "workplace violence" could mean almost anything and thus, by design, they mean nothing.

The result is that, in lieu of pushback, to escape the new Dark Age, tens of millions of Americans are increasingly dropping out in search of some sort of physical or mental monastery, an escape, a refuge from a vindictive state and from those who crafted and are invested in it.

Millions no longer watch the Emmys or Grammys or any sort of entertainment awards event. They do not go to the movies or even watch new Hollywood releases on their computers or televisions.

Popular music is skipped on the expectation that it is not just vulgar and foul, but incoherently politicalized. They more and more pass on professional sports, neither watching nor attending what has become condemnatory rituals or lectures on social justice from pampered multimillionaire athletes.

At work, they keep their thoughts to themselves and nod assent to received pieties.

Courtship resembles a careful script in which a wrong word, an unartful advance can spell career destruction. To be safe, would-be couples inquire firsthand about their respective politics and traditions. The amoral marketplace, in *Brave New World* fashion, answers with promises of inanimate and mechanical sex partners.

All scour their past—in fear that something 20, 30, or 50 years prior might resurface, immediately become mythologized and thus weaponized to destroy them, especially should they have achieved status, public recognition, affluence, or influence. One's personal privacy is kept hidden, not just in disgust with our generation's therapeutic maladies in which others pour out their emotions and fragilities in lieu of an idea, but because any disclosure is expected later to be used against oneself.

An idea of retirement is not merely a house by the lake or a cottage on the coast to die in peace, but now a mental refuge in which we are at last free from 24/7 sermonizing and worry over thought crimes, both in person and electronically—a world in which a sermonizer on a computer screen or in a television set does not lecture us for perceived shortcomings without acknowledgment that he is more likely than not to also fail to

meet his own standards of morality.

In other words, America is resembling the medieval Balkans, where spent traditionalists fled to the mountaintops, abandoned the plains of a dying culture to the new zealots who stormed in under the pretense of civilization.

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