

The Plague of Presentism

Presentism: Now there's one ugly duckling of a word.

My online dictionary defines presentism as “uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts.” To my surprise, the 40-year-old dictionary on my shelf also contains this eyesore of a word and definition.

To be present, of course, is a generally considered a virtue. It can mean everything from giving ourselves to the job at hand—no one wants a surgeon dreaming of his upcoming vacation to St. Croix while he's cracking open your chest—to consoling a grieving friend.

But presentism is altogether different. It's a disease, a contagion here in America as infectious as the Wuhan flu. The latter spreads by way of a virus, the former through ignorance and puffed-up pride.

Presentism is what inspires the afflicted to [tear down the statues](#) of such Americans as Washington, Jefferson, and Robert E. Lee for owning slaves without ever once asking why this was so or seeking to discover what these men thought of slavery. Presentism is why the “[Little House Books](#)” and some of the early stories by Dr. Seuss are attacked or banned entirely.

Presentism is the reason so many young people can name the Kardashians but can't tell you the importance of Abraham Lincoln or why we fought in World War II.

Presentism accounts in large measure for our Mount Everest of debt and [inflation](#). Those overseeing our nation's finances have refused to listen to warnings from the past, even the recent past, about the clear dangers of a government creating trillions of dollars out of the air.

Presentism has led America into overseas adventures that have invariably come to a bad end. Afghanistan, for example, has long been [known as the graveyard of empires](#), a cemetery which includes the tombstones of British and Russian ambitions. By our refusal to heed the lessons of that history and our botched withdrawal from Kabul, we dug our own grave alongside them.

And presentism can kill. The manner in which our officials handled the COVID epidemic, for instance, ignored the wisdom of earlier ages, which suffered far greater plagues. Instead, those in control ordered us into lockdowns, closed businesses, schools, and churches, restricted travel, and ruined the economy and the supply chain, leaving the country broke and broken. The arrogant “Follow the Science” crew not only administered insufficiently tested vaccines, again ignoring past wisdom, but commanded everyone to take the jab.

Finally, presentism rejects old moral codes and mores with little thought as to why those codes and customs existed and where their banishment might lead. Marriage and family are no longer the foundation stones of society, and so the culture crumbles. Legalized abortion has led us to a place where a number of Americans favor abortion up to the moment of birth, a form of child sacrifice long condemned as barbarous by any civilized society. Kids who can't legally buy cigarettes or alcohol are permitted, and in some cases encouraged, to undergo pharmaceutical and surgical sex changes our recent ancestors would have considered barbaric and monstrous. They built a nation; some in our time are busy building a new version of “[The Island of Doctor Moreau](#).”

Unlike COVID, the flu, or even the common cold, a cure for presentism lies at hand. It's called the past. If Americans knew more about their history, their Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the wars we've fought to keep our freedoms, the trials suffered by our country, and the liberty that requires constant vigilance, we would gain

perspective on the present.

And if our young people studied literature, art, and culture, they would gain those tools necessary to keep many of the howling imbecilities of our current age at bay. The plays of Shakespeare, the short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and even the nursery rhymes of Mother Goose are just three of a thousand resources that can put reins and a saddle on the galloping steed of our ignorant present.

At the heart of presentism is pride, once regarded as the worst, the most demonic, of sins. This is not the quiet pride that comes with some worthy accomplishment, a man who works hard and wins a promotion or a woman who overcomes her addiction to alcohol. No—this is the blind pride that leads some of our fellow citizens to believe they can control the earth's climate when they can't manage our country's debt or even, in many cases, their own households.

In [Matthew 23:12](#), we read, “Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

A reckoning is on the way for those who advocate and practice presentism, who shut their eyes and ears to the wisdom of their ancestors and imagine themselves as gods and masters of the universe.

When that house of cards collapses, as it most surely will, let us hope that the rest of us are not left crushed in the wreckage.

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