

America's Great Cultural and Political Divide

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America is more divided culturally and politically than at any time since the 1850's. Real and authentic dialogue does not occur and violence and the threat of violence increase daily. We are on a precarious path with potentially dangerous outcomes.

In 1850 one of the greatest debates in American, perhaps world history occurred. On one side Daniel Webster, master wordsmith and by 1850 a severe alcoholic. On the other, John C. Calhoun, a man debating literally from his deathbed.

Calhoun has of course been much maligned of late, being a white southern man that supported states' rights. Daniel Webster sits somewhere in the paragon of American greats. This despite the fact the Compromise of 1850 did not prevent war, it merely made it inevitable and much bloodier than had the issue been resolved politically, diplomatically or militarily in 1850. Webster's reputation is also untarnished by the provable and obvious fact that his arguments were intellectually dishonest. He often argued in the style later familiar as "we have to define what 'is' is". "Accede" was one such word that Webster attacked vigorously in an attempt to make a claim that the founders never used such a word to describe the acceptance by the states of the Constitution in 1787. [1]

Of course, accede was a word used, and often, to describe the ratification of the new constitution. Here are but three examples.

"If these, with the States eastward and northward of us, should accede to the Federal government..." George Washington [2]

"The Constitution has been ratified by all the States;... Rhode Island did not accede to it, until more than a year after it had been in operation;" Justice Story [3]

Father of the Constitution, James Madison, "used the expression 'to accede' in the Convention of 1787, in order to denote the act of adopting 'the new form of government by the States.'" [4]

Webster knew well that accede was both used and that it represented the actual mindset of sovereign states ratifying a constitution that delegated specific powers to a new central government. Accede was a problem and had to be purged, because the antonym of accede is secede – you must actually look in the [Oxford dictionary](#) for that obvious truth, [Meriam-Webster does not reflect this](#), how odd false narratives and alternative

truth is. (Daniel had no relation to the Webster dictionary but the political take of the revisionist language is still obvious)

Webster argues in 1850 that words had meaning, it appears that if standard meanings do not fit the narrative then the thing to do is to simply try and change the definition.

Despite those facts, the debates surrounding the Compromise of 1850 came close to real dialogue, much closer than what followed and near than what we witness now.

Move forward to 1856 and all façade of honest intellectual debate had disappeared. Both sides hurled vitriolic and personal attacks against each other. Lies, misrepresentations and falsehoods filled fiery speeches and diatribes. In the heat of all of this Charles Sumner had the particular bad judgment to go a bit too far one day in May of that year. Two days later, Preston Brooks responded, repeatedly with a cane to Sumner's head – on the Senate floor no less. [5] That action is something one might expect in the Roman Senate during the waning decades of the Empire. There is a lesson here.

America has not been so divided since the decade of the 1850's. The shooting incident at a [2017 Republican congressional baseball practice](#) is not an event that exists in isolation. I suggest it represents the Sumner-Brooks episode of our time.

Consider the results of a [Pew Research Center](#) study. [6]

“The divisions between Republicans and Democrats on fundamental political values – on government, race, immigration, national security, environmental protection and other areas – reached record levels during Barack Obama’s presidency. In Donald Trump’s first year as president, these gaps have grown even larger.” [7]

Take just one criterion used in the study for instance.

*“**Racial discrimination.** In recent years, Democrats’ views on racial discrimination also have changed, driving an overall shift in public opinion. Currently, 41% of Americans say racial discrimination is the main reason many blacks cannot get ahead – the largest share expressing this view in surveys dating back 23 years. Still, somewhat more Americans (49%) say blacks who cannot get ahead are mostly responsible for their own condition.” [8]*

That difference of opinion defines much about a person's worldview and there is really not much room for compromise of agreement between those two polls. On one end is an ideology that the government must essentially regulate opportunity, on the other the idea that America is the land of opportunity. Those are very different positions but those differences are found in almost all social and economic policies left and right. This represents a fundamental difference in philosophy, one where there is no easy middle ground. People either believe in individual responsibility, hard-work and the American dream or they believe that government must fix and control most things.

This difference is profound, and it is expressed more and more dishonesty and with growing hate. Recently a PhD I am acquainted with was describing an organization and bemoaning their ineptitude. He said, and I paraphrase. “well it is run by a bunch of white men”.

I assume this man is intelligent enough to have sat in classrooms for a large portion of his life and to convince others that have spent their life in academia to bestow upon him the title of doctor. I would assume he could see the absurdity and hypocrisy of his utterance – yet he did not and cannot.

Here is a thought exercise for you. Go into an office, boardroom or on television and say “well, you know, that organization is run by a bunch of black women/Latinos/homosexuals/etc.”. Ordinary people just don’t do that. The backlash would be immediate. It would be viewed as racist, insensitive and ignorant.

It is not, however, and apparently, racist in our current order of things to say what my acquaintance said about old white, presumably Christian, heterosexual men, and to say it and intended it with disdain, loathing and subtle hate. We have entered our version of the 1850’s.

There is more of course. Political debate and dialogue across the spectrum have degraded into attacks, falsehoods and smears. Political debate, a real debate about ideas, simply do not happen either in government or academia. Certain elements have defined the idea of free speech as their “right” to get together with a few of their clown friends and shout down anyone that says anything they do not like. This happens all the time on college campuses.

I sense that there is real fear on the right about groups like [Antifa](#). I suspect there is real fear on the left within folks that sympathize with Antifa about the right. Violence has already occurred.

In June of 2016, NPR ran a piece examining if left-wing violence was increasing. NPR is a fairly left-leaning organization so one might expect a complete pass on the matter. The article not only acknowledged the marked increase in a propensity toward violence, it concluded with:

“Domestic terrorism experts say that concern is only heightened by the fact that the line between what’s considered mainstream and what’s considered fringe is becoming increasingly blurred.” [9]

The NPR piece was partially in response to an editorial published in The Washington Times by Judson Phillips that began with:

“The first skirmishes of a second American civil war have begun.

No, this is not a metaphorical analogy to that bloody conflict that killed approximately 620,000 Americans. It is an objective statement of the reality in America.” [10]

I contend that we have entered the age of bloody Kansas and there are numerous [John Brown proto-terrorist](#) types stirred up, mad as hell and not ready to take it anymore. I would only disagree with the phraseology, we are on a path toward our first actual civil war, the war of 1861-1865 was a war independence.

The Atlantic published a piece in September of 2017 that began with one example of how disconnected some elements have become from common-sense.

“Since 1907, Portland, Oregon, has hosted an annual Rose Festival. Since 2007, the festival had included a parade down 82nd Avenue. Since 2013, the Republican Party of Multnomah County, which includes Portland, had taken part. This April, all of that changed.

In the days leading up to the planned parade, a group called the Direct Action Alliance declared, ‘Fascists plan to march through the streets,’ and warned, ‘Nazis will not march through Portland unopposed.’ The alliance said it didn’t object to the Multnomah GOP itself, but to ‘fascists’ who planned to infiltrate its ranks. Yet it also denounced marchers with ‘Trump flags’ and ‘red maga hats’ who could ‘normalize support for an orange man who bragged about sexually harassing women and who is waging a war of hate, racism and prejudice.’ A second group, Oregon Students Empowered, created a Facebook page called ‘Shut down fascism! No nazis in Portland!’”

Next, the parade’s organizers received an anonymous email warning that if “Trump supporters” and others who promote ‘hateful rhetoric’ marched, ‘we will have two hundred or more people rush into the parade ... and drag and push those people out.’ When Portland police said they lacked the resources to provide adequate security, the organizers canceled the parade. It was a sign of things to come.” [11]

The Oxford dictionary defines terrorism as: “The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.” The threat of violence depicted above certainly meets the definition of a terroristic threat, it was intended to silence political speech through the threat of and if necessary the use of violence.

I am honest enough to admit this is not merely a leftist thing. It is entirely possible that disaffected sections of the right could turn to the sort of violence exhibited by the left at some point in the future, either in reaction to violence or because of some perceived wrong. I also would challenge anyone the point out specific examples of organized, sustained violence by right-leaning groups in the US since the 1960’s, excluding some isolated examples by neo-Nazis in the Pacific Northwest in the 1980’s. But Neo-Nazis have never represented anything like the numbers the extreme left does. The extreme left has become something of the mainstream, calling out big-name support and attendance at their events.

This not the case for right-leaning extremist. There is no there there, it does not happen. It could, we sit on just that sort of powder keg, but it does not occur. I would contend that in the current state where dialogue cannot occur and violence, bully by

agitated protest, and uncivil behavior continue there absolutely will be more violence, from all sides in the future.

Donald Trump will not go away, he will continue to execute policies that make people like [Robert DeNiro foam at the mouth](#) and utter profanities. And it will only get worse. Trump will likely appoint a very conservative Supreme Court justice this year that will shape the law for many years. There is always the possibility that one of the other aged justices might die or be forced to retire in the next two years. None of this will sit well with progressives and liberals. Trump will continue to be Trump and his core supporters will remain “deplorable”. There is much more anger yet to come from liberals.

In 2000 Michael Peirce wrote a piece originally published on [LewRockwell.com](#) and eventually included in [The Annotated Secessionist Papers](#) that was filled with the anger, frustration and palatable rage many conservatives felt after eight years under a Clinton administration. Mr. Peirce was ready to leave the entire union by that juncture. [12] The interesting thing is Mr. Peirce and folks like him on the conservative side never found their answers in the first decade of the 2000’s. George W. Bush was mired in wars and Obama was as much anathema to traditional Americanism as Clinton to them. Clinton and Obama set the stage for a Trump to exist – their leftist policies swung the right further to the right. Trump will do and has done the same for the left, I would not be surprised to see an avowed socialist actually win the next election. This will serve only to divide us more.

We, in America, are in a real mess and I have no idea how to fix this. Neither vocal minority, left or right, wants to be lorded over by policies of the other, nor at this point will either long tolerate it. The potential for violence has already been expressed in direct and overt action and there is no sign that this will cease. We must either figure out a way to exist as Calhoun’s concurrent majorities, or a way to allow our individual states to better represent the culture of their populations or we must peacefully break it all apart into smaller pieces. To simply ignore the storm on the horizon is folly, hail has already damaged the roof and there is much worse to come.

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[1] Bledsoe, Albert Taylor, “[Is Davis a Traitor: Or Was Secession a Constitutional Right Previous to the War of 1861?](#)”, Hermitage Press, 1907, pp. 13-17,

[2] *ibid.*

[3] *ibid.*

[4] *ibid.*

- [5] Wikipedia contributors. "[Caning of Charles Sumner.](#)" Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia. Wikipedia, 22 May. 2018. Web. 2 Jul. 2018.
- [6] "The Partisan Divide on Political Values Grows Even Wider", The Pew Research Center, October 5, 2017
- [7] *ibid.*
- [8] *ibid.*
- [9] "FACT CHECK: Is Left-Wing Violence Rising?", NPR, June 16, 2017
- [10] "[Resist movement, violence are tearing America apart Antifa, others terrorizing America](#)", The Washington Times, June 14, 2017
- [11] "[The Rise of the Violent Left Antifa's activists say they're battling burgeoning authoritarianism on the American right. Are they fueling it instead?](#)", The Atlantic, September 2017
- [12] Peirce, Michael, et. al. "[The Annotated Secessionist Papers](#)" Second Edition, The Calhoun Institute, pp. 70-79

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