



Calamitous Consequences of Success of a Secret Conspiratorial Scheme to Capture the Courts

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An independent judiciary is a key requirement of a healthy functioning democracy, assuring people that court decisions will be based on the nation's laws and constitution, not on shifting political power or the pressures of a temporary majority. "Endowed with this independence, the judicial system in a democracy serves as a safeguard of the people's rights and freedoms."

Trust in the court system's impartiality -- in its being seen as the "non-political" branch of government -- is a principal source of its strength and legitimacy.

Tragically, the Supreme Court has been captured by conservatives and is no longer independent, as partisan political judges are making rulings guided by preconceived prejudices that favor whites, males, corporations, privileged elites and Christians -- and undermine the rights and opportunities of women, working people, the poor, non-Christians and those in racial minorities.

One out of every four women in the United States has chosen to have an abortion during their lifetimes, so it is a severe shock that conservatives on the Supreme Court have taken away the federally assured right for any woman to make a choice to have a safe and legal abortion. This right was decided to be constitutional almost 50 years ago with the *Roe v. Wade* decision in January 1973.

Today, this right has become an ultimate hot button wedge issue. After the revelation was leaked that a draft Supreme Court ruling against *Roe* was about to be unleashed on the American public, a seriously intense brouhaha materialized, and it got gravely worse after the ruling was made official on June 24, 2022.

This is a stunningly consequential matter, with astonishingly far-reaching implications. Read all about it in my long introspection into this issue in *Women's Rights: Let Freedom Ring - Honestly!*

This ruling violates the long established *Roe* precedent, and also represents a new prohibition that will serve as another distraction and smokescreen for a profound plot against America that has been unfolding since the days of Richard Nixon. This is the plot to capture the Supreme Court and the federal judiciary for the main purpose of allowing corporate America and vested interest groups and conservative politicians to triumph over the general welfare and the common good.

Conspiracy theories about the most preposterous things have become surprisingly popular in recent years -- "Jewish space lasers are real", and "global pedophilic elites are running a massive ring devoted to abducting and trafficking of children", and things like that. So this simple statement that there has been a long-running scheme to capture the courts may at first blush seem to fall in the same category of absurd conspiracy theories, because it sounds like it could be a fiendish fabrication or an instance of far-fetched hyperbole or supreme exaggeration.

But hold on! The evidence is overwhelming, and undeniable, and it has been presented in extraordinary smoking gun detail by the honorable Senator Sheldon Whitehouse in a series of 14 Speeches given to the American public from the floor of the U.S. Senate between May 25, 2021 and May 11, 2022. In these incisive and illuminating monthly speeches, Senator Whitehouse has been warning people about the nefarious Scheme to capture the Supreme Court and the federal judiciary since 1972. And this is a scheme that has tragically succeeded almost beyond belief.

Senator Whitehouse is a lawyer, former Attorney General of Rhode Island, and current Senator from Rhode Island who has been serving since 2007, and is a senior member of the Senate Judiciary Committee. He has been giving these distinguished speeches for more than a year to expose the nature, motivation and details of this plot by far right factions.

Each of these 14 Speeches is about 15 minutes long, and can be seen right now on YouTube. I urge all concerned Americans to become well-informed by starting to watch Senator Whitehouse's The Scheme Speech 1: The Powell Report, and thereby gain insight and understanding of this astonishing, disturbing and hopefully motivating Big Picture story.

These 14 Speeches are based on Sheldon Whitehouse's two incisive books: (1) *Capture: The Corporate Infiltration of American Democracy*, which concerned corporate capture of regulatory and government agencies, and (2) *The Scheme: How the Right Wing Used Dark Money to Capture the Supreme Court*.

This issue is greatly consequential because this court capture scheme has a top objective of trying to get away with as much as favored in-groups can get away with. These groups include rich people and corporate entities trying to pay low tax rates, avoid regulations, foist cost externalities onto the public, gain loophole privileges or bailouts, and evade accountability. They act in league with white supremacists and male chauvinist Christian dominionists who want to have their way and impose their rigid dictates on others. ("Some pigs seem to think they are more equal than all the others on our Animal Farm, as George Orwell would attest.")

Senator Whitehouse reveals a detailed scoop on how corporate special interests and their well-heeled donors have engaged in this secretive scheme to capture the Supreme Court since the days before Richard Nixon appointed the schemer-in-chief Lewis Powell to the Supreme Court. These interest groups have engaged in this Scheme to stack the Supreme Court with radically extreme conservatives in order to facilitate the maximizing of profits and promote narrow and greedy goals of corporate CEOs and shareholders at the expense of all other stakeholders. Those who are harmed include workers, employees, consumers, young people, environmental protection advocates, champions of safeguarding biological diversity, and people in communities who espouse the crucial values of good citizen goals.

Senator Whitehouse recounts how anonymous mega-donors on the far right have seized control of the federal judiciary, including a 6-3 majority on the Supreme Court. He has many years of experience as a prosecutor, and following his book *Capture: The Corporate Infiltration of American Democracy*, Whitehouse turned his attention to the concomitant right-wing scheme to capture courts. This diabolical effort, driven by the self-proclaimed "grim reaper" Mitch McConnell, led to the Trump administration's appointment of over 230 "business-friendly" judges, including 174 judges for United States district courts, 54 judges for United States courts of appeal, and the last three Justices of the United States Supreme Court.

The conservative legal activist Leonard Leo has been one of the lead facilitators of this court capture scheme and the plot against the American people that it represents. He is thus a villainous nemesis of fair and reasonable expectations that our judiciary will honorably serve as honest and good stewards of inclusive hopes for us to achieve a reasonable modicum of liberty and justice for all.

The bottom line is that the court capture scheme has not only been insidiously successful, but that it has succeeded despite the fact that it is a blatantly treacherous Big Money assault on the Constitution, our independent judiciary and the rule of law. This is a dark and underhanded skirmish in an existential struggle by confederates and co-conspirators in the overbearing corporatocracy in the U.S., whose goal is to serve as a Trojan horse for the triumph of greed and abuses of power by letting odious "barbarians at the gate" profit by grabbing excessive and broadly undesirable influence. In this, they win by achieving anti-egalitarian, anti-progressive and anti-environmental goals

Leo's influence is profoundly malign in the trench warfare of judicial activism. This internecine strife pits the far right elite against *We the People* in a consequential battle for the soul of the nation and its general welfare, both right now and far, far into the future.

In Jim Hightower's scathing exposé on Leonard Leo in the May 2022 edition of his succinct Hightower Lowdown,

the title tells the story: "*He's the capo behind the Supreme Court coup*". A capo, aptly, is a high-ranking commander in a Mafia crime family, "who heads a 'crew' of soldiers and has major social status and influence in the organization."

Whitehouse traces the motive to control the court system back to Lewis Powell's notorious Memorandum in 1971, which gave a road map for corporate influence to target the judiciary. Whitehouse also chronicles a hidden-money campaign using an armada of front groups, aided and abetted by Republican justices in cases from *Bellotti v. Bank of Massachusetts* to the infamous *Citizens United*. "The scheme utilized the Federalist Society as an appointments turnstile, spent secret millions to support the nominees, orchestrated an 'amicus brief' signaling apparatus, and propped up front-group litigants to 'fast-lane' strategic test cases to the friendly Justices."

The infamous Powell Report lamented that the very survival of corporate America might be at stake, and in it, Powell recommended that corporate political power should be cultivated and used aggressively, without compromise or appeasement, and deployed to stack the Supreme Court with allies that would make it an activist-minded court that could use judicial action to accomplish the focused goals of rich people and corporate America.

In *The Scheme Speech 2: Powell Groundwork*, Senator Whitehouse makes it clear how conservatives Justices have twisted the Constitution and the Bill of Rights to mean bizarrely contorted things. The First Amendment, for instance, guarantees freedom of speech and the right of the people to peaceably assemble, yet shrewd highly-compensated lawyers and judges have construed the First Amendment to have an almost religious respect for the freedom of corporate entities to organize and spend freely to achieve their goals, no matter how detrimental this wantonly cunning construction turns out to be for the American people.

In *The Scheme Speech 3: The Latent Virus*, Whitehouse seeks to promote the passage of more strongly protected voting rights and "to deal with the question of the dark money plague that is infesting our democracy and taking the power over decision making in this body and in this building away from regular people and putting it into the hands of not only special interests but of special interests who are happy to operate in secret." One agenda of conservative politicians and judges is to hide the fact that many rulings made in recent years by "conservative" (corrupt) Justices are a part of a covert scheme to give special interests the power to gain maximum profits at the public's expense.

Revealingly, and wrongly, the deepest pocket players are allowed to operate in secret and use shady dark money to advance their goals.

In *The Scheme Speech 10: Climate Obstruction and the Scheme*, Senator Whitehouse addresses the crucially important topic of climate action and how conservatives in Congress and in the federal judiciary have pushed climate change denialism.

He powerfully begins *Speech 10*: "As the Presiding Officer knows, I have delivered a lot of speeches on the Senate floor, and a majority of them -- 279 of them, to be precise -- addressed climate change. These were my 'Time to Wake Up' speeches, many of which focused on the network of phony front groups and trade associations used by the fossil fuel industry to block any meaningful climate legislation."

"That vast web of climate denial and climate obstruction is one of the main reasons that we are in the climate crisis we face today. I am here today to report that there is common technique behind that smelly climate denial operation and the right-wing donor operation to capture the Court."

"They both rely on massive amounts of dark money. They both rely on a small number of ultrawealthy donors who supply that dark money. And they both rely on an armada of front groups and phony corporate entities, funded by those big donors, to hide their hands. At this point, it is, actually, depressingly, familiar."

"But it is worse than just common technique. It is the same entities: the Koch operation, Americans for Prosperity, DonorsTrust, the Bradley Foundation, the Scaife Foundation, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. The list goes on and on and on. These are the exact same players on both sides of the operation -- on the climate-denying web and on the Court-capturing scheme."

"My colleagues and I showed in a number of Web of Denial climate speeches how a few ultrawealthy, right-wing foundations, corporate trade groups, and so-called donor-advised funds supply the bulk of the dark money for modern-day climate denial."

"Big oil companies used to do that directly, but they got burned and learned that it is bad for their public image, and I suspect they are hiding now behind those anonymizing entities and trade groups. The big funding guns included the Koch network; the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation; the Searle Freedom Trust; the Sarah Scaife Foundation; Donors Capital; and DonorsTrust, which has been called the right wing's "dark money ATM."

In *The Scheme Speech 4: A New Constitutional Right for Dark Money*, Senator Whitehouse explains that "the single most important goal of this covert scheme is to protect itself. The apparatus behind the scheme may be put to innumerable political uses, but none of those political uses will be effectuated unless the underlying apparatus protects itself and stays operational. Survival of this operation is job one, and a core strategy for protecting its covert operations is camouflage."

"To camouflage this scheme you need anonymity for the donors behind the operation. The scheme is blown if there is transparency. The clandestine connections among front groups become apparent, and the manipulating hands of the string pullers behind the surreptitious scheme become visible. Voters then see the scheme, understand the players and the motives, get the joke, so to speak, and the operation is blown. So anonymity -- donor anonymity -- is essential. Voters may hate big, anonymous donors, but big, anonymous donors need anonymity."

"The term for this anonymous funding, now pouring by the billions of dollars into our politics, is 'dark money.' This is a dark money operation, and if you are out to capture a court, you will want to make sure that court will protect your dark money -- the camouflage for all of your covert operations. That is job one, which brings us to the Americans for Prosperity Foundation case."

"The Americans for Prosperity Foundation is a central front group of the Koch brothers' political influence operation. It sued to prevent California from getting access to donor information of the so-called nonprofits, like itself, that, since *Citizens United*, have provided screening, anonymity for the megadonors behind their political efforts. For these political groups, donor anonymity is vital for the scheme to function."

This information gives us powerful good reason to demand that Congress pass an effective law to curtail Big Money influence and to get dark money out of the driver seat of our elections and decision making in Congress and the executive branch and the judiciary.

In *The Scheme Speech 5: The Federalist Society*, Whitehouse gives a "nutshell overview" of the "short jump for big donors from regulatory capture, which is a well-understood and broadly observed phenomenon, to applying known techniques of regulatory capture to capture a court."

"One of their most important players in applying capture techniques to the judiciary has been the Federalist Society. I will start with some very straightforward observations. Every member of the Court's six-Justice Republican majority is a current or former member of the Federalist Society."

"Justices regularly headline Federalist Society fundraisers, like the gala Brett Kavanaugh chose for his first major public speaking engagement after his disastrous confirmation, and they boast of their association with the group. The Federalist Society is a dark money organization. It receives millions in anonymous donations."

"The Federalist Society carefully vetted and promoted each member of the current Court majority. Each member rose to the top of the group's donor-approved slates of nominees. Each was backed by the Federalist Society's extended network of satellite groups." ... "For the dark money forces behind the capture of the Court, the Federalist Society became their nomination's gatekeeper."

"The Federalist Society has three component efforts. The first is basically a law school debate club. At more or less every law school in the country, they organize seminars and invite academics, judges, attorneys to speak. It is pretty standard law school stuff."

"The second is a fairly run-of-the-mill Washington think tank. They issue newsletters, host podcasts, convene events with conservative legal luminaries. This think tank's mission is to 'reorder priorities within the legal system' and to create a network of members that 'extends to all levels of the legal community.'"

"Then there is the third Federalist Society operation. This is the gatekeeper. It doesn't really care about fostering young legal minds. It doesn't care about galas or podcasts either. It cares about one thing: the allegiance of Republican-appointed Justices to right-wing donors' interests. And the dark money sluice gates into the Federalist Society provide the perfect means of influence. Money talks. Dark money whispers."

Senator Whitehouse mentions the malign influence of the legal activist Leonard Leo, and explains the whole sordid story of how Leo, a big honcho in this despotic Scheme, was a longtime vice president of the Federalist Society and a coordinator of big donor support for far right judicial nominees. He channeled large sums of dark money to efforts to rig the system ever more extremely to the advantage of the riggers. This is corruption incarnate!

"We are still learning about the scope of Leo's covert funding and influence, but a 2019 Washington Post expose painted a remarkable picture: a vast network of Leo-affiliated front groups; shell entities with no employees and vague connections to Leo cutouts; shared post office boxes; common contractors and officers across nominally separate entities, even some sharing Presidents; dark money funders, anonymous advertising, and enormous pay packages for operatives."

"It has the earmarks of a covert operation of the sort that is run by hostile countries in the intelligence arena. But this covert operation was run in America against America by Americans."

In *The Scheme* Speech 6: *The Judicial Crisis Network*, Senator Whitehouse examines the origins, motivations and central players in "repulsive intricacy" of detail. He points out that to defend their court capture scheme, they work overtime to pretend that the courts have NOT been captured in order to make the judiciary seem legitimate and independent, rather than marching to the drummer of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and ALEC (the American Legislative Exchange Commission), which do the bidding of giant corporations that finance their activities.

Whitehouse finds the same small handful of right-wing billionaires and corporations running operations that he likens to "covert ops," ultimately enticing the Senate to break rules, norms and precedents to confirm wildly inappropriate nominees who would advance the anti-government agenda of a small number of corporate oligarchs.

"The world got a glimpse of this story when the Senator's presentation at the Amy Comey Barrett hearing went viral. Now, full of unique insights and inside stories, *The Scheme* further pulls back the curtain on a powerful and hidden apparatus that has spent years trying secretly to corrupt our politics, control our courts, and degrade our democracy."

In *The Scheme* Speech 7: *The Kavanaugh Operation*, Senator Whitehouse explains how peace was made between the "house of Trump and the house of Koch", so that they could stomach working together to sell the American people down the river to accomplish extremely narrow anti-democratic goals.

Among the unacceptably damaging costs of the success of this scheme are disempowered workers, low minimum wages, worsening injustices and insecurity for millions of people, marginalized communities living in health-harming sacrifice zones, fraying social cohesion, unnecessarily heightening risks of violence and even civil war, and an increasingly costly destabilized global climate featuring more and more extreme temperatures, severe storms, almost biblical torrential flooding, cataclysmic hurricane seasons, terrible wildfires, parching droughts and the insidious creep of rising sea levels.

In *The Scheme* Speech 9, Senator Whitehouse unmasks an important part of the scheme's apparatus, a tool used to orchestrate *Amicus Curiae* friend-of-the-court legal briefs. One aspect of this topic is that conservative activists increasingly use amicus briefs to get the high court to take up cases onto its docket, and not just to influence arguments during the merit stages of cases. This moves cunningly-designed test cases into consideration that should not see the light of day. A prime example of such cases are those involving abortion rights that are designed to be enforced by private citizens (vigilantes) to evade judicial review by eliminating the role of state officials in enforcing reproductive rights.

The Scheme Speech 14: Senator Whitehouse's latest speech, on May 11, 2022, was delivered just 9 days after the leaked draft of the Supreme Court's ruling on *Roe v. Wade*. Whitehouse unmasked the scheme again in looking into efforts being made to smash the foundational Supreme Court precedent that established a woman's right to choose to have an abortion in the first months of a pregnancy.

Senator Whitehouse introduces this understanding in The Scheme Speech 14: Attacking Roe -- "In the week since the news broke, a lot of Americans have expressed just how strongly they disagree with the path this Court is headed down. They are disappointed, stunned, outraged, and they are right. When you take a second to remember what these same Justices told us in the past about Roe, you can be doubly outraged. I know Democrats on the Senate Judiciary Committee are. We saw the last three Republican Justices come through that committee and look us in the eye as we asked what they thought about Roe. Let's be clear: Each of these Republican Justices came before the committee; each was specifically asked about *Roe v. Wade*."

"Here is what they told us:"

Neil Gorsuch: "*Roe v. Wade*, decided in 1973, is a precedent of the United States Supreme Court. It has been reaffirmed."

Brett Kavanaugh: "It is settled as a precedent of the Supreme Court, entitled to respect under principles of *stare decisis*."

Amy Coney Barrett: "*Roe* is not a super-precedent because calls for its overruling have never ceased. But that doesn't mean that *Roe* should be overruled. It just means that it doesn't fall within a small handful of cases like *Marbury v. Madison* and *Brown v. Board* that no one questions anymore."

Samuel Alito himself, at his confirmation hearing in 2008, said that the *Roe v. Wade* decision was a "very important precedent" of the Supreme Court, though he was evasive as to whether or not he regarded it as "the settled law of the land", as John Roberts had called it a year earlier.

But pay attention to what Alito has now written. Here is what Alito's draft opinion says: "*Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences."

"Well, there was no mention of 'egregiously' at the confirmation hearings. There was no mention of 'wrong from the start' when we asked about *Roe*. Does anyone seriously think that this was a sudden, new epiphany that came over the Federalist Society Justices in the last few weeks? None -- NONE -- managed to mention their belief that *Roe v. Wade* was 'egregiously wrong from the start.' Whether that was outright lying or confirmation hearing hide-the-ball tricks, it is dishonorable, and it was dishonest."

"If that is what you believe as a judge, own it. Don't keep your views secret until you have the votes to make your move. That may be clever politics, but it is politics, not judging. It is a big tell about this captured Court."

When judges blatantly deceive the representatives of the American people in the Senate, who are responsible for confirming them to lifetime positions deciding people's destinies on the Supreme Court, it is EGREGIOUSLY wrong!

"Since the news broke, Republicans have tried desperately to change the subject. Mitch McConnell expressed the odd conviction that the real outrage is not the obliteration of women's rights but that we found out about it a month early. He says: 'This lawless action should be investigated and punished as quickly as possible. Other Republicans called for the FBI to prosecute the leaker criminally or civilly.'"

This misdirected outrage fell off the radar of public awareness as evidence accumulated that it was actually conservatives that probably leaked the offensive draft ruling, and other leaks continued with stories about the underhanded intentions of ethics-deficient conservatives on the haughtily stenchy side of the bench.

Listen, the important circumstance here is not who the leaker was, though it would be real interesting to know the details and the motives. What is important is fact that conservatives who have captured the Supreme Court are abusing the power they have seized, and they are wielding that power relentlessly, oppressively, unfairly and ruthlessly -- and contrary to the U.S. Constitution and rules of law, and reasonably responsible norms, and the propriety of good governance.

Legitimacy of the Judicial Branch of Government

Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, as it says right there in the Declaration of Independence. So the legitimacy of the U.S. government in our democratic republic depends on the consent of the people, which by all rights should be honestly well informed.

"The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government" states Article 21 of the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This means that the moral right to use state power is justified and lawful only when consented to by the people over which that political power is exercised.

Fairness is a cornerstone of our democracy. So cultivating well-informed consent is crucial in commendation-worthy democratic republics. This is a glaring and salubrious contrast to condemnation-deserving despotic governments throughout history where kings were deemed to have a divine right to rule imperiously, and often misused authority or gave official sanctions to the imposition of illegitimate colonial rule or slavery on big swaths of the populace.

It has become a staple of political machinations and subterfuge to "manufacture consent" of the citizenry by using a wide variety of pathological tactics, so it is an existential necessity for good citizens and honorable patriots to become well informed and see the naked truth about what's happening in our societies.

Article 1 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights."

Using thinking similar to that of 17th century English philosopher John Locke, the founders of the United States of America believed in a state built upon the consent of "free and equal" citizens; a state otherwise conceived would lack legitimacy and both rational and legal authority. This was expressed, among other places, in the 2nd paragraph of the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. -- That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

The will of the people, unfortunately, is being routinely bucked on many consequential issues that range from pocketbook issues to voting rights to abortion rights to environmental protections to sensible regulations on corporations to laws that would address the epidemic of gun violence. A main reason for this is that our political system is rigged against majority rule and the public will, due to the system of the Electoral College facilitating rule by leaders that do not get the most votes, along with the distorted over-representation of voters by states with small populations in the U.S. Senate, together with undemocratic decisions made due to supermajority requirements of the filibuster and the contorted and polarizing effects of discriminatory gerrymandering.

Moreover, the Supreme Court today has been stacked with "conservatives" who are violating precedents to engage in judicial activism that gives excessive sway to decisions that are made contrary to the expressed will of the people. And Justices are running roughshod over public opinion and seemingly disdaining all the ideals set forth in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. This makes it crucially important that our representatives come together in agreement on ways to reasonably alter the judiciary and the legislative branch.

Properly, their actions should be informed by an Anti-Corruption Commission that should be created to provide good recommendations. Voting rights for all citizens should rightly be strengthened, and gerrymandering prohibited, and Big Money removed from the drivers seat in elections and in lobbying.

Progressives in Congress have introduced a Judicial Ethics and Anti-Corruption Act of 2022 to impose a code of conduct on the Supreme Court and tighten rules about requirements for Justices to recuse themselves from cases in which they have a conflict of interest, as well as to ban justices from owning and trading individual stocks. This proposed new law should be passed.

And the Electoral College should be abolished and replaced with a National Popular Vote Interstate Compact. This

compact is an agreement among a group of U.S. states and the District of Columbia to award all their electoral votes to whichever presidential candidate wins the overall popular vote in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Already 15 states plus D.C. have joined, accounting for 196 electoral votes and 73% of the states needed to essentially make the popular vote the law of the land. Let's get to 100% by 2024, states!

The good reason for this constitutional reform is because the Electoral College has been described as "a loaded pistol pointed at our system of government." It creates "a game of Russian roulette" because the way it distorts the will of the people threatens our democracy.

"We've already seen the popular vote loser win the White House five times, including twice in the last twenty years."

"And this obtuse system of choosing a national leader led directly to the former President -- one of those five who lost the popular vote (in 2016) but still won the office -- attempting to subvert the will of the people by twisting the Electoral College into a mess, and when that didn't work, fomented a literal insurrection with supporters breaking into the Capitol Building to disrupt certification of the election."

And Mitch McConnell and Donald Trump managed to stack the Supreme Court with anti-abortion pro-corporate partisans who are part of The Scheme to hijack our court system and advance the interests of the few over the best interests of the many.

Squid Ink Confusion, Obfuscation and Prestidigitation

In his Scheme Speech 12, Senator Whitehouse explains how right-wing interest groups spread misinformation and confuse issues. After Justice Stephen Breyer announced his retirement at the end of the current Supreme Court session (which ended on June 30, 2022), the Judicial Crisis Network announced a multimillion-dollar ad blitz against Breyer's replacement on the Supreme Court. This ad was aired even before the new candidate was announced.

The assertion was made in the ad that left-wing dark money was poised to capture the Supreme Court. "I am not making that up," said Senator Whitehouse. "Think of a squid. When a squid senses danger, it squirts a jet of ink into the water. The squid ink creates confusion and distracts predators, and the squid sneaks off. This ad from the Judicial Crisis Network is squid ink."

"Let's start with just a quick review of the facts. Right-wing donor interests captured our Supreme Court under Donald Trump. They did it with dark money. They used the front group Judicial Crisis Network to launder off identities of big right-wing contributors. The identified contributions funded political campaign ads against Merrick Garland and for Gorsuch, Kavanaugh and Barrett. Those are the facts. The road onto the Supreme Court for those three Justices was paved with dark money."

"By the way, the checks were big. Four of the checks to Judicial Crisis Network were for \$15 million or more. That is a big check. Because we don't know who those donors are or who that donor is -- it could all be one donor -- we don't know what business they had before the Court or why it was so worth it to them or him to spend \$60 million to influence the makeup of the Court."

"This new Judicial Crisis Network ad -- the squid ink ad -- is designed to confuse those rather conspicuous facts. They can hide who funded them, but they can't hide what they did; so, squid ink -- distraction, misdirection. Their accusations of dark money corruption are a projection of the very scheme they themselves hatched and executed. As I have discussed previously in these speeches, this is a classic propaganda technique: You accuse your adversary of what you yourself have been doing."

"Yes, it is maddening to have a phony front group use dark money to capture and corrupt our Supreme Court and turn it into the Court that dark money built. It is devilish, Vladimir Putin-style propaganda for that phony front group to then accuse others of exactly what it did -- a false mirror of its own behavior."

The current internecine brouhaha over the revocation of women's reproductive rights is a distracting barrage of emotion hijacking subterfuge aimed at making sure the American people do not realize how nefarious the Scheme has been that has captured the Supreme Court and achieved the on-going goal of doing the bidding of corporate interests to maximize profits and increase corporate power and undermine protections of consumers, communities, women and the environmental commons.

Sheldon Whitehouse: "I have noticed recently ... that Republicans are currently reverting, often, to the same dark money line of attack as the Judicial Crisis Network. As we watch Republican Senators attack Democrat dark money, let's remember a few things. First, Republicans created, protected, and defended -- and defend to this day -- dark money. Republicans block our efforts to get rid of dark money."

"Republicans came first to the dark money game with billions of dark money dollars. Then, when we began to play by their rules -- the rules they made, the rules they defend -- they complained. I guess they hope that we will unilaterally disarm so they can pound us with dark money, just as they did for years after their Republican Justices in *Citizens United* let the big money flow."

"Well, unilateral disarmament isn't going to happen, but that is not the only reason for the squid ink. The falsehood of this ad serves to damn us all in the eyes of the public. The right-wing scheme reckons that Americans, frustrated and cynical about a slimy, dark money battle purportedly involving both sides, will tune out and turn away from what Justice Sotomayor has called the 'stench' of partisanship emerging at the Supreme Court. All this misdirection -- squid ink -- can then distract from their captured Court's record for the big scheme's donors. The 'Roberts Five' have a pattern now, a pattern of partisan 5-to-4 decisions that all benefit easily identified Republican donor interests -- an 80-to-0 record. It is a heck of a pattern."

"And now they have a new right-wing, dark money supermajority to amp it up even further. It is no wonder polling shows that Americans believe the six Justice Republican majority is motivated mainly by politics and that the Court's approval rating just hit an all-time low."

"If there was any honest concern about dark money on the Republican side, there is a really, really easy way to show it: support legislation to clean it up; put an end to it."

"I have a bill, the DISCLOSE Act. It will end dark money in our politics and in our judiciary. Every single Senate Democrat has voted in favor of this DISCLOSE Act."

"So, my Republican friends, support it, pass the law, end the slimy, political, dark money era we now live in. They could do that, but I will make you a bet that they won't. Dark money power is too important a weapon for right wing donors to abandon."

"So, instead, Republicans in this Chamber filibuster that legislation -- filibuster it -- and dark money continues to corrupt our politics."

"Brace yourselves, folks. Squid ink will flow in the weeks and months ahead. For the dark money forces squirting out the squid ink, the aim is defense, defense of their mighty prize: the Court that dark money built and that dances to their dark money tune."

In 2022, conservatives are doubling down on their court capture scheme by making concerted efforts to stack state courts like they stacked the Supreme Court and other federal courts. They are doing this to complete their court capture scheme, because many state courts have stood in the way of the GOP's efforts to gerrymander maps and such things. "Republicans don't like it one bit. So the GOP is spending big money in judicial elections this year with the hope that state courts will then not impose limits on Republican gerrymandering" in future years.

The Scheme Speech 8

In The Scheme Speech 8: Tu Quoque (You Too), Senator Whitehouse talks about "a little bit of counterprogramming from the scheme."

Again, once vested interests have captured an agency, then "Job 1" ... "is to pretend it is not captured; it is still legit."

Whitehouse mentions a trip that one of the principal operatives of the court capture scheme, the minority leader Senator McConnell, made to the Heritage Foundation, one of the central dark money groups in the court capture scheme. He made the trip "to toast Justice Clarence Thomas, one of the most ardent justices in pursuing the scheme's donors' goals and purposes."

McConnell "opened by lauding Justice Thomas for his campaign to overturn decades of precedent protecting women's constitutional right to abortion." His main mission "was to defend the court capture scheme, and that is an important mission right now because the court just hit an all-time low on Gallup's national approval survey. According to a poll out this month by one of the most respected pollsters in the country, about two-thirds of Americans think politics guides the Supreme Court's decisions. And that is not a partisan opinion. Republicans and Democrats share that view in equal proportion."

"And Americans aren't wrong. When big Republican donor interests come before the Court, they win -- it looks like every time. I have shown the pattern. I have published an article on it. It is currently at 80 to 0. Lawyers would love to take evidence like that -- an 80-to-0 record -- into court as pattern evidence of bias."

"So when the evidence is bad, what do you do? You blow smoke. There is an old, old propaganda technique of accusing your adversary of the exact wrong you are committing. It is such an old propaganda technique that it even has a Latin name: the 'tu quoque fallacy,' from the Latin for 'you too.' The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as 'retorting a charge upon one's accuser.' It is a rhetorical trick."

"At Heritage, Senator McConnell used this rhetorical trick, retorting a charge that critics like me of what has happened to the Court were trying to politicize the Court. Now, that is a particularly tricky version of this rhetorical trick because it is an accusation of something that we did not do, coming from people who actually did that."

"We have all seen in plain view the mischief done by Senate Republicans to capture the Court for big special interests. They weren't even subtle. So the 'tu quoque' rhetorical trick says to accuse us of what they did."

As Mitch McConnell spins his distortions of the truth, in "the majority leader's telling, it is Democrats who are up to no good at the Court. Let's look at what that telling leaves out because it masks a lot."

"First, it masks the Court's partisan record, the record I have described: Justice Thomas and his fellow Republican appointees in the 5-to-4 and now 6-to-3 majority on the Robert's Court has handed down over 80 partisan 5-to-4 decisions benefiting easily identified Republican donor interests. Like I said, by my reckoning, it is an 80-to-0 record for the big donors. His telling masks all of that."

Whitehouse goes on to adduce an impressive list of other things McConnell is masking, including "the entire Republican Court-packing operation that yielded three donor-selected Justices and hundreds of lower court judges during the Trump Presidency", and "the big donors' nominations turnstile at the Federalist Society, where they decided who would and would not become a Justice", and "the dark money political attack groups, which used massive anonymous donations to apply political pressure on behalf of the donors' nominees", etc.

"And, last, it masks what Republicans did, shredding norms and rules that the Senate had long relied on to manage judicial nominations, the scrapping of the Supreme Court filibuster; the scrapping of the circuit court blue slip; the acceptance of preposterous assertions of executive privilege to hide nominees' records; the refusal to grant Merrick Garland so much as courtesy visits, let alone a hearing; the invention of the so-called Garland rule about not confirming Justices near an election; the mad rush to confirm Brett Kavanaugh under the cloud of barely examined sexual assault allegations; and then the hypocritical full 180-degree reversing of that so-called Garland rule to jam a rightwing Justice onto the Court 8 days before an election."

"This was all done in plain view. This was not subtle. You have got to be gaslighting really hard to not pay attention to all that evidence."

A Bullet Ricochets

Politicians and news outlets often perniciously twist the truth and circumstances for perverse political purposes and narrow partisan advantages. A surprising example of this is told in the documentary film *Ricochet*, which tells an extraordinary story about the shooting of 32-year-old Kate Steinle on a pier in San Francisco in July 2015. Donald Trump and conservative media outlets seized the narrative in this event to blame the shooting on sanctuary city policies and illegal immigration, when what the story was really about was a terrible tragedy caused by a calamitous concatenation of circumstances involving mental illness and the dangers of guns that don't have safety

mechanisms to prevent accidental shootings and are not securely stored to prevent theft, along with the unintended consequences of cruel incarceration and deportation policies for illegal immigrants.

Republicans have used the Southern Strategy in elections to gain power since the 1960s by seeking increased support from white voters through base appeals to racial prejudices against African-Americans. Then not long after the FCC Fairness Doctrine was abolished in 1987, propaganda really began to be hyper amplified by cunning politicians, and talk radio hosts began spouting angry rhetoric without balanced opinion, nuance or comprehensive understanding.

Historian Heather Cox Richardson tells this fascinating story of another aspect of Republican tactics. "In the 1990 midterm elections, a political action committee associated with House Republican whip Newt Gingrich gave to Republican candidates a document called *Language: A Key Mechanism of Control*. It urged candidates to label Democrats with words like 'decay,' 'failure,' 'crisis,' 'pathetic,' 'liberal,' 'radical,' 'corrupt,' and 'taxes,' while defining Republicans with words like 'opportunity,' 'moral,' 'courage,' 'flag,' 'children,' 'common sense,' 'hard work,' and 'freedom.' Gingrich later told the *New York Times* his goal was 'reshaping the entire nation through the news media.'"

As a result of its demonic strategies, "Tragically, the GOP is becoming a political party whose modern legacy is being defined by violent white supremacists. If we are ever going to stop this sort of home-grown white supremacist terrorism, it is going to take a greater majority of our leaders doing everything they can."

Instead, Republicans staunchly oppose legislation to combat gun violence and domestic terrorism like new laws such as the proposed Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act of 2022 that would deal with mass shootings by teenagers and others using assault weapons.

There are many other vital considerations that wisdom advises us to ponder, and a wide array of them is evaluated in my essay, *An "Intellectual Feast" of Decidedly Dubious Distinction*. Check it out!

An Ultimately Undesirable Impact Resulting from Court Capture

The court capture scheme makes sacrificial pawns of women, poor people and persons in disenfranchised racial minority groups.

The repeal of *Roe v. Wade* rights is allowing a swelling number of red states to impose terribly burdensome obligations on countless numbers of women being forced to bear unwanted children. Women who are victims of this offensively controlling male domineering religion-based prohibition and vilely misogynistic abuse of power are rightly angry at this zeal-driven imposition on them. They particularly dislike being deprived of the freedom to be able to freely make choices in matters that influence their own destinies. Each individual deserves to have a reasonable degree of agency in their lives.

Republican-dominated state legislatures, newly emboldened with aggressive hubris, passed more than 100 laws restricting abortions in 2021 -- the most of any year since the Courts landmark *Roe v. Wade* decision in 1973.

While victimizing women with their ideological stubbornness and fervent opposition to reasonable compromises, conservatives have become masters "at playing the victim card", and used this manipulative ploy to distract the multitude of real victims of their schemes from the facts, scale, nature and depraved depth of their shrewd schemery, and from the extent of the harmful impacts that have resulted -- and will result in future years -- from their stoked resentments and skullduggery.

Duped followers of Republican extremists have been emotionally triggered to resent others, and experience hyped up angst and conflict over culture war wedge issues; more squid ink.

White supremacists and other members of extremist groups not only strive to hype up people's hate on far-right websites and on Fox News, but they diabolically direct this angry resentment toward others with different skin colors, or religious beliefs, or sexual orientation, or political persuasion.

One goal of the court capture Scheme to is to more strictly control people and undermine their ability to demand fairer treatment and remedial action. Bah, humbug!

"Republicans in states like Texas and Louisiana are already moving forward with bills to criminalize abortion providers, prevent women from seeking reproductive care in other states, and are targeting state and Federal funding for clinics and groups like Planned Parenthood."

A one-line story from the Associated Press underscores just how medieval Republicans have become, by setting the bar for what counts as moderation from them these days: "Louisiana women who have abortions won't face possible murder charge after state House amends bill."

Back in *The Scheme Speech 3*, Sheldon examined the secret corporate power game plan, explaining: "The Powell plan, thread one, was a political response recommended for America's traditional corporate elite, which had been traumatized by the social upheaval of the 1960s. The second thread, thread two, was a separate strain of American ire that had been simmering on our society's fringe for many decades. The extremists on this simmering fringe were traumatized by things long accepted as mainstream by most Americans."

"The fringe resentments shifted with the varying tides of news and events but regularly boiled over against several targets. One was the role of Jewish people in finance, the press, Hollywood, and -- after FDR -- in government. Another was the improving economic and social condition of minorities. Another was the arrival of immigrants, particularly non-European immigrants; but backlash to immigration from Ireland and Italy had been profound, as my home State experienced back under the Know-Nothings. Other resentments sprang from imaginary events, conspiracy theory delusions, and crackpot ideas."

"This persistent strain along the American fringe was chronicled in Pulitzer Prize-winning Richard Hofstadter's 1964 essay, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*, later a popular book. This latent strain of paranoid extremism showed itself in groups like the John Birch Society, which never gained social or political acceptance. It was fed and nurtured by a handful of right-wing foundations set up by a few colossally rich and politically irate and frustrated families. It boiled up in the Presidential campaign of Senator Barry Goldwater, which ended in one of the worst landslide defeats in American history. It drove the occasional aspirations of the Libertarian Party, whose extremist platform suffered predictable but humiliating crushings at the polls. All of this defeat, over all of these decades, concentrated the strain, isolated its most persistent and determined elements, and added to it an emotional payload of resentment."

"One target of this fringe was the existence of government regulation. The Libertarian Party, in 1980, ran on a platform of ending Social Security, ending Medicare, closing the post office, undoing the American highway program, stopping public education, and eliminating all our public regulatory agencies -- even the Federal Aviation Administration that keeps planes from bumping into each other."

"This platform barely attracted 1% of the vote, an unsurprising but humiliating crushing. That humiliating crushing was suffered by David Koch, Libertarian Party candidate for Vice President, and the party's major funder. The Koch family is spectacularly, unimaginably rich. Privately held Koch Industries pours hundreds of millions of dollars into their pockets every year. The family annual income exceeds most families' dreams of lifetime wealth. The Kochs have social ambition, putting their names on educational TV programs, art centers, and university buildings. They are not the sort of people who take humiliation well. They are also not stupid, and the family has long and sometimes dark international experience, including odious efforts in previous decades to build factories for evil regimes." (For instance, businessman Fred Koch, one of the founders of the racist right-wing John Birch Society, helped build 15 oil refineries for Stalin in the early 1930s, and also a major oil refinery for Nazi Germany, according to Jane Mayer in her book *Dark Money: The Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right*.)

"Made confident by the arrogance of wealth, driven by extremist ideology, spurred by the resentment of humiliating political rejection, experienced in the devious ways of the international world, steeped in the corporate skills of long-term planning and patient execution, and with unlimited resources to indulge themselves, the Koch brothers, Charles and David, were uniquely positioned to take this longstanding, latent, extremist fringe and amplify it and direct it, by plan, in secret, and over decades if need be."

"If front groups needed to be set up, so be it; subsidiaries were a familiar concept. If identities needed to be laundered off money they gave, so be it; telling lawyers to find or design a way to do that was familiar. If fringe groups needed to be coordinated to work collectively with each other, so be it; organizing with others through trade associations and lobbying groups was familiar activity. And if money needed to be spent, well, so be it; money was no object, and getting people to do things for you for money is a familiar practice of the very rich."

"The nurture and guidance of the Kochs breathed new strength and life -- and deregulatory purpose -- into the nativist far-right fringe. Meanwhile, in the regulatory arena, waited the third of the three threads. Major corporate interests -- from the railroads first to banks, chemical companies, and polluting industries -- had assembled, over time, a quietly powerful presence to help them in administrative Agencies; to make sure that regulation was friendly to business, and, even more than that, under the right circumstances, with the right people and pressures, could be turned to advantage of the regulated industry."

"In administrative hearings and rulemakings, regulated industries regularly outgunned public interest groups. Law firms dedicated to this lucrative corporate regulatory practice sprouted. Gleaming stables were kept of well-tended professional witnesses who could reliably spout the corporate line in Agency proceedings."

"Companies played the long game in these regulatory Agencies, of accreting minor victories, step-by-step, inch-by-inch, but that together summed up to major gains. Many of these gains were deeply buried in the weeds of arcane policy and technical detail, inscrutable to the general media and so invisible to the general public."

"Revolving doors spun between regulatory Commissions and industry, so that Agency decision makers often reflected the values, priorities and interests of the regulated industry, not the general public. At the extreme, the regulatory Agency became servant to the industry master -- a phenomenon well known and well documented as regulatory capture. "I wrote a separate book on this, *Captured*, so I won't dwell on it at great length here. It is enough to note that regulatory capture is so common that it has been a robust field of academic research and writing now for decades, both in economics and in administrative law."

"So these three socioeconomic strands converged. America's regular corporate elite took up the Powell memo strategy of emboldened political engagement, seeking to reclaim their power and restrain the unwelcome changes roiling American society. The extremists of great wealth brought to the right-wing fringe and its motley array of extremist groups an unprecedented strategic discipline, unlimited resources, and the tactics of hard-edged corporate organization. The regulatory capture apparatus was there for the hiring, eager to pursue the new prospects offered by big industries and eccentric billionaires. Out of this slumgullion of immense wealth, extreme political ambition, and expertise at regulatory capture, how long would it take for people to start thinking about capturing not just regulatory Agencies but courts -- indeed the U.S. Supreme Court?" ("As it turned out, not long", was the answer.)

Deport Rupert Murdoch of Fox News

Prominent among the parties complicit in this scheme to capture the courts is Rupert Murdoch, chair of the Fox Corporation and one of the main men ultimately responsible for dividing Americans into dangerously polarized camps by deceiving people profoundly, brainwashing them, hijacking their emotions, engaging in fear-mongering, riling up their suspicions and mistrust, and acting with dastardly intent by promoting the "great replacement theory" that says white people are being replaced by immigrants of color, thereby harnessing the dominion demands by white supremacists and harmfully exploiting anti-immigrant sentiments.

Rupert Murdoch does all of this to gain power and money, without moral compass or respect for democracy or good governance, or domestic tranquility, or the great goal of securing the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity.

On May 14, in Buffalo in upstate New York, an 18-year-old white man murdered 10 people and wounded three others using an AR-15 assault rifle. "The shooter traveled more than 200 miles to get to a predominantly Black neighborhood, where he put on heavy body armor and live streamed his attack as he gunned down people grocery shopping. Eleven of those he shot were Black."

The FBI has said they are investigating the shooting as "racially motivated violent extremism". The Buffalo Police

Commissioner, Joseph Gramaglia, said, "The evidence that we have uncovered so far makes no mistake that this is an absolute racist hate crime. It will be prosecuted as a hate crime. This is someone who has hate in their heart, soul and mind."

"Before his attack, the shooter published a 180-page screed on Google Drive. It ... explained his belief in what is known as the 'great replacement theory,' embraced by white nationalists. This is the idea that white people are losing economic, cultural, and political power to Black people and other people of color."

The teenage shooter identified himself as a white supremacist and anti-Semite and described his intention to attack a Black neighborhood. In the diatribe, the murderer spoke extensively about the 'great replacement theory', which asserts that white people are being driven out and replaced by non-white people in Western societies.

Authorities said that the mass shooting was a racially motivated attack by a teenage shooter, so the massacre drew closer attention to the fear-stoking and suspicion-based replacement theory that has been boosted by the Far Right and its allies at Fox News, and on many conservative media platforms.

A New York Times investigation had found that Tucker Carlson, Fox's top political pundit and cable TV's highest-rated host, spewed rhetoric about "the great replacement theory" in more than 400 episodes of his show since 2016. "The theory baselessly claims that white people are being replaced by people of color and will ultimately become extinct. Carlson has repeatedly argued that Democrats want to force demographic change on the US through immigration as a way to retain and grow their political power."

This emotion-manipulating conspiracy theory is stoked for narrow political advantage, and used as another terribly divisive wedge issue to cause a deepening disaffection of the electorate.

Soon after the Buffalo shooting, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer called out Tucker Carlson, Fox News and other right-wing outlets "engaged in a craven quest for viewers and ratings", along with MAGA Republicans for pushing the replacement theory. He said Carlson and Fox have spread the "poison" of the racist "replacement theory." ... "This is a poison that is being spread by one of the largest news organizations in our country."

"The message is not always explicit, but we've all seen the pattern," Schumer said. "Every time MAGA Republicans or pundits vilify wrongly immigrants and call them 'invaders,' every time they falsely claim that millions of undocumented people cast ballots in our elections, every time loud, bigoted voices bemoan the disintegration of a 'classic America' the subtext is clear," Schumer said. "These hard-right MAGA Republicans argue that people of color in minority communities are somehow posing a threat, a threat to the American way of life."

"It's a heinous, racist conspiracy theory -- and for years, Tucker Carlson has been known as one of its chief proponents. Carlson openly describes immigrants in grotesque, inhumane terms -- he has argued, on air, that Democrats were letting in 'more obedient voters from the third world' in order to 'replace' the current (white) electorate."

This once-fringe theory that white people will be 'replaced' by people of color has been weaponized by extreme Republicans to fearmonger about demographic changes all around the country."

"Every night, this dangerous rhetoric is beamed into millions of homes across the United States. There's absolutely no place for this sort of violent, hateful, dangerous rhetoric -- it's the same sort of sentiment that has influenced the white supremacist attacks in El Paso, Pittsburgh, Montreal, and Christchurch in past years."

"Unfortunately, it's only a matter of time before another person is radicalized into a white supremacist who then feels emboldened to slaughter innocent people. The stakes are too high to wait."

Eugene Robinson wrote in *The Black victims of the Buffalo shooting were killed by white supremacy*: "Do not dare look away from the bloody horror that left 10 dead in Buffalo. Do not dare write off the shooter as somehow uniquely 'troubled.' Those Black victims were murdered by white supremacy, which grows today in fertile soil nourished not just by fringe-dwelling racists but by politicians and other opportunists who call themselves mainstream."

"The 18-year-old White man suspected of gunning down Black people at a supermarket in a Black neighborhood was reportedly a believer in 'replacement theory' -- the notion of a vast conspiracy by Democrats and/or Jews to achieve dominance by 'importing' people of color to diminish the political power of White people. The idea is laughable on its face -- but do not laugh. This paranoid fantasy killed nine Black worshippers at Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, S.C. in 2015. It killed 11 Jewish worshippers at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018. It killed 23 people, mostly Latinos, at a Walmart in El Paso in 2019. And now we have the carnage in Buffalo."

"What we need to talk about is how politicians and thought leaders on the right are using the vile poison of replacement theory to further their own selfish ends -- garnering campaign donations and votes, boosting television ratings, achieving fame. And we need to talk about how most of this demagoguery is coming from people who should know, and probably do know, that what they are telling potential killers, such as ... the man in custody after the Buffalo shooting, is complete fiction."

"The replacement-theory grifters know that they are stoking the anxieties some White people feel about the nation's increasing diversity. They also know that they are playing with tropes that have long been popular among unapologetic white supremacists, including those who infamously marched through Charlottesville bearing torches. And they must realize by now that some impressionable White people will take this rhetoric seriously - and act on it."

"The accused Buffalo killer took pains to choose a location where he knew the victims would be people of color. Blame him for what he did. But also blame the prominent right-wing voices, like Tucker Carlson, that egged him on."

"To prevent mass shootings, we need a different approach. There are many strategies to preempt mass shootings, none perfect on their own. These include improving access to mental health care and crisis support at schools and workplaces, expanding suicide prevention programs, holding media and social media companies accountable for hateful rhetoric on their platforms, and limiting access to firearms for high-risk individuals."

It is statistically true that young men under the age of 21 are disproportionately likely to use assault weapons in mass shootings, so they should be prohibited from buying, owning or possessing assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines.

Doonesbury on Sunday, July 10 had an incisive political cartoon in which an underage bar patron said "Gimme a beer", and the bartender asked him for ID, which he couldn't provide, so the youngster (wearing a University of Texas t-shirt) got angry and said, "You'll be sorry." So in the next frame, the teenager was in a gun shop, saying "Gimme an assault rifle", and the proprietor with guns galore on the wall to choose from simply said, "Which one?"

An earlier observer: "The empire of anti-intellectual evil is striking back at the radical realignment of the nation's demographic quilt. We cannot continue to rule as the white majority when very shortly that won't be the case. The outright conservative shift, however, of our nation's courts will be around for a *long time*, as Mitch McConnell recently said with a big Kentucky-holler, bourbon-drinking grin." That image is appropriately offensive!

The great replacement theory is depicted in several political cartoons as a person's brain being replaced with a toxic stew of fear, paranoia, racism and hate, all poured into them by Fox News and far right social media platforms.

"Tucker Carlson is a dangerous individual. He spouts off racist, misogynistic, xenophobic, and homophobic rhetoric every chance he gets. Why? Because he is given a platform to do so and for ratings. His diatribes rile up the most hateful people in America. If he continues with his conspiracy theories and hatred it will lead to atrocities that as a country, we will never be able to heal."

"Tucker Carlson's views exceed the protections of the Constitution as they present a clear and present danger of serious, substantive evil." ... "The only solution is to remove him from Television, prevent him from distributing his malicious propaganda."

The 'great replacement theory' "is usually associated with a French agitator who argued in a 2011 book that immigrants were destroying European culture, but the theory that an 'other' is destroying traditional society has

roots stretching far back in European history. In the twenty-first century, that theory has launched right-wing political parties and shootings around the world."

Media reporter Paul Farhi writes in his article *Conservative media is familiar with Buffalo suspect's alleged 'theory'*, that the murderer had endorsed this theory, "a once-fringe racist idea that became a popular refrain among media figures such as Tucker Carlson and Laura Ingraham of Fox News and conservative writer Ann Coulter."

The theory reveals deep concern that white Americans are at risk of being 'replaced' by people of color "because of immigration and higher birthrates." The murderer apparently chose a neighborhood with a large number of Black residents for his alleged attack after having been radicalized online. "There's no indication that he watched Carlson's program."

"The theory was once confined to far-right White extremists, who cast immigration as part of a plot by 'elites' to take political and economic power away from White people. It has gained broader circulation in recent years as a talking point among prominent conservative media figures."

In the wake of the Buffalo shooting, "Miles Taylor -- a member of Trump's administration who warned anonymously of how dangerous Trump was -- announced he was leaving the Republican Party and called on others to do the same. 'In the wake of the mass shooting in Buffalo on Saturday,' he wrote, 'it's become glaringly obvious that my party no longer represents conservative values but in fact poses a threat to them -- and to America.'"

Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY), who represents Buffalo, wrote a letter to Rupert Murdoch, chair of the Fox Corporation, in the immediate aftermath of the Buffalo mass shooting of Blacks. He also sent the letter to three other of the corporation's leaders. The letter urged them to stop "the reckless amplification of the so-called 'Great Replacement' theory on your network's broadcasts." He noted that people who watch the Fox News Channel are nearly three times more likely to believe in the replacement myth than those who watch other networks. He pointed out "the central role these themes have played in your network's programming in recent years," especially on Tucker Carlson's show. He wrote: "I implore you to immediately cease all dissemination of false white nationalist, far-right conspiracy theories on your network."

New York representative Elise Stefanik, the third-ranking Republican in the House of Representatives, has pushed the great replacement theory for years. After the mass shooting in Buffalo, she hypocritically said: "It is not the time to politicize this tragedy. We mourn together as a nation." Other Republicans insisted they did not know what the Great Replacement Theory is, even though a number of them are on video talking about it.

The theory is a fear-mongering conspiracy that is based in racial hate, and is also pushed for highly divisive political purposes -- and Republicans are using it to try to create a government dominated by their party alone.

In an article by Daily Kos Staff on May 15, 2022 titled *Rep. Elise Stefanik promoted 'great replacement' conspiracy cited by Buffalo terrorist*, the point was made that Stefanik "was catapulted to a top House Republican leadership position after Republicans purged Rep. Liz Cheney from the role as punishment for speaking out against Donald Trump's violent attempted coup. Stefanik has since proven to have no moral boundaries whatsoever, eagerly embracing the farthest-right conspiracy theories culled from QAnon, from neo-Nazi groups, and other extremists -- but we knew that, due to her fervent prior backing of an actual attempted coup and her devotion now to sabotaging investigations of that coup."

"Stefanik was quick to express vague sympathy over the murder of 10 Americans at the hands of a white supremacist citing the neo-Nazi 'great replacement' theory, a white nationalist conspiracy theory that claims world elites (billionaire George Soros is frequently mentioned, or just nameless 'Democrats') are importing non-white immigrants in great numbers so as to dilute America's 'whiteness.'"

After the Buffalo murders, President Biden visited the city and declared, "Evil will not win in America. Hate will not prevail. And white supremacy will not have the last word."

"What happened here is simple and straightforward," Biden said, "Domestic terrorism. Violence inflicted in the service of hate and a vicious thirst for power that defines one group of people being inherently inferior to any other group. A hate that through the media and politics, the Internet, has radicalized angry, alienated, lost and

isolated individuals into falsely believing that they will be replaced ... by people who don't look like them and who are therefore, in a perverse ideology that they possess and [are] being fed, lesser beings."

Biden called on "all Americans to reject [that] lie." He condemned "those who spread the lie for power, political gain, and for profit." ... "The ideology of white supremacy has no place in America," he said. "Silence is complicity."

"We have to refuse to live in a country where fear and lies are packaged for power and for profit. We must all enlist in this great cause of America."

"This is work that requires all of us -- presidents and politicians, commentators, citizens. None of us can stay in the sidelines. We have to resolve here in Buffalo that from ... this tragedy ... will come hope and light and life. It has to. And on our watch, the sacred cause of America will never bow, never break, never bend. And the America we love -- the one we love -- will endure."

The Buffalo shooter's ramblings "drew not only from the European theory -- although there is plenty of that in his 180 pages of racism and anti-Semitism. They also drew from America's own version of a theory of replacement. That theory comes out of the 1870s and was explicitly connected to voting."

"In 1867, Congress began the process of recognizing the right of Black people to have a say in their government. In the Military Reconstruction Act, it called for conventions in former Confederate states to write new state constitutions and permitted Black southerners to register to vote to choose delegates to those conventions. White supremacists scoffed at the idea that formerly enslaved people and those white men willing to work with them could produce coherent constitutions."

"When their constitutions not only were coherent, but made adjustments to give more representation to poorer white men than the prewar constitutions had provided, white supremacists set out to make sure voters did not ratify the new constitutions. Needing to avoid the U.S. Army, still stationed in the South to protect Black people and their white allies, the white supremacists dressed up in white sheets to look like dead Confederate soldiers (no one was fooled) and tried to terrorize voters to keep them from the polls."

"It didn't work. Voters ratified the new constitutions, which guaranteed Black voting. Congress readmitted the southern states to the Union, but not until they ratified the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. That crucially important amendment dissolved the state laws discriminating against Black Americans. It established that Black people were U.S. citizens and guaranteed that the U.S. government would see to it that no state could take away the rights of any citizen without the due process of law."

"In 1870, white politicians in Georgia tried to undermine their new state constitution. The American people then ratified the Fifteenth Amendment protecting the right of Black men to vote. Congress also created the Department of Justice to enable the federal government to enforce the Fourteenth Amendment, which it promptly did. Attorney General Amos Akerman, a former Confederate who had become a Republican, oversaw more than 1,000 cases against the Ku Klux Klan."

"With the federal government holding them to account for their racist attacks on Black Americans, southern white supremacists began to argue that their objections to Black equality were actually about voting. By 1871, they argued that Black men voted for leaders who promised roads and hospitals and schools. Those social investments would require tax levies, and since the Black population was poor almost by definition after enslavement, those taxes would fall almost entirely on the white men who owned property. In this telling, Black voting was essentially a redistribution of wealth from those with money to those without, from white men to Black men. It was socialism."

"White supremacists began to say that they objected to Black voting and to the governments Black people elected not on racial grounds, but on economic ones. They promised to 'redeem' the South from the profligate state governments that they said were bleeding tax dollars out of white landowners to provide services for the poor, generally characterized as Black, although there was no racial monopoly on poverty in the post-Civil War South."

"In 1876, the 'Redeemers' took over the southern states, thanks partly to the rhetoric that made them sound reasonable to northern observers and largely to the violence that enabled them to keep Black men from the polls. The 'Solid South' would stay Democratic until Arizona Republican senator Barry Goldwater, running for president on

a platform that called for the federal government to leave states' racial discrimination alone, won five deep southern states in 1964."

"The violence of the 1876 election, along with fears of what their lives would look like in its wake, led Black Americans to leave the South in a movement known as the Exodus. In 1879 and 1880, about 20,000 Black southerners went west to Kansas, Oklahoma and Colorado. 'The whole South ... had got into the hands of the very men that held us slaves,' one recalled, 'and we thought that the men that held us slaves was holding the reins of government over our heads.... [and] there was hope for us and we had better go.'"

"About two thousand of those migrants went to Indiana, a contested state in which the Republican and Democratic parties traded power. In 1876, it had gone to the Democrats by a few thousand votes."

"When Black Americans began to come to their state, Indiana Democrats immediately howled that the Republicans were importing Black migrants to shift the state back toward the Republicans in the 1880 election. Their clamor was loud enough to cause a Senate investigation. The Democratic majority on the select committee concluded that the Republicans must have induced the Black southerners to leave their region because there was well-paid work and no violence in the South; Republicans retorted that if they were really trying to flood the electoral system, they would have left Black Americans where they were."

"But the conspiracy theory took root. White Hoosier Democrats met Black migrants with showers of rocks and vowed to 'clean out all the g-d d- -n**ers in the county before the [1880] election.' After a political rally in Rockport, Indiana, Democrats attacked local Black inhabitants, shouting: 'Kill them, kill them.' After they shot Uriah Webb, one rioter stood over his body and said, 'One vote less,' while the others cheered Democratic presidential candidate Winfield Scott Hancock."

"Racial hostility kept the Black population of Indiana small, but it also fed the cultural and social discrimination that made Indiana the beating heart of the resurgent Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. Under violent con man David Curtis Stephenson, who raped, mutilated and murdered a female state employee, the Indiana Ku Klux Klan developed the idea of '100% Americanism,' which argued for a hierarchy of races in which the white race was uppermost. Immigrants and Black Americans, that theory said, were destroying traditional America."

"That argument has poisoned American politics since the 1870s. The Buffalo shooter echoed the modern European great replacement theory, but he also echoed the racial 'socialist' argument of the U.S. He railed against Black Americans, whom he wildly insisted take, on average, \$700,000 apiece from white Americans. He urged those who thought like him not to pay taxes, which he said would be wasted on such people. Then he warned white Americans not to become a political minority because minorities are never treated well."

Fox News Channel personality Tucker Carlson, who is one of the country's leading proponents of the replacement theory, spun this story on his show, saying: "I know that the left and all the little gatekeepers on Twitter become literally hysterical if you use the term 'replacement,' if you suggest that the Democratic Party is trying to replace the current electorate, the voters now casting ballots, with new people, more obedient voters from the Third World. But they become hysterical because that's what's happening actually. Let's just say it: That's true."

However, the fact is, "It was not true in 1879, it is not true now, and people making this argument have blood on their hands." The theory "is a warped, anti-Semitic, and white-supremacist ideology brought to the mainstream by Fox News and Tucker Carlson."

"Fox 'News' has become an echo chamber for the lunatic fringe (which is increasingly indistinguishable from the Republican Party), and with the departure of Chris Wallace, it has taken them further on that side of the spectrum."

Howard Dean said on MSNBC on May 19 that Americans should "boycott" Fox News and primetime host Tucker Carlson, blaming Fox for the racially-motivated mass murder in Buffalo.

The Beat host Ari Melber reminded Dean that Fox CEO Lachlan Murdoch has said the day before that the network's viewers see Fox as "an America media brand" more than "news." Dean reacted to the comment by saying that the Murdochs should be deported. He also accused Fox News of complicity in "murder."

Howard Dean added, "I see the brand of Fox being hate, anger, dishonesty and now murder. That's the brand, that's the brand that the Murdochs have chosen to be their flagship."

Rupert Murdoch is arguably one of the most malign influences in American media. The Australian billionaire has weaponized his media influence to create a dystopian world in order to profit through this act of sabotage.

Fox News and Other Right-Wing Media Organizations

The authors of the new book *This Will Not Pass: Trump, Biden, and the Battle for America's Future* claim that President Joe Biden has called Fox News "one of the most destructive forces in the United States" and its owner, Rupert Murdoch, "the most dangerous man in the world."

While Fox News often highlights its journalism separate from its talking heads, even some of the networks own former staffers have publicly complained about its political coverage, particularly for how its opinion personalities have spoken about the deadly and destructive riot by Trump supporters in the Capitol on January 6, 2021.

Broadcast journalist Chris Wallace announced last December that he was opting not to return as host of *Fox News Sunday*, ending his run with the network after 18 years for a new deal with rival network CNN. "Speaking with *The New York Times* in a later interview about his decision, Wallace said he felt things began to change at Fox after Biden defeated Donald Trump in the 2020 election and Trump attacked the results as fake. Trump's supporters went on to riot at the Capitol last year."

"I'm fine with opinion: conservative opinion, liberal opinion," Wallace told the *Times*. "But when people start to question the truth -- Who won the 2020 election? Was Jan. 6 an insurrection? -- I found that unsustainable." He continued: "Before, I found it was an environment in which I could do my job and feel good about my involvement at Fox. And since November of 2020, that just became unsustainable, increasingly unsustainable as time went on."

"Wallace also confirmed reports that he had complained to the network's management about Tucker Carlson's documentary *Patriot Purge*, which falsely claimed that the Jan. 6 attack was a 'false flag' operation meant to demean conservatives."

What Fox News does is to stoke the fears, anger and resentments of its viewers and distort facts and evidence, and push false narratives and conspiracies, and manipulate the emotions of its viewers to exploit culture war issues and use hot button wedge issues to motivate them and get them addicted to mainlining a toxic stew of negative feelings. Fox programming reinforces echo chambers of MAGA insurrectionist apologism, and helps promote the far right agenda that succeeds by dividing people and running roughshod over the common good and perverting accurate understandings and doubling down on grandstanding jackassery.

Worse yet, treacherously, "Fox News has been pushing pro-Putin propaganda since the start of Trump's bromance with the Russian leader." Since the beginning of Putin's illegal war on Ukraine, "the Kremlin and Fox News have parroted each others' talking points more and more often. In fact, according to the *New York Times*, Fox News has been mentioned by Russian media 217% more times this past quarter than the quarter before that."

In *How Russian Media Uses Fox News to Make Its Case*, details are provided about how the Fox network has appeared hundreds of times in Russian media. "The narratives advanced by the Kremlin and by parts of conservative American media have converged in recent months, reinforcing and feeding each other. Along the way, Russian media has increasingly seized on Fox News's prime-time segments, its opinion pieces and even the network's active online comments section -- all of which often find fault with the Biden administration -- to paint a critical portrait of the United States and depict America's foreign policy as a threat to Russia's interests. Tucker Carlson was a frequent reference for Russian media, but other Fox News personalities -- and the occasional news update from the network -- were also included." These are reprehensible facts.

Fox Plays by the Right-Wing Media Playbook

There are three basic components of the right-wing playbook in both the print and broadcast media, as well as online.

(1) Pick a strategic fight locally. The right-wing doesn't pick fights on deregulating ExxonMobil or cutting taxes

for their rich donors -- those are loser issues for them. Instead, they pick fights to distract from their unpopular policy agenda. They pick fights that don't just resonate emotionally with their right-wing base, but that resonate emotionally with the broader population -- and particularly fights that activate or stoke division along lines of race, gender, or sexuality. The goal is to create conflict that distracts from real issues, supports their wacko worldview, and benefits them politically. Sometimes, there is legitimate reactionary grassroots energy on the issue; sometimes, it's pure astroturf; often, it's a mix of both.

(2) Amplify those fights with your propaganda machine. Whether it's a viral rant from Ben Shapiro on Facebook, an opening segment from Tucker Carlson on Fox News, nationally-regurgitated talking points on a Sinclair-owned radio station, or just Russian-funded disinformation, the right-wing has developed a truly impressive (and scary) propaganda machine. Before the New York Times or CNN or your other mainstream news source covers their chosen local conflict, this propaganda machine kicks into gear relentlessly and repetitiously amplifying the strategic fight.

(3) Spread the conflict to the mainstream. There are two biases in the establishment media that the right-wing exploits brilliantly: a bias for conflict ("if it bleeds, it leads") and a bias for treating Republicans and Democrats as two equally-likely purveyors of truth (bothsidesism). The right-wing knows this, and they take advantage of it. Most modern elected Republicans are, to use a technical term, full of shit -- every reasonable person paying attention knows this. But most of the establishment press is intestinally incapable of treating right-wing claims as any more suspect than others. That these right-wing talking heads are talking about some emotional local conflict -- well that makes the issue just about irresistible for mainstream coverage.

And then they've answered those two all-important questions: the most important thing happening in the country is this made-up and irrelevant but emotionally charged issue, and it's those damn elitist, condescending Democratic politicians who are to blame for it.

"What this looks like in the real world: This is not just theory or history -- the right-wing is running this playbook in this very moment to define the political reality we all live in. The dominant version today is the 'EdScare' (it's a take on the McCarthyite 'Red Scare'). If you don't know it by that name, you might know it by 'Critical Race Theory'."

"Last year, throngs of angry people started showing up at local school board meetings, concerned that something called 'Critical Race Theory' was being taught. And, in their minds, any school material that acknowledged the existence of racism or the history of anti-Black oppression qualified as CRT. Within a matter of months, Critical Race Theory went from a school of legal thought to a central rallying cry of the right -- and an issue in the November elections. Similar panics about gender and sexuality followed."

"How does this happen? Let's run this through the playbook above:"

"Pick a strategic fight locally. The right-wing picked a strategic fight intended to divide us, and particularly to fuel white peoples' anxieties about being perceived as racist. Local groups formed with the support of a massive, right-wing, dark-money infrastructure capable of resourcing them and amplifying them (as Media Matters has painstakingly documented). Their relentless policing and harassment of school boards and teachers helped to produce the content necessary to fan the flames of a panic. All of this added up to a story of parents vs. woke bureaucrats -- perfect for packaging as part of the broader national right-wing frame."

"And then just like that, it suddenly stopped. Coverage evaporated after the GOP ran the table in Virginia's 2021 elections -- *Fox News Coverage of CRT Plummeted*. If you'll recall, the exact same dynamic played out in 2018 with Trump's manufactured 'migrant caravan' crisis -- coverage 'nearly stopped after the U.S. midterms.' Or go back to the midterms before that in 2014, when the GOP manufactured Ebola crisis coverage ... and then also dropped the issue almost entirely after the election -- *Ebola Coverage Plummeted After Midterms*."

"That's how it works. The right-wing never actually thought the real top issue in the country was Ebola, or the migrant caravan, or CRT, or whatever manufactured, strategically emotional conflict they came up with. The point is building right-wing political power by distracting, dividing and conquering. And it works. As David Smith of the Guardian reported in *Republicans' midterm pitch: never mind the policy, here's the culture war*. The midterms are

back, and the culture wars are back -- amazing how that works."

"So what do we do? No retreat, no defense -- only offense."

"The diabolical brilliance of this right-wing strategy is the trap it sets. Suddenly, an emotionally charged issue is all over mainstream media. This gives all of us living in reality two options: we can engage in the debate of their issue, or we can try to talk about something else. Both are loser strategies. The right-wing picked the issue for us to lose on -- if we engage directly, we lose. But they also picked this issue to be conflictual, sexy, front-page material. If we try to change the subject (Infrastructure! Recovery! The Biden agenda!), the mainstream media won't bite. It's tails -- the right-wing wins, heads -- we lose."

"So if you can't play defense on their turf, and you can't just ignore it and hope the media covers something else, that leaves one strategy: going on offense." Let's try it!!

The Role of Billionaires in Influencing Public Opinion and National Policy

The so-called Fourth Estate of media is often regarded as being helpful in holding powerful institutions accountable. Unfortunately, it too is failing us in many ways. A void has been created by the decline of print journalism due to advertising increasingly being done online. And this void is being filled by billionaires seeking to profit by influencing and controlling information and public opinion.

Michael Scherer and Sarah Ellison explained on May 1, 2022 in their article *How a billionaires boys' club came to dominate the public square*: "It is an unusual and consequential feature of the nation's new 'digital public square' that technological change and the fortunes it created have given a vanishingly small club of massively wealthy individuals the ability to play arbiter, moderator and bankroller of not only the information that feeds the nation's discourse but also the architecture that undergirds it."

The latest case is Elon Musk's \$44 billion takeover of Twitter, the outcome of which is to be seen, but will likely be quite negative with regards to the greater good because deceptive misinformation and false conspiracies will almost certainly proliferate without responsible moderation.

For his part, Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg, who is #15 on the Forbes list of the world's wealthiest, has autonomy over the algorithms and moderation policies of the nation's top three social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram and Facebook Messenger.

Billionaire Jeff Bezos has significant influence with the Washington Post, and New York billionaire Mike Bloomberg also has far-reaching influence since he created Bloomberg LP in 1981.

And Australian billionaire Rupert Murdoch has vast influence with his Fox News network, as noted above -- and he has wielded it ruthlessly since he made his first purchase in the United States in 1976 when he bought the New York Post and then launched Fox News and later expanded to the Wall Street Journal.

"The information that courses over these networks is increasingly produced by publications controlled by fellow billionaires and other wealthy dynasties, who have filled the void of the collapsing profit-making journalism market with varying combinations of self-interest and altruism. It is a situation that has alarmed policy experts at both ends of the increasingly vicious ideological and partisan divides."

This is a serious issue, says Brookings scholar Darrell West, because "we are now very dependent on the personal whims of rich people, and there are very few checks and balances on them. They could lead us in a liberal, conservative or libertarian direction, and there is very little we can do about that."

Brendan Nyhan, a Dartmouth political scientist who has studied misinformation and its effects on democracy, said social media allows Zuckerberg and Musk to have "greater influence over the flow of information than has been possible in human history."

"Of particular concern to Nyhan is the lack of transparency over the way these platforms control the information on them. Democrats and Republicans have recently expressed interest in increased antitrust enforcement, as well as new legal restrictions that condition the immunity social networks enjoy from civil lawsuits on their agreement to properly moderate debate. There are, naturally, deep divisions about what that moderation should look like."

"In the European Union, lawmakers have been pushing forward laws that require social networks to crack down on speech illegal in Europe that is generally protected by the U.S. Constitution. The proposed laws also require algorithmic transparency and give consumers more control how their own information is used."

Ben Wizner, director of the ACLU's speech, privacy and technology project, said the key challenge created by individual control over social media and journalism is, at root, about scale. "We are talking about a small handful of people who now exercise extraordinary control over the boundaries of our discourse," he said. "The importance for media and journalism is that there be a diverse ecosystem that represents the interests of many, not just the few."

"Nearly all of these executives, including Musk, claim benevolent motivations, and many, like Bezos who owns The Post, have established firewalls of editorial independence that protect against their direct influence on articles such as this one. But the power to fund, shape and hire leaders that decide what is shared and what is covered has nonetheless become the subject of its own political conflict. Partisans find themselves celebrating the autonomy of the rich men who they see as serving their interests, while simultaneously objecting to the unchecked power of those who don't."

"Both Murdoch and Bloomberg have invested heavily in opinion-driving journalism, through Fox News and Bloomberg Opinion, respectively. They follow in the tradition that emerged in the last century when wealthy families and scions, such as William Randolph Hearst and the Sulzberger family that owns the New York Times, came to dominate the largest newsgathering organizations."

The role of social media networks, which have largely replaced print newspapers as the way most Americans get their information, has complicated the issue, in part due to the fact that there are so few networks and they are so dominant. A 2019 poll by the Pew Research Center found 62 percent of Americans felt that social media companies have "too much control over the news people see." Sensible remedies are needed!

Historian Heather Cox Richardson Letters from an American on May 19, 2022

The Conservative Political Action Committee (CPAC), the influential right-wing PAC of the American Conservative Union, held its first European event in Budapest, Hungary. Its leaders chose Hungary "apparently because they see that country as a model for the society they would like to see in the U.S. under a strongman leader like rising authoritarian prime minister Viktor Orbán of Hungary," wrote historian Heather Cox Richardson in one of her recent *Letters from an American*.

"Orbán is the architect of what he calls 'illiberal democracy,' or 'Christian democracy.' This form of government holds nominal elections, although their outcome is preordained because the government controls all the media and has silenced opposition. Illiberal democracy rejects modern liberal democracy because the equality it champions means an acceptance of immigrants, LGBTQ rights, and women's rights and an end to traditionally patriarchal society. Orbán's model of minority rule promises a return to a white-dominated, religiously based society, and he has pushed his vision by eliminating the independent press, cracking down on political opposition, getting rid of the rule of law, and dominating the economy with a group of crony oligarchs."

"Led by personalities like Tucker Carlson, the American right wing embraces the Hungarian model, despite the corruption, lack of legal accountability, and attacks on the press that make Hungary the only member of the European Union no longer rated as 'free' by democracy watchdog Freedom House. As if in illustration of Orbán's policies, U.S. journalists were not allowed into CPAC."

"Orbán gave the keynote speech at the CPAC convention. In it, he embraced the 'great replacement theory' that says white people are being replaced by immigrants of color. This is the myth that motivated the shooter in Buffalo, New York, last weekend, when he murdered ten people and wounded three others. It is the myth from which most Republicans have tried to distance themselves since the Buffalo killings."

"It is surprising to see folks who talk about American greatness take their inspiration from the leader of a small central European country of fewer than 10 million people, about the size of Michigan. Yale philosophy professor Jason Stanley commented: 'Oh come on US conservatives, stop embarrassing yourselves. Have some dignity and national pride.'"

Truly,
Tiffany B. Twain
July 12, 2022