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Carolina Review

UNC's Conservative and Libertarian Journal, Since 1993.



From the Editor-in-Chief

Dear Readers,

The long expected and well overdue day has finally come. Chapel Hill is unmasked. The longest “two weeks” of our lives are over.

Although by the time I arrived at Chapel Hill the worst of Covid-19 had already passed by, I was doubtful that the pandemic policies of the campus would disappear as soon as they did. I wholly expected to be wearing a mask to my classes next Fall. It was very welcome news that the masks, originally intended for only a few weeks, would not last many more months or years into the future.

Spring is now here as well. The weather is warm and the plants are blooming. Our campus, filled now with faces and color, looks the best it has this



year. A rejuvenating Spring break has lifted our spirits and we have passed the halfway mark of the semester.

As you enjoy these wonderful days at Chapel Hill, the staff of Carolina Review offers you this magazine. Inside, you will see a review of the Covid-19 pandemic by Nate Gibson as well as Devin Lynch’s personal experiences with the ending mask mandate. You will read in my own article about the wonders of the classics. Kristen Snyder will teach you about the upcoming midterm elections and Nate Gibson will discuss the threats which media technology poses to us, and both of them will write follow up pieces next month. From Elijah Parish, you will get a thoughtful reflection on the ideologies of the conservative movement. And last but not least, Grant Lefelar will demonstrate how our administration’s inability to fix the Old Well is symbolic of deeper institutional problems.

We hope you enjoy our magazine!

Lux Libertas,

Erik Hanson
Editor-in-Chief

Carolina Review

Carolina Review is the journal of conservative and libertarian thought published at the University of North Carolina. Since 1993, we have been the only published voice of conservatism on campus. Note that each article expresses the view of the author, not the publication or staff as a whole.

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The Midterm Evaluation Project

**KRISTEN
SNYDER**

Staff Writer

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Journalism Major

from Indian Trail, NC

The Democrats anxiously await November 8th when the American people will pass judgment on the party's leadership through their votes in the 2022 Midterm Elections.

Four hundred thirty-five congressional seats will open to competitive races for the first time after the controversial Presidential election of 2022 concluding Democrat Joseph R. Biden as the winner. The Democratic Party has held the majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate for the last two years passing a 1.9 trillion-dollar relief bill to aid Americans through government stimulus. Yet, with Midterm elections right around the corner, this small victory may not be enough to draw Americans eyes away from their fuel tanks, grocery bills, and TVs.

Democrats met in Philadelphia on March 10th to discuss action plans on how to keep their bicameral majority. Looking at recent polls from FiveThirtyEight, many

Americans are losing faith in the Democratic party. President Biden faces a 51.3% disapproval rating as support increases for the Republican party.

The recent State of the Union gave President Biden the opportunity to highlight his achievements and an attempt to in-



Democrats anxiously await November 8th when the American people will pass judgment on the party's leadership.

crease the morale for his party and fellow Americans. He pointed to the bipartisan support of the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act as well as the stimulus bill through the American Rescue Plan. He received strong applause for his sanctions against Russia in support of Ukraine. However, much within the President's address pointed to growing factions within the Democratic party.

President Joe Biden originally ran on the platform to "Build Back Better;" but, two years later many Democratic values have yet to be addressed. Students have yet to see reform for student loans. Abortion has been further restricted. President Biden encouraged police reform but continues to support their funding. This remains an unfavorable decision among many young Democratic voters. Although support of the Ukraine has been a unifying factor, many Americans are conflicted whether this current Russian aggression correlates to President Biden's sudden withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The Midterm Elections are a chance for the American people to evaluate the presidential administration. It should be noted that the party holding executive leadership often will lose seats unless it has demonstrated large successes in the eyes of American citizens.

Texas held its primaries on March 1st setting the tone for election season. While Texas is known for being a more conservative



state, many seats will be reevaluated for the current needs of each district. Texan voters will decide between moderate candidates, such as the 3rd district's Representative Van Taylor, or more conservative candidates, many of whom continue to question the results of the 2020 election. Eyes will also be on the outcome of Texas's gubernatorial election as Democrat Beto O'Rourke and Republican Incumbent Greg Abbott advance from the primaries. If O'Rourke provides a strong opposition to the Republican incumbent, it will be a strong indication of Texan support for the current President. However, beating a conservative incumbent in the state of Texas will not be an easy task.

In 2020, Americans looked at the state of their nation and many thought that anything would be better than the past administration's leadership. Now, polls demonstrate that Americans



The Midterm Elections are a chance for the American people to evaluate the presidential administration.

believe they may have made a mistake.

In this article series, I will discuss the monthly results of the

primaries and how they correspond to the current events surrounding them. I hope to educate readers on how to look at politics objectively and understand the reasons behind the results of the polls.

Kristen Snyder is a Staff Writer for CR, and involved with TPUSA on campus.

A Fountainhead

**GRANT
LEFELAR**

*Gue Writer
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PoliSci & History
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It was a Monday, October 18th of 2021 to be exact. After a semi-boring day of attending history lectures and a twenty-five minute run along the usual route for my LFIT jogging class, I made my usual walk from campus to my apartment. Carrying a heavy, textbook-laden backpack and two empty water bottles that I had depleted of life following my run, my tired, parched self planned to make a necessary pit stop at the Old Well. However, as I imagined the temporary relief I would receive from the lukewarm, yet refreshing water fountain, I suddenly received a text from a friend who turned out to be a bringer of bad news. The bad news in question: the Old Well's water fountain faucet was gone.

Immediately, and simultaneously lamenting the fact that I would have to make my way back to my apartment feeling slightly dehydrated, my mind raced with who the culprits may be. As the University had not sent any communique

stating that the Old Well would be closed nor was the fountain capped like it was during the first stage of the pandemic, the only realistic explanation was that it was an act of vandalism. Could it be a disgruntled Miami fan looking for revenge after Hurricanes QB Tyler Van Dyke threw a final

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The bad news in question: the Old Well's water fountain faucet was gone.

second interception to seal the game for Carolina Football? Or maybe, a drunken fellow Tar Heel decided to have a laugh and stole it to satisfy their alcohol-fueled sense of humor? Nevertheless, whoever was responsible for the disappearance of the Old Well's water fountain faucet is insignificant when taking into account the

University's response.

Judging by the response of any reasonable person, the correct University response would be to simply replace the stolen faucet with a new one. Water fountain heads are not expensive, if looking from the standards of a multi-billion dollar University, as they are on average about forty dollars. Easily, the University could have ordered the replacement part and sent a maintenance worker out to quickly alleviate the issue. However, that is not what happened. Instead, from the time I am writing this in mid-January, the Old Well simply remains a short pipe sticking up in the water fountain basin. You can still press the button and water will emerge, though it is impossible and somewhat unsanitary to drink from. Also, no cap has been placed on the pipe, leaving the fountain open to the elements. So, with this information, University officials decided to take one of two roads. The first road, being unlikely, was they decided to close the Old Well without telling anyone and without



capping it. Or, the most likely option, was that the incompetence of our school officials allows UNC's most symbolically important structure to remain useless.

I understand that it is hard to get riled up by a water fountain. Yet, the Old Well does not remain the school administration's only or largest failing. Horrible on-campus mental health resources for students, deterioration of building facades, with the most notable being Alumni Hall whose entrance stands damaged and unsafe for public use, the massive pain-in-the-behind that is registering for classes on ConnectCarolina, etc. Also, in news that made headlines over the summer, the bungled offered tenure to New York Times journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones in which school officials stonewalled on if the controversial writer and activist would be allowed a tenured professorship at the Hussman School of Journalism. The controversy had a unique impact on campus politics by emboldening both her conservative critics and

her progressive supporters. Either way, the entire episode was an embarrassment from multiple angles and ended with Hannah-Jones' understandable decision to accept a position at Howard University instead.

Today, as the Old Well remains without a fountain, the University



Now, a bi-partisan group of students must come forward to force the administration's hand in a positive direction, all with the expressed goal of holding the administration accountable.

has slowly lost its credibility as one of America's top institutes of higher learning. As us students pay around ten thousand dollars in tuition and other expenses each year, we should demand better. Now, a bi-partisan group of students must come forward to force the

administration's hand in a positive direction, all with the expressed goal of cleaning up the student government and holding the administration accountable for their failures. Hopefully, the missing water fountain in the Old Well will become a fountainhead for much needed change and reform on campus. If not, UNC risks further deterioration, both in its buildings and the morale of its students.

Grant Lefelar is a Staff Writer for CR.

The Worlds That Made Our Own

**ERIK
HANSON**

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The Classics are fading away. They are in such a great decline that most people do not even know what they are, and are much less able to profess any significant knowledge of the Ancient Greek and Roman civilizations or the Latin and Ancient Greek languages, all of which define the classical world. Worse, many people who know about—but have never studied—the classics simply proclaim them dead and undesirable. Are they right? Should we scrap the language of academia through the time of Newton and declare classical learning deceased? Should we bury the languages of Thucydides, Plato, and Aristotle, and of Ovid, Cicero, and Caesar, six feet under for their alleged “lack of practical application?” With all the information known to the world fitting into our pockets on phones why should we bother learning unspoken Latin and Ancient Greek? These are the questions which the modern world poses to the classical, and which demand an account of the virtues of the classics.

The classics open one’s mind to new and influential civilizations,

peoples, and all of their collective experience. The histories of Ancient Greece and Rome are rich and deeply pedagogical for those keen on perpetuating a free society. Furthermore, beyond the simple benefits of learning history and its lessons, the classical world is the foundation of our own Western world, with its philosophers influencing our ideas, its political thinkers shaping our government, and its languages dominating our dialect. No nation can endure with its foundation uprooted. Rather than drifting into danger like a ship with no rudder, Western society ought to reinvest itself in the classics. Nothing could be more careless than neglecting the classical civilizations which birthed the soul of our society.

From reading the classics, we come to know the wisdom of ancient philosophers. Aristotle’s observations on happiness and virtue have lost no luster in the several millennia they have existed. Plutarch’s insight into ethics and Cato’s commitment to virtue are not obsolete. The stoic doctrines of Marcus Aurelius and many others still have valuable applications in today’s world. The long list of ancient philosophers and their ideas and their ongoing influ-

ence would remain incomplete no matter the extent to which I document it. Although the classical texts were written thousands of years ago, few words have since been written which are equally insightful into human nature and which guide readers equally well in how to live.

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The profound philosophies of the ancients still govern both our thinking and Western society’s, teaching us to discern fact from fiction and the virtuous from the immoral

Besides enabling a genuine exploration of Rome and Greece and deepening students’ appreciation for the classical worlds, there is also much intellectual rigor and growth which accompanies reading Latin and Greek. Parsing these languages requires forsaking word order and instead conducting a math-like



Photo Credit: ThoughtCo.com

analysis of subtle conjugations, inflections, and syllable changes to piece together grammatical puzzles. Readers must synthesize vocabulary, expansive grammar, and the surrounding textual and historical context to comprehend ideas which translations often cannot truly reflect. Reading the classical languages trains one's critical thinking in this completely unique manner. Then come the literary benefits. Over 60% of English words come from Latin, and many trace their roots back even farther to Ancient Greek. Learning classical roots aids English comprehension and is the best manner of improving one's personal lexicon. The grammar of the classical languages not only polishes one's own English grammar, but also reveals new sentence constructions and ways to express thoughts. Many of the classical authors read today were rhetorical masters, and

by serving as role models they teach us how to write more convincing and compelling arguments. Their styles are instructive, and they take writers to new literary heights. A study of the classical languages is itself a study of English. The aforementioned benefits are interdisciplinary, abundant, and wonderful. Yet in the classics there is still one more attribute which you should not underestimate. It would give the classics a purpose even if nothing else did. In many cases, the classical works which have been preserved stand among the world's finest writing. Only Shakespeare's plays can rival Homer's enchanting *Odyssey*, and just the finest speeches, like Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, match the quality of Cicero's orations. Reading the classical works is uniquely enjoyable, and the classical authors leave their readers wholly gratified.

So are the people who declare "Aristotle was wrong" and "Latin is a dead language" right? Should our society abandon the languages most influential for thousands of years, whose words made our language, whose civilizations shaped our society, and whose thinkers paved the way to our world? No. We should not let the old age and muteness of the classics deceive us. Rather, we should study our foundations and our history and reap the rewards. Although the classical languages are rarely spoken, given their copious benefits, they are certainly more alive than dead. Few things are more enriching to a modern individual's writing, critical thinking, and understanding of the world.

Erik Hanson is the CR Editor-in-Chief

The Technology Problem

NATE
GIBSON

Opinion Editor

Junior

*PoliSci & Gov from
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This article is part of a 2-part series. This one will aim to outline the problem which we face and provide an explanation. Next month's edition will include an article addressing how we can aim to mitigate these harms and lessen their negative impacts. Technology has become an undeniably integral part of our everyday lives. Furthermore, the impact of technology has increased remarkably with the introduction of "free" services such as social media, making for more thoroughly connected communities. Of course, one could write a novel on the positive impacts social media and technology entail. Unfortunately, much less thought is given to the counterpart of this assertion—social media also has the potential to wreak havoc on society as we know it, subverting our nation in a manner which eats at the very foundations it rests upon. Simply stated, the negative ramifications of social media have long been overlooked or trivialized. The most dangerous virus is one which

you aren't even aware of, silently destroying the connections which we value and posing a real national security risk. Change must happen to ensure that social media is not what brings the end to our amazing country.

I wish that such a contention was an over exaggeration, but it simply is not. To begin, there are some valuable problem statements which outlining will give us a better understanding of why our doom is inevitable should our trajectory not change.

Here's the basic problem statement. Humans have paleolithic emotions and brains, medieval institutions, and Godlike technology. Our brains are slow to adapt to changing circumstances, respond to incentives, and are easily "hackable." An algorithm can hack it, feeding you the most appealing content curated just for you. Our institutions (primarily the government, but this also includes big tech) are slow to respond to problems. The slow nature of government responding to imperative threats and new technological developments has been proven

time and time again; whether the innovation be railroads, social media, AI, or deep fakes. Technology—social media in particular—gives us immense power. Frankly, this innovation comes close to putting in our palm the power of God—never before imagined. The opportunity to communicate any idea at any time with any group of people is a remarkable development in the human race, one which cannot be understated. So, with technology progressing faster than we possibly can, how do we wield the power of God properly while lacking His love, wisdom, and jurisprudence?

This is an immense problem. Social media algorithms are much smarter than us.



The basic business model of these big tech companies rests on selling their most valuable commodity—you

In fact, your social media of choice knows you just as well as your friends and family, if not better. These platforms make money by building a virtual profile of you and selling it to advertisers. They know your friends, interests, habits, lifestyle, and location. Tristan Harris, the creator of the documentary *The Social Dilemma*, contends that “our mind is more profitable as dead slabs of predictable behavior.” Hence, social media tries to calculate—eventually, curate—your every move.

Compounding this problem, social media is engaged in a “race to the bottom of the brain stem.” They don’t want to just show you any content; they want to show you the most viral, engaging, infuriating, reaction-evoking content. This process has little to no regard towards if the content is inflammatory, divisive, or even dangerous. A study which examined 140,000 tweets from 44 news organizations found that “for both right-leaning and left-leaning media, ‘negative news spreads farther through the current Twitter network than positive news.’” Outrage sells, and social media is in the business of making money.

Here’s where a few different problems begin to work together to our great disadvantage. Of the top 15 pages for African-Americans, 2/3 are run by troll farms. Troll farms are organizations that purposely publish offensive or disturbing content with the intent of creating tension or to control people’s opinions. Of the top 15 pages for Native Americans, 1/3 are run by troll farms. Needless to say, these troll farms are run by American enemies. We are not living in a virtual reality which reflects the real world. It is a fabricated reality, and it is fabricated by individuals,

organizations, and countries which do not have your best interests in mind. This existing framework of flawed mechanics and algorithms is promoted despite its flaws because it is profitable, not because it is beneficial.

These inherent problems lend themselves to malicious foreign actors, creating a recipe for disaster. Our enemies are not unaware of the great potential social media has to internally destroy America; in fact, they have been using this tactic for some time now. The Chinese military doctrines, corroborating the most significant piece of war literature ever written—*The Art of War*—correctly assert that one should never attack a stronger enemy directly. Instead, it is beneficial to divide them internally based on existing fault lines. Facebook and other platforms make this incredibly easy considering that they divide people into their tribal identity groups, continuing to feed them information which often creates a rabbit hole. We’ve seen ample examples of the radicalization which can result from this process.

Regardless, when the populace is polarized enough, they elect a polarized government. This results in gridlock. Autocratic nations exercise full control over nearly all content which spreads. This is a uniquely democratic and free-society problem. Thus, autocratic societies would be much more effective and come to overpower the confused and conflicted free ones. Russia has been aware for the past several decades of the effectiveness of polarizing fault lines. Dating back to the Cold War, Russia has actively sought to undermine American unity and sow division. KGB defectors allege that as much as 85% of KGB employees

worked on “active measures.” These active measures do not constitute overt war. Rather, they aim to subvert the population internally and tear a country apart without a single bullet. This is much more dangerous than actual war. These methods destroy the very nature of our democratic values. Looking at the state of society, it’s tough to argue that their decades of work have not been effective. Social media is a great weapon which can be tactfully utilized by our enemies. Various political science studies point to the fact that while social media may not be the origin of greater polarization, platforms “intensifies divisiveness and contributes to its corrosive consequences.” By pitting Americans against Americans, foreign actors can dominate us without any overt measures.

Declining trust in fellow citizens and major institutions is a real problem. Look at the hyperpolarization which plagues us now; doxxing, destroying one’s livelihood, and political violence are not going away soon to say the least. Other destructive effects include declining trust in fellow citizens and major institutions, legislative dysfunction, an erosion of democratic norms, and a loss of faith in commonly held facts. Simply stated, these problems will destroy us if they are not handled promptly. This does not necessitate an authoritarian government control over these free platforms, but it does require change, ideas for which will come in the second part of this article.

Nate Gibson is the CR Opinion Editor

What Are We Conserving?

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PARISH**

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Freshman studying

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from Durham, NC

Politics is by its very nature irrational. The absurdities we all see cannot be explained by mere ignorance or differing values. Ignorance does not explain the passion and vitriol — after all, few people are highly emotional about advanced calculus. It also doesn't explain the persistence of beliefs in the face of new evidence or the clustering of unrelated beliefs. There's no reason I should be able to predict your position on immigration or taxes from your position on gun control, yet I probably could. Worse still, one would think that having a broader conception of the moral value of living beings, that may, for example, lead to one advocating for animal rights, would also lead to one advocating for the rights of the unborn, yet these two positions have an inverse correlation. Diverging value structures also cannot account for political arguments because they similarly don't account for position clustering, nor do they account for differing beliefs in

fact patterns. One's beliefs on the morality of the police should have no effect on one's understanding of the number of people killed by police each year, yet those with differing beliefs also differ greatly on the facts. I believe it is widely agreed that this irrationality of politics is a substantial societal danger.

As conservatives, we have a fundamental respect for long-standing institutions — it's a defining feature of the school of thought. Oversimplifying for the sake of explanation, progressives say, "Think of all the possibilities," and we say, "Just don't ruin things too much." A conundrum then arises when institutions decay: how should one who respects institutions respond to an institution's corruption? We can recognize the rot and yet we don't want to destroy it wholesale. We may even have an instinctual dislike of those who want to change it before we can evaluate whether we think the change is a good idea. So the question arises: what should a conservative do in a seemingly corrupt

society?

Carl Jung had an idea that in order to be the best possible man, you needed to be able to integrate your feminine side. This idea wasn't original to Jung — it's perennial. The Tao Te Ching may be the pinnacle manifestation of this idea of the union of opposites taken to its most extreme. A less esoteric example is Muhammad Ali's famous quote, "float like a butterfly, sting like a bee." Boxing may be a sport centered around masculine aggression, violence, and dominance, but success at the highest level requires a sort of feminine flow or style.

Though it may be an unpleasant thought in the age of rigid adherence to ideology and group identity, I think this notion of the integration of opposites maps very well onto politics. While I'd style myself a conservative, I'm unashamed to admit that I hold a considerable number of maverick positions. My dominant conservative intuition is also influenced by a libertarian, left, and empiricist intuition — each of which fre-



CONSERVATIONISM

Javier Jaén

Photo Credit: Javier Jaen

quently contradicts the others, and I find myself struggling to balance. I wonder if others share my eclectic political intuitions. I don't find the idea of anarchism unattractive. I think the data likely favor single-payer healthcare over our current abomination of a system. And the topic of this article, I'd like to briefly sketch out arguments for some ostensibly left-wing positions that conservatives should consider adopting.

The first issue I'd like to bring up is the one on which I believe we've made decent progress. Recently polling has shown that Republicans are significantly more likely to support Julian Assange than Democrats, but this wasn't always the case. There was a time when Assange was a liberal

darling for exposing the crimes of the surveillance state, and it's quite shameful that Republicans opposed this. Worse still, it's unclear whether this increased support for Assange marks a sustained ideological growth or mere power politics such as appreciation of Wikileaks releasing Clinton's emails during the 2016 election or the disaffectedness with federal agencies for hoaxes like Russiagate. The silence from the new "free-speech party" has been deafening when it comes to cases like the house arrest of Steven Donziger for the crime of fighting Chevron's pollution and exploitation. Conservatives ought to respect the rights of protestors and whistleblowers. When one critiques, the purpose is to purify, not

to destroy. When we fail to distinguish the two, that only invites the destroyers. Conservatives who punish those who expose the flaws in severely flawed institutions are doing a great disservice to themselves. If those flaws are not reconciled, the whole will inevitably collapse.

Another issue on which the right has been tentatively making some progress has been economic populism. We needed fusionism to defeat the Soviet Union, but did letting Libertarians into the coalition really have to mean sucking up to corporations? When I say I want to preserve traditions, I'm not referring to the profits of Amazon. We've known for at least a few hundred years that rampant inequality precipitates collapse, and

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One last issue on which the right has made some progress which I'd bring up is that of foreign policy

Albeit small, shift in right-wing foreign policy since I first became politically conscious. Even seen conservative commentators have been critiquing Bush's war in Iraq for some time now. There are two problems I see with this movement, despite seeing it as a net-positive. The first is that this movement seems to be motivated, not by a genuine desire to do good, but by a defeatist and disinterested isolationism. Obviously, this is better than a foreign policy bought and owned by Raytheon and Lockheed Martin, but it is suboptimal. The second problem, and I believe the more severe of the two, is that the right-wing anti-war movement neglects to be proactive. I'm relieved to see conservatives not gung-ho to go "liberate" and "bring democracy" to Ukraine, and excited by the conservatives critiquing the war in Iraq, but it seems like the criticisms are highly reactionary and with a narrow scope. I've never seen a conservative draw attention to stolen assets and starvation in Afghanistan (except to own Biden) or bombings in Somalia or US funded genocide in Yemen.

Perhaps, in a year I will have flipped my position on all three of the aforementioned issues. Until then, I think I've presented three

ways in which the conservative movement has adopted nominally left-wing positions for the better. This is a non-exhaustive list, but I think it's more than enough to make my point. There is much value to be gained from not being trapped in one ideological camp. Naturally, this imperative applies to any left-wing readers, but for my fellow conservatives: you're allowed to acknowledge anthropogenic climate change without subscribing to the permanent revolution, and you can read Marx and Foucault without being the subject of some Kafka novel and turning into a "bloody post-modern neo-marxist!" --

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The problem of polarization is one, universally acknowledged

The problem of polarization is one, universally acknowledged. This proposed epistemic humility is an easily accessible, tangible, and extraordinarily effective strategy in combating this problem, which I would implore all free thinkers to undertake.

Elijah Parsh is is a Staff Writer for CR

Stop Weaponizing Politeness

DEVIN LYNCH

*Staff Writer
Senior studying
Computer Science
from Charlotte, NC*

A few days ago, I received an email from a professor acknowledging the end of UNC's mask mandate but “respectfully asking” that we continue to wear masks in class this week since we'll be participating in group discussions and about to go on Spring Break. At the start of the pandemic, I would have complied with and treated this as a mostly reasonable request. But coronavirus-inspired restrictions stopped being reasonable requests as soon as the first two-week lockdown lasted more than two weeks.

Personal health choices during the pandemic weren't really choices.

Over the last two years, people have become far more health conscious. As the realities of exacerbating factors for Covid set in, we realized that there's a lot we can do to improve our overall health and odds of coming out of this pandemic mostly okay. People are looking out for each other, too. That's all great. But those who claim moral superiority over others just trying to live their life can't claim to be selfless. Some continue to choose an insular lifestyle, avoid large gatherings, and

wear masks indoors as a personal health measure. Sure. That's one's own prerogative. The rest of us are expected to politely accept this with the understanding that some people just aren't comfortable returning to real life. That's fine too. But there are people out there who have opposing preferences—who choose to continue to live their lives as they always have.

If we treated everyone's preferences with the same degree of respect, there wouldn't be an issue. But the



Personal health choices during the pandemic weren't really choices.

reality is that those who remain fearful of Covid occupy a special place in our society's hierarchy of acceptable positions. It's unthinkable to question their personal decisions, but excoriating those of us who stopped wearing masks a long time ago is fair game.

The hypocrisy is astounding. Choosing to let this virus rule your life and guide your decisions has been considered a perfectly valid

choice. A noble one, even. But if you decide to live your life the way you always have, you were told that it wasn't your choice to make. I gave the lockdown crowd the benefit of the doubt at first. We were told that we could live our lives again after two weeks, then after a vaccine became available, then after everyone was vaccinated. But these promises have continually been broken, and frankly I'm not sure what the latest ultimatum is.

It's time to stop pretending any of us actually have a choice. Moral busybodies can either acknowledge that they see a Covid-conscious lifestyle as the only acceptable way to live, or acknowledge the legitimacy of the large majority who just want to live normally again. You can't have it both ways. If respecting others' personal preferences for a less-risky lifestyle is just part of being polite, then so is letting the rest of us live normal lives.

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What Went Wrong? Analyzing the Covid Pandemic and its Varied Reactions

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At long last, the masks come off. It's been a long two years—a two years worth examining and reflecting on. Why exactly did COVID-19 polarize us so thoroughly? What did we do right? Wrong? We saw a lot of institutions and political players unmasked through their actions, whatever that unmasked form is, over the past two years. What can we learn? Where did we go wrong?

On January 9th, 2020, the WHO announced a mysterious coronavirus-related pneumonia emerging from Wuhan, China. Travel precautions are seen as a primary solution by experts. On January 21st, human transmission was confirmed as the death toll began to rise. On February 2nd, the Trump administration decided to mandate health screenings and a 2-week quarantine for those arriving from China, specifically targeted at those who had been in the Hubei province. Australia, Germany, Italy, and New Zealand were enacting similar measures.

The response? Outrage. Democrats called the executive decision xenophobic, with leadership figures such as Speaker Nancy Pelosi encouraging people to go to Chinatown and remarking how “we feel safe and sound with so many of us coming here.” Given, there was limited information and it was not widespread knowledge that packed areas were so hazardous. However, the immediate political response to what should have been a fairly normal and conscientious reaction to a spreading virus set the stage for what the pandemic would be. Polarized.

Trump's March 13 travel ban on non-us citizens was similarly controversial, reminding many of his earlier ban on Muslim countries at the start of his tenure. However, it is worthwhile to note this Covid-related measure was much less political in nature. Regardless, the reaction still was all too political for Trump's political adversaries. The cultish following and hatred associated with the enigma of Trump did not have regard for a pandemic. The move was reacted to along party lines and

condemned by many regardless of legitimate merit.

I think that everything began innocently. A novel virus, quickly escalating pandemic, and limited data forced us all to react in unprecedented manner. “Unprecedented times,” they were called. And, to be fair, they were. But, as more and more information emerged, more masks of our elites were removed. We saw the ugly hypocrisy and authoritarianism of these disconnected pundits, CEOs, and politicians was on full display throughout. Rules for thee, not for me, became a motto. While restrictions became stricter and stricter, we continuously (up until the very end of the pandemic) saw those promulgating restrictive

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The science didn't change; political incentives did.

standards fail to live up to them. As death counts rose and transmission continued, fear spread.

Two weeks turned into a month, a month into many. All the time, democratic leaders like Andrew Cuomo were praised and republicans like Ron DeSantis were condemned. As time went on, we saw the evident process of media glorification and villainization. The political hit jobs were hidden behind thin facades of tropes like “the science,” sweeping any governance issues with political allies under the rug, demagoguing the response of political enemies. As soon as Trump uttered the word “hydroxychloroquine,” it was too demagogued to ever be legitimately discussed.

“The science” became a weaponized term which actually facilitated a general undermining of faith in institutions. We saw this process of destabilization in a variety of institutions during the pandemic. The media, our government, the elites writ large; their steadfast dedication to earning political points and repetition of popular narratives ad nauseum resulted in a plethora of ideas and science being silenced. Contrary to the desired result, this stifling of discourse regarding sensitive pandemic matters drove many to distrust our institutions more than they had at the start of the pandemic. When people feel as though they are denied nuance and forced into unanimity, they are bound to look elsewhere.

Quality institutions are supposed to provide a feeling of safety and effectively serve varied groups of people. However, when an exploration for the truth—albeit, such explorations inevitably run into dead ends with falsities—is forbidden, foolish ideas begin to sound more and more appealing. Facilitated by everyone being at home and online, conspiracy theories flourished. This points to the fact

that a growing distrust of institutions has serious ramifications. In a case-in-point instance where the truth should reign supreme, people felt as though it was being hidden. The resulting rise in distrust of institutions is disastrous for everyday life, harming social relationships and eroding our social fabric.

The pandemic also revealed the absolute power held by our social media overlords. The joke “what’s the difference between a fact and a conspiracy? A couple of months” began to carry more and more weight as we observed the big tech reaction to budding dialogue on the lab leak theory and conflicting discourse on lockdown efficacy. Social media suspended and silenced accounts which spread “misinformation.” In reality, “misinformation” was a thin veil for “opinions which do not parrot those of the CDC.”

The irony of such a mindset arose from the somewhat arbitrary nature with which CDC guidelines were initially created. The 6 feet guidance was described as arbitrary in nature by former FDA commissioner Scott Gottlieb, saying that “nobody knows where it came from,” speculating that it could be thanks to flu-related precautions and historical habits.

Either way, the absolute nature of the 6-foot guidance and mask efficacy did not satisfy people’s curiosity. There wasn’t enough explanation for such a lengthy restriction of everyday freedoms. Instead, people turned to sources where they felt they could get “true” information, regardless of its veracity. Had there been an acceptance of more nuanced studies and a bipartisan examination of policies, perhaps this could have been avoided. The rise of legiti-

mate misinformation and conspiracy theories during the pandemic can be largely attributed to a lack of data and the strong-arming of recommendations from our authority figures. Any dissent was dismissed as lunacy. People were hungry for something—even if it wasn’t right.

The dismissal of legitimate nuance only began there. We’ve already covered how accounts were banned for suggesting that Covid may be man-made. However, when academia came around to the realization that this was a possibility, it became an accepted viewpoint for which none of the “blue checks” on Twitter would be deplatformed for. While questioning the effectiveness of lockdowns—or even weighing their effects on mental health with their benefits—warranted a tweet deletion or account suspension initially, once the blue checks came around to the same questions they were suddenly okay to ask. Overall, the trend of silencing thoughtful discourse in the name of ubiquitous narratives was evident throughout the pandemic. Such a phenomena is troubling, further revealing the ultimate power that social media has on your online presence.

While this observation doesn’t advocate for every idea ever thrown out on social media, it remains valuable to point out that this curtailing of discourse is a very dangerous precedent to set. Eliminating an individual’s online footprint at will for opposing popular narratives is Orwellian in nature, particularly given the fact that such websites are the main method of communication in our modern age. We should think carefully and hard before accepting this standard, particularly when the rationale for suspension is a quandary

which would become legitimate mere weeks in the future.

With the pandemic hitting the accelerator in March, we knew the age-striated risk nature of Covid by June. Yet, policy was not meaningfully impacted by this finding. The elites continued to shutter business, wreaking havoc on our economy and mental health. While Cuomo shipped Covid-positive patients back into nursing homes and hid the resulting death count, DeSantis tailored care directly towards elderly and focused on securing the safety of the elderly first. Yet, DeSantis was the villain. Liberal states took much longer to come around to differentiating policy by age demographic, an idea which should have been acted on much earlier. Frankly, the reason for this is very clearly political brownie points. The freedom to work is apparently subservient to a governor's political aspirations; it is much more appealing to reserve the rebuttal that "I did something—you didn't" than make difficult decisions. This doesn't help anyone.

When the Trump administration's initiative for a vaccine yielded results with Project Warpspeed, political adversaries were quick to denounce the safety of such an expediently delivered treatment. Prominent political leaders fear-mongered once again, calling the vaccine production rushed, unsafe, and lacking oversight. In reality, we owe the awe-inspiring rapid production of a God-send vaccine to private innovation. Of course, pharma was still made out to be the enemy for some time. When it was politically palatable to be pro-vaccine, the script flipped and vaccines became of utmost importance. All these hap-

penings exposed how thoroughly partisan our politics has become. The data didn't change, the people in power did. So who was lying before? Who is lying now? Valuable questions to ponder. The economic fallout from forcibly shuttering most economic activity was perilous. Understandably, the government wanted to react. Yet, in their reaction, the ineptitudes of federal bureaucracy were evident. Massive stimulus packages may have been necessary in the peak of the pandemic, but the inflationary results of too strong a response has manifested in recent months. Decisions like the eviction moratorium were patently unconstitutional, forcing landlords to jump through a variety of slow-moving bureaucratic hoops in order to receive any form of protection. Aid was slow to be distributed and riddled with fraud. Meanwhile, shutdowns and isolation ravaged the mental health of all Americans. Particularly unjust was the handling of Covid in regards to children and young adults—despite being fully aware of the varied risk factors dependent on age demographic relatively early, most states continued to treat all ages very similarly. Locking down children and throwing off their education track damaged them for life. The statistics on the pandemic's affect on suicide, depression, anxiety, and addiction are staggering. Yet, these issues were too taboo to breach. Should you make mention of them, you would be castigated as not doing enough. Clearly, you just wanted to kill grandma.

Any serious discourse involving a messy cost-benefit analysis was thrown out the window. While anti-lockdown protests from those

actively losing their livelihood were construed as just horrible, any protest for a cause which pleased the check marks was perfectly fine. The concern for super-spreader events seemed limited in purview to causes which struck those in power as objectionable.

In our lives, UNC— as with other universities— extended spring break and mandated a rapid transition to a completely virtual learning process. Of course, such a sporadic and full transition is difficult. People and institutions can only be faulted to a certain extent for such strenuous circumstances. The semester went as well as it can go given such an instantaneous transition to a completely new format of learning.

Next semester, Carolina was ready to try again. After a long semester of solitude and confusion, we were excited to go back in person. Everybody knew exactly what would happen— some students would shelter, some would hit the ground running and immediately go to a party. Student-run accounts like "Whereyallgoin" dedicated their time to calling out fellow classmates, publicly shaming them until social media disallowed such doxxing practices. Instead of camaraderie and understanding, a culture of fear and division was instilled at UNC, with students being afraid of their fellow classmates referring them to the University for what could even be minor transgressions. Walking in large groups even seemed to be prohibited.

The complete discombobulation on full display elicited The Daily Tar Heel headline of "clusterfuck," referencing the 4 clusters which requisited the transition back to full-online learning. All students



Source: ABC News

were told to go home, effectively attempting to ruin another semester of on-campus learning and interpersonal interaction. Desperate times call for desperate measures, but the general lack of willpower to follow legitimate science (at risk demographics and resulting mortality, transmission rates, mask efficacy, etc.) and replacement of institutional trust with animosity towards those who even questioned forced norms was pervasive. Obviously, neither of these are good.

Finally, UNC has come around to lifting the mask mandate. The science didn't change; political incentives did. Don't forget that your academic experience was sacrificed out of fear of backlash, not out of students' best interests. While this may be debatable, the general point of a misalignment in the University's priorities was evident throughout.

The pandemic capitalized on gestating polarization, making divisions more prominent than ever thanks to the catalyst of the pandemic. The irony of the situation is that this bloodbath took place within an age demographic which

is not particularly at risk primarily during a virtual semester.

So what politicized Covid? I won't assign blame to Democrats or Republicans, though it may appear I have throughout this article. Truthfully, both parties worked together to achieve the state we find ourselves in. The Democrats and media focused on rebutting whatever Republicans said; meanwhile, the majority of Republicans focused on endorsing Trump fully, missteps and all. Instead of redirecting to proven scientific studies, they engaged in worthless and unwinnable political banter. Study after study points to a generalized decreasing trust in our institutions.

So, what can we take away from such a hectic couple of years? For one, don't forget. The careless attitudes of those who don't share your struggles must not be forgotten. While I can't blame people for trying to lower the death count of a deadly disease, it is unacceptable to brush off any nuanced policy rebuttal with an allegation of murderous intent. Remember what our "leaders" showed us the past two years. Second, we need to solve

the underlying issues of political polarization. If we cannot effectively respond to a pandemic, hope for normal democratic governance is all but lost. We must not subside and accept this crisis of animosity; we must act to build social capital and reach across the aisle now. Third, we know that if we have a more deadly pandemic, we're screwed. wisdom, and jurisprudence? This is an immense problem. Social media algorithms are much smarter than us.

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The Last Word

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Proverbs 1:7