

## *Defend America's History—and Retake Its Institutions*

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*The country hasn't passed from great to evil in 20 years. But elites have failed and betrayed us.*



An activist protests the Fourth of July in New York.

PHOTO: JOHN MARSHALL MANTEL/ZUMA PRESS

That was quick.

At the end of the 20th century, the U.S. had won World War II and the Cold War, liberated half the planet from history's most dehumanizing ideologies, advanced a free-market capitalism that had led more humans out of poverty than any economic system ever devised, and given the world the richest bounty of intellectual, cultural and scientific capital since the Enlightenment. Americans could—and did—look at themselves and the nation they had built with immense pride.

Twenty years later much of the country's political leadership, almost its entire academic establishment, most of the people who control its news and cultural output, and a good deal of its corporate elite view America as an irredeemably malignant force for enslavement and oppression, a uniquely evil power founded on an ideology of racial supremacy. These Jacobins demand that Americans repudiate

most of the nation's history, tear down the icons of its creation, and engage in a cultural expurgation of its sins.

Only four years ago Sen. Bernie Sanders, a man not noted for a surfeit of patriotic fervor, visited Mount Rushmore and [pronounced](#): "It really does make one very proud to be an American." On Friday, when President Trump made the pilgrimage, we were told that he was appearing, in the words of [a CNN reporter](#), "in front of a monument of two slave owners and on land wrestled away from Native Americans."

If the self-image of Americans a generation ago was that of a smiling GI receiving flowers from liberated peoples, today we're told it's a police boot stamping on a human face forever. What happened?

We can hope that the present mania is in part one of the baleful consequences of the lockdown lunacy. If you've been stuck at home mainlining the distortions of the media for four months, your tolerance threshold for fiction has doubtless been raised.

But the roots of the current insanity are more profound than the inch-deep scholarship of the sophomores now in control of America's newsrooms.

With hindsight, it's clear that America in 2020 was ripe for the kind of mindless Maoism that demands fealty to its gospel of ideological cleansing. The nation has reached a combustive moment. The rot in America's cultural institutions was spread for more than half a century by a self-loathing cultural establishment. Now it has matured amid a public malaise induced by 20 years of elite-driven political and economic failure that has undermined faith in the system that made America great.

The cultural corrosion has been evident for decades. Perhaps what we should have seen better were its consequences: Generations of students fed a steady diet of critical race theory and postcolonial gender studies—all delivered in safe spaces protected by an intolerance of dissent—poured out of college campuses into the world, waving their white-fragility texts like little red books.

But they graduated into an America that has been convulsed by two decades of unaccustomed failure and loss. In 20 years, wars and foreign-policy failures in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere; financial breakdown; and now the pandemic have exposed a hollow political leadership.

All the while the capitalism that had produced so much opportunity for so many has become increasingly a vehicle of power for a few. Megacompanies in finance and technology have grown unchecked. The modern woke corporation publicly disdains and derides the values on which the nation—and its profits—were built, even as it pursues global opportunities at the expense of American communities.

It won't be enough to reassert America's great historic virtues. It will require weakening the power of the totalitarians on campus, ensuring fair access for all

voices on tech platforms, holding to account the lawless mobs defacing and defaming the nation's legacy. But it will also require addressing the rot in American capitalism, reining in the power of bloated monopolies, and ensuring that corporations prioritize Americans over their globalist, progressive agendas.

This is personal for me. I came to this country as that great American century was closing. Like millions of immigrants I was drawn by the irresistible allure of a nation forged in pursuit of a universal ideal it had actually succeeded in achieving. Of course we knew there was a sharp tear in America's vibrant fabric, a legacy of racial prejudice that mocked the ideals of the founding. But the nation's demonstrated ability to advance beyond that, to mend and improve itself, makes America even more admirable.

This country hasn't passed from great to evil in two decades. America hasn't failed. But Americans have been failed—misled by inept and deceitful political leaders, deserted by predatory and mercenary corporate chiefs, and, above all, betrayed by a parasitic cultural elite that exploited American freedom to trash the country. It isn't America's history that needs to be repudiated. It's its present.

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