

Twitter Thread by Matthew Sheffield



Matthew Sheffield

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As a former conservative activist and journalist, it has been so frustrating to see my former compatriots spreading wild and unchecked claims about "voter fraud." [@jacknicas](#) of the NYT took a deep look at claims of "dead" people in Michigan voting. Link in next tweet.

While examining claims made by right-wing activists who are not credible individuals is a thankless task which elite media editors despise, this is vital and important work in this age of fake news. Here's the link: <https://t.co/WljvhMZnK6>

As the co-creator of NewsBusters, the most prominent anti-media website, I was part of a decades-long tradition of complaining about media elites being "unfair" to conservative views. There is still much to that argument, but eventually I saw that I was missing context.

What I did not realize until I began expanding my work into creating actual media and reporting institutions such as the Washington Examiner (I was the founding online editor) was that U.S. conservatives do not understand the purpose of journalism.

This became evident to me as I saw that conservative-dominated media outlets were MUCH more biased than outlets run by liberals. The latter had flaws that arose from a lack of diversities (note plural) but they operated mostly in good faith. That's not how the former operated.

I eventually realized that most people who run right-dominated media outlets see it as their DUTY to be unfair and to favor Republicans because doing so would somehow counteract perceived liberal bias.

While I was enmeshed in the conservative media tradition, I viewed lefty media thinkers like [@jayrosen_nyu](#) as arguing that journalism was supposed to be liberally biased. I was wrong. I realized later that I didn't understand that journalism is supposed to portray reality.

This thought was phrased memorably by [@StephenAtHome](#) as "reality has a well-known liberal bias" which is an oversimplification but is more accurate than the conservative journalist view which is that media should promote and serve conservative politicians.

I also discovered as I rose through the right-wing media ranks that most conservative media figures have no journalism training or desire to fact-check their own side. I also saw so many ppl think that reporting of info negative to GOP pols was biased, even if it was true.

If you would like to get a great look at the tensions and origins of conservative journalism, there is a wonderful, fabulous book by my friend [@pastpunditry](#) which I cannot commend enough. My career was an updated version of what she chronicled. <https://t.co/lBeOH0gieb>

People ask sometimes if conservative media figures like Sean Hannity or anyone associated with the Federalist could actually be so credulous as to believe unfounded and non-specific allegations of "voter fraud." But the reality is that they don't actually even think that far.

Truth for conservative journalists is anything that harms "the left." It doesn't even have to be a fact. Trump's numerous lies about any subject under the sun are thus justified because his deceptions point to a larger truth: that liberals are evil.

This assumption is behind all conservative media output. They never tell you what their actual motives are. Most center-left people don't realize just how radical many conservative elites are, largely because they don't wear it on their sleeves.

Just as a for-instance of this point, most people have no idea that the top two Trump White House figures, Mike Pence and Mark Meadows, think that biological evolution is a lie. <https://t.co/rWIWHjzWJf>

This is an extraordinarily dangerous viewpoint in light of the SARS2 coronavirus epidemic because the entirety of virology and epidemiology is based on evolution. If you think it's "fake" then you'll believe ludicrous nonsense like "herd immunity."

The same thing is happening with right-wing media and specious claims of voter fraud. Conservatives are willing to believe them even if there is no evidence, simply because anything negative about liberals is true. This mentality extends to the very highest ranks.

Newt Gingrich, William Bennett, and a bevy of GOP elected officials have no problem parroting unverified rumors as fact because conservative journalism is not about supporting conservatives, not about finding facts.

I tried for over a decade to inculcate some standards of independence and professionalism among conservative writers but my efforts made me enemies, especially when I argued that the GOP should be neutral on religion instead of biased toward Christians.

I began work on a manuscript in 2012 fearing that Mitt Romney would lose his election because conservatives had not learned how politics actually works and that we should adapt to serve public needs and make peace with secular people.

I showed my manuscript to several people who I thought were my friends because I wanted to get the perspective of religious conservatives. Instead of helping me, some of them began trying to expel me from the conservative movement.

I eventually realized that many conservative activists were committed to identity rather than ideas. One of my friends literally told me in 2016 that he would support Cruz bc "that's what the Christians are doing."

We're at a critical moment in U.S. politics right now because the Christian identity politics that is the edifice of Republican electioneering is teetering. Millions of Americans have for decades thought that their countrymen are evil.

You can watch this play out right now on a television stage when you tune into Fox News as they cover the election. Fact-based journalists have finally realized that the identity rage of the GOP is going into a raging crescendo.

On an hourly basis now outside of the rage-filled lie-fests of primetime, Fox reporters are gently trying to explain to guests that they need actual evidence before accusing people of crimes. The guests, such as Gingrich, have NEVER been challenged like this on Fox.

Bret Baier, Chris Wallace, Martha MacCallum, and others are trying to save conservatism from itself. It's like watching a modern-day adaptation of Aeschylus or Sophocles. Sadly, the rest of us are not just spectators in this tragedy.

How American conservatism dies is the most important story, by far, of this moment. Conventional media will never tell this story because their business is built on the lie that Trump is an aberration rather than apotheosis. That NeverTrump is righteous rather than venal.

At the same time, the tens of millions of people who vote Republican are not deplorable. They are misled. And the mocking and tribalistic coverage that lefty media often engage in only makes things worse. Only love can defeat hate.

I will be undertaking several projects address these and other large subjects including: a memoir of my youth in a fundamentalist Mormon household and a new magazine called Flux that will cover politics, data, sociology, and religion. Please follow to join me!

And just to clarify my point about people who are "misled."

It's the people that Trump referred to when he said "I love the poorly educated." They are the people who work hard, go to church, and feel they have no future in a secular America.

Not the leaders but the led.

Thanks for reading my rant.

If you would to see some of my writing that explores this topic at greater length, here is an older piece I wrote about the vulnerability of "own the libs" conservatism to reaction. <https://t.co/zhG2ZBI81T>