Being English is not racist! Ben Fogle calls out woke police as St George's Day looms
Josh Saunders, *Daily Express*, 21 April 2021

Ben Fogle has called out the woke police for "mistaking" English patriotism with "racism and xenophobia" in an interview ahead of St George's Day. The TV presenter is encouraging English people across the country to stand against those who have "hijacked" the once-popular patriotic celebration, which stems back hundreds of years. He told Express.co.uk that the nation is often "treated as the embarrassing aunt at a wedding" for marking the day but they should no longer be ashamed. Fogle believes people fear flying the St George's cross or marking St George's Day itself due to its link to less savoury causes. He believes the discomfort stems from criticism of England due to its "size and power of influence", which leaves some "a little squeamish" about being patriotic. He argues that "celebrating Englishness" does not "mean you are celebrating the Empire" or insulting other nations.

The 47-year-old claimed: "It doesn't mean that you hate the Scots, Welsh and Northern Irish. "We are living in a time when to celebrate national identity is interpreted as dislike or even blind hatred of multiculturalism and internationalism." He argued that criticism was "not true" and personally "loves the rich, multiculturalism of England" – as do many others. "We should be proud of the distinction that differs from our union of nations."

Fogle, who had a Scottish grandfather with Eastern European heritage and Canadian father, said he proudly "defines" himself as "English". This led him to fight for the right to celebrate St George's Day and felt patriotic displays should not be misinterpreted by others. He notes that it is especially important to "define our unique distinctions on an international stage" especially in a "post-Brexit world". The TV star argues that "national days of celebration" are "the source of worldwide pride" and something England should mark: "Scotland has Saint Andrew's Day, Wales has Saint David's and Ireland has Saint Patrick's Day. Each one celebrated with huge national pride but England's St George's Day often passes largely unceremoniously."

Fogle feels celebrations on April 23 could and "should be something more" than the previous displays in honour of patron saint and Englishness. He describes "Englishness" as a "collective spirit" that is not necessarily defined "solely" by "heritage" but "belonging". The star also argues that "you don't have to conform to a certain genealogy" because being English is "a mind-set". Fogle said: "I like to queue, I love to talk about the weather, I enjoy tea, I love Marmite, and I play cricket... I feel a great pride in my Englishness, not in a jingoistic, BNP, xenophobic pride, but a pride in the experience of living in England for 47 years."

Fogle highlights "the problem" many people face is that to "define oneself as English and to celebrate" is often "seen as a slight against the wider union". He said: "The polarity of popular culture means that to celebrate Englishness is seen by many as a snub, even an insult, against the other nations in our Union. "English patriotism is also often mistaken for xenophobia, racism or intolerance, and that is very sad – we need to reclaim it from the racists and the xenophobics." Fogle urges the public to "collectively lift our cups of tea and cucumber sandwiches to the rainy sky" in celebration of England this Friday. "Raise them to England, our England, my England – a nation whose green and pleasant land has been shaped by her weather."

Fogle isn't the only one calling for change – a 2019 Daily Express poll found 92 percent of readers wanted to make St George's Day a bank holiday. Some fans expressed frustration over the day "usually passing with little comment" and felt it was time to "celebrate to the full".

St George's Day, which occurs on April 23, previously was a national holiday in England but fell out of favour in the 18th century. The patron saint is best-known through mythology, which claims he saved a princess after slaying a dragon – a symbolic reference to the Devil in the Middle Ages. St George fought against the Great Persecution of Christians and likely never set foot in the UK. He was promoted from soldier in the Roman Army to the personal guard for Emperor Diocletian, who lived from 284 to 305 AD. In 303 AD, St George was imprisoned and tortured for his unwavering Christian beliefs before being beheaded on April 23 – the day he is celebrated in England. The legendary figure was adopted into English culture by King Edward III, who established the Order of the Garter in his name. Currently within that order, which recognises chivalry, is Prince Charles and no more than 24 other living members, mainly composed of royals.

Queen facing 'darkest period' as Charles 'struggles' to steer royals 'into calmer waters'
Rachel Russell, *Daily Express*, 21 April 2021

The Queen is marking her 95th birthday privately today following a troubling few months for the Monarchy. She is currently still in mourning after her beloved husband of 73 years Prince Philip died earlier this month. Just weeks before his death, the Royal Family was plunged into crisis as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex gave a shocking insight into their struggles as working royals during a televised interview with Oprah Winfrey.

Royal expert Daniela Elser is uncertain whether Charles will be able to repair the Firm's reputational damage after Meghan Markle and Harry alleged the colour of their son Archie's skin had been questioned and how Meghan was left feeling suicidal as a royal. She wrote in the *Australian Daily Telegraph*: "Today marks her 95th birthday, the indefatigable monarch having passed into the history books years ago as the longest-reigning monarch in history. However, on what should have been a proud milestone for the mother, grandmother and great-grandmother, instead the Queen is currently facing one of the darkest periods in her 69-year reign with the knowledge that the institution she dedicated her life to protecting is teetering on the precipice. Since 2017, when Prince Philip retired from public life, his iron grip on the family has waned, leaving his son Prince Charles to step into the void. Given the upheaval and pick 'n' mix of crises that have buffeted the crown since then, the Prince of Wales has clearly struggled to steer the ship of state back into calmer waters."

The dark clouds gathering over Buckingham Palace right now go far beyond the grief that Her Majesty must be feeling. Not since the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, in 1997 has the Royal Family faced such a period of reckoning and been the subject of such intense public debate than over the course of the past six weeks. In early March, when Harry and Meghan, Duke and Duchess of Sussex, sat down with TV supremo Oprah Winfrey for a two-hour special, their claims of royal indifference to her mental health problems and of racism unleashed a global outcry. Since then, the palace has become a target for unrelenting scrutiny and a whole lot of media hand-wringing about the current state of the monarchy.

Prince Harry briefly saw his father Charles this week as he flew back to the UK for his grandfather's funeral. Following the ceremony at Windsor Castle, Harry is reported to have joined a brief meeting with Charles, his brother Prince William and Kate, the Duchess of Cambridge, at Frogmore Cottage. However, sources said they were unlikely to have resolved any outstanding issues during the short meeting. A source told the *Sun*: "Harry obviously felt outnumbered as there are three of them and only one of him so wanted it to be on his home turf. There is no way this is the end of the crisis in their relationships but it's a good gesture and a nice way to take the first step towards healing. William, Kate and Charles all left after about two hours, which was long enough for the process of getting father and brothers talking again to start."

Now Charles is holed up in his Welsh getaway at Llwynywermod in Llandovery, Wales, to spend some time privately to grieve following the funeral. This means he may not have fixed his issues with Harry before his son flew back to the US to reunite with his pregnant wife and Archie.

During the explosive Oprah interview, Harry took aim at Charles and said he was cut off financially from his father after he stepped down as a senior royal. He added he relied on money he inherited from his late mother Princess Diana while setting up his new life with Meghan and son Archie in the US. Harry said the deals he and Meghan signed with Spotify and Netflix, reported to be worth more than £100 million, were to help his family receive an income after being cut off from his father when he stepped down as senior royal. He told Oprah: "I have what my mum left me and without that we wouldn't have been able to do this. It's like she saw it coming and she's been with us through this whole process."

Harry then added he felt trapped in the Royal Family and shared his "compassion" for his brother and father Prince Charles being unable to leave their roles. He said: "My father and my brother, they are trapped. They don't get to leave. And I have huge compassion for that." Meghan also talked about her son Archie not receiving security after he was not made a prince. She also suggested Archie was not made a prince because of his race, even though rules set by George V meant he was not entitled to be one. [...]

The Observer view on Boris Johnson's fitness for office
Editorial, *The Observer*, 25 April, 2021

Integrity is one of the seven principles of public life, alongside selflessness, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership. Enunciated by Lord Nolan in 1995, they set out the ethical standards to which all those who work in the public sector should adhere. It would be fair to expect the prime minister, the most senior public office holder in the land, to set an example for other public servants. But with every week he is in No 10, it becomes clearer that Boris Johnson is a man who comprehensively fails the Nolan test and who brings the office of prime minister into utter disrepute.

On Friday, Dominic Cummings published a blog that set out some extraordinary charges against his former boss. Cummings himself is a man of questionable integrity, as highlighted by the dishonest campaign he ran in favour of Brexit, but he was Johnson's most senior adviser during a critical period of national emergency and his claims must be thoroughly investigated. There are two main claims, either of which if true should be sufficient to spell the end of Johnson as prime minister. First, Cummings alleges that Johnson tried to put a stop to a government inquiry that he himself had ordered into who leaked the cabinet decision to impose a second national lockdown last November before an official announcement. This was a highly damaging leak that resulted in a media frenzy and confused public health communications at a time when people's lives depended on receiving clear and reliable information from the government. Cummings claims that Johnson wanted to call off the inquiry because he feared it would expose a close friend of his fiancée as the source.

Second, Cummings says that the prime minister sought to get donors to pay for £58,000 of renovations to his Downing Street flat in plans that were "unethical, foolish, possibly illegal and almost certainly broke the rules on proper disclosure of political donations". Like all prime ministers, Johnson has a £30,000 annual allowance for the upkeep and refurbishment of his official residence under government rules, but it seems this generous allowance was not enough. Johnson has since stated that he has personally met the cost of the redecoration. But the Tory party is under investigation by the Electoral Commission over whether a donation it received to help pay the bill was appropriately declared.

That these serious allegations are entirely plausible speaks volumes about just how weak and dishonourable Johnson has already revealed himself to be. There have been questions about his integrity for as long as he has held public office. As mayor of London, he failed to declare personal interests, including the fact that a woman he appointed as an adviser was the mother of one of his children. With Cummings, he led the Vote Leave campaign, which misled voters that leaving the EU would mean an extra £350m a week for the NHS, a claim the UK Statistics Authority declared a "clear misuse of official statistics" – and lied that a vote to remain in the EU was a vote for a border with Iraq and Syria. The campaign itself was found guilty of breaking electoral law.

Since becoming prime minister, Johnson has continued to behave disgracefully. When democratically elected MPs would not pass his flawed Brexit deal, he shut down parliament in a move the supreme court later declared was unlawful. Not only has he shown a total lack of concern for the union during his premiership, prioritising the right of his party's desire for a hard Brexit over the national interest, he has failed to show due regard for the fragile situation in Northern Ireland. He lied about the consequences of his deal for border arrangements for Northern Ireland and has been far too slow to respond to rising tensions there. In a sign that he considers loyalty more important than integrity or decency, he failed to sack Priti Patel, who was found to have breached the ministerial code by bullying civil servants. His government has been beset by scandal in relation to the awarding of government contracts to people with ministerial contacts during a pandemic.

All this is profoundly depressing but entirely in keeping with Johnson's character. This is the man who did not decide whether to back remaining or leaving the EU until it was clear which would be better to further his own political career. Brexit has unleashed a broader governing crisis on the country; to achieve it in the way he wanted, Johnson purged the Conservative party of the integrity, experience and competence of people such as Grieve, leaving a cabinet of amateurish ministers such as Patel, Gavin Williamson and Robert Jenrick. During a national emergency, in which well over 100,000 people have lost their lives, we have a government consumed with sowing division and picking culture wars to distract from its incompetence and channelling public funds to areas of the country based on political expediency rather than levels of need.

Johnson's premiership embodies perfectly what happens when you get government by people who are motivated not by public service or the national interest but who instead see politics as a power trip that will eventually pave the way for lucrative financial gain. The lack of vision, integrity and principle leaves a vacuum that gets filled with petty infighting, briefing and counter-briefing and obsessing about whether the furnishing of official residences caters to personal tastes.

The Conservatives have been waging their 'war on woke' for decades
Evan Smith, *The Guardian*, 21 April 2021

Rarely a week passes without a right-wing commentator warning about the rise of "cancel culture" or decrying the "woke agenda". "Wokeness" has been described as a threat to democracy, freedom of speech and – in the words of the culture secretary, Oliver Dowden – part of a wider effort to "do Britain down". Boris Johnson's government, cheered on by sections of the British press, is waging a "war on woke" to deal with this alleged crisis, targeting left-wing activists, anti-racists, academics and trans rights advocates. Some have suggested ministers are stoking this culture war to distract voters from their failures in government. But this explanation underestimates the ideological reasons behind the government's strategy, which is better understood as an attempt to shift the Overton window* to the right while framing the rights of minorities as a fringe concern. The Conservatives seek a post-Brexit Britain bolstered by an increasingly nativist and divisive populism, and a national pride in the achievements of the British empire, untrammelled by left- wing critics.

There is a long history in Britain of the right whipping up a moral panic about left-wing activists working within state institutions to promote minority issues that most "ordinary" people supposedly oppose. In the 1980s, the British media portrayed a coalition of Marxists, anti-racists, feminists and gay rights activists as the "loony left", a trope that was embraced by editors, journalists and politicians alike, particularly during the 1987 general election.

Under Margaret Thatcher, the Conservatives endorsed a neoliberal free-market economy, but their liberalism did not extend beyond this. The government's regressive approach to issues of race, gender and sexuality was famously characterised as one of "Victorian values". For the British right in the 1980s, a war on the "loony left" was part of a broader ideological battle to reverse the social changes of the 1960s, when progress had been made on issues such as legalising homosexuality and abortion, and the increased awareness the "1968 generation" showed towards the rights of women, gay people and Black and Asian people.

While many left-wing MPs resigned themselves to fighting defensive battles at the national level, local government became a fertile site of resistance to Thatcherism. Councils across London, alongside the Greater London council (GLC) under Ken Livingstone, Sheffield city council and Liverpool city council became places to enact socialist politics in a country governed by majority Tory rule. In London, Ken Livingstone infamously organised talks with Sinn Féin representatives through the GLC. Unsurprisingly, this provoked anger among sections of the British press. Apocryphal stories of what would come to be known in the 1990s as "political correctness gone mad", such as the alleged banning of the word "manhole" or the censoring of the nursery rhyme Baa Baa Black Sheep by Hackney council, made tabloid headlines – supposedly exposing the left's fixation with "fringe" and minority issues.

Of course, criticisms of the "loony left" – and the implicit accusation that too much attention was being devoted to the rights of minorities – weren't exclusively the preserve of Conservatives. Many people in the Labour party also attacked sections of the left that supported these issues. In 1983, Labour still viewed gay rights as a minority issue that might not appeal to voters.

There are clear parallels between criticisms of the "loony left" in the 1980s and the labelling of movements such as Black Lives Matter and Extinction Rebellion as "woke" in the present day. In both eras, Conservative politicians and sections of the British press have demonised left-wing movements and portrayed them as worrisome forces attempting to infiltrate national institutions. While the right sought to rid local authorities of the "loony left" in the 1980s, they're now raising the alarm over the alleged creep of "wokeness" in cultural institutions such as the BBC and the National Trust.

As the political theorist Lea Ypi wrote last year, this culture war is stoking fears that Britain is threatened by left-wing "identity politics" that are harmful to a particular British way of life. Just as stories about the "loony left" gave credence to Thatcher's war on local government in the second half of the 1980s, similar fear of "wokeness" and charges of "left-wing bias" or "virtue signalling" have legitimised the pressure that ministers have placed upon institutions such as the BBC. While some of their targets may have changed, the scare tactics of the right have not.

**Overton window = the range of ideas the public is willing to consider and accept*

The good, the bad and the monarchy: why we're still suckers for the royal fairy tale
Alex Von Tunzlemann, *The Guardian*, 24 April 2021

There is a small community of islanders in Vanuatu who believe in the divinity of Prince Philip. The cult is thought to have emerged before Prince Philip himself visited Vanuatu in 1974: members are in mourning. Much amusement has been had in the British press over the years, gently (or not so gently) mocking this belief. Last Saturday, though, when millions of Britons watched the reverential coverage of Prince Philip's funeral, there was cause to reflect on the beliefs that underpin royalty in our own society. Despite the technological and societal transformation of the world since Philippos of Greece was born on a dining table in Corfu in 1921, the place of British royalty in public life – and in the public imagination – is as strong as ever.

Reactions on social media to the coverage of Philip's funeral varied. Some were empathetic and emotional, imagining the Queen's grief as she sat alone. Others scrutinised the younger royals for drama: there was great excitement when Princes William and Harry, whose divergence in recent years has been the subject of much speculation, briefly spoke to each other. Others were dismissive, making flippant comments or jokes. Royal fandom, like many fandoms, attracts an anti-fandom that is equally strong in its convictions – though not in its numbers. The BBC received 110,000 complaints from viewers who felt there was too much coverage of Philip's death, while 13.6 million watched his funeral in the UK alone.

Longstanding narratives about the royals are fiercely disputed: there are deep divisions between those who think, for instance, that the Duke and Duchess of Sussex have been wronged by a racist and restrictive system and those who think them feckless. In previous decades, there were those who thought Diana, Princess of Wales, had been wronged, and those who thought her feckless; the same applied to Princess Margaret before her. This dynamic plays out in every generation: did they fail royalty or did royalty fail them?

The belief in "good" royals requires the creation of "bad" royals, for there can be no light without shade. The "bad" royals acquire their own fans, who create defensive counter narratives. Philip himself was often cast as one of those "bad" royals during his lifetime – though death, as with Diana, can be spectacularly redemptive. During the BBC's funeral coverage, commentators remarked on his care for his regiments, the centrality of his faith, his profound devotion as a husband.

All of these things may well be true. They would have to be said, though, whether they were true or not. Repeating these sentiments is a form of community bonding among supporters of the "good" royals. They affirm the fundamental theme promoted by modern British royalty that separates "good" from "bad" royals: duty. The Queen announced this theme on her 21st birthday, when she was still Princess Elizabeth: "I declare before you all that my whole life, whether it be long or short, shall be devoted to your service and the service of our great imperial family to which we all belong." She has maintained it impeccably ever since.

The narratives we build around royalty are, of course, largely fantastical; comparisons to fairy tales, soap operas or fan fiction are frequently made. This does not mean they are trivial. In a monarchy, our feelings about the royals reflect and reinforce our own social and political identities, and how we relate to the state itself. This is just as true for anti-monarchists as it is for those who fervently admire one set of royals or another.

The young Philip hoped to streamline and open up the monarchy, inviting the BBC in to make an intimate documentary, *Royal Family*, in 1969. Later, as his own relationship with the media grew fractious, he regretted having made his family so accessible. The documentary has not been shown on British television since the 1970s. It was leaked briefly on YouTube earlier this year, and swiftly removed. "Above all things our royalty is to be reverenced, and if you begin to poke about it you cannot reverence it," Walter Bagehot wrote in 1867 of Queen Victoria's constitutional role. "Its mystery is its life. We must not let daylight in upon magic."

It is an elegant line, but the position of royalty in society is more complex than mystery. The royals are simultaneously an ordinary family and an extraordinary phenomenon: we know them intimately and not at all. When Bagehot was writing, modern British republicanism was reaching its height and "reverence" was far from universal. In the early 1870s, republican clubs were formed across Britain. The Liberal MP Sir Charles Dilke was among their supporters. The popular press of the time could be astonishingly intrusive. Since then, the evolution of television and social media has exposed the magic of royalty to the glare of daylight over and over again.

Anyone who imagines that this has diminished interest in royalty clearly does not follow the media. The narratives and counternarratives of "good" or "bad" royals are endlessly discussed; those who disdain the whole thing often make a point of that position too. At the centre of Britain's relationship with royalty is not mystery but storytelling: identification with one of various narratives that unite the personal and political, reflecting our values and our relationship with the state.

Prosecuting individual police officers won't deliver racial justice
Adam Elliott-Cooper, *The Guardian*, 24 April 2021

At last year's Conservative party conference, while the largest anti-racism protests in Britain's history were taking place across the country, the former home secretary, Sajid Javid, declared that Black Lives Matter is "not a force for good". This week, following the outcome of the trial of Derek Chauvin, the former police officer who was found guilty of the murder of George Floyd, Javid tweeted triumphantly: "Black lives matter".

Although this about-turn may seem counterintuitive, it's perfectly consistent with the government's position on racism. Rather than reflecting on the demands for systemic change made by Black Lives Matter protesters, Britain's political class has championed the role of the courts in punishing individual perpetrators of racial violence. Similar celebrations took place when the killers of Stephen Lawrence were eventually found guilty of murder, even though the Police Federation remained in denial about the institutional racism that characterised its response to his death. Viewed from the perspective that racism is an issue of a few bad apples rather than a structural or institutional problem, the single guilty verdict of an individual police officer in the US is something to celebrate. But can criminal prosecutions and prisons ever really deliver racial justice?

Prosecuting state officials who have committed acts of racial violence can be cathartic – and it's something that we've been denied in the UK. There have been at least 1,784 deaths at the hands of the police in England and Wales since 1990, considerably more if we include deaths in prisons and at our borders. But if we step back and examine how the justice system in Britain operates, it's clear that prosecuting individuals helps to *produce* racial inequalities rather than solve them.

British politicians have long regarded racism as a distinctly American issue, implicitly playing down comparable problems such as the disproportionate use of force that Black people experience at the hands of UK police, or the reality that while Britain's prison population has soared, Black people in England and Wales have been incarcerated at the same or a higher proportional rate as African Americans in the US. In the midst of the BLM protests last summer, two Black men were tasered in north London. One was a pensioner standing on the stairs at his home (in an official statement, the Met said no indication of misconduct was identified). The other was a young man who was left paralysed from the chest down after being tasered while climbing over a wall. The taser, a weapon police claim should only be used when an officer is in danger, is deployed with alacrity, particularly against Black people.

Meanwhile, Britain's prison population has nearly doubled over the past two decades. According to the 2017 Lammy report, 25% of Britain's prisoners are categorised as BAME (this figure jumps to 40% for those in youth prisons). The sustained harm that prisoners experience can have long-term physical and mental effects. Deaths by suicide are more than eight times more common inside prisons, and on release former inmates endure relatively high rates of joblessness, homelessness, mental health problems and a greater likelihood of rearrest and imprisonment.

Crucially, these forms of "justice" do little to either improve public safety or transform the lives of those who have been imprisoned for committing harm. Many have pointed out that since 1971 Britain has not convicted a single officer for any of the deaths that have occurred at police hands. But such convictions would vindicate the very system that leads to these deaths in the first place. If incarcerating ordinary working-class Black people doesn't improve public safety, then why would convicting individual police officers make a difference? Prison is not the answer to meting out justice, which is precisely why the Black Lives Matter movement did not demand that Derek Chauvin be put on trial.

Instead, the most decisive demands that Black Lives Matter have made are to defund the police and prison system and spend these resources on communities where public services and opportunities have been destroyed. Community-led youth, mental health and domestic violence services are often best positioned to improve public safety. Investment in these services can make people less likely to come into contact with the police and prison system in the first place, while also reducing the likelihood of vulnerable people being harmed or harming others.

But rather than engage with these demands, which are gaining popular support in Britain, the government has instead gone on the offensive. It has published a recent report denying institutional racism exists, and even proposed legislation that will criminalise protesters while expanding police powers.

The protests of summer 2020, as well as the people who gathered this year to protest over the death of Sarah Everard and the police, crime, sentencing and courts bill, brought together people from a wide range of backgrounds. Police and prison violence has shown itself to be a problem that can't be solved through self-regulation; the criminal justice system cannot put itself on trial. Despite what the government may think, the harm caused by police, prison and border systems is both a racist and a British problem. The outcome of the Chauvin trial, despite its political cheerleaders, reaffirms the necessity of finding alternatives to the criminal justice system as we know it.

Brexit divisions and lockdown fatigue are fuelling violence in Northern Ireland

Owen Polley, *The Telegraph*, 7 April 2021

Anger and despair among loyalists over capitulations to Irish nationalism have contributed to a tense atmosphere, which made disorder likely. On Tuesday morning, a carpet of snow covered many parts of Northern Ireland, but it was an unusually hot holiday weekend for the province's police service. In loyalist areas of Newtownabbey and Carrickfergus, officers were pelted with petrol bombs, while rioters from both sides of the community threw stones and bricks in Londonderry. The violence followed the Public Prosecution Service's announcement that it will not prosecute republican politicians for breaching Covid-19 regulations last summer, at the funeral of the IRA henchman, Bobby Storey.

The PPS's report revealed that the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) liaised with Sinn Féin, when it organised an event that included thousands of mourners, speeches at an IRA plot at Milltown Cemetery and the closure to the public of Roselawn Cemetery, 10 miles away, where Mr Storey was actually cremated. This police "engagement" with republicans was one of the chief reasons why prosecutors believed they were unlikely to secure convictions.

They'd been asked to consider evidence against 24 of Sinn Féin's elected representatives, including Northern Ireland's deputy first minister Michelle O'Neill and finance minister, Conor Murphy. In its eagerness to appear "progressive" Sinn Féin was among the most zealous champions of lockdown in Northern Ireland. The law at the time, which its ministers helped create, dictated that only 10 mourners could attend a funeral. In her role as deputy first minister, Mrs O'Neill accused those who gathered in large groups of "killing people", while, as a republican leader, she posed for selfies at an enormous extravaganza organised to celebrate the life of a terrorist thug.

In the aftermath of the PPS's report, the three main Unionist parties in Northern Ireland called for the resignation of the PSNI's chief constable, Simon Byrne, claiming that he had lost the confidence of the Unionist community. The perception is widespread that, while the police apply the rule of law strictly to loyalists and the rest of society, republicans are considered untouchable and can effectively do what they like.

Clearly, neither Sinn Féin's hypocrisy nor the questionable decisions taken by a chief constable justify rioting, and politicians from across Northern Ireland's political divide have condemned the violence without equivocation. Most of the people arrested during the disruption were in their teens and early 20s, which implies that the boredom of lockdown contributed to a combustible situation. [...]

In Bristol recently, "Kill the Bill" protests turned violent, while youths battled each other in the Meadows in Edinburgh over the weekend. If restrictions are not eased drastically soon, young people will surely become even more frustrated, and it could be a turbulent summer. That's particularly true in Northern Ireland, where "recreational rioting" is regarded as a traditional pastime in certain areas. There are also suggestions that some of the violence was orchestrated by "criminal elements" in the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). The PSNI describes the South East Antrim faction of this loyalist paramilitary organisation as a drug "cartel that has wrapped itself in a flag" and the First Minister, Arlene Foster, accused "malign elements" of "whipping up some of our young people".

None of this context stopped Irish nationalist politicians and representatives of the rabidly pro-EU Alliance Party from trying to use the riots to undermine Unionists' valid concerns about the Storey funeral and the Northern Ireland Protocol, which has contributed to an angry mood among loyalists. Matthew O'Toole, a Social Democratic and Labour Party MLA, provided a particularly flagrant example, when he tweeted that a 13-year-old child should not have been placed in the position of being arrested, "because some old men say they are offended by customs paperwork."

During the Brexit negotiations, nationalists, the Dublin government and fanatical Europhiles used the threat of republican violence shamelessly, to insist that no extra checks or paperwork should take place at the Irish land border. As a result, Boris Johnson agreed to an internal frontier that divides Northern Ireland from the rest of the United Kingdom, trampling on the political sensitivities of Unionists. This extraordinary capitulation to Irish nationalism caused anger and despair among loyalists, which, in turn, contributed to a tense atmosphere that made disorder likely. As ever, though, the people who insisted that Northern Ireland could not leave the EU on the same basis as the rest of the UK want to escape all responsibility for the outcome they engineered. They imply that it's all the fault of Brits who voted for Brexit, or that it's no big deal to tear Unionists away from the internal market and political life of their nation state.

The rioters, meanwhile, have succeeded only in easing the pressure on Sinn Féin that followed the Storey funeral report and deflecting attention from legitimate opposition to the Protocol. It may have been lockdown madness or a UDA drug dispute, as much as political considerations, that encouraged them onto the streets, but their actions could damage Unionism nevertheless.

SNP to force schoolchildren to 'face the UK's colonial past' Black Lives Matter-inspired lessons
Dan Sanderson, *The Telegraph*, 16 April 2021

Schools are being urged to adopt a new programme of 'anti-racist education' with lessons highlighting 'Scotland and the UK's colonial history.' The Scottish National Party has published plans to force Scottish schoolchildren to "face the UK's colonial past" in Black Lives Matter-inspired history lessons. Historians and teachers raised concerns that a new programme of "anti-racist education" which Nicola Sturgeon plans to roll out will present pupils with a one-sided, negative and politicised version of Britain's history.

The SNP included the pledge to commission a taxpayer-funded teaching programme inspired by the Black Lives Matter movement in its manifesto for the Holyrood elections next month-which opinion polls suggest the party will almost certainly win. This would highlight "Scotland and the UK's colonial history and all schools would be urged to adopt it. "It is blinkered, distorting and racist to teach history through the narrow perspective proposed by the SNP," Chris McGovern, a retired headteacher and chairman of the Campaign for Real Education, said. "Humankind's capacity for good and evil has nothing to do with skin colour. The SNP's education policy needs to stop playing truant with truth."

The SNP manifesto makes clear the policy is motivated by the Black Lives Matter movement, which rose to global prominence following the death of George Floyd at the hands of police in the United States last year. It states that the Black Lives Matter had "shone a powerful spotlight on continuing racial injustice and race-based violence, and the need for countries to face their colonial history."

Chris Whatley, Professor of Scottish History at the University of Dundee, said that while he understood why the policy had been proposed, he was concerned that only the negative aspects of the UK's colonial history would be presented under the SNP scheme. He added that while it was clear slavery should be condemned and aspects of empire were "evil" by today's standards, it was a "mistake" to judge history by present-day morals. "Of course slavery is to be condemned," he said. "A good history programme would recognise the importance of understanding the contexts in which this horrific trade in human beings was then conducted. "Balance too would be critical - an appreciation that empire was in many respects evil as judged by today's standards, [but] Scotland today owes much to the gains of empire, an enterprise in which Scots actively participated."

Lindsay Paterson, professor of education policy at the University of Edinburgh, said teaching about racism had been taking place in Scottish schools since the 1980s. He added: "The important point is that teachers are very experienced in teaching contentious issues in a balanced way. It's unfortunate when politicians don't recognise the good work that has been done, including the work that has found a way of dealing with controversial issues objectively. "Politicians are better to leave this kind of topic to teachers, who know very well how to handle controversy sensitively."

Clare Adamson, the SNP candidate for Motherwell & Wishaw, said: "The SNP is committed to strengthening education for our young people and recognising the importance of having equality and human rights embedded in our education. "Only by listening to the very real concerns raised, and recognising and learning from our past, will we be able to properly move forward together. It is not the case that teaching on racism should be even-handed. Racism is wrong and our schools should say so. "The recent Black Lives Matter movement has shone a powerful spotlight on continuing racial injustice and race-based violence, and the need for countries to face their colonial history. "That is why I am proud that at this election, the SNP is bringing forward a bold and progressive agenda which will include funding for the development of an online programme on Scotland and the UK's colonial history throughout the world that can be delivered to schools, and we will encourage Local Authorities to adopt the programme in all schools."

In March the *Telegraph* revealed that Adam Smith's grave had been included in dossiers of sites linked to "slavery and colonialism" by Edinburgh City Council. The 17th century Scottish Enlightenment philosopher and "father of capitalism" whose face appeared on the £20 note is buried in the city's Canongate Kirkyard, which is controlled by the local authority.

Supreme Court considers whether students can be punished for comments outside class

Pete Williams, *NBC News,* April 26, 2021

When a ninth grader at a Pennsylvania high school discovered one Saturday that she didn't make the varsity cheerleading team and would remain on the junior varsity squad, she lashed out the way her peers often do — on social media. What happened next is the subject of a case the Supreme Court will hear Wednesday involving the free speech rights of students nationwide.

Brandi Levy responded to the rejection by taking a photo of herself and a friend at a convenience store with their middle fingers raised. She repeatedly used a vulgar four-letter verb to write, "f--- school f--- softball f--- cheer f--- everything." She posted that message on Snapchat to 250 friends and assumed it would vanish, like any post on that site, within 24 hours.

"I wasn't really thinking about it when I was making it. I was just upset at everything," she said in an interview. "I just wanted to blow off steam."

But another student found out about the message, took a screenshot and showed it to her mother, who happened to be one of the school's two cheerleading coaches. Brandi was suspended from the junior varsity team for her entire sophomore year. She and her parents sued, and a federal appeals court ruled that because her message was posted off campus, she was beyond the reach of school authorities and for that reason could not be punished.

The Supreme Court's landmark ruling on student expression came in 1969, when it said Ohio students could not be punished for wearing black armbands in school to protest the Vietnam War. In a widely quoted passage, the court said students and teachers alike do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

Student expression cannot be regulated, that ruling said, unless it would substantially disrupt the work and discipline of the school. Brandi and the Mahanoy Area School District disagree on how that precedent applies to off-campus expression like hers in the internet age.

The school says the spread of smartphones, social media and the need for remote learning prompted by the Covid-19 pandemic have blurred the line between on and off campus.

"Wherever student speech originates, schools should be able to treat students alike when their speech is directed at the school" and causes disruption, the district told the Supreme Court it is filings.

The prevalence of social media, the district said, "has made it far easier for students' off-campus messages to instantly reach a wide audience of classmates and dominate the on-campus environment."

The National School Boards Association said in a friend-of-court brief that upholding the appeals court's hard-and-fast rule would be disastrous.

"School administrators must be able to discipline off-campus speech that threatens harm to the school environment — including speech that bullies or harasses students or staff or concerns potential on-campus violence," it said.

The Biden administration is siding with the school district. The Department of Justice said the court's previous cases on school speech dealt with the effects of a message on other students and school activities, not on the time or place where the messages were expressed. But the American Civil Liberties Union of Pennsylvania, representing the Levys, said young people "have the right to find their voices without being unduly chilled." Off campus, "government may not penalize speech because listeners find it offensive or even disagreeable."

Bullying, harassment and making threats are not protected forms of expression, the ACLU said, so a victory for Brandi would not diminish a school's authority to deal with those kinds of messages. Louisiana and seven other states agree. They told the court that a ruling in favor of the school district would impose even more of a burden on educators already forced to serve as the never-off-duty police of students.

"This untenable position results in schools either unconstitutionally chilling their students' speech or facing an uproar, often in the form of a lawsuit, for failing to regulate it," they said.

Brandi's father, Larry Levy, said he hopes the court keeps off-campus speech off-limits, for the sake of free expression. Besides, he said in an interview, "that's how parents learn about what's going on in our children's lives, through social media." The Supreme Court will issue its ruling by late June.

730 words

Kamala Harris is Asian and Black. That shouldn't be confusing in 2020. But it is to some.

Nadra Nittle, *NBC News*, 12 August 2020

During her 2020 presidential campaign, Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., found herself at the center of a controversy about which Americans can claim to be Black, or Black enough — because of both her biracial identity and her immigrant parents. Born to a Jamaican father and an Indian mother, Harris was subject to a smear campaign insinuating that she was not Black at all — which began anew immediately after presumptive Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden announced she was his pick for the vice presidential nomination. After a July 2019 debate, critics took issue with her for discussing a topic they viewed to be most relevant to American Descendants of Slavery (ADOS) — busing to racially integrate schools. [...]

[The ADOS movement] seeks to prioritize the socio-political goals of African Americans whose families have lived in the United States for generations, rather than their counterparts whose families arrived recently and voluntarily. Black immigrants to the United States enjoy higher household incomes and rates of educational attainment than U.S.-born African Americans, a trend that gets overlooked when the Black experience is universalized. (However, some Black immigrants, such as Afro-Latinos, are speaking up about the marginalization they face in society.)

The ADOS concept includes supporters as wide-ranging as Harvard philosophy professor Cornel West, who has said that it is giving working-class Black people a voice, and white conservative political commentator Ann Coulter. But the movement has many detractors, some of whom view it as divisive at best and xenophobic at worst. Others have argued that it ignores the long history of African Americans with immigrant roots, including black nationalist Marcus Garvey, who was Jamaican, and Nation of Islam leader Malcolm X, whose mother was Grenadian. Similarly, the idea that multiracial people are distinct from other Black people overlooks the history of mixed-race civil rights activists such as Homer Plessy, Walter Francis White, Adam Clayton Powell and Diane Nash, all of whom could've "passed" for white.

Still, 20 years into the movement to allow mixed-race Americans to acknowledge their differentiation from Black Americans, the multiracial demographic is one of the fastest-growing groups in this country. And it's fair to say that the oldest Gen Zers and the youngest millennials are unfamiliar with a society that deemed someone wholly Black — and nothing else — for having a trace of African ancestry.

Today, it's not uncommon for young people with two Black parents to view themselves as completely distinct from those with just one — hence, the outcry that the new show "BlackAF" didn't exclusively star actors with two Black parents, or the recent charges of anti-black racism leveled at the biracial rapper Doja Cat. And Meghan Markle — born to a black mother and a white father exactly 20 years after Obama — has consistently identified as biracial, reinforcing the generational divide in perceptions of Black identity. Or take singer-songwriter Kehlani, who has white, black and Native American ancestry: in May, she gave fans permission on Twitter to call her "mixed." For a multiracial woman, that's not exactly a groundbreaking announcement, but the reasons she gave for doing so reflect a shift in how black identity is viewed today. The 25-year-old R&B star explained the importance of recognizing that she does "not face the same issues as black women w 2 black parents" and that to suggest otherwise perpetuates the erasure of these women.

Generations ago, when the archaic one-drop rule — which declared that a drop of African blood made one Black — still shaped African American identity, these discussions about authentic representations of Blackness weren't as likely to occur. In 1982, Susie Guillory Phipps, who didn't realize until adulthood that she was 3/32nds Black under the law, fought the state of Louisiana to have the race listed on her birth certificate changed from "colored" to white. She lost, and the Supreme Court refused to hear the case.

As recently as the 1990s, mixed-race people were typically encouraged to identify — or simply identified in society — as Black, even if they looked racially ambiguous (see: Mariah Carey). And it was considered laughable, if not unthinkable, that a darker-skinned multiracial person would reject the Black category in favor of identifying as multiracial. Golf star Tiger Woods is a case in point: in 1997, he was widely ridiculed for saying that he didn't consider himself as Black but "cablinasian," a portmanteau of Caucasian, Black, Indian and Asian, representing the entirety of his racial background. Just three years later, Woods and other mixed people who didn't want to be boxed into one racial category would be vindicated by the census. And today, Blasian is an acceptable way for people of mixed Asian and Black heritage to refer to themselves.

Unbound by the one-drop rule or even by the broad term African American, Black people in the United States have more freedom than ever to identify themselves as they choose. For some, that means not describing themselves as solely Black; for others, that means specifying their ethnic origins, embracing the ADOS label or taking none at all. Each choice is potentially controversial — but more important than how any one person identifies is that Blackness in this country has long been nuanced, and always will be. 882 words

Stop leaving Her out of the conversation

Meghan Dodaballapur, *The Michigan Daily,* March 23, 2021

Disclaimer: The author of this piece is not a Black trans woman. This piece is intended to address other readers who do not identify as Black trans women and call upon their urgent allyship and action.

Happy Women's History Month! I'm sure you've seen cute graphics of women floating around your Instagram explore page. Or maybe your Twitter timeline is flooded with celebrities acknowledging the important women in their lives. This month intends to celebrate the accomplishments and strides towards equality women have made throughout the world, as well as celebrate the impact women have in all aspects of life. While it's quite admirable to look at the much-needed improvements we have made in relation to gender equality, it has become increasingly apparent that this month fails to shine light on the women who are continuously left out of the conversation: Black transgender women.

The intersectionality of being Black, transgender and a woman disproportionately make these women targets of hate crimes and state-sanctioned violence. During the summer of 2020, six Black transgender women — Brayla Stone, Merci Mack, Shakiie Peters, Draya McCarty, Tatiana Hall and Bree Black — were killed within nine days. The National Council for Transgender Equality U.S. Transgender Survey revealed that 47% of the survey's Black respondents "reported being denied equal treatment, verbally harassed, and/or physically attacked in the past year because of being transgender." While 22% of transgender people reported experiencing biased harassment from police officers, 38% of Black trans people reported this kind of harassment. Given that transgender women of color are disproportionately victims of hate crimes, it can be assumed that Black trans women are experiencing violence all the more frequently due to the intersection of transphobia and ongoing anti-Black oppression. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Black feminist who coined the term "intersectionality," says the term aims to acknowledge and account for the fact that "many of our social justice problems like racism and sexism are overlapping, creating multiple levels of injustice." [...]

Once white women were granted the right to vote in 1920, they viewed this as a success for the movement, ignoring the fact that a subset of women, women of color, were excluded from this right. White women created an exclusionary version of feminism where only they would receive certain privileges. We as a society can't celebrate how far women as a whole have come while simultaneously ignoring the injustices that Black trans women continue to endure. Black trans feminism aims for inclusion and justice. While speaking on behalf of her community for International Women's Day, Ashlee Marie Preston explained that "Black trans women are contributing to a culture that emancipates all women from structures and social systems that place constraints on our freedom to exercise full agency — and impede our capacity to thrive." It is evident that this type of feminism is genuinely for all women.

If we want to amplify these voices, we must first acknowledge the fact that Black trans women have multiple aspects of their identity that society and the government continue to oppress. It is our job to maintain a safe environment where Black transgender women are centered in all movements — not just the ones they helped create. As allies, we cannot stand by idle when we see others perpetuating racist, transphobic or sexist comments in our own community. We must not allow others to continue spreading ideals that directly lead to Black trans womens' discrimination. We are responsible for making an active effort to support Black trans women and amplify their platforms, art and knowledge. We must include Black trans women authors, such as Janet Mock and Toni Newman, in our readings so we can engage in their perspectives, art and storytelling. While it is our obligation as allies to continue to learn the perspectives of Black trans women, we must remember that it is not their obligation to educate us. We must always keep Black trans women at the forefront of our conversations and engage in our own efforts.

Additionally, it is of utmost importance that we actively support Black trans women through tangible action. This can be done by providing mutual aid directly to Black trans women through organizations like For The Gworls, which raises money for Black trans people's rent and gender-affirming surgeries. We can support Black trans women by donating to the Transgender Law Center, National Center for Transgender Equality and Homeless Black Trans women funds, if able to do so. We must also support the Black trans women within our own communities by volunteering at local homeless shelters that house trans people — for those in the general Ann Arbor area, the Ozone House in Ypsilanti is a youth homeless shelter that houses trans and other LGBTQ+ youth. It is important that we also make an active effort to listen to Black trans activists, such as Ashlee Marie Preston, Elle Hearns, Tona Brown, Laverne Cox and Angelica Ross, through both social media and supporting their work. While public figures have slightly increased visibility, we must not forget to listen to the Black trans women within our own communities. Justice can only begin to be served through action, and as allies, we must make an active effort to do our part.

879 words

After attack on the Capitol, we need a new way to think about America

Austin Sarat, *The Hill,* January 11, 2021

On Jan. 6, the United States became a different, less exceptional nation.

The riotous invasion of the Capitol was shocking, if not surprising, and it shattered the proud assertion of America's special status as the only nation on earth always to peacefully transfer power from one political party to another.

Helping Americans come to terms with that loss will require rethinking the way we talk about ourselves as well as what patriotism entails. Going forward, our political leaders need to recalibrate the rhetoric they use to describe this country and the words with which they rally citizens to service and sacrifice.

It will not be an easy task, since celebrating American exceptionalism has become a deeply ingrained habit. For almost as long as we have been a nation, Americans have been invited to a particular conceit: We have been told regularly, and repeatedly, that this country occupies a special station on earth. We are unique, and somehow able to rise above the destinies of other nations.

This way of thinking can be traced to the Puritans who first colonized America. It also was given expression in 1783 when George Washington proclaimed that America's "absolute freedom" gave it a distinctive status among the nations of the world.

Washington urged his fellow citizens to embrace that status by sacrificing "their individual advantages to the interest of the community." And he argued that the fate of America's experiment in self-government was crucial to what he called "the destiny of unborn millions."

The transfer of power in 1801 from our second president, John Adams, to Thomas Jefferson was a landmark in world history and set the precedent that, until last week, marked America as exceptional. [...]

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries American exceptionalism was a central part of the curriculum throughout the nation's public schools. One study of the most commonly used textbooks found that they regularly "hailed American exceptionalism, manifest destiny, and America as God's country."

In 1941, "Life" magazine publisher Henry Luce called the 20th century an "American century." "Democracy and other American ideals," Luce noted, "would do their mysterious work of lifting the life of mankind from the level of the beasts to what the Psalmist called a little lower than the angels." During the mid-20th century Cold War, some of America's leading historians embraced Luce's view and celebrated exceptionalism. They tried to unearth its roots in American geography, culture and politics.

And throughout the last 100 years, presidents have regularly talked about America's unique greatness and role in the world. In 1915, President Woodrow Wilson said that the United States was a nation set apart by its values and principles from the rest of the world. The "force of America," he argued, "is the force of moral principle." Wilson called on Americans to remember that the United States had a "plain destiny [to] serve [rather than] subdue the world."

Ronald Reagan frequently echoed Wilson. As he put it in a speech on the night before the 1980 election, "I believe that Americans in 1980 are every bit as committed to that vision of a shining 'city on a hill,' as were those long ago settlers ... Visitors to that city on the Potomac are Americans awed by what has gone before, proud of what for them is still ... a shining city on a hill."

Indeed, among modern presidents it is not enough to say that America is a great nation. President-elect Biden is just the latest to insist that this is "the greatest nation on earth" and a "beacon for the globe."

The Trump years have exposed cracks in the edifice of American exceptionalism and the fragility of our claim to be such a "beacon for the globe." And the events of Jan. 6 have done untold damage to our self-image and standing in the world.

As America seeks to recover and repair that damage, we would benefit from a bit more humility about our claim to exceptionalism. Jake Sullivan, Biden's designee to be his National Security Advisor, got it right when in 2019 he said that "American exceptionalism is not a description of reality but the expression of an ambition. It is about striving, and falling short, and improving. This is the essence of a patriotism that every American can embrace."

736 words

A "cradle-to-grave" Supreme Court does not serve the public interest

Jim Jones, *The Hill,* May 6, 2021

There are several problems with the present-day structure of the U.S. Supreme Court, but the number of seats is not one of them. The United States has done very well with nine seats since 1869 and really don't need any more than that for the court to function properly. Of much greater concern is the lack of turnover on the court. There has been an increasing tendency of presidents to appoint people in the infancy of their legal careers in hopes that they will serve until they draw their final breath — sort of a "cradle-to-grave" system.

Adding four seats to the court might correct the current ideological imbalance, but is it really a good idea to add seats every time one party decides the court might need rebalancing? It gives the appearance of playing politics with what Americans like to regard as a relatively apolitical institution.

And how about trying to get 13 lawyers-turned-judges to arrive at a coherent majority opinion? Even with a nine-member court, the justices often write such a number of separate opinions in important multi-issue cases that it is difficult to know what the court is really saying. The more members, the harder it will be to reach results that the public can rely upon. Is it any wonder that our U.S. circuit courts of appeal generally hear and decide cases in three-judge panels.

Limiting terms of service might be a reasonable fix, but that would probably require an amendment to the Constitution, which is highly unlikely. However, in 2009 a group of distinguished legal scholars suggested a statutory plan whereby each president would make one Supreme Court pick after every federal election. The longest-serving justice would remain on the court, but on senior status. Senior justices would not actively sit on cases, except where a sitting justice could not participate. Under this plan, Justice Thomas would be the first to take senior status, followed by Justice Breyer and then Justice Alito.

This reform would bring new blood to the court on a regular basis. By removing the incentive to appoint youngsters who would serve until they die, the plan would very likely result in the appointment of older, tested, more-experienced lawyers or jurists. Some of the most qualified members of the bench and bar are effectively excluded from consideration simply because politicians want their candidates to serve as long as possible. The last three court appointments were ages 49, 53 and 48.

I have no pretensions of being a distinguished legal scholar, but I joined the Idaho Supreme Court at age 63 and voluntarily retired after serving 12 years. After law school, I served as an artillery officer in Vietnam, three years as legislative assistant for a U.S. senator, eight years as Idaho attorney general and 25 years in private practice. I'm aware of many lawyers and judges across the country with valuable experience and distinguished legal careers who would be ideal candidates for the Supreme Court, if eligibility were open to those over 55 years of age.

This plan would solve another problem for the court — recusals. Even on state supreme courts, like Idaho's, where senior justices are available in the event of a recusal, there is some reluctance to recuse oneself from an important case. There is no provision for substitutes in U.S. Supreme Court cases, making it even more difficult for justices to recuse when they really should do so, partly for fear of a tie vote. But with a stable of senior justices to fill in upon a recusal, there should be no tie-vote concern.

Senior justices could also be deployed to reduce backlogs in crowded U.S. circuit courts of appeal around the country by participating in circuit court cases.

It is time to dispense with a system that fosters a cradle-to-grave Supreme Court. So many well-seasoned individuals who would be a credit to the court are ruled out simply because they would not be able to serve for three or four decades. Plus, periodic turnover is a good thing. The longer a justice sits in the ivory tower of the court, the greater the likelihood of losing touch with the real world.

709 words

Montana tribal members, fearing water contamination, relieved as Keystone XL pipeline blocked

Nora Mabie, *USA Today – Great Falls Tribune,* January 21, 2021

GREAT FALLS, Mont. – When Cheyenne Foote heard that President Joe Biden blocked the Keystone XL pipeline permit on his first day in office, she cried. Foote, 68, is an elder of the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes, and she feared the pipeline, which passes through a portion of Montana near the Fort Peck Reservation, would contaminate the tribes' water supply.

"Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, my prayers have been answered," Foote said as she wept. "I am so happy. I am just so happy."

Foote grew up in Fort Kipp, Montana. She remembers racing to the river in the summer to fill cups of water and watching her uncle in the winter fill buckets with snow that would melt and later be used for the garden. Now, Foote holds water ceremonies and said she "cherishes every drop I see."

"Water is life," she said. "You can't live without water. The Creator gave it to us, and it's our job to take care of it."

The 1,200-mile, $8 billion Keystone XL, would deliver heavy crude from western Canada through a portion of Montana and to Gulf Coast refineries. Biden's executive order reverses former President Donald Trump's revival of the pipeline. Trump in 2017 reduced regulations that would otherwise slow building projects. Former President Barack Obama rejected the pipeline in 2015 saying it would "undercut" American leadership in the fight against global climate change. Proponents of the pipeline argue it will bring jobs and economic development to eastern Montana. Montana Sen. Steve Daines on Monday tweeted canceling the pipeline would be a "terrible mistake," citing that it is projected to provide thousands of high-paying jobs, including hundreds in the state. In response to Biden's executive order Wednesday, Daines announced he and seven other senators would be introducing legislation to allow construction of the pipeline to continue.

But many tribal members say the pipeline threatens their communities. The Missouri River runs west to east along the Fort Peck Reservation's southern border. Because the pipeline does not cross the reservation, the tribes will not receive revenue from it. But the reservation's drinking water source is an intake on the Missouri River 57 miles downstream from where the pipeline would cross beneath the confluence of the Missouri and Milk rivers. Many tribal members are concerned an oil spill from the pipeline would contaminate their irrigation and drinking water supply. Angeline Cheek, Fort Peck tribal member and Indigenous Justice Organizer for the ACLU of Montana, said she has organized countless protests, workshops and prayer walks opposing the pipeline.

"We look at these pipelines as an act of genocide against Native people. Pipelines cross our reservations, causing destruction to our environment and our people. We can't live without water, and you cannot replace a life," she said.

"This is about honoring our ancestors' treaties and protecting our natural resources. As Indigenous people, we are the original caretakers of the environment, and we need to protect it."

While Cheek said she is relieved Biden canceled the pipeline permit, she knows her work is not done.

"It's been a long journey. This puts us at ease for four years, but we need to look for long-term solutions. We still have to move forward and ensure we gain future victories in the courts," she said.

Fort Peck Tribal Chairman Floyd Azure said he was glad to hear the permit was blocked.

"We're all elated here," he said. "They didn't ask for our perspective or allow us to have any input on the pipeline. They basically told us what they were going to do, and if we didn't like it, we just had to live with it."

Azure said he feared oil spills would contaminate the water supply, affecting not only tribal members but also residents in surrounding communities.

"Just because they say it's safe, doesn't mean it's safe. They never gave us a plan if a spill did happen," he said.

Azure said he feared "man camps," or temporary housing for oil workers, would increase the spread of COVID-19, which could be especially devastating for tribal elders or members with diabetes or other health conditions. Roosevelt County, which contains portions of the Fort Peck Reservation, had 1,428 total COVID-19 cases and 52 deaths from the virus, as of Wednesday. The county's population is 60.5% Indigenous. [...]

718 words

President Joe Sanders

Kimberley A. Strassel, *The Wall Street Journal,* May 6, 2021

The White House this week proposed to strip drug companies of their vaccine patents, an act hailed by adulators as "moral leadership." It's better seen as the encapsulation of the Biden presidency—a case study in fictional narratives, executive overreach, recklessness, and kowtowing to the left.

The biopharmaceutical industry in under a year accomplished a modern miracle—designing a breakthrough vaccine to counter Covid-19; engineering a ground-up production process; and climbing a logistical Everest. It was a triumph of innovation, investment and capitalism, a moment that deserves to be celebrated.

Instead, the Biden administration supports a proposal in the World Trade Organization that would "waive" the intellectual-property rights of the companies that accomplished this feat, giving away their technology to every drugmaker in the world. Put another way, Mr. Biden is freely handing American invention to China—the country that routinely steals it, and whose Wuhan lab might have been the source of the virus.

The move is in keeping with the administration's refusal to acknowledge the history of the vaccine achievement. Team Biden continues its willful disregard of Operation Warp Speed, in part because it is too petty to give credit to any person, company or initiative connected to the Trump administration.

It has instead pushed the claim that the Biden administration alone deserves credit for the vaccine rollout. This rewriting of reality is becoming routine. The administration declares there is no "crisis" at the border, as illegal crossings surge. It says Georgia's election-law update is "Jim Crow," although the state provides more voting opportunities than others. It redefines entitlement spending as "infrastructure." The press only encourages these fictions, making it easier for the administration to ignore biotech's lead role in beating the pandemic and to hand over its work to the world.

The move is also in keeping with the administration's attitude that Congress exists solely to rubber-stamp its spending proposals. Congress has spent decades wrangling over the contours of patent protections, producing bipartisan legislation from the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 and the Hatch-Waxman Act of 1984 to the Leahy-Smith Act of 2011. Mr. Biden proposes to disregard all these laws with the wave of an executive memo to the WTO—much as he has already been governing by dubious executive orders on immigration, mask mandates, pipeline cancellations, and healthcare. Mr. Biden will use Congress when reconciliation makes it convenient. But what Congress won't give him, he will decree unilaterally.

The patent decision is also in line with the Biden administration's willingness to take wild steps with little thought or care about the damaging consequences. No doubt it is glorying in the praise from the World Health Organization. But the precedent of willy-nilly canceling patents will prove cataclysmic for drug innovation and health. Moderna spent 10 years developing its mRNA technology, and only this week turned its first profit. Next pandemic, Moderna and other companies won't bother. The same is true of cancer drugs, Parkinson's therapies, even new antibiotics. Don't believe it? "Let's do insulin next," tweeted an exultant Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez in response to the patent news, along with a graph showing the plunge in vaccine makers' stock prices.

Add this to an extraordinary list of unknowns and unintended consequences imposed in only three short months. What will the Biden administration's expansion of ObamaCare (part of its Covid "relief" law) do to healthcare prices? Do they know? What is the fallout of shoveling some $200 billion at schools that aren't educating kids? The February spending bill extended enhanced federal unemployment benefits to September, which means restaurants can't get employees to come back to work. So this week the Biden administration touted its new Restaurant Revitalization Fund—a government fix to the government's blunder.

Mostly, the patent decision showcases who is in charge. It isn't Mr. Biden. Progressives have been calling for patent waivers since last year, and Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren and AOC amped up the pressure on Mr. Biden in the past month. These voices won out—again—over those in the administration who noted that waiving patent protections isn't the answer. Even the administration's Covid guru, Anthony Fauci, this week told the Financial Times that the patent release will likely get bogged down in lawsuits, and "there are other ways to ramp up vaccine production around the world."

In a debate with Mr. Trump last year, Mr. Biden testily asserted that *he* is "the Democratic Party right now"; what he says goes. But name one progressive demand he hasn't rolled over for. This is a Sanders presidency by another name. The patent decision is only the latest example, and surely not the last. It's going to be a long, and destructive, few years.

791 words

Does Boris Johnson even care about what's happening in Northern Ireland?
Mary Dejevsky , *Independent*, 9 April 2021

The echoes from the 30 years of Northern Ireland's Troubles are loud. On Wednesday night, seven police officers were reported injured in Belfast, a bus was torched and its driver and a journalist were attacked. At least one of the city's so-called "peace gates" was breached, and there was violence elsewhere in the province, too. The UK prime minister, Boris Johnson, put out a statement on Twitter, saying he was "deeply concerned" and piously prescribing "dialogue, not violence or criminality" as "the way to resolve differences".

Quite so. A week before, though, when the violence first erupted, you would have been hard put to find anything much being said in the worlds of politics or the media beyond Northern Ireland itself. Having heard a brief mention on London's LBC early last Saturday, I switched to the BBC for some detail – but nothing. On the *BBC News* website, I had to burrow as far as the Northern Ireland section to find any mention of the disturbances. On that night's *News at Ten*, the BBC reported that there was now "more rioting" in west Belfast. More? Where was the news the first time around? It was not until Monday and even Tuesday that the rest of the UK was being given more than an inkling of what was happening, and why, in what is – still – an integral part of the United Kingdom. A report from Sima Kotecha on BBC's *Newsnight* on Tuesday finally made a decent stab at it. By now the violence was into its fifth day. And still, the politicians were holding back.

Nor was I alone in questioning especially the BBC coverage (or lack of it); social media commentators asked why single-issue "Kill the Bill" and anti-lockdown protests in Cardiff, London and Bristol were getting all the attention, while events in Belfast seemed to be getting none. This, despite the fact that any trouble in Northern Ireland, still more at this time of year – Good Friday Agreement, Easter Rising, anyone? – was likely to have much deeper roots and be potentially far more destabilising in its effects.

It was also what some on both sides of the Irish Sea had been gloomily forecasting, as arrangements for Northern Ireland proved time and again the stumbling block to any Brexit agreement. Whether it was the Brexit treaty agreed by Theresa May, its chequered passage through parliament, or the trade deal eventually concluded by Boris Johnson at the eleventh hour, time and again the nail-biting moment turned on Northern Ireland. Theresa May's need for support after her ill-judged 2017 election gave Northern Ireland's Democratic Unionist Party an effective veto over any settlement they opposed – a veto that it did not hesitate to use, even though Northern Ireland as a whole had voted against Brexit at the referendum. The on-off compromise on a "backstop" was May's solution, but one she could not, in the end, get through the House of Commons.

Taking over in the summer of 2019, Johnson took another tack; he ditched the DUP and the Tory Remainers to get the agreement through parliament, and the size of his subsequent electoral victory allowed him to finalise a trade deal that set the customs border with the EU down the Irish Sea. The unrest that has erupted now – orchestrated (as some claim) or not – is the logical, perhaps inevitable, consequence of that decision.

It has revealed what many knew, but preferred not to say. For all the benefits of peace over the past 23 years, and for all that the Good Friday Agreement is lauded the world over as a model of conflict resolution, reconciliation is another matter. Those so-called "peace gates" permit controlled passage between walled enclaves that have left Belfast's Protestants and Catholics more secure, but as divided residentially as ever. For a "peace gate" to have been torn down is a breach as symbolic as it is real.

One question now is how far, even whether, the current violence can be curbed without a severe clampdown or even a return to direct rule. Uncertainty may be one reason why Westminster politicians have been as reluctant as the media to pronounce. How profound is the breakdown of law and order? Can it be "switched off" as readily as it seems to have been "switched on"? Will saying too much risk making a bad, but limited, situation worse?

I wonder, though, whether there are not two other considerations. In the first instance, Boris Johnson appears to have delegated responsibility for what happens next to Northern Ireland's devolved government and its current first minister, Arlene Foster. Foster, I feel, carries considerable blame for the current situation. Had she not thwarted Theresa May's "backstop", that "softer" Brexit might have passed. Now, it seems, Foster is being given a chance to sort out the mess she, some might say, has largely created. It is a gamble that may or may not pay off. The second consideration is that politics in the rest of the UK and in Westminster has moved on. Interest in Northern Ireland's fractious politics has waned since the 1990s and how far even the Conservative Party can be called unionist any more must be in doubt. A 2019 poll showed a majority of party members would choose Brexit above preserving the union – with Northern Ireland the devolved nation they cared least about.

Tory ex-minister condemns approach to immigration
May Bulman, *The Independent*, 11 January 2020

The government's "inhuman" approach to immigration will only cause further problems and end up costing the taxpayer more money, a former Home Office minister has said. Caroline Nokes, who left her role as immigration minister last July, laid out a damning indictment of her former department's direction of travel, describing it as "profoundly depressing" and at times "hideously wrong". In an interview with The Independent, the Conservative MP for Romsey and Southampton North accused ministers of "paying lip service" to Wendy Williams' *Lessons Learned* report on the Windrush scandal – which broke while she was in office – and said they were failing to put people at the heart of Home Office policy, as was recommended in the review. The MP condemned the approach that the minister Chris Philp and the current home secretary, Priti Patel, have taken to the asylum system. She said the increasingly "brutal" response risked "whipping up an unpleasant reaction to some very vulnerable people", as well as creating legal and financial problems for ministers in the future.

Ms Patel announced in October that her department was going to fix the "fundamentally broken" asylum system in the UK to make it "firm and fair", describing it as the biggest overhaul of the system in decades. As part of this, ministers are drawing up plans to establish a swift deportation process for removing asylum seekers to EU countries after the Brexit transition period, and to place those waiting on their claims in a number of "camps". One of the camps is to be located in Ms Nokes's constituency, on Ministry of Defence land that has no electricity or water mains. The 500 asylum seekers there will not be provided with healthcare and will be in earshot of gunfire from a nearby gun range. The Home Office claimed the site would have access to running water, electricity and sanitation before migrants were housed there. It also said the department would work to meet statutory healthcare obligations. The MP described this as "deeply worrying", adding: "We know these people are going to have had huge trauma. It fills me with horror that our supported asylum accommodation processes have gone so hideously wrong that they can't even recognise that this is not a decent way to accommodate people. "The Home Office went through so much pain over Windrush; the home secretary herself has described it as a stain on the Home Office. And yet it appears that we don't care that putting asylum seekers in a camp with no water might also be regarded as a shameful stain on the Home Office."

Ms Nokes also raised alarm about the fact that the Home Office has made no commitment to restart the process of refugee resettlement to the UK, after plans to welcome 5,000 individuals to the country in 2020 were abandoned because of the coronavirus pandemic. Other countries such as France, Spain and Italy have reopened their resettlement programmes. "I totally get Covid, but there's been no affirmation of what happens in 2021," she said. "The resettlement scheme was ground-breaking and full credit to David Cameron for putting it in place and Theresa May for seeing it through, but the stark reality is there now appears to be no firm, ongoing commitment to global refugee resettlement.

Asked about the Home Office's recent criticisms of "lefty" and "activist" lawyers, whom they have attacked for "frustrating" the department's attempts to deport people, Ms Nokes said she believed any minister had "really good cause to be frustrated" when people "try one route and then they try another and then they try a third". But the former minister warned that the current rhetoric risked undermining the judiciary system. Referencing the controversial charter flight to Jamaica, which saw 35 foreign national offenders taken off the flight in the days and hours before when it emerged they had valid legal claims, Ms Nokes questioned whether ministers had given enough attention to ensuring each deportee was being removed lawfully.

Reflecting on her own time in the Home Office, which lasted 18 months until July 2019, when she was "unceremoniously hoofed" by Boris Johnson when he became prime minister, Ms Nokes said her "single biggest regret" was "not picking up on the scale of the Windrush scandal faster. Among her proudest achievements during her time in office was the launch of the EU settlement scheme – the process for EU nationals in Britain to apply for post-Brexit immigration status – which she said was "proof that the Home Office could introduce a system that was slick, efficient, would work", citing the fact that 4.6 million people have so far applied.

But while she enjoyed the challenge that came with being immigration minister, Ms Nokes said it was "seriously stressful", adding: "You were taking decisions that would impact upon somebody's living conditions, whether they were being deported back to a foreign country where the situation was sub-optimal, and that always stressed me beyond belief." And the situation for vulnerable immigrants is worse now, she believes, citing the apparent unwillingness of today's Home Office to take in child refugees who are stranded in Europe, a move that was previously facilitated – albeit in smaller numbers than had been hoped – under the Dubs Amendment, which ended earlier this year.

Hate Crimes Against Asian Americans Are on the Rise. Many Say More Policing Isn't the Answer

Cady Lang, *TIME,* February 18, 2021

When Amanda Nguyen saw the video, she was horrified. In the Jan. 28 security footage, 84-year-old Vicha Ratanapakdee was shoved to the ground while taking his morning walk in San Francisco; just two days after the assault, he died. (Nineteen-year-old Antoine Watson has since been charged with and pleaded not guilty to murder and elder abuse.) It was one of several incidents of physical violence against Asian American elders in recent weeks across the U.S., but Nguyen had yet to see coverage by a major news outlet about the concerning increase in violence towards the Asian American and Pacific Islander community, following a year of xenophobic rhetoric and racist attacks amid the pandemic.

"I was mad, like blood boiling through my veins now, watching my community get slaughtered," says Nguyen, a civil rights activist who was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for her work in advocating for sexual assault survivors. "How many more people need to be killed in order for the news outlets, especially mainstream ones, to think that we're worthy of a story?" In response, Nguyen made an Instagram video where she implored her viewers to speak out about Ratanapakdee's death, as well as the assault of a 64-year-old Vietnamese grandmother who was assaulted and robbed in San Jose, Calif., and the attack on a 61-year-old Filipino man whose face was slashed with a box cutter on a New York City subway. Nguyen's video went viral as more reports of violent attacks and robberies emerged, including one of a 91-year-old man who was caught on camera being thrown to the ground in Oakland Chinatown, where there have been upwards of 20 violent attacks and robberies reported since January.

Since the start of the pandemic last spring, Asian Americans have faced racist violence at a much higher rate than previous years. The NYPD reported that hate crimes motivated by anti-Asian sentiment jumped 1,900% in New York City in 2020. Stop AAPI Hate, a reporting database created at the beginning of the pandemic as a response to the increase in racial violence, received 2,808 reports of anti-Asian discrimination between March 19 and December 31, 2020. The violence has continued into 2021, and President Joe Biden signed an executive order denouncing anti-Asian discrimination shortly after taking office in January. While anti-Asian violence has taken place nationwide and particularly in major cities, the uptick in attacks in 2021 has been particularly focused in the Bay Area, especially in San Francisco and Oakland's Chinatowns.

Many attribute the 2020 uptick to the xenophobic rhetoric of Biden's predecessor; former President Trump repeatedly referred to COVID-19 as "the China virus," blaming the country for the pandemic. In doing so, Trump followed in a long American history of using diseases to justify anti-Asian xenophobia, one that dates back to the 19th and 20th centuries and has helped to shape perception of Asian Americans as "perpetual foreigners." "There's a clear correlation between President Trump's incendiary comments, his insistence on using the term 'Chinese virus' and the subsequent hate speech spread on social media and the hate violence directed towards us," says Russell Jeung, a co-founder of Stop AAPI Hate and a professor of Asian American Studies at San Francisco State University. "It gives people license to attack us. The current spate of attacks on our elderly is part of how that rhetoric has impacted the broader population."

Many have pointed out that racial violence against Asian Americans often goes overlooked because of persistent stereotypes about the community. "There is a stereotype and an assumption that Asian Americans have class privilege, that they have high socioeconomic status and education, and that any discrimination doesn't really happen or feel legitimate," says Bianca Mabute-Louie, a racial justice educator. "There are these assumptions about ways that Asian Americans have 'succeeded' in this country." Mabute-Louie cites the pervasiveness of the model minority myth as a large contributing factor to the current climate. That false idea, constructed during the Civil Rights era to stymie racial justice movements, suggests that Asian Americans are more successful than other ethnic minorities because of hard work, education and inherently law-abiding natures. "This contributes to erasing the very real interpersonal violence that we see happening in these videos, and that Asian Americans experience from the day-to-day, things that don't get reported and the things that don't get filmed." Because the model minority myth suggests upward mobility, it creates a fallacy that Asian Americans don't experience struggle or racial discrimination, a stereotype that's been bolstered by limited (and in some cases, flawed) media representation like the film *Crazy Rich Asians* and more recently, Netflix's *Bling Empire.* [...]

790 words

Nigel Farage is back... and Boris Johnson should be very scared
Dan Hodges, *The Mail On Sunday*, 8 November 2020

The fear in the Minister's voice was palpable. 'It's not just going to be Covid. He's going to focus on that. But then it will spiral off into all sorts of other issues. It's really scary.' Nigel Farage is back. Last week it was announced the Brexit Party would be rebranding as Reform UK. Its mission: to use the Covid crisis as the catalyst for a fresh assault on an exhausted and embattled British political establishment. 'The Government has dug itself into a hole with coronavirus and rather than admit its mistakes, it keeps on digging,' he claimed in a message to supporters. 'The new national lockdown will result in more life-years lost than it hopes to save, as non-Covid patients with cancer, cardiac, lung and other illnesses have treatments delayed or cancelled again. Businesses and jobs are being destroyed.'

His return was immediately dismissed as irrelevant grandstanding. The Farage era was over, his opponents scoffed dismissively. At which point, the opinion polls suddenly scoffed back. Boris Johnson had slumped five points below Sir Keir Starmer. The Tories were languishing on 35%, their worst rating since Boris entered Downing Street. And the Brexit Party – a party that no longer exists – were up to 6%, just a point behind the Liberal Democrats. 'We've not got an Election coming up, so that's not the immediate problem,' a Minister said. 'But just having Farage back in the conversation means in every poll we're going to be five or six points lower than we would be. And when you get stuck there, it starts to spook people. Especially the Red Wall MPs.'

For many people, Nigel Farage is nothing but a political opportunist. Maybe he is – but he's a brilliant one. And the fact that he has seen in the Covid crisis his next great opportunity should strike fear into the heart of Boris, Starmer and every other mainstream politician. Farage is the master of identifying and exploiting a political vacuum. Saying the things others dare not say. Embracing positions few would touch with a barge-pole. And he has seized on the fact that coronavirus is not creating a vacuum, but gouging a gaping, plunging chasm through the heart of our nation.

Last week, England was again forced into solitary confinement. For the next month – at a minimum – our most basic rights have been placed into cold storage. And it was done without so much as a whimper from our political class. The Government ordained it. The official Opposition rubber-stamped it. And the House of Commons meekly acquiesced to it. Of the 555 MPs who voted on introducing a new national lockdown, only 39 raised their voice in opposition.

It's happening again. Yes, there are many people who believe a 'circuit-breaker' is the best way of protecting life and safeguarding the economy. But there are many who do not. And they are once more being elbowed aside as a cosy national consensus is constructed around them. Actually, to say 'constructed' is to imply there is some form of design to the latest Covid masterplan. There is none. At least not one most members of the Cabinet have been privy to. 'There has been no consultation on any of this,' one Cabinet Minister told me. 'I didn't know anything about it until I heard it on the news.' At the top of Government there is now no leadership worthy of the name. The Cabinet have been neutered. And Boris himself has become a cowed and isolated figure. 'You can't get him to listen,' one Minister said. 'And when he does listen, what you're saying doesn't register. I think he's mentally checking out. I really think he may just walk away in the New Year.'

But it's not just that the British people are once more witnessing an abdication of leadership. They are also being sold a false prospectus. On Thursday, the Government was rebuked for using misleading data to justify the circuit-breaker after it emerged that an apocalyptic graph showing winter Covid deaths spiralling above the first peak had been surreptitiously amended.

A leadership vacuum. A tranche of dodgy dossiers. An elite consensus stitched up between the mainstream parties. The stage has been constructed – all that's required now is for Nigel Farage to slap on the greasepaint and stride on to it. And when he does, he will again be mocked and vilified. People may well find his exploitation of a global pandemic that has claimed over a million lives tasteless. But it won't matter. Partly because the role of pantomime villain is one he relishes. And partly because who else is going to speak for those who think we have entered a lockdown too far?

We have one chance left to stop history repeating itself. On December 2, the lockdown is scheduled to end. And it must. Because if we don't end lockdown then, we know what happens next. Brexit. Immigration. Covid. Every time the ground is ceded, Nigel Farage strolls over with a fag, a pint and a cheeky laugh to fill it. 'We are keeping a very close eye on the Prime Minister,' he told his supporters. Boris and his party know it. And they should be very afraid.

Caitlyn Jenner's Campaign as a Trans Republican Is the End of Identity Politics

Skylar Baker-Jordan, *Newsweek,* April 23, 2021

A narcissistic, right-wing reality TV star is running for public office.

No, Donald Trump has not announced his 2024 presidential campaign. Caitlyn Jenner is running for Governor of California as a Republican in the expected recall election of Governor Gavin Newsom.

As a gay man, I suppose many might expect me to support Jenner, a transgender woman, because of "identity politics," the view that our identities should be the focal point of our politics. But I have news for you: I would rather drink Trump-branded bleach than vote for a millionaire Republican—even an LGBTQ one.

Because the truth is, identity politics will only get you so far. It's something I'm keenly aware of, as someone who is working class. And though this is not always the case, there is often a fundamental tension between a politics rooted in material issues and one rooted in identity.

Of course, as a gay man, I am acutely aware of policies that harm myself and other gay folks. I still resent Republican's using same-sex marriage as a wedge issue in 2004, not only because they rode a wave of anti-gay amendments to electoral victory, but because they were homophobic and had a real detriment to my life.

Ironically, this means I would never vote for Jenner, who despite being trans opposed same-sex marriage—until she realized it was hurting her brand. I would never vote against my own individual interests as a gay man and the class interests of gay and lesbian people as a group.

But I also would not vote for Jenner because my own class interests—that is, my *economic* class interests—are not the same as Jenner's. And this is where liberals often fall victims to identity politics itself.

There is a tendency to look at voters as part of a block with narrow interests predetermined along the axes of race, sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity. Politicians on the left tend to look at things like same-sex marriage and the Equality Act as being "gay issues," with the assumption that simply being on the right side of those issues is enough to win our support. [...]

Having access to affordable healthcare and cheap housing is what matters most to me. Fixing our electrical grid so that my electricity doesn't go off and the bridge below me doesn't wash out whenever it rains would have a more immediate and material effect on my life.

These are the kitchen table issues that identity politics so often ignores, yet these are the things that matter most to voters. Voters, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity, care more about their material circumstances than they do ideological culture wars; at least, voters who are exposed to the vicissitudes of daily life do. I wouldn't know about those who are never beset by financial worries.

I doubt Caitlyn Jenner worries about the electricity much. Jenner, who once described herself as "economically conservative, socially liberal" and who told the 2016 Republican National Convention that "it was harder to come out as a Republican" than as a trans woman, voted for Donald Trump in 2016. She supported his massive tax cut for the wealthy and deregulation of the economy and only recanted her support when he turned on the trans community. Put simply, Jenner is not a friend of the working American.

Expecting someone to support Jenner or any candidate because they identify as LGBT is to ignore the real class consciousness we need to be building: a class consciousness among the working class.

It is time we eschew identity politics and engage with the real conflict, that between the wealthy who control the economy and the workers they depend on to make them money. Social justice is a noble cause, and I am not suggesting we give up the fight for LGBTQ, racial, and gender equality. But we all need to start realizing that identity politics and the endless culture wars predicated on it are meant to divide, not unite, the working class.

Nothing makes this clearer than Caitlyn Jenner's run for governor as a trans Republican. It might just be the nail in the coffin of identity politics.

715 words

America calls on Kamala Harris – and Black women – to clean up its mess

Karen Attiah, *The Washington Post,* November 7, 2020

Sen. Kamala D. Harris can now add Shatterer of Glass Ceilings to her already impressive résumé.

One hundred years after women in America secured the right to vote, Harris is now set to become the first woman to become vice president of the United States. Harris, born to an Indian mother and a Jamaican father, will also be the first nonwhite woman to occupy the office.

Exit polls showed that once again, Black women put the Democratic Party on their backs, with 91 percent of Black women voting for the Biden-Harris ticket, the highest percentage of any racial group. In Georgia, Stacey Abrams emerged as a Black political superheroine; her voting rights organization Fair Fight helped register 800,000 voters and may help deliver the traditionally red state to Biden. It is a point of pride that Harris's path to success was shaped by Black institutions; she graduated from Howard University, a historically Black college, and is a member of the historically Black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha.

However, as much as Harris's victory is a moment for celebration, as a Black woman, I can't help but brace myself. Black women know the ugliness that America is capable of. We know that the violent twin forces of racism and sexism course through America's DNA so powerfully that not even a Black woman in the White House can be safe from it.

As a Black-identifying woman and a highly successful daughter of immigrants, Harris's elevation represents everything that America claims to uphold and defend as a country. For decades — setting aside recent years — we have claimed that immigrants are not just welcome but an essential part of the great American experiment, testing whether this nation is capable of extending the rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to those who exist outside the margins of whiteness and maleness.

Of course the outgoing president has made clear that he does not stand for that. Donald Trump has gone out of his way to mispronounce Harris's first name and pejoratively called her a "female socialist". Trump even decided to resurrect the birther conspiracy, questioning whether Harris met the citizenship requirements to be vice president.

Any political figure's physical safety is a concern in normal times, but as a nonwhite woman, Harris has a larger target on her back in the era of Trumpism. In October, a Maryland man was charged with threatening to rape and kill her. In the days before the election, as Harris made homestretch campaign stops in north Texas, a Biden-Harris campaign bus was surrounded by a caravan of Trump supporters. Instead of urging calm and civility, Trump tweeted that the "patriots did nothing wrong" and later posted video of the caravan and said "I LOVE TEXAS!"

I worry about the attacks that will come Harris's way. Trump may leave the White House, but his brand of violent racism and sexism will remain embedded in America's political psyche like shards of broken glass.

As Harris, like many Black women, navigates an America full of angry Trump voters, we can be sure there will be disappointment and missteps. Even during the campaign, we saw what that would look like: When the Biden-Harris campaign released a statement about the police killing of 27-year-old Walter Wallace Jr. in Philadelphia, it dedicated more space and energy to scolding protesters for property damage than condemning the actions of a police department that needlessly stole the life of a mentally ill Black man.

James Baldwin once asked white America, "How much time do you want for your 'progress'?" I would humbly add another question: Under what conditions will America allow women and Black people to reap the benefits of decades upon decades of struggle?

This is a triumphant moment that calls for celebration. The best way for America to honor Harris's historical moment is to protect, support and elevate Black women.

America has decided to elevate a Black woman to the vice presidency just as the country has been humiliated and on its knees. Harris must now help save a deeply polarized America ailing from a deadly pandemic and a shattered economy. It's an all-too-familiar scenario to Black women — White America always hopes that we will clean up its mess. But Black women don't vote to save White America; we vote to save ourselves from White America and its impulses. It's time for Democrats to work to give Black women the better and safer America that we deserve.

763 words

It's time for apprenticeships to take the stage
James Kirkup, *The Times*, 19 April 2021

Hartlepool College of Further Education doesn't appear to have much in common with the Girls' Day School Trust. The college educates people in one of the poorer parts of England. The trust operates 25 independent schools in places such as Notting Hill and Kensington. But between them, they could point the country to a fairer society and a more productive economy.

Hartlepool first. In a fortnight, political types will be scrambling to interpret the result of a by-election there. Will Boris Johnson's jolly populism capture another "Red Wall" town, or will Sir Keir Starmer's cries of Tory sleaze and Covid cockup secure the Labour base? Both those political narratives miss the most interesting things about Hartlepool, which are mostly about education. Hartlepool is one of the places where the other half lives, the 50 per cent and more who don't go to university. About 12 per cent of Hartlepool's children go to top-tier universities, compared with 17 per cent for England as a whole. Another 32 per cent of Hartlepool school-leavers go on to some sort of higher education, but a fair few do their degree at the town's further education (FE) college. And 17 per cent of Hartlepool's 18-year-olds go on to what Whitehall calls "higher technical" qualifications: advanced apprenticeships, Higher National Diplomas and other vocational training that delivers serious workplace skills. The figure for England as a whole is just 3 per cent.

In other words, Hartlepool and its FE college are actually doing what a few politicians and a lot of policy wonks have talked about for years: delivering high-level vocational training to large numbers of people from that other 50 per cent. FE is hugely important to places like Hartlepool, and hugely important to the British economy. The workplace skills it delivers aren't just the ladder that many (mostly poorer) people climb to a better working life. They're one of the keys to unlocking the productivity growth that is our only long-term path to greater prosperity. Too many of our workers lack good skills and training, and so too many businesses are built on low-skill, low-wage jobs.

If we are to stand any chance of becoming the high-value, high-wage economy that Brexiteers promised we'd be outside the European Union, we need better skills and training, which should mean a bigger, better FE sector. That better-funded sector should also be central to training and retraining people whose careers have been upended by Covid-19.

But FE is for other people, and other people's children. At least, that's what it is to a political class dominated by graduates (85 per cent of MPs went to university) and to a media industry similarly skewed towards people with degrees. And because FE is for other people, no one has made much of a fuss about deep and repeated cuts to FE budgets, falling student numbers and a constant churn of policies that all leave the sector dazed and falling short of its potential. That has to change. The country can't afford to go on neglecting and undervaluing the people who don't go to university. Politically, education is a vital but often under-appreciated dividing line. Brexit was largely a contest between graduates and nongraduates. Tory advances in 2019 came largely among non-graduates; Labour easily beat the Conservatives among degree-holding voters.

Socially, a better deal for FE, its people and places can't come soon enough, "levelling up" means nothing unless places like Hartlepool and its college get more respect, support and money. That will mean a fresh look at the idea of social mobility, which shouldn't have to mean geographical mobility: a levelled-up economy would be one where it is easier to climb the wage ladder in your home town or region. The great expansion of higher education has been a good thing for Britain in aggregate but it's also helped create an economy where to get ahead, too many people have to move away, generally to the southeast pre-pandemic, a quarter of all UK graduates of England's universities found work in London six months after graduation.

Some of the job of fixing this falls to Gavin Williamson. He's also the only Tory cabinet minister I've heard say he'd be happy if his kids became apprentices instead of going to university. Which brings us back to the Girls' Day School Trust, where parents can pay £20,000 a year for each daughter's fees. Many hope a private school education will improve their children's chances of going to a top university, but more and more such parents are working out that a good apprenticeship with a big firm is a better, cheaper route to career success than a middling degree.

More far-sighted employers are recognising the benefits, to themselves and society, of bigger, better apprenticeship schemes recruiting from a wider talent pool. Tony Blair, set the target in 1999 for 50 per cent of school-leavers to go to higher education. That was the right goal at the time, but now the focus must be on the other 50 per cent. That should mean more degree apprenticeships, a new push for firms to contribute more to workplace training schemes and a well-funded and valued FE sector, for adults as well as school-leavers.

Is Biden Missing His Chance on Guns?

Lisa Lerer, *The New York Times*, April 3, 2021

After six long years of legislative wrangling, Joe Biden was on the brink of victory. His historic crime bill was finally moving toward passage. Only one issue stood in his way: a controversial, 10-year federal ban on assault weapons.

"Six years ago, it was guns. Five years ago, it was guns. Four years ago, it was guns. Last night it was guns. This morning it was guns," Mr. Biden told reporters in August 1994, during end-stage negotiations over the legislation. "And right now, it's guns. It's guns, guns, guns, guns."

Much of Mr. Biden's legislative career could be summarized in the same way. For decades, he played a crucial role in major legislative battles over gun control, championing proposals to tighten regulations on guns and their owners. On the campaign trail last year, Mr. Biden proposed the most expansive gun control platform of any presidential candidate in history, promising to reinstate the assault weapons ban, institute a voluntary gun buyback program and send a bill to Congress on his first day in office repealing liability protections for gun manufacturers and closing background-check loopholes.

Yet 73 days into his presidency, with five mass shootings and more than 10,000 gun violence deaths having already occurred this year, Mr. Biden is approaching the issue with far less urgency. Of the more than 50 executive orders and memorandums he has given so far, none have addressed gun control. That bill he promised to send to Congress never arrived. And his use of the bully pulpit to push for new measures has been uneven to nonexistent.

Less than 24 hours after a shooting rampage last month in Boulder, Colo., that killed 10 people, Mr. Biden promised action, saying he didn't need to "wait another minute, let alone an hour, to take common sense steps" on gun control. When pressed on those measures by reporters two days later, he seemed more comfortable waiting: He quickly dismissed the specifics of his proposals as "a matter of timing," before making clear that his focus would be the infrastructure bill.

"Of any president in my lifetime, he has the most expansive understanding of gun violence," said Kris Brown, the president of Brady: United Against Gun Violence. "But I'll be honest, when I first heard that, it did not make me feel good."

Mr. Biden wasn't always a champion of gun control. During his early years in the Senate, he screened staff members for liberal views on gun control, won positive ratings from the National Rifle Association and opposed gun control measures. His position shifted during the long legislative battle over the criminal justice bill, which ended up being the biggest gun control victory during his nearly half a century in Washington.

For the next three decades, he approached the issue with the zeal of a convert. From his earliest days as vice president, he pushed President Barack Obama to do more on guns. After the massacre of 26 children and adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in 2012, Mr. Obama tasked Mr. Biden with crafting a package of tough gun control measures — an effort that ended in defeat. Six years later, Mr. Biden went viral comforting the families of the victims of the school shooting in Parkland, Fla.

As president, he's taking a much lower profile on the issue, focusing far more intently on efforts to pass his relief bill earlier this year and to champion his infrastructure package. It's a position that extends throughout the administration: A day after the Boulder shooting, Vice President Kamala Harris pressured the Senate to take action, deflecting more than six minutes of questions about what executive actions the president was prepared to take.

"This is going to be about your viewers and all of us pleading to the reason, pleading to the hearts and minds of the people in the U.S. Senate," she said. "Let's say, 'We're going to hold our elected people accountable if they're not going to be with us.'"

A few days later, when asked about the issue during a visit to a school in Connecticut, she quickly pivoted from guns to promoting the administration's relief package. [...]

708 words

Biggest cultural challenge of our lifetime: Defeating anti-American indoctrination

Dr. Ben Carson and Gov. Kristi Noem, *Fox News,* May 3, 2021

In his 1989 farewell address, President Ronald Reagan worried whether we were doing a good enough job teaching our own children what it means to be American. He longed for what he called an "informed patriotism."

This sentiment was echoed over 30 years later by President Trump, who in his own farewell address warned that our "loss of confidence in ourselves" was not just a worry, but our greatest danger. "No nation can long thrive," President Trump said, "that loses faith in its own values, history and heroes – for these are the very sources of our unity and our vitality."

It's bad enough to lose one's faith, which at least holds forth the possibility of recovering it. But what if we give up and abandon altogether the teaching of our children the true and inspiring story of America? What will become of our youngest Americans who are starting off with a blank slate about what our country means and stands for? What exactly are we doing if we are not teaching them about their country's values, history and heroes?

The alarming answer is, in our nation today, there are far too many classrooms where our children and grandchildren are not learning about the positive revolution in human affairs set in motion by our Founders, or how later leaders like Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. called upon the wisdom and vision of the Founders to defeat the evil injustices of slavery and segregation.

Instead, many are learning that our Founders were altogether sinful men unworthy of statues or even praise. The historic achievements of Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Douglass and King are being shelved in favor of the false and destructive narrative that we are a systemically racist and ultimately irredeemable nation.

Even worse – and at an alarming pace – students are being subjected to the radical concept known as critical race theory, which pits them against one another on the basis of race and gender under the guise of achieving "equity." Not only is this extreme ideology deeply divisive and harmful, but it rejects America's most defining principle – that as individuals we are all created equal by God. This is not a formula for building a more perfect Union.

A great nation cannot survive if its citizens are taught to hold their own country in contempt. Our Founders knew that people are not perfect – that is why they created an ingenious constitutional system of checks and balances. But that system also requires strong civic engagement by citizens who understand and defend the values and traditions that make America special.

Critical race theory is a deliberate means to sow division and cripple our nation from within – one brainwashed and resentful student at a time. And while foreign adversaries like China and Russia surely work to inflame our divisions, we are doing this to ourselves.

Whether or not we can defeat this ascendant anti-Americanism is perhaps the most important cultural challenge of our lifetime, and fortunately a growing number of courageous parents, grandparents and teachers understand the stakes and have begun to speak out and push back. [...]

It is true that President Biden and his congressional allies are working hard to impose a new federally-funded, federally-defined curriculum for civics and history, but education remains primarily a state and local issue – and rightly so.

And while it may seem difficult to make an impact in Washington, D.C., you may be surprised by how powerful your voice can be in your own school district or state capital. By focusing on this issue, we have the opportunity to create an entirely new, diverse coalition of voters for these values – one built upon a genuine love for our nation and our children.

Critics often deride our push for truthful, patriotic education by claiming that we don't want to have "difficult conversations" about troubling aspects of our history. They're wrong. Our children and grandchildren should understand the full picture – our fundamental values, our greatest achievements, and the long struggles to overcome injustice as well.

In doing so, they will learn the story of a brave and vibrant people. They will learn the stories of amazing men and women of every color and background who, for almost 250 years, have together fought, argued and strived to build a more perfect union.

It's now up to us to choose – will we prepare our youngest generation to write the next exciting chapter in the great American story? If so, we must act now, before it's too late.

772 words

How Views on Black Lives Matter Have Changed – And Why That Makes Police Reform So Hard

Alex Samuels, *FiveThirtyEight*, April 13, 2021

Daunte Wright was driving in his car through Brooklyn Center, Minnesota, two days ago when police officers pulled him over and later fatally shot him. This isn't the first time cops have used excessive or fatal force against a Black person. In fact, just 10 miles away from where Wright died, former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was on trial for murder after kneeling on George Floyd's neck for more than nine minutes last summer.

Floyd's death sparked a massive movement against police brutality and a sweeping shift in public opinion. And while it's possible that in the wake of the latest tragedy, public support for reforming policing might increase again, new calls for change face a significant obstacle in public opinion. Gains in support for reform, especially among white Americans, tend to be fleeting, and there's no consensus on what type of reforms the public wants.

Eleven months after Floyd's death, support for the Black Lives Matter movement has fallen, while America's trust in law enforcement has risen. Sixty-nine percent of Americans, according to a USA Today/Ipsos survey from March, now trust local police and law enforcement to promote justice and equal treatment of all races versus 56 percent who felt the same way last June. [...]

Public opinion is all over the place. Just over half of Americans, according to USA Today/Ipsos, oppose redirecting police funds to social services (57 percent) while 43 percent supported the idea — a slight decline from last August. The only thing most people can seem to agree on — even at the height of the protests after Floyd's death — is that they're against the idea of defunding the police. And this remains true today, even among Black Americans and Democrats.

Because many Americans are so split on what they want, police reform is often politicized — leading many Democrats to tread cautiously about saying they support "defunding the police." President Biden, for instance, was careful ahead of Election Day to say he was in favor of a law enforcement overhaul and maintained that "most cops are good." (Of course, these more measured stances likely helped him in November since voters didn't appear to link his views to the Black Lives Matter movement, which was already seeing decreased support at the time of the election.)

But even with a Democratic majority in both congressional chambers, Biden hasn't changed his messaging. He's encouraged congressional Democrats to pass a sweeping police reform bill, which would ban chokeholds and create national standards for policing to bolster accountability, but he hasn't broached legislation that would radically transform policing that the progressive wing of the Democratic Party is calling for.

Some Republican leaders, meanwhile, have encouraged their party to find common ground on reform issues, though their voters appear less sympathetic to drastic changes in policing. The Democrat-led police reform bill has received the bulk of media attention, but Sen. Tim Scott, the lone Black GOP U.S. senator, also introduced a police reform bill shortly after Floyd's death. Democrats largely rebuffed that bill because they don't think it goes far enough, but the lack of compromise among lawmakers isn't necessarily due to the contents of the two bills (Scott once argued there's a 70-75 percent overlap with his bill and what Democrats want, though some Democrats have debated this). Rather, the Black Lives Matter movement has increasingly become a partisan issue as the movement has expanded into political races and policy issues like voter suppression.

That said, Americans — both Democrats and Republicans — want some sort of reform. A poll released last week from Vox/Data For Progress found that nearly three-fourths of Americans (71 percent) either support or strongly support a federal ban on police chokeholds. Seventy-one percent of respondents also want to end police racial profiling, while 84 percent are in favor of mandating body camera use. (Republicans were less likely than Democrats to support all three reforms, but they supported mandating body cameras at nearly the same rate as Democratic respondents, 80 percent and 88 percent, respectively.)

At this point, it's unclear what's next in both the Chauvin murder trial (closing arguments may start Monday) and what will happen to the officer who shot and killed Wright, but what happens next is likely to have an impact on both policing and reform in years to come.

738 words

Rick Santorum's Remarks on Native Americans are Despicable, But Here's What's Worse

Judith Le Blanc, *HuffPost,* May 6, 2021

It's strange being invisible. Even though you feel like a fully formed person, made of blood, bone, thoughts and feelings, people forget you exist. You wake up, make your coffee and read the news, and there it is. Rick Santorum reminds you that your homeland, your ancestors who farmed, hunted, fished, governed our communities, formed economies with neighbors and traders, and taught their children to respect everything around them, are seen as a "blank slate."

Native Americans have been erased from history since the first white settler arrived. Native peoples — if we're recognized as existing at all — are constantly reminded that our role was simply in providing the land on which this place called America was formed.

There were times when we negotiated and signed treaties to protect what we had. The places we called sacred were soaked with the blood of our people, slaves and indentured servants to form this country. We signed agreements and shared environmental knowledge, and yet we were murdered, tricked and forced into giving up our homes. The devastation of this loss is still felt today.

But instead of acknowledging that the founding of America was not all fireworks and flags, people like Santorum, a former U.S. senator and now a CNN contributor, create a story that suits them. They rewrite the Great American history as one in which no one lived in this place before white people came. It's a deliberate strategy to whitewash the violence that was committed against our people to create the United States, and it is a not-at-all-subtle way to ignore the agreements the federal government made with our peoples centuries ago. But despite living in near anonymity in our own ancestral homelands, we haven't given up our fight today. We continue to fight for the federal government to keep its promises, follow the treaties they signed with us, and work with tribal governments to protect our land, air and water.

Our fight at Standing Rock was among the most visible and powerful moments in our movement to take a stand for our homelands. We came together from Native nations everywhere to pray and to say "no more." No more infrastructure projects cutting through our lands and our livelihoods without our consent. No more "build it first and then fight it out in court later." The federal government is required to work with tribal governments before the first ditches are dug, yet we see over and over again a fatally flawed process where the feds commit to an oil pipeline, or a mining contract or a dam before the first conversation with our tribes even begins.

The attempts to erase our people is directly tied to the ways in which governments proceed without our consent. If they just ignore that we exist, then they don't have to engage with our sovereign governments in any part of the decision-making. The problem with this approach is that it is in direct violation of the constitutionally guaranteed treaties our ancestors signed — agreements that were intended to ensure we had a voice in any and all decisions regarding our homelands.

Standing Rock was the beginning, not the end. Standing Rock is everywhere. And our people aren't going to back down from protecting and shaping the future of the land, air and water for all people, Native and non-Native. Clean drinking water is a treaty and a human right for all. Our ancestors made a commitment to Mother Earth and we intend to keep their promises.

By raising our voices and joining together in activism and prayer, we are making a visible impact. The confirmation of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, a Native American, and the huge Native voter turnout in the 2020 presidential election, shows what is possible when we advocate for big change in Indian Country. Slowly, sometimes too slowly, Native peoples are being rewritten back into U.S. history, even as those like Santorum attempt to eliminate the very existence of Native peoples from America's story.

So, we will fight, like we always have. But when the Santorums of the world enjoy a platform like CNN to share their ignorance and bigotry, we're in not just a fight for our ways of life and our homes, but to set the record straight.

Journalism should be focused on revealing the truths around us, not concealing it. Our homelands were not a blank slate. My ancestors are not figments of my imagination. I am here and I am real — even though too many try to erase me.

774 words

How to remake Britain: We need a new progressive alliance
Linda Colley, *New Statesman*, 17 March 2021

Unless first-past-the-post gives way to proportional representation, it will remain difficult to forge the effective coalitions of the righteous and the reforming needed to lead a national project.

Roberto Unger's recent essay* arguing that the United Kingdom must embark on a national programme of self-renewal now that it has left the European Union, is predictably probing and salutary. His recommendation that we focus on what the UK may achieve outside the EU is useful and cheering. And he is right to insist that the UK's economic woes will never be redressed until systematic attention is paid to our no less woeful "constitutional arrangements". But his analysis also poses questions. As Unger has argued elsewhere, in the UK, as in the US, what is urgently needed is a new progressive alliance which is able and willing to address the most pressing political dilemmas. An alliance like this may be easier to achieve in the US because progressives operate for the most part under the umbrella of the Democratic Party. But in the UK, progressives – and their potential voters – are split between Labour, the Greens, the Liberal Democrats, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the exiled Conservative left. Unless first-past-the-post gives way to proportional representation, it will remain difficult to forge the effective coalitions of the righteous and the reforming needed to lead a national project.

The problem though is not simply the electoral system. Ever deepening partisanship poses other significant challenges. Increasing provisions for "party democracy" has only tended to make things worse. In recent decades, both Labour Party members in the constituencies, and still more their Tory counterparts, have been drawn to selecting leaders who cater to their respective comfort zones, rather than seeking out candidates possessed of high and proven competence and broad, potentially UK-wide appeal. So the left has suffered from the leadership defects of Jeremy Corbyn, while the country as a whole has suffered from a series of not overwhelmingly distinguished Old Etonians and Oxford Conservatives.

But the most immediate obstacle to forging a "national project" is of course that, *pace* Unger, the UK is becoming less and less "a unitary state". Brexit has only exacerbated existing fissures in sentiment and allegiance between England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Referenda can be useful devices for producing closure on tricky moral issues such as abortion, and for determining mundane civic habits, like the direction of traffic on roads. But without proper care, thought and drafting, they are poor instruments for resolving acute debates over cultural and political identity.

When Australia held a referendum in 1999 to determine whether it would remain a monarchy, the rules stipulated that a majority of its states had to vote in the same way for either change, or for no change. Imagine how different things would be had David Cameron and his allies stipulated that – in a composite UK – a majority of its four component parts would also have to agree on either staying within the EU or on leaving it. But, of course, this was not done; and there is a fundamental, structural reason why this was not done.

Australia acted as it did because, like most countries, it possesses a codified constitution which sets out the rules of the political and governance game. For all the prating about "Global Britain", the UK remains profoundly unglobal in this regard. It still does not possess a codified constitution. Consequently, and as with the EU referendum, its rulers can substantially make things up as they go along, sometimes with disastrous political consequences.

There is also, though, a more ubiquitous problem. Unger is attracted to broad and ambitious analysis, an approach with which I am in sympathy. But focusing on identifying the dilemmas that now confound "the whole world" cannot by definition be enough. In the UK, as in most countries, a substantial and powerful minority exists that continues to benefit from the political and economic status quo. In the absence of major warfare, serious civil commotion, revolution, or the fear of these things – and without the emergence of successful and adroit coalitions of the righteous and the reforming – how are these sometimes predatory and complacent minorities to be outmanoeuvred, so that new projects and happier possibilities can feasibly emerge?

Linda Colley is a historian and an expert on British, imperial and global history from 1700

**Robert Unger, "Britan's Project"(essay published in* The New Statesman, *18.03.2021)*

Musa Okwonga's *One of Them*: an elegantly written memoir of his Eton days
Stephen Bush, *New Statesman*, 14 April 2021

This detailed exploration of life at Eton slips along so gracefully that I spent the last few chapters in a state of horror that the book didn't have much longer to run. One of the stranger consequences of getting into Oxford is that you become, whether you like it or not, a beneficiary of the establishment. Lazy stereotypes about cleverness and merit become assumptions that it would no longer be wise to challenge. I think most Oxbridge graduates know this, which is why we spend so much time trying to underplay or apologise for our ill-gotten gains. We say things like, "I went to a comprehensive" (which requires no further explanation), or "I went to a state school" (which is a way of saying "I went to a grammar"), or "I went to a grammar" (which means "I went to a private school with the words 'Grammar School' in the title"), or "Well, I didn't go to Eton" (which means "I went to a very, very posh school, but not the one everyone's heard of").

I went to a comprehensive, but I've spent as much time being asked questions about Eton, of which I know nothing, as I have about my university, Oxford. Small wonder, when you consider a third of our postwar prime ministers have been Old Etonians, including the present incumbent. This is also true of his business secretary Kwasi Kwarteng, the Leader of the House Jacob Rees-Mogg and a host of other MPs, as well as the Archbishop of Canterbury and many luminaries from across the arts and sciences. Yet personal accounts of the school are rare: David Cameron devotes just three of his memoir's 700 pages to his time at the school (in them, he admits his O-level results were "for Eton, distinctly mediocre"). In fact, *One of Them*, by the poet and writer Musa Okwonga, is the first detailed memoir of life at Eton for close to 50 years.

Okwonga is a writer worth waiting half a century for. He is an Old Etonian of a type I think anyone who has been to a prestigious university will loosely recognise: those inhabitants of, as Okwonga puts it, "small towns in the Thames Valley" with "middle-class professionals" for parents, a description that applies as much to Kwarteng (the son of a barrister and a civil servant) or the Hitchin and Harpenden MP Bim Afolami (the son of a doctor and a pharmacist) as it does to Okwonga (whose mother was a doctor). This is also a type of pupil that is vanishing fast: fees at Eton have more than trebled in the 20 years since Okwonga left, making his story impossible to repeat now. While they are perhaps not the most sympathetic occupants of Ed Miliband's "squeezed middle", these children of consultants and doctors, whose parents can no longer afford to send them to England's grandest public schools, are a symptom of the United Kingdom's anaemic wage growth. "It is grim to think that the journey I took … is no longer possible for boys like me," Okwonga writes.

The absence of future Okwongas from Eton's list of alumni is a bigger loss for the school than either it or, at times, Okwonga himself appears to realise. *One of Them* is such a good advert for the place that, at one point, I paused to look up the fees, momentarily forgetting that I don't have a spare £14,000 to burn every term or, for that matter, a child.

It's not just Okwonga's prose that sells the school. Yes, he writes about the lavish facilities and all the extra-curricular opportunities, but it is a less tangible asset – confidence – that stands out. *One of Them* is a richly observed book, packed with elegant descriptions of life on a football field, experiences of racism, of love and of friendship. Some parts I immediately recognised. When Okwonga recounts a day ruined by being stopped and searched by police, reflecting on "the spontaneous joy that we might have found up ahead", I thought: I've had days spoiled like that. Other parts are distinctly Etonian: he writes of his unease at the way pupils talked about the "lebs" – ie, plebs – and the knowledge that they were laughing at the people he grew up alongside. But, on the whole, it is clear that going to Eton is an extraordinary and privileged experience, and one that Okwonga largely enjoyed.

The confidence that Eton bestows on its students, though, comes with a sense of obligation. "So few black boys get to come here," he writes at one point, and "I blew it". He has failed, he believes, to take full advantage of the benefits of the education he received. To which I would say: if this one book were the beginning, middle and end of my professional career, I would count it as a success. Okwonga is surely right to note that Eton's flourishing has come at the expense of the country; I'm not wholly convinced that its flourishing hasn't come at the expense of its alumni, too. For all this book left me full of envy and desire for an Eton education, it also left me relieved to have escaped being an Old Etonian.