



## The American Left's Media Purge

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The American Left is intensely frustrated by President Donald Trump's ability to penetrate their monopoly on the news cycle. When the Left is frustrated, it acts out, up to and past the point of violence. A powerful weapon at its disposal is its ability to silence its perceived enemies. Much of the mainstream US media, cowed by the Left, reflexively capitulates to its demands to "cancel" individuals who express opinions that go against Leftist orthodoxy.

In the wake of the riots and destruction that coursed across the US after the killing of George Floyd, *New York Times* editorial page editor James Bennet was left with no choice but to resign after allowing the paper to publish an op-ed by US Senator Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas). Cotton argued in his piece that the military should be mobilized to restore order, and the airing of such a view is now verboten in the pages of the *Times*. Similarly, Stan Wischnowski, long-time editor of the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, was pushed out of his job for daring to print a piece with the headline "Buildings Matter, Too."

Both were victims not of careful reviews conducted by their papers but of the demands of the mob, which is now in control of the American newsroom. Along the same lines of this trend, Twitter made the executive decision to begin "curating" President Trump's tweets.

To an extent, these events are simply eruptions coming from a large group of individuals who have not been educated in the norms of liberal democracy, but there is more to it than that. The demand to shame and ultimately silence perceived political opponents reflects the Left's deep frustration that it has lost its monopoly on the news and is unable to beat Trump at its own game.

The American Left has controlled the news narrative for at least half a century. With a few notable exceptions, such as Fox News and the *Wall Street*

*Journal*, the mainstream media have kept Republican presidents under perpetual assault and served as a mouthpiece for the Democratic Party. This pattern was as consistent as it was effective: the *Times* would publish an article, the sitting Republican president and his administration would be forced to spend days or weeks reacting to it, and when the public finally got tired of it, the paper would fire off a new salvo. The barrage was relentless and there was no return of fire.

President Trump changed that completely. In the months preceding the 2016 election, his use of Twitter indicated that the next presidency, should he win it, would be made visible to the public in an entirely new way. In Trump's hands, Twitter was as effective a weapon against his numerically superior enemy as was the artillery deployed by Napoleon Bonaparte.

Sure enough, after Trump was elected, his crude but precise fire proceeded to decimate one column of well-trained professional writers after another. He essentially flipped the game upside down. His modus operandi is to wake up in the morning, shoot out an extemporaneous, unfiltered, at times wholly ridiculous tweet in all caps to his millions of followers, and then watch *The New York Times* and all the other media outlets throw all their resources at reacting to it. Suddenly it was the Republican president setting the agenda, not the media.

At the dawn of the internet, and indeed for decades thereafter, most politicians resigned themselves to the idea that the internet was an unstoppable and uncontrollable force. They did not understand it, viewing it as an untamable force of nature that had to be accommodated. An America leader cannot, after all, behave like Kim Jong-un, Xi Jinping, or Vladimir Putin, all of whom strictly control (and, in Kim's case, entirely block) internet use. Yet President Trump, whose position as a political outsider has allowed him to take steps that previous presidents would never have considered, managed to coopt the internet for his own purposes.

Trump's ability to harness the media was deeply galling to the Left. Almost immediately after his victory, voices began to rise up demanding that the president and his supporters be silenced. The value of free speech, a pillar of liberal democracy, was slowly but persistently eroded by an increasingly vocal progressive mob, which comprises not only a good chunk of the national media's readership but populates its newsrooms as well.

The dam was breached the week of the George Floyd riots. For Jake Dorsey of Twitter, his decision to "curate" the president does not seem to have entailed any internal struggle with democratic principles. That is not entirely surprising, as Silicon Valley has almost no understanding of the world

around it. Many of its leaders have only just discovered Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics. It will take at least another few decades of changes to cultural fashion before they get to ideas like liberal democracy.

As self-defeating and dangerous as it may be, the Left's fervor to "cancel" the president and his supporters by erasing them from the internet and the printing press is only growing. Its ultimate goal of countrywide censorship meted out according to its own dictates cannot be achieved in a functioning democracy. It remains to be seen whether the Left's attempts to achieve that goal will succeed or will incense the president's supporters and grow his base.

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