

O EAST OREGONIAN PINION

CHRISTOPHER RUSH
PublisherKATHRYN B. BROWN
OwnerDANIEL WATTENBURGER
Managing EditorWYATT HAUPJT JR.
News Editor

Founded October 16, 1875

OTHER VIEWS

How we destroy lives today

Within living memory, political polarization had at least something to do with issues, but in the age of social media, it's almost entirely about social type. It's about finding and spreading the viral soap operas that are supposed to reveal the dark hearts of those who are in the opposite social type from your own.

It's about finding images that confirm your negative stereotypes about people you don't know. It's about reducing a complex human life into one viral moment and then banishing him to oblivion.

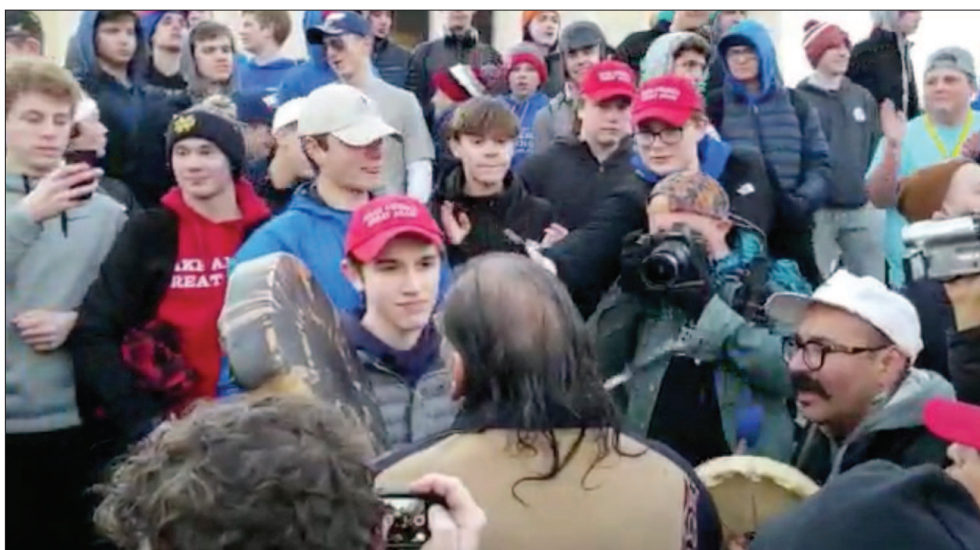
You don't have to read social theory on this phenomenon; just look at the fracas surrounding the Covington Catholic High School boys.

For those of you vacationing on Mars this past weekend, a video went viral showing a group of boys, many of them in MAGA hats, surrounding an older Native American man who was banging a drum.

The man, Nathan Phillips, told two different versions of what happened. He told *The Washington Post* that he was singing a traditional song when the teenagers swarmed around him, some chanting, "Build that wall, build that wall." He decided the right thing to do was get away. "I've got to find myself an exit out of this situation."

He told *The Detroit Free Press* that the incident started when the boys started attacking four African-Americans. So he decided to intervene. "There was that moment when I realized I've put myself between beast and prey. These young men were beastly and these old black individuals was their prey."

Many news organizations ran one



A teenager wearing a "Make America Great Again" hat, center left, stands in front of Nathan Phillips, an Omaha elder singing and playing a drum in Washington during a rally on Friday.

Survival Media Agency via AP

of these accounts. Before you judge the reporters too harshly, it's important to remember that these days the social media tail wags the mainstream media dog. If you want your story to be well placed and if you want to be professionally rewarded, you have to generate page views — you have to incite social media. The way to do that is to reinforce the prejudices of your readers.

In this one episode, you had a gentle, 64-year-old Native American man being swarmed by white (boo!), male (boo!), preppy (double boo!) Trump supporters (infinite boo!). If you are trying to rub the pleasure centers of a liberal audience, this is truly a story too good to check.

Saturday was a day of liberal vindication. See! This is what those people do! This is who they really are. Reza Aslan, the religious scholar, tweeted a photo of the main Covington boy and asked, "Have you ever seen a more punchable face than this kid's?" The filmmaker Michael Green

showed the same image and tweeted: "A face like that never changes. This image will define his life. No one need ever forgive him."

The institutions in charge of serving the boys did what institutions always do in the face of a social media mob. They cratered. The school and archdiocese apologized. The mayor of Covington denounced them.

On Sunday, several longer videos emerged showing that most of what Phillips had told the media was inaccurate. The incident actually started when members of the hate cult — the Black Hebrew Israelites — started hurling racist and homophobic slurs at the boys.

The Covington boys eventually asked their chaperone if they could do their school cheers. As they were doing that, Phillips walked into the middle of their circle and banged his drum in the face of one of the boys. Everybody was suddenly confused. Students shouted, "What is

going on?" Then there was confusion and discomfort, smirking and verbal jousting.

Everybody involved in the incident was operating in an emotional and moral context that has been set by the viciousness of the Black Hebrew Israelites. Of the major players, the boys' behavior is probably the least egregious.

So Sunday was a day of conservative vindication. See? This is what those liberals do! They rush to judgment, dehumanize and seek to expunge us from national life. The main boy wrote a public letter that was consistent with the visual evidence and that was actually quite humane.

In this case the facts happened to support the right-wing tribe. But that's not the point. The crucial thing is that the nation's culture is now enmeshed in a new technology that we don't yet know how to control.

In this technology, stereotype is more salient than persons. In this technology, a single moment is more important than a life story. In this technology, a main activity is proving to the world that your type is morally superior to the other type.

The Covington case was such a blatant rush to judgment — it was powered by such crude prejudice and social stereotyping — I'm hoping it will be an important pivot point. I'm hoping that at least a few people start thinking about norms of how decent people should behave on these platforms.

It's hard to believe that people are going to continue forever on platforms where they are so cruel to one another. It's hard to believe that people are going to be content, year after year, to distort their own personalities in service to a platform, making themselves humorless, semi-blind, joyless and grim.

David Brooks is a columnist for the *New York Times*.

OTHER VIEWS

How Democrats came to love 'co-equal'

The divided government of 2019 is a mirror image of the divided government of 2011. Back then, Democrats controlled the White House and Senate, while Republicans had recently taken control of the House with a big victory in the 2010 midterms. Today, Republicans control the White House and Senate, while Democrats have recently taken control of the House with a big victory in the 2018 midterms.

It's the same situation, essentially. But today there is a vastly different public conversation about the balance of power in government. These days, we are often reminded that Congress is a co-equal branch of government, and therefore Speaker Nancy Pelosi stands on an even level with President Trump. Back in 2011, when the two players were Speaker John Boehner and President Barack Obama, there wasn't as much of that kind of talk.

A comparison, from the Nexis database of newspapers, magazines, websites and television transcripts: From Election Day 2010 until Jan. 20, 2011, there were 18 mentions of "Boehner" and "co-equal." From Election Day 2018 until Jan. 20, 2019, there were 683 mentions of "Pelosi" and "co-equal."

Democrats have been saying it every day, starting with Pelosi the morning after the election. Congress' role is "not to be a rubber stamp, but a co-equal branch," she said, adding that she and her colleagues had a "responsibility for oversight as an independent, co-equal branch."

Pelosi said much the same many more times by Jan. 3, when she officially won the speaker's gavel. In her first speech on the House floor, she said, "The legislative branch is Article I: the first branch of government, co-equal to the president and judiciary."

Virtually every other House Democrat said it, too.

There was even talk to the effect that Pelosi is now equal to the president. The chief advocate: Pelosi herself. "Asked if

she considers herself Mr. Trump's equal, she replied, "The Constitution does," *The New York Times* reported in an article about the speaker.

A Jan. 17 discussion on CNN focused on the speaker's battle with the president over the government shutdown and State of the Union address. Republican Rep. Michael Turner said of Pelosi, "She needs to come to some recognition that she's not equal to the president of the United States."

Susan Hennessey, a Brookings Institution scholar, CNN analyst, and editor of the blog Lawfare, blanched. "Pretty wild to hear a member of Congress forcefully argue that congressional leaders are constitutionally inferior to the president," Hennessey tweeted. "James Madison weeps."

But the speaker of the House is not, in fact, equal to the president of the United States. Congress, not the House, is a co-equal branch of government. Actually, more than equal — it is, as Pelosi noted, the first branch of government. But to exert its will, Congress must be united. To overrule the president — and, of course, Congress can even remove the president — Congress must be united.

Pelosi controls just half of Congress. And she only controls the House when she gets 218 members to agree with her. To

overrule a presidential veto, she needs 287 members to agree with her. And then the Senate, controlled by Republicans under Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, has to go along.

On the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue, the executive branch is the only branch of government headed by a single person. That gives that one person, in this case President Trump, the power of the executive branch. No single person in the other two branches has that power.

The bottom line is the House is one-half of a co-equal branch of government. The speaker of the House is enormously powerful in the House. If she can persuade majorities, and sometimes supermajorities, of House members, and then majorities, and sometimes supermajorities, of the Senate to go along with her, she can block the president's agenda and exert enormous power in the government. But by herself — not so much.

The system simply was not designed for a head-to-head equal competition — the president versus the speaker. It doesn't work that way. It's entirely understandable that Democrats and their allies in the press would want to see Pelosi as equal to the president. But that doesn't make it true.

Byron York is chief political correspondent for *The Washington Examiner*.

YOUR VIEWS

Ellis Project road closures a 'blank check'

I would like to provide you with my concerns regarding the Ellis [Integrated Vegetation] Project [in the Umatilla National Forest].

My name is Ladd Dick and I was born and raised in Heppner (class of 1962). I am a business owner (1967-1972) and a part owner of a family cabin on Lake Penland, where I spend as much of my time as possible.

The information I received indicates that 30 to 100 miles of roads would be closed. This should be an exact number and the roads to be closed listed and shown on a map. I will never be comfortable with allowing an unknown number and miles of roads to be closed. Who makes this decision and why hasn't it already been made? This is like a blank check with no limit on the amount.

This is national forest, not a national park. It is publicly owned and road closures limit my access to areas that I have enjoyed since I was a child (born in 1944). I protested new logging roads (1960s and 1970s) that were being built within yards of existing roads, but now the pendulum has moved way too far in the other direction.

I am an avid hunter and fisherman but am now limited to a short distance from my vehicle. I am not handicapped but this could be seen as a violation of Americans With Disabilities rights. Is this an attempt to make certain areas available only to private hunting groups on our public land? That is the result of road closures in other areas of the national forest where I have hunted in the past. These road closures were the result of washouts that were never repaired due to a lack of funds (a convenient way to achieve road closures), not a planned road closure.

When I have requested projects for the Forest Service to consider, the response has always been no funds are available. How do funds for a project that will limit my access to areas I love become available? Why are funds available to close roads but are not available repair damaged roads? Road closures will only benefit special interest groups.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my concerns with the Ellis Project.

Ladd E. Dick
Oak Harbor, Wash.

Unsigned editorials are the opinion of the East Oregonian editorial board. Other columns, letters and cartoons on this page express the opinions of the authors and not necessarily that of the East Oregonian.

The East Oregonian welcomes original letters of 400 words or less on public issues and public policies for publication in the newspaper and on our website. The newspaper reserves the right to withhold letters that address concerns about individual services and products or letters that infringe on the rights of private citizens. Letters must be signed by the author and include the city of residence and a daytime phone number. The phone number will not be published. Unsigned letters will not be published.

Send letters to managing editor Daniel Wattenburger, 211 S.E. Byers Ave. Pendleton, OR 9780, or email editor@eastoregonian.com.