

Voodoo Journalism

How the undermining of our democracy is being aided and abetted by both-sideism.



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As polls open in states all over the country, I am gobsmacked by the number of journalists - or should I say, people who write for journalism organizations - who are treating this election as if it's a matter of choosing a pizza topping, not whether or not we keep an entire, 240+ year system of government.

The New York Times yesterday ran an astonishing, "man in a pub" story on how people are voting in Wisconsin. The writer was [Jonathan Weisman](#), who was [demoted from deputy editor](#) of the Washington bureau in 2019 for tweets that - how do I say this kindly - reeked of racism. Racism which he defiantly refused to acknowledge.

It is rare for someone to be demoted who holds dear the Times' head-in-the sand editorial and access journalism philosophy. (For the latter, see: [Iraq War](#), [Judith Miller](#).) People who challenge the paper's skewed notion of objectivity get demoted all the time, or leave on their own in frustration.

For this story, Weisman - now a reporter - parachuted in on LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and talked to people about how they feel about the election. Then he proceeded to treat their feelings as fact.

"Of course," wrote Weisman, "just what is threatening democracy depends on who

you talk to.”

No. Just no. What is threatening democracy are people who wanted to murder the Vice President and Speaker of the House unless they enshrined the loser of the presidential election as a lifetime dictator.

What is threatening democracy are “public officials” like Tommy Tuberville, who [told a crowd](#) in Minden, Nevada (population 3,400) that Democrats “want reparation [for slavery] because they think the people that do the crime are owed that. Bullshit. They are not owed that.”

This from a man - Andrew Lawrence pointed out in the Guardian - who made [millions off of coaching Black men](#) who got little, if anything, back from putting their bodies on the line.

What is threatening democracy is gerrymandering, which Weisman acknowledged has already rendered Wisconsin an undemocratic state.

“But that democratic erosion,” writes Weisman, “may have sent many of Wisconsin’s citizens on a downward spiral of feeling powerless, apathetic and disconnected as one-party control becomes entrenched.”

Then he quotes a Democratic Party organizer: “It is daunting to convince fellow Democrats their votes matter.”

Powerless. Apathetic. Disconnected. He’s saying, “Wow, gerrymandering sure makes people feel bad,” rather than “Gerrymandering is a tool used by would-be autocrats who want to nullify the vote of the people in a free country. And we’re getting a front-row seat in Wisconsin to how democracy erodes.

But after noting that the state legislature is hopelessly gerrymandered - without [details that lay out](#) that 65 percent of seats will go to Republicans in a state where Democratic and Republican [registration is roughly 50-50](#) - Weisman decides to both-sides the idea of who is putting a thumb on the scales. He quotes a woman he identifies as Republican: “What is the purpose if I go vote? Someone crooked

somewhere along the way is just going to put more votes in somewhere else than the real people's votes. I think it's definitely tilted heavily on the Democratic side.”

This belies the reality - which Weisman had just laid out. But he can't or won't say that. He has to run the two quotes about being apathetic by a Democrat and a Republican, to show that this is a universal issue. The facts don't bear that out. Republicans have a distinct and unfair advantage in the legislature. But their supporters have been told for decades that they are the real victims. Weisman happily upholds that myth.

There's more I can write about Weisman's piece, but you get the drift. And if you want more, I saw that [Dan Froomkin](#) wrote about this also.

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Take a Walk On the Supply Side

There's [another piece from the Times](#) which I discovered this weekend when I was looking for info on attack ads in Nevada. This one is a supposed “fact check” from a month ago on an untruthful ad run against Rep. Dina Titus. The ad asserts that Titus - and by extension, all Democrats - created an inflationary environment.

Times writer [Neil Vigdor](#) checks with his colleague, economics reporter [Ben Casselman](#), about whether Dems caused inflation. Casselman's answer told me more about him than it did the economy:

“Here's what I think we can say with confidence: Inflation soared last year, primarily for a bunch of pandemic-related reasons — snarled supply chains, shifts in consumer demand — but also at least in part because of all the stimulus money that we poured into the economy. Then, just when most forecasters expected inflation to start falling, it took off again because of the jump in oil prices tied to

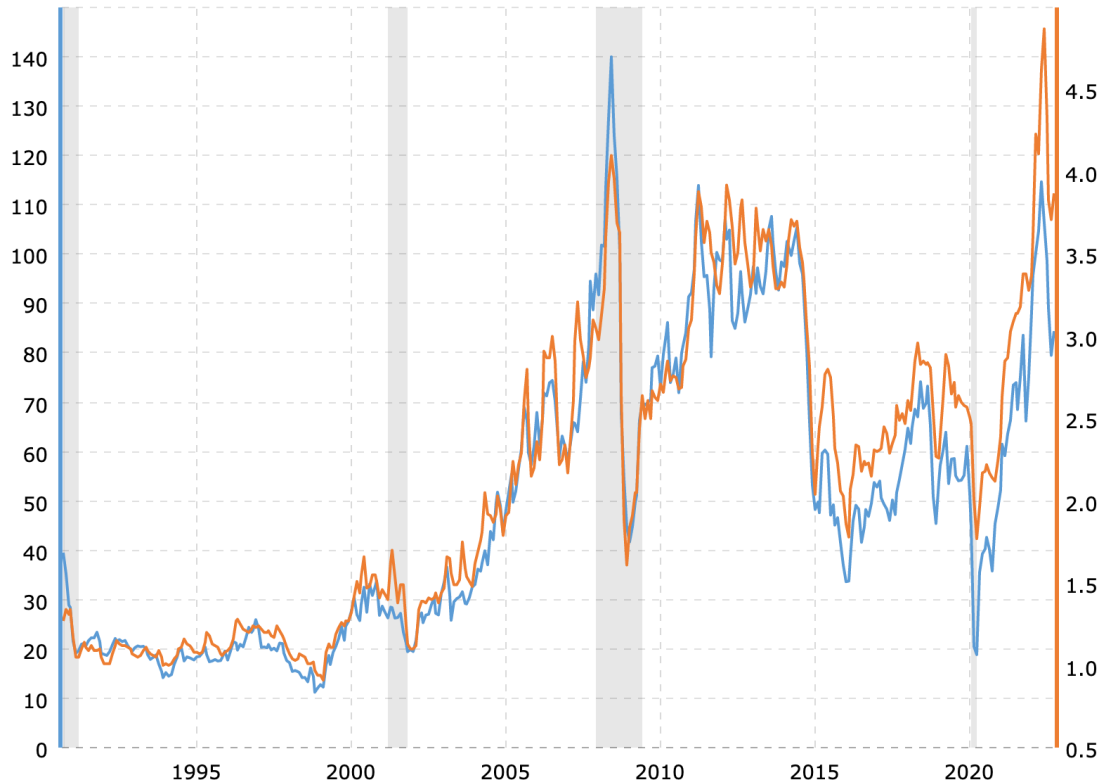
the war in Ukraine."

What this shows me is that Casselman believes in supply-side, trickle-down economics. What George HW Bush called "voodoo economics," and what Liz Truss was just booted for wanting to go back to.

There is another view of economics: Keynesian economics. Which the Biden administration and economics journalists like Zach Silk are calling "inside-out" economics. It's the economic philosophy that built the prosperity of the latter half of the 20th century, and the middle class.

But Casselman and a lot of other economics writers don't note that the folks saying economic stimulus creates inflation are arguing for one equation. Another equation is about capping profits on or taxing commodities in which people are paying more - what Teddy Roosevelt called the "windfall profits tax."

That would include at the gas pump. Oil companies and their executives are [making record profits](#), and the price of a barrel of oil is not that high [compared to previous years](#), when the cost at the pump was less.



This chart from MicroTrends illustrates the disparity in the cost of crude oil vs. gas. In Feb. 2014, the price of a barrel of oil was \$102. And the average price of gas was \$3.44. In March of 2022, a barrel of oil was \$100, but this time the average price of a gallon of gas was \$4.23.

So something is clearly wrong with the "free market" around this. But Casselman doesn't even mention this as a problem.

We can disagree on Friedman (or, really, Hayek) vs. [Keynes](#). I'm totally a Keynesian. But if I'm going to lay something out, I'm going to note that there are competing views of economics in 21st century western democracies. I might lay out how and why I think "supply-side" is problematic, and entertain a conversation about whether the pitfalls we have to watch out for with Keynes are worse (they are not), but I won't ignore one side completely. Casselman did. And he's an "expert" just because he covers economics for the Times. In a fact-check like this, his biases aren't noted. They are just stated as if they were "objective fact." They are not.

How many readers, though, will see the bias? And how many will simply accept

Casselmann's view that economic stimulus is bad, but corporate greed should be ignored completely?

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Is It Still 1988?

Not to be outdone by one another, Weisman and Vigdor [teamed up today on a piece](#) that could have been written when the elder Bush was running for president. It's all about the horse race, and the "tactics" Democrats are using to get voters' attention.

The subhead says it all:

"In the final stretch before the 2022 midterm elections, some Democrats are pushing for a new message that acknowledges the pain of rising prices."

But the experts Vigdor and Weisman quoted didn't argue for just "acknowledging the pain of rising prices." They also argued for Democrats telling voters "to convey their legislative successes while setting up culprits other than themselves: Republicans who voted against popular measures like capping the price of insulin, and wealthy corporations that are jacking up prices and reaping more profits."

Weisman and Vigdor again show their bias, though, when they note Democratic pollster Celinda Lake "insisted there was time, with barely two weeks to go, to correct course."

That word "insisted" implies they are skeptical, and probably conveyed that to Lake as they were interviewing her.

If only Weisman, Vigdor and Casselman would have reported on all the votes House Democrats passed and the Senate refused to take up to lower inflation by addressing corporate profits, or that it was Democrats - not Republicans taking the credit - who passed legislation that is pouring money into cities to fix roads and bridges. Then people might not be so "fixated" on the one issue that is being

pushed by one party, and abetted by the so-called newspaper of record.