

Post-Progressivism

Why we are leaving the 60-year era of cultural left-liberalism

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URL: <https://erickaufmann.substack.com/p/post-progressivism>



It's not often a [tweet thread](#) of mine hits 11,000 likes and counting, so I share it in full here. Essentially, I see the '[vibe shift](#)' against woke excess as the end of a 120-year period - and especially a 60-year period - of rising cultural left-liberalism. This stems from my *Wall Street*

Journal op-ed yesterday, itself based on an academic paper I wrote in *Theory and Society* in late February. Also in this vein is my free conference on Post-Progressive social science at the University of Buckingham June 5-7 (a few spots still remain for this star-studded lineup, which caps at 200, so act fast!) and pre-conference London event on 'Is Woke Dead', 4 June, featuring Gad Saad, Matt Goodwin and Batya Ungar-Sargon.

The cultural left focused heavily, after 1964, on equal outcomes and emotional harm protection for historical marginalized race, gender and sexual minority groups (a.k.a. woke). Those aims became canonized as unassailable and dominant values and taboos. One virtue-signaled to them and feared them. That project still lives in the hearts and minds of many, and in zombie institutional DEI policies and procedures which can only be unpicked by deliberate political action.

Yet the cultural left's confident moral righteousness and untrammelled power in the culture is over. Cultural leftists must now face the fact that the others, include mainstream media and corporate elites, are wise to their excesses. They are just one interest group among many. The chiliastic balloon has been punctured, a calamity for a quasi-religious movement.

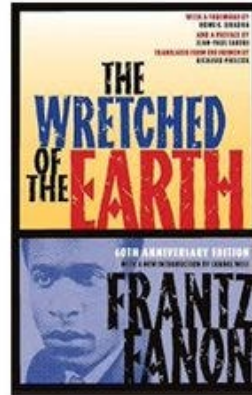
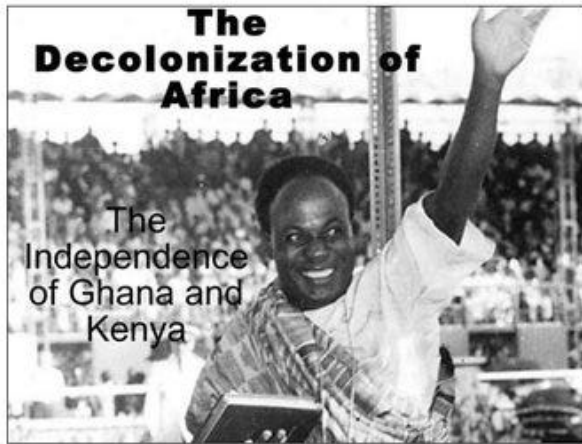
The thread:

1/ We are entering a post-progressive era. The cultural left-liberalism which emerged a century ago and took off in the late 1960s is exhausted. This 'vibe shift' doesn't just repudiate the last decade, but the last 60 years. My latest

@WSJ

2/ Ideas are often downstream of events, rather than the reverse. The origins of postmodernism and critical theory lie in decolonization, Civil Rights and the 'new social movements' of minorities, feminists and gays.

Theory is downstream of reality: postcolonialism



3/ As with postmodernism, events spurred post-progressivism: the illiberalism and irrationality of cancel culture & transactivism, endemic populism and polarization, family and community breakdown (including birthrate collapse)



4/ Trump is illiberal, corrupt, narcissistic. But his war on DEI strikes a chord: even critics admit he has a point. His repudiation of affirmative action (1965), disparate impact (1971) and speech codes (1987) goes well beyond rejecting the Awakening of the 2010s

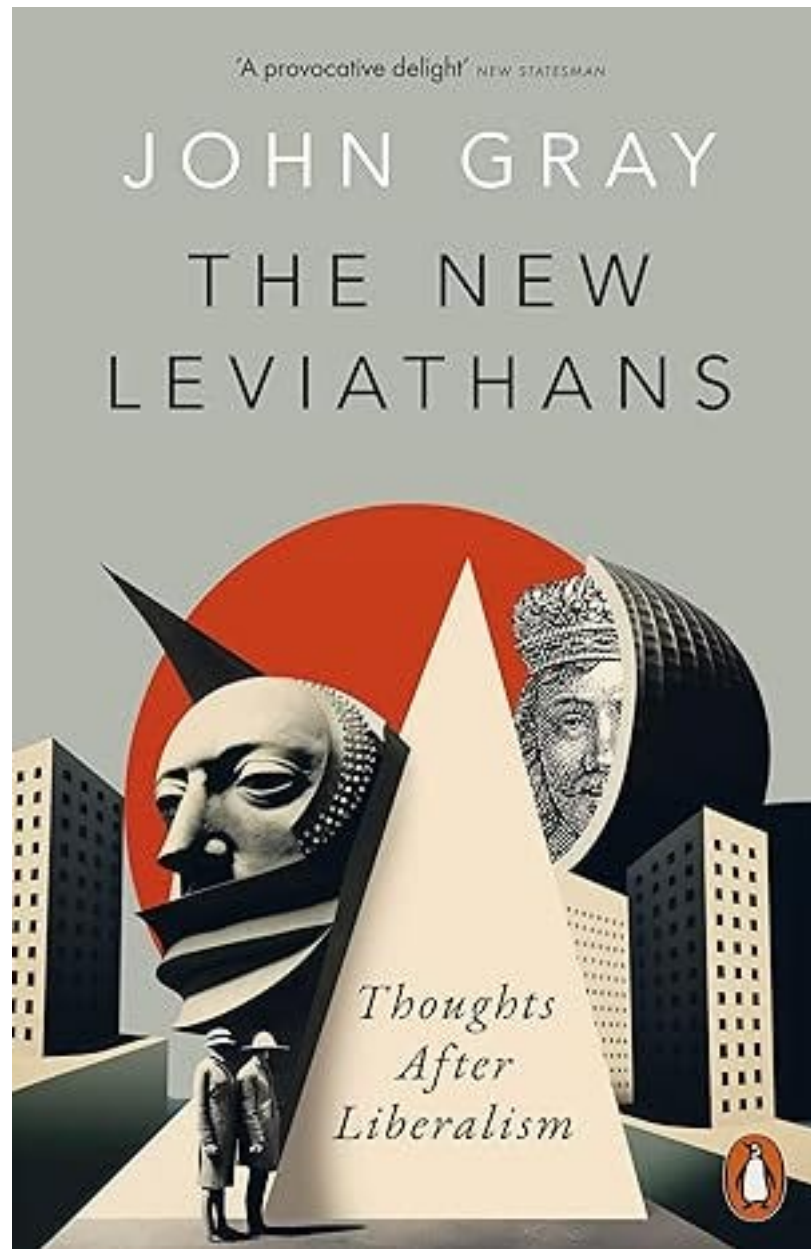
From Equal Opportunity to Equal Results

We seek not just legal
equity...not just
equality as a
right...but...equality
as a result.

— Lyndon Johnson,
1965



5/ Left-liberalism is moderate on economics but has no guardrails on culture. Cultural left-liberals believed in constant upward movement towards ever more diversity, equity and inclusion. This became a grand narrative of progress toward utopia



6/ Equal outcomes and emotional harm protection for sacred race, gender and sexual identity groups (woke) was the unassailable End of History. The only question was mobilizing activists & capturing institutions

Arc of History-ism

From Martin Luther King to Barack Obama—an idea of progress

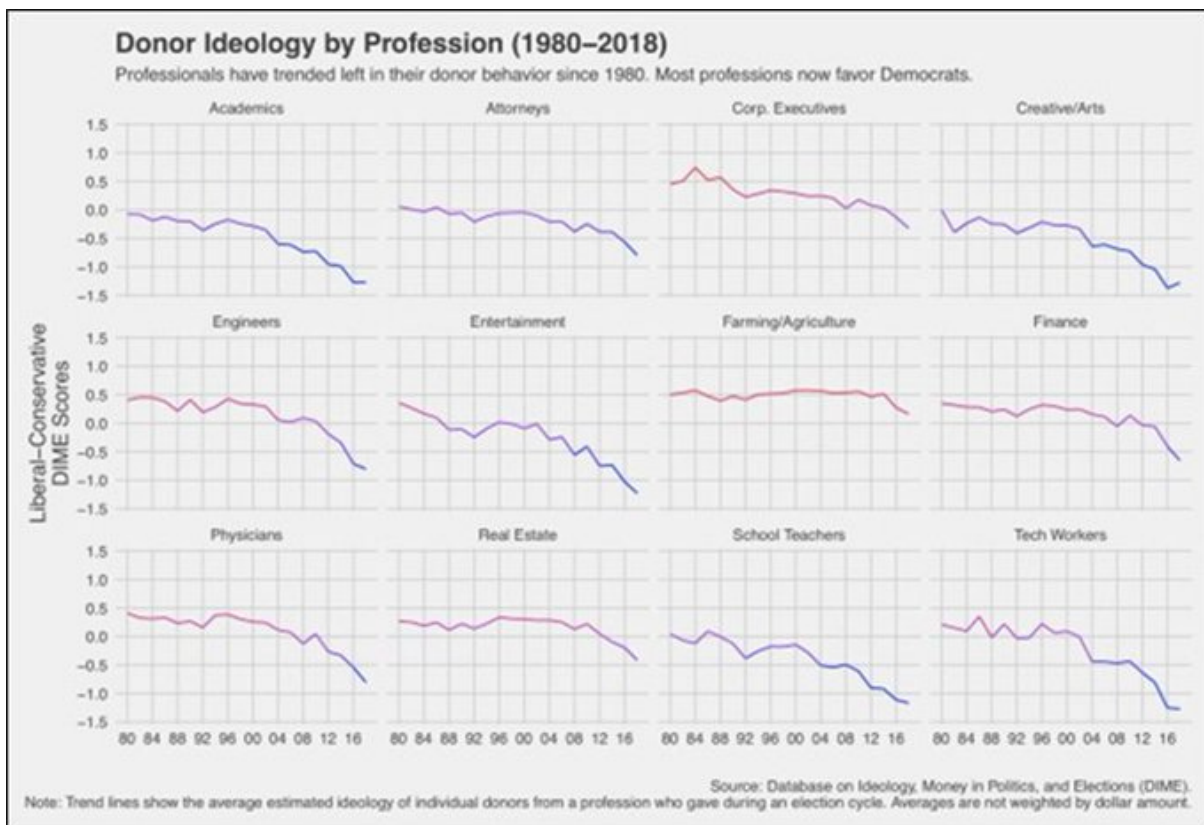


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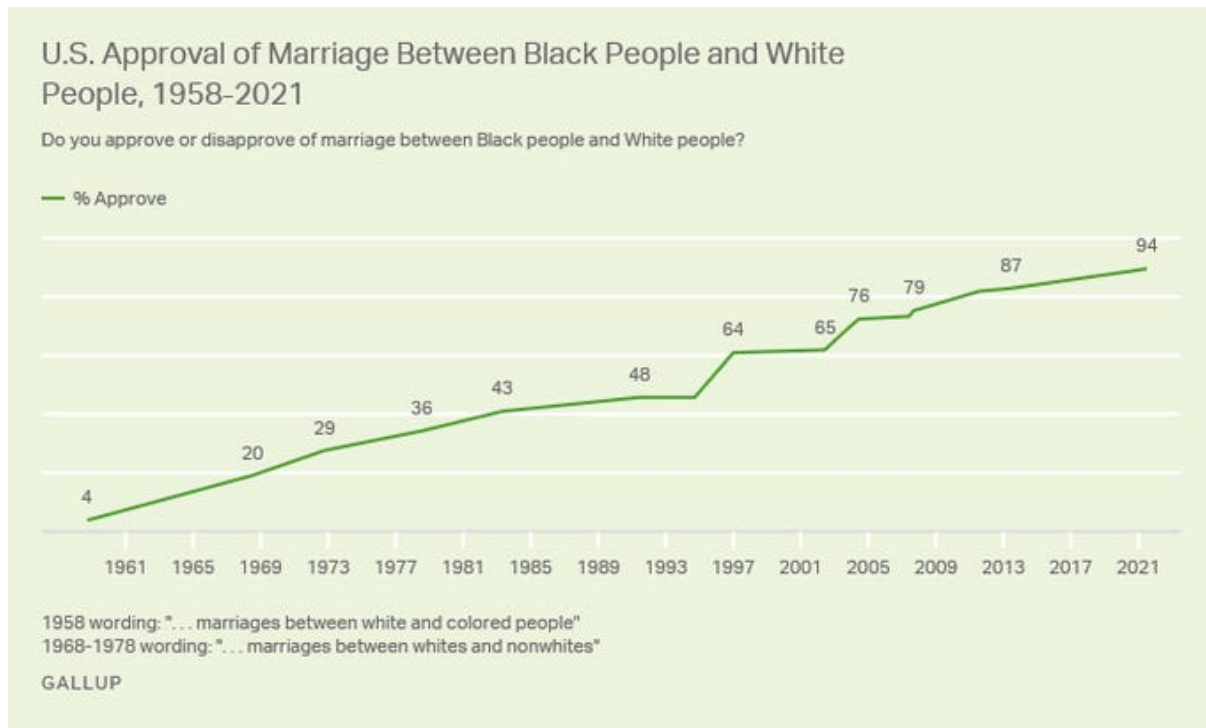
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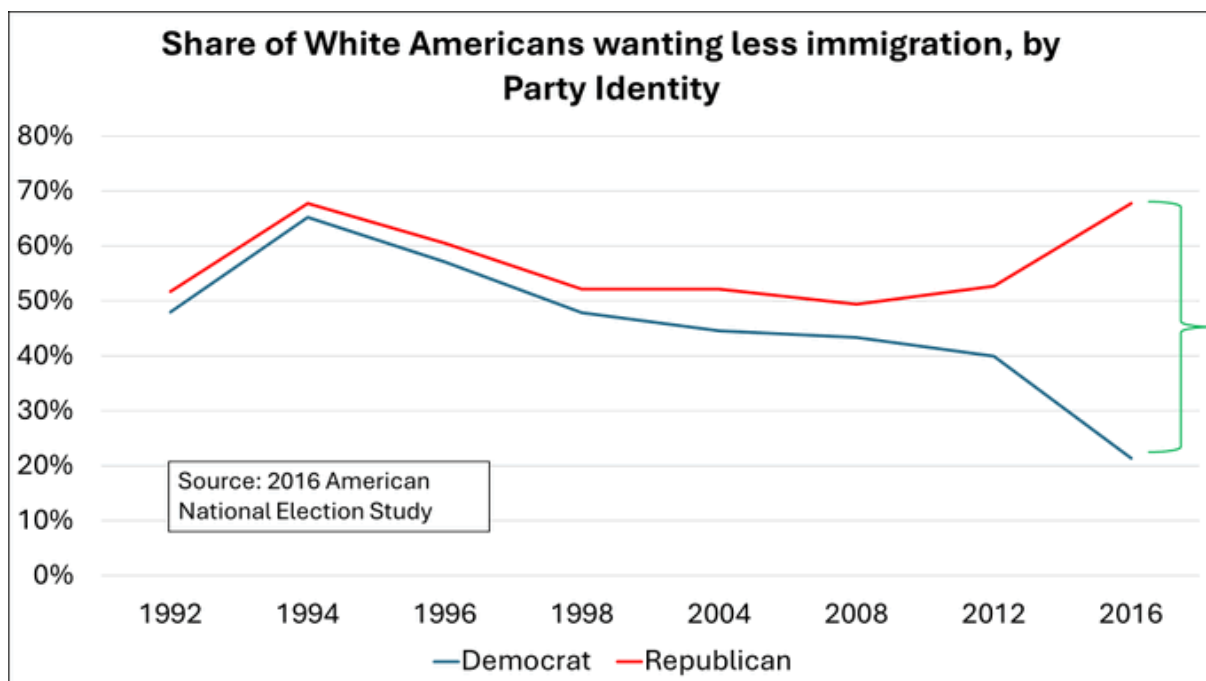
7/ The progressive dream focused on winning the young and the educated while capturing the meaning-making institutions. It worked. Attitudes held only by artists and sociologists in the 1960s spread. The professions all shifted left, as Adam Bonica shows:



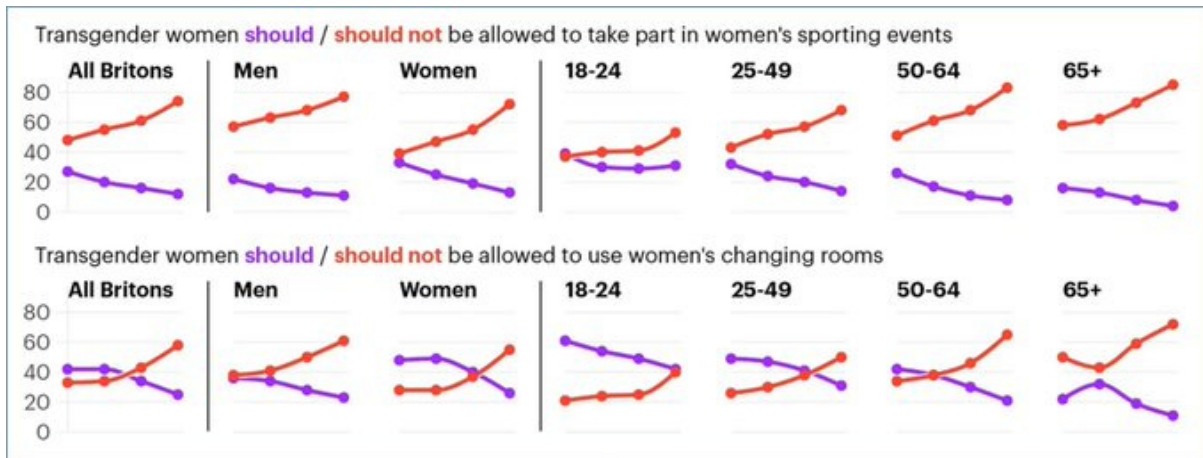
8/ According to value change theorists like Ron Inglehart, affluence and security were producing a new left-liberal generation, one birth, one funeral and one college degree at a time. This held true for 60 years



9/ But as the cultural left pushed to the next level: from individual equality to group equality of outcome, rights for citizens to rights across borders, gay rights to trans rights, it ran into the sands of polarization. The progressive escalator stalled



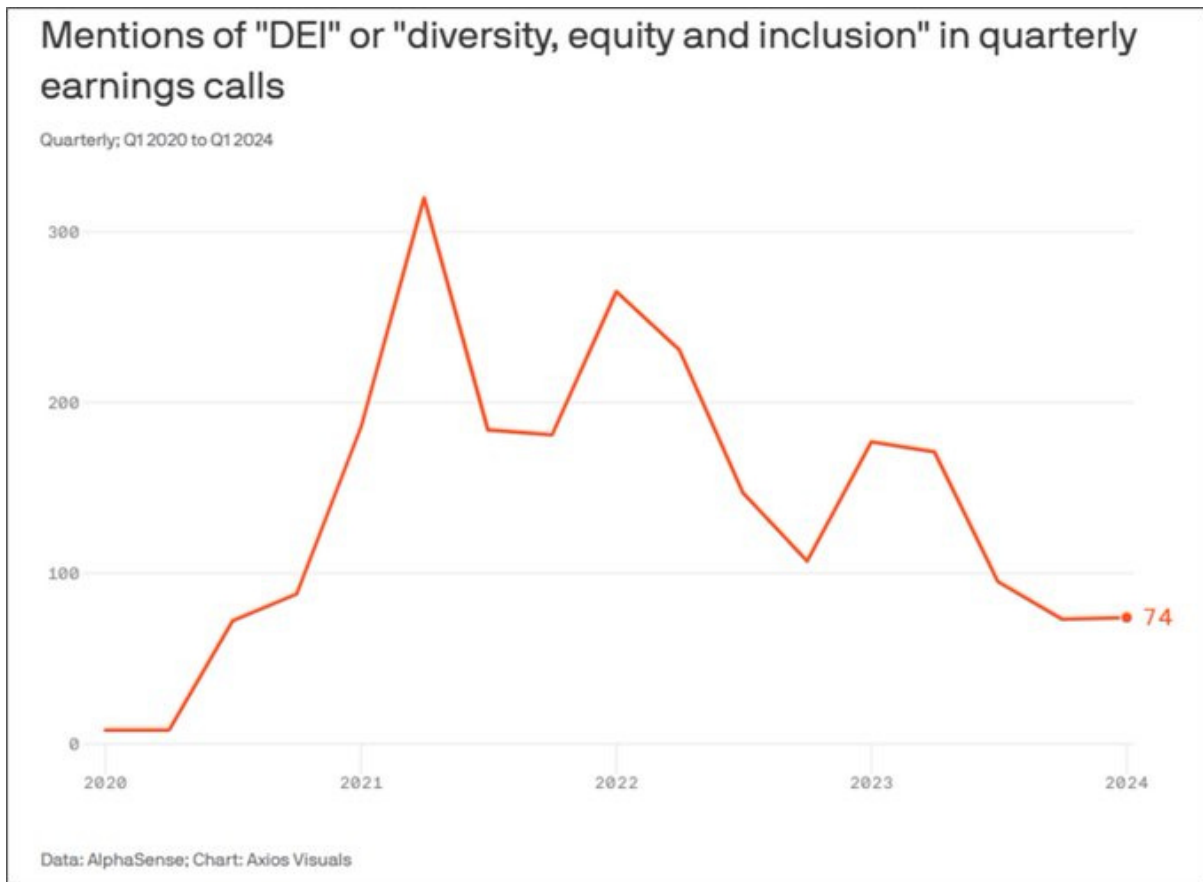
10/ Stunningly, attitudes on trans went ‘backwards’ after 2022, the first cultural reversal for the liberal left in a century. For a movement used to being in the vanguard of history, this is an existential crisis (UK data via [@YouGov](#), points for years 2021-24)



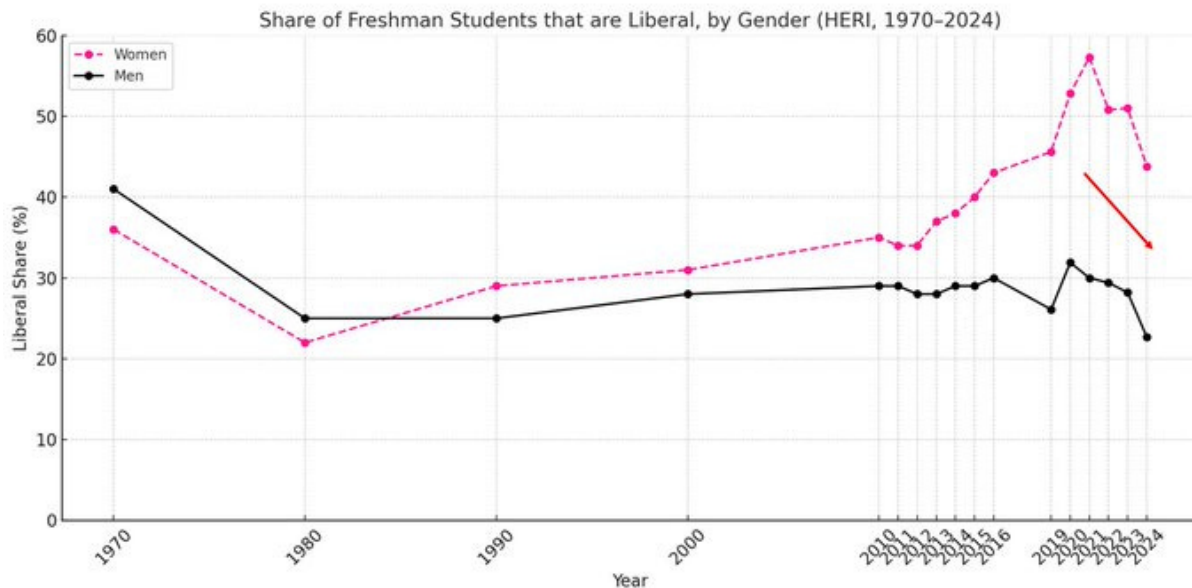
11/ Today, what Daniel Bell calls the left's ‘chiliastic hopes’ are over. Mainstream media outlets openly criticize the excesses of woke, and moderate left politicians and pundits argue that it helped put Trump in office. Progressive activism has lost confidence and energy



12/ The rise of anti-woke politicians like Ron DeSantis and the aftermath of the October 7 Hamas attacks rocked elite institutions. DEI ideas of the past 50 years have lost power in corporate America while universities are backing away



13/ The progressive dream focused on winning the young and educated. Young people are more woke on average. But a growing anti-woke tendency among formerly moderate young people has shifted young college students to the right since 2022 (HERI freshman data):



14/ Postmodernism argued that new times required required an unmasking of techno-scientific modernism. Post-progressivism means we need to deconstruct the progressive moral backcloth to public life that presents itself as natural and consensual, adopting a critical view of its motivation

Current Vacancies Benefits & Rewards Equality Diversity & Inclusion Athena Swan Charter - Gender Equality Understanding the Race Equality Charter Mark Our Commitment to LGBT+ Equality How we Enhance the University's Equality Diversity and Inclusion Equality Monitoring Equality Policies, Plans and Reports Join our Equality Networks Understanding the Gender Pay Gap	DIGNITY AT WORK AND STUDY POLICY			
	Policy Name:	Dignity At Work And Study Combating Harassment	Policy No:	P2021-884
	Policy Owner:	Head of Equalities, Human Resources	Effective Date:	Jan 2020
	Legislation:	Equality Act 2010	Next Review Date:	Jan 2021
	Documents being replaced:	P1415-1469		
POLICY STATEMENT Swansea University is committed to providing a working and learning environment which will enable staff and students to fulfil their personal potential. The University accepts that such an environment cannot be created or sustained if individually or collectively staff and students are subject to harassment of any kind. In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, Swansea University's values and other relevant University Policies, everyone should be treated with dignity and respect at work and study. The University recognises that lack of dignity can seriously worsen working, learning and social conditions. For an individual it can cause demotivation, loss of self-confidence and self-esteem, stress related ill health, poor work quality and reduced output. For the University it can cause increased absenteeism, increased staff turnover, poor working relationships, decline in productivity and results, and damage to the University's reputation. All employees have an obligation not to behave in a manner that could be offensive to others and harassment in any form will not be tolerated. Incidents of harassment will be regarded extremely seriously and may be grounds for disciplinary action up to and including dismissal. The University is committed to investigating allegations of harassment fully, fairly, empathetically and confidentially. Investigations will be carried out in a timely manner depending on the complexities of the case. The University will protect a complainant's wish for confidentiality, though where a founded complaint identifies a criminal act or illegal discrimination, the University has a legal responsibility to take appropriate action.				

15/ Postmodernism asserted that the end of the grand narrative of modernism meant a new scholarly paradigm of relativism. Post-progressivism argues that the end of the progressive

grand narrative demands a new social science



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POST-PROGRESSIVISM?: TOWARD A NEW SOCIAL SCIENCE

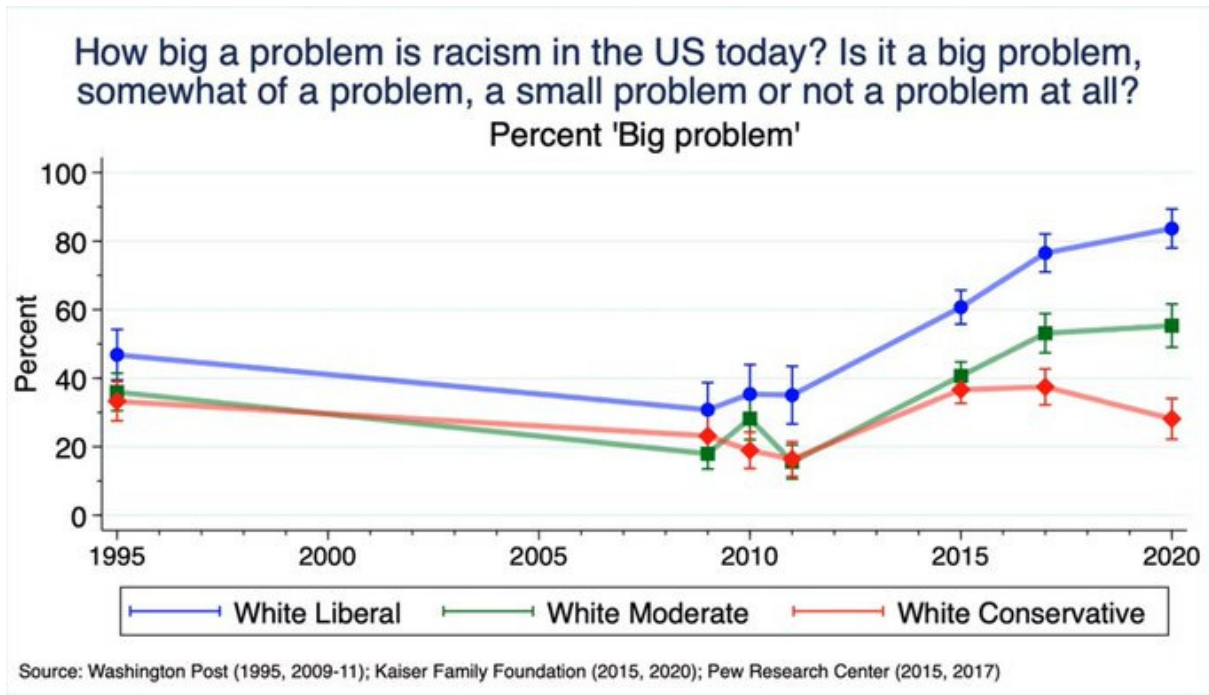


ATTENDEE GUIDEBOOK

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16/ Where critical theory critiqued race or sex as social constructs, post-progressivism uses a meta-critical theory that critiques the critics. Racism and sexism are (in part) social constructs whose meanings are deliberately inflated



17/ My

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Op Ed

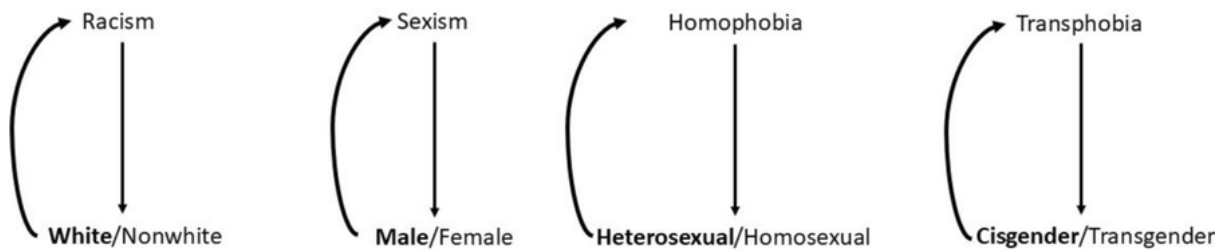


Opinion | Welcome to the Post-Progressive Political Era

From wsj.com

18/ My @Theory Society paper:

Critical Theory



The post-progressive condition: Meta-critical theory and the rebalancing of knowledge

From link.springer.com

19/ The academic conference on post-progressive social science:

<https://heterodoxconference.com>

20/ We are leaving the progressive era, c. 1964-2022. The failure of woke was its Waterloo. Elite culture is in transition. What will replace it?