

AlterNet

The dark post-conservative ideas at a right-wing think tank give a foreboding glimpse of Trumpism's future

Alex Henderson

July 13, 2021

Although not as well-known as other right-wing think tanks such as the Heritage Foundation and the libertarian Cato Institute, the Claremont Institute has been around since 1979 — when it was founded in California by students of the late Harry V. Jaffa, who had been a speechwriter during Sen. Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign. Claremont has taken a decidedly Trumpian turn in recent years, and in a lengthy [article published by The Bulwark](#) this week, Laura K. Field (a senior fellow at the Niskanen Center) argues that Claremont has been overtaken by far-right conspiracy theorists, "election lies" and authoritarianism.

"The Claremont Institute used to be one of the principal places for conservative intellectuals to come together," Field explains. "It was founded by scholars who were taken seriously even by people who disagreed with them, and some such scholars still publish in the pages of the (Claremont Review of Books). That Claremont has been unparalleled in its intellectual submission to Trumpism should give us pause. After all, in some respects, the Claremont crowd is precisely the sort who should have known better: deeply read in political philosophy and history, and familiar with the many warning signs that Trump would be a damaging and divisive president. There is also a sense, however, in which the Claremont crowd's submission to Trump was the most predictable thing in the world — the simple culmination of a political theory rooted in jingoism and denial."

Field goes on to cite specific examples of how long Claremont has sunk, noting that Jack Michael Posobiec III, who promoted the ludicrous Pizzagate conspiracy theory, and Turning Point USA's Charlie Kirk — a promoter of the Big Lie — are both Lincoln Fellows for Claremont. According to Field, Claremont has been hijacked by "intellectual cheerleaders for Trump" and others who have promoted the Big Lie that Trump won the 2020 election and was victimized by widespread voter fraud.

Many Never Trump conservatives — from MSNBC's Joe Scarborough to Washington Post columnist Max Boot to members of the Lincoln Project — have argued that Trumpism is not traditional conservatism, but outright fascism. And in an infamous essay published by [the American Mind](#) on March 24, Glenn Ellmers (a Claremont senior fellow) admitted that Trumpism falls outside of traditional conservatism. In Ellmers' essay, titled "Conservatism Is No

Longer Enough," he argued that a post-conservative approach will be needed to save the U.S. from the left and infamously wrote, "Most people living in the United States today — certainly more than half — are not Americans in any meaningful sense of the term.... It is not obvious what we should call these citizen-aliens, these non-American Americans; but they are something else."

Field explains, "The people he has in mind are the ones who voted for Joe Biden.... The real and 'authentic' Americans are, 'by and large,' the 74 million people who voted for Trump.... Ellmers' essay is a bold-faced call to anti-republican, anti-democratic, factional arms and action. More than any kind of legitimate appeal to republican or democratic norms of persuasion, it signals an acknowledgment of defeat."

To make matters worse, Fields writes, Claremont "has knowingly provided cover to, and made common cause with, an alleged white supremacist named Darren J. Beattie."

Field notes, "Beattie has a Ph.D. in political philosophy from Duke University. He was a speechwriter in the Trump White House but was fired in August 2018 for having spoken at a conference in 2016 alongside White supremacists."

Field wraps up her essay by lamenting that stressing that while Claremont wasn't always dominated by extremists, it clearly is now.

"The Claremont Institute says that its mission is 'to restore the principles of the American Founding to their rightful, preeminent authority in our national life,'" Field writes. "But all it has done lately is divide and despoil the public spirit."