

# THE CAP TIMES

## Paul Fanlund: ‘Political correctness’ is rampant ... by Trump and the GOP

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The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines “politically correct” as “conforming to a belief that language and practices which could offend political sensibilities should be eliminated.”

One could argue that Donald Trump and fellow Republicans practice “political correctness” by protecting the delicate “political sensibilities” of aggrieved white males.

All the time, at any cost.

We all know that “PC” has long been Trump’s go-to political cudgel. When women and people of color dare demand equal treatment, it is summarily dismissed as political correctness.

But my contrarian notion came to mind this week with news that Trump would not follow through on former President Barack Obama’s plan to replace President Andrew Jackson on the \$20 bill with the image of Harriet Tubman.

She was an escaped slave who returned to the South and became a conductor on the “Underground Railroad” that brought slaves to freedom in the North. She was a Union scout during the Civil War and later advocated for women’s voting rights.

Having Tubman, or, I suppose, any woman, on such widely circulated currency might violate the “sensibilities” of Trump’s white male base, so, in PC style, he’s blocking it. Oh, there have been a few faces of women on money through time. Heck, Martha Washington was on the \$1 silver certificate as recently as the 1890s, so what’s the rush?

Trump adores Jackson. Our president, the man with the suspicious bone spur Vietnam deferment, laughably likens himself to a modern day Jackson, a general and a war hero.

During the 2016 campaign, Trump denounced the proposed Tubman \$20 bill proposal as “pure political correctness” and suggested she might be better suited to the obscure \$2 bill. “Andrew Jackson had a great history, and I think it’s very rough when you take somebody off the bill,” he said at the time.

A portrait of Jackson hangs in the Oval Office, and Trump regards Jackson as a populist hero like himself. Shortly after taking office, he laid a wreath at Jackson’s tomb near Nashville, Tennessee, and said, “It was during the revolution that Jackson first confronted and defied the arrogant elite,” Trump told a crowd gathered there. “Does that sound familiar to you?”

While old-time history books described Jackson as one of America’s great presidents, more recent accounts also note how he orchestrated the removal of Native Americans east of the Mississippi River with forced marches that became known as the “Trail of Tears.”

Taking it further, historian Douglas Brinkley described Jackson as an “unrepentant whipmaster” regarding the treatment of his slaves and said the Indian Removal Act, Jackson’s first significant act as president, was simple genocide.

It is any surprise that Trump, with his record on immigration and civil rights, would identify?

Hours after Trump’s Treasury Director, Steven Mnuchin, announced that the Tubman \$20 bill would be delayed until at least 2026, former Obama communications director Dan Pfeiffer told the Washington Post that the move “has all the hallmarks of Trumpism — racism, misogyny, pettiness and whatever the opposite of virtue signaling is.”

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And yet, I would submit that it is actually a Trump example of “political correctness” — an action taken to protect the sensibilities of his base.

A similar example of right-wing political correctness came to mind regarding the spectacular Museum of African American History and Culture that stands on the National Mall in Washington, D.C. Opened in 2016, it remains one of the capital’s toughest tickets.

I have visited the museum three times, and each time the extensive lower floor exhibits — filled with haunting artifacts of the slave trade and civil rights movement — packed a profound emotional weight. So much so that museum designers ended the exhibit with a “contemplation” area that features a cylindrical fountain that quietly rains into a pool in the center of the room.

Yet in 1994, the late U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms, a North Carolina Republican and segregationist, led the charge to thwart the construction of the museum. In a Baltimore Sun story, he called it unnecessary and a waste of taxpayer dollars. He said “the Smithsonian already has two related museums — the Anacostia Museum and the African Art Museum,” both in Washington. Helms also questioned the museum’s policy regarding participation by “the Nation of Islam and other radical ‘black separatist’ groups.”

Clearly, in this Trump-era political correctness of the right, Helms was a man ahead of his time.

Make no mistake, Trump’s version of political correctness is at the center of everything he does.

He claimed that Obama and Hillary Clinton let ordinary Americans suffer because their first priority was political correctness. According to a post-election analysis in The Guardian, Trump said: “They have put political correctness above common sense, above your safety, and above all else. ... I refuse to be politically correct.”

Yet, being politically correct — in defense of those aggrieved and delicate white male sensibilities — is exactly what he does.

An op-ed writer in the Washington Post has cleverly labeled this GOP phenomenon as “patriotic correctness.”

“Conservatives have their own, nationalist version of PC, their own set of rules regulating speech, behavior and acceptable opinions. ... It’s a full-throated, un-nuanced, uncompromising defense of American nationalism, history and cherry-picked ideals. Central to its thesis is the belief that nothing in America can’t be fixed by more patriotism enforced by public shaming,

boycotts and policies to cut out foreign and non-American influences,” wrote Alex Nowrasteh of the Cato Institute.

And, I would add, women and people of color.

Just as I will never succumb to the rhetorical trap of describing the next Republican effort to weaken some important safety net program or consumer protection as a “reform,” neither will I ever accept that “political correctness” flows one way.

Because, on behalf of all of those poor old aggrieved white males, it does not.