

# Wonkette

## David Brooks Sad No One Would Pay Dead Christopher Hitchens To Tell Women They Aren't Funny

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Finally! The moment that everyone has been waiting for all month — David Brooks has published an op-ed weighing in on cancel culture, beating new life into a dead horse. He will not be intimidated, he will not be afraid to say the exact same things that others like him have been saying for what seems like 6,000 years at this point.

As expected, it is a whirlwind of well-worn thoughts about the "intellectual exclusion" of conservatives and "heterodox" thinkers (by law, all essays decrying "cancel culture" must use the term "heterodox" *at least* 42 times) and handwringing because "This thing that was popular 30 years ago would probably not be a popular thing now!," and how people are afraid to share the things they believe on social media, because of how those things will be criticized.

So let's jump in, shall we?

Like other realms, American intellectual life has been marked by a series of exclusions. The oldest and vastest was the exclusion of people of color from the commanding institutions of our culture.

Today, there's the exclusion of conservatives from academic life. Then there's the exclusion of working-class voices from mainstream media. Our profession didn't used to be all coastal yuppies, but now it mostly is. Then there's the marginalization of those with radical critiques — from say, the Marxist left and the theological right.

Intellectual exclusion and segregation have been terrible for America, poisoning both the right and the left.

Oh! The dude who works at the *New York Times* wants to talk about how "our profession" didn't used to be all coastal yuppies? That's not because of some kind of trend of purposeful intellectual exclusion, that is *because capitalism*. If pretty much all media jobs require people to live in expensive cities on the East Coast, the media will be made up, entirely, of people who can afford to live in expensive cities on the East Coast.

As far as the "exclusion of conservatives from academic life"? Perhaps running around screaming that universities are facilities of "Marxist indoctrination" helped with that. As far as everything else? Radical thought is radical thought because it is on the fringe. If it were not, it would not be all that radical. Although if you want the truth, as someone who has always been on

the radical Left side of things, I can tell you that people are actually a lot more open to certain ideas now than they were 20 years ago.

Conservatives were told their voices didn't matter, and many reacted in a childish way that seemed to justify that exclusion. A corrosive spirit of resentment and victimhood spread across the American right — an intellectual inferiority complex combined with a moral superiority complex.

Aw! Were they told their voices didn't matter? I wonder if that was because they spent a good deal of time telling everyone else in the world that their voices didn't matter. That they weren't "Real Americans." That women who wanted equality were "feminazis." That everyone in the whole world was out to destroy their way of life. That they needed guns in order to overthrow the government in case things were not going their way?

Brooks goes on like that for some time, criticizing the spirit of anti-intellectualism on the Right and the supposed intellectual conformity on the Left. A conformity that would probably, hypothetically, lead us to not publish the work of *Christopher Hitchens* in this day and age.

In some ways the left has become even more conformist than the right. The liberal New Republic has less viewpoint diversity than the conservative National Review — a reversal of historical patterns. Christopher Hitchens was one of the great essayists in America. He would be unemployable today because there was no set of priors he wasn't willing to offend.

And then who would be there to tell women we aren't funny? Or to support the invasion of Iraq despite the fact that it was a really bad idea? Other than so, so many other people who would be very easy to find anywhere. I could give you 12 message boards and websites right now.

Of course, what Brooks is really asking here is *Would anyone pay Christopher Hitchens to say that women are not funny?* Would a magazine or website with a lot of money hear that particular pitch and go "Yes please, we would like to buy that with our money!" And the answer is *probably not*. Not because of "censorship," not because they were afraid of offending people, but because it's not a particularly interesting or new take. No one is clamoring to know the thought process behind that theory. It's been done. By him.

We currently live in a world where it is remarkably easy to get offended. I am not talking here about people being overly sensitive, I am talking about there actually being many, many things out there that are very much worth being offended by. We are at no loss of that right now! We've got police officers killing unarmed Black people left and right. Donald Trump is our president. Rightwing domestic terrorism is up 300 percent since he *started* being our president. There are secret police disappearing people in Portland. There is a pandemic happening and a large percentage of our population is out there claiming it's not real and refusing to wear masks and people are dying because of that. There are so many, many things to actually be offended by that it is a wonder that we are not all constantly walking around in a state of shock going "What the fuck even is this?"

Personally, I find it offensive that when all of this is going on, rich white dudes like David Brooks cannot stop themselves from spilling untold amounts of ink in the *New York Times* about how they don't feel they have enough of a voice or a platform, and how very sad it is that Dead Christopher Hitchens cannot, hypothetically, get anything published these days.

One might also be offended by the idea that David Brooks somehow thinks that he, David Brooks, is somehow more socially acceptable than Hitchens, who was at least *occasionally* right about things or clever — two things David Brooks has never managed to pull off.

And yet he continues.

Now the boundaries of exclusion are shifting again. What we erroneously call "cancel culture" is an attempt to shift the boundaries of the sayable so it excludes not only conservatives but liberals and the heterodox as well. Hence the attacks on, say, Steven Pinker and Andrew Sullivan.

Ah yes, known liberal Andrew Sullivan.

There is no one in the world — and this includes Steven Pinker, David Brooks, and Andrew Sullivan — who does not have their own ideas about what is and what is not "sayable." Pinker has ... well.

Perhaps that could have remained unsaid. (The link the tweet is now dead, but here is the [internet archive copy](#) of the very charming Heather MacDonald National Review article it referred to.)

Brooks continues:

This is not just an elite or rare phenomenon. Sixty-two percent of Americans say they are afraid to share things they believe, according to a [poll](#) for the Cato Institute. A majority of staunch progressives say they feel free to share their political views, but majorities of liberals, moderates and conservatives are afraid to.

Look, I hate to be "heterodox" here, but from where I stand, there are a whole lot of people out there who could benefit from not saying every little thing that comes into their mind. In fact, I would include myself in this group, on some days.

There will *always* be things that people think privately but don't say publicly. What I will say is that, as a "staunch progressive," I am pretty used to people disagreeing with me and have been for my whole entire life, so the idea of people disagreeing with me publicly is not all that intimidating. I grew up in a very small and conservative town, there is not much anyone can do to scare me at this point. But part of the reason I am not "afraid" is because I believe I am standing up for what's right, and so I don't care what other people think. Most of the time.

I think a lot of the time, the things people are afraid to say are the things they're not too sure of themselves or things that they, on some level, think are wrong or that would serve no other purpose than to hurt people.

But personally, I've never known a conservative who was afraid of any of those things or, really, afraid to share their political views. In fact, I have found them quite eager to do this. Same goes for moderates, who really seem to want everyone to know that they, and *only* they, are the *truly* reasonable ones.

The rest of Brooks's op-ed is all about how he thinks the subscription-only model of [Substack](#) is going to be the future of media, so that writers can just write for their specific audiences, for people who like them enough to pay to read them, without worrying about getting fired or "canceled." Though it certainly does seem like an odd solution to this supposed intellectual segregation.

The first good thing about Substack is there's no canceling. A young, talented heterodox thinker doesn't have to worry that less talented conformists in his or her organization will use ideology as an outlet for their resentments. The next good thing is there are no ads, just subscription revenue. Online writers don't have to chase clicks by writing about whatever Trump tweeted 15 seconds ago. They can build deep relationships with the few rather than trying to affirm or titillate the many.

It's possible that the debate now going on stupidly on Twitter can migrate to newsletters. It's possible that writers will bundle, with established writers promoting promising ones. It's possible that those of us at the great remaining mainstream outlets will be enmeshed in conversations that are more freewheeling and thoughtful.

Those are two different things though?

I only subscribe to one Substack right now (Samantha Irby's "[Who's On Judge Mathis Today?](#)" newsletter, both because she is hilarious and because we've been friends for over a decade), and while I am very in favor of writers being able to make money independent of outlets, if that were the whole entire future of journalism, I'd be a little worried! Because not everyone can afford to subscribe to 40 different newsletters. That would be a little classist, frankly.

Mostly I'm hopeful that the long history of intellectual exclusion and segregation will seem disgraceful. It will seem disgraceful if you're at a university and only 1.5 percent of the faculty members are conservative. (I'm looking at you, [Harvard](#)). A person who ideologically self-segregates will seem pathetic. I'm hoping the definition of a pundit changes — not a foot soldier out for power, but a person who argues in order to come closer to understanding.

Everyone ideologically self-segregates, including David Brooks. He chooses who he wants to listen to just as much as anyone else does. As long as the word "intellectual" is a thing, there will be "intellectual exclusion" of some form or another. If David Brooks wants to be a pundit who "argues in order to come closer to understanding," he should consider listening more.