Twitter Thread by Elizabeth Spiers



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First, I don't believe that "cancel culture" exists. There is no systemic problem of people being fired because their ideas are too radical. People generally get fired because they say something bigoted or do something that's fire-able anyway. This is a separate problem:

> Wolfe, who was fired from the NYT for a tweet where she said she had "chills" after Biden landed in DC ahead of the inauguration, is the latest victim of a playbook perfected by the likes of GamerGate and similar harassment campaigns. https://t.co/cVP3psguiG
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> — Katherine Cross (@Quinnae_Moon) January 24, 2021

There is a problem of institutions that treating Internet commenters as if the customer is always right, and everyone is a customer. I think it partly has to do with viewing news as more of a consumer product than something that has a public service element.

And employers need to know how to differentiate between bad faith critiques and legitimate concerns, & use (godforbid) critical thinking skills to separate the two. They need to consider the complaints on their own merits, & in the context of the employee's work and known intent

Just to use an example; someone my TL compared Will Wilkinson's firing to James Damore's, as if either of those cases were about radical ideas. I find what Damore was advancing despicable, but from a corporate perspective, he was also a walking gender discrimination lawsuit.

There were multiple reasons to fire Damore, and at least one that was rooted in sheer practicality. Wilkinson and Wolfe's firings were both predicated upon taking the critiques of bad faith Internet commenters at face value, as if they were meaningful and sincere.

As if the customer is always right. And in Wolfe's case, you also had to read into her comment. For some people seeing Biden's plane land might produce and emotional effect because it's a historic moment, not because you're partisanly swooning over Biden.

But even if she had been expressing relief that Trump was out of office (which many Republicans are happy about too), it's not very different from things her more powerful colleagues have said on Twitter. She got fired because she's lower in the

hierarchy.

If the Times is going to have a policy that none of its reporters can express a personal opinion about current events or display any emotion, it needs to be equally applied. And have the politics desk would have been fired by now if it had been.

I also think that kind of policy would be stupid, and impossible to enforce. Contrary to the bad faith critiques, these things do not remove or cover up bias. Opinions are something everyone has and they're a product of critical thinking.

American journalism has really undermined itself by using language that implies that journalistic objectivity is the same as neutrality, and non-thinking reporting of empirical facts in some kind of arbitrary format.

Every reporter has opinions because every human does. Every reporter has some kind of partisan leanings because they have opinions about the parties too. Journalistic objectivity should really be called journalistic remove, which is more accurate.

No human is capable of objectivity, in the way that bad faith critics allege is the goal, because no one is omniscient. "Journalistic objectivity" is about not letting opinions get in the way of seeing what the truth is and reporting it.

And a lot of people don't understand this because media literacy is terrible, but also because "objectivity" is entirely the wrong word and news execs keep stupidly using it. And just to come back to a point: Wolfe's firing was about her lack of power at the Times, not her bias.