Twitter Thread by Zack Beauchamp



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1. The problem with the Ben Shapiro Playbook isn't primarily the author. It's that the *content* of the piece is bad, in a way that was eminently predictable given the author.

I'm going to go through the entire piece and explain why.

2. Shapiro's core argument is that House Republicans opposed impeachment because they saw it as a Democratic plot to undermine them — and, moreover, that they were right (or at least justified) in thinking that.

Many in the media seem bewildered that House Republicans didn't unanimously join Democrats in supporting impeachment **(looking at you, Playbook readers in the media)** — after all, Republicans were in the building when rioters broke through, seeking to do them grievous physical harm. **My Republican sources** tell me that opposition to impeachment doesn't spring from generalized sanguinity over Trump's behavior: I've been receiving calls and texts for more than a week from **elected Republicans heartsick over what they saw** in the Capitol.

Opposition to impeachment comes from a deep and abiding conservative belief that members of the opposing political tribe want their destruction **,** not simply to punish Trump for his behavior. Republicans believe that Democrats and the overwhelmingly liberal media see impeachment as an attempt to cudgel them collectively by lumping them in with the Capitol rioters thanks to their support for Trump.

The evidence for that position isn't difficult to find.

3. This logic has a glaring logical flaw: as @jonathanchait points out, Democrats couldn't use impeachment to tie Republicans to Trump *if they voted for it* https://t.co/DPoeiX167z

4. The problem goes deeper than that. The evidence that Shapiro uses to argue that Republicans are justified is that Democrats and liberal commentators have argued that the Capitol Hill riot vindicates their positions on *issues other than impeachment*

Sen. **RON WYDEN** (D-Ore.) suggested this week at NBCNews.com that the only way to prevent a repeat of the Capitol riot was endorsement of a full slate of Democratic agenda items. Rep. **ALEXANDRIA OCASIO-CORTEZ** (D-N.Y.) suggested that "Southern states are not red states, they are suppressed states, which means the only way that our country is going to heal is through the actual liberation of Southern states ..." And **PAUL KRUGMAN** of The New York Times placed blame for the Capitol riots on the entire Republican Party infrastructure: **"This Putsch Was Decades In The Making."**

Unity looks a lot like "sign onto our agenda, or be lumped in with the Capitol rioters."

5. Of course they'd say that — they're Democrats! You can debate the validity of these claims, but that says nothing about the purpose of pursuing impeachment. There's just no real connection between Shapiro's argument and the evidence offered for it.

6. Next, Shapiro argues that Democrats want to blame all Republicans and Trump voters for the riot — and will use this as a pretext for "repression" for conservatives everywhere.

Conservatives see the game. It doesn't matter whether you held your nose when voting for Trump; it doesn't matter if you denounced his prevarications about a "stolen election" (for the record, I met with great ire when I declared the night of the election that Trump's declaration of victory was "deeply irresponsible").

If you supported Trump in any way, you were at least partially culpable, the argument goes. It's not just Trump who deserves vitriol — it's all 74 million people who voted for him.

And *that* claim, many conservatives believe, will serve as the **basis for repression** everywhere from social media to employment**. Evidence to support that suspicion** wasn't in short supply this week:

7. This is a dodge. It positions the argument that the GOP bears some responsibility is necessarily unreasonable and evil. That a party that made Trump its leader and backed him for four years is axiomatically innocent, and saying otherwise is the real problem.

8. Shapiro's "evidence" for this claim that Democrats want to "repress" the GOP? That corporations — not Democrats, *corporations* — punished outlets and politicians who either tolerated violent rhetoric or encouraged the election fraud delusion.

— **Parler, the social media competitor to Twitter,** was taken off the internet entirely by Amazon Web Services. AWS pointed to violent and threatening posts appearing on Parler as the rationale for the takedown. But as the single journalist most targeted by anti-Semitism on Twitter in 2016, as assessed by the ADL (I've got the medal on my shelf), I can fairly attest that Twitter is no wonderland. And according to The Washington Post, new evidence suggests that Facebook was used by Capitol rioters to coordinate, too. Will tech companies dump them, too?

To conservatives, the deplatforming of Parler looked **far more like political retaliation than good housekeeping** , especially after social media's decision to downgrade the New York Post's coverage of Hunter Biden in the month leading up to the election.

— **GoDaddy kicked AR15.com,** the biggest gun forum in the world, offline.

— **Corporations ranging from AT&T to Marriott,** from Dow to Airbnb, announced they would cut off all political giving to Republicans who had challenged electors. No such consequences ever attended Democrats who winked and nodded — and sometimes more — at civil unrest around the nation emerging from Black Lives Matter protests and antifa violence over the summer.

9. These were targeted actions against specific groups, not the entire Republican party. And yet Shapiro sees this evidence of a conspiracy to repress the entire GOP!

So you see the real argument here: it's not just impeachment, but any consequences, that are illegitimate.

10. Now, here's the next section. Virtually every claim in this is either dishonest or false.

In 2018, Abrams didn't try to overturn the election, telling supporters that "the law currently allows no further viable remedy" for an election she felt (justifiably!) was unfair.

Furthermore, many conservatives doubt that Democrats are applying any sort of neutral standard toward Trump in pursuing impeachment.

— Is the standard refusal to accept election results? **STACEY ABRAMS** never accepted her election loss (she still claims she was the victim of voter suppression); Rep. **JAMIE RASKIN** (D-Md.) has been appointed one of the Democrats' impeachment managers by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, but challenged Florida's electors in 2016.

— Is the standard "incitement"? Few serious lawyers believe that Trump's activities would amount to prosecutable incitement; the real impeachment charge against Trump is extraordinarily reckless and inflammatory rhetoric and behavior. But that sort of rhetoric is, unfortunately, commonplace in today's day and age, and sometimes even ends with violence (see, e.g., a Bernie Sanders supporter shooting up a congressional softball game).

11. Raskin's objections were pro forma and without support from a Senate member, so they didn't trigger debate. And the reputable First Amendment lawyers I've spoken to say there is a real case that Trump did incitement; Shapiro links out to a piece by Andy McCarthy, a crank.

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12. Here's the last substantive section, which is really a con. Shapiro is arguing for "neutral standards" to "unite the country" while quite literally arguing for division — that Republicans are justified in seeing Democrats as evil and opposing impeachment to spite them.

Those on the political left see such questions as "whataboutism." And yes, none of these politicians are the sitting president of the United States and head of the executive branch looking to pressure the legislature to violate the law and overturn a lawful election.

But it's just as plausible to see such questions as **demands for neutral political standards** to hold *everyone* accountable. Without such standards, conservatives fear, any political flashpoint will be used as a cudgel to cram down social, cultural or even governmental repression.

Republicans may divide over impeachment — **there are good prudential arguments against, and good principled arguments in favor** . But one thing is certain: If anyone expects Americans to come together once the Trump era is over, that's a pipe dream.

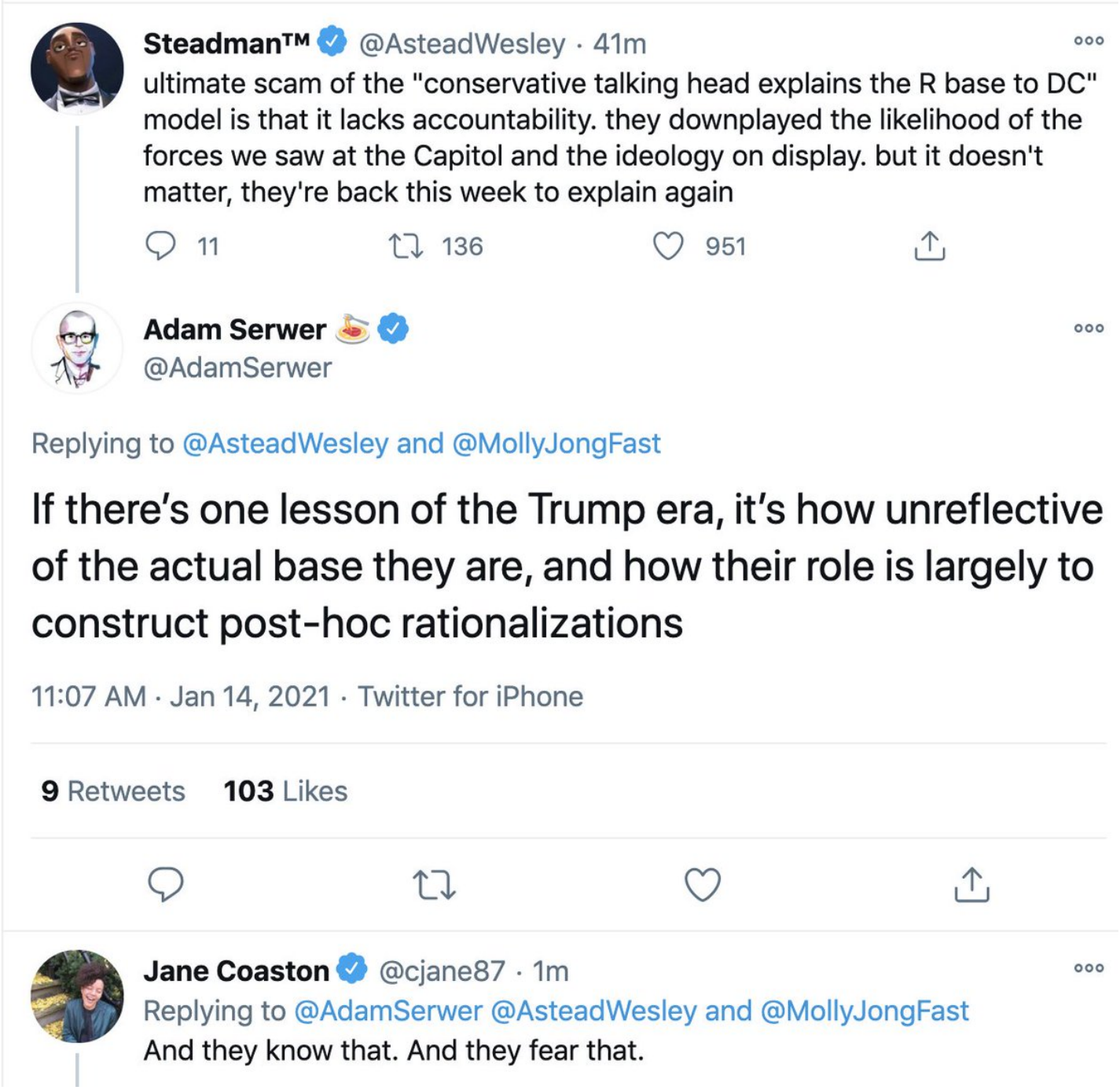
Our social fabric is torn. It was torn before Trump. And, as it turns out, the incentive structure of modern politics and media cuts directly against stitching it together again.

13. But this is Shapiro's shtick. Out of one side of his mouth, he positions himself as a high-minded intellectual. Out of the other side, he offers up the most divisive conservative red meat imaginable. Some examples I compiled a bit ago:

- Writing that "**Israelis like to build. Arabs like to bomb crap and live in open sewage**," and saying the only solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is **ethnically cleansing the Palestinians**
- **Tweeting that** "Trayvon Martin would have turned 21 today if he hadn't taken a man's head and beaten it on the pavement before being shot"
- Penning a column warning against the evils of "**militant gay English**" courses at universities
- Calling President Obama a "**philosophical fascist**"
- Saying transgender people suffer from "**mental illness**" in an interview
- **Mocking black Americans** for being excited about the film *Black Panther*

14. So the real problem with today's Playbook isn't Ben Shapiro's identity. It's that the piece itself is poorly reasoned and outright dishonesty in a way that was predictable given his past work — and that no editor fixed the piece. It's just below decent journalistic standards.

15. Coda: there is an argument that Playbook is helping its more left-leaning readers understand the right better by publishing this. That's false, for reasons @AsteadWesley, @AdamSerwer, and @cjane87 explain here:



16. Coda II: this statement from Politico's EIC makes it worse, not better.

The logical and evidentiary flaws in the newsletter were glaring and obvious; if it was "very closely edited," then the editorial process failed. https://t.co/FNa8UlSO4S

Politico is facing backlash on Thursday—both internally and externally—for handing over the keys to its signature news product for the day to Ben Shapiro, an oft-incendiary right-wing commentator.

"We published a piece by a very prominent writer, provocateur, and podcaster. We stand by every word in there, it was very closely edited," the outlet's top editor Matt Kaminski said as part of his response to staffers during a Thursday meeting.

At another point, the top editor added: "Mischief making has always been a part of *Politico*'s secret sauce. We were an upstart. Some of that sensibility is always going to be a part of this publication."