Twitter Thread by Jonathan Chait



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I've seen a lot of praise for this Kevin Williamson piece on Trump and the GOP. I obviously agree with the "Trump is bad" sentiment, which accounts for its popularity among Never Trumpers. However....

There are a couple massive flaws worth highlighting, because they're characteristic of the poisons that inhabit even many species of anti-Trump conservatism.

The first his Williamson's whitewashing of William F. Buckley's support for white supremacy:

> (William F. Buckley Jr. at first opposed *Brown*, and he recoiled from the thuggish segregationist George Wallace even as he insisted that local school boards had a legitimate right to decide to impose segregation if they chose. Buckley was horrified by the bombing in Birmingham, Ala., but he also insisted that it was in part the result of "revolutionary assaults on the status quo, and contempt for the law, which are traceable to the Supreme Court's manifest contempt for the settled traditions of constitutional practice," placing the blame partly at Earl Warren's feet, clever as rhetoric but unconvincing as analysis. Buckley's racial views — *at that time*; Buckley's mind was not preserved in amber in 1955 — were distinctive in that they were subordinate to his anti-majoritarianism and his practically Federalist contempt for rank democracy: Considering the political situation of blacks in the South disenfranchised on the pretext of their being uneducated, he argued that the prudent solution would be the rigorous disenfranchisement of uneducated people of all races both in the South and beyond. Buckley's famous line about preferring to be governed by the first 2,000 names in the Boston telephone book rather than by the faculty of Harvard has given some people a mistaken view of his attitudes respecting populism and elitism.)

Williamson justifies Buckley's support for disenfranchising blacks on the grounds that Buckley also wanted to disenfranchise "unqualified" whites.

But that was not on the table. What was on the table was measures to equalize voting for blacks and whites. Buckley opposed them.

And while his view "evolved," that means that he gave up on restoring de jure segregation after he lost his fight to preserve it.

His principle didn't change.

How do we know? When faced with the same question in South Africa two decades later, Buckley made the same choice! https://t.co/0fwlsodmPx

Buckley's reasons for supporting Aparthied in South Africa in the 80s were identical to his reasons for supporting it in the South in the 60s: black people were inferior, white people therefore entitled to rule.

The second tic worth noting is Williamson's contempt for democracy:

> Like its financial counterpart, moral bankruptcy happens two ways: gradually, then suddenly. In 2016, I wrote that the likely outcome of a Trump presidency would be the end of the Republican Party as we had known it. And so it ends for the Grand Old Party: From abolition to anarchy, from republicans to rabble, a bloody-minded, homicidal gang in thrall to the very democracy John Adams warned us about. A dog in this condition would be put to sleep. It would be a piece of mercy.

This is a very NR belief. The NR version of it lionizes elites, who are entitled to rule by dint of their superior intelligence and cultivation.

It's a creepy Buckley view his heirs still cling to.

One can believe in the need for elites to supply expertise, and also for elected representatives to use independent judgment. But when you're to the point of using democracy as a hate term, you've crossed into a disturbing place -- as evidenced by the uses Buckley put that notion

and the Buckleyite contempt for democracy helped open the door for Trump's attacks on democracy. They're difficult to disentangle in practice: both forms of belief that certain kinds of white people are entitled to minority rule.