Twitter Thread by Seth Cotlar



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Rush Limbaugh will be remembered as one of the most consequential figures in the history of American conservatism, because he reflected and shaped the world view of the post-Reagan GOP base more than any other single person.

> Rush Limbaugh was given the Medal of Freedom at the State of the Union last night. Here's a bit on who he is.
>
> Viewer discretion is advised. pic.twitter.com/rWYbfnDThl
>
> — Media Matters (@mmfa) February 5, 2020

Limbaugh is also a good example of how the distinction between “respectable” conservatism and “the more radical fringe” can easily be overstated. https://t.co/MD81JaUbpG

> This Bill Buckley/Rush Limbaugh joint effort was published in 1993, just in case anyone thought being anti-PC was a new Trumpian dimension of American conservatism, or that National Review was above Rush's crass anti-intellectual populism. pic.twitter.com/XtnoW1yF4S
>
> — Seth Cotlar (@SethCotlar) January 2, 2021

In 1992 George HW Bush had Rush Limbaugh open his final campaign event before Election Day. https://t.co/G580dznhkL

> At 1:30 on this video GHB *opens* with these words. "And may I start by thanking Rush Limbaugh. Last night, you know, Governor Clinton was at the Meadowlands with Richard Gere and other Hollywood liberals." https://t.co/La3Bcb6I8K
>
> — Seth Cotlar (@SethCotlar) November 16, 2019

Rush descended from a well-off and well-connected family in Missouri, but he played the role of “pissed off Joe Six Pack” really well. He’s a perfect example of “plutocratic populism.” https://t.co/eUSIiffk07

Limbaugh’s cruel bigotry and aura of aggrieved entitlement was a feature, not a bug. In an era of shifting social mores, Limbaugh gave his listeners permission to be a-holes and be proud about it. He perfected the schtick that would get Trump elected.

Limbaugh's buffoonery actually shaped my politics in a significant way, though not in the way he intended. Between 1992 and 1997 I made several, 10-hour drives between Chicago (where I was in grad school) and central PA (where my family was). I listened to Rush each time.

Rush was still a fairly new figure in the political universe at that point, but he was becoming a big hit with a certain segment of the population with which I was experientially familiar, angry white people. I totally got why his bit resonated...and it wasn't good.

I grew up in a conservative small town. Both of my grandpas voted GOP. The idea of voting Republican, in 1992-4, was not some outlandish thing in the world I was socialized into. But Rush made it clear that being proudly deplorable was a requirement for membership in his GOP.

Between 1992 & 1997 I was becoming a US Historian. What I heard on Rush's radio show was an affirmation of the most anti-democratic impulses in the nation's history, and a rejection of the historical figures & movements who advanced the nation's ideals of equality and democracy.

Rush sounded exactly like all of the right wing lawyers, dentists, and real estate agents in my hometown who'd sit around at the Country Club bar and complain about black people and feminazis, and then climb in their Lincoln town cars and drive home drunk.

Rush, like those guys, was an elitist bully. He thought he was better than most other people, and he didn't even have the integrity to even try to tell the truth to his "dittohead" fans. He was a mean-spirited huckster who built a politics that harmed his working class listeners.

This is in part why I have so little sympathy for the conservatives of the 90s who now are shocked, shocked about what the GOP became. The worst of Trumpism was all right there on Rush's 90s show to behold. Choosing not to see the horror of what the GOP was becoming was a choice.

I find it terribly sad that "being hated by liberals" is something that Limbaugh was proud of. I'm sure he'd find my criticisms of him to be affirmations of just how great a person he was. He loved to make people angry. He loved to watch our political culture burn. What a legacy.

Anyway, if you're curious about how the GOP went from the smiley, sunny, optimistic Reagan messaging to the dark, foreboding, apocalyptic, resentful Trump...few transitional figures are as important as Rush.

Here's an archive of 5700 of Rush's shows from 2005 to 2017, in case anyone's interested. https://t.co/tUaozue8Eb

In 1994 it was clear that Rush Limbaugh became richer (because he was already from a family of means) and more famous BECAUSE of the vile and hateful things he was willing to say on air. He was proud of this. It was his brand. https://t.co/K7LwJvo3LX

So for all of those "conservatives" out there saying how formative Rush was for them. This is what they're referring to. THIS is what people loved about him.

He gave conservatives permission to take pleasure in hating their fellow Americans who weren’t like them, and then to call such behavior “the pinnacle of American patriotism.”