Twitter Thread by Learned



Learned
@learnedfoote

(1/35) A thread about growing up as a gay kid in a Christian fundamentalist right-wing homeschooling family in the 1990s, and how I interpret today's political culture in light of those experiences.

Not all tweets are numbered but this is where it's going.
Tweets 3-9 "biblical law" and stoning gay people
Tweets 10-17 coming out in the evangelical church
Tweets 18-29 white-washing confederate history
Tweets 30-35 Scopes in modern politics & education

I grew up with R. J. Rushdoony on the bookshelf, an influential proponent of homeschooling who sought to instill Christian dominion in America. Reading @JulieIngersoll's excellent book last weekend inspired me to share how his ideology impacted my life. @C_Stroop @RLStollar

Ingersoll wrote in her 2015 book about how Rushdoony "advocated the death penalty for gays and incorrigible teens" (xiii). I made the same point in 2009, junior year of college, when I wrote an essay called "Education, the State, and the Fight to Take Back America."

In that 2009 essay, I wrote how Rushdoony promoted a "return to Biblical law, which he said should govern all nations, especially America" and how that law "would even apply the death penalty to homosexuals or rebellious children" (18). I wrote that line based on 2 sources:

#1—Milton Gaither's Homeschool: An American History (2008): "When Rushdoony called for a return to biblical law, he meant it. If the Old Testament instructs us to stone homosexuals and disobedient children, then this is God's will and the Christian society will do so" (136).

#2—Personal experience. I vividly recall a conversation with my dad, about whether parents could justifiably help put disobedient children to death. An example he gave was if that child were guilty of murder. Biblical stoning was a topic of conversation.
https://t.co/vtXLpn97DZ

In my homeschooling 1990s world, stoning wasn't an uncommon topic (see "libertarian" darling Gary North). The conversation unsettled me, but as a child I found it difficult to counter. Why not follow the Biblical law more closely? Stoning, I heard, was quick and merciful.

The far-right fundamentalist logic became scarier after puberty, when I could more easily imagine that it might apply to me.

(10/35) I had zero sex education, no TV, few non-Christian friends (until 2001 and the Internet). The first I heard of homosexuality was the killing of Matthew Shepard when I was 10. I learned "both sides" were wrong. His killers. Him for being gay.

It took a year or two to identify with Shepard. When puberty hit, I thought I just liked seeing Ben-Hur take his shirt off. I had a whole collection of shirtless dudes in Bible story books, but I didn't think of it as "sexuality" until I read a Christian book on sex and demons.

Except in books, I never heard anyone in my evangelical circle argue for the death penalty for gays. This was the age of "hate the sin and love the sinner." The politics preached in the pulpit and at home, however, were relentlessly homophobic, opposed to HIV/AIDS research, etc.

In 2003, I was 15 and was starting to come out to friends. In June that year the Supreme Court decided Lawrence v. Texas. I remember that day very precisely because it was on the front page of the Drudge Report and my father disagreed with the decision to legalize sodomy.

The summer before I came out to my parents, I heard my father disagree with Lawrence v. Texas and my mother compare homosexuality to pedophilia. I was terrified to come out but basically had to because church elders had found out.

After I came out, no one quoted anything like Rushdoony to me. My dad seemed to take a libertarian "your life, your choices" approach, while my mom turned to charismatic religion and spiritual warfare. James Dobson propaganda filled the house.

They sent me to an ex-gay "therapist" when I was 16. He was in his 50s or 60s. My religion then was Tori Amos, and I had absolutely zero interest in believing whatever this guy had to say. He complimented my eyes and body and asked if I worked out. I found that disconcerting.

Today I can't find the line between extreme voices like Rushdoony or North, who advocate the death penalty for male homosexuality, and voices like James Dobson teaching parents how to bring up (heterosexual) boys, or Scalia arguing sodomy is criminal and comparable to murder.

(18/35) I wrote an essay in college (linked) that described how the religious right created a parallel subculture through homeschooling, and that "homeschooling for these people often implied reclamation of the government and the country" (18).
https://t.co/6KYjbAKPde

For British colonists in America, homeschooling originally depended on a tight connection between family, church, and state. Puritans "passed laws that reached into households and enabled tight regulation" (17).

In mid-20th c., that changed when "white Protestant Christians [who] often enjoyed wide control over the processes of government" found their control slipping (18). The Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925. School prayer in 1962. And the civil rights era.

In what in retrospect was shameful understatement, I wrote in 2009 of the right-wing homeschooling movement that "sometimes they were motivated by racial animus and the deep-seated changes of the civil rights era" (17).

Racism in the right-wing Christian homeschooling world is always weirdly pretending it doesn't exist. Some people are offended at being called racist, but they're reading Lew Rockwell?

The Christian right-wing libertarian line was like "OK confederate slavery was wrong, but also other forms of slavery might theoretically be OK since slavery was in the Bible, oh and by the way the Civil War wasn't "really" about slavery and Lincoln (not Trump) was a tyrant.

An example of this massive incoherency regarding race is the Christian historical Sower Series, which in what apparently counts as Reagan era "bipartisan" spirit features Mahalia Jackson and George Washington Carver alongside Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson.

Robert E. Lee, according to these Christian history books for kids, was a "gallant Christian soldier." Stonewall Jackson was "loved in the south, admired in the north." Flags from the confederacy feature prominently on both books.
https://t.co/N3FyUxyuyw
https://t.co/7BpM0zHt3L

Rushdoony vomited propaganda, as confederate sympathizers like Ron and Rand Paul have since, that an oppressive government explicitly founded on white supremacy should be made over as patriotic freedom fighters fighting federal overreach (Ingersoll 17).
https://t.co/Bt4jHG4J44

These neo-confederates have the anti-democratic spirit that animated the 1861 Texas secession, which tried to dissolve the American gov't because the "debasing doctrine of the equality of all" is a "violation of the plainest revelation of the Divine Law."
https://t.co/ylFmngwiln

American education for years has lied and covered up the past, such as Texas avoiding in its high-school textbooks what its own secession documents clearly state.
https://t.co/dQIOT9biIo

Large parts of the Christian right-wing, from Eric "Jesus was white!" Metaxas to Rand & Ron Paul, swim the seas of Christian fascism in the theological wake of the confederacy. BTW Ron Paul runs a homeschooling curriculum with "stone the gays!" Gary North.
https://t.co/GQ9H6OEA8t

(30/35) Rushdoony wasn't the first to champion 6-day creation account. But he's part of a right-wing ideology that accepts history, science, even religion as politically convenient. If Adam hung out with dinosaurs, why not believe the election was rigged or COVID is a conspiracy?

Trump's 1776 commission called for "patriotic education," which for them meant banning critical race theory, condemning LGBTQ rights, and putting white-washed lies in place of historical events. This ideology's impact on education goes way past that 1 report.

Ted Cruz said on Jan. 6, before the storming of congress: "39% of Americans believe the election that just occurred was rigged. You may not agree with that assessment. But it is nonetheless a reality for nearly half the country." As if belief = reality.

Unity shouldn't have to mean going along with dominion and hegemony for straight white rich Christian men who like to ignore Matthew 19:24. It shouldn't mean turning a blind eye to an authoritarian waging a months-long violent campaign against the peaceful transfer of power.

When Republicans talk about "unity," so often they just mean an excuse to get back to bigotry:
Sen. Cornyn complaining about trans people in the military.
https://t.co/eegD7g5Mk7
Rep. Crenshaw saying "BLM has done exactly zero good for America."
https://t.co/pSJVtThc1K

> Another "unifying" move by the new Administration?
>
> Biden Ends Partial Ban on Transgender Soldiers in U.S. Military https://t.co/DiVXdFnEQ8
>
> — Senator John Cornyn (@JohnCornyn) January 25, 2021

As long as it's existed, the US has been bound up with dominionist and oppressive politics. Yet there are contrary liberatory democratic impulses as well. Our politics and education should be based on honest appraisals and critiques, not a lullaby of comforting authoritarian lies