The New Bookburners:

Evidence-Informed Tales of Tribalism-Infused Academia

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Abstract

In this chapter, we focus on understanding the rise of "bookburning" in academia, as a manifestation of far left tribalism. We use the term "bookburning" to refer primarily to the coerced retraction of articles in peer-reviewed academic journals at the hands of academic mobs who produce no evidence of fraud or error in empirical data but are outraged at real or imagined violations of equalitarian beliefs and values. "Bookburning" differs from "book burning" only in that the latter refers to the literal burning of books, whereas the former refers to any attempt by outrage mobs to remove published material. The first section reviews evidence regarding rises in and manifestations of academic tribalism and political extremism in general. The second focuses primarily on the tribalism of the left. This is because, as we document, academia not only skews massively left in the politics of its professors but, increasingly, this includes a large proportion of far-left extremists. We then review recent evidence indicating that equalitarianism – an extreme form of egalitarianism that accepts discrimination as the only source of certain group differences and demonizes those who propose alternatives – undergirds much academic extremism. Next, we review recent studies that have provided preliminary support for equalitarian hypotheses. The final section of the chapter reviews both data and real-world accounts of academics acting in aggressive, punitive, and censorious ways to demonize people and ideas that violate equalitarian values. We close by reviewing several cases of academic equalitarian tribalism that culminated in bookburning.

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"On May 10, 1933, student groups at universities across Germany carried out a series of book burnings of works that the students and leading Nazi party members associated with an "un-German spirit." Enthusiastic crowds witnessed the burning of books by Brecht, Einstein, Freud, Mann and Remarque, among many other well-known intellectuals, scientists and cultural figures, many of whom were Jewish. The largest of these book bonfires occurred in Berlin, where an estimated 40,000 people gathered to hear a speech by the propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, in which he pronounced that "Jewish intellectualism is dead" and endorsed the students' "right to clean up the debris of the past." (U.S. Holocaust Museum, n.d.).

Bookburning has an over 2000-year-old history. It is a political move, in which a powerful group exploits a righteous claim to be a victim of injustice and is used to "…reshape the balance of power and send a message…" (Boissoneault, 2017). As such, it reflects a rise in tribalism that heralds authoritarianism and oppression. Even when it does not precede outright mass murder and genocide, bookburning is toxic to free and open inquiry. It banishes certain ideas or people based on the power of the banishers. Given that they are expected to produce new knowledge about the world, one might expect bookburning to be anathema to academic scientists.

This is often not the case. In this chapter, we review theory, evidence, and concrete examples reflecting an embrace of bookburning among U.S. academics. We restrict most of our discussion to the U.S. because it is the country we know best, although some of our examples have international aspects. By "bookburning," we do not restrict the meaning to the literal burning of books, but, rather, a very similar

impetus adapted to the 21st century. Bookburning need not refer to physical books. Typically, modern bookburning primarily pertains to electronic materials that are of great significance to academics, particularly peer-reviewed papers. The modern sensibility, then, does not manifest as it did in 1933 Germany.

"Book burning" is typically written with two words. We have coined the neologism "bookburning" because we wanted a different, but related, term. We use "bookburning" to expand the concept beyond the original. "Bookburning" includes classic burning of actual books, but also refers to calls to retract, remove, and memory-hole published papers, or, indeed, any effort to remove any expressive work from public dissemination, including firing or ostracizing its authors or creators (although the latter might also be called modern witch-burning). In the present chapter, we focus on factors that have undergirded bookburning for thousands of years: a sense of righteous victimization at the hands of the powerful and a desire to impose values and norms on those who they see as violating them.

This chapter contains three main sections. The first briefly reviews some of the common manifestations of tribal or politically sectarian psychology. The second reviews evidence regarding equalitarianism, a form of "cosmic egalitarianism" (Winegard & Winegard, 2018) on the political far left, which likely drives much of the support for bookburning among academics. The final section reviews both evidence and real world events involving academic tribal demonization and bookburning.

PART I: TRIBALISM IN GENERAL

Regardless of whether one's preferred metaphor is "tribalism" or "sectarianism," abundant evidence now converges on the idea that, in the modern U.S., people have sorted by politics, favor their political ingroup, and despise, demonize, and delegitimize their opponents (Finkel et al., 2020; Iyengar, Lelkes, Levendusky, Malhotra & Westwood, 2019). Tribalism is a metaphor that captures the fierce ingroup loyalties that sometimes undergird political intergroup conflicts. One theoretical perspective (Clark & Winegard, 2020, p. 2) described it this way: people often obtain "…meaning and identity from belonging to groups" and pointed out that tribal psychology means the group "… rewards and revere[s] committed and helpful group members with deference and accolades."

This perspective further argues that tribalism can be (and currently is in the U.S.) particularly acute in political conflicts and is characterized by intense ingroup favoritism and ideological epistemology (Clark & Winegard, 2020). Intragroup processes incentivize ingroup favoritism by rewarding loyal and committed group members and punishing disloyalty through ostracism, stripping the disloyal of status and resources, and, historically in some cases, by death. Ideological epistemology refers to the tendency for ideology to influence and distort perceptions of realities. This occurs through processes such as use of a priori beliefs to interpret ambiguous information, confirmation bias, myside bias, selective exposure to confirmatory information and selective avoidance of disconfirming information.

Finkel et al. (2020) argued that a better term for these phenomena is "political sectarianism" because it does not require the kinship ties typically associated with tribalism. Instead, they argue that a better parallel is religious sectarianism, which typically involves a "…strong faith in the moral correctness and superiority of one's sect" (p. 533). We see few fundamental differences between the psychology underlying these phenomena, and, in this chapter, will use the terms interchangeably.

Affective Polarization: Hating and Punishing Them

Many consequences of political tribal psychology – hatred of the outgroup, myopic certainty, moral righteousness, and cognitive distortions – characterize the extremes. In nationally representative samples, American partisans view the other side as holding more extreme views than they actually hold, and these biased perceptions are more extreme (and more erroneous) among extreme partisans (Westfall, Van Boven, Chambers & Judd, 2015). The dramatic rise in affective polarization – hatred of one's political opponents – stems at least in part from partisan identities (see Iyengar et al., 2019 for a review). This goes beyond mere disagreement or opposition; the more strongly people identify with a political party, the more they despise the opposing party (Iyengar et al., 2019).

Not surprisingly, Iyengar et al.'s (2019) review also concluded that, when given authority to distribute resources, people reward co-partisans and penalize opposing partisans. People also show "spillover effects" – massive ingroup favoritism in domains unrelated to politics, such as when selecting candidates for a college scholarship, evaluations of job applicants, dating behavior, and online labor markets (Iyengar et al.,

2019). Partisan bias was also twice the magnitude of racial bias on implicit association test scores (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015).

Echo Chambers

Tribal politics have also produced informational and social echo chambers. People are far more likely to share morally- and emotionally laden content on social media with ideological fellow travelers (Brady, Wills, Jost, Tucker & Van Bavel, 2017), seek out ideologically compatible news content (Lu & Lee, 2019), and even reject friendships and romantic relationships with opposing partisans (Iyengar et al., 2019). Tribal animosities are most likely to be activated when partisans express their views in moral and emotional ways, especially on social media (Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018).

Expressing outrage at one's opponents is likely to signal tribal loyalty, gain ingroup status, garner attention from and motivate one's tribal compatriots to action, and evoke hostility and backlash from the other side (Clark & Winegard, 2020; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018). The negative responses from the other side most likely further the cycle. Outage evokes outrage which feeds the cycle. Indeed, being the target of sneering dismissive hostility from *the other side* can incentivize bad behavior on one's own side. Hostility from the other side can be worn as a badge of honor likely to be lauded by one's ingroup. One can gain status with one's ingroup by moral grandstanding (Tosi & Warmke, 2016) and, we suspect, by being denounced by the outgroup.

Tribalism, Extremism and Dogmatism

Cognitive rigidity, and its corresponding "us vs. them" dogmatic thinking, when accompanied by tribal-ideological attachments, can lead to a willingness to self-sacrifice and commit harm against perceived out-groups (Moghaddam, 2018; Zmigrod, Rentfrow, & Robbins, 2019). In many cases, individuals become radicalized due to a sense of grievance or injustice that they perceive as affecting their group, leading them to seek out like-minded individuals who share their views (Hogg et al., 2010). Once they become part of a radical group, individuals may be exposed to extremist narratives that further reinforce their us vs. them worldview and justify aggression against outgroups (Moghaddam, 2018). Over time, these individuals may

become more entrenched in their beliefs and less willing to consider alternative viewpoints, leading to further polarization and intergroup tensions. Tribalism begets tribalism.

PART II: EQUALITARIAN TRIBALISM

The problems of tribalism, political sectarianism, polarization, dogmatism, zealotry, and extremism characterize both the left and the right. However, in this chapter, our focus is on academia. In Part III, we review the evidence showing that academia is now populated by people almost entirely left in their politics, with at least a large minority on the far left. As such, most manifestations of tribal psychology of academics are almost entirely an expression of the politics of the left. Therefore, before proceeding to tribalism in academia, it is necessary to understand the tribal political psychology of those on the left.

Equalitarianism

According to The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (2013): "Egalitarian doctrines tend to rest on a background idea that all human persons are equal in fundamental worth or moral status." Equalitarianism has been called "cosmic egalitarianism" (Winegard & Winegard, 2018) because it constitutes an extreme, phenomenologically unfalsifiable set of egalitarian beliefs. According to Winegard, Clark, Hasty and Baumeister (2023), it stems "...from an aversion to inequality and a desire to protect relatively low status groups. Equalitarianism includes three interrelated beliefs: (1) demographic groups do not differ biologically; (2) prejudice is ubiquitous and explains existing group disparities; (3) society can, and should, make all groups equal in society."

Winegard et al. (2023), in the first empirical assessment of equalitarianism of which we are aware, measured it by endorsement of 18 items, such as "The only reason there are differences between men and women is because society is sexist" and "Racism is everywhere, even though people say they are not racist." Their key findings across eight MTurk samples and a meta-analysis, including over 3,200 participants, were that:

1. Liberalism was substantially correlated with equalitarianism, usually more than $r = .5$, a relationship in the top 5% of all relationships in social psychology (Richard, Bond & Stokes-Zoota, 2003).

2.   In six experiments, people evaluated the credibility of findings with equalitarian results (e.g., a test showed women outperforming men) or anti-equalitarian results (e.g., the same test showed men outperforming women). Liberals evaluated the same result as more credible when the results portrayed a victim group more favorably than a privileged group.

3.   This latter finding held even though two studies showed that liberals believed that the same standards should apply to evaluating such findings, regardless of which group was favored.

4.   Conservatives showed the reverse pattern, albeit weaker: they evaluated the result as more credible when it portrayed a privileged group more favorably. Moderates generally showed no such biases.

One of the main limitations to this research is that, though Winegard et al. (2023) did assess rejection of biological explanations for inequality, they did not assess whether their participants also rejected social and cultural explanations for inequality. We are aware of no comparable experimental investigations of equalitarian rejection of, e.g., cultural explanations for group differences. Nonetheless, there is ample evidence for equalitarian rejection of *any* explanation other than discrimination for racial inequality from outside the lab. For example, when Wax & Alexander (2017) argued that differences in the adoption of "bourgeois values" explains many of the outcome differences between Black and White people in the U.S., the flood of denunciations members of the U.S. academy was immediate (Haidt, 2017). Similarly, there are ample concrete examples of academics rejecting cultural difference explanations for Asian American success (e.g., Syed, 2022; see Jindra & Sakamoto, 2023 for a critique of such rejections).

We also think that Winegard et al.'s (2023) claim that equalitarianism includes the belief that "society can, and should, make all groups equal in society" is too limited. Even their own results were that equalitarians favored studies in which oppressed groups outperformed privileged groups. People on the progressive left rarely raise objections to pervasive academic achievement gaps favoring girls and women, greater representation of women in social psychology or of men in prisons, gaps favoring BIPOC people (such as ethnic Asians) over White people, and the like (see Honeycutt & Jussim, in press). Therefore, we adapt Winegard et al.'s (2023) definition of equalitarianism to go beyond rejection of biologically based

group differences and beyond "making all groups equal." We define equalitarianism as involving two core beliefs and attitudes:

1. Discrimination in the present is the only reason for lower status or poorer outcomes among groups that equalitarians care about (e.g., people who are BIPOC, LGBTQ, women, etc.).

2. Support for coercive social justice. Society needs to be mobilized to institute laws, policies and practices to indoctrinate into and impose equalitarian values on others, and to eliminate all processes (e.g., those involved in hiring, admissions, publication, grant awarding, etc.) in which groups deemed oppressed have worse outcomes.

Although we do not include it as part of the definition, we hypothesize that equalitarianism often comes with two other features:

- "Flip the script." Equalitarians will not always push for group equality. Instead, they will at least not object to, and sometimes even support, policies, programs, and processes that create or exacerbate inequalities *if* those inequalities favor people from groups equalitarians consider oppressed (as found by Winegard et al., 2023).

- "Propensity to outrage." Equalitarianism also often includes a propensity to offense and outrage at anyone who presents ideas or evidence that contests or disconfirms the assumption that all lower status groups suffer solely because of discrimination in the present. Outrage is also likely to be expressed at those who characterize coercive social justice and flip the script policies as themselves unjust.

This chapter is not the place to review different approaches to inequality, but it should go without saying that one can oppose discrimination (e.g., in hiring or admissions) without endorsing the full slate of equalitarian values and practices, for example, by endorsing equal opportunity rather than equal outcomes.

As the first empirical investigation of equalitarianism, for all its strengths, Winegard et al. (2023) has many limitations, including reliance on MTurk samples and a primary focus on *evaluating findings.* Understanding the role of equalitarianism in sectarian hostility within and beyond academia clearly requires more research. We therefore propose seven hypotheses regarding how people high in equalitarianism differ

from others (and list papers that provide at least some preliminary support for each, adding asterisks (*'s) when the evidence is about academics). Higher levels of equalitarianism should predict:

1. Greater identification with leftwing political labels and movements, especially radical and extreme ones. Every hypothesis below can be reinterpreted as, "there should be more evidence of this on the left, and especially the far left, than among other groups" because of heightened equalitarianism on the far left (Buss & Von Hippel, 2018*; Geher & Gambacorta, 2010*; Von Hippel & Buss, 2017*).

2. Greater willingness to demonize people for real or imagined prejudice against identity groups deemed deserving of special protections by the progressive left.

3. Heightened sensitivity to "detecting" racism, sexism, oppression, and other bigotries. This includes seeing more "isms" (racism, sexism, etc.) and "phobias" (transphobia, Islamophobia, etc.) than seen by others and greater willingness to conclude many social phenomena reflect "isms" (Jussim, 2022a), especially among one's opponents (Bernstein, Zambrotta, Martin & Micalizzi, 2023). This includes glorification and premature acceptance of claims in the scientific literature supposedly exposing the power or extent of "isms" yet subsequently found to be dubious or debunked such as many of the early claims about microaggressions (Lilienfeld, 2017*), implicit bias (Corneille & Hutter, 2020*) and stereotype threat (Sackett, Hardison & Cullen, 2004*).

4. Overestimation of manifestations of discrimination (McCaffree & Saide, 2021).

5. A greater willingness to engage in censorship of speech and even science that is perceived as violating equalitarian norms on grounds that it is somehow "harmful" to marginalized groups, typically without feeling any onus for presenting evidence of such harms (Carlos, Sheagley & Taylor, 2023; Kaufmann, 2021*; Rausch, Redden & Geher, 2023).

6. Greater social vigilantism: willingness to publicly shame and ostracize those who engage in expression seen as violating equalitarian values (Proulx, Costin, Magazin, Zarzeczna & Haddock, 2022).

7. Willingness to violate basic human rights, such as due process, for those accused of wrongdoing, if the wrongdoing includes allegations of expressions of prejudice or discrimination against some marginalized group.

Leftwing Authoritarianism

For a half-century, academics denied that there was substantial endorsement of authoritarianism among the left in the democratic west (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996) or of its psychological underpinnings, such as dogmatism (Jost, Glaser, Kruglanski & Sulloway, 2003). More recent research, however, has found ample evidence of leftwing authoritarianism (Conway, Houck, Gornick & Repke, 2018; Costello, Bowes, Stevens, Waldman, Tasimi & Lilienfeld, 2022). Leftwing authoritarianism (LWA) is characterized by dogmatism, social vigilantism, prejudice against outgroups, anti-hierarchical aggression, and willingness to censor one's opponents.

Perhaps because work on LWA is still relatively new, we are aware of no research directly linking LWA to tribalism per se. Nonetheless, the toxic brew of dogmatism, intergroup aggression, and censorship that characterizes both left and right extremists plays a major role in the related notion of mutual radicalization (Moghaddam, 2018). This refers to cycles of conflict whereby identity salience and perceived victimhood lead to exaggerations of outgroup threat. These exaggerations "justify" (within the political ingroup) a cycle of enforced conformity and obedience to intragroup norms, and aggressive attempts to stigmatize, ostracize, and dominate the outgroup. Few people enjoy being the target of social vigilantes, aggression, or censorship, so such actions are strong contenders for contributing to the types of polarization and resentments that exacerbate tribal/sectarian conflict.

LWA, Equalitarianism and Endorsement of Soviet Anti-American Anti-Racist Propaganda

We (Honeycutt, Careem, Sudhakar, Khaykin, Finkelstein, Stevens, Finkelstein & Jussim, 2023) recently completed data collection and preliminary analysis for a project that integrates some of the ideas presented so far regarding equalitarianism, tribalism, conflict, and political extremism. Specifically, we examined whether conventional liberalism and LWA predicted endorsement of virulently anti-American propaganda with anti-racist themes.

To do so, we exploited some of the ugliest anti-American propaganda from the Cold War. Soviet-era anti-American propaganda routinely denounced the U.S. as deeply racist. Sometimes, this was communicated with political cartoons, such as the Statue of Liberty hiding Ku Klux Klansmen and Black people in chains or lying in pools of blood (see online supplement for all images and measures reported herein). To test the hypothesis that people high in LWA would be most likely to endorse these sorts of virulent images, we used a Qualtrics panel to conduct a U.S. survey (n=1268) with a sample matched to the population on gender, age, race, geographic region, and education.

Participants viewed and rated eight images in total – four Soviet anti-American propaganda images with anti-racist themes . Two of these images used KKK imagery and two did not use KKK imagery yet were virulently anti-American/anti-racist, e.g., a graphic image of a Black man lying in a pool of blood against the background of a U.S. city). We called the remaining images "humanistic" for short. Their provenance was not Soviet; and they displayed diverse people cooperating in a variety of ways. Two of these images depicted labor movement themes, and two images depicting modern day humanistic anti-racist themes (e.g., racially diverse people working together). Participants were also asked to nominate one of the eight images to be shared by the research team on social media.

In our survey, participants viewed the series of images and rated how true the message of the image is, how accurate the meaning of the image is, and whether the image captures reality in America. These three variables were highly correlated and results were similar when analyzed separately; therefore, we only report results for the combined variable here (i.e., the average of true, accurate, and captures reality for all Soviet propaganda images). Henceforth, we refer to this variable as "endorsement" of the images.

Analyses tested the conceptual prediction that left-wing extremists particularly endorse anti-American anti-racist propaganda. This meant that our key operational prediction was that LWA would most strongly correlate with such endorsement (see supplement for pre-registration). We had no predictions about whether conventional liberals would also more strongly endorse the virulent Soviet authoritarian anti-American anti-racist propaganda.

As predicted, LWA was strongly correlated with endorsement of the Soviet anti-American anti-racist image (r= .50, all standardized regression correlations reported herein greater than r, beta=.15 are statistically significant at p<.001). In contrast, LWA was not correlated (p's>.05) with endorsement of the humanistic anti-racist images (r's<.07). People high in LWA were not broad-spectrum anti-racists; they specifically embraced authoritarian anti-American anti-racism propaganda. This pattern was clearly driven by LWA rather than liberalism per se (though they were correlated, r=.39). Even after controlling for liberalism/conservatism (in regression), LWA predicted endorsement of the Soviet anti-American anti-racist images (standardized beta=.44).

Liberalism/conservatism did predict endorsement of the Soviet images, but more weakly (beta=.17). LWA (controlling for left/right political identity) did not predict endorsement of the labor and humanistic anti-racist images. Although LWA did predict some endorsement of the Labor images, these relationships were extremely small (standardized betas of about .1).

We also examined whether the LWA embrace of Soviet authoritarian propaganda extended beyond endorsement to actual behavior. Participants were led to believe that they could vote to share one of the images on social media, and that the researchers would do so with the image that received the most votes. Those who were higher on LWA were also more likely to select one of the Soviet images to be shared on social media (r=.26). LWA was also substantially higher among those who chose a Soviet image to share than among those who chose a humanistic image (t(1265)=9.37, p<.001, Cohen's d=1.13).

These analyses provide substantial initial support for the equalitarian demonization hypothesis. People higher in LWA much more strongly endorsed Soviet propaganda demonizing the U.S. in the name of antiracism. Liberals did so as well, but more weakly, albeit still statistically significantly. This sort of demonization of one's political opponents is a central characteristic of political sectarianism.

Endorsement Of Hitler's Rhetoric, If Applied to White People

Bernstein & Bleske-Rechek (2023) examined the extent to which modern American college students and college graduates (MTurk samples, total n=424) would endorse Hitler's rhetoric if Whites or Blacks replaced references to Jews. An example is presented here (the others are in the supplement): *For reasons*

which will immediately be apparent, White people have never possessed a culture of their own and the basis

for their knowledge has always been furnished by the civilizations of others.

The main outcome assessed was how many participants agreed with at least one of the modified

Hitler quotes. One headline result was that 55% of college student participants agreed with at least one Hitler

quote when it was applied to White people. Figure 1 presents the means by participant political identity

(liberal, moderate, conservative) and by the group used in the Hitler quote (Jews, Whites, Blacks).

Endorsement of the Hitler quote when referring to White people was significantly higher across the board.

This was especially true for liberals, who also showed the highest overall endorsement (55% vs <40% for

moderates and conservatives) of the Hitler quote when applied to Whites. Bernstein and Bleske-Rechek

(2023) found a very similar pattern of endorsement of the rhetoric in DiAngelo's *White Fragility* as was

obtained for Hitler's *Mein Kampf.* Conservatives more often endorsed Hitler's rhetoric when applied to

Blacks and Jews than did liberals, albeit at far lower levels than liberal endorsement when it applied to White

people. Unfortunately, Bernstein & Rechek (2023) did not assess LWA, so we do not know how much of

this reflects LWA versus conventional liberalism. Nonetheless, like the results for the Soviet antiracist

propaganda, these are consistent with equalitarian hypotheses regarding demonization of White people.

Figure 1: Percent who "probably" or "definitely" agree with > 1 statement. Date from Bernstein & Bleske-Rechek, 2023
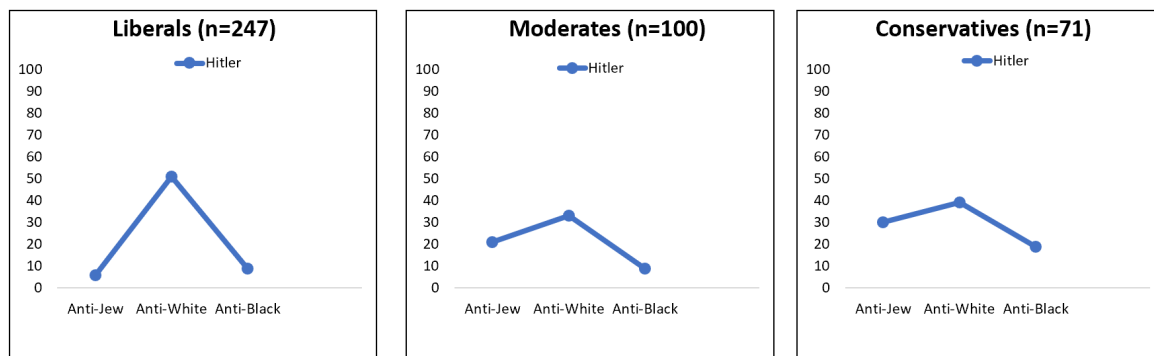
PART III: DATA-DRIVEN AND EVENT-BASED TALES OF ACADEMIC TRIBALISM

The Data-Based Tale of the Hard Left Turn

Surveys of university faculty conducted over the past 50 years have consistently demonstrated that

faculty are decidedly left leaning, and this skew is growing (see Honeycutt & Jussim, 2020 for a review). For

example, recent work using faculty voter registration data found, overall, a ratio of 8.5 Democrats for every Republican, with even higher ratios in most elite institutions and most social science departments (Langbert, 2018; Langbert & Stevens, 2022). However, even more relevant to the ideological climate on campus than such lopsided ratios is the increasing overrepresentation of the far left within the academy (compared to the single-digit representation in the population – see Honeycutt & Jussim, in press for a review).

This ongoing change within the academy is clearly demonstrated by comparing an older survey of faculty to a recent large-scale survey of faculty. Gross and Simmons (2014) recruited a national sample of faculty (in 2006), and as a part of their questions asked faculty how much they identified with various leftwing labels. Honeycutt (2022) asked similar questions to a large national sample of faculty (in 2022). Findings from the two surveys are shown in Table 1. More faculty identified as a part of the extreme Left in 2022, compared to 2006, and massively so with 40% indicating that at least one of the far left labels described them at least moderately well. It's not just that the left-skew is extreme: the extreme left is massively overrepresented.

Table 1. Faculty identifying as radical, political activist, Marxist, or Socialist, and those who selected "at least one of these."		
	Gross and Simmons (2014)	**Honeycutt (2022)**
Radical	11.2%	17.2%
Activist	13.5%	22.3%
Marxist	3%	7.9%
Socialist	not asked	26%
Selected at least one*	unable to determine	40.4%
* Percent of faculty who indicated these labels described them at least moderately well (i.e., with a score of 4 or higher). Data from Honeycutt (2022).		

We know of no research that has directly assessed equalitarianism among academics. Nonetheless, the combination of Winegard et al.'s (2023) results showing strong correlations between liberalism and equalitarianism, and the extreme left skew of academia suggests that equalitarianism is likely to be high. Additional evidence for this hypothesis is presented after the next Tale.

The Tale of the Snake and The Rope

The following is a Hindu allegory (Kumar, 2014):

Seeing a rope in the dark, it is mistaken for a snake - an error... We mistakenly superimpose the image of an illusory snake onto the real rope... The error occurs only in partial light or when the eyes are defective. Then there is partial knowledge; we know that some 'thing' exists... That the 'thing' is actually a rope is hidden because of the inadequate light or knowledge... In place of the covered part, the mind substitutes or 'projects' something of its own, namely the snake... If light (i.e. knowledge) is made available, the rope is now seen...The snake has not 'gone away' since it never existed, except in the mind of the observer, where it might have given rise to very real fears and physical effects (fast heartbeat, sweating etc.) From the point of view of actual reality... only the rope is real, the snake does not exist. For a perceiver who sees a snake, that snake is 'relatively' real and causes as much mental suffering as would a truly real snake.

This allegory, we propose, captures the psychology of the equalitarian detection of racism. Almost anything that *might* be racism *is* (seen as) racism. Work on naive realism (Pronin, Gilovich & Ross, 2004) has found that people often have difficulty distinguishing their subjective and often dubious beliefs from reality. If this applies to equalitarians, when they "see" racism, they do not consider their views subjective or requiring evidence. There is no subjective doubt and (as we shall show) often no need to consider alternative explanations for whatever they are explaining by some bigoted ism or phobia.

One need not rely on Hindu allegories, however, to reach a similar conclusion. Equalitarians may simply have a strong a priori belief (Pennycook, 2020) that racism is pervasive (see, e.g., any academic proclamation about systemic racism). Acting in a Bayesian rational manner (using one's prior belief to interpret new information) can be indistinguishable from conventional confirmation bias if the strong prior leads to relentlessly interpreting not only ambiguous, but irrelevant and even disconfirming evidence, as support for the prior (e.g., in Syed's, 2022 essay, evidence of greater Asian American than White academic achievement and incomes is interpreted as consistent with White supremacy). Thus, equalitarians likely interpret a great deal of ambiguous evidence as racism and, in the real world, many things are sufficiently

ambiguous to be capable of being interpreted as racism (see supplementary materials for examples, such as academics interpreting objectivity and paraphrasing Martin Luther King Jr. as racism).

The Peer Reviewed Tale of the Voracious White Parasite

A paper titled "On Having Whiteness" (Moss, 2021, p. 355) begins thus:

"Whiteness is a condition one first acquires and then one has—a malignant, parasitic-like condition to which "white" people have a particular susceptibility. The condition is foundational, generating characteristic ways of being in one's body, in one's mind, and in one's world. Parasitic Whiteness renders its hosts' appetites voracious, insatiable, and perverse. These deformed appetites particularly target nonwhite peoples. Once established, these appetites are nearly impossible to eliminate."

In Mein Kampf, Adolf Hitler (1939, p. 16) wrote:

"This pestilential adulteration of the blood, of which hundreds of thousands of our people take no account, is being systematically practised by the Jew to-day. Systematically these negroid parasites in our national body corrupt our innocent fair-haired girls and thus destroy something which can no longer be replaced in this world."

The parallels between the passages echo Bernstein and Bleske-Rechek's (2023) findings about similarly disturbing levels of endorsement of Hitler's rhetoric when applied to White people, especially by liberals. Lest one be tempted to dismiss Moss (2021) as the ravings of a lone lunatic:

1. This was published in a peer reviewed journal, meaning that an editor and at least one or two reviewers or more probably thought this was good stuff; and

2. Rather than being seen as some weird anomaly, it actually received an award for writing about racism from the American Psychoanalytic Society (Karbelnig, 2022). That means quite a few elite members of this society not only thought highly of Moss's Hitler-esque rhetoric, they thought it was so good as to deserve a special honor.

Although this is not an example of bookburning, it is an example of demonization. It is the type of rhetoric that inflames tribal passions in a manner that can, and we argue has, helped set the sociocultural stage for modern bookburners. Indeed, when this type of demonization gains sociocultural traction, a moral

panic may ensue. Goode & Ben-Yehuda (1994, p. 156) describe moral panic this way: "In a moral panic, the reactions of the media, law enforcement, politicians, action groups, and the general public are out of proportion to the real and present danger a given threat poses to the society. In response to this exaggerated concern, "folk devils" are created, deviant stereotypes identifying the enemy, the source of the threat, selfish, evil wrongdoers who are responsible for the trouble. The fear and heightened concern are exaggerated, that is, are above and beyond what a sober empirical assessment of its concrete danger would sustain." Later in the same paper they point out that moral panics typically erupt suddenly, suddenly subside and reappear periodically. We propose that "moral panic" is a good lens through which to view the bookburning episodes described below.

The Data-Based Tale of the New McCarthyism

FIRE maintains, and updates weekly, a Scholars Under Fire ("SUF") database, which offers the most comprehensive documentation to date on attempts to sanction scholars for legally and contractually protected expression at American institutions of higher education. Data on sanction attempts are collected from campus, local, and national news stories, as well as from other sources tracking similar types of incidents. Numbers following reflect those reported in the most recent SUF report (Frey & Stevens, 2023), but, because the database is updated weekly, new incidents are being regularly added.

Over the past 23 years (i.e., since 2000) 1,080 sanction attempts of American scholars have been documented, with nearly two-thirds of them (698 of 1,080) resulting in some form of official sanction. This has included 225 terminations, with 60 of these involving tenured professors. SUF counts presented herein do not always add up to exactly 1,080 because the sources of sanction attempts are not always mutually exclusive – some sanction attempts are initiated by multiple groups; or sanction categories reported here are also not comprehensive – some tallies refer to sanction attempts from the left or right, but exclude those that are not ideological.

The annual number of attempts to sanction scholars for expression has dramatically increased since 2000, with four sanction attempts documented in 2000, compared to 145 in 2022. Even more stark, broken out by decade since 2000, 108 (10%) sanction attempts occurred in the first decade (2000 to 2009), 463

(43%) occurred in the following decade (2010 to 2019), and 509 (47%) occurred in the last three years (2020 to 2022). It is unclear whether the trend of the last three years represents a new normal for campus dynamics, but it is, at minimum, alarming.

Sanction attempts, to date, are more frequently initiated by individuals and groups from the political left of the scholar targeted than those from the political right of the scholar (560 of 1,080, or 52% from the left; 442 out of 1,080, or 41% from the right). Since 2000, 818 sanction attempts have been initiated by groups within the academy (299 from administrators, 177 from scholars, 89 from graduate students, and/or 402 from undergraduate students). Sanction attempts from within the academy have disproportionately been from the left of the scholar (506, compared to 239 from the right, 73 from neither). Conversely, most sanction attempts by groups outside of the academy – members of the public and/or politicians or government officials – tend to come from the right. Since 2000, there have been 147 sanction attempts initiated by groups off campus (77 from the general public, 77 by politicians and/or government officials, 7 by both). Of those 147, 118 came from the right of the scholar, 26 from the left, and three from neither.

Over half the sanction attempts have been in response to a scholar's opinions (589 of 1,080 attempts). Over 40% were in response to a scholar's teaching practices and/or scientific inquiry (467 of 1,080 attempts). Additionally, the majority of 617 of 1,080 sanction attempts (57%) involved scholars or expressing their views on racial, gender, and/or sexuality issues.

Although we could find no definitive tally of professors fired during the McCarthy Era (roughly 1947-1957), Schrecker (1980) reported that "over 100" academics testified before the House UnAmerican Activities Committee, many of whom were fired; she also documented several firings resulting from more local investigations. In the absence of better records, one cannot be sure whether the current wave of firings has been worse, similar, or less severe than that during McCarthyism. Nonetheless, Schrecker's (1980, p. 326) sentiments about that era reverberate today: "In retrospect, it would be heartening to report that the academic community rose up in opposition to the firing of these people. But this did not happen."

The New McCarthyism has some differences and some similarities with the original. The original occurred in the midst of the Second Red Scare and was led primarily by investigations occurring in the U.S.

Senate (though it was always local administrators, rather than the Senate, who blacklisted or fired academics). In contrast, The New McCarthyism is occurring in the midst of what is plausibly described as a moral panic (Goode & Ben Yehuda, 1994; Rosado, al-Gharbi & Halberstadt, 2023) over racism and other forms of oppression. Another difference is that, in The New McCarthyism, calls to punish are being instigated at the grassroots – often by social media mobs – and even meted out primarily by other academics (including administrators) rather than being led by the government. One similarity is that communist infiltration of the U.S. government in the 1940s and 1950s was a real problem (Haynes, Klehr & Klehr, 1999), as is prejudice today. Indeed, the moral panic literature (Goode & Ben Yehuda, 1994) recognizes the existence of real problems underlying the typically exaggerated perceptions of threats (as does the work on radicalization, e.g., Moghaddem, 2018) and the impetus to punish "folk-devils" (term used to describe supposed transgressors targeted for punishment by the morally panicked mobs).

The Tale of Decolonization by Bookburning a Peer Reviewed Article

In 2017 (retracted), Gilley published a paper in *Third World Quarterly* titled "The Case for Colonialism." It was a narrative review without original data and accepted as a "viewpoint essay" (Gilley, 2021). This chapter does not critically evaluate or endorse the article. Indeed, colonialism included horrific events that Gilley (2018) did not discuss, such as Belgian mass murder in The Congo and French atrocities in Algeria. We present some of Gilley's arguments to give some sense of the substance of the article rather than to express support for them. Gilley (2018) argued that, in some places, indigenous people flocked to colonial centers of control because life was better there (higher standards of living, less vulnerability to violence) and that some failed states today would benefit from freely choosing to invite a return of colonial administration. Because of widespread revulsion at colonialism, the morally panicked bookburning reaction was swift: Within days, thousands of academics signed two separate petitions calling for the article to be retracted. Gilley eventually removed it when he and the editors were subject to what he considered to be credible death threats (Gilley, 2021).

The Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE, n.d.) produces principles for retraction that focus entirely on data fraud, rampant data error, double publication, and plagiarism. Although no journals are

bound by them unless they choose to be, our judgment is that they constitute the only justified scientific reasons for retracting an article. Neither "revulsion at colonialism," "moral panics over claims in an article" nor "thousands of offended academics call for retraction" are among its standards. While the article was later published in a different outlet (Gilley, 2018), the point remains that the bookburners succeeded in removing it in its original form. Just as the books burned in Nazi Germany in 1933 could still be found elsewhere, that does not mean they were not burned.

The Tale of Inclusive Bookburning of a Peer Reviewed Article

Tomas Hudlicky was an eminent chemistry professor who published a retrospective on a classic 30-year-old paper in the prominent journal, *Angewandte Chemie.* Unfortunately for him, he criticized diversity efforts as a form of discrimination and as a rejection of merit-based hiring, called for a "masters and apprentice" model of training and characterized Chinese academics as disproportionately publishing papers characterized by "fraud and improper publication practices" (p.5). Again, we are not evaluating the (de)merits of his arguments. Regardless, this was enough to get him and his paper denounced by hundreds of academics on social media, many calling for retraction. The journal capitulated to the mob, and as part of the protest, many members of *Angewandte Chemie*'s editorial board resigned (Kramer, 2020). Their objections included this rejection of normal publication processes: "This essay was submitted, sent out for peer-review, accepted, and published. This does not happen by accident. We, as a group, denounce the essay itself and the *process by which it was published"* (emphasis added). This is truly bizarre and, we propose, evidence that the event was a moral panic. They denounced *normal academic publishing processes* because the mob did not like the paper. The original paper can still be found online (Hudlicky, 2020).

Whether his arguments were good or bad, innocuous, or offensive, is irrelevant. There was no data fraud or error because there was no original data. Academic freedom includes the freedom to express ideas others consider offensive. Board members certainly had the right to resign. Academic freedom protects the right of morally panicked outrage mobs to denounce the paper and call for its retraction (indeed, such freedoms protect literal book burning as well). We use the term "outrage mob" as defined by Stevens et al (2020): A group or crowd whose goal is to punish those they consider responsible for something that offends,

insults, or affronts their beliefs, values or feelings.

Nonetheless, Hudlicky's article should have been refuted, not retracted, absent data fraud or rampant data error. The idea that different peer review processes should apply to articles that make claims some academic outrage mob opposes than to other articles reveals the authoritarian and censorious nature of this bookburning. Although the proximal responsibility for the retraction lies with the editors of *Angewandte Chemie*, the instigation was the outrage mobs, without whose demands there is no reason to believe that the paper would have been removed.

Whether diversity initiatives are so sacred that they should never be criticized in peer reviewed journals or even only criticized in a manner the mob finds acceptable are matters of opinion. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that most Americans oppose race-based selection for jobs and college admissions (Graf, 2019; Horowitz, 2019) and have consistently rejected them when given the opportunity at the polls (Potter, 2014). This suggests that the tribal equalitarian norms that Hudlicky's claims violated might not be quite so common outside academia.

The Tale of Rapid Onset Bookburning of a Peer Reviewed Article

Gliske (2019, retracted) published a new theory of gender dysphoria in the journal *ENeuro* involving social, biological, and behavioral components. Much like the Gilley and Hudlicky bookburnings, this work ran afoul of an academic outrage mob. Within days, a petition obtained over 900 signatories calling for retraction (Roepke et al., 2019), claiming that the paper caused "harm" (with no evidence of such harms) and calling for changes to *ENeuro's* review process to include activists as reviewers. *ENeuro* caved to the mob and retracted the paper.

Retraction Watch (2020) published a scathing criticism of the retraction that included this:

"We can't comment on the merits of Gliske's paper as a work of science. But we do feel comfortable saying that the journal appears to have badly botched this case. It admitted reviewing Gliske's manuscript and accepting the article as a "theory/new concept" piece — one "not based on novel" data but which "serves to question existing dogma."

In other words, it can't fairly hide behind the claim — which it now seems to be making — that it had inadvertently accepted a poorly-done study."

The Tale of the Mass Call to Mass Bookburn Racist Mules

In 2022, Klaus Fiedler, former editor of Perspectives on Psychological Science (PoPS), accepted five papers that were critical of a previously published paper (Roberts et al., 2020) on diversity in psychological science. After some back and forth with Fiedler regarding publishing his reply to the critical commentaries, Roberts (2022) pulled his reply from consideration for publication and denounced Fiedler and the invited commentators as racists. Although Roberts (2022) denounced the whole lot as racists, he reserved particular approbation for Jussim (2022c), who used a line from Fiddler on the Roof ("there was the time he sold him a horse but delivered a mule") as a metaphor for the disingenuousness of diversity discourse in psychology (wherein diversity is often characterized as being important in order to capture different perspectives, life experiences and backgrounds, what is often delivered is a narrow view of diversity as based exclusively on identity groups progressive view as deserving special protections and benefits). Roberts (2022, p.21) denounced Jussim (2022c) for "...explicitly parallel[ing] people of color with mules…which is a well-documented racist trope used to dehumanize people of color." More details about this part of the story can be found in the supplement, including evidence that no such trope exists, even in the source Roberts (2022) cited for its existence.

Nonetheless, the morally panicked response to Roberts's (2022) denunciation was swift. Within days, an academic outrage mob organized primarily on social media and gained almost 1,400 signatories for a petition (Ledgerwood et al., 2022) that called on PoPS to withdraw the papers Fiedler accepted criticizing Roberts et al. (2020). The specific phrasing called to make them "... available only as supplementary online material for context…" Within days, Fiedler was ousted as editor of PoPS, and all but one associate editor resigned as did about a third of the editorial board (see supplement for full text of the open letter).

The online supplement goes into more depth about the facts surrounding this call for bookburning, something with which we are quite familiar because one of us (Jussim) provided one of the denounced commentaries. Regardless, none of the papers violated COPE guidelines, and many of the arguments for

retracting them as found on academic social media are, like the arguments for retracting the Hudlicky and Gliske papers, strange or just plain wrong (see supplement for more details).

Furthermore, this incident raised academic bookburning to a whole new level. Prior to this, we are aware of no academic bookburning that targeted more than a single article at a time. In contrast, this was an attempt at simultaneously bookburning an entire set of commentaries in one fell swoop. It remains to be seen whether this is an idiosyncratic outlier, or the start of a new elevated level of bookburning within academia.

CONCLUSION: THE SCIENTIFIC DANGERS OF TRIBALISM-INFUSED BOOKBURNING

In this chapter, we have reviewed evidence about the nature of tribalism/political sectarianism in general, but with a special focus on academia. Political tribalism is generally characterized by extremism, dogmatism, conformity to ingroup norms, and intolerance of the outgroup. Because the U.S. academy skews heavily left, including massive overrepresentation of the far left, we then focused on the nature of far left tribalism. We reviewed recent experimental evidence suggesting that *equalitarianism* often undergirds leftwing tribalism, and surveys showing disturbing levels of endorsement of some of the most toxic rhetoric that emerged from the two most brutal totalitarian regimes of the 20th century – the Nazis and Soviet Communists – *if* that rhetoric was framed as some form of social justice. In addition, we summarized both extensive data and several real world incidents of demonization and bookburning, each of which is plausibly interpretable as evidence for our equalitarian hypotheses. .

Bad vs. Bona Limitations and Qualifications

We anticipate several classes of bad objections to this review. Mischaracterizing claims is a common tool of propaganda masquerading as scholarship (Gambrill, 2010; Waever & Buzan, 2020) and as Roberts (2022) so trenchantly demonstrated, an effective one for mobilizing academic equalitarian tribal bookburning. Therefore, we expect the claims herein to be misrepresented more often than not within academia. One such straw misrepresentation would be a blanket dismissal of our review along the lines of "these authors care more about White demonization than actual racism, and anyone with half a brain can see that the enduring inequalities produced by racism is a far more serious problem." This is a bad objection for

at least two reasons. First, nowhere have we argued that demonization of White people is a more severe problem than is anti-Black racism or other forms of racism because none of us believe this to be the case.

Second, this chapter is not a comparison of the seriousness of demonization of White people versus the seriousness of racism. This chapter is about academic equalitarian tribalism; demonization of White people is one aspect of that tribalism but plays a relatively minor role in our review. Third, even the sections of this chapter that are about demonization of White people don't compare its importance to that of racism. Studying infectious viruses does not mean one considers them more serious than cancer; studying suicide does not mean one considers it more important than global warming. Presumably, it is obvious to anyone not grinding political axes that the evidence we presented regarding demonization of White people does not mean we care more about that than well-supported evidence of racism.

But why even address demonization of White people or the U.S. *at all?* Demonization is a manifestation of prejudice, one of the oldest topics in social psychology (e.g., LaPiere, 1936, who studied prejudice against Armenian Americans) and of tribal/sectarian hostilities. As our introductory review showed, such hostilities are corrosive to democracy and, historically, have sometimes foreshadowed aggression against the group demonized, ranging from soft aggression, such as ostracism and bookburning, up to and including, in some cases, hard aggression, including mass murder and genocide. One can fight prejudice (racism, sexism, etc.) without demonization – e.g., by implementing anti-discrimination laws and practices, and by a variety of sorts of advocacy. The last few years have seen a spike in political violence in the U.S. (Charlottesville, the January 6th riots, and the minority of Black Lives Matter protests that were violent). Whereas rightwing extremism played a role in the rightwing violence, it is plausible that so has leftwing extremism in leftwing violence. Because work on leftwing extremism is in its infancy in social psychology, we need more research to better understand it.

Another bad potential objection is that much of this chapter ignores terrible behavior on the part of far right extremists. We have mostly not addressed far right extremism (except for Part I which reviewed evidence about tribalism generally), but it is still a bad objection. Our focus here is on *academic tribalism,* mostly in the U.S., and there is no serious movement of rightwing extremists in the

U.S. academy. An extensive review of far right extremism is irrelevant to this review. Those interested in work on rightwing extremism can consult an extensive literature (e.g., Altemeyer, 1996) or some of the work by several of the co-authors of the present chapter (Finkelstein et al., 2020; Riggleman, Goldenberg, Farmer, Harrell, Marchi, Brozowski [Finkelstein] & Finkelstein, 2021). Most of this review has focused on biases and authoritarian aggression among those on the left not because rightwing extremism is unimportant, but because it was irrelevant to this chapter and because far less is known about leftwing extremism.

Yet another bad potential objection is that the bookburners were "justified." We have little doubt that modern bookburners will reject our characterization of retraction by morally panicked outrage mob as bookburning. The articles targeted for retraction are in a manner not all that different from how the Nazis viewed censorship of a free press – as justified on the grounds that no one should be exposed to "filth and corruption" (Mchangama, n.d.).

Regardless, bookburning is bad and, in political sectarian conflicts, opposing partisans generally view their side as not merely justified but morally superior (Moghaddem, 2018). Bookburners throughout history believed they were justified. Their "justifications," however, can provide useful insights into the phenomenology of bookburning and, as such, spur further research on tribalism. But, even if one grants any credence to those justifications, it merely *explains why the bookburners believe their bookburning was right.* It is still modern bookburning which we believe is far more harmful than the benefits produced by any of the "justifications" of the bookburners.

On the other hand, there are some bona fide limitations to this review. Empirical research on equalitarian-based tribalism, both as a psychological phenomenon and its concomitant corrosive effects on scientific validity, is in its infancy. Although our review included at least some evidence that bears on the seven equalitarian hypotheses articulated herein, more work is needed. However, the far left skew of the academic social sciences means that it is not likely to blossom quickly and, instead, is likely to emerge as a small trickle. This is not because it lacks importance but because social scientists know they

risk difficulties getting such work published, reputational damage for engaging in it, and, as shown here, punishment for producing such work.

Modern Academic Bookburning Corrodes Inquiry and Undermines Scientific Validity

The central argument of the present chapter is that the retraction of academic articles in response to morally panicked outrage mobs is the disturbing modern manifestation of bookburning. The psychology of bookburning may be eternal: Demonizing one's opponents is central to the psychology of tribalism; once demonized, the depraved work of one's ideological opponents should never see the light of day. If, somehow, it does get published, from the standpoint of the tribal/equalitarian mob: 1. Such morally depraved claims should be immediately retracted using almost any means necessary, even if they fail to fall within Committee on Publication Ethics guidelines; and 2. It constitutes evidence for the corruption of peer review and editorial processes. We then reviewed evidence and real world manifestations of this sort of demonization and modern bookburning within academic publishing.

In addition to exacerbating tribal/sectarian intergroup hostilities, social pressure to *not* make certain claims corrupts the scientific literature (Joshi, 2022). If X is not true, but there is pressure to present evidence that X is true and against presenting evidence that it is not true, the academic literature can become disconnected from the underlying realities. It can be filled with articles claiming that X is generally true with little or no countervailing evidence, even though X is not true or only true in some constrained situations (Honeycutt & Jussim, 2020, in press; Joshi, 2022). Our review documents the punishment and bookburning that academic outrage mobs have meted out to many of those who have criticized equalitarian claims in psychology. Although the tales described in detail here only included "Whiteness," colonialism, diversity, and transgender research, many other punishment attempts involve criticisms of microaggressions, implicit bias, stereotype threat and "systemic racism," (see the SUF database). We conclude, therefore, that the academic literature on these topics is likely a distortion of the underlying realities.

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