

Opinion | CONTRIBUTING OP-ED WRITER **GENRE = COLUMN**
The National Crackup *Headline gives a hint of the thesis*



Thesis: The national coherence in the US is cracking up. The reasons are Trump's politics but the opposite side's reactions to that as well. Polarization is happening and it's dangerous and sad.

Timothy Egan OCT. 27, 2017 **Writer's name and picture**

Photo



People marching at the '#NoMuslimBanEver' rally in downtown Los Angeles, Calif., this month. Credit Mark Ralston/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

Background information on how the North Americans have been called and what it means. A subjective view on the topic.

I never cared for the “melting pot” metaphor, in part because it treats a nation of immigrants like a stew with all the cultures cooked out of it. **Nor was I a fan of** “gorgeous mosaic,” which sounds fine coming from a kindergarten teacher but is flat as a political rallying cry.

I prefer “the American experiment.” It’s just as inartful, yet closer to the truth. The **audacious** idea that people from **all races, ideologies and religious sects** would **check their hatreds at the door** after becoming citizens is **our** sustaining narrative.

Within **our** borders, Protestants don’t fight Catholics, Sunnis don’t go after Shiites, Armenians share neighborhoods with Turks, and a family that can trace much of its ancestry to slavery occupied a White House built in part by slaves.

A statement:
what is
happening
now.
Arguments
with **examples**
of the
confrontation.

But that tenuous construct is breaking apart. We are retreating to our **tribal, ethnic and primitively prejudicial** quarters. Everything is about race and identity. We come **from privilege, or oppression.** We choose politicians based on **whether they help our tribe or hurt People Like Us.**

This is President Trump's legacy. He has shattered the idea, eloquently expressed by President Barack Obama, that we are *not* "irrevocably bound to a tragic past." In the Trump era, we are **neck-deep in that tragic past.**

A statement, the thesis:
Accuses both
Trump and
also the
political left of
the bad
situation.

Stupidly, the left is playing its part in this crackup, perhaps ensuring that Trump will stay in office. When people shout, "Check your privilege" at a speaker at a public event, what they're saying is, "Shut up, your opinion doesn't matter because of the color of your skin."

Trump is a master divider. He tweets against football players because he wants people to resent rich black athletes. **Instead of sports being** our last unifying diversion, **it's just another** platform for hate.

Examples of
Trump's
behaviour to
prove that it's
bad.

He tweets about saying "Merry Christmas again," because it puts people of other faiths on alert. As Newt Gingrich, a master demagogue himself, said, "He intuitively knows how he can polarize."

Trump opened the door to overt expressions of hatred. The investment adviser Marc Faber recently made this observation in his newsletter: "Thank God white people populated America, and not the blacks. Otherwise, the United States would look like Zimbabwe." For good measure, he defended Confederate generals, "whose only crime was to defend what all societies had done for more than 5,000 years: keep a part of the population enslaved."

A turn in the
text: from
criticising
Trump to the
other side.

Trump, **of course,** has never apologized for giving comfort to people who marched on behalf of a confederacy of slaveholders. And we all know that race would be an issue if a black occupant of the White House had fathered five children with three women, attacked grieving combat widows and exploited the office for personal gain.

But when people shame fellow citizens with the blunt edge of identity politics, they only encourage the backlash that gave us Trump.

Examples of
how the anti-
racist activists
also deepen
the
confrontation.
The statement
is that not all
white people
are racist.

White people who are not privileged — the **poor, the uneducated, the struggling** — feel belittled when elite whites scorn their "**privilege.**" **What's privileged about living paycheck to paycheck?** About eight million citizens voted for President Obama — twice — and then flipped their vote for Trump. Most of them, surely, are not racist.

What they heard from Obama was the best American music. "In no other country is my story even possible," he said in his 2008 speech on race. After noting that he won some of the whitest counties in the country, he criticized a view "that sees white racism as endemic, and that elevates what is wrong with America above what we know is right with America."

Argumenting
based on an
authority,
former
President
Obama.

To dismiss white concern over busing or affirmative action as racist "only widens the racial divide and increases misunderstanding," he said. **Yet,** that is **exactly** what many liberal whites and blacks are doing now. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his new book of

essays, compares gentrification, which comes in many colors, to “a more pleasing name for white supremacy.”

Argumentation based on an authority, a professor. Another authority is a famous alt-right activist Bannon.

He’s been getting pushback from African-Americans with a more expansive view. “Coates has convinced me that his particular brand of anti-racism does more political harm than good,” wrote [Cedric Johnson](#), a professor of African-American studies at University of Illinois at Chicago, in an essay last year.

Certainly Steven Bannon knows that. He has repeatedly said that the more Democrats talk about identity and race, the more it helps his white nationalistic cause.

A worst case scenario of the future

If all cultural appropriation is bad — extending even to, say, an Italian-American chef becoming expert in North African food — **then we are doomed**. If everyone is a racist, **then no one can be saved from an awful destiny** at birth.

A consequence of the situation. The writer emphasizes that something must be done right away.

Most Americans now feel their own group faces discrimination, according to [a new NPR poll](#). A majority of whites say that discrimination exists against whites, even though a majority have not personally experienced it.

This is a **tragic** result of the retreat to tribal quarters, pushed by extremists on both sides. If it persists, the United States that Obama celebrated cannot hold. The breaking point is now.

Timothy Egan

The environment, the American West and politics.
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