



Politics and Pragmatics

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I Can Tolerate Anything Except The Outgroup

[Content warning: Politics, religion, social justice, spoilers for "The Secret of Father Brown". This isn't especially original to me and I don't claim anything more than to be explaining and rewording things I have heard from a bunch of other people. Unapologetically America-centric because I'm not informed enough to make it otherwise. Try to keep this off Reddit and other similar sorts of things.]

I.

In Chesterton's [*The Secret of Father Brown*](#)



, a beloved nobleman who murdered his good-for-nothing brother in a duel thirty years ago returns to his hometown wracked by guilt. All the townspeople want to forgive him immediately, and they mock the titular priest for only being willing to give a measured forgiveness conditional on penance and self-reflection. They lecture the priest on the virtues of charity and compassion.

Later, it comes out that the beloved nobleman did *not* in fact kill his good-for-nothing brother. The good-for-nothing brother killed the beloved nobleman (and stole his identity). Now the townspeople want to see him lynched or burned alive, and it is only the priest who – consistently – offers a measured forgiveness conditional on penance and self-reflection.

The priest tells them:

It seems to me that you only pardon the sins that you don't really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don't regard as crimes, but rather as conventions. You forgive a conventional duel just as you forgive a conventional divorce. You forgive because there isn't anything to be forgiven.

He further notes that this is why the townspeople can self-righteously consider themselves more compassionate and forgiving than he is. Actual forgiveness, the kind the priest needs to cultivate to forgive evildoers, is really really hard. The fake forgiveness the townspeople use to forgive the people they like is really easy, so they get to boast not only of their forgiving nature, but of how much nicer they are than those mean old priests who find forgiveness difficult and want penance along with it.

After some thought I agree with Chesterton's point. There are a lot of people who say "I forgive you" when they mean "No harm done", and a lot of people who say "That was unforgiveable" when they mean "That was genuinely really bad". Whether or not forgiveness is *right* is a complicated topic I do not want to get in here. But since forgiveness is generally considered a virtue, and one that many want credit for having, I think it's fair to say you only earn the right to call yourself 'forgiving' if you forgive things that genuinely hurt you.

To borrow Chesterton's example, if you think divorce is a-ok, then you don't get to "forgive" people their divorces, you merely ignore them. Someone who thinks divorce

is abhorrent can “forgive” divorce. *You* can forgive theft, or murder, or tax evasion, or something *you* find abhorrent.

I mean, from a utilitarian point of view, you are still doing the correct action of not giving people grief because they’re a divorcee. You can have all the Utility Points you want. All I’m saying is that if you “forgive” something you don’t care about, you don’t earn any Virtue Points.

(by way of illustration: a billionaire who gives \$100 to charity gets as many Utility Points as an impoverished pensioner who donates the same amount, but the latter gets a lot more Virtue Points)

Tolerance is also considered a virtue, but it suffers the same sort of diminished expectations forgiveness does.

The Emperor [summons before him](#) Bodhidharma and asks: “Master, I have been tolerant of innumerable gays, lesbians, bisexuals, asexuals, blacks, Hispanics, Asians, transgender people, and Jews. How many Virtue Points have I earned for my meritorious deeds?”

Bodhidharma answers: “None at all”.

The Emperor, somewhat put out, demands to know why.

Bodhidharma asks: “Well, what do you think of gay people?”

The Emperor answers: “What do you think I am, some kind of homophobic bigot? Of course I have nothing against gay people!”

And Bodhidharma answers: “Thus do you gain no merit by tolerating them!”

II.

If I had to define “tolerance” it would be something like “respect and kindness toward members of an outgroup”.

And today we have an almost unprecedented situation.

We have a lot of people – like the Emperor – boasting of being able to tolerate everyone from every outgroup they can imagine, loving the outgroup, writing long paeans to how great the outgroup is, staying up at night fretting that somebody else might not like the outgroup enough.

This is really surprising. It’s a total reversal of everything we know about human psychology up to this point. No one did any genetic engineering. No one passed out weird glowing pills in the public schools. And yet suddenly we get an entire group of people who conspicuously promote and defend their outgroups, the outer the better.

What is going on here?

Let’s start by asking what exactly an outgroup is.

There’s a very boring sense in which, assuming the Emperor’s straight, gays are part of his “outgroup” ie a group that he is not a member of. But if the Emperor has curly hair, are straight-haired people part of his outgroup? If the Emperor’s name starts with the letter ‘A’, are people whose names start with the letter ‘B’ part of his outgroup?

Nah. I would differentiate between multiple different meanings of outgroup, where one is “a group you are not a part of” and the other is...something stronger.

I want to avoid a very easy trap, which is saying that outgroups are about how different you are, or how hostile you are. I don't think that's quite right.

Compare the Nazis to the German Jews and to the Japanese. The Nazis were very similar to the German Jews: they looked the same, spoke the same language, came from a similar culture. The Nazis were totally different from the Japanese: different race, different language, vast cultural gap. But the Nazis and Japanese mostly got along pretty well. Heck, the Nazis were actually moderately positively disposed to the *Chinese*, even when they were technically at war. Meanwhile, the conflict between the Nazis and the German Jews – some of whom didn't even realize they were anything other than German until they checked their grandparents' birth certificate – is the stuff of history and nightmares. Any theory of outgroupishness that naively assumes the Nazis' natural outgroup is Japanese or Chinese people will be totally inadequate.

And this isn't a weird exception. Freud spoke of [the narcissism of small differences](#), saying that “it is precisely communities with adjoining territories, and related to each other in other ways as well, who are engaged in constant feuds and ridiculing each other”. Nazis and German Jews. Northern Irish Protestants and Northern Irish Catholics. Hutus and Tutsis. South African whites and South African blacks. Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs. Anyone in the former Yugoslavia and anyone else in the former Yugoslavia.

So what makes an outgroup? Proximity plus small differences. If you want to know who someone in former Yugoslavia hates, don't look at the Indonesians or the Zulus or the Tibetans or anyone else distant and exotic. Find the Yugoslavian ethnicity that lives closely intermingled with them and is most conspicuously similar to them, and chances are you'll find the one who they have eight hundred years of seething hatred toward.

What makes an unexpected in-group? The answer with Germans and Japanese is obvious – a strategic alliance. In fact, the World Wars forged a lot of unexpected temporary pseudo-friendships. [A recent article from War Nerd](#) points out that the British, after spending centuries subjugating and despising the Irish and Sikhs, suddenly needed Irish and Sikh soldiers for World Wars I and II respectively. “Crush them beneath our boots” quickly changed to fawning songs about how “there never was a coward where the shamrock grows” and endless paeans to Sikh military prowess.

Sure, scratch the paeans even a little bit and you find condescension as strong as ever. But eight hundred years of the British committing genocide against the Irish and considering them literally subhuman turned into smiles and songs about shamrocks once the Irish started looking like useful cannon fodder for a larger fight. And the Sikhs, dark-skinned people with turbans and beards who pretty much exemplify the European stereotype of “scary foreigner”, were lauded by everyone from the news media all the way up [to Winston Churchill](#).

In other words, outgroups may be the people who look exactly like you, and scary foreigner types can become the in-group on a moment's notice when it seems convenient.

III.

There are certain theories of dark matter where it barely interacts with the regular world *at all*, such that we could have a dark matter planet exactly co-incident with Earth and never know. Maybe dark matter people are walking all around us and through us, maybe my house is in the Times Square of a great dark matter city, maybe a few meters away from me a dark matter blogger is writing on his dark matter computer about how weird it would be if there was a light matter person he couldn't see right next to him.

This is sort of how I feel about conservatives.

I don't mean the sort of light-matter conservatives who go around complaining about Big Government and occasionally voting for Romney. I see those guys all the time. What I mean is - well, take creationists. According to [Gallup polls](#), about 46% of Americans are creationists. Not just in the sense of believing God helped guide evolution. I mean they think evolution is a vile atheist lie and God created humans exactly as they exist right now. That's half the country.

And I don't have a *single one of those people* in my social circle. It's not because I'm deliberately avoiding them; I'm pretty live-and-let-live politically, I wouldn't ostracize someone just for some weird beliefs. And yet, even though I [probably](#) know about a hundred fifty people, I am pretty confident that not one of them is creationist. Odds of this happening by chance? $1/2^{150} = 1/10^{45}$ = approximately the chance of picking a particular atom if you are randomly selecting among all the atoms on Earth.

About forty percent of Americans want to ban gay marriage. I think if I *really* stretch it, maybe ten of my top hundred fifty friends might fall into this group. This is less astronomically unlikely; the odds are a mere one to one hundred quintillion against.

People like to talk about social bubbles, but that doesn't even begin to cover one hundred quintillion. The only metaphor that seems really appropriate is the bizarre dark matter world.

I live in a Republican congressional district in a state with a Republican governor. The conservatives are definitely out there. They drive on the same roads as I do, live in the same neighborhoods. But they might as well be made of dark matter. I never meet them.

To be fair, I spend a lot of my time inside on my computer. I'm browsing sites like Reddit.

Recently, there was a thread on Reddit asking - [Redditors Against Gay Marriage, What Is Your Best Supporting Argument?](#) A Reddit user who didn't understand how anybody could be against gay marriage honestly wanted to know how other people who *were* against it justified their position. He figured he might as well ask one of the largest sites on the Internet, with an estimated user base in the tens of millions.

It soon became clear that nobody there was actually against gay marriage.

There were a bunch of posts saying "I of course support gay marriage but here are some reasons some other people might be against it," a bunch of others saying "my argument against gay marriage is the government shouldn't be involved in the marriage business at all", and several more saying "why would you even ask this question, there's no possible good argument and you're wasting your time". About halfway through the thread someone started saying homosexuality was unnatural and I *thought* they were going to be the first one to actually answer the question, but at

the end they added “But it’s not my place to decide what is or isn’t natural, I’m still pro-gay marriage.”

In a thread with 10,401 comments, a thread *specifically* asking for people against gay marriage, I was eventually able to find *two* people who came out and opposed it, way near the bottom. Their posts started with “I know I’m going to be downvoted to hell for this...”

But I’m not only on Reddit. I also hang out on LW.

On last year’s survey, I found that of American LWers who identify with one of the two major political parties, 80% are Democrat and 20% Republican, which actually sounds pretty balanced compared to some of these other examples.

But it doesn’t last. Pretty much all of those “Republicans” are libertarians who consider the GOP the lesser of two evils. When allowed to choose “libertarian” as an alternative, only 4% of visitors continued to identify as conservative. But that’s still... some. Right?

When I broke the numbers down further, 3 percentage points of those are neoreactionaries, a bizarre sect that wants to be ruled by a king. Only *one percent* of LWers were normal everyday God-’n-guns-but-not-George-III conservatives of the type that seem to make up about half of the United States.

It gets worse. My formative years were spent at a university which, if it was similar to other elite universities, had [a faculty](#) and [a student body](#) that skewed about 90-10 liberal to conservative – and we can bet that, like LW, even those few token conservatives are Mitt Romney types rather than God-n’-guns types. I get my news from vox.com, an Official Liberal Approved Site. Even when I go out to eat, it turns out my favorite restaurant, California Pizza Kitchen, is [the most liberal restaurant in the United States](#).

I inhabit the same geographical area as *scores and scores* of conservatives. But without meaning to, I have created an *outrageously* strong bubble, a 10^{45} bubble. Conservatives are all around me, yet I am about as likely to have a serious encounter with one as I am a Tibetan lama.

(Less likely, actually. One time a Tibetan lama came to my college and gave a really nice presentation, but if a conservative tried that, people would protest and it would be canceled.)

IV.

One day I realized that entirely by accident I was fulfilling *all* the Jewish stereotypes.

I’m nerdy, over-educated, good with words, good with money, weird sense of humor, don’t get outside much, I like deli sandwiches. And I’m a psychiatrist, which is about the most stereotypically Jewish profession short of maybe stand-up comedian or rabbi.

I’m not very religious. And I don’t go to synagogue. But *that’s* stereotypically Jewish too!

I bring this up because it would be a mistake to think “Well, a Jewish person is by definition someone who is born of a Jewish mother. Or I guess it sort of also means someone who follows the Mosaic Law and goes to synagogue. But I don’t care about

Scott's mother, and I know he doesn't go to synagogue, so I can't gain any useful information from knowing Scott is Jewish."

The defining factors of Judaism – Torah-reading, synagogue-following, mother-having – are the tip of a giant iceberg. Jews sometimes identify as a "tribe", and even if you don't attend synagogue, you're still a member of that tribe and people can still (in a statistical way) infer things about you by knowing your Jewish identity – like how likely they are to be psychiatrists.

The last section raised a question – if people rarely select their friends and associates and customers explicitly for politics, how do we end up with such intense political segregation?

Well, in the same way "going to synagogue" is merely the iceberg-tip of a Jewish tribe with many distinguishing characteristics, so "voting Republican" or "identifying as conservative" or "believing in creationism" is the iceberg-tip of a conservative tribe with many distinguishing characteristics.

A disproportionate number of my friends are Jewish, because I meet them at psychiatry conferences or something – we self-segregate not based on explicit religion but on implicit tribal characteristics. So in the same way, political tribes self-segregate to an impressive extent – a $1/10^{45}$ extent, I will never tire of hammering in – based on their implicit tribal characteristics.

The people who are actually into this sort of thing sketch out a bunch of speculative tribes and subtribes, but to make it easier, let me stick with two and a half.

The Red Tribe is most classically typified by conservative political beliefs, strong evangelical religious beliefs, creationism, opposing gay marriage, owning guns, eating steak, drinking Coca-Cola, driving SUVs, watching lots of TV, enjoying American football, getting conspicuously upset about terrorists and commies, marrying early, divorcing early, shouting "USA IS NUMBER ONE!!!", and listening to country music.

The Blue Tribe is most classically typified by liberal political beliefs, vague agnosticism, supporting gay rights, thinking guns are barbaric, eating arugula, drinking fancy bottled water, driving Priuses, reading lots of books, being highly educated, mocking American football, feeling vaguely like they should like soccer but never really being able to get into it, getting conspicuously upset about sexists and bigots, marrying later, constantly pointing out how much more civilized European countries are than America, and listening to "everything except country".

(There is a partly-formed attempt to spin off a Grey Tribe typified by libertarian political beliefs, Dawkins-style atheism, vague annoyance that the question of gay rights even comes up, eating paleo, drinking Soylent, calling in rides on Uber, reading lots of blogs, calling American football "sportsball", getting conspicuously upset about the War on Drugs and the NSA, and listening to filk – but for our current purposes this is a distraction and they can safely be considered part of the Blue Tribe most of the time)

I think these "tribes" will turn out to be even stronger categories than politics. Harvard might skew 80-20 in terms of Democrats vs. Republicans, 90-10 in terms of liberals vs. conservatives, but maybe 99-1 in terms of Blues vs. Reds.

It's the many, many differences between these tribes that explain the strength of the filter bubble – which *have I mentioned* segregates people at a strength of $1/10^{45}$?

Even in something as seemingly politically uncharged as going to California Pizza Kitchen or Sushi House for dinner, I'm restricting myself to the set of people who like cute artisanal pizzas or sophisticated foreign foods, which are classically Blue Tribe characteristics.

Are these tribes based on geography? Are they based on race, ethnic origin, religion, IQ, what TV channels you watched as a kid? I don't know.

Some of it is certainly genetic – [estimates of](#) the genetic contribution to political association range from 0.4 to 0.6. Heritability of one's attitudes toward gay rights range from 0.3 to 0.5, which hilariously is a little more heritable than homosexuality itself.

(for an interesting attempt to break these down into more rigorous concepts like "traditionalism", "authoritarianism", and "in-group favoritism" and find the genetic loading for each [see here](#). For an attempt to trace the specific genes involved, which mostly turn out to be NMDA receptors, [see here](#))

But I don't think it's just genetics. There's something else going on too. The word "class" seems like the closest analogue, but only if you use it in the sophisticated Paul Fussell [Guide Through the American Status System](#) way instead of the boring "another word for how much money you make" way.

For now we can just accept them as a brute fact – as multiple coexisting societies that might as well be made of dark matter for all of the interaction they have with one another – and move on.

V.

The worst reaction I've ever gotten to a blog post was when [I wrote about](#) the death of Osama bin Laden. I've written all sorts of stuff about race and gender and politics and whatever, but that was the worst.

I didn't come out and say I was happy he was dead. But some people interpreted it that way, and there followed a bunch of comments and emails and Facebook messages about how could I possibly be happy about the death of another human being, even if he was a bad person? Everyone, even Osama, is a human being, and we should never rejoice in the death of a fellow man. One commenter came out and said:

I'm surprised at your reaction. As far as people I casually stalk on the internet (ie, LJ and Facebook), you are the first out of the "intelligent, reasoned and thoughtful" group to be uncomplicatedly happy about this development and not to be, say, disgusted at the reactions of the other 90% or so.

This commenter was right. Of the "intelligent, reasoned, and thoughtful" people I knew, the overwhelming emotion was conspicuous disgust that other people could be happy about his death. I hastily backtracked and said I wasn't happy per se, just surprised and relieved that all of this was finally behind us.

And I genuinely believed that day that I had found some unexpected good in people – that everyone I knew was so humane and compassionate that they were unable to rejoice even in the death of someone who hated them and everything they stood for.

Then a few years later, Margaret Thatcher died. And on my Facebook wall – made of these same "intelligent, reasoned, and thoughtful" people – the most common

response was to quote some portion of the song “Ding Dong, The Witch Is Dead”. Another popular response was to link the videos of British people spontaneously throwing parties in the street, with comments like “I wish I was there so I could join in”. From this exact same group of people, not a single expression of disgust or a “c’mon, guys, we’re all human beings here.”

I [gently pointed this out](#) at the time, and mostly got a bunch of “yeah, so what?”, combined with links to an article claiming that “the demand for respectful silence in the wake of a public figure’s death is not just misguided but dangerous”.

And that was when something clicked for me.

You can talk all you want about Islamophobia, but my friend’s “intelligent, reasoned, and thoughtful people” – her name for the Blue Tribe – can’t get together enough energy to really hate Osama, let alone Muslims in general. We understand that what he did was bad, but it didn’t anger us personally. When he died, we were able to very rationally apply our better nature and our Far Mode beliefs about how it’s never right to be happy about anyone else’s death.

On the other hand, that same group absolutely *loathed* Thatcher. Most of us (though [not all](#)) can agree, if the question is posed explicitly, that Osama was a worse person than Thatcher. But in terms of actual gut feeling? Osama provokes a snap judgment of “flawed human being”, Thatcher a snap judgment of “scum”.

I started this essay by pointing out that, despite what geographical and cultural distance would suggest, the Nazis’ outgroup was not the vastly different Japanese, but the almost-identical German Jews.

And my hypothesis, stated plainly, is that if you’re part of the Blue Tribe, then your outgroup isn’t al-Qaeda, or Muslims, or blacks, or gays, or transpeople, or Jews, or atheists – it’s the Red Tribe.

VI.

“But racism and sexism and cissexism and anti-Semitism are these giant all-encompassing social factors that verge upon being human universals! Surely you’re not arguing that mere *political* differences could ever come close to them!”

One of the ways we *know* that racism is a giant all-encompassing social factor is the Implicit Association Test. Psychologists ask subjects to quickly identify whether words or photos are members of certain gerrymandered categories, like “either a white person’s face or a positive emotion” or “either a black person’s face and a negative emotion”. Then they compare to a different set of gerrymandered categories, like “either a black person’s face or a positive emotion” or “either a white person’s face or a negative emotion.” If subjects have more trouble (as measured in latency time) connecting white people to negative things than they do white people to positive things, then they probably have subconscious positive associations with white people. You can [try it yourself here](#).

Of course, what the test famously found was that even white people who claimed to have no racist attitudes at all usually had positive associations with white people and negative associations with black people on the test. There are very many claims and counterclaims about the precise meaning of this, but it ended up being a big part of the evidence in favor of the current consensus that all white people are at least a little racist.

Anyway, three months ago, someone finally had the bright idea of [doing an Implicit Association Test with political parties](#), and they found that people's unconscious partisan biases were *half again as strong* as their unconscious racial biases (h/t [Bloomberg](#)). For example, if you are a white Democrat, your unconscious bias against blacks (as measured by something called a d-score) is 0.16, but your unconscious bias against Republicans will be 0.23. The Cohen's *d* for racial bias was 0.61, by [the book](#) a "moderate" effect size; for party it was 0.95, a "large" effect size.

Okay, fine, but we know race has *real world* consequences. Like, there have been [several studies](#) where people sent out a bunch of identical resumes except sometimes with a black person's photo and other times with a white person's photo, and it was noticed that employers were much more likely to invite the fictional white candidates for interviews. So just some stupid Implicit Association Test results can't compare to that, right?

Iyengar and Westwood also decided to do the resume test for parties. They asked subjects to decide which of several candidates should get a scholarship (subjects were told this was a genuine decision for the university the researchers were affiliated with). Some resumes had photos of black people, others of white people. And some students listed their experience in Young Democrats of America, others in Young Republicans of America.

Once again, discrimination on the basis of party was much stronger than discrimination on the basis of race. The size of the race effect for white people was only 56-44 (and in the reverse of the expected direction); the size of the party effect was about 80-20 for Democrats and 69-31 for Republicans.

If you want to see their third experiment, which applied *yet another* classic methodology used to detect racism and *once again* found partyism to be much stronger, you can read the paper.

I & W did an unusually thorough job, but this sort of thing isn't new or ground-breaking. People have been studying "belief congruence theory" – the idea that differences in beliefs are more important than demographic factors in forming in-groups and outgroups – for decades. As early as 1967, Smith et al were doing surveys all over the country and [finding that](#) people were more likely to accept friendships across racial lines than across beliefs; in the forty years since then, the observation has been replicated scores of times. Insko, Moe, and Nacoste's 2006 review [Belief Congruence And Racial Discrimination](#) concludes that:

. The literature was judged supportive of a weak version of belief congruence theory which states that in those contexts in which social pressure is nonexistent or ineffective, belief is more important than race as a determinant of racial or ethnic discrimination. Evidence for a strong version of belief congruence theory (which states that in those contexts in which social pressure is nonexistent, or ineffective, belief is the only determinant of racial or ethnic discrimination) and was judged much more problematic.

One of the best-known examples of racism is the "Guess Who's Coming To Dinner" scenario where parents are scandalized about their child marrying someone of a different race. Pew has done [some good work on this](#) and found that only 23% of conservatives and 1% (!) of liberals admit they would be upset in this situation. But Pew *also* asked how parents would feel about their child marrying someone of a different *political party*. Now 30% of conservatives and 23% of liberals would get

upset. Average them out, and you go from 12% upsetness rate for race to 27% upsetness rate for party – more than double. Yeah, people do lie to pollsters, but a picture is starting to come together here.

(Harvard, by the way, is a tossup. There are more black students – 11.5% – than conservative students – 10% – but there are more conservative faculty than black faculty.)

Since people will delight in misinterpreting me here, let me overemphasize what I am *not* saying. I'm not saying people of either party have it "worse" than black people, or that partyism is more of a *problem* than racism, or any of a number of stupid things along those lines which I am sure I will nevertheless be accused of believing. Racism is worse than partyism because the two parties are at least kind of balanced in numbers and in resources, whereas the brunt of an entire country's racism falls on a few underprivileged people. I am saying that the *underlying attitudes that produce* partyism are stronger than the underlying attitudes that produce racism, with no necessary implications on their social effects.

But if we want to look at people's psychology and motivations, partyism and the particular variant of tribalism that it represents are going to be fertile ground.

VII.

Every election cycle like clockwork, conservatives accuse liberals of not being sufficiently pro-America. And every election cycle like clockwork, liberals give extremely unconvincing denials of this.

"It's not that we're, like, *against* America per se. It's just that...well, did you know Europe has much better health care than we do? And much lower crime rates? I mean, come on, how did they get so awesome? And we're just sitting here, can't even get the gay marriage thing sorted out, seriously, what's wrong with a country that can't... sorry, what were we talking about? Oh yeah, America. They're okay. Cesar Chavez was really neat. So were some other people outside the mainstream who became famous precisely by criticizing majority society. That's *sort of* like America being great, in that I think the parts of it that point out how bad the rest of it are often make excellent points. Vote for me!"

(sorry, I make fun of you because I love you)

There was a big brouhaha a couple of years ago when, as it first became apparent Obama had a good shot at the Presidency, Michelle Obama [said that](#) "for the first time in my adult life, I am proud of my country."

Republicans pounced on the comment, asking why she hadn't felt proud before, and she backtracked saying of course she was proud all the time and she loves America with the burning fury of a million suns and she was just saying that the Obama campaign was *particularly* inspiring.

As unconvincing denials go, this one was pretty far up there. But no one really held it against her. Probably most Obama voters felt vaguely the same way. *I* was an Obama voter, and I have proud memories of spending my Fourth of Julys as a kid debunking people's heartfelt emotions of patriotism. Aaron Sorkin:

[What makes America the greatest country in the world?] It's not the greatest country in the world! We're seventh in literacy, 27th in math, 22nd in science,

49th in life expectancy, 178th in infant mortality, third in median household income, No. 4 in labor force, and No. 4 in exports. So when you ask what makes us the greatest country in the world, I don't know what the f*** you're talking about.

(Another [good retort](#) is "We're number one? Sure - number one in incarceration rates, drone strikes, and making new parents go back to work!")

All of this is true, of course. But it's weird that it's such a classic interest of members of the Blue Tribe, and members of the Red Tribe never seem to bring it up.

("We're number one? Sure - number one in levels of sexual degeneracy! Well, I guess probably number two, after the Netherlands, but they're really small and shouldn't count.")

My hunch - both the Red Tribe and the Blue Tribe, for whatever reason, identify "America" with the Red Tribe. Ask people for typically "American" things, and you end up with a very Red list of characteristics - guns, religion, barbecues, American football, NASCAR, cowboys, SUVs, unrestrained capitalism.

That means the Red Tribe feels intensely patriotic about "their" country, and the Blue Tribe feels like they're living in fortified enclaves deep in hostile territory.

Here is a popular piece published on a major media site called [America: A Big, Fat, Stupid Nation](#). Another: [America: A Bunch Of Spoiled, Whiny Brats](#). Americans are ignorant, scientifically illiterate religious fanatics whose "patriotism" is actually just narcissism. [You Will Be Shocked At How Ignorant Americans Are](#), and we should [Blame The Childish, Ignorant American People](#).

Needless to say, every single one of these articles was written by an American and read almost entirely by Americans. Those Americans very likely enjoyed the articles very much and did not feel the least bit insulted.

And look at the sources. HuffPo, Salon, Slate. Might those have anything in common?

On both sides, "American" can be either a normal demonym, or a code word for a member of the Red Tribe.

VIII.

The other day, I logged into OKCupid and found someone who looked cool. I was reading over her profile and found the following sentence:

Don't message me if you're a sexist white guy

And my first thought was "Wait, so a sexist black person would be okay? Why?"

(The girl in question was white as snow)

Around the time the Ferguson riots were first starting, there were a host of articles with titles like [Why White People Don't Seem To Understand Ferguson](#), [Why It's So Hard For Whites To Understand Ferguson](#), and [White Folks Listen Up And Let Me Tell You What Ferguson Is All About](#), this last of which says:

Social media is full of people on both sides making presumptions, and believing what they want to believe. But it's the white folks that don't understand what this is all about. Let me put it as simply as I can for you [...]

No matter how wrong you think Trayvon Martin or Michael Brown were, I think we can all agree they didn't deserve to die over it. I want you white folks to understand that this is where the anger is coming from. You focused on the looting...."

And on a hunch I checked the author photos, and every single one of these articles was written by a white person.

[White People Are Ruining America](#)? White. [White People Are Still A Disgrace](#)? White. [White Guys: We Suck And We're Sorry](#)? White. [Bye Bye, Whiny White Dudes](#)? White. [Dear Entitled Straight White Dudes, I'm Evicting You From My Life](#)? White. [White Dudes Need To Stop Whitesplaining](#)? White. [Reasons Why Americans Suck #1: White People](#)? White.

We've all seen articles and comments and articles like this. Some unsavory people try to use them to prove that white people are the *real* victims or the media is biased against white people or something. Other people who are very nice and optimistic use them to show that some white people have developed some self-awareness and are willing to engage in self-criticism.

But I think the situation with "white" is much the same as the situation with "American" - it can either mean what it says, or be a code word for the Red Tribe.

(except on the blog [Stuff White People Like](#), where it obviously serves as a code word for the *Blue* tribe. I don't know, guys. I didn't do it.)

I realize that's making a strong claim, but it would hardly be without precedent. When people say things like "gamers are misogynist", do they mean [the 52% of gamers who are women](#)? Do they mean every one of the 59% of Americans from every walk of life who are known to play video or computer games occasionally? No. "Gamer" is a coded reference to the Gray Tribe, the half-branched-off collection of libertarianish tech-savvy nerds, and everyone knows it. As well expect that when people talk about "fedoras", they mean Indiana Jones. Or when they talk about "urban youth", they mean freshmen at NYU. Everyone knows exactly who we mean when we say "urban youth", and them being young people who live in a city has only the most tenuous of relations to the actual concept.

And I'm saying words like "American" and "white" work the same way. Bill Clinton was the ["first black President"](#), but if Herman Cain had won in 2012 he'd have been the 43rd white president. And when an angry white person talks at great length about how much he hates "white dudes", *he is not being humble and self-critical*.

IX.

Imagine hearing that a liberal talk show host and comedian was so enraged by the actions of ISIS that he'd recorded and posted a video in which he shouts at them for ten minutes, cursing the "fanatical terrorists" and calling them "utter savages" with "savage values".

If I heard that, I'd be kind of surprised. It doesn't fit my model of what liberal talk show hosts do.

But [the story](#) I'm *actually* referring to is liberal talk show host / comedian Russell Brand making that same rant against Fox News for *supporting war against* the Islamic State, adding at the end that "Fox is worse than ISIS".

That fits my model perfectly. You wouldn't celebrate Osama's death, only Thatcher's. And you wouldn't call ISIS savages, only Fox News. Fox is the outgroup, ISIS is just some random people off in a desert. You hate the outgroup, you don't hate random desert people.

I would go further. Not only does Brand not feel much like hating ISIS, he has a strong incentive not to. That incentive is: the Red Tribe is known to hate ISIS loudly and conspicuously. Hating ISIS would signal Red Tribe membership, would be the equivalent of going into Crips territory with a big Bloods gang sign tattooed on your shoulder.

But this might be unfair. What would Russell Brand answer, if we asked him to justify his decision to be much angrier at Fox than ISIS?

He might say something like "Obviously Fox News is not literally worse than ISIS. But here I am, talking to my audience, who are mostly white British people and Americans. These people already know that ISIS is bad; they don't need to be told that any further. In fact, at this point being angry about how bad ISIS is, is less likely to genuinely change someone's mind about ISIS, and more likely to promote Islamophobia. The sort of people in my audience are at zero risk of becoming ISIS supporters, but at a very real risk of Islamophobia. So ranting against ISIS would be counterproductive and dangerous.

On the other hand, my audience of white British people and Americans is very likely to contain many Fox News viewers and supporters. And Fox, while not quite as evil as ISIS, is still pretty bad. So here's somewhere I have a genuine chance to reach people at risk and change minds. Therefore, I think my decision to rant against Fox News, and maybe hyperbolically say they were 'worse than ISIS' is justified under the circumstances."

I have a lot of sympathy to hypothetical-Brand, especially to the part about Islamophobia. It *does* seem really possible to denounce ISIS' atrocities to a population that already hates them in order to [weak-man](#) a couple of already-marginalized Muslims. We need to fight terrorism and atrocities – therefore it's okay to shout at a poor girl ten thousand miles from home for wearing a headscarf in public. Christians are being executed for their faith in Sudan, therefore let's picket the people trying to build a mosque next door.

But my sympathy with Brand ends when he acts like his audience is likely to be fans of Fox News.

In a world where a negligible number of Redditors oppose gay marriage and 1% of Less Wrongers identify conservative and I know 0/150 creationists, how many of the people who visit the YouTube channel of a well-known liberal activist with a Che-inspired banner, a channel whose episode names are things like "War: What Is It Good For?" and "Sarah Silverman Talks Feminism" – how many of them do you think are big Fox News fans?

In a way, Russell Brand would have been *braver* taking a stand against ISIS than against Fox. If he attacked ISIS, his viewers would just be a little confused and uncomfortable. Whereas every moment he's attacking Fox his viewers are like "HA HA! YEAH! GET 'EM! SHOW THOSE IGNORANT BIGOTS IN THE OUTGROUP WHO'S BOSS!"

Brand acts as if there are just these countries called “Britain” and “America” who are receiving his material. Wrong. There are two parallel universes, and he’s only broadcasting to one of them.

The result is exactly what we predicted would happen in the case of Islam. Bombard people with images of a far-off land they already hate and tell them to hate it more, and the result is ramping up the intolerance on the couple of dazed and marginalized representatives of that culture who have ended up stuck on your half of the divide. Sure enough, if industry or culture or community gets Blue enough, Red Tribe members start getting harassed, fired from their jobs (Brendan Eich being the obvious example) or otherwise shown the door.

Think of Brendan Eich as a member of a tiny religious minority surrounded by people who hate that minority. Suddenly firing him doesn’t seem very noble.

If you mix together Podunk, Texas and Mosul, Iraq, you can prove that Muslims are scary and very powerful people who are executing Christians all the time – and so we have a great excuse for kicking the one remaining Muslim family, random people who never hurt anyone, out of town.

And if you mix together the open-source tech industry and the parallel universe [where](#) you can’t wear a FreeBSD t-shirt without risking someone trying to exorcise you, you can prove that Christians are scary and very powerful people who are persecuting everyone else all the time, and you have a great excuse for kicking one of the few people willing to affiliate with the Red Tribe, a guy who never hurt anyone, out of town.

When a friend of mine heard Eich got fired, she didn’t see anything wrong with it. “I can tolerate anything except intolerance,” she said.

“Intolerance” is starting to look like another one of those words like “white” and “American”.

“I can tolerate anything except the outgroup.” Doesn’t sound quite so noble now, does it?

X.

We started by asking: millions of people are conspicuously praising every outgroup they can think of, while conspicuously condemning their own in-group. This seems contrary to what we know about social psychology. What’s up?

We noted that outgroups are rarely literally “the group most different from you”, and in fact far more likely to be groups very similar to you sharing *almost* all your characteristics and living in the same area.

We then noted that although liberals and conservatives live in the same area, they might as well be two totally different countries or universe as far as level of interaction were concerned.

Contra the usual idea of them being marked only by voting behavior, we described them as very different tribes with totally different cultures. You can speak of “American culture” only in the same way you can speak of “Asian culture” – that is, with a lot of interior boundaries being pushed under the rug.

The outgroup of the Red Tribe is occasionally blacks and gays and Muslims, more often the Blue Tribe.

The Blue Tribe has performed some kind of very impressive act of alchemy, and transmuted *all* of its outgroup hatred to the Red Tribe.

This is not surprising. Ethnic differences have proven quite tractable in the face of shared strategic aims. Even the Nazis, not known for their ethnic tolerance, were able to get all buddy-buddy with the Japanese when they had a common cause.

Research suggests Blue Tribe / Red Tribe prejudice to be much stronger than better-known types of prejudice like racism. Once the Blue Tribe was able to enlist the blacks and gays and Muslims in their ranks, they became allies of convenience who deserve to be rehabilitated with mildly condescending paeans to their virtue. "There never was a coward where the shamrock grows."

Spending your entire life insulting the other tribe and talking about how terrible they are makes you look, well, tribalistic. It is definitely not high class. So when members of the Blue Tribe decide to dedicate their entire life to yelling about how terrible the Red Tribe is, they make sure that instead of saying "the Red Tribe", they say "America", or "white people", or "straight white men". That way it's *humble self-criticism*. They are so interested in justice that they are willing to critique *their own beloved side*, much as it pains them to do so. We know they are not exaggerating, because one might exaggerate the flaws of an enemy, but that anyone would exaggerate their *own* flaws fails [the criterion of embarrassment](#).

The Blue Tribe always has an excuse at hand to persecute and crush any Red Tribers unfortunate enough to fall into its light-matter-universe by defining them as all-powerful domineering oppressors. They appeal to the fact that this is definitely the way it works in the Red Tribe's dark-matter-universe, and that's in the same country so it has to be the same community for all intents and purposes. As a result, every Blue Tribe institution is permanently licensed to take whatever emergency measures are necessary against the Red Tribe, however disturbing they might otherwise seem.

And so how virtuous, how noble the Blue Tribe! Perfectly tolerant of all of the different groups that just so happen to be allied with them, never intolerant unless it happen to be against intolerance itself. Never stooping to engage in petty tribal conflict like that awful Red Tribe, but always nobly criticizing their own culture and striving to make it better!

Sorry. But I hope this is at least a *little* convincing. The weird dynamic of outgroup-*philia* and ingroup-*phobia* isn't anything of the sort. It's just good old-fashioned ingroup-favoritism and outgroup bashing, a little more sophisticated and a little more sneaky.

XI.

This essay is bad and I should feel bad.

I should feel bad because I made *exactly* the mistake I am trying to warn everyone else about, and it wasn't until I was almost done that I noticed.

How virtuous, how noble I must be! Never stooping to engage in petty tribal conflict like that silly Red Tribe, but always nobly criticizing my own tribe and striving to make it better.

Yeah. Once I've written a ten thousand word essay savagely attacking the Blue Tribe, either I'm a very special person or they're my outgroup. And I'm not *that* special.

Just as you can pull a fast one and look humbly self-critical if you make your audience assume there's just one American culture, so maybe you can trick people by assuming there's only one Blue Tribe.

I'm pretty sure I'm not Red, but I did talk about the Grey Tribe above, and I show all the risk factors for being one of them. That means that, although my critique of the Blue Tribe may be right or wrong, in terms of *motivation* it comes from the same place as a Red Tribe member talking about how much they hate al-Qaeda or a Blue Tribe member talking about how much they hate ignorant bigots. And when I boast of being able to tolerate Christians and Southerners whom the Blue Tribe is mean to, I'm not being tolerant at all, just noticing people so far away from me they wouldn't make a good outgroup anyway.

I had *fun* writing this article. People do not have fun writing articles savagely criticizing their in-group. People can criticize their in-group, it's not *humanly impossible*, but it takes nerves of steel, it makes your blood boil, you should sweat blood. It shouldn't be *fun*.

You can bet some white guy on Gawker who week after week churns out "Why White People Are So Terrible" and "Here's What Dumb White People Don't Understand" is having fun and not sweating any blood at all. He's not criticizing his in-group, he's never even *considered* criticizing his in-group. I can't blame him. Criticizing the in-group is a really difficult project I've barely begun to build the mental skills necessary to even consider.

I can think of criticisms of my own tribe. Important criticisms, true ones. But the thought of writing them makes my blood boil.

I imagine might I feel like some liberal US Muslim leader, when he goes on the O'Reilly Show, and O'Reilly ambushes him and demands to know why he and other American Muslims haven't condemned beheadings by ISIS more, demands that he criticize them right there on live TV. And you can see the wheels in the Muslim leader's head turning, thinking something like "Okay, obviously beheadings are terrible and I hate them as much as anyone. But you don't care even *the slightest bit* about the victims of beheadings. You're just looking for a way to score points against me so you can embarrass all Muslims. And I would rather personally behead every single person in the world than give a smug bigot like you a single microgram more stupid self-satisfaction than you've already got."

That is how I feel when asked to criticize my own tribe, even for correct reasons. If you think you're criticizing your own tribe, and your blood is not at that temperature, consider the possibility that you aren't.

But if I want Self-Criticism Virtue Points, criticizing the Grey Tribe is the only honest way to get them. And if I want Tolerance Points, my own personal cross to bear right now is tolerating the Blue Tribe. I need to remind myself that when they are bad people, they are merely Osama-level bad people instead of Thatcher-level bad people. And when they are good people, they are powerful and necessary crusaders against the evils of the world.

The worst thing that could happen to this post is to have it be used as convenient feces to fling at the Blue Tribe whenever feces are necessary. Which, given what has

happened to my last couple of posts along these lines and the obvious biases of my own subconscious, I already expect it will be.

But the best thing that could happen to this post is that it makes a lot of people, especially myself, figure out how to be more tolerant. Not in the “of course I’m tolerant, why shouldn’t I be?” sense of the Emperor in Part I. But in the sense of “being tolerant makes me see red, makes me sweat blood, but darn it *I am going to be tolerant anyway.*”

Book Review: Albion's Seed

I.

[*Albion's Seed*](#) by David Fischer is a history professor's nine-hundred-page treatise on patterns of early immigration to the Eastern United States. It's not light reading and not the sort of thing I would normally pick up. I read it anyway on the advice of people who kept telling me it explains everything about America. And it sort of does.

In school, we tend to think of the original American colonists as "Englishmen", a maximally non-diverse group who form the background for all of the diversity and ethnic conflict to come later. Fischer's thesis is the opposite. Different parts of the country were settled by very different groups of Englishmen with different regional backgrounds, religions, social classes, and philosophies. The colonization process essentially extracted a single stratum of English society, isolated it from all the others, and then plunked it down on its own somewhere in the Eastern US.

I used to play *Alpha Centauri*, a computer game about the colonization of its namesake star system. One of the dynamics that made it so interesting was its backstory, where a Puerto Rican survivalist, an African plutocrat, and other colorful characters organized their own colonial expeditions and competed to seize territory and resources. You got to explore not only the settlement of a new world, but the settlement of a new world by societies dominated by extreme founder effects. What kind of weird pathologies and wonderful innovations do you get when a group of overly romantic Scottish environmentalists is allowed to develop on its own trajectory free of all non-overly-romantic-Scottish-environmentalist influences? *Albion's Seed* argues that this is basically the process that formed several early US states.

Fischer describes four of these migrations: the Puritans to New England in the 1620s, the Cavaliers to Virginia in the 1640s, the Quakers to Pennsylvania in the 1670s, and the Borderers to Appalachia in the 1700s.

II.

A: The Puritans

I hear about these people every Thanksgiving, then never think about them again for the next 364 days. They were a Calvinist sect that dissented against the Church of England and followed their own brand of dour, industrious, fun-hating Christianity. Most of them were from East Anglia, the part of England just northeast of London. They came to America partly because they felt persecuted, but mostly because they thought England was full of sin and they were at risk of absorbing the sin by osmosis if they didn't get away quick and build something better. They really liked "city on a hill" metaphors.

I knew about the Mayflower, I knew about the black hats and silly shoes, I even knew about [the time Squanto threatened to release a bioweapon buried under Plymouth Rock that would bring about the apocalypse](#). But I didn't know that the Puritan migration to America was basically a eugenicist's wet dream.

Much like eg Unitarians today, the Puritans were a religious group that drew disproportionately from the most educated and education-obsessed parts of the English populace. Literacy among immigrants to Massachusetts was twice as high as

the English average, and in an age when the vast majority of Europeans were farmers most immigrants to Massachusetts were skilled craftsmen or scholars. And the Puritan “homeland” of East Anglia was an unusually intellectual place, with strong influences from Dutch and Continental trade; historian Havelock Ellis finds that it “accounts for a much larger proportion of literary, scientific, and intellectual achievement than any other part of England.”

Furthermore, only the best Puritans were allowed to go to Massachusetts; Fischer writes that “it may have been the only English colony that required some of its immigrants to submit letters of recommendation” and that “those who did not fit in were banished to other colonies and sent back to England”. Puritan “headhunters” went back to England to recruit “godly men” and “honest men” who “must not be of the poorer sort”.

INTERESTING PURITAN FACTS:

- 1.** Sir Harry Vane, who was “briefly governor of Massachusetts at the age of 24”, “was so rigorous in his Puritanism that he believed only the thrice-born to be truly saved”.
- 2.** The great seal of the Massachusetts Bay Company “featured an Indian with arms beckoning, and five English words flowing from his mouth: ‘Come over and help us’”
- 3.** Northern New Jersey was settled by Puritans who named their town after the “New Ark Of The Covenant” – modern Newark.
- 4.** Massachusetts clergy were very powerful; Fischer records the story of a traveller asking a man “Are you the parson who serves here?” only to be corrected “I am, sir, the parson who *rules* here.”
- 5.** The Puritans tried to import African slaves, but they all died of the cold.
- 6.** In 1639, Massachusetts declared a “Day Of Humiliation” to condemn “novelties, oppression, atheism, excesses, superfluity, idleness, contempt of authority, and trouble in other parts to be remembered”
- 7.** The average family size in Waltham, Massachusetts in the 1730s was 9.7 children.
- 8.** Everyone was compelled by law to live in families. Town officials would search the town for single people and, if found, order them to join a family; if they refused, they were sent to jail.
- 9.** 98% of adult Puritan men were married, compared to only 73% of adult Englishmen in general. Women were under special pressure to marry, and a Puritan proverb said that “women dying maids lead apes in Hell”.
- 10.** 90% of Puritan names were taken from the Bible. Some Puritans took pride in their learning by giving their children obscure Biblical names they would expect nobody else to have heard of, like Mahershalalhasbaz. Others chose random Biblical terms that might not have technically been intended as names; “the son of Bostonian Samuel Pond was named Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin Pond”. Still others chose Biblical words completely at random and named their children things like Maybe or Notwithstanding.
- 11.** Puritan parents traditionally would send children away to be raised with other families, and raise those families’ children in turn, in the hopes that the lack of familiarity would make the child behave better.
- 12.** In 1692, 25% of women over age 45 in Essex County were accused of witchcraft.
- 13.** Massachusetts passed the first law mandating universal public education, which was called The Old Deluder Law in honor of its preamble, which began “It being one chief project of that old deluder, Satan, to keep men from the knowledge of the scriptures...”
- 14.** Massachusetts cuisine was based around “meat and vegetables submerged in plain water and boiled relentlessly without seasonings of any kind”.
- 15.** Along with the famous scarlet A for adultery, Puritans could be forced to wear a B for blasphemy, C for counterfeiting, D for drunkenness, and so on.

16. Wasting time in Massachusetts was literally a criminal offense, listed in the law code, and several people were in fact prosecuted for it.

17. This wasn't even the nadir of weird hard-to-enforce Massachusetts laws. Another law just said "If any man shall exceed the bounds of moderation, we shall punish him severely".

Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote of Massachusetts Puritanism: "The underlying foundation of life in New England was one of profound, unutterable, and therefore unuttered melancholy, which regarded human existence itself as a ghastly risk, and, in the case of the vast majority of human beings, an inconceivable misfortune." And indeed, everything was dour, strict, oppressive, and very religious. A typical Massachusetts week would begin in the church, which doubled as the town meeting hall. There were no decorations except a giant staring eye on the pulpit to remind churchgoers that God was watching them. Townspeople would stand up before their and declare their shame and misdeeds, sometimes being forced to literally crawl before the other worshippers begging for forgiveness. Then the minister would give two two-hour sermons back to back. The entire affair would take up to six hours, and the church was unheated (for some reason they stored all their gunpowder there, so no one was allowed to light a fire), and this was Massachusetts, and it was colder in those days than it is now, so that during winter some people would literally lose fingers to frostbite (Fischer: "It was a point of honor for the minister never to shorten a sermon merely because his audience was frozen"). Everyone would stand there with their guns (they were legally required to bring guns, in case Indians attacked during the sermon) and hear about how they were going to Hell, all while the giant staring eye looked at them.

So life as a Puritan was pretty terrible. On the other hand, their society was *impressively* well-ordered. Teenage pregnancy rates were the lowest in the Western world and in some areas literally zero. Murder rates were half those in other American colonies. There was remarkably low income inequality – "the top 10% of wealthholders held only 20%-30% of taxable property", compared to 75% today and similar numbers in other 17th-century civilizations. The poor (at least the poor native to a given town) were treated with charity and respect – "in Salem, one man was ordered to be set by the heels in the stocks for being uncharitable to a poor man in distress". Government was conducted through town meetings in which everyone had a say. Women had more equality than in most parts of the world, and domestic abuse was punished brutally. The educational system was top-notch – "by most empirical tests of intellectual eminence, New England led all other parts of British America from the 17th to the early 20th century".

In some ways the Puritans seem to have taken the classic dystopian bargain – give up all freedom and individuality and art, and you can have a perfect society without crime or violence or inequality. Fischer ends each of his chapters with a discussion of how the society thought of liberty, and the Puritans unsurprisingly thought of liberty as "ordered liberty" – the freedom of everything to tend to its correct place and stay there. They thought of it as a freedom from disruption – apparently FDR stole some of his "freedom from fear" stuff from early Puritan documents. They were extremely not in favor of the sort of liberty that meant that, for example, there wouldn't be laws against wasting time. *That* was going too far.

B: The Cavaliers

The Massachusetts Puritans fled England in the 1620s partly because the king and nobles were oppressing them. In the 1640s, English Puritans under Oliver Cromwell

rebelled, took over the government, and killed the king. The nobles not unreasonably started looking to get the heck out.

Virginia had been kind of a wreck ever since most of the original Jamestown settlers had mostly died of disease. Governor William Berkeley, a noble himself, decided the colony could reinvent itself as a destination for refugee nobles, and told them it would do everything possible to help them maintain the position of oppressive supremacy to which they were accustomed. The British nobility was sold. The Cavaliers – the nobles who had fought and lost the English Civil War – fled to Virginia. Historians who cross-checking Virginian immigrant lists against English records find that of Virginians whose opinions on the War were known, 98% were royalists. They were overwhelming Anglican, mostly from agrarian southern England, and all related to each other in the incestuous way of nobility everywhere: “it is difficult to think of any ruling elite that has been more closely interrelated since the Ptolemies”. There were twelve members of Virginia’s royal council; in 1724 “all without exception were related to one another by blood or marriage...as late as 1775, every member of that august body was descended from a councilor who had served in 1660”.

These aristocrats didn’t want to do their own work, so they brought with them tens of thousands of indentured servants; more than 75% of all Virginian immigrants arrived in this position. Some of these people came willingly on a system where their master paid their passage over and they would be free after a certain number of years; others were sent by the courts as punishments; still others were just plain kidnapped. The gender ratio was 4:1 in favor of men, and there were entire English gangs dedicated to kidnapping women and sending them to Virginia, where they fetched a high price. Needless to say, these people came from a very different stratum than their masters or the Puritans.

People who came to Virginia mostly died. They died of malaria, typhoid fever, amoebiasis, and dysentery. Unlike in New England, where Europeans were better adapted to the cold climate than Africans, in Virginia it was Europeans who had the higher disease-related mortality rate. The whites who survived tended to become “sluggish and indolent”, according to the universal report of travellers and chroniclers, although I might be sluggish and indolent too if I had been kidnapped to go work on some rich person’s farm and sluggishness/indolence was an option.

The Virginians tried their best to oppress white people. Really, they did. The depths to which they sank in trying to oppress white people almost boggle the imagination. There was a rule that if a female indentured servant became pregnant, a few extra years were added on to their indenture, supposedly because they would be working less hard during their pregnancy and child-rearing so it wasn’t fair to the master. Virginian aristocrats would *rape their own female servants*, then add a penalty term on to their indenture for becoming pregnant. That is an *impressive* level of chutzpah. But despite these efforts, eventually all the white people either died, or became too sluggish to be useful, or worst of all just finished up their indentures and became legally free. The aristocrats started importing black slaves as per the model that had sprung up in the Caribbean, and so the stage was set for the antebellum South we read about in history classes.

INTERESTING CAVALIER FACTS:

1. Virginian cavalier speech patterns sound a lot like modern African-American dialects. It doesn’t take much imagination to figure out why, but it’s strange to think of a 17th century British lord speaking what a modern ear would clearly recognize as Ebonics.

2. Three-quarters of 17th-century Virginian children lost at least one parent before turning 18.
3. Cousin marriage was an important custom that helped cement bonds among the Virginian elite, “and many an Anglican lady changed her condition but not her name”.
4. In Virginia, women were sometimes unironically called “breeders”; English women were sometimes referred to as “She-Britons”.
5. Virginia didn’t really have towns; the Chesapeake Bay was such a giant maze of rivers and estuaries and waterways that there wasn’t much need for land transport hubs. Instead, the unit of settlement was the plantation, which consisted of an aristocratic planter, his wife and family, his servants, his slaves, and a bunch of guests who hung around and mooched off him in accordance with the ancient custom of hospitality.
6. Virginian society considered everyone who lived in a plantation home to be a kind of “family”, with the aristocrat both as the literal father and as a sort of abstracted patriarch with complete control over his domain.
7. Virginia governor William Berkeley probably would not be described by moderns as ‘strong on education’. He said in a speech that “I thank God there are no free schools nor printing [in Virginia], and I hope we shall not have these for a hundred years, for learning has brought disobedience, and heresy, and sects into the world, and printing has divulged them, and libels against the best government. God keep us from both!”
8. Virginian recreation mostly revolved around hunting and bloodsports. Great lords hunted deer, lesser gentry hunted foxes, indentured servants had a weird game in which they essentially draw-and-quartered geese, young children “killed and tortured songbirds”, and “at the bottom of this hierarchy of bloody games were male infants who prepared themselves for the larger pleasures of maturity by torturing snakes, maiming frogs, and pulling the wings off butterflies. Thus, every red-blooded male in Virginia was permitted to slaughter some animal or other, and the size of his victim was proportioned to his social rank.”
9. “In 1747, an Anglican minister named William Kay infuriated the great planter Landon Carter by preaching a sermon against pride. The planter took it personally and sent his [relations] and ordered them to nail up the doors and windows of all the churches in which Kay preached.”
10. Our word “condescension” comes from a ritual attitude that leading Virginians were supposed to display to their inferiors. Originally condescension was supposed to be a polite way of showing respect those who were socially inferior to you; our modern use of the term probably says a lot about what Virginians actually did with it.

In a lot of ways, Virginia was the opposite of Massachusetts. Their homicide rate was sky-high, and people were actively encouraged to respond to slights against their honor with duels (for the rich) and violence (for the poor). They were obsessed with gambling, and “made bets not merely on horses, cards, cockfights, and backgammon, but also on crops, prices, women, and the weather”. Their cuisine focused on gigantic sumptuous feasts of animals killed in horrible ways. There were no witchcraft trials, but there were people who were fined for disrupting the peace by accusing their neighbors of witchcraft. Their church sermons were twenty minutes long on the dot.

The Puritans naturally thought of the Virginians as completely lawless reprobate sinners, but this is not *entirely* true. Virginian church sermons might have been twenty minutes long, but Virginian ballroom dance lessons could last nine hours. It wasn’t that the Virginians weren’t bound by codes, just that those codes were social rather than moral.

And Virginian nobles weren’t just random jerks, they were *carefully cultivated* jerks. Planters spared no expense to train their sons to be strong, forceful, and not take

nothin' from nobody. They would encourage and reward children for being loud and temperamental, on the grounds that this indicated a strong personality and having a strong personality was fitting of a noble. When this worked, it worked *really* well – witness natural leaders and self-driven polymaths like George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. More often it failed catastrophically – the rate of sex predation and rape in Virginia was at least as high as anywhere else in North America.

The Virginian Cavaliers had an obsession with liberty, but needless to say it was not exactly a sort of liberty of which the ACLU would approve. I once heard someone argue against libertarians like so: even if the government did not infringe on liberties, we would still be unfree for other reasons. If we had to work, we would be subject to the whim of bosses. If we were poor, we would not be “free” to purchase most of the things we want. In any case, we are “oppressed” by disease, famine, and many other things besides government that prevent us from implementing our ideal existence.

The Virginians took this idea and ran with it – in the wrong direction. No, they said, we *wouldn't* be free if we had to work, therefore we insist upon not working. No, we *wouldn't* be free if we were limited by poverty, therefore we insist upon being extremely rich. Needless to say, this conception of freedom required first indentured servitude and later slavery to make it work, but the Virginians never *claimed* that the servants or slaves were free. That wasn't the point. Freedom, like wealth, was properly distributed according to rank; nobles had as much as they wanted, the middle-class enough to get by on, and everyone else none at all. And a Virginian noble would have gone to his grave insisting that a civilization without slavery could never have citizens who were truly free.

C: The Quakers

Fischer warns against the temptation to think of the Quakers as normal modern people, but he has to warn us precisely because it's so tempting. Where the Puritans seem like a dystopian caricature of virtue and the Cavaliers like a dystopian caricature of vice, the Quakers just seem *ordinary*. Yes, they're kind of a religious cult, but they're the kind of religious cult any of us might found if we were thrown back to the seventeenth century.

Instead they were founded by a weaver's son named George Fox. He believed people were basically good and had an Inner Light that connected them directly to God without a need for priesthood, ritual, Bible study, or self-denial; mostly people just needed to listen to their consciences and be nice. Since everyone was equal before God, there was no point in holding up distinctions between lords and commoners: Quakers would just address everybody as “Friend”. And since the Quakers were among the most persecuted sects at the time, they developed an insistence on tolerance and freedom of religion which (unlike the Puritans) they stuck to even when shifting fortunes put them on top. They believed in pacificism, equality of the sexes, racial harmony, and a bunch of other things which seem pretty hippy-ish even today let alone in 1650.

England's top Quaker in the late 1600s was William Penn. Penn is universally known to Americans as “that guy Pennsylvania is named after” but actually was a larger-than-life 17th century superman. Born to the nobility, Penn distinguished himself early on as a military officer; he was known for beating legendary duelists in single combat and then sparing their lives with sermons about how murder was wrong. He gradually started having mystical visions, quit the military, and converted to Quakerism. Like many Quakers he was arrested for blasphemy; unlike many Quakers, they couldn't

make the conviction stick; in his trial he “conducted his defense so brilliantly that the jurors refused to convict him even when threatened with prison themselves, [and] the case became a landmark in the history of trial by jury.” When the state finally found a pretext on which to throw him in prison, he spent his incarceration composing “one of the noblest defenses of religious liberty ever written”, conducting a successful mail-based courtship with England’s most eligible noblewoman, and somehow gaining the personal friendship and admiration of King Charles II. Upon his release the King liked him so much that he gave him a large chunk of the Eastern United States on a flimsy pretext of repaying a family debt. Penn didn’t *want* to name his new territory Pennsylvania – he recommended just “Sylvania” – but everybody else overruled him and Pennsylvania it was. The grant wasn’t quite the same as the modern state, but a chunk of land around the Delaware River Valley – what today we would call eastern Pennsylvania, northern Delaware, southern New Jersey, and bits of Maryland – centered on the obviously-named-by-Quakers city of Philadelphia.

Penn decided his new territory would be a Quaker refuge – his exact wording was “a colony of Heaven [for] the children of the Light”. He mandated universal religious toleration, a total ban on military activity, and a government based on checks and balances that would “leave myself and successors no power of doing mischief, that the will of one man may not hinder the good of a whole country”.

His recruits – about 20,000 people in total – were Quakers from the north of England, many of them minor merchants and traders. They disproportionately included the Britons of Norse descent common in that region, who formed a separate stratum and had never really gotten along with the rest of the British population. They were joined by several German sects close enough to Quakers that they felt at home there; these became the ancestors of (among other groups) the Pennsylvania Dutch, Amish, and Mennonites.

INTERESTING QUAKER FACTS:

- 1.** In 1690 a gang of pirates stole a ship in Philadelphia and went up and down the Delaware River stealing and plundering. The Quakers got in a heated (but brotherly) debate about whether it was morally permissible to use violence to stop them. When the government finally decided to take action, contrarian minister George Keith dissented and caused a major schism in the faith.
- 2.** Fischer argues that the Quaker ban on military activity within their territory would have doomed them in most other American regions, but by extreme good luck the Indians in the Delaware Valley were almost as peaceful as the Quakers. As usual, at least some credit goes to William Penn, who taught himself Algonquin so he could negotiate with the Indians in their own language.
- 3.** The Quakers’ marriage customs combined a surprisingly modern ideas of romance, with extreme bureaucracy. The wedding process itself had sixteen stages, including “ask parents”, “ask community women”, “ask community men”, “community women ask parents”, and “obtain a certificate of cleanliness”. William Penn’s marriage apparently had forty-six witnesses to testify to the good conduct and non-relatedness of both parties.
- 4.** Possibly related: 16% of Quaker women were unmarried by age 50, compared to only about 2% of Puritans.
- 5.** Quakers promoted gender equality, including the (at the time scandalous) custom of allowing women to preach (condemned by the Puritans as the crime of “she-preaching”).
- 6.** But they were such prudes about sex that even *the Puritans* thought they went too far. Pennsylvania doctors had problems treating Quakers because they would “delicately describe everything from neck to waist as their ‘stomachs’, and anything

from waist to feet as their 'ankles'".

7. Quaker parents Richard and Abigail Lippincott named their eight children, in order, "Remember", "John", "Restore", "Freedom", "Increase", "Jacob", "Preserve", and "Israel", so that their names combined formed a simple prayer.

8. Quakers had surprisingly modern ideas about parenting, basically sheltering and spoiling their children at a time when everyone else was trying whip the Devil out of them.

9. "A Quaker preacher, traveling in the more complaisant colony of Maryland, came upon a party of young people who were dancing merrily together. He broke in upon them like an avenging angel, stopped the dance, and demanded to know if they considered Martin Luther to be a good man. The astonished youngsters answered in the affirmative. The Quaker evangelist then quoted Luther on the subject of dancing: 'as many paces as the man takes in his dance, so many steps he takes toward Hell. This, the Quaker missionary gloated with a gleam of sadistic satisfaction, 'spoiled their sport'."

10. William Penn wrote about thirty books defending liberty of conscience throughout his life. The Quaker obsession with the individual conscience as the work of God helped invent the modern idea of conscientious objection.

11. Quakers were heavily (and uniquely for their period) opposed to animal cruelty. When foreigners introduced bullbaiting into Philadelphia during the 1700s, the mayor bought a ticket supposedly as a spectator. When the event was about to begin, he leapt into the ring, personally set the bull free, and threatened to arrest anybody who stopped him.

12. On the other hand, they were also opposed to other sports for what seem like kind of random reasons. The town of Morley declared an anathema against foot races, saying that they were "unfruitful works of darkness".

13. The Pennsylvania Quakers became very prosperous merchants and traders. They also had a policy of loaning money at low- or zero- interest to other Quakers, which let them outcompete other, less religious businesspeople.

14. They were among the first to replace the set of bows, grovels, nods, meaningful looks, and other British customs of acknowledging rank upon greeting with a single rank-neutral equivalent - the handshake.

15. Pennsylvania was one of the first polities in the western world to abolish the death penalty.

16. The Quakers were lukewarm on education, believing that too much schooling obscured the natural Inner Light. Fischer declares it "typical of William Penn" that he wrote a book arguing against reading too much.

17. The Quakers not only instituted religious freedom, but made laws against mocking another person's religion.

18. In the late 1600s as many as 70% of upper-class Quakers owned slaves, but Pennsylvania essentially invented modern abolitionism. Although their colonial masters in England forbade them from banning slavery outright, they applied immense social pressure and by the mid 1700s less than 10% of the wealthy had African slaves. As soon as the American Revolution started, forbidding slavery was one of independent Pennsylvania's first actions.

Pennsylvania was very successful for a while; it had some of the richest farmland in the colonies, and the Quakers were exceptional merchants and traders; so much so that they were forgiven their military non-intervention during the Revolution because of their role keeping the American economy afloat in the face of British sanctions.

But by 1750, the Quakers were kind of on their way out; by 1750, they were a demographic minority in Pennsylvania, and by 1773 they were a minority in its legislature as well. In 1750 Quakerism was the third-largest religion in the US; by 1820

it was the ninth-largest, and by 1981 it was the sixty-sixth largest. What happened? The Quakers basically tolerated themselves out of existence. They were so welcoming to religious minorities and immigrants that all these groups took up shop in Pennsylvania and ended its status as a uniquely Quaker society. At the same time, the Quakers themselves became more “fanatical” and many dropped out of politics believing it to be too worldly a concern for them; this was obviously fatal to their political domination. The most famous Pennsylvanian statesman of the Revolutionary era, Benjamin Franklin, was not a Quaker at all but a first-generation immigrant from New England. Finally, Quakerism was naturally extra-susceptible to that thing where Christian denominations become indistinguishable from liberal modernity and fade into the secular background.

But Fischer argues that Quakerism continued to shape Pennsylvania long after it had stopped being officially in charge, in much the same way that Englishmen themselves have contributed disproportionately to American institutions even though they are now a numerical minority. The Pennsylvanian leadership on abolitionism, penal reform, the death penalty, and so on all happened *after* the colony was officially no longer Quaker-dominated.

And it’s hard not to see Quaker influence on the ideas of the modern US – which was after all founded in Philadelphia. In the middle of the Puritans demanding strict obedience to their dystopian hive society and the Cavaliers demanding everybody bow down to a transplanted nobility, the Pennsylvanians – who became the thought leaders of the Mid-Atlantic region including to a limited degree New York City – were pretty normal and had a good opportunity to serve as power-brokers and middlemen between the North and South. Although there are seeds of traditionally American ideas in every region, the Quakers really stand out in terms of freedom of religion, freedom of thought, checks and balances, and the idea of universal equality.

It occurs to me that William Penn might be literally the single most successful person in history. He started out as a minor noble following a religious sect that everybody despised and managed to export its principles to Pennsylvania where they flourished and multiplied. Pennsylvania then managed to export *its* principles to the United States, and the United States exported them to the world. I’m not sure how much of the suspiciously Quaker character of modern society is a direct result of William Penn, but he was in one heck of a right place at one heck of a right time

D: The Borderers

The Borderers are usually called “the Scots-Irish”, but Fischer dislikes the term because they are neither Scots (as we usually think of Scots) nor Irish (as we usually think of Irish). Instead, they’re a bunch of people who lived on (both sides of) the Scottish-English border in the late 1600s.

None of this makes sense without realizing that the Scottish-English border was *terrible*. Every couple of years the King of England would invade Scotland or vice versa; “from the year 1040 to 1745, every English monarch but three suffered a Scottish invasion, or became an invader in his turn”. These “invasions” generally involved burning down all the border towns and killing a bunch of people there. Eventually the two sides started getting *pissed* with each other and would also torture-murder all of the enemy’s citizens they could get their hands on, ie any who were close enough to the border to reach before the enemy could send in their armies. As if this weren’t bad enough, outlaws quickly learned they could plunder one

side of the border, then escape to the other before anyone brought them to justice, so the whole area basically became one giant cesspool of robbery and murder.

In response to these pressures, the border people militarized and stayed feudal long past the point where the rest of the island had started modernizing. Life consisted of farming the lands of whichever brutal warlord had the top hand today, followed by being called to fight for him on short notice, followed by a grisly death. The border people dealt with it as best they could, and developed a culture marked by extreme levels of clannishness, xenophobia, drunkenness, stubbornness, and violence.

By the end of the 1600s, the Scottish and English royal bloodlines had intermingled and the two countries were drifting closer and closer to Union. The English kings finally got some breathing room and noticed – holy frick, everything about the border is *terrible*. They decided to make the region economically productive, which meant “squeeze every cent out of the poor Borderers, in the hopes of either getting lots of money from them or else forcing them to go elsewhere and become somebody else’s problem”. Sometimes absentee landlords would just evict everyone who lived in an entire region, *en masse*, replacing them with people they expected to be easier to control.

Many of the Borderers fled to Ulster in Ireland, which England was working on colonizing as a Protestant bulwark against the Irish Catholics, and where the Crown welcomed violent warlike people as a useful addition to their Irish-Catholic-fighting project. But Ulster had some of the same problems as the Border, and also the Ulsterites started worrying that the Borderer cure was worse than the Irish Catholic disease. So the Borderers started getting kicked out of Ulster too, one thing led to another, and eventually 250,000 of these people ended up in America.

250,000 people is a *lot* of Borderers. By contrast, the great Puritan emigration wave was only 20,000 or so people; even the mighty colony of Virginia only had about 50,000 original settlers. So these people showed up on the door of the American colonies, and the American colonies collectively took one look at them and said “nope”.

Except, of course, the Quakers. The Quakers talked among themselves and decided that these people were also Children Of God, and so they should demonstrate Brotherly Love by taking them in. They tried that for a couple of years, and then they questioned their life choices and *also* said “nope”, and they told the Borderers that Philadelphia and the Delaware Valley were actually kind of full right now but there was lots of unoccupied land in *Western* Pennsylvania, and the Appalachian Mountains were very pretty at this time of year, so why didn’t they head out that way as fast as it was physically possible to go?

At the time, the Appalachians were kind of the booby prize of American colonization: hard to farm, hard to travel through, and exposed to hostile Indians. The Borderers fell in love with them. They came from a pretty marginal and unproductive territory themselves, and the Appalachians were far away from everybody and full of fun Indians to fight. Soon the Appalachian strategy became the accepted response to Borderer immigration and was taken up from Pennsylvania in the north to the Carolinas in the South (a few New Englanders hit on a similar idea and sent their own Borderers to colonize the mountains of New Hampshire).

So the Borderers all went to Appalachia and established their own little rural clans there and nothing at all went wrong except for the entire rest of American history.

INTERESTING BORDERER FACTS:

- 1.** Colonial opinion on the Borderers differed within a very narrow range: one Pennsylvanian writer called them “the scum of two nations”, another Anglican clergyman called them “the scum of the universe”.
- 2.** Some Borderers tried to come to America as indentured servants, but after Virginian planters got some experience with Borderers they refused to accept any more.
- 3.** The Borderers were mostly Presbyterians, and their arrival *en masse* started a race among the established American denominations to convert them. This was mostly unsuccessful; Anglican preacher Charles Woodmason, an important source for information about the early Borderers, said that during his missionary activity the Borderers “disrupted his service, rioted while he preached, started a pack of dogs fighting outside the church, loosed his horse, stole his church key, refused him food and shelter, and gave two barrels of whiskey to his congregation before a service of communion”.
- 4.** Borderer town-naming policy was very different from the Biblical names of the Puritans or the Ye Olde English names of the Virginians. Early Borderer settlements include – just to stick to the creek-related ones – Lousy Creek, Naked Creek, Shitbitches Creek, Cuckold’s Creek, Bloodrun Creek, Pinchgut Creek, Whipping Creek, and Hangover Creek. There were also Whiskey Springs, Hell’s Half Acre, Scream Ridge, Scuffletown, and Grabtown. The overall aesthetic honestly sounds a bit Orcish.
- 5.** One of the first Borderer leaders was John Houston. On the ship over to America, the crew tried to steal some of his possessions; Houston retaliated by leading a mutiny of the passengers, stealing the ship, and sailing it to America himself. He settled in West Virginia; one of his descendants was famous Texan Sam Houston.
- 6.** Traditional Borderer prayer: “Lord, grant that I may always be right, for thou knowest I am hard to turn.”
- 7.** “The backcountry folk bragged that one interior county of North Carolina had so little ‘larnin’ that the only literate inhabitant was elected ‘county reader’”
- 8.** The Borderer accent contained English, Scottish, and Irish elements, and is (uncoincidentally) very similar to the typical “country western singer” accent of today.
- 9.** The Borderers were famous for family feuds in England, including the Johnson clan’s habit of “adorning their houses with the flayed skins of their enemies the Maxwells in a blood feud that continued for many generations”. The great family feuds of the United States, like the Hatfield-McCoy feud, are a direct descendent of this tradition.
- 10.** Within-clan marriage was a popular Borderer tradition both in England and Appalachia; “in the Cumbrian parish of Hawkshead, for example, both the bride and the groom bore the same last names in 25 percent of all marriages from 1568 to 1704”. This led to the modern stereotype of Appalachians as inbred and incestuous.
- 11.** The Borderers were extremely patriarchal and anti-women’s-rights to a degree that appalled even the people of the 1700s.
- 12.** “In the year 1767, [Anglican priest] Charles Woodmason calculated that 94 percent of backcountry brides whom he had married in the past year were pregnant on their wedding day”
- 13.** Although the Borderers started off Presbyterian, they were in constant religious churn and their territories were full of revivals, camp meetings, born-again evangelicalism, and itinerant preachers. Eventually most of them ended up as what we now call Southern Baptist.
- 14.** Borderer folk beliefs: “If an old woman has only one tooth, she is a witch”, “If you are awake at eleven, you will see witches”, “The howling of dogs shows the presence of witches”, “If your shoestring comes untied, witches are after you”, “If a warm current of air is felt, witches are passing”. Also, “wet a rag in your enemy’s blood, put it behind a rock in the chimney, and when it rots your enemy will die”; apparently it

was not a coincidence they were thinking about witches so much.

15. Borderer medical beliefs: “A cure for homesickness is to sew a good charge of gunpowder on the inside of the shirt near the neck”. That’ll cure homesickness, all right.

16. More Borderer medical beliefs: “For fever, cut a black chicken open while alive and bind it to the bottom of your foot”, “Eating the brain of a screech owl is the only dependable remedy for headache”, “For rheumatism, apply split frogs to the feet”, “To reduce a swollen leg, split a live cat and apply while still warm”, “Bite the head off the first butterfly you see and you will get a new dress”, “Open the cow’s mouth and throw a live toad-frog down her throat. This will cure her of hollow-horn”. Also, blacksmiths protected themselves from witches by occasionally throwing live puppies into their furnaces.

17. Rates of public schooling in the backcountry settled by the Borderers were “the lowest in British North America” and sometimes involved rituals like “barring out”, where the children would physically keep the teacher out of the school until he gave in and granted the students the day off.

18. “Appalachia’s idea of a moderate drinker was the mountain man who limited himself to a single quart [of whiskey] at a sitting, explaining that more ‘might fly to my head’. Other beverages were regarded with contempt.”

19. A traditional backcountry sport was “rough and tumble”, a no-holds-barred form of wrestling where gouging out your opponent’s eyes was considered perfectly acceptable and in fact sound strategy. In 1772 Virginia had to pass a law against “gouging, plucking, or putting out an eye”, but this was the Cavalier-dominated legislature all the way on the east coast and nobody in the backcountry paid them any attention. Other traditional backcountry sports were sharpshooting and hunting.

20. The American custom of shooting guns into the air to celebrate holidays is 100% Borderer in origin.

21. The justice system of the backcountry was heavy on lynching, originally a race-neutral practice and named after western Virginian settler William Lynch.

22. Scottish Presbyterians used to wear red cloth around their neck to symbolize their religion; other Englishmen nicknamed them “rednecks”. This *may* be the origin of the popular slur against Americans of Borderer descent, although many other etiologies have been proposed. “Cracker” as a slur is attested as early as 1766 by a colonist who says the term describes backcountry men who are great boasters; other proposed etymologies like slaves talking about “whip-crackers” seem to be spurious.

This is not to paint the Borderers as universally poor and dumb – like every group, they had an elite, and some of their elite went on to become some of America’s most important historical figures. Andrew Jackson became the first Borderer president, behaving *exactly* as you would expect the first Borderer president to behave, and he was followed by almost a dozen others. Borderers have also been overrepresented in America’s great military leaders, from Ulysses Grant through Teddy Roosevelt (3/4 Borderer despite his Dutch surname) to George Patton to John McCain.

The Borderers *really* liked America – unsurprising given where they came from – and started identifying as American earlier and more fiercely than any of the other settlers who had come before. Unsurprisingly, they strongly supported the Revolution – Patrick Henry (“Give me liberty or give me death!”) was a Borderer. They also played a disproportionate role in westward expansion. After the Revolution, America made an almost literal 180 degree turn and the “backcountry” became the “frontier”. It was the Borderers who were happiest going off into the wilderness and fighting Indians, and most of the famous frontiersmen like Davy Crockett were of their number. This was a big part of the reason the Wild West was so wild compared to, say, Minnesota (also a

frontier inhabited by lots of Indians, but settled by Northerners and Germans) and why it inherited seemingly Gaelic traditions like cattle rustling.

Their conception of liberty has also survived and shaped modern American politics: it seems essentially to be the modern libertarian/Republican version of freedom from government interference, especially if phrased as “get the hell off my land”, and *especially* especially if phrased that way through clenched teeth while pointing a shotgun at the offending party.

III.

This is all interesting as history and doubly interesting as anthropology, but what relevance does it have for later American history and the present day?

One of my reasons reading this book was to see whether the link between Americans’ political opinions and a bunch of their other cultural/religious/social traits ([a “Blue Tribe” and “Red Tribe”](#)) was related to the immigration patterns it describes. I’m leaning towards “probably”, but there’s a lot of work to be done in explaining how the split among these four cultures led to a split among two cultures in the modern day, and with little help from the book itself I am going to have to resort to total unfounded speculation. But the simplest explanation – that the Puritans and Quakers merged into one group (“progressives”, “Blue Tribe”, “educated coastal elites”) and the Virginians and Borderers into another (“conservatives”, “Red Tribe”, “rednecks”) – has a lot going for it.

Many conservatives I read like to push the theory that modern progressivism is descended from the utopian Protestant experiments of early America – Puritanism and Quakerism – and that the civil war represents “Massachusetts’ conquest of America”. I always found this lacking in rigor: Puritanism and Quakerism are sufficiently different that positing a combination of them probably needs more intellectual work than just gesturing at “you know, that Puritan/Quaker thing”. But the idea of a Puritan New England and a Quaker-ish Pennsylvania gradually blending together into a generic “North” seems plausible, especially given the high levels of interbreeding between the two (some of our more progressive Presidents, including Abraham Lincoln, were literally half-Puritan and half-Quaker). Such a merge would combine the Puritan emphasis on moral reform, education, and a well-ordered society with the Quaker doctrine of niceness, tolerance, religious pluralism, individual conscience, and the Inner Light. It seems kind of unfair to just mix-and-match the most modern elements of each and declare that this proves they caused modernity, but there’s no reason that *couldn’t* have happened.

The idea of Cavaliers and Borderers combining to form modern conservatism is buoyed by modern conservatism’s obvious Border influences, but complicated by its lack of much that is recognizably Cavalier – the Republican Party is hardly marked by its support for a hereditary aristocracy of gentlemen. Here I have to admit that I don’t know as much about Southern history as I’d like. In particular, how were places like Alabama, Mississippi, et cetera settled? Most sources I can find suggest they were set up along the Virginia model of plantation-owning aristocrats, but if that’s true how did the modern populations come to so embody Fischer’s description of Borderers? In particular, why are they [so Southern Baptist](#) and [not very Anglican](#)? And what happened to all of those indentured servants the Cavaliers brought over after slavery put them out of business? What happened to that whole culture after the Civil War destroyed the plantation system? My *guess* is going to be that the indentured servants and the Borderer population mixed pretty thoroughly, and that this stratum

was hanging around providing a majority of the white bodies in the South while the plantation owners were hogging the limelight – but I just don't know.

A quick argument that I'm not totally making all of this up:



This is a map of voting patterns by county in the 2012 Presidential election. The blue areas in the South carefully track the so-called “black belt” of majority African-American areas. The ones in the Midwest are mostly big cities. Aside from those, the only people who vote Democrat are New England (very solidly!) and the Delaware Valley region of Pennsylvania. In fact, you can easily see the distinction between the Delaware Valley settled by Quakers in the east, and the backcountry area settled by Borderers in the west. Even the book's footnote about how a few Borderers settled in the mountains of New Hampshire is associated with a few spots of red in the mountains of New Hampshire ruining an otherwise near-perfect Democratic sweep of the north.

One anomaly in this story is a kind of linear distribution of blue across southern Michigan, too big to be explained solely by the blacks of Detroit. But a quick look at Wikipedia's [History of Michigan](#) finds:

In the 1820s and 1830s migrants from New England began moving to what is now Michigan in large numbers (though there was a trickle of New England settlers who arrived before this date). These were “Yankee” settlers, that is to say they were descended from the English Puritans who settled New England during the colonial era....Due to the prevalence of New Englanders and New England transplants from upstate New York, Michigan was very culturally contiguous with early New England culture for much of its early history...The amount with which the New England Yankee population predominated made Michigan unique among frontier states in the antebellum period. Due to this heritage Michigan was on the forefront of the antislavery crusade and reforms during the 1840s and 1850s.

Although I can't find proof of this specifically, I know that Michigan was settled from the south up, and I suspect that these New England settlers concentrated in the southern regions and that the north was settled by a more diverse group of whites who lacked the New England connection.

Here's something else cool. We can't track Borderers directly because there's no “Borderer” or “Scots-Irish” option on the US census. But *Albion's Seed* points out that the Borderers were uniquely likely to identify as just “American” and deliberately forgot their past ancestry as fast as they could. Meanwhile, when the census asks an ethnicity question about where your ancestors came from, every year some people will stubbornly ignore the point of the question and put down “America” (no, this does not track the distribution of Native American population). Here's a map of so-called “unhyphenated Americans”, taken from [this site](#):



We see a strong focus on the Appalachian Mountains, especially West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky, bleeding into the rest of the South. Aside from west Pennsylvania, this is very close to where we would expect to find the Borderers. Could these be the same groups?

Meanwhile, here is a map of where Obama underperformed the usual Democratic vote *worst* in 2008:



These maps are small and lossy, and surely unhyphenatedness is not an *exact* proxy for Border ancestry – but they are nevertheless intriguing. You may also be interested in the Washington Post’s correlation between [distribution of unhyphenated Americans and Trump voters](#), or the Atlantic’s article on [Trump and Borderers](#).

If I’m going to map these cultural affiliations to ancestry, do I have to walk back on my previous theory that they are [related to class](#)? Maybe I should. But I also think we can posit complicated interactions between these ideas. Consider for example the interaction between race and class; a black person with a white-sounding name, who speaks with a white-sounding accent, and who adopts white culture (eg listens to classical music, wears business suits) is far more likely to seem upper-class than a black person with a black-sounding name, a black accent, and black cultural preferences; a white person who seems black in some way (listens to hip-hop, wears baggy clothes) is more likely to seem lower-class. This doesn’t mean race and class are exactly the same thing, but it does mean that some races get stereotyped as upper-class and others as lower-class, and that people’s racial identifiers may change based on where they are in the class structure.

I think something similar is probably going on with these forms of ancestry. The education system is probably dominated by descendents of New Englanders and Pennsylvanians; they had an opportunity to influence the culture of academia and the educated classes more generally, they took it, and now anybody of any background who makes it into that world is going to be socialized according to their rules. Likewise, people in poorer and more rural environments will be surrounded by people of Borderer ancestry and acculturated by Borderer cultural products and end up a little more like that group. As a result, ethnic markers have turned into and merged with class markers in complicated ways.

Indeed, some kind of acculturation process has to have been going on, since most of the people in these areas today are not the descendents of the original settlers. But such a process seems very likely. Just to take an example, most of the Jews I know (including my own family) came into the country via New York, live somewhere on the coast, and have very Blue Tribe values. But Southern Jews believed in the Confederacy as strongly as any Virginian – see for example [Judah Benjamin](#). And [Barry Goldwater](#), a half-Jew raised in Arizona, invented the modern version of conservatism that seems closest to some Borderer beliefs.

All of this is very speculative, with some obvious flaws. What do we make of other countries like Britain or Germany with superficially similar splits but very different histories? Why should Puritans lose their religion and sexual prudery, but keep their interest in moralistic reform? There are whole heaps of questions like these. But look. Before I had any idea about any of this, I wrote that American society seems divided into two strata, one of which is marked by emphasis on education, interest in moral reforms, racial tolerance, low teenage pregnancy, academic/financial jobs, and Democratic party affiliation, and furthermore that this group was centered in the North. Meanwhile, now I learn that the North was settled by two groups that when combined have emphasis on education, interest in moral reforms, racial tolerance, low teenage pregnancy, an academic and mercantile history, and were the heartland of the historical Whigs and Republicans who preceded the modern Democratic Party.

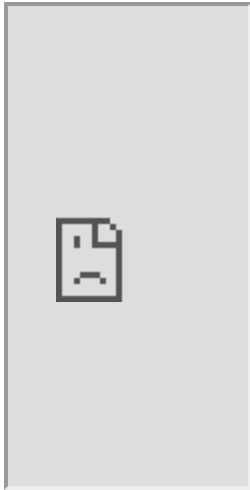
And I wrote about another stratum centered in the South marked by poor education, gun culture, culture of violence, xenophobia, high teenage pregnancy, militarism, patriotism, country western music, and support for the Republican Party. And now I learn that the South was settled by a group noted even in the 1700s for its poor education, gun culture, culture of violence, xenophobia, high premarital pregnancy, militarism, patriotism, accent exactly like the modern country western accent, and support for the Democratic-Republicans who preceded the modern Republican Party.

If this is true, I think it paints a very pessimistic world-view. The “iceberg model” of culture argues that apart from the surface cultural features we all recognize like language, clothing, and food, there are deeper levels of culture that determine the features and institutions of a people: whether they are progressive or traditional, peaceful or warlike, mercantile or self-contained. We grudgingly acknowledge these features when we admit that maybe making the Middle East exactly like America in every way is more of a long-term project than something that will happen as soon as we kick out the latest dictator and get treated as liberators. Part of us may still want to believe that pure reason is the universal solvent, that those Afghans will come around once they realize that being a secular liberal democracy is obviously great. But we keep having deep culture shoved in our face again and again, and we don’t know how to get rid of it. This has led to reasonable speculation that some aspects of it might even be genetic – something which would explain a lot, though not its ability to acculturate recent arrivals.

This is a hard pill to swallow even when we’re talking about Afghanistan. But it becomes doubly unpleasant when we think about it in the sense of our neighbors and fellow citizens in a modern democracy. What, after all, is the point? A democracy made up of 49% extremely liberal Americans and 51% fundamentalist Taliban Afghans would be something very different from the democratic ideal; even if occasionally a super-charismatic American candidate could win over enough marginal Afghans to take power, there’s none of the give-and-take, none of the competition within the marketplace of ideas, that makes democracy so attractive. Just two groups competing to dominate one another, with the fact that the competition is peaceful being at best a consolation prize.

If America is best explained as a Puritan-Quaker culture locked in a death-match with a Cavalier-Borderer culture, with all of the appeals to freedom and equality and order and justice being just so many epiphenomena – well, I’m not sure what to do with that information. Push it under the rug? Say “Well, my culture is better, so I intend to do as good a job dominating yours as possible?” Agree that We Are Very Different Yet In The End All The Same And So Must Seek Common Ground? Start researching genetic engineering? Maybe secede? I’m not a Trump fan much more than I’m an Osama bin Laden fan; if somehow Osama ended up being elected President, should I start thinking “Maybe that time we made a country that was 49% people like me and 51% members of the Taliban – *maybe that was a bad idea*”.

I don’t know. But I highly recommend Albion’s Seed as an entertaining and enlightening work of historical scholarship which will be absolutely delightful if you don’t fret too much over all of the existential questions it raises.



Albion's Seed, Genotyped

Last year [I reviewed *Albion's Seed*](#), historian David Fischer's work on the four great English migrations to America (and JayMan continues the story in his series on [American Nations](#)). These early migrations help explain modern regional patterns like why Massachusetts is so liberal or why Appalachia seems so backwards. As always, there's the lingering question of how much of these patterns are cultural versus genetic versus gene-cultural interaction.

Now Han et al take this field high-tech with the publication of [Clustering Of 770,000 Genomes Reveals Post-Colonial Population Structure Of North America](#) (h/t gwern, werttrew)

The team looked at 770,000 genomes analyzed by the AncestryDNA company and used a technique called identity-by-descent to find recent common ancestors. Then they used some other techniques to divide them into natural clusters. This is what they got:



This is the European-settler-focused map – there's another one focusing on immigrant groups lower down [here](#)

This is kind of beautiful. While not exactly matching *Albion's Seed*, it at least clearly shows its New Englander and Pennsylvania Quaker migrations (more realistically the Germans who came along with the Quakers), with less distinct signals for Borderers and Virginians. It shows how they spread directly west from their place of origin in almost exactly the way *American Nations* predicted. It even confirms my own conjecture that the belt of Democrat voters along southern Michigan corresponds to an area of New Englander settlement there (see part III [here](#), or search “linear distribution of blue”). And it confirms Razib Khan's observation that [the Mormons are just displaced New Englanders](#) and that their various unusual demographic features make sense in that context.

My biggest confusion is in the Southern/Appalachian region. I think Fischer would have predicted two distinct strains: a Tidewater/Virginian population along the coasts, and a Borderer/Appalachian population centered in West Virginia and Kentucky. Instead there are three populations, all of which start along the Atlantic Coast and continue inland in about the same way. Assuming red/“Appalachian” is the Borderers, I don't know if Fischer has a good explanation for the purple/“upland south” vs. gold/“lower south” distinction. Nor I do get understand why, if one of those two represent the Tidewater Virginians, they don't seem to be in the Tidewater Virginia region (which here is inhabited mostly by Borderers). Maybe this has something to do with the Civil War, or with the growth of the DC suburbs?

(And I guess we still haven't ruled out the maximally boring explanation that interbreeding is entirely geographic and north-south is a bigger distinction than east-west so we're just seeing the country divided into five equal-sized latitudinal bands.)

Not exactly a confusion, but more a disappointment: this map doesn't provide the confirmation I'd hoped for that Californians, Seattleites, and other “Left Coasters” are displaced New Englanders – which would complete the circle of “Liberal Democrats = Puritan/Quaker population subgroup”. It's also disappointing how little data they have

for the Mountain West in general; I don't know if that's because there weren't enough people there to show up, or because they're a mix of every genetic lineage and don't fit into any of the clusters nicely.

Still, I find this a really elegant example of hard science confirming historical speculation. Thanks to everyone who brought it to my attention.

[EDIT: Jayman [goes much more into depth on this](#)]

Society Is Fixed, Biology Is Mutable

Today during an otherwise terrible lecture on ADHD I realized something important we get sort of backwards.

There's this stereotype that the Left believes that human characteristics are socially determined, and therefore mutable. And social problems are easy to fix, through things like education and social services and [public awareness campaigns](#) and "calling people out", and so we have a responsibility to fix them, thus radically improving society and making life better for everyone.

But the Right (by now I guess the far right) believes human characteristics are *biologically* determined, and biology is fixed. Therefore we shouldn't bother trying to improve things, and any attempt is just utopianism or "immanentizing the eschaton" or a shady justification for tyranny and busybodyness.

And I think I reject this whole premise.

See, my terrible lecture on ADHD suggested several reasons for the increasing prevalence of the disease. Of these I remember two: the spiritual desert of modern adolescence, and insufficient iron in the diet. And I remember thinking "Man, I hope it's the iron one, because that seems a *lot* easier to fix."

Society is *really hard to change*. We figured drug use was "just" a social problem, and it's *obvious* how to solve social problems, so we gave kids nice little lessons in school about how you should Just Say No. There were advertisements in sports and video games about how Winners Don't Do Drugs. And just in case that didn't work, the cherry on the social engineering sundae was putting all the drug users in jail, where they would have a lot of time to think about what they'd done and be so moved by the prospect of further punishment that they would come clean.

And that is why, even to this day, nobody uses drugs.

On the other hand, biology is gratifyingly easy to change. Sometimes it's just giving people more iron supplements. But the best example is lead. Banning lead was probably kind of controversial at the time, but in the end some refineries probably had to change their refining process and some gas stations had to put up "UNLEADED" signs and then we were done. And crime [dropped](#) like fifty percent in a couple of decades - including many forms of drug abuse.

Saying "Tendency toward drug abuse is primarily determined by fixed brain structure" sounds callous, like you're abandoning drug abusers to die. But maybe it means you can fight the problem head-on instead of forcing kids to attend more and more [useless](#) classes where cartoon animals sing about how happy they are not using cocaine.

What about obesity? We put a *lot* of social effort into fighting obesity: labeling foods, banning soda machines from school, banning large sodas from New York, programs in schools to promote healthy eating, doctors chewing people out when they gain weight, the profusion of gyms and Weight Watchers programs, and let's not forget a level of stigma against obese people so strong that I am *constantly* having to deal with their weight-related suicide attempts. As a result, everyone...keeps gaining weight at exactly the same rate they have been for the past couple decades. Wouldn't

it be nice if increasing obesity was driven at least in part by [changes in the intestinal microbiota](#) that we could reverse through careful antibiotic use? Or by trans-fats?

What about poor school performance? From the social angle, we try No Child Left Behind, Common Core Curriculum, stronger teachers' unions, weaker teachers' unions, more pay for teachers, less pay for teachers, more prayer in school, banning prayer in school, condemning racism, condemning racism even more, et cetera. But the poorest fifth or so of kids [show spectacular cognitive gains from multivitamin supplementation](#), and doctors continue [to tell everyone schools should start later so children can get enough sleep](#) and continue to be totally ignored despite [strong evidence in favor](#).

Even the most politically radioactive biological explanation – genetics – doesn't seem that scary to me. The more things turn out to be genetic, the more I support universal funding for implantable contraception that allow people to choose when they do or don't want children – thus breaking the cycle where people too impulsive or confused to use contraception have more children and increase frequency of those undesirable genes. I think I'd have a heck of a lot easier a time changing gene frequency in the population than you would changing people's locus of control or self-efficacy or whatever, even if I wasn't allowed to do anything immoral (except by very silly religious standards of "immoral").

I'm not saying that all problems are purely biological and none are social. But I do worry there's a consensus that biological things are unfixable but social things are easy – or that social solutions are morally unambiguous but biological solutions necessarily monstrous – and so for any given biological/social breakdown of a problem, we figure we might as well put all our resources into attacking the more tractable social side and dismiss the biological side. I think there's a sense in which that's backwards, and in which it's possible to marry scientific rigor with human compassion for the evils of the world.

A Philosopher Walks Into A Coffee Shop

I have been really enjoying literarystarbucks.tumblr.com, which publishes complicated jokes about what famous authors and fictional characters order at Starbucks. I like it so much I wish I knew more great literature, so I could get more of the jokes.

Since the creators seem to be restricting themselves to the literary world, I hope they won't mind if I fail to resist the temptation to steal their technique for my own field of interest. Disclaimer: two of these are widely-known philosophy jokes and not original to me.

* * *

Parmenides goes up to the counter. "Same as always?" asks the barista. Parmenides nods.

* * *

Pythagoras goes up to the counter and orders a caffe Americano. "Mmmmm," he says, tasting it. "How do you guys make such good coffee?" "It's made from the freshest beans," the barista answers. Pythagoras screams and runs out of the store.

* * *

Thales goes up to the counter, says he's trying to break his caffeine habit, and orders a decaf. The barista hands it to him. He takes a sip and spits it out. "Yuck!" he says. "What is this, water?"

* * *

Gottfried Leibniz goes up to the counter and orders a muffin. The barista says he's lucky since there is only one muffin left. Isaac Newton shoves his way up to the counter, saying Leibniz cut in line and he was first. Leibniz insists that he was first. The two of them come to blows.

* * *

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel goes up to the counter and gives a tremendously long custom order in German, specifying exactly how much of each sort of syrup he wants, various espresso shots, cream in exactly the right pattern, and a bunch of toppings, all added in a specific order at a specific temperature. The barista can't follow him, so just gives up and hands him a small plain coffee. He walks away. The people behind him in line are very impressed with his apparent expertise, and they all order the same thing Hegel got. The barista gives each of them a small plain coffee, and they all remark on how delicious it tastes and what a remarkable coffee connoisseur that Hegel is. "The Hegel" becomes a new Starbucks special and is wildly popular for the next seventy years.

* * *

Socrates goes up to the counter. "What would you like?" asks the barista. "What would you recommend?" asks Socrates. "I would go with the pumpkin spice latte," says the barista. "Why?" asks Socrates. "It's seasonal," she answers. "But why exactly is a seasonal drink better than a non-seasonal drink?" "Well," said the barista, "I guess it helps to connect you to the rhythm of the changing seasons." "But do you do other things to connect yourself to that rhythm?" asked Socrates. "Like wear seasonal clothing? Or read seasonal books? If not, how come it's only drinks that are seasonal?" "I'm not sure," says the barista. "Think about it," says Socrates, and leaves without getting anything.

* * *

Rene Descartes goes up to the counter. "I'll have a scone," he says. "Would you like juice with that?" asks the barista. "I think not," says Descartes, and he ceases to exist.

* * *

Jean-Paul Sartre goes up to the counter. "What do you want?" asks the barista. Sartre thinks for a long while. "What *do*? I want?" he asks, and wanders off with a dazed look on his face.

* * *

William of Occam goes up to the counter. He orders a coffee.

* * *

Adam Smith goes up to the counter. "I'll have a muffin," he says. "Sorry," says the barista, "but those two are fighting over the last muffin." She points to Leibniz and Newton, who are still beating each other up. "I'll pay \$2 more than the sticker price, and you can keep the extra," says Smith. The barista hands him the muffin.

* * *

John Buridan goes up to the counter and stares at the menu indecisively.

* * *

Ludwig Wittgenstein goes up to the counter. "I'll have a small toffee mocha," he says. "We don't have small," says the barista. "Then what sizes do you have?" "Just tall, grande, and venti." "Then doesn't that make 'tall' a 'small'?" "We call it tall," says the barista. Wittgenstein pounds his fist on the counter. "Tall has no meaning separate from the way it is used! You are just playing meaningless language games!" He storms out in a huff.

* * *

St. Anselm goes up to the counter and considers the greatest coffee of which it is possible to conceive. Since existence is more perfect than nonexistence, the coffee must exist. He brings it back to his table and drinks it.

* * *

Ayn Rand goes up to the counter. "What do you want?" asks the barista. "Exactly the relevant question. As a rational human being, it is my desires that are paramount.

Since as a reasoning animal I have the power to choose, and since I am not bound by any demand to subordinate my desires to that of an outside party who wishes to use force or guilt to make me sacrifice my values to their values or to the values of some purely hypothetical collective, it is what I want that is imperative in this transaction. However, since I am dealing with you, and you are also a rational human being, under capitalism we have an opportunity to mutually satisfy our values in a way that leaves both of us richer and more fully human. You participate in the project of affirming my values by providing me with the coffee I want, and by paying you I am not only incentivizing you for the transaction, but giving you a chance to excel as a human being in the field of producing coffee. You do not produce the coffee because I am demanding it, or because I will use force against you if you do not, but because it most thoroughly represents your own values, particularly the value of creation. You would not make this coffee for me if it did not serve you in some way, and therefore by satisfying my desires you also reaffirm yourself. Insofar as you make inferior coffee, I will reject it and you will go bankrupt, but insofar as your coffee is truly excellent, a reflection of the excellence in your own soul and your achievement as a rationalist being, it will attract more people to your store, you will gain wealth, and you will be able to use that wealth further in pursuit of excellence as you, rather than some bureaucracy or collective, understand it. That is what it truly means to be a superior human.” “Okay, but what do you want?” asks the barista. “Really I just wanted to give that speech,” Rand says, and leaves.

* * *

Voltaire goes up to the counter and orders an espresso. He takes it and goes to his seat. The barista politely reminds him he has not yet paid. Voltaire stays seated, saying “I believe in freedom of espresso.”

* * *

Thomas Malthus goes up to the counter and orders a muffin. The barista tells him somebody just took the last one. Malthus grumbles that the Starbucks is getting too crowded and there’s never enough food for everybody.

* * *

Immanuel Kant goes up to the counter at exactly 8:14 AM. The barista has just finished making his iced cinnamon dolce latte, and hands it to him. He sips it for eight minutes and thirty seconds, then walks out the door.

* * *

Bertrand Russell goes up to the counter and orders the Hegel. He takes one sip, then exclaims “This just tastes like plain coffee! Why is everyone making such a big deal over it?”

* * *

Pierre Proudhon goes up to the counter and orders a Tazo Green Tea with toffee nut syrup, two espresso shots, and pumpkin spice mixed in. The barista warns him that this will taste terrible. “Pfah!” scoffs Proudhon. “Proper tea is theft!”

* * *

Sigmund Freud goes up to the counter. "I'll have ass sex, presto," he says. "What?!" asks the barista. "I said I'll have iced espresso." "Oh," said the barista. "For a moment I misheard you." "Yeah," Freud tells her. "I fucked my mother. People say that." "WHAT?!" asks the barista. "I said, all of the time other people say that."

* * *

Jeremy Bentham goes up to the counter, holding a \$50 bill. "What's the cheapest drink you have?" he asks. "That would be our decaf roast, for only \$1.99," says the barista. "Good," says Bentham and hands her the \$50. "I'll buy those for the next twenty-five people who show up."

* * *

Patricia Churchland walks up to the counter and orders a latte. She sits down at a table and sips it. "Are you enjoying your beverage?" the barista asks. "No," says Churchland.

* * *

Friedrich Nietzsche goes up to the counter. "I'll have a scone," he says. "Would you like juice with that?" asks the barista. "No, I hate juice," says Nietzsche. The barista misinterprets him as saying "I hate Jews", so she kills all the Jews in Europe.

The Witching Hour

On an ordinary evening, Tal Aivon was lively and pleasant. The collection of longhouses and yurts within its tall brick walls shone bright with kerosene – not just torches, real kerosene – and its communal meeting area was noisy with conversation and song. The children would be playing their games, and on the eves of holy days the Lorekeepers would chant their stories of the Lost World, accompanied by lyres and the town's one decaying gyitar.

Tonight, though, a pall lay on Tal Aivon. The six gates of its tall brick walls were barred and shut, and foreboding warriors dressed in odd combinations of Kevlar and steel armor stood just within them, brandishing their swords. Families locked themselves in their yurts and longhouses, huddled around little kerosene lanterns. In the temple, the priests knelt before the stone idols of St. Christ and St. Mahomet, chanting plaintive prayers for protection.

"I still don't understand," Meical Dorn complained, from inside the longest longhouse "what this is all about. "None of the wildlings are anywhere nearby – I should know, I've came through two hundred miles of forest to get here – and the only three towns in this area are at peace with you. In Great Rabda, even an impending attack couldn't make us cower inside like this. I have half a mind to think there's something you're not telling me, Fin. Something that might...threaten our deal."

Fin Lerisas, Chief Lorekeeper for Tal Aivon, sighed. "Nothing that would threaten our deal, Meical. Great Rabda has gold. We have sunblessings. Just stay here long enough for our bankers to figure out the price, and you'll have timers and mathers and lighters of your very own."

Meical glanced longingly at the Chief Lorekeeper's own sunblessing, a timer that stood on the shelf of his private room. 1:52 AM gleamed on its face, with an maddeningly smooth red glow unlike sunlight or moonlight or firelight. Yet Meical knew it was sunlight, or something like. He was the Lorekeeper of Great Rabda. The Lorekeepers of Tal Aivon were far wiser than he – how could they not be with the town's close proximity to ruined Diteroi and its trove of artifacts from the Lost World – but even he knew how sunblessings worked. You took them outside and the blue tiles on their surface fed on sunlight. Then they worked various miracles. Timers would tell you the time far more precisely than any sundial – invaluable in keeping the schedule of sacred prayer decreed by St. Mahomet. Mathers would add and subtract quantities more quickly than the fastest savant. Lighters would shine at night without wood or kerosene.

Meical had no doubt that the Lorekeepers of Tal Aivon – the wisest on the Great Peninsula – knew of still other sunblessings, ones that mighty but lore-deficient Great Rabda had never heard of. He himself would be happy with anything – even the meanest timer. Of all the millions of wonders built by the Lost World, only the sunblessings still worked, and they were in fiendishly short supply. While lore-rich Tal Aivon had a timer upon each of its six gates, Great Rabda, for all its bountiful gold and grain, had not a single sunblessing to call its own. As its Lorekeeper, it would aid his status immensely if this trade mission was successful and he could bring something back to demonstrate the power of the Lost World and, incidentally, his own importance as keeper of its Lore.

But even his greed for power did not override his concern for his own safety. "I'm serious, Fin. I want to know what's going on. I can't deal with a city that won't even tell me why it's on high alert."

Fin Lerisas, Chief Lorekeeper of Tal Aivon and wisest in ancient matters on the whole Great Peninsula, gave another sigh. "If you were not a Lorekeeper yourself, I would not sure such secrets with a foreigner. But if it threatens the deal, very well. Only know that you will be no happier with this knowledge, and that you may not sleep quite as soundly on autumn nights from now on."

Meical gave a nod, indicating he wanted the old man to continue.

"In Great Rabda you have no sunblessings, and so you must keep the time like wildlings, by watching the course of the sun. Here in Tal Aivon we have six timers, one on each of the city gates, and so everyone down to the meanest peasant knows the time, down to the second. To most, they check the time when they enter the city, and the time when they leave the city, and they never think any more of it. We Lorekeepers are more astute, but not infinitely so. And so it was only forty years ago, in the time when my uncle Derech was Chief Lorekeeper, that we noticed" (and here his voice changed to a whisper) "*that there is something wrong with Time.*"

"The stars," he continued "sometimes match the time as told by the timers, and sometimes they do not. At first we thought the flaw was in the heavens themselves, so perfect are the devices of the Lost World. But this so discomfited my uncle that for three months he sat in front of this very timer, handing it off to an acolyte only when he slept. And one night, his watch bore fruit."

"What happened?" asked Meical, breathlessly.

"Time moved backwards," said Fin.

"Impossible," said Meical.

"It was on this very night," said Fin. "Time, which three hundred sixty four days of the year moves only in one direction, suddenly jumped backwards. And you yourself will witness it."

He pointed to the timer on his shelf, which now read 1:59 AM. Its red glow suddenly looked unfriendly, even eerie. Even though Meical knew it had to be sunlight at its root, it held none of the wholesomeness of the sun.

And then it changed. 1:59 turned to 1:00.

Meical gasped, and his fingers instantly formed the cross of St. Jesus and then the crescent of St. Mahomet. "Madness!" he whispered.

"Something," said Fin, "is wrong with this night. It is not always this night - it can come as early as three days before, or as late as three days after. My uncle worked out the formula after several years. But every year, it happens. Time jumps backwards."

"But why?" asked Meical. "Why would the gods do such a thing? Why would they break the symmetry of the True Time and the heavens?"

"That's the worst part," said Fin. "When I was younger, I looked over my uncle's formula – the one for calculating the day when the time skip would happen – and found what he had missed. The day of the time skip is fixed to the seven day calendar of the Lost World. To the ancients, it would always occur on the same day of the week. Sunday. Their holy day."

Meical felt his blood run cold. "That's...some coincidence."

"Perhaps," said Fin. "But I don't think it *is* a coincidence. The gods are just. They would not play with Time as children play with blocks, picking one up here, then putting it down far away. I think the ancients of the Lost World, the ones who could build the great glass towers, the ones who manufactured sunblessings, the ones who made Diteroi-That-Was – I think they took their magic and threw it against time, and broke it. I think they wanted to become lords of time itself."

"But they failed," guessed Meical.

"They created a single hour," said Fin. "Of the nine thousand hours in a year, all but one were made by the gods, but one was made by Man. What stopped them from creating more, from creating an infinite number of hours, from becoming immortal by arresting the progression of Time? We will never know. But it is my belief that when they saw what men had done, the gods stopped them before they could do worse. Meical, I believe that is how the Lost World ended. A last ditch effort by the gods to save Time itself from the hubris of Man."

Meical was silent. For all their wisdom, none of the Lorekeepers claimed to know how the Lost World ended. Surely the gods had pulverized it for some offense, but what sin could have been so dire as to doom those magnificent glass towers, those great black roads as smooth as water? Meical looked at the clock, gleaming 1:03 AM, and knew. Knew in his heart that Fin was right.

"There is a day in the very early springtime," said Fin, "when an hour disappears. The gods are stingy. They would not grant the ancients their victory. What they did with that hour in springtime, I do not know. But their message is clear."

Meical shuddered again. Like all the inhabitants of Great Rabda, he had told the time with the sun and the stars. But it had always been an approximation, not the to-the-second True Time displayed on the six gates of Tal Aivon. And so in their ignorance they had missed no fewer than two violations of Time, and it had fallen to the people of Tal Aivon alone to guard these terrible secrets.

"You ask why we extinguish our fires and pray this night. Nine thousand hours in the year were made by the gods, but one was made by Man. I cannot help but wonder what walks abroad, during the hour no god made. I cannot help but wonder what spirits awake on the anniversary of the old world's death. When time itself stands stagnant, what sorts of things breed within it? I prefer not to think about such things. That is why for the past forty years, ever since my discovery, I have knelt with the priests in the temple, and joined in their prayers. With an honored guest such as yourself here, I thought to entertain you instead, to avoid worrying you. Now I see that thought was vain. Will you come to the temple and pray with me?"

And so on the longest night of the year, Fin Lerisas, Chief Lorekeeper of Tal Aivon, and Meical Dorn, Lorekeeper of Great Rabda, knelt in the temple and prayed to St. Jesus and St. Mahomet that time continue, that 1:59 AM be followed by 2:00 AM just as it always had in the past, and that the people be forgiven the sins of the Lost World,

which had dared to change Time itself. And lo, at the appointed hour the six clocks on the six gates of Tal Aivon showed 2 AM, and the people rejoiced, and the kerosene lights were lit and the city of Tal Aivon was lively and pleasant once again.

Three days later, Meical Dorn left Tal Aivon minus the gold he had brought but with a sunblessing of his own, a beautiful slate-gray mather that would have the engineers of Great Rabda dancing with glee. They had offered him a timer instead, a beautiful digital timer that even played short tunes at different hours, but Meical had refused. He bore a secret that need not trouble the people of Great Rabda. They would have a mather, and calculate things lightning-quick, and never know that there was a flaw in Time that even the gods themselves could not resolve.

But until the day he died, every so often on chill autumn nights Meical Dorn would look up at the stars and shudder.