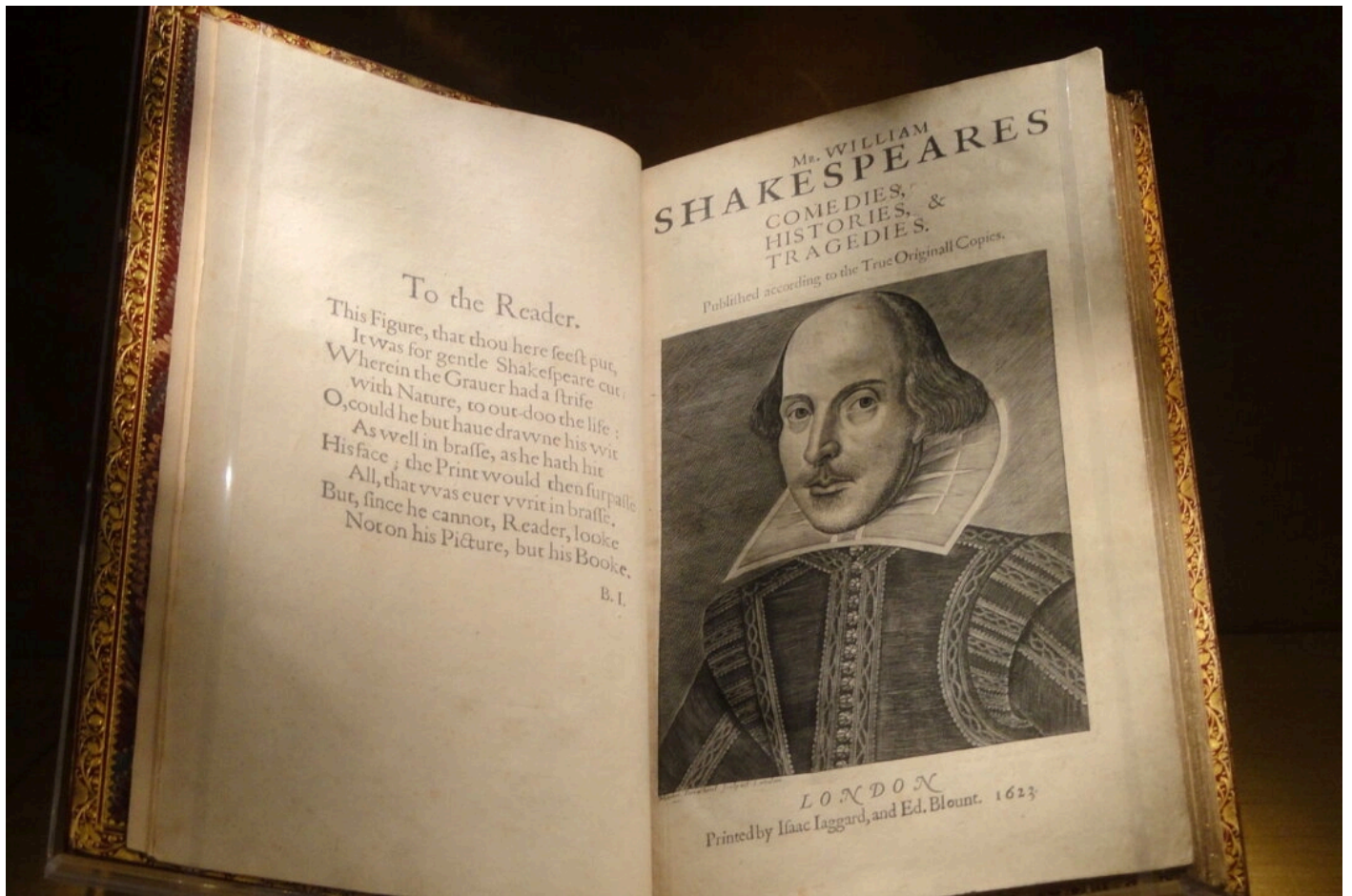


Experts Against Themselves

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The First Folio at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C. The First Folio is the earliest known printing of 36 of Shakespeare's plays. Public Domain



By Mark Bauerlein

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Commentary

A strange thing is happening in cultural and educational institutions in the United States. We hear a lot about populist disgust with

academia, state bureaucracies, media, and other elite spheres. At the same time, however, we see literal elites themselves trash those institutions, often while occupying high posts within them. They label Trump voters ignorant and anti-intellectual when those individuals echo the president-elect when he calls the networks fake news and the campus centers of indoctrination, but some of them turn around and level even worse charges at the very places in which they've climbed the ladder and achieved remarkable success.



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Some examples:



The editor of Scientific American (who just resigned her post) has devoted numerous stories in recent years to reprimanding the fields for their bigotry. An article with the title “Doctors Do Racist Things to Patients. Here Are Seven Ways They Can Stop” opened with this



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indictment: “As many doctors are starting to realize, they are not passive agents in a racist society and health care system: their actions (and inactions) contribute to health disparities.”

An article from August 2021 had the headline, “[Modern Mathematics Confronts Its White, Patriarchal Past](#),” while another one told us in 2020 that “[Racism and Sexism in Science Haven't Disappeared](#).” There are many more similarly censorious pieces. It is important to note that the point of these stories is not to uncover specific incidents of discrimination. Scientific American circa 2023 targets the entire system, the common practice of working scientists and doctors. In other words, a magazine formerly devoted to the marvels of scientific inquiry has become under its recent editorial team a scold charging science and scientists with the worst social crimes.

Another example is the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C., one of the great literary archives and museums in the [world](#). There, one can view rare books and manuscripts by and related to The Bard, attend seminars and book clubs, and enjoy performances of the plays. The founder of the library, Henry Folger, idolized Shakespeare and set his institution just behind the U.S. Capitol as a mecca for all Americans to share the playwright's genius.

Last year, however, Folger decided to hire an executive director who has a contrary [point of view](#). She believes that the whole idea of Shakespeare as Bard is just another tool of white colonialism. Recently, she has argued, “the construction of Shakespeare as the ‘Bard’ was itself instrumentalized within the British colonial project, as a national poet and as an [icon of white heritage](#).” It’s okay to love Shakespeare, she says, just remember that he’s implicated in race politics and empire. Again, we have a leader pulling down the very thing her institution was created to exalt.

There are many more examples. College presidents are supposed to uphold their campuses as beacons of learning and integrity, but in the wake of George Floyd many of them alleged that their schools’ own policies have been and still are fraught with [racism](#).

In 2021, the American Psychiatric Association issued a [formal apology](#) for “its support of structural racism in psychiatry.” And how many institutions berate themselves with [land acknowledgements](#) recited at the start of events and posted on home pages? Sometimes, the actions aren’t political at all but instead involve changes of policy that subvert the longstanding mission of the enterprise. The National Council of Teachers of English recently advised instructors to “[decenter book reading](#) and essay writing as the pinnacles of English Language Arts education,” an astonishing abandonment of the core of the discipline (one which will only maintain the trend of declining reading and writing scores).

As I said, it’s a strange form of masochism—or maybe we shouldn’t call it masochism given that it is instrumental to the prosperity of the ones who voice these criticisms and apologies. Political correctness demands it—it’s a job requirement. The posture of guilt has become a sign of worthiness, whereby one’s willingness to acknowledge the sins of an institution qualifies one to lead that institution. By questioning its traditional aims and foundations, leaders prove their enlightened condition to the ones who count, their peers and supporters. I’ve seen it in action many times at conferences, in interviews, and on talk shows, where it unfolds in the same way that a skilled laborer showing up for a job call brandishes his union card when he enters the room.

A change has happened, though. While this advanced mode of virtue signaling impresses those within and somehow related to the institution, it no longer flies among the majority of Americans. Outsiders interpret these actions rightly as betrayals of trust. They want elites to stand strong, to make them feel good about their country, their heroes, traditions, arts, and schools, not feel ashamed of them.

Laymen and women now have a ready answer to those leaders criticizing the institutions they lead: not “How noble you are to be so honest and sensitive,” but instead, “If you don’t like this place, then why don’t you resign?”

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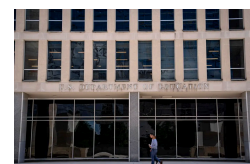
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