USA: How the right invented "political correctness" as a phantom enemy

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For 25 years, invoking this vague and ever-shifting nemesis has been a favourite tactic of the right – and Donald Trump's victory is its greatest triumph.

Three weeks ago, around a quarter of the American population elected a demagogue with no prior experience in public service to the presidency. In the eyes of many of his supporters, this lack of preparation was not a liability, but a strength. [Donald Trump](#) had run as a candidate whose primary qualification was that he was not "a politician". Depicting yourself as a "maverick" or an "outsider" crusading against a corrupt Washington establishment is the oldest trick in American politics – but Trump took things further. He broke countless unspoken rules regarding what public figures can or cannot do and say.

Every demagogue needs an enemy. Trump's was the ruling elite, and his charge was that they were not only failing to solve the greatest problems facing Americans, they were trying to stop anyone from even talking about those problems. "The special interests, the arrogant media, and the political insiders, don't want me to talk about the crime that is happening in our country," Trump said in one [late September speech](#). "They want me to just go along with the same failed policies that have caused so much needless suffering."

Trump claimed that Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton were willing to let ordinary Americans suffer because their first priority was political correctness. "They have put political correctness above common sense, above your safety, and above all else," Trump declared after a Muslim gunman killed 49 people at a gay nightclub in Orlando. "I refuse to be politically correct." What liberals might have seen as language changing to reflect an increasingly diverse society – in which citizens attempt to avoid giving needless offence to one another – Trump saw a conspiracy.

Throughout an erratic campaign, Trump consistently blasted political correctness, blaming it for an extraordinary range of ills and using the phrase to deflect any and every criticism. During the first debate of the Republican primaries, Fox News host Megyn Kelly asked Trump how he would answer the charge that he was "part of the war on women".

"You've called women you don't like 'fat pigs,' 'dogs,' 'slobs,' and 'disgusting animals'," Kelly pointed out. "You once told a contestant on Celebrity Apprentice it would be a pretty picture to see her on her knees …"

"I think the big problem this country has is being politically correct," Trump answered, to audience applause. "I've been challenged by so many people, I don't frankly have time for total political correctness. And to be honest with you, this country doesn't have time either."

Trump used the same defence when critics raised questions about his statements on immigration. In June 2015, after Trump referred to Mexicans as "rapists", NBC, the network that aired his reality show The Apprentice, announced that it was [ending its relationship with him](#). Trump's team retorted

that, "NBC is weak, and like everybody else is trying to be politically correct."

In August 2016, after saying that the US district judge Gonzalo Curiel of San Diego was [unfit to preside over the lawsuit](#) against Trump Universities because he was Mexican American and therefore likely to be biased against him, [Trump told CBS News](#) that this was "common sense". He continued: "We have to stop being so politically correct in this country."During the second presidential debate, Trump answered a question about his proposed "ban on Muslims" by stating: "[We could be very politically correct](#), but whether we like it or not, there is a problem."

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Every time Trump said something "outrageous" commentators suggested he had finally crossed a line and that his campaign was now doomed. But time and again, Trump supporters made it clear that they liked him because he wasn't afraid to say what he thought. Fans praised the way Trump talked much more often than they mentioned his policy proposals. He tells it like it is, they said. He speaks his mind. He is not politically correct.

Trump and his followers never defined "political correctness", or specified who was enforcing it. They did not have to. The phrase conjured powerful forces determined to suppress inconvenient truths by policing language.

There is an obvious contradiction involved in complaining at length, to an audience of hundreds of millions of people, that you are being silenced. But this idea – that there is a set of powerful, unnamed actors, who are trying to control everything you do, right down to the words you use – is trending globally right now. Britain's rightwing tabloids issue frequent denunciations of "political correctness gone mad" and rail against the smug hypocrisy of the "metropolitan elite". In Germany, conservative journalists and politicians are making similar complaints: after the assaults on women in Cologne last New Year's Eve, for instance, the chief of police Rainer Wendt said that leftists pressuring officers to be *politisch korrekt*had prevented them from doing their jobs. In France, Marine Le Pen of the Front National has condemned more traditional conservatives as "[paralysed by their fear of confronting political correctness](#)".

Trump's incessant repetition of the phrase has led many writers since the election to argue that the secret to his victory was a backlash against excessive "political correctness". Some have argued that Hillary Clinton failed because she was too invested in that close relative of political correctness, "identity politics". But upon closer examination, "political correctness" becomes an impossibly slippery concept. The term is what Ancient Greek rhetoricians would have called an "exonym": a term for another group, which signals that the speaker does not belong to it. Nobody ever describes themselves as "politically correct". The phrase is only ever an accusation.

If you say that something is *technically* correct, you are suggesting that it is wrong – the adverb before "correct" implies a "but". However, to say that a statement is *politically* correct hints at something more insidious. Namely, that the speaker is acting in bad faith. He or she has ulterior motives, and is hiding the truth in order to advance an agenda or to signal moral superiority. To say that someone is being "politically correct" discredits them twice. First, they are wrong. Second, and more damningly, they know it.

If you go looking for the origins of the phrase, it becomes clear that there is no neat history of political correctness. There have only been campaigns *against* something called "political correctness". For 25 years, invoking this vague and ever-shifting enemy has been a favourite tactic of the right. Opposition to political correctness has proved itself a highly effective form of crypto-

politics. It transforms the political landscape by acting as if it is not political at all. Trump is the deftest practitioner of this strategy yet.

Most Americans had never heard the phrase "politically correct" before 1990, when a wave of stories began to appear in newspapers and magazines. One of the first and most influential was published in October 1990 by the New York Times reporter Richard Bernstein, who warned – under the headline "[The Rising Hegemony of the Politically Correct](#)" – that the country's universities were threatened by "a growing intolerance, a closing of debate, a pressure to conform".

Bernstein had recently returned from Berkeley, where he had been reporting on student activism. He wrote that there was an "unofficial ideology of the university", according to which "a cluster of opinions about race, ecology, feminism, culture and foreign policy defines a kind of 'correct' attitude toward the problems of the world". For instance, "Biodegradable garbage bags get the PC seal of approval. Exxon does not."

Bernstein's alarming dispatch in America's paper of record set off a chain reaction, as one mainstream publication after another rushed to denounce this new trend. The following month, the Wall Street Journal columnist Dorothy Rabinowitz decried the "brave new world of ideological zealotry" at American universities. In December, the cover of Newsweek – with a circulation of more than 3 million – featured the headline "THOUGHT POLICE" and yet another ominous warning: "There's a 'politically correct' way to talk about race, sex and ideas. Is this the New Enlightenment – or the New McCarthyism?" A similar story graced the cover of [New York magazine in January 1991](#) – inside, the magazine proclaimed that "The New Fascists" were taking over universities. In April, Time magazine reported on "a new intolerance" that was on the rise across campuses nationwide.

If you search ProQuest, a digital database of US magazines and newspapers, you find that the phrase "politically correct" rarely appeared before 1990. That year, it turned up more than 700 times. In 1991, there are more than 2,500 instances. In 1992, it appeared more than 2,800 times. Like Indiana Jones movies, these pieces called up enemies from a melange of old wars: they compared the "thought police" spreading terror on university campuses to fascists, Stalinists, McCarthyites, "Hitler Youth", Christian fundamentalists, Maoists and Marxists.

Many of these articles recycled the same stories of campus controversies from a handful of elite universities, often exaggerated or stripped of context. The New York magazine cover story opened with an account of a Harvard history professor, Stephan Thernstrom, being attacked by overzealous students who felt he had been racially insensitive: "Whenever he walked through the campus that spring, down Harvard's brick paths, under the arched gates, past the fluttering elms, he found it hard not to imagine the pointing fingers, the whispers. Racist. There goes *the racist*. It was hellish, this persecution."

In an interview that appeared soon afterwards in The Nation, Thernstrom said the harassment described in the New York article had never happened. There had been one editorial in the Harvard Crimson student newspaper criticising his decision to read extensively from the diaries of plantation owners in his lectures. But the description of his harried state was pure "artistic licence". No matter: the image of college students conducting witch hunts stuck. When Richard Bernstein published a book based on his New York Times reporting on political correctness, he called it Dictatorship of Virtue: Multiculturalism and the Battle for America's Future – a title alluding to the Jacobins of the French Revolution. In the book he compared American college campuses to France during the Reign of Terror, during which tens of thousands of people were executed within months.

None of the stories that introduced the menace of political correctness could pinpoint where or when it had begun. Nor were they very precise when they explained the origins of the phrase itself.

Journalists frequently mentioned the Soviets – Bernstein observed that the phrase "smacks of Stalinist orthodoxy"– but there is no exact equivalent in Russian. (The closest would be *"ideinost"*, which translates as "ideological correctness". But that word has nothing to do with disadvantaged people or minorities.) The intellectual historian LD Burnett has found scattered examples of doctrines or people being described as "politically correct" in American communist publications from the 1930s – usually, she says, in a tone of mockery.

The phrase came into more widespread use in American leftist circles in the 1960s and 1970s – most likely as an ironic borrowing from Mao, who delivered a famous speech in 1957 that was translated into English with the title "On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People".

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Ruth Perry, a literature professor at MIT who was active in the feminist and civil rights movements, says that many radicals were reading the Little Red Book in the late 1960s and 1970s, and surmises that her friends may have picked up the adjective "correct" there. But they didn't use it in the way Mao did. "Politically correct" became a kind of in-joke among American leftists – something you called a fellow leftist when you thought he or she was being self-righteous. "The term was always used ironically," Perry says, "always calling attention to possible dogmatism."

In 1970, the African-American author and activist Toni Cade Bambara, used the phrase in an essay about strains on gender relations within her community. No matter how "politically correct" her male friends thought they were being, she wrote many of them were failing to recognise the plight of black women.

Until the late 1980s, "political correctness" was used exclusively within the left, and almost always ironically as a critique of excessive orthodoxy. In fact, some of the first people to organise against "political correctness" were a group of feminists who called themselves the Lesbian Sex Mafia. In 1982, they held a "Speakout on Politically Incorrect Sex" at a theatre in New York's East Village – a rally against fellow feminists who had condemned pornography and BDSM. Over 400 women attended, many of them wearing leather and collars, brandishing nipple clamps and dildos. The writer and activist Mirtha Quintanales summed up the mood when she told the audience, "We need to have dialogues about S&M issues, not about what is 'politically correct, politically incorrect'."

By the end of the 1980s, Jeff Chang, the journalist and hip-hop critic, who has written extensively on race and social justice, recalls that the activists he knew then in the Bay Area used the phrase "in a jokey way – a way for one sectarian to dismiss another sectarian's line".

But soon enough, the term was rebranded by the right, who turned its meaning inside out. All of a sudden, instead of being a phrase that leftists used to check dogmatic tendencies within their movement, "political correctness" became a talking point for neoconservatives. They said that PC constituted a leftwing political programme that was seizing control of American universities and cultural institutions – and they were determined to stop it.

The right had been waging a campaign against liberal academics for more than a decade. Starting in the mid-1970s, a handful of conservative donors had funded the creation of dozens of new thinktanks and "training institutes" offering programmes in everything from "leadership" to broadcast journalism to direct-mail fundraising. They had endowed fellowships for conservative graduate students, postdoctoral positions and professorships at prestigious universities. Their stated goal was to challenge what they saw as the dominance of liberalism and attack left-leaning tendencies within the academy.

Starting in the late 1980s, this well-funded conservative movement entered the mainstream with a series of improbable bestsellers that took aim at American higher education. The first, by the University of Chicago philosophy professor Allan Bloom, came out in 1987. For hundreds of pages, The Closing of the American Mind argued that colleges were embracing a shallow "cultural relativism" and abandoning long-established disciplines and standards in an attempt to appear liberal and to pander to their students. It sold more than 500,000 copies and inspired numerous imitations.

In April 1990, Roger Kimball, an editor at the conservative journal, The New Criterion, published Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted our Higher Education. Like Bloom, Kimball argued that an "assault on the canon" was taking place and that a "politics of victimhood" had paralysed universities. As evidence, he cited the existence of departments such as African American studies and women's studies. He scornfully quoted the titles of papers he had heard at academic conferences, such as "Jane Austen and the Masturbating Girl" or "The Lesbian Phallus: Does Heterosexuality Exist?"

In June 1991, the young Dinesh D'Souza followed Bloom and Kimball with Illiberal Education: the Politics of Race and Sex on Campus. Whereas Bloom had bemoaned the rise of relativism and Kimball had attacked what he called "liberal fascism", and what he considered frivolous lines of scholarly inquiry, D'Souza argued that admissions policies that took race into consideration were producing a "new segregation on campus" and "an attack on academic standards". The Atlantic printed a 12,000 word excerpt as its June cover story. To coincide with the release, Forbes ran another article by D'Souza with the title: "Visigoths in Tweed."

These books did not emphasise the phrase "political correctness", and only D'Souza used the phrase directly. But all three came to be regularly cited in the flood of anti-PC articles that appeared in venues such as the New York Times and Newsweek. When they did, the authors were cited as neutral authorities. Countless articles uncritically repeated their arguments.

In some respects, these books and articles were responding to genuine changes taking place within academia. It is true that scholars had become increasingly sceptical about whether it was possible to talk about timeless, universal truths that lay beyond language and representation. European theorists who became influential in US humanities departments during the 1970s and 1980s argued that individual experience was shaped by systems of which the individual might not be aware – and particularly by language. Michel Foucault, for instance, argued that all knowledge expressed historically specific forms of power. Jacques Derrida, a frequent target of conservative critics, practised what he called "deconstruction", rereading the classics of philosophy in order to show that even the most seemingly innocent and straightforward categories were riven with internal contradictions. The value of ideals such as "humanity" or "liberty" could not be taken for granted.

It was also true that many universities were creating new "studies departments", which interrogated the experiences, and emphasised the cultural contributions of groups that had previously been excluded from the academy and from the canon: queer people, people of colour and women. This was not so strange. These departments reflected new social realities. The demographics of college students were changing, because the demographics of the United States were changing. By 1990, only two-thirds of Americans under 18 were white. In California, the freshman classes at many public universities were "majority minority", or more than 50% non-white. Changes to undergraduate curriculums reflected changes in the student population.

The responses that the conservative bestsellers offered to the changes they described were disproportionate and often misleading. For instance, Bloom complained at length about the "militancy" of African American students at Cornell University, where he had taught in the 1960s.

He never mentioned what students demanding the creation of African American studies were responding to: the biggest protest at Cornell took place in 1969 [after a cross burning on campus](#), an open KKK threat. (An arsonist burned down the Africana Studies Center, founded in response to these protests, in 1970.)

More than any particular obfuscation or omission, the most misleading aspect of these books was the way they claimed that only their adversaries were "political". Bloom, Kimball, and D'Souza claimed that they wanted to "preserve the humanistic tradition", as if their academic foes were vandalising a canon that had been enshrined since time immemorial. But canons and curriculums have always been in flux; even in white Anglo-America there has never been any one stable tradition. Moby Dick was dismissed as Herman Melville's worst book until the mid-1920s. Many universities had only begun offering literature courses in "living" languages a decade or so before that.

In truth, these crusaders against political correctness were every bit as political as their opponents. As Jane Mayer documents in her book, Dark Money: the Hidden History of the Billionaires Behind the Rise of the Radical Right, Bloom and D'Souza were funded by networks of conservative donors – particularly the Koch, Olin and Scaife families – who had spent the 1980s building programmes that they hoped would create a new "counter-intelligentsia". (The New Criterion, where Kimball worked, was also funded by the Olin and Scaife Foundations.) In his 1978 book A Time for Truth, William Simon, the president of the Olin Foundation, had called on conservatives to fund intellectuals who shared their views: "They must be given grants, grants, and more grants in exchange for books, books, and more books."

These skirmishes over syllabuses were part of a broader political programme – and they became instrumental to forging a new alliance for conservative politics in America, between white working-class voters and small business owners, and politicians with corporate agendas that held very little benefit for those people.

By making fun of professors who spoke in language that most people considered incomprehensible ("The Lesbian Phallus"), wealthy Ivy League graduates could pose as anti-elite. By mocking courses on writers such as Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, they made a racial appeal to white people who felt as if they were losing their country. As the 1990s wore on, because multiculturalism was associated with globalisation – the force that was taking away so many jobs traditionally held by white working-class people – attacking it allowed conservatives to displace responsibility for the hardship that many of their constituents were facing. It was not the slashing of social services, lowered taxes, union busting or outsourcing that was the cause of their problems. It was those foreign "others".

PC was a useful invention for the Republican right because it helped the movement to drive a wedge between working-class people and the Democrats who claimed to speak for them. "Political correctness" became a term used to drum into the public imagination the idea that there was a deep divide between the "ordinary people" and the "liberal elite", who sought to control the speech and thoughts of regular folk. Opposition to political correctness also became a way to rebrand racism in ways that were politically acceptable in the post-civil-rights era.

Soon, Republican politicians were echoing on the national stage the message that had been product-tested in the academy. In May 1991, President George HW Bush gave a commencement speech at the University of Michigan. In it, he identified political correctness as a major danger to America. "Ironically, on the 200th anniversary of our Bill of Rights, we find free speech under assault throughout the United States," Bush said. "The notion of political correctness has ignited controversy across the land," but, he warned, "In their own Orwellian way, crusades that demand correct behaviour crush diversity in the name of diversity."

After 2001, debates about political correctness faded from public view, replaced by arguments about Islam and terrorism. But in the final years of the Obama presidency, political correctness made a comeback. Or rather, anti-political-correctness did.

As Black Lives Matter and movements against sexual violence gained strength, a spate of thinkpieces attacked the participants in these movements, criticising and trivialising them by saying that they were obsessed with policing speech. Once again, the conversation initially focused on universities, but the buzzwords were new. Rather than "difference" and "multiculturalism", Americans in 2012 and 2013 started hearing about "trigger warnings", "safe spaces", "microaggressions", "privilege" and "cultural appropriation".

This time, students received more scorn than professors. If the first round of anti-political-correctness evoked the spectres of totalitarian regimes, the more recent revival has appealed to the commonplace that millennials are spoiled narcissists, who want to prevent anyone expressing opinions that they happen to find offensive.

In January 2015, the writer Jonathan Chait published one of the first new, high-profile anti-PC thinkpieces in New York magazine. "[Not a Very PC Thing to Say](#)" followed the blueprint provided by the anti-PC thinkpieces that the New York Times, Newsweek, and indeed New York magazine had published in the early 1990s. Like the New York article from 1991, it began with an anecdote set on campus that supposedly demonstrated that political correctness had run amok, and then extrapolated from this incident to a broad generalisation. In 1991, John Taylor wrote: "The new fundamentalism has concocted a rationale for dismissing all dissent." In 2015, Jonathan Chait claimed that there were once again "angry mobs out to crush opposing ideas".

Chait warned that the dangers of PC had become greater than ever before. Political correctness was no longer confined to universities – now, he argued, it had taken over social media and thus "attained an influence over mainstream journalism and commentary beyond that of the old". (As evidence of the "hegemonic" influence enjoyed by unnamed actors on the left, Chait cited two female journalists saying that they had been criticised by leftists on Twitter.)

Chait's article launched a spate of replies about campus and social media "cry bullies". On the cover of their September 2015 issue, the Atlantic published an article by Jonathan Haidt and Greg Lukianoff. The title, "[The Coddling Of the American Mind](#)", nodded to the godfather of anti-PC, Allan Bloom. (Lukianoff is the head of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, another organisation funded by the Olin and Scaife families.) "In the name of emotional wellbeing, college students are increasingly demanding protection from words and ideas they don't like," the article announced. It was shared over 500,000 times.

> The climate of digital journalism and social media sharing enabled the anti-political-correctness stories to spread.

These pieces committed many of the same fallacies that their predecessors from the 1990s had. They cherry-picked anecdotes and caricatured the subjects of their criticism. They complained that other people were creating and enforcing speech codes, while at the same time attempting to enforce their own speech codes. Their writers designated themselves the arbiters of what conversations or political demands deserved to be taken seriously, and which did not. They contradicted themselves in the same way: their authors continually complained, in highly visible publications, that they were being silenced.

The climate of digital journalism and social media sharing enabled the anti-political-correctness (and anti-anti-political correctness) stories to spread even further and faster than they had in the 1990s.

Anti-PC and anti-anti-PC stories come cheap: because they concern identity, they are something that any writer can have a take on, based on his or her experiences, whether or not he or she has the time or resources to report. They are also perfect clickbait. They inspire outrage, or outrage at the outrage of others.

Meanwhile, a strange convergence was taking place. While Chait and his fellow liberals decried political correctness, Donald Trump and his followers were doing the same thing. Chait said that leftists were "perverting liberalism" and appointed himself the defender of a liberal centre; Trump said that liberal media had the system "rigged".

The anti-PC liberals were so focused on leftists on Twitter that for months they gravely underestimated the seriousness of the real threat to liberal discourse. It was not coming from women, people of colour, or queer people organising for their civil rights, on campus or elsewhere. It was coming from @realdonaldtrump, neo-Nazis, and far-right websites such as Breitbart.

The original critics of PC were academics or shadow-academics, Ivy League graduates who went around in bow ties quoting Plato and Matthew Arnold. It is hard to imagine Trump quoting Plato or Matthew Arnold, much less carping about the titles of conference papers by literature academics. During his campaign, the network of donors who funded decades of anti-PC activity – the Kochs, the Olins, the Scaifes – shunned Trump, citing concerns about the populist promises he was making. Trump came from a different milieu: not Yale or the University of Chicago, but reality television. And he was picking different fights, targeting the media and political establishment, rather than academia.

As a candidate, Trump inaugurated a new phase of anti-political-correctness. What was remarkable was just how many different ways Trump deployed this tactic to his advantage, both exploiting the tried-and-tested methods of the early 1990s and adding his own innovations.

First, by talking incessantly about political correctness, Trump established the myth that he had dishonest and powerful enemies who wanted to prevent him from taking on the difficult challenges facing the nation. By claiming that he was being silenced, he created a drama in which he could play the hero. The notion that Trump was both persecuted *and* heroic was crucial to his emotional appeal. It allowed people who were struggling economically or angry about the way society was changing to see themselves in him, battling against a rigged system that made them feel powerless and devalued. At the same time, Trump's swagger promised that they were strong and entitled to glory. They were great and would be great again.

Second, Trump did not simply criticise the idea of political correctness – he actually said and did the kind of outrageous things that PC culture supposedly prohibited. The first wave of conservative critics of political correctness claimed they were defending the status quo, but Trump's mission was to destroy it. In 1991, when George HW Bush warned that political correctness was a threat to free speech, he did not choose to exercise his free speech rights by publicly mocking a man with a disability or characterising Mexican immigrants as rapists. Trump did. Having elevated the powers of PC to mythic status, the draft-dodging billionaire, son of a slumlord, taunted the parents of a fallen soldier and claimed that his cruelty and malice was, in fact, courage.

This willingness to be more outrageous than any previous candidate ensured non-stop media coverage, which in turn helped Trump attract supporters who agreed with what he was saying. We should not underestimate how many Trump supporters held views that were sexist, racist, xenophobic and Islamophobic, and were thrilled to feel that he had given them permission to say so. It's an old trick: the powerful encourage the less powerful to vent their rage against those who might have been their allies, and to delude themselves into thinking that they have been liberated. It

costs the powerful nothing; it pays frightful dividends.

Trump drew upon a classic element of anti-political-correctness by implying that while his opponents were operating according to a political agenda, he simply wanted to do what was sensible. He made numerous controversial policy proposals: deporting millions of undocumented immigrants, banning Muslims from entering the US, introducing stop-and-frisk policies that have been ruled unconstitutional. But by responding to critics with the accusation that they were simply being politically correct, Trump attempted to place these proposals beyond the realm of politics altogether. Something political is something that reasonable people might disagree about. By using the adjective as a put-down, Trump pretended that he was acting on truths so obvious that they lay beyond dispute. "That's just common sense."

The most alarming part of this approach is what it implies about Trump's attitude to politics more broadly. His contempt for political correctness looks a lot like contempt for politics itself. He does not talk about diplomacy; he talks about "deals". Debate and disagreement are central to politics, yet Trump has made clear that he has no time for these distractions. To play the anti-political-correctness card in response to a legitimate question about policy is to shut down discussion in much the same way that opponents of political correctness have long accused liberals and leftists of doing. It is a way of sidestepping debate by declaring that the topic is so trivial or so contrary to common sense that it is pointless to discuss it. The impulse is authoritarian. And by presenting himself as the champion of common sense, Trump gives himself permission to bypass politics altogether.

Now that he is president-elect, it is unclear whether Trump meant many of the things he said during his campaign. But, so far, he is fulfilling his pledge to fight political correctness. Last week, he told the New York Times that he was trying to build an administration filled with the "best people", though "Not necessarily people that will be the most politically correct people, because that hasn't been working."

Trump has also continued to cry PC in response to criticism. When an interviewer from [Politico](#) asked a Trump transition team member why Trump was appointing so many lobbyists and political insiders, despite having pledged to "drain the swamp" of them, the source said that "one of the most refreshing parts of … the whole Trump style is that he does not care about political correctness." Apparently it would have been politically correct to hold him to his campaign promises.

As Trump prepares to enter the White House, many pundits have concluded that "political correctness" fuelled the populist backlash sweeping Europe and the US. The leaders of that backlash may say so. But the truth is the opposite: those leaders understood the power that anti-political-correctness has to rally a class of voters, largely white, who are disaffected with the status quo and resentful of shifting cultural and social norms. They were not reacting to the tyranny of political correctness, nor were they returning America to a previous phase of its history. They were not taking anything back. They were wielding anti-political-correctness as a weapon, using it to forge a new political landscape and a frightening future.

The opponents of political correctness always said they were crusaders against authoritarianism. In fact, anti-PC has paved the way for the populist authoritarianism now spreading everywhere. Trump is anti-political correctness gone mad.

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The Guardian
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