

INDIVIDUALS, JOURNALISM, AND SOCIETY
EPISODE 20 - EPILOGUE

Written by

Stephen B. Waters

Based on, *Individuals, Journalism, and Society*

6391 Karlen Rd., Rome, NY 13440
(315) 225-2706
sbwaters@rnymedia.com

INDIVIDUALS, JOURNALISM, AND SOCIETY

EPISODE 20 - EPILOGUE - LESSONS YET TO BE LEARNED

INT. BEDROOM - MORNING

2/25/2021 - Twelve years have taught new lessons.

It's been 12 years since publisher Brad recorded a chronology of Election Day, 2008, hour by hour, with lessons learned.

Brad opens bedroom curtains as his teacher wife rests in bed.

BRAD

"Morning, sweetheart!"

JANET

Morning, dear. What's up?"

BRAD

Looking over the lake again. - You realize it's been twelve years since I wrote "Individuals, Journalism, and Society." I'd like to say much is the same but it's different.

JANET

Well, you're older, ache more, have retired from the newspaper, and keep busy with your grandson.

BRAD

But who would have figured lessons ready to learn back then would be so difficult for so many to see.

JANET

Like what?

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

First point: Who owns society?

BRAD

Like whose society is this?

JANET

Which one?

BRAD

Our society. You and me. Who owns it? You or me?

JANET

We do individually and together. There is no ruler.

BRAD

What if I decide I'm in charge and start setting new rules.

JANET

There will be Hell to pay. And I won't leave; I'll send you packing.

BRAD

I believe you! – Come on, I've got fresh coffee for you out on the porch.

JANET

Thank you.

INT. PORCH – MOMENTS LATER

Second point: Resolving differences.

As they move to the porch overlooking the lake, they talk, pour coffee, and sit down.

BRAD

Second lesson: How then should we resolve our differences?

JANET

We tacitly agree to work under an umbrella of peaceful problem resolution. It's a process we can trust.

BRAD

Suppose I pack the court, restrict what you can say, or count the ballots myself?

JANET

Then you are playing a risky game of chicken with no guarantee you will win.

BRAD

It could get nasty so, instead, let me try to bluff you: Accuse you of having taken advantage of me for years, redefine words to flummox you. ... Cheat.

JANET

I don't like where this is headed.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Third point: Which is the greater political risk?

BRAD

Okay then. Third lesson: what do you fear more, the fear politicians conjure up during an emergency or the fear that under the guise of that emergency they would grasp for permanent control?

JANET

The latter. The first cultures and people on the surface, but the latter, rips at the underlying fabric of society that ties all individuals together.

BRAD

Exactly. Culture and society are different. People seldom see that cultures are like the pile of a carpet - so varied and different. But society is the warp and weft underneath the pile that holds the carpet together.

JANET

Society forms at any edge where any two individuals or cultures meet. The minimum requirements for society are humility and reciprocity.

BRAD

That matters because civilizations are tissue thin - less than a single generation deep.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

People absent humility and reciprocity who reach for power tend to misuse it in ways that quickly drag a culture back down to life no better than the law of the jungle.

JANET

People struggled for thousands of years to lift themselves a tiny fraction above an animal world without morality, and these bastards would destroy it because their personality defects won't let them face themselves in a mirror.

BRAD

Like parasites they will co-opt a political base to serve as a host. They used postmodernism to hijack liberalism and then abandoned all it stood for.

JANET

Classical liberalism was open-minded, believed in individualism, and in universal human values. Not these parasites. There are fools and charlatans on both sides so this isn't about Republicans or Democrats is it?

BRAD

There is enough warped thinking to go around. Some people are shallow, others mean, but the more dangerous are those whose built their morality at odds with reality.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Fourth point: People think differently and not always clearly.

BRAD

Some people are too brittle to refine their view of reality based on experience. They won't face when their beliefs are at odds with what is real.

JANET

People still believe they are rational when fifty years ago research proved many of our conclusions well up from beneath our consciousness. Sperry and Gazzaniga earned a Nobel Prize in 1968 for that, yet schools still ignore that rationality isn't how we think, but how we check our work. Rationality is how we try not to make the same mistake twice.

BRAD

People too often think they are right, not because they *are* right, but simply because they *think* they are right. – Some not only don't *want* to check their work, their egos won't *let* them check their work.

JANET

Unhealthy distortions in people pose a problem for everyone obliged to deal with them.

BRAD

Therapy can help some individuals like that, but it is often difficult to get those with a distorted view of reality to recognize they need help.

JANET

It's worse when people like that gather into groups where – both inside the group and outside – they reinforce their own defective logic, pseudo-reality, and pseudo-morality. The larger the group, the more they bully the community to conform to their warped perceptions.

BRAD

It's as if *Clockwork Orange* with *Bonfire of the Vanities* joined together. Imagine fictional anti-social delinquent Alex joined with the 1500s Friar Savonarola to give you villainy that can't face itself. Alex bullied as Savonarola destroyed both history and mirrors.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Fifth point: Groupthink often fosters distorted ideas, realities, and moralities

JANET

Most people don't expect aberrant malevolence in others. Most trust others to use logic like their own, test conclusions, and use consistent morality. They expect others to be reasonable - even when they signal by talk and action that they have conflicts with reality.

BRAD

Once in power they push their fantasy. They bully more - ostracize, shun, punish, and economically cripple those with whom they disagree. They treat objection as criminal and, whatever isn't yet a crime, their double standards treat as one.

JANET

Ancient Greeks would say their logic subverts *logos* and their morality dominates *ethos*.

BRAD

They can't see postmodernism is unworkable.

JANET

I thought postmodernism's logical inconsistency consumed itself in the decades after the 1950s.

BRAD

It theoretically died 80 years earlier, in 1872, when Lewis Carroll skewered its slipperiness in *Through the Looking Glass*. Humpty Dumpty had the audacity to claim, "When I use a word it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less."

JANET

That's when Alice cut down his posturing. "The question is whether you can make words mean so many different things."

BRAD

Carroll's readers laughed at Dumpty's false claim to power, "The question is which is to be master – that's all." – Yet, since the 1960s, postmodernism jumped out of philosophy and literature like a virus jumps species, to infect politicians, educationists, community organizers, pontificators and journalists.

JANET

Postmodernism struggles after power. It squabbles over interpretations, putting this narrative over that, but their myths are dishonest and incomplete.

BRAD

They don't bother to validate their claim because, by definition, it's valid simply because it's theirs. They discard *your* claim unexamined because it is yours, not theirs, and they ignore the obvious inconsistency.

JANET

So your claim has to become theirs because they say so.

BRAD

That absence of a peaceful process of conflict resolution throws everyone back to the Law of the Jungle.

JANET

That's absurd. You can't contrive a story that ends up less reasonable than what you criticize. If the ethical framework one advocates doesn't value honesty there is absolutely nothing in it for anyone.

BRAD

Nevertheless, many of today's milquetoast institutions buy into the fraud.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

Just as Antonio Gramsci predicted: War would not defeat western culture but it would fall to a long march through its institutions. The grab for power symptomatic of the disease. By their logic, reality should bend to their fantasy. They have to impose their pseudo-reality on the rest of us because, otherwise, they would have to face that they're the ones who don't measure up.

JANET

You claim that, but can you prove it?

BRAD

Easily. As skilled dissemblers they turn away all objections rather than answer them. Nail down what they say and do, and the fractures become obvious. Quite simply, they claim to stand for all that is "good" in society but, since they see society as theirs to control, they don't believe in society at all.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Sixth point: People suffering distorted reality gull other people.

JANET

The problem would be smaller with single individuals, where psychological problems are more easily detected and therapy can be offered.

BRAD

But when such people gather into self-reinforcing groups, it's different. They acquire increasing social influence to pressure others to conform, believe, and pretend.

JANET

Like Hollywood where they compliment bad acting with air-kisses, or a lifetime courtesy title because someone completed an obscure poorly written thesis, or even an obsequious congressional "honorable gentleman or gentle lady" for someone who is anything but.

BRAD

Such cross-connected pseudo-authorities depreciate word meanings and analytic skills. They entice you to conform to their lens of artificial reality.

JANET

You'd think that would be isolated.

BRAD

Why? Pseudo-journalists pander for political access. Pseudo-politicians pander to corporate contributors. Pseudo-teachers pander to bureaucracy. Pseudo-community organizers, inveigle themselves into influence peddling, claiming "rights" as stakeholders. Pseudo-businessmen pander to public regulators. And they all pander to mold new generations of panderers.

JANET

So, adrift in a sea of uncertainty with no one but ourselves to trust, what should one do?

BRAD

Figure out who deserves trust.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Action #1: Mistrust those who claim expertise.

JANET

People are too complacent to check the work of those who govern them. They cede vetting ideas to those who claim authority but show little integrity and a worse track record.

BRAD

The powerful urge us to trust experts, but don't check past failures, and we seldom learn how to select real experts.

JANET

They push credentials instead of understanding. Face it, a real expert is someone who can explain things so clearly even we can understand.

INT. BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Action #2: Defend against disordered words.

BRAD

Part of the problem is that many people aren't equipped to digest claims an alleged expert might make.

JANET

People seldom concede better judgment to anyone else.

BRAD

Ancient Rome didn't, and it collapsed around 500 A.D. Not until around 800 AD, 300 years later, did Charlemagne revise schooling to detect weak thinking that could undermine a culture. He decreed that king and commoner would study the *Trivium* to validate conclusions before they were accepted.

JANET

His schools sought to teach people to think and later in graduate classes practice on subjects.

BRAD

Progress was undermined some 700 years later, around 1500, when educationists eviscerated Charlemagne's schooling. They stripped Aristotlean Rhetoric of its requirement to organize and validate what was said.

JANET

They stopped teaching students to defend themselves against words, words, words. They foolishly started teaching subjects hoping students would learn to think.

BRAD

Absent the need to order and validate what was said, politics and law became shoddy game of salesmanship. Neither judges nor voters learned enough to care. As a result, schools today teach that Ancient Rome collapsed, but ignore that long-term tolerance of bad thought and worse behavior might easily cause it to happen again.

JANET

I'm embarrassed to say that educated citizens in the early Middle Ages were better equipped to detect mendacity than citizens schools produce today.

BRAD

History today is so shallow that citizens don't know or care that the ancients knew better! Ancient Greeks called such overweening pride – *hubris*.

JANET

Ignore history and you may not know until too late that collapse is imminent. Sad to see social, educational, and political ignorance jeopardize yet another culture of decent people.

INT. PORCH – MOMENTS LATER

Action #3: Reclaim control of hermeneutics.

BRAD

Few realize the current war is being fought between the ears. Who gets to decide the meaning and intent of words used to think and converse. Hermeneutics is the study of who gets to interpret things. Postmodern activists want control.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

Don't give it to them. They expect you to give up without a fight. They want to privilege *their* intentions over yours.

JANET

They assault you at every turn in politics, news, schools, entertainment, social media, and on the street – Projection, hate speech, and cancel culture; false claims of instigation, dog whistles, and secret signs; community guidelines, business vigilantes, and fascist firings for crime-think; corporate social agendas, boycotts, book-burning, statue-tipping, false flags, and physical mobs. It's pointless for them to impose "Wokeness" on the past. Those who would control your thoughts feel their thoughts are privileged and perfect compared to yours.

BRAD

Simply put, speech police want to control language to kill individual agency and replace it with linguistic collectivism.

JANET

That's revolting.

BRAD

Well, they are engaged in revolution.

JANET

Real individuality isn't selfish. It values community with others.

INT. PORCH – MOMENTS LATER

Action #4: Demand the Law of Non-conformity be followed.

BRAD

Next demand consistency in what activists say and do. They certainly won't.

JANET

Aristotle's law of non-conformity says a cat cannot be a non-cat. A mind like theirs that cannot find consistency in its conclusions is – there are so many words for it – unsound, defective, incomplete, childish, ... a problem for everyone.

BRAD

The examples are endless. 1) They advocate tolerance they impose by repression. 2) They call for acceptance, compassion, empathy, and fairness that is conditional and selectively applied. 3) They support merit except for special classes of people. 5) They stand up for free speech, but only for approved subjects. 6) They want compromise but only toward their goals. – And it is all to support a contrived reality that never matches what's really real.

JANET

1) They play linguistic games all the way down, never allowed to be checked for consistency or completeness. 2) They turn away when directly brought to their attention. 3) They talk past questions, never stating strong opposition arguments and never addressing them. 4) Their arguments are inconsequential and illogical. 5) Their word meanings are slippery and vague. 6) Their premises are unsound, supported by unworthy warrants. 7) And even if their premises were valid, they would not lead to sound conclusions.

BRAD

Want examples of their cognitive dissonance? 1) The CDC says the flu virus is down because people wear masks but the COVID-19 virus is up because people don't wear masks.

JANET

2) The government wants to test passengers who fly across the border but not those who walk across.

BRAD

3) Recycling matters but lifecycle costs for renewable power don't include recycling.

JANET

4) In the name of clean air they reject oil pipelines in favor of truck and rail alternatives that increase pollution or don't work when you need it. And buying oil from abroad apparently pollutes less than oil produced here.

BRAD

5) Governments over-regulate our productive economy to throttle the productive economy needed to pay for government itself.

JANET

6) Science became consensus that forbids evidence that might undermine consensus. Science is now an oracle rather than a method for asking questions.

BRAD

7) Higher minimum wage kills entry-level jobs they claim to want people to have.

JANET

8) You can't defend property because some say others need it more.

BRAD

9) Voter ID disenfranchises minorities rather than protecting their vote, too.

JANET

10) Others have to pay for what you call a free lunch.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Action #5: Trust actions, not words.

BRAD

In a sea of warped political accusations, dismiss those who have blown smoke or tolerated others who did. That includes journalists. When you can't trust what politicians say, match their past promises with what has been delivered.

JANET

Many journalists are simply newsreaders and cable bookers who take no pride in accuracy and, instead, seek validation from popularity, access, fees, bogus awards, and airtime.

BRAD

Where are pithy questions, analysis of feeble rhetoric, or comparisons with past promises? We can't shift responsibility for understanding the world to the national press. They are determined to mold you to their views. Although we hire them, they *don't* work for us. Perhaps they did, long ago, under local ownership. At least back then they admitted they wrote from a point of view.

JANET

They certainly don't expose, label, and laugh at gaslighting, poor rhetoric, and silly policy. They push it on you unchallenged!

BRAD

Fire them! Now! At the national level they never have been journalists. Laugh at them. Make them squirm. Gaslight and gibberish - Pseudo-politicians spout it. Pseudo-journalists repeat it. Educationists teach it. The opposition ignores it. And most citizens never learned to recognize, label, and laugh at it.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Action #6: Laugh at their inconsistency.

JANET

Is laughter enough?

BRAD

Laughter dissolves the non-reasoning they use. They will label anything more than laughter as subversive and an excuse to apply greater force. Defectively powerful people will use any reason to clamp down. They don't need real reasons to avoid wrestling with their pseudo-reality.

JANET

They don't believe in civil society do they?

BRAD

No, some individuals in some cultures are builders but others are destroyers.

JANET

You see it in how they undermine individual freedom, suppress opposition, and undermine longstanding useful institutions.

BRAD

They are amoral defectives.

JANET

That's brutal.

BRAD

But accurate when they don't give a shit. They prey on those who are naive enough expect others to operate under a moral umbrella similar to their own.

JANET

What do such people hope to gain?

BRAD

Underneath all their words, it's how they defend themselves *from* themselves. They fear mirrors as much as does Dracula.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

They destroy those who challenge their pseudo-reality. Their ego depends on seeing their own mental map of reality as more perfect than reality itself. Power is how they keep real reality distant. They may claim it's just politics. It's not. Real politics is about encouraging people to come to understanding, not duping them.

JANET

Then when people call it a political conflict with socialism or fascism, they miss the mark.

BRAD

Those are two different concepts with one bad and the other worse. In one case, socialism offers no means to self cleanse. All competition occurs behind the veil. No one guards the guardians. People often overlook that central planners can't know enough or react fast enough to solve more problems than they create.

JANET

The abstraction of political jargon obscures the underlying problem of misrepresenting reality and morality.

BRAD

When people become so disturbed, you can't defeat their pseudo-reality with logic because they don't see anything to concede. Their slippery language allows them to avoid admitting anything. A crime? In their mind, the only crime is admitting to a crime.

JANET

That would be sad if it weren't dangerous.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Insight #1: The real battle is to suppress individuality.

JANET

So the big battle is between individualism and collectivism?

BRAD

Not really. Focus tighter than that. The fight between socialism or fascism and capitalism is really a skirmish beneath the real conflict.

JANET

The big battle is between ...

BRAD

Individuals.

JANET

Individuals against individuals - not conflicting concepts of government?

BRAD

While socialism and fascism restrict individuality in society, they are not as dangerous as disturbed people who covet power to control you.

JANET

What do you mean?

BRAD

Face the two problems: First, their twisted logic shows they are unwilling to see that solutions they propose cause more problems than they solve. ... And, second, they don't check their work. They just don't.

JANET

Leave out facts that undermine their thesis and all that is left is fiction.

BRAD

And a nagging feeling that something is amiss.

JANET

They claim to stand for all that is "good" in society" but actions show they don't believe in society at all. They undermine society with others for power to temporarily impose an incomplete pseudo-reality and half-baked pseudo-morality on the rest of us. It doesn't stand up.

BRAD

They push evidence that they don't measure up so far away into the future they hope they'll die before they have to face it. Instead, they pose to a gullible electorate that their words are authoritative and the only words that matter. They don't validate their claims. And if you challenge them, you are subversive, racist, or guilty of some other unprovable accusation.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Insight #2: Individuality exposes the fraud of identity politics

JANET

Individual versus individual makes sense, but is calling it lust for power enough? Is unwillingness to face reality so compelling it compels they destroy institutions with nothing to replace them?

BRAD

They claim to want a more equitable society when actually they tear down merit as a measure. Their underlying theme is entitlement instead of responsibility. They feel entitled to something for nothing. They shoulder no responsibility for family, community, economic growth, and quash every opportunity for progress.

JANET

With "Intersectionality" they marshaled multiple possibilities of discrimination – racism, sexism, and classism – to tear society down – with nothing to replace it.

BRAD

In the end, followers have put their life on the line for a theory that doesn't care about them. People who claim offense and who have the rings of power, cancel you from society. Worse, their belief system crushed by a false claim of liberation gives totalitarianism the opportunity to take hold.

JANET

How far we have descended! A hundred years ago the march of progress was celebrated as the cornerstone of modernism.

BRAD

The trajectory across premodern, modern, and postmodern views of the world tells the story.

JANET

Pre-modernists, before the 17th century believed faith and reason offered a view of the world that was symbiotic.

BRAD

Then Descartes offered a Modern view that rejected faith but still believed in progress. That view collapsed when World Wars I and II forced people to consider reason can create havoc on the earth.

JANET

So in despair, Leftists turned to postmodernism. Sadly, postmodernism offered no brake on oppressive power.

BRAD

When relativism destroys the final threads of a shared universe, progress has no future. None.

JANET

It's foolish. Attacking logic and rationality is what you do if your ideology has nothing to offer. Such deconstruction is a self-defeating worldview waiting to implode.

BRAD

Many of today's universities simply don't see that. If they did they would laugh it down. Instead academics flatten out all objections until they become meaningless. They ignore that when you hold to a falsehood, you imprison yourself. They call their anti-science science. They forgot Karl Popper's observation that rather than prove what's true, science prunes away what is demonstrably false.

JANET

Forcing group identity became more important than individual beliefs. They built a shelter from the storm that casts followers into the middle of the storm.

BRAD

Identity politics allows no reconciliation. No counterfactuals are accepted.

JANET

For them, racism is okay if you identify as something else. They dare suppress that assigning classes according to a physical characteristic is the definition of racism!

BRAD

The circular reasoning of Critical Race Theory invariably rejects evidence that conflicts with their assertions. They need to find "systemic racism" that creates "white privilege" that leads to "racial oppression."

JANET

Then they claim racism to demand neoracist solutions that only exacerbate racist problems.

BRAD

James Lindsay points out the flawed logic they use does not pursue truth but holds on to social grievances. He suggests reasonable people might have to become super-antiracist. "Super-antiracists are reasonably colorblind without denying real racism when it occurs. They treat every person as an individual, not a member of a racial category. They are against all forms of racism, including Woke neoracism."

JANET

Martin Luther King was a super-antiracist which is why CRT progressives don't revere King's accomplishments.

BRAD

Universities and institutions no longer disperse the fog that descended. They celebrate it! That leaves each individual alone to stand up to the winds that blow.

JANET

When they hold a position that refutes itself, the reason to learn about it clearly is to defend your humanity.

INT. PORCH - MOMENTS LATER

Insight 3: Laugh now, before it's too late.

BRAD

Laugh at them. Make them squirm. They are charlatans, not politicians, academics, journalists, or activists. Both common sense and comedy are in short supply.

JANET

If enough people laugh, whatever elective legitimacy they ever claimed will collapse.

BRAD

Laugh now. Even though they may pursue you in anger. Laugh now, because if you don't, they will get stronger and hurt you more. They will hound you, your family, your business. They will pursue you until you give up your humanity. Your individuality.

JANET

It all comes from lying - to others and to yourself. Fyodor Dostoevsky once said, "A man who lies to himself, and believes his own lies, becomes unable to recognize truth, either in himself or anyone else, and he ends up losing respect for himself and for others."

BRAD

I'll match your quote with Natan Sharansky's challenge. "In the democratic society in which you live, can you express your individual views loudly, in public and in private, on social media and at rallies, without fear of being shamed, excommunicated, or cancelled? ... Each of us individually decides whether we want to submit to the crippling indignity of doublethink, or break the chains that keep us from expressing our own thoughts, and becoming whole." - It's not about authorities. It's about you. Measure your place in your world. Assess your own liberation.

JANET

To avoid a dystopian world, resolve to be individual.

BRAD

Yes. There is a way back to civil society. Tom Wolfe wrote about it in *The Electric Kool-aid Acid Test*.

(MORE)

BRAD (CONT'D)

In the book, activists and officials pushed Ken Kesey to take one side or another about war. He refused to play the game. He took out his harmonica and played. He made the powerful uncomfortable. They couldn't cope. Laughter called regular people back from political absurdity.

JANET

On all sides, if the ethical framework you advocate doesn't value honesty, there is nothing in it for me.

BRAD

So who checks consistency and who does not? Who masters enough rhetoric to tell the difference? Who resolves that there is some shit I will not eat? Who can carefully, cautiously, and with humor, back away from the precipice?

JANET

(Smiling.)

We do — when we make our own choice. Do I laugh now?

END OF EPISODE 20.