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Opinion

Why Is Everyone Talking About the Claremont Institute?

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On Wednesday, Elisabeth Zerofsky of *The New York Times Magazine* published a [lengthy essay](#) titled, "How the Claremont Institute Became a Nerve Center of the American Right." Zerofsky's piece was well-researched, honest, and measured, but the same cannot necessarily be said for other recent fulminations against the [California-based conservative think tank](#). Less than two weeks ago, *The Washington Post* published [one such sordid entry](#), disproportionately focused on the January 6, 2021, jamboree at the U.S. Capitol, titled, "The Claremont Institute Triumphed in the Trump Years. Then Came Jan. 6."

Other examples abound. Last fall, Emma Green of *The Atlantic* published a [moderately fair interview](#) with Claremont Institute President [Ryan Williams](#) provocatively titled, "The Conservatives Dreading—and Preparing For—Civil War." *The New Republic* reserved much digital ink for Claremont in a [long essay](#) last year on "The Radical Young Intellectuals Who Want To Take Over the American Right." And *The Bulwark*, a fetid swamp of "NeverTrump" histrionics, has published multiple hit pieces that make the *Post's* salvo look downright temperate by comparison.

So familiar has this refrain become that I sarcastically [tweeted](#), following the *Post's* recent excretion: "Ah, it's time for another rendition of the 'anti-Claremont hit piece,' the most overwrought and oversaturated sub-genre in the leftist literary arsenal." But with blue-blooded newspapers such as the *Post* and the *Times* now joining the fray, it seems that long-form essays inveighing against Claremont have reached a fever pitch.

This raises the obvious question: Why? Why is everyone, from seldom-read "NeverTrump" blogs to *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* themselves, now talking about the Claremont Institute?

To an extent, perhaps the better question is why is everyone—and the corporate press, specifically—*only now* talking about Claremont? The think tank, for many decades, has held real sway in America's right-wing intellectual firmament. It has been around for long enough where many prominent alumni from its [fellowship programs](#) have reached the pinnacles of their professions; Claremont's alumni ranks include national television and radio hosts, a sitting U.S. senator, numerous federal judges, and many other notable conservative activists. Its flagship publication, the cerebral [Claremont Review of Books](#) (CRB), has existed for over two decades.

But Claremont clearly *has* made gains in stature, clout, and the depth and breadth of its institutional reach over the past half-decade or so. From an intellectual perspective, that is attributable to the fact that many leading Claremonsters have been, and continue to be, defenders of former President [Donald Trump](#) and/or proponents of the sort of nationalist and conservative-populist policies that now anchor the "[New Right](#)" challenge to the conservative establishment's [regnant right-liberal "Fusionism."](#)



U.S. President Donald Trump awards the Claremont Institute, accepted by their president Ryan Williams, the National Humanities medal in the East room of the White House on November 21, 2019.

ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS/AFP via Getty Images

"[The Flight 93 Election](#)," the famous September 2016 *CRB* essay published pseudonymously but now credited to Hillsdale College's Michael Anton, effectuated a genuine paradigm shift on the Right, ushering in a new era of [truculent conservative politics](#) that is less interested in politely quibbling over marginal income tax rates than it is in [fighting the culture war](#) with the aim of vigorously defending the [American way of life](#) from the destructive domestic forces of civilizational arson. [The American Mind](#), Claremont's online journal founded in 2018 as an edgier complement to the *CRB*, has quickly emerged as a leading organ of the [young](#) online Right. Many Claremont alumni filled the ranks of the Trump White House, and Claremont has also made inroads with the exceptional governor of my state, Florida's [Ron DeSantis](#).

I am very far from neutral on the question of the Claremont Institute. I am a proud [Claremont alumnus](#), a regular participant in their alumni programs, and a [frequent American Mind contributor](#). I was struck by [Chris Rufo's](#) poignant description of Claremont, in Zerofsky's *Times* essay this week, as a "brotherhood." Rufo is spot-on. And in that "brotherhood" sense—from an intellectual, professional, and activist perspective—there is really no other organization on the Right quite like Claremont.

Perhaps most important, though, Claremonsters recognize—to use a phrase that itself has [Claremont-world provenance](#)—“[what time it is](#)” in America. We understand that the questions that now divide our fellow countrymen are not prosaic ones pertaining to tax rates or regulatory red tape, but the most foundational questions of all. What are men and women? What is justice and injustice? Are America's Founding principles and animating spirit, for that matter, just or unjust?

These are the kind of heady questions that are less Bush versus Gore than they are Lincoln versus Douglas. These are defining questions of human anthropology and the very basic building blocks of civilization.

Amidst that sober, “Flight 93 Election”-esque societal backdrop, the political stakes very quickly become very high. Inspired by the Harry Jaffa-penned Barry Goldwater quip that “moderation in pursuit of justice is no virtue,” Claremonsters recognize that the time is *now* to reject the “[principled loserdom](#)” of the decadent old guard and command the battle stations in pursuit of [outright victory](#) over our recalcitrant foes in America's roiling culture wars. In our [late-stage republic](#), there is simply no more time to waste.

Perhaps that, above all, is why Claremont has garnered so much attention of late. The fact that Claremont “knows what time it is,” and has been proven capable of operationalizing that sentiment at the highest levels of the American Right despite its modest institutional size, poses a unique threat to the [ruling class](#) and its corrupt regime. The more success Claremont has, then, the more scathing the future hit pieces may become. So be it—such is a small price to pay to salvage the American way of life from the ruling class's treacherous talons.

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