

Don't complain about cancel culture and then pursue it

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Silencing journalists and scholars, chasing dissent from the public square, distorting history to serve an ideological narrative — it's the stuff of autocrats, and now, the reprehensible behavior of Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick.

Texans of all stripes should be deeply troubled by Patrick's announcement last week that he used his authority, as the state's No. 2 elected official, to cancel a virtual panel discussion he didn't like at the Bullock Texas State History Museum, a public institution supported in part by taxpayer dollars.

The topic was a new book about the Alamo, but that is beside the point. It's not the lieutenant governor's job to decide which ideas can be shared and debated at a public forum. It's not his job to tell Texans what to think.

The book at the heart of this controversy, "Forget the Alamo," casts a critical eye on Texas' founding fathers, suggesting their desire to keep slaves helped fuel their push for independence from Mexico, which opposed slavery. That account — supported by decades of scholarship, largely by Latino historians whose work deserves greater public recognition — runs counter to the simplistic tale that generations of Texas students have learned in school, the story celebrating the white heroes of the Alamo while largely ignoring the contributions of Tejano allies and the thorny role of slavery.

The well-documented book is not, as Patrick alleged on Twitter, a "fact-free rewriting of TX history." And it's not solely about history. The book by Bryan Burrough, Chris Tomlinson and Jason Stanford also probes the present-day politics around the storytelling of the Alamo, suggesting Patrick used "manufactured outrage" over the Alamo restoration plan to undercut Land Commissioner George P. Bush, whom he viewed as a political rival.

Patrick's push to cancel the book discussion went beyond preserving an idealized narrative of Texas' founding fathers. It silenced an examination of Patrick's own efforts to capitalize on that narrative — efforts that could cost Texas taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars if Patrick follows through on his pledge for sizable state funding for an Alamo museum, housing what the book's authors argue is a collection of Alamo memorabilia of dubious authenticity.

For months now Republicans

have griped about "cancel culture," a catchall condemnation for everything from the repackaging of Mr. Potato Head to the efforts by social media companies to reduce the spread of conspiracy theories on their private platforms. Simmering with faux outrage, Republicans have appeared on TV, penned guest columns and fired off fundraising emails — absurdly complaining to the masses that they were being muzzled.

But what Patrick did last week was a textbook case of real censorship, a clear case of the government stifling free speech. Patrick abused his authority as a member of the State Preservation Board to cancel an event at a public institution because he disagreed with the message. The only silver lining is that Patrick's effort backfired spectacularly, drawing national attention to the topic and driving book sales through the roof. The publisher, according to one of the authors, has ordered two more printings.

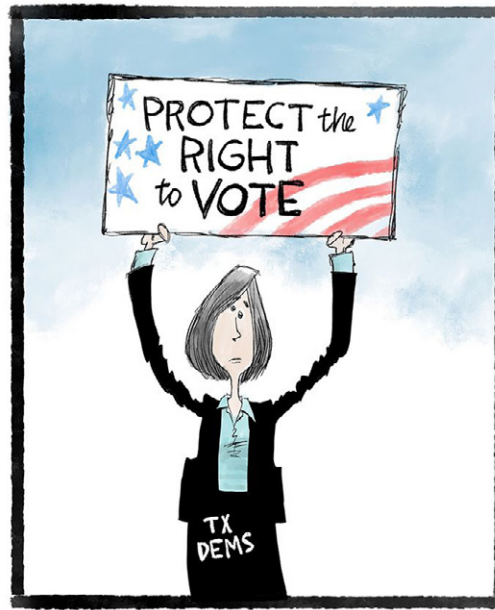
Forget, for a moment, the Alamo. Remember, instead, the First Amendment. Remember that it was the first enumeration of Americans' protected rights for a reason: The free exchange of ideas, even difficult or unpopular ones, is the oxygen that keeps democracy alive. Americans cannot govern themselves if government leaders dictate what's fact and what's not, what can be discussed and what's forbidden.

And yet state leaders keep trying. Last month Gov. Greg Abbott signed a bill creating the "1836 Project," a thinly disguised propaganda campaign about "why Texas became so exceptional in the first place." He also signed a bill limiting the ways that race and current events can be discussed in public schools, tapping into the ginned-up debate over critical race theory — a topic he's urged lawmakers to revisit in the special session, alongside the supposed censorship of conservatives on social media.

Abbott and GOP lawmakers have repeatedly tried to curtail an honest, nuanced examination of Texas history, opting for indoctrination over discourse. This, on top of a barrage of bills last session in which the Legislature tried to dictate a range of decisions, from personal medical care to police funding levels, that Texans and local communities should be free to make for themselves.

Enough already. Patrick is free to disagree with the authors of any book. Better yet, he's free to challenge the authors to explain and defend their findings. Either way, Texans deserve to have the discussion. The lieutenant governor had no right to shut it down.

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Some welcome pushback against Russia, China

The British Royal Navy destroyer HMS Defender recently broke away from the HMS Queen Elizabeth Carrier Strike Group to conduct a Black Sea mission that triggered Russia's reflexive dishonesty. This was one episode among several lately that demonstrate increasing resistance to Russian and Chinese assaults on a rules-based international order.

The Defender sailed close to the Crimean coast, through what Russia has claimed are its territorial waters since it seized Crimea from Ukraine seven years ago. The Defender's mission in Ukrainian waters was to demonstrate that the legality of the seizure has never been recognized internationally. Russia responded by claiming to have fired shots at, and dropped fragmentation bombs near, the Defender, which Russia said then changed course. Although Russian planes flew low over the ship, no bombs were dropped, the only gunfire was from a previously scheduled Russian exercise nearby, and the Defender did not alter its course, according to the British Defense Ministry.

The British government says the Royal Navy strike group's 26,000-mile cruise is "the UK's most ambitious deployment for two decades." The group, which includes a U.S. Navy destroyer and a Dutch frigate, conducted combat operations from the Queen Elizabeth in the eastern Mediterranean, attacking forces of the Islamic State, as the Royal Air Force has been doing for seven years from Cyprus.

The Queen Elizabeth, one of only 18 large carriers worldwide, is the largest ship ever built for the Royal Navy. Before it left Britain in May, the government said the strike group would be "confident but not confrontational" in the South China Sea, where China illegally



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claims near-total sovereignty. Unfortunately, "nonconfrontational" means that the group will not sail through the Taiwan Strait. Beijing will surely interpret this avoidance as a flinch. Still, with the British Army now smaller than at any time in more than three centuries, the Royal Navy, Europe's most formidable naval power, augments the complications confronting Chinese as well as Russian war planners.

The Financial Times recently reported U.S.-Japan joint military exercises — presented as disaster relief training — in the South China and East China seas, and "top-secret tabletop war games" in case of "a conflict with China over Taiwan." Presumably someone thought the no-longer-quite-so-secret games should be publicized, perhaps for the edification of China. The westernmost island in the Japanese archipelago is 68 miles from Taiwan. The Senkaku islands in the East China sea are administered by Japan but claimed by China.

Heino Klinck, a Pentagon official who oversaw military relations with Japan and Taiwan late in the Trump administration, tells the Financial Times: "The Japanese government has increasingly recognized, and even acknowledges publicly, that the defense of Taiwan equates to the defense of Japan." Evidence of this includes the Hudson Institute's June 28 virtual event on "The Transformation of Japan's Security Strategy," at which Japan's State Minister for Defense Yasuhide Nakayama described the Taiwan Strait as a "red line of the 21st century." He said, "We have to protect . . .

Taiwan as a democratic country." He called Taiwan more than a "friend," a "brother," and said, "We are family." Emphasizing the increasing collaboration of China and Russia in military exercises near Japan, he stressed the importance of European militaries "exercising in Asia."

Japan's Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso was recently quoted (in remarks at a political fundraiser) saying that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan would threaten Japan's "survival," so "Japan and the U.S. must defend Taiwan together." This, even though Japan officially adheres to the "one-China policy" — the increasingly threadbare fiction that Taiwan and People's Republic of China are somehow part of a single polity.

The Wall Street Journal noted, "In the balance of power between the world's two largest economies, the U.S. and China, the world's third-largest economy, Japan, is critical." And retired U.S. Adm. James Stavridis, former supreme allied commander of NATO, says that "over time" the U.S. policy is to confront China with a "global maritime coalition" that includes, in addition to Japan, "Australia, New Zealand, India, South Korea, Singapore and Vietnam."

Henry Kissinger has said, not unreasonably, that we are in "the foothills" of a cold war with China. And Vladimir Putin, who nurses an unassuageable grudge about the way the Cold War ended, seems uninterested in Russia reconciling itself to a role as a normal nation without gratuitous resorts to mendacity. It is, therefore, well to notice how, day by day, in all of the globe's time zones, civilized nations are, in word and deed, taking small but cumulatively consequential measures that serve deterrence.

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We learned from financial crisis, we can learn from pandemic

We are now nearly a year and a half into the pandemic. Enough time has passed to start looking back and drawing lessons, especially when comparing it with the last great jolt to the international system — the global financial crisis. Did we learn any lessons from 2008? Have we handled this one any better?

At first glance, the comparison would seem to favor the present. About 18 months into the 2008 crisis — say, by the middle of 2009 — U.S. unemployment was climbing to its highest numbers in decades, the stock market was struggling back from one of its worst foreclosures in history, and housing foreclosures were spiraling to their worst levels ever.

By contrast, with half the population vaccinated today, the U.S. economy is roaring. Growth rates rival the Reagan boom. The stock market is at new highs. Even wages show signs of rising. While the United States is doing better than most, the other major industrial countries are also on the road to recovery. The chief reason is everyone learned the lesson of 2008: During systemic collapses, governments need to go big and fast, spending money and providing li-



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quidity. The voices of austerity in the United States and Europe — extremely powerful during the 2008 crisis — have been largely silent this time around.

That is where the good news ends. Back in 2008, policymakers quickly recognized the need for fundamental change. The financial system was risky, poorly regulated and unstable. In 2010, Congress enacted sweeping reforms to banks — higher capital requirements, lower leverage, less speculation, stress tests — all of which the banks lobbied hard against. But the banks were wrong. During this pandemic, the financial system has performed well — a testament to those reforms. Despite the near-shutdown of the global economy in 2020, banks almost everywhere weathered the storm. That is because central banks supported them but also because they were well capitalized and more tightly regulated.

Yet, during the current crisis,

despite our many failures in fighting the disease, we are talking very little about reforms. Early on during the pandemic we watched as governments in many countries failed on basic public health functions, such as testing, tracing, quarantining and clear public communication. Some learned and recovered, but many have simply been saved by the early arrival of vaccines. Almost none have begun to ask how to genuinely reorganize their health-care bureaucracies, to learn from countries that got it right, and to put in place new policies, procedures and frameworks to ensure better performance during the next pandemic — which will surely come.

The divergence between the last crisis and this one has been most stark on the global level. As Daniel Drezner, a professor of international politics at Tufts University, wrote in his book "The System Worked," people used to think of global governance the way Woody Allen joked about food at Catskills resorts: so bad and, yet, such small portions! In fact, as Drezner documents, global governance functioned surprisingly well during the financial crisis. Countries cooperated, central banks worked together and a downward spiral

was averted. He notes that even China was remarkably willing to go along with major international initiatives. Washington played the central role, nudging countries to get in line but also acting in ways that helped others. The economic historian Adam Tooze points out that about half of all the liquidity provided by the Federal Reserve was used by European banks.

This wasn't done out of blind generosity. "We recognized that it was in our enlightened self-interest to save the dollar-based international financial system, and that required helping others, not just ourselves," former treasury secretary Timothy Geithner told me recently. He acknowledged that much of the global cooperation happened because many of the key players around the world were "instinctive multilateralists." He said, "We all knew that we wanted to prevent the nationalism and protectionism that caused so much damage in the 1930s."

Alas, while the response to the 2008 crisis succeeded economically, it failed politically, unleashing the wave of populism and anti-elitism that crippled the response to today's crisis. Men such as Donald Trump, Hungary's Viktor Orban and Brazil's Jair Bolson-

aro reacted to the pandemic by hunkering down, consolidating power and blaming foreigners. Liberal-minded politicians enacted protectionist measures and even blocked the export of vaccines. In China, the epicenter of the pandemic, President Xi Jinping proved to be less open, cooperative and multilateral than his predecessor during the last global crisis.

President Biden has made a start, but Washington needs to lead the world in a fundamentally different direction. Unless we push hard to vaccinate the whole planet, this pandemic will linger and morph and perhaps even widen. The only way to restore and sustain global growth is to help developing countries that are saddled with huge debt burdens. And the best way to prepare for future crises — whether they involve pandemics, extreme weather, or cybercrime — is collectively. This is not dewy-eyed idealism. The system worked a decade ago; it can again.

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