

April 9, 2015

Victor Davis Hanson, whose day job is California farmer, writes on the "Engineered Drought" in his state.

California governor Jerry Brown had little choice but to issue a belated, state-wide mandate to reduce water usage by 25 percent. How such restrictions will affect Californians remains to be seen, given the Golden State's wide diversity in geography, climate, water supply, and demography.

We do know two things. First, Brown and other Democratic leaders will never concede that their own opposition in the 1970s (when California had about half its present population) to the completion of state and federal water projects, along with their more recent allowance of massive water diversions for fish and river enhancement, left no margin for error in a state now home to 40 million people. Second, the mandated restrictions will bring home another truth as lawns die, pools empty, and boutique gardens shrivel in the coastal corridor from La Jolla to Berkeley: the very idea of a 20-million-person corridor along the narrow, scenic Pacific Ocean and adjoining foothills is just as unnatural as "big" agriculture's Westside farming. The weather, climate, lifestyle, views, and culture of coastal living may all be spectacular, but the arid Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay-area megalopolises must rely on massive water transfers from the Sierra Nevada, Northern California, or out-of-state sources to support their unnatural ecosystems. ...

Megan McArdle posts on the subject.

... California has to do something -- many of its reservoirs are half-empty, and the Sierra Nevada snowpack, which provides much of California's water, is far below normal levels. But that doesn't mean it should do this particular thing. California's proposal is far too heavy on top-down regulatory management, and far too light on pricing.

I've seen a lot of apocalyptic writing about California only having a year of water left (not true), and I've heard some idle talk about whether California can continue to grow. But California's problem is not that it doesn't have enough water to support its population. Rather, the problem is that its population uses more water than it has to. And the reason people do this is that water in California is seriously underpriced, as Marginal Revolution's Alex Tabarrok notes. While the new emergency rules do include provisions for local utilities to raise rates, that would still leave water in the state ludicrously mispriced. According to Tabarrok, the average household in San Diego pays less than 80 cents a day for the 150 gallons of water it uses. This is less than my two-person household pays for considerably less water usage, in an area where rainfall is so plentiful that the neighborhood next door to me has a recurrent flooding problem. ...

Mr. Hanson has more on the general drift in California.

The proverbial thin veneer of civilization has never been thinner in California, as if nature has conspired to create even greater chaos than what man here has already wrought. What follows below was a fairly typical seven-day period in the land of the highest sales, fuel, and income taxes that have led to the nearly worst freeways, schools, and general infrastructure in the nation.

I recently came home from an out-of-state trip. Something was wrong: I noticed off in the distance a strange geyser at the top of the hill. Vandals had apparently earlier taken sledgehammers to the pump's four-inch plastic fittings — all to scavenge two brass valves (recycle value of about \$20).

The fools did not know the pump was even on. When they smashed open the plastic pipes the spurting water apparently drenched them, and so they left their self-created mess. (No, criminals here do not know how to turn off a pump.) The ensuing deluge of several hours had ripped a three-foot-deep gully for about 20 yards.

I've lost count of how many pumps have been vandalized over the last decade. Some people play golf after work and weekends, but out here the pastime is to drive out to the countryside to wreck things for a few dollars of copper and bronze. It reminds me of the Ottomans in Greece, who pried off the lead seals over the iron clamps that had held together the marble blocks of ancient Greek temples and walls. The Turks, who could make little but scavenge a lot, got their few ounces of lead for bullets. In the exchange, the exposed iron marble clamps rusted and fell apart, ruining the antiquities that had theretofore survived 2,000 years of natural wear and tear. One civilization builds and invests, quite a different one destroys and consumes. ...

... Does anyone realize that the entire California experiment — having 75% of the people live in a Mediterranean climate where 25% of the state's rain and snow fall — is unnatural and depends on each generation's ingenuity and industriousness to ensure water, an educated populace, safe freeways, and basic safety and security for the citizenry?

The enervated middle class of California struggles under high taxes, high housing costs, high-cost energy, terrible schools, and high crime. Increasingly it is considering leaving paradise. In our pyramidal state, there is a vast underclass (22% of the state lives below the poverty line, schools are rated 46th in the nation, and one out of three hospital admittances over 35 suffers from diabetes, etc., a disease for whose prevention California rates near last in expenditures). The base of the pyramid is growing, and now represents one in six of all American welfare recipients. ...

... What nature's deadly four-year drought is teaching California is that even the liberal aristocracy eventually has a rendezvous with what they created.

All the capital, income, and influence in the state cannot guarantee exemption from their own self-induced chaos. Climbing atop the smokestacks of the sinking Titanic is of little use after you have deprecated the idea of more lifeboats.

John Fund deals with Harry Reid's lack of regret for his lies about Romney.

It was just over 60 years ago that the tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy were repudiated when he was censured by the Senate in December 1954. Ever since then, McCarthyism — the reckless hurling of accusations at adversaries so as to destroy their reputations — has been considered one of the lowest forms of political behavior and one liberals love to crusade against.

But McCarthyism isn't limited to one party or ideology. And if liberals have any sense of self-awareness they will recognize the tactic has returned and is growing in their back yard.

Harry Reid, the top Democrat in the Senate, was asked by CNN's Dana Bash this week if he regretted his 2012 accusation on the Senate floor that GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney "hasn't paid taxes for ten years." Reid presented no evidence at the time and claimed he didn't need any: "I don't think the burden should be on me. The burden should be on him. He's the one I've alleged has not paid any taxes."

Reid's response in the interview was fascinating. When asked by Bash if his tactic was McCarthyite he visibly shrugged on camera, smiled, and said "Well, they can call it whatever they want. Romney didn't win, did he?" White House spokesman Josh Earnest refused to criticize Reid for his comment because it "was three years old," when in reality Reid's televised reveling in it was only three days old. ...

More on the Left's lies from [Naomi Schaefer Riley](#).

The verdict's in on Rolling Stone. According to no less an authority than the Columbia Journalism Review, the magazine's last year story of a University of Virginia gang rape was a "journalistic failure [that] encompassed reporting, editing, editorial supervision and fact-checking."

But as with many other stories that don't fit into the right narrative, the media will continue to draw the wrong lessons.

As an AP article noted, "Despite its flaws, the article heightened scrutiny of campus sexual assaults amid a campaign by President Barack Obama."

Despite its flaws? You mean despite the fact that as far as anyone can tell, the story was made up out of whole cloth?

Even once the police investigated the claims of the alleged victim, The New York Times reported: "Some saw a more complex picture, saying that the uproar over the story and the steps that the university had taken since in an effort to change its culture had, in the end, raised awareness and probably done the school, and the nation, some good."

How has the university benefited from the fact that a fraternity has been falsely accused of a horrific crime? And how has the nation benefited from the false but now widespread belief that violent rape, even gang rape, is raging on US campuses? ...

The writer who first called bullshit on the Rolling Stone rape story has posted a reaction to the Columbia Journalism School's review of the disaster. In his blog Shots In The Dark, [Richard Bradley](#) has gone long. We include it here since this is the last post for a few days so there'll be time to go back to it. Bradley's first post dated November 24, 2014 started the ball rolling for a more critical look at the story. You can find it in [Pickings December 4, 2014](#).

... I want to go through a few specific things that I jotted down as I read the CJS report, and then I'd like to conclude with where I think it does fail in one very important way.

1) In Sabrina Rubin Erdely's public statement, she makes no apology to the fraternity she defamed. I imagine she feared, or was told, that doing so might have legal implications. I doubt that that would be the case; whether that was her intention or not, she obviously harmed the

fraternity. There can be no doubt about that. So it is particularly galling that instead of apologizing to people on whom she inflicted tangible harm, she apologizes to "any victims of sexual assault who may feel fearful as a result of my article." What about people whom she falsely accused of rape?

Rubin Erdely owes Phi Psi and its members—probably all fraternity members, frankly—an apology. That she refuses to acknowledge her obligation says something about her character.

It also suggests that, despite everything, she still believes, whether Jackie's story is true or not—it obviously isn't—some larger truth about rape culture and the predilections of fraternity members. Seen in this light, her refusal to apologize actually strengthens the fraternity's lawsuit; it reinforces the idea that Sabrina Rubin Erdely really, really doesn't like fraternities—and was determined to portray their members as rapists.

2) The Columbia report notes that Rolling Stone refused to waive its attorney client privilege and give Coll access to their lawyers. The tautological reason Rolling Stone gave: That to do so would be waiving attorney-client privilege. (Get it? They wouldn't waive attorney-client privilege because that would mean waiving attorney-client privilege.)

The magazine's lack of transparency casts doubt on virtually all of what Rolling Stone has to say in its own defense.

Here's why: With a story this sensitive, good libel lawyers—and I assume Rolling Stone has very good lawyers—are, or should be, very much in the mix. On sensitive stories, they become something akin to editors with a law degree. You simply could not publish such an accusatory article without having it very heavily lawyered; there is, or ought to be, a lot of discussion between the editor-in-chief and the magazine's libel lawyer(s). That Rolling Stone won't disclose their lawyers' advice suggests that the magazine did not take it, or did the least amount possible to satisfy legal concerns. After all, if the lawyers argued that the magazine had done excellent work and was on safe ground publishing the story, disclosing that information would likely have discouraged any potential lawsuits—like the one Phi Psi is now pursuing against the magazine.

In other words: It's highly likely that Rolling Stone had a prepublication warning that this story had significant problems—and published the story anyway. Because they knew it was a sexy story, and they were willing to take the risk. ...

City Journal

[An Engineered Drought](#)

Shortsighted coastal elites bear most of the blame for California's water woes.

by Victor Davis Hanson

California governor Jerry Brown had little choice but to issue a belated, [state-wide mandate](#) to reduce water usage by 25 percent. How such restrictions will affect Californians remains to be seen, given the Golden State's wide diversity in geography, climate, water supply, and demography.

We do know two things. First, Brown and other Democratic leaders will never concede that their own opposition in the 1970s (when California had about half its present population) to the completion of state and federal water projects, along with their more recent allowance of massive water diversions for fish and river enhancement, left [no margin for error](#) in a state now home to 40 million people. Second, the mandated restrictions will bring home another truth as lawns die, pools empty, and boutique gardens shrivel in the coastal corridor from La Jolla to Berkeley: the very idea of a 20-million-person corridor along the narrow, scenic Pacific Ocean and adjoining foothills is just as unnatural as “big” agriculture’s Westside farming. The weather, climate, lifestyle, views, and culture of coastal living may all be spectacular, but the arid Los Angeles and San Francisco Bay-area megalopolises must rely on massive water transfers from the Sierra Nevada, Northern California, or out-of-state sources to support their unnatural ecosystems.

Now that no more reservoir water remains to divert to the Pacific Ocean, the exasperated Left is damning “corporate” agriculture (“Big Ag”) for “wasting” water on things like hundreds of thousands of acres of almonds and non-wine grapes. But the truth is that corporate giants like “Big Apple,” “Big Google,” and “Big Facebook” assume that their multimillion-person landscapes sit atop an aquifer. They don’t—at least, not one large enough to service their growing populations. Our California ancestors understood this; they saw, after the 1906 earthquake, that the dry hills of San Francisco and the adjoining peninsula could never rebuild without grabbing all the water possible from the distant Hetch Hetchy watershed. I have never met a Bay Area environmentalist or Silicon Valley grandee who didn’t drink or shower with water imported from a far distant water project.

The Bay Area remains almost completely reliant on ancient Hetch Hetchy water supplies from the distant Sierra Nevada, given the inability of groundwater pumping to service the Bay Area’s huge industrial and consumer demand for water. But after four years of drought, even Hetch Hetchy’s huge Sierra supplies have only about a year left, at best. Again, the California paradox: those who did the most to cancel water projects and divert reservoir water to pursue their reactionary nineteenth-century dreams of a scenic, depopulated, and [fish-friendly environment](#) enjoy lifestyles predicated entirely on the fragile early twentieth-century water projects of the sort they now condemn.

It’s now popular to deride California agriculture in cost-benefit terms, given that its share of state GNP (anywhere from 4 percent to 8 percent, depending on how one counts related industries) supposedly does not justify its huge allotted consumption of state water (anywhere from 65 percent to 80 percent). But note the irony: California supplies a staggering percentage of the nation’s fresh vegetables and fruits; it’s among the most efficient producers in the world of beef, dairy, and staple crops. One can purchase an iPhone 6 or a neat new Apple watch, but he still must eat old-fashioned, pre-tech food. There are no calories in Facebook, and even Google can’t supply protein. On the other hand, I can live without an iPad. Who is to say which industry is essential and which isn’t? Insulin and antibiotic production constitute a micro-percentage of GDP, but is their water usage less important than Twitter’s? Is a biologist who studies bait-fish populations in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta really more important than a master tractor driver whose skill gives broccoli to thousands?

We’re suffering the ramifications of the [“small is beautiful,”](#) “spaceship earth” ideology of our cocooned elites. Californians have adopted the ancient peasant mentality of a limited good, in which various interests must fight it out for the always scarce scraps. Long ago we jettisoned the can-do visions of our agrarian forebears, who knew California far better than we do and trusted nature far less. Now, like good peasants, we are at one another’s throats for the last drops of a finite supply.

Bloomberg

The Real Cost of California's Drought

by Megan McArdle

As California heads into its fourth year of drought, Governor Jerry Brown is taking the unprecedented step of ordering mandatory rationing:

Brown issued an executive order seeking a mandatory 25 percent reduction in use and a requirement that new homes feature water-efficient irrigation if the builder plans to use potable water for landscaping. He also called for 50 million square feet of lawns to be replaced with drought-tolerant landscaping and required campuses, golf courses and cemeteries to cut back on water.

California has to do something -- many of its reservoirs are half-empty, and the Sierra Nevada snowpack, which provides much of California's water, is far below normal levels. But that doesn't mean it should do this particular thing. California's proposal is far too heavy on top-down regulatory management, and far too light on pricing.

I've seen a lot of apocalyptic writing about California only having a year of water left (not true), and I've heard some idle talk about whether California can continue to grow. But California's problem is not that it doesn't have enough water to support its population. Rather, the problem is that its population uses more water than it has to. And the reason people do this is that water in California is seriously underpriced, as Marginal Revolution's Alex Tabarrok notes. While the new emergency rules do include provisions for local utilities to raise rates, that would still leave water in the state ludicrously mispriced. According to Tabarrok, the average household in San Diego pays less than 80 cents a day for the 150 gallons of water it uses. This is less than my two-person household pays for considerably less water usage, in an area where rainfall is so plentiful that the neighborhood next door to me has a recurrent flooding problem.

Artificially cheap water encourages people to install lush, green lawns that need lots of watering instead of native plants more appropriate to the local climate. It means they don't even look for information about the water efficiency of their fixtures and appliances. They take long showers and let the tap run while they're on the phone with Mom. In a thousand ways, it creates demand far in excess of supply.

Having artificially goosed demand, the government then tries to curb it by mandating efficiency levels and outlawing water-hogging landscaping. Unfortunately, this doesn't work nearly as well as pricing water properly, then letting people figure out how they want to conserve it. For one thing, you can only affect large and visible targets, such as appliance manufacturers or lawns. For another, people will often try to evade your regulations -- my low-flow showerhead came with handy instructions on how to remove the flow restrictor. And, perhaps most important, you limit the potential conservation to the caps. So people have an efficient dishwasher but don't consider doing small loads by hand; they have a low-flow showerhead but don't consider taking shorter showers. In short, no one is looking for ways to conserve more than whatever you've mandated. This may be enough to temporarily manage the current crisis, but it does nothing to set California's water usage on a more sustainable path.

I know what you're going to say: Higher water bills will hurt the poor. But as Tabarrok points out, these bills are such a small portion of household budgets that even doubling them wouldn't make much difference. Moreover, the biggest subsidies in California are going to agriculture. Thanks to these subsidies, California is planting water-intensive crops such as rice and almonds even as it starts fussing about residents' lawns.

If we're truly worried about the poor, we could set some minimum amount of water that would be sold at a very cheap rate, with any excess charged at market rates to reflect the actual supply and the cost of providing it. This would be hugely unpopular with homeowners who have big lawns as well as with farmers. And perhaps the fabulous array of California produce would be reduced. But that seems like a reasonable price to pay for keeping California's reservoirs from running dry.

Pajamas Media

[The Drought: California Apocalypto](#)

by Victor Davis Hanson

The proverbial thin veneer of civilization has never been thinner in California, as if nature has conspired to create even greater chaos than what man here has already wrought. What follows below was a fairly typical seven-day period in the land of the highest sales, fuel, and income taxes that have led to the nearly worst freeways, schools, and general infrastructure in the nation.

I recently came home from an out-of-state trip. Something was wrong: I noticed off in the distance a strange geyser at the top of the hill. Vandals had apparently earlier taken sledgehammers to the pump's four-inch plastic fittings — all to scavenge two brass valves (recycle value of about \$20).

The fools did not know the pump was even on. When they smashed open the plastic pipes the spurting water apparently drenched them, and so they left their self-created mess. (No, criminals here do not know how to turn off a pump.) The ensuing deluge of several hours had ripped a three-foot-deep gully for about 20 yards.

I've lost count of how many pumps have been vandalized over the last decade. Some people play golf after work and weekends, but out here the pastime is to drive out to the countryside to wreck things for a few dollars of copper and bronze. It reminds me of the Ottomans in Greece, who pried off the lead seals over the iron clamps that had held together the marble blocks of ancient Greek temples and walls. The Turks, who could make little but scavenge a lot, got their few ounces of lead for bullets. In the exchange, the exposed iron marble clamps rusted and fell apart, ruining the antiquities that had theretofore survived 2,000 years of natural wear and tear. One civilization builds and invests, quite a different one destroys and consumes.

Four days earlier, three people (a male and two females) had parked nearby at the neighbor's abandoned house. It was said not to meet California's codes and thus was condemned, though the dwelling is far better built than are the occupied shacks and trailers across the street with various goats, chickens, geese, sheep, and cows grazing between the houses. In any case, the vandals were kicking in the sheet rock to rip out Romex wire (perhaps \$5 worth of recyclable wire per ruined wall). I tried to catch them, but by the time I got to the truck and drove back out after them, they were speeding out of the alleyways with impunity.

When these things happen, no one calls the sheriff, the insurance company, or any authority. The problem is so ubiquitous, and the old civilized infrastructure so ossified, that it is impossible to address the vandalism and chronic violation of civilization's basic tenets.

I think that we've come full circle in California: from the premodern Wild West of the 19th century to a decadent postmodernism [that is every bit as feral](#), though the roughness of ascension is always preferable to its counterpart in decline. The day before Easter, Sacramento tried to stage the world's largest public Easter egg hunt. From [news reports](#) it seems quickly to have devolved into a Darwinian free-for-all, where the [ochlos](#) swarmed the few who played by the rules.

After shutting the pump off, I drove back into the yard. That night the most miserable canine creature imaginable limped into the yard — a beaten bloody female dog dumped on the road.

This is a common occurrence in rural California: when dogs go into heat or become too expensive to feed or can no longer perform in backyard dog-fights, their peeved owners drive out of town, pull up to a rural house, and toss the dog out the car window.

We cleaned the creature up, and are trying to nurse it back to life to join our other dogs — who themselves were once throwaways.

After fixing the broken pipes, the pump ironically went dry the next day.

The well is a respectable 245 feet, but the submersible pump is set at 80 feet. The water table has fallen from 52 to 79 feet in a year, as the absence of surface water for four years has forced everyone to pump 24/7 to keep orchards and vineyards alive. (In the past, we've gone 10 years in a row without turning on a pump, given the irrigation district's normal deliveries out of Pine Flat Reservoir — in the age before fish and scenic river restoration.) Water is taken out of the ground, but none is percolating back down. We forget that the logic of the Sierra snow runoff was to fill valley ponds and canals, whose storage water trickled down and replenished the aquifer, which farmers rarely had a need to tap through pumping.

I am on a list to have the dry agricultural pump lowered to 130 feet. Right now, there is a scramble for pump installers and well drillers. Daily, homes and farms go dry as the aquifer plunges. A paradox emerges in Central and Southern California: unlike the foothills, the Sierra, the coastal corridor, the West Side, and the Coast Range, there is a *vast* aquifer beneath the San Joaquin Valley, at least for about 10 miles on either side of the 99 freeway. The railroad men of the 19th century whose rails the freeway follows knew where water for their steam engines was plentiful.

For the near future, the problem is not running out of water per se, but rather the wild [sauve-qui-peut](#) mentality of deeper wells, bigger pumps, and larger power bills, and who can get an overbooked well driller or pump installer first. But then the current water chaos is not so different from driving [the State 99](#) or trying to visit the DMV.

On the evening news, the governor announced a 25% reduction in state water usage. A wise move — but still at this late date, mostly a symbolic gesture after [a half-century of state madness](#) that saw (1) the state's population soar from 20 to 40 million people, (2) the envisioned second- and third-phase reservoirs of various California water projects all cancelled, (3) and several million acre feet of stored water before and during the drought released from reservoirs to the ocean for fish and scenic river restoration.

Given that the agricultural pump had gone out, I also checked the house well and pump (it's one thing to lose a grape crop, quite another to have no drinking water). It was a good thing. The much smaller pump was drawing on only 5 feet of water; so I had it lowered another 20 feet to near the bottom of the well. When the final 20 feet margin of error goes, that domestic well is kaput. But even a small new well for a house requires \$30,000, with a six-month to one-year waiting list.

I had thought I would call my son, a history teacher and coach at a local rural school, to have him help me check the wells and to fix the broken fittings on the pump. But he lives in California, too. So, of course, he has his own disasters. An hour before I called, his car was vandalized and window smashed, with the loss of computer, keys, and wallet in broad daylight, the day before Easter in a north Clovis shopping center. He cancelled his credit cards within an hour; too late, the thieves had already used it at a Jack in the Box and gas station.

Do we look for guidance for all this chaos from our governor? The Legislature? The clergy? The UC or CSU campus hierarchy?

I doubt it. Students at UC Berkeley are talking about creating racially segregated "safe spaces." The second in command at the Fresno Police Department was just arrested for drug trafficking (a \$180,000 salary I guess is far too little compensation). And the L.A. mass transit train just had another human-induced collision (where are we going to find enough educated workers to pilot the zooming high-speed rail cars?).

At least the governor recently weighed in on illegal immigration to suggest that those who wanted existing federal immigration laws enforced were "un-Christian" (the governor is now, in Jimmy Swaggart style, habitually deriding those who do not share his ideology [as un-Christian](#)).

In the drought finger-pointing, it is now *de rigueur* to damn "Big Ag," and to decry the use of water for things like almond trees. But why are almonds less important to our collective lives than are iPhones? Can you eat an app? Drink a search engine?

If one massages statistics and lumps environmental and recreational use of state and federal reservoir water under "agricultural use," one then can claim that only 4 to 8% of state GNP is generated by agriculture and does not warrant "75%" of our water usage.

But where does "Big Facebook" get its water — if not from far distant water projects? Which is more unnatural, to farm corporate almonds outside of Tranquility where the water table is at 1,000 feet, or to cram millions of people into the arid Bay Area corridor where there is no aquifer to speak of, and thus water must be transferred from the north and east over vast distances to ensure the viability of Big Apple and Big Google?

At least the former elite in farming understand that they must build and maintain reservoirs and that bait fish are more expendable than is food, while the latter elite in theory object to the very infrastructure that in the concrete allows them to live in a most unnatural landscape.

Does anyone realize that the entire California experiment — having 75% of the people live in a Mediterranean climate where 25% of the state's rain and snow fall — is unnatural and depends on each generation's ingenuity and industriousness to ensure water, an educated populace, safe freeways, and basic safety and security for the citizenry?

The enervated middle class of California struggles under high taxes, high housing costs, high-cost energy, terrible schools, and high crime. Increasingly it is considering leaving paradise. In

our pyramidal state, there is a vast underclass (22% of the state lives below the poverty line, schools are rated 46th in the nation, and one out of three hospital admittances over 35 suffers from diabetes, etc., a disease for whose prevention California rates near last in expenditures). The base of the pyramid is growing, and now represents one in six of all American welfare recipients.

Atop sits the wealthiest 1% elite in the United States, whose capital ensures immunity from the consequences of one's own ideology — at least up to a point.

After all, Redwood City and East Palo Alto are apparently seen as forcing wealthy white and Asian liberals into private academies in Silicon Valley. Even those who demand higher taxes tend to relocate one "permanent" residence in nearby tax-free Nevada — a potentially disastrous trend, given that only about 160,000 Californians of 40 million residents account for 54% of all state income tax revenue.

Even those in Malibu, Bel Air, and Old Pasadena must use the unusable 405. Even Hetch Hetchy and other water projects cannot supply the Bay Area's voracious appetite for water. Putting phase one of high-speed rail down among the yokels of Central California does no good unless it is linked up with a messy, smelly, dirty construction site in the Bay Area.

What nature's deadly four-year drought is teaching California is that even the liberal aristocracy eventually has a rendezvous with what they created.

All the capital, income, and influence in the state cannot guarantee exemption from their own self-induced chaos. Climbing atop the smokestacks of the sinking Titanic is of little use after you have deprecated the idea of more lifeboats.

National Review

Liberals Are the New McCarthyites—and They're Proud of It

Harry Reid leads today's Pitchfork Persecutors.

by John Fund

It was just over 60 years ago that the tactics of Senator Joseph McCarthy were repudiated when he was censured by the Senate in December 1954. Ever since then, McCarthyism — the reckless hurling of accusations at adversaries so as to destroy their reputations — has been considered one of the lowest forms of political behavior and one liberals love to crusade against.

But McCarthyism isn't limited to one party or ideology. And if liberals have any sense of self-awareness they will recognize the tactic has returned and is growing in their back yard.

Harry Reid, the top Democrat in the Senate, was asked by CNN's Dana Bash this week if he regretted his 2012 accusation on the Senate floor that GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney "hasn't paid taxes for ten years." Reid presented no evidence at the time and claimed he didn't need any: "I don't think the burden should be on me. The burden should be on him. He's the one I've alleged has not paid any taxes."

Reid's response in the interview was fascinating. When asked by Bash if his tactic was McCarthyite he visibly shrugged on camera, smiled, and said "Well, they can call it whatever

they want. Romney didn't win, did he?" White House spokesman Josh Earnest refused to criticize Reid for his comment because it "was three years old," when in reality Reid's televised reveling in it was only three days old.

Las Vegas journalist Jon Ralston, who has observed Reid over the latter's 30-year career in the Senate, has had enough. He revealed that he had written a harshly critical column in 2012 about Reid's "ruthless, Machiavellian politics" in response to the senator's accusation against Romney but saw it spiked by the *Las Vegas Sun* because its editor wanted to protect Reid.

The column pulled no punches in going after Reid: "He doesn't care about being criticized for using the same tactics that Joe McCarthy used. . . . Is there anything more dangerous than a man who does not care? And a related question: Is there anything more sadly desperate than a party that will do anything not to talk about the economy and to change the subject to Mitt Romney's wealth? . . . Sometimes the ends do not justify the means, even in the political swamp."

But increasingly the political swamp is being governed by the law of the jungle. Take the Koch Brothers, who Reid has ceaselessly pilloried as "un-American" in speeches on the Senate floor. And the vilification continues, even with no election in sight. Just this past February, *Salon* published a piece by Thom Hartmann, America's leading liberal talk-radio-show host, about the Koch Brothers. The title: "Fascism Is Rising in America."

Liberals have become quite fond of using fascist imagery to denounce their opponents in some of the same ways conservatives used to warn about Reds under every bed. Al Gore calls his critics "digital brownshirts." Last month, Vice President Joe Biden accused foes of union power of being "blackshirts."

And then there are the "naming of names" and economic pressure that seem wildly out of place in a supposedly free marketplace of ideas. Last month, a group of 39 scientists accused the Smithsonian's Museums of Science and Natural History and the American Museum of Natural History in New York City of compromising their "integrity" by accepting money from the Koch Brothers.

A related petition demanded the Koch Brothers be removed from any museum boards. The scientists claimed that the "only ethical way forward" was for institutions to "cut all ties" with climate-change skeptics and fossil-fuel companies. Syracuse University did just that this week by announcing its full divestment from fossil-fuel companies.

Senator Reid's Democratic colleagues have joined in the shaming. Senators Barbara Boxer of California, Ed Markey of Massachusetts, and Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island sent a letter in February to over 100 companies and think tanks demanding they reveal their ties to any efforts to argue against climate-change policies.

Koch Industries senior vice president Mark Holden wrote back to say, "We decline to participate in this endeavor and object to your apparent efforts to infringe upon and potentially stifle fundamental First Amendment activities."

Most of the mainstream media failed to report on a blatant attempt by the senators to bully their opponents, even after the American Meteorological Society warned that fishing expeditions seeking information on specific critics of climate-change science "sends a chilling message to all academic researchers."

Some of the hallmarks of the original McCarthyism are popping up in today's variant. Media companies were pressured in the 1950s not to hire people suspected of Communist ties. Today, pressure is being applied to isolate or sideline scholars who disagree with climate-change policies. In the 1950s, people accused of heretical views were sometimes unfairly attacked or threatened. Today, people who oppose gay marriage sometimes see their jobs or businesses put at risk. Ask Brendan Eich, who was forced to step down last year as CEO of Mozilla for making a six-year-old donation to a measure opposing same-sex marriage. Or the owners of the Indiana pizza parlor who had to close their doors after threats mounted when they said they would serve any customers in their restaurant but wouldn't cater a gay wedding.

Eric Dezenhall, who heads a crisis-communications firm in Washington, D.C., told *Forbes* magazine last year:

There is a very specific narrative today on certain issues, and if you step an inch out of bounds, you're going to get fouled or worse. [Eich] stepped on one of the three great land mines: gay rights, race, and the environment. You don't have to have made flagrantly terrible statements to get into trouble now.

Back in the 1950s, there was a real threat of Communists in government, but the tactics of Joe McCarthy were often reckless and vicious. At the time, not enough conservative leaders criticized McCarthy and stood up for civil discourse. Today, the new Pitchfork Persecutors are being led by the top Democrat in the U.S. Senate and sanctioned by the White House itself. To paraphrase Joseph Welch, the Massachusetts lawyer who faced down McCarthy in congressional hearings that preceded his censure, shouldn't we expect more decency from some of our leaders?

NY Post

[Facts matter: Left sticks to 'narratives,' evidence be damned](#)

by Naomi Schaefer Riley



Ellen Pao unsuccessfully filed a discrimination lawsuit against Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers.

The verdict's in on Rolling Stone. According to no less an authority than the Columbia Journalism Review, the magazine's last year story of a University of Virginia gang rape was a "journalistic failure [that] encompassed reporting, editing, editorial supervision and fact-checking."

But as with many other stories that don't fit into the right narrative, the media will continue to draw the wrong lessons.

As an AP article noted, "Despite its flaws, the article heightened scrutiny of campus sexual assaults amid a campaign by President Barack Obama."

Despite its flaws? You mean despite the fact that as far as anyone can tell, the story was made up out of whole cloth?

Even once the police investigated the claims of the alleged victim, The New York Times reported: "Some saw a more complex picture, saying that the uproar over the story and the steps that the university had taken since in an effort to change its culture had, in the end, raised awareness and probably done the school, and the nation, some good."

How has the university benefited from the fact that a fraternity has been falsely accused of a horrific crime? And how has the nation benefited from the false but now widespread belief that violent rape, even gang rape, is raging on US campuses?

Wouldn't it have done more good for people to know that young women are statistically less likely to be attacked on a campus than off of one?

But who cares about the facts as long as awareness has been raised? Take the case of Ellen Pao, who filed suit against her former employer, venture-capital group Kleiner Perkins, for gender discrimination.

She was seeking millions of dollars in damages to make up for what she claimed was a pattern of women being excluded from important meetings. They weren't invited on a ski trip with other partners. Women were forced to sit in the back of the room during a meeting.

Two weeks ago, a jury decided her claims were completely without merit. And yet from the media coverage, you'd think Ellen Pao successfully exposed a Silicon Valley ripe with discrimination.

Here's Farjad Manjoo in The New York Times: "The trial has nevertheless accomplished something improbable... The case has also come to stand for something bigger than itself. It has blown open a conversation about the status of women in an industry that, for all its talk of transparency and progress, has always been buttoned up about its shortcomings."

In a Bloomberg article called "Ellen Pao Lost, Women Didn't," Katie Benner declared: "The case broke wide open the issue of sexism in a powerful, influential industry."

Or take the Atlantic, which declared, "Ellen Pao's claim against top venture-capital firm Kleiner Perkins seems to have come up short, but it's brought heightened attention to gender discrimination in tech."

Come up short? She lost.

There was no merit to her claims. If Silicon Valley is so filled with sexist pigs acting illegally, perhaps we could find a case where they actually did that.

What Ellen Pao successfully did is what most people who file frivolous lawsuits do: They make it harder for companies to do business. They make it more expensive to cover their behinds.

They push everyone to make sure they never put anything substantive in an e-mail, and hire large numbers of bureaucrats to ensure that another lawsuit isn't filed. Or if it is, it's settled out of court.

This is not unlike what happened after the Justice Department released its report on the shooting of Michael Brown last summer.

The only "lesson" that could really be drawn from the DOJ report and the grand jury's non-indictment was that you shouldn't knock over convenience stores, but if you do and a police officer catches you, it's probably not a good idea to resist arrest.

But that was not the lesson that others wanted to emphasize. Which is why the Ferguson police now has to try to change the composition of its staff and ticketing policies — though they have no bearing on the case at hand.

Even The Washington Post's Jonathan Capeheart, whose article "'Hands Up, Don't Shoot' Was Built on a Lie" offered a kind of mea culpa for rushing to judgment in the case, concluded: "Yet this does not diminish the importance of the real issues unearthed in Ferguson by Brown's death. Nor does it discredit what has become the larger 'Black Lives Matter.'" "

Actually, yes, it does diminish the importance because it calls into question whether those were real issues at all.

Maybe we've spent too much time around preschool teachers. Maybe we are so used to being infantilized by the media that we hardly notice these rejoinders at the end of every story, assuring us that even if the story was all wrong, the narrative was correct.

Not everything has to be a teachable moment. And if we do need a moral to every story, it would be useful to find one based on the facts.

Naomi Schaefer Riley is a senior fellow at the Independent Women's Forum.

Shots In the Dark

[In the End, It's All About Rape Culture—or the Lack Thereof](#)

by Richard Bradley

I've taken a couple of days before responding to Columbia Journalism School's report on the Rolling Stone/Sabrina Rubin Erdely/Jackie fiasco. There's always pressure to provide near-instantaneous reactions to news events, but the report is long and substantive. I wanted to take some time with it.

At last, I've finished [the thing](#) —and I have plenty of reactions.

The blog post below is long, probably too long, so forgive me, and if you don't feel like reading all of it, just skip to the last couple paragraphs.

Anyone reading this blog probably know the gist of the report. (And thank you all for your comments—I've really enjoyed reading them.) Here's the takeaway: Rolling Stone screwed up in every way imaginable, but no one's going to get fired, the magazine has no plans to change its editorial or fact-checking procedures, and Sabrina Rubin Erdely will again grace the magazine's pages with her Hemingway-esque prose and ironclad reporting.

This heads-will-not-roll resolution, along with comments from owner and editor-in-chief Jann Wenner that again seemed to put the onus of responsibility on Jackie, doesn't seem to have quelled the anger over Rolling Stone's bogus journalism. (Although part of me agrees with Wenner: Jackie is a liar, and we shouldn't forget that. She does not escape responsibility because, as I heard managing editor Will Dana say on NPR the the other day, she's "a girl." She's a college junior, a young woman, a legal adult, and of an age where, if you called her a girl, many women of her age would take offense. Let's put it this way: She is old enough to know better, and to suggest otherwise is sexist.)

Anyway. I thought the Columbia report was...pretty good. Its authors clearly put a lot of time and thought into it. Its strength—and, depending on your perspective, its weakness—was the tight focus of its scope. There is a lot that Steve Coll and his colleagues did not get into or did not get into much: whether anyone should be fired, catfishing, the Department of Education's crusade against the "epidemic" of campus sexual assault.

But in terms of what it did do—investigate the reporting, editing and fact-check processes at Rolling Stone—I thought the report was very solid.

In all immodest candor, I also thought that Columbia dean Steve Coll et al [essentially confirmed all the doubts that I raised six months ago](#).

Again, in the spirit of full disclosure, there is one thing that bugs me about the reference to me in the report, the acknowledgment of my "early if speculative" blog posting calling Sabrina Rubin Erdely's article into question. I've encountered this theme—that I was "speculating"—repeatedly since I wrote my blog, and it frustrates me. By framing what I wrote as speculation, a number of mainstream publications, such as the Times and the New Yorker, feel free to ignore my blog when detailing how Erdely's story was dismantled by press critics.

The supposition that I was "speculating" misses the larger point of what I wrote; the foundation of my argument was not "a hunch," but basic professionalism. Any decent editor who is honest with him or herself would tell you the same: Even if Jackie's story turned out to be true, it *still* shouldn't have been published as it was reported and written. Will Dana should have sent it back to the editor and writer with a note saying: "You don't have this story. Go back and do your jobs." It was not "speculative" to say that the story should not have been published without further reporting; it was Journalism 101, the kind of thing that they teach (I assume) in the first couple weeks at Columbia Journalism School. And I didn't have to have access to all the fact-checker's notes and interview transcripts to know that; any reader with some small degree of journalism experience could know that—and, frankly, should have.

My suspicion that Jackie's story was not true was based on the idea that if it were, Rolling Stone would have shown us the reporting to back it up. Since Rolling Stone did not, one had to conclude that the evidence to support Jackie did not exist.

There. Got that off my chest.

I want to go through a few specific things that I jotted down as I read the CJS report, and then I'd like to conclude with where I think it does fail in one very important way.

1) In **Sabrina Rubin Erdely's [public statement](#), she makes no apology to the fraternity she defamed.** I imagine she feared, or was told, that doing so might have legal implications. I doubt that that would be the case; whether that was her intention or not, she obviously harmed the fraternity. There can be no doubt about that. So it is particularly galling that instead of apologizing to people on whom she inflicted tangible harm, she apologizes to "any victims of sexual assault who may feel fearful as a result of my article." What about people whom she falsely accused of rape?

Rubin Erdely owes Phi Psi and its members—probably all fraternity members, frankly—an apology. That she refuses to acknowledge her obligation says something about her character.

It also suggests that, despite everything, she still believes, whether Jackie's story is true or not—it obviously isn't—some larger truth about rape culture and the predilections of fraternity members. Seen in this light, her refusal to apologize actually *strengthens* [the fraternity's lawsuit](#); it reinforces the idea that Sabrina Rubin Erdely really, really doesn't like fraternities—and was determined to portray their members as rapists.

2) **The Columbia report notes that Rolling Stone refused to waive its attorney client privilege** and give Coll access to their lawyers. The tautological reason Rolling Stone gave: That to do so would be waiving attorney-client privilege. (Get it? They wouldn't waive attorney-client privilege because that would mean waiving attorney-client privilege.)

The magazine's lack of transparency casts doubt on virtually all of what Rolling Stone has to say in its own defense.

Here's why: With a story this sensitive, good libel lawyers—and I assume Rolling Stone has very good lawyers—are, or should be, very much in the mix. On sensitive stories, they become something akin to editors with a law degree. You simply could not publish such an accusatory article without having it very heavily lawyered; there is, or ought to be, a lot of discussion between the editor-in-chief and the magazine's libel lawyer(s). That Rolling Stone won't disclose their lawyers' advice suggests that the magazine did not take it, or did the least amount possible to satisfy legal concerns. After all, if the lawyers argued that the magazine had done excellent work and was on safe ground publishing the story, disclosing that information would likely have discouraged any potential lawsuits—like the one Phi Psi is now pursuing against the magazine.

In other words: *It's highly likely that Rolling Stone had a prepublication warning that this story had significant problems—and published the story anyway.* Because they knew it was a sexy story, and they were willing to take the risk.

3) **Sabrina Rubin Erdely claims that she spoke to Jackie several days after publication** and just happened to ask her, "Oh, by the way, what was Drew's real name? You can tell me now." [I'm paraphrasing, of course.] And that when Jackie fudged on the spelling of Drew's last name, Erdeley suddenly got suspicious.

This anecdote is, I suspect, a load of hoey. There were, after all, many, many pre-publication indicators that Jackie was not a reliable source, yet Erdely never got suspicious then. Jackie won't return calls, she threatens to back out of the story, Jackie's mother won't return calls.... Let me tell you something: If you have a source who's claiming she was gang-raped, and tells you to talk to her mother for corroboration, and the mother won't return your phone calls—you get nervous fast.

It's incomprehensible to me that there could be red flags like this and only now, post-publication, when Jackie misspells Drew's last name, does her spider sense start to tingle. (It's worth noting, by the way, that the reason Jackie would have claimed she didn't know the exact spelling of Drew's last name would be to hide the fact that there was no Drew, and make Drew's non-existence harder to establish—a fine example of Jackie's calculated deception to keep her horrible fable from coming apart.)

Erdely claims that she asked Jackie this question at this point because Drew was “at-large” and “dangerous.” That claim does not pass the smell test. For one thing, this would have been the case pre-publication as well as post. For another, in the wake of the 2.7 million readers Erdely's story attracted, it's implausible that Drew was sitting back in his frat boy lair planning his next gang rape. This is not Silence of the Lambs we're talking about.

I think Erdely told this story to try to look like she was being responsible and thorough, even if only after the fact. My bet is that she was probably reacting to something—post-publication phone calls from skeptics? my blog post? the reporting of [T. Rees Shapiro](#) or [Hanna Rosin](#)?—that rattled her, and she was starting to panic, and trying to confirm what she should have confirmed (or not) before the article was published.

Which is another way of saying that I don't think Jackie is the only liar in this matter.

4) **Sabrina Rubin Erdely is a terrible journalist.** This harsh but inescapable truth is born out again and again throughout the Coll report, though its authors are kind enough not to connect the dots. (Not me.) There are many reasons, but the most basic one is that Erdely knew what story she wanted to write before she wrote it—and her faith in her own righteousness blinded her to everything that could have prevented this disaster.

More on the subject of Rubin Erdely's terrible journalism later.

5) **The one true thing about Jackie's story...is that it disproves Sabrina Rubin Erdely's story.** Erdely used Jackie to argue that UVa is indifferent to allegations of sexual assault. But as we know now, the university took Jackie's story very seriously. Jackie spoke with a dean who subsequently checked up on her multiple times; was offered counseling; was offered the opportunity of pursuing the matter through university channels or through the police; and was recommended to a rape survivor group. Then, she was taken seriously when she claimed that she'd been hit in the head with a bottle, although there was ample reason to suggest that this incident was fabricated. Does this sound like official indifference to you?

Reading between the lines, it's hard not to think that the officials at UVa who heard Jackie's story didn't believe it—and yet they took it seriously, handled it professionally, and did what they could given that their complainant refused to file a complaint. Yet they are maligned by Erdely as indifferent, uncaring.

So why did Rubin Erdely choose as her avatar of official indifference a woman whose story actually disproved her thesis? Because Jackie's tale of gang rape was just too sexy not to lead with.

6) Sabrina Rubin Erdely is a terrible journalist, part II.

In the Columbia report, Erdely explains that if she had spoken to the three friends whom Jackie encountered on the night in question—as she should have—and the three friends contradicted Jackie's story—as, of course, they later would—she would have instantly abandoned Jackie and gone in search of a rape victim free of those “contradictions.”

As the report puts it:

If Erdely had learned Ryan's account that Jackie had fabricated their conversation, she would have changed course immediately, to research other UVA rape cases free of such contradictions, she said later.

(Note how the word “contradictions” is actually here a euphemism for “lies.”)

Let's consider that for a moment, because it sounds virtuous, but isn't. Sabrina Rubin Erdely started with a thesis and went in search of someone—and some place—that fit her thesis. She found Jackie and the University of Virginia. But, she admits, if she had discovered that Jackie was a liar, it wouldn't have caused her to question her thesis. (To which the only response is, if that doesn't cause you to question your thesis, what would?) Instead, she'd just go find another person who would better conform to what she already wanted to write.

And if that person proved to be a fraud as well, she'd find another...and another...

I am not a lawyer, so I don't know if Phi Psi has a strong case against Erdely and Rolling Stone. But if the famed “actual malice” test—you are intending to defame someone—is relevant, it seems to me that Erdely has just given the fraternity some explicit evidence of such malice. Even if her “victim” was a liar, Erdely has no doubt: Frat boys are rapists.

7) **There are significant discrepancies between Erdely's recollection of the editing process and those of her editor, Sean Woods;** these are not easily explained by differing interpretations or foggy memories. At least one of these people is lying.

8) **As the Columbia report points out, Sabrina Rubin Erdely is a terrible journalist (part III).**

Consider her outreach to the fraternity officers; she crafts emails that are deliberately vague and essentially impossible to rebut; they suggest that Erdely did not want Jackie's story to be disproved.

“I've become aware of allegations of gang rape that have been made against the UVA chapter of Phi Kappa Psi,” Erdely wrote. “Can you comment on those allegations?”

That is a deeply and deliberately dishonest way to ask for comment about a specific incident; the recipient of that email couldn't possibly comment on such a vague question. It makes me think that Erdely *wanted* to make it look like the fraternity was stonewalling, because that would

reinforce her caricature of fraternities as sinister and predatory. And, of course, because she wanted Jackie's story to be true; she had a lot to gain if it were.

9) **Sabrina Rubin Erdely saw what she wanted to see.**

All of Jackie's dissembling—her failure to return phone calls, her evasiveness, her refusal to name names, her threat to pull out of the story—were behaviors that should have set off alarms in any good reporter. Not Erdely. To her, Jackie's "behavior seemed very consistent with a victim of trauma." In other words: Every single thing that Jackie did that would, to most reporters, suggest she was an unreliable source, actually *confirmed* to Erdely that Jackie was a reliable source. In that scenario, there is literally nothing that Jackie could do that would not then be evidence of her credibility. If she swore on a Bible that she was lying, it would only prove how "traumatized" she was.

10) **Sabrina Rubin Erdely is not just a horrible reporter, she is a deeply dishonest one.**

According to the Coll report, two sources in the story publicly claimed that they did not say that Erdely attributes to them.

Allen W. Groves, the University dean of students, and Nicole Eramo, an assistant dean of students, separately wrote to the authors of this report that the story's account of their actions was inaccurate.

Those claims are detailed in a footnote in the report; they should not be a footnote, because they speak to the credibility of Erdely's reporting throughout. But they are worth acknowledging here.

Eramo's letter to Coll is long and worth reading; this, to me, is the most telling section.

....contrary to the quote attributed to me in Rolling Stone, I have never called the University of Virginia "the rape school," nor have I ever suggested — either professionally or privately — that parents would not "want to send their daughter" to UVA.

Those were enormously damning quotes when they were published, essential to Erdely's argument, and at the time, they struck me as remarkable. A university employee would say these things? That didn't feel right. I believe Eramo; at the least, Erdely misquoted her; at the worst, Erdely made up quotes.

Allen Groves wrote a long and detailed letter in which he defends himself against Erdely's portrayal of him as glib and dismissive about the fact that UVa was being investigated by the Department of Education for Title IX violations. You should read the letter; [it's fascinating](#). But the most telling part is when he recommends interested parties to watch a video of the meeting that Erdely describes in a way that really does make Groves sound like an ass.

Let me tell you something: When someone who is written about as being dismissive of rape encourages people to watch a video of the incident in question, he's probably been presented unfairly. I believe Groves.

(And by the way: A fact-checker should have watched that video and pushed back against the way Erdely characterized what Groves said and how he said it. A hundred bucks says that didn't happen.)

10) Sabrina Rubin Erdely is a terrible journalist (part IV) who puts the blame for her mistakes on other people.

“In retrospect,” she tells Coll about not calling the alleged rapists, “I wish somebody had pushed me harder.”

No. Just...no. You're accusing people of rape. You don't need an editor to tell you to get their side of the story. You need a conscience.

11) Magazine editor Will Dana's lack of oversight is hard to explain—and excuse.

He tells Coll that he did not know of the holes in reporting, editing and fact-checking the piece contained when it arrived at his desk. It is incomprehensible to me that a managing editor of a national magazine could be publishing a story of this gravity—containing such horrific allegations—without being deeply involved in it every step of the way. Even if he weren't: All you had to do is read the damn thing to know that it was ridden with problems.

And again: The lawyers must have pointed out these problems. So I'm again forced to wonder if people are being honest here. Even if Dana didn't know about the deeply flawed editorial process when the story landed in his in-box—which he should have—he must have known about it at some point.

But, to be fair, the fact that he actually went ahead and published the story suggests that he is telling the truth—that he was completely asleep at the wheel.

12) I have seen a lot of published fretting—not just in Erdely's statement—about whether this fiasco will discourage victims of rape from going public. This sentiment, which I have seen far more of than I have seen empathy for the people Erdely falsely accused of rape, strikes me as odd. A horrific story of rape, which, following its publication in a national magazine, had an enormous impact, is discovered to be a fraud. And the response is: Well, we should all worry about the potential impact on rape victims' ability to come forward to speak the truth.

I have a different take: Let's agree that if you don't lie and claim that you were gang-raped as part of a fraternity initiation ritual, you'll be treated with respect. And if people treat you disrespectfully based simply on past frauds, then shame on them.

But in the meantime, let's remember that the only known victims of this story are members of the Phi Psi fraternity, fraternity members in general and the University of Virginia. These individuals and institutions suffered in tangible ways; you might even say that some of the fraternity members were “traumatized.” The argument that the people we should worry about first are rape victims could actually—if I may borrow a phrase from Sabrina Rubin Erdely—*re*-traumatize them.

13) Rolling Stone should not have taken down Rubin Erdely's article. Doing so doesn't feel like an attempt to do the right thing or correct the record; it feels like an attempt to whitewash history. Kind of like when Vogue took its profile of Syria's absolutely lovely first lady ([“A Rose in the Desert”](#)) off its website....

I'm wrapping up here, so thank for your patience, and if you can, bear with me just a little bit longer.

Remember how I said that I thought Columbia made one big, fundamental mistake?

Here it is.

The only part of Sabrina Rubin Erdely's article closely examined by Columbia was the lede, which detailed Jackie's incredible story of gang rape.

Columbia should, in fact, have closely examined the entirety of Erdely's article.

Because ultimately, this article was not really about Jackie. Take a pencil, lop the Jackie story off the top, and the article could have run pretty much as it was.

The article was about the existence of rape culture and university indifference to said culture.

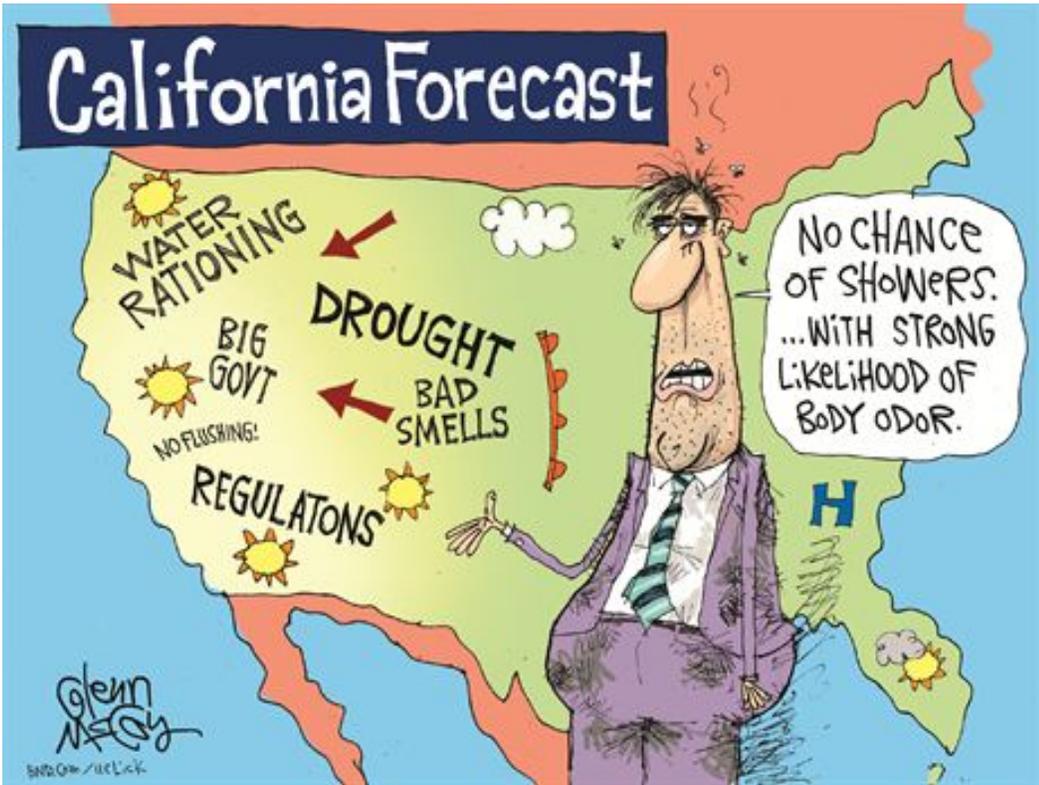
Jackie's story was supposed to be proof of that, and Jackie's story was a lie. But no one at Rolling Stone—not Erdely, not Dana, not Woods, not Wenner—seems to have considered just the possibility that maybe, must maybe, they were wrong about this.

Jackie's lies do not in and of themselves disprove Rubin Erdely's rape-culture thesis.

But if you examined the rest of the article with the same critical eye that you examine Jackie's story, you'll find that it, too, is deeply deceptive. **“A Rape on Campus” is fashioned on selective presentation of material, the use of bogus or discredited statistics, quotes that are either fabricated or taken out of context, unconfirmed allegations, anonymous sources, the deliberate exclusion of evidence contrary to the author's thesis, and material that is either fabricated or presented in a way that is so profoundly misleading it can only be evidence of incompetence or dishonesty.** (The multiple verses of a UVa fight song, for example, that nobody at UVa has actually heard.)

Sabrina Rubin Erdely was not first and foremost trying to obtain justice for Jackie; that was incidental. Her intention was to prove the existence of rape culture and to shame and ostracize those whom she fervently believed participated in it.

When you know how Rubin Erdely went about her work, you are forced to conclude that she failed, that the rest of her story is as unbelievable as Jackie's story—it's just concocted in a slicker way. In the ongoing debate about sexual assault on campus, we must remember this.



CREATORS SYNDICATE
© 2 0 1 5

SKILLN



HOW MUCH FOR AN UP-
GRADE TO WHEEL WELL?

