

Why the Past 10 Years of American Life Have Been Uniquely Stupid

By [Jonathan Haidt](#)

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Babel: What would it have been like to live in Babel in the days after its destruction? In the Book of Genesis, we are told that the descendants of Noah built a great city in the land of Shinar. They built a tower “with its top in the heavens” to “make a name” for themselves. God was offended by the hubris of humanity and said:

Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.

The text does not say that God destroyed the tower, but in many popular renderings of the story he does, so let’s hold that dramatic image in our minds: people wandering amid the ruins, unable to communicate, condemned to

mutual incomprehension.

The story of Babel is the best metaphor I have found for what happened to America in the 2010s, and for the fractured country we now inhabit. Something went terribly wrong, very suddenly. We are disoriented, unable to speak the same language or recognize the same truth. We are cut off from one another and from the past.

It’s been clear for quite a while now that [red America and blue America](#) are becoming like two different countries claiming the same territory, with two different versions of the Constitution, economics, and American history. But Babel is not a story about tribalism; it’s a story about the fragmentation of everything. It’s about the shattering of all that had seemed solid, the scattering of people who had been a community. It’s a metaphor for what is happening not only *between* red and blue, but within the left and within the right, as well as within universities, companies, professional associations, museums, and even families.

Babel is a metaphor for what some forms of social media have done to nearly all of the groups and institutions most important to the country’s future—and to us as a people. How did this happen? And what does it portend for American life?

Read the rest of the article at:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/05/social-media-democracy-trust-babel/629369/>

Ezra Klein on Twitter and Musk 4/27/22 (Excerpts)

Twitter takes the rich, numerous and subtle values that we bring to communication and quantifies our success through follower counts, likes and retweets. Slowly, what Twitter rewards becomes what we do. If we don’t, then no matter — no one sees what we’re saying anyway. We become what the game wants us to be, or we lose. And that’s what’s happening to some of the most important people and industries and conversations on the planet right now....

There is a reason that Donald Trump, with his preternatural gift for making people look at him, was Twitter’s most natural and successful user. And he shows how the platform can shape the lives of those who never use it. From 2017 to 2021, the White House was occupied by what was, in effect, a Twitter account with a cardiovascular system, and the whole world bore the consequences.

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A platform that heaps rewards on those who behave cruelly, or even just recklessly, is a dangerous thing. But far too often, that’s what Twitter does. Twitter rewards decent people for acting indecently.... The easiest way to rack up points is to worsen the discourse.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/opinion/elon-musk-twitter.html>