



## *The Incendiary Power of Words*

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The legendary 19<sup>th</sup> century American author Edgar Allan Poe, a fellow Baltimorean, claimed: "Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality."

In our current milieu, socially and politically dysfunctional at all levels of government and society, words can be no less lethal than weaponized drones.

The coarse discourse we are subjected to (and unfortunately engage in at times) has created an atmosphere of anger, frustration, resentment, hostility, and anxiety. Discussions and debates on issues have rapidly devolved into attacks on the person rather than the point of view.

In one recent study, Americans were asked where they placed Democrats and Republicans on a spectrum between "ape" and "human." Distressingly, participants said people in the other party were 20 to 30 points below fully human, on average. When queried where they imagined people of the other party would place them on the scale, they said 60 points below human.

To note, how many friendships have come asunder in the wake of the last two presidential elections? How many confrontations and screaming matches have taken place over the Dobbs decision on abortion where so many on one side liken all abortions to infanticide and while many others argue for a woman's right to choose under all circumstances? Everything today is black or white. Shades of gray and the middle ground are on a long-term vacation.

Three very timely examples where words matter are *immigration*, *trade* and *wokeness*. To many these are like waving a red flag in front of a bull.

Take the first instance where scores of people across the country consider "immigration" as synonymous with "illegal immigration". It is indisputable that our immigration and border security systems are broken and that illegal immigration is akin to home invasion; but the dog whistle of "open borders" that no one, no party advocates, simply adds fuel to the fire of those who oppose all immigration, despite the fact that we are all descendants of immigrants except for Native Americans. Immigrants perform the work Americans do not want to do, they pay taxes, serve in the military, and enrich our culture. And let's not forget, over 50% of Silicon Valley companies were founded by immigrants or their offspring including Apple, Amazon, Google, Facebook and eBay were all founded by first-or second-generation immigrants.

"Trade" is another word that riles people up. Say "trade" and many people think losses of American jobs, plant closings, a flood of cheap imports from Asia, and America's trade deficit.

First, while the trade deficit was \$860 billion last year, which is *merchandise* trade, not trade in services and finance where the U.S. runs a *surplus*, not a deficit. Services account for nearly 80% of the U.S. economy. In an economy like Miami, sectors like IT, professional services, real estate and tourism account for an even higher share. It is true that trade can result in job losses and plant closings; and there are U.S. government programs like the Trade Adjustment Assistance Act that provide help to displaced workers and plants, including job retraining. We should keep in mind, too, that in a market economy the consumer rules not a protected industry that can drive up prices, hurting the poor above all and adding to inflation. Finally, the term “trade” itself is misapplied in its common usage since it encompasses all international commerce including finance, investment, licensing, and technology transfer. It should not. Deuteronomy states “the poor will always be with you”, well so will the uninformed.

Finally, there is the word “woke”. If ever there were an incendiary term, this one takes the prize. According to Vox cultural reporter Aja Romano, “woke” is bipartisan: it is used as a shorthand for political progressiveness by the left, and as a denigration of leftist culture by the right. While conservative government officials across the nation should not become thought police and censor free speech on campus, the media, big corporations and the universities themselves need to stop walking on eggshells and challenge the jihadists of political correctness whose fixation with gender, pronouns, race and historical and ancestral guilt are further widening the cracks in the foundation of American society.

Proverbs got it right: our words have the power to destroy and the power to build up. What we say and to whom are determinants of what kind of society we want to live in. This message is more relevant today than ever before.

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