



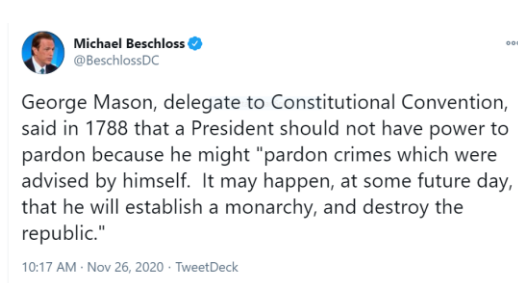
The first object¹ chosen was a meme concerning the Supreme Court Case *McGirt v. Oklahoma*. Depicted are two astronauts, overlooking the earth, posing a question and answer to one another with one holding a gun to the other's head. The one holding the gun is the 'The Supreme Court of the United States,' while the one on the other end of the gun is the state of Oklahoma. With Oklahoma asking, "Wait, it's all Indian Country?" to which the Supreme Court with a gun responding, "Always has been." This meme uses history and current events to form a multilayered cultural introspection on the status of Native Americans that is deeply rooted in our national discourse. In order to interpret this meme in its intended way, one must know certain things about American history. One must understand that Native Americans are just that, native. We like to say that the pilgrims or the English were settlers when they were the invaders in reality. Before this American invasion of the 'New World' as they called it, the settlers interfered with complex, established, culturally diverse civilizations that the Natives had formed long before the first ships set sail to explore the land (Yawp Book: Indigenous America, The First Americans). For a specific example, one can look to the tribe of the Mississippians, a native civilization that rivaled Europe's. Their tribe was home to an expansive Mississippian settlement, Cahokia. Like Oklahoma, Cahokia was located in the mid-west, most specifically, near modern-day St. Louis. To underscore the sheer size of the Native tribe's imprint, their Cahokian

¹ <https://twitter.com/danielwinlander/status/1281304420978810880/photo/1>

population "...peaked at a population of between ten thousand and thirty thousand. It rivaled contemporary European cities in size. No American city, in fact, would match Cahokia's peak population levels until after the American Revolution" (Yawp Book: Indigenous America, The First Americans). This chapter of American history speaks to the sheer size and scale of the Native traditions and cultures here long before other settlers arrived. Thus, the meme makes very effective use of history with its implicit contention that the land that is now America was once 'Indian Country' as the meme states. Besides, it provides a clear, compelling argument that is not abused or misrepresented but straight forward and linear.

History's most significant power is in reminding us of our past, reminding us of our greatest faults and follies. The long, drawn-out suffering of the Native Americans, inflicted upon them by the settlers paints a dark picture in the early chapters in our history, one that continues to permeate to this day. Through diseases that the settlers infected their populations with, the warfare they were subjected to by Europeans, and the system of enslavement and forced laboring, the natives had become oppressed. The interactions with European settlers caused significant destruction of the Native community. The totality of suffering is difficult to calculate. Still, its estimates depict near genocide "...as much as 90 percent of the population of the Americas perished within the first century and a half of European contact." (Yawp Book, Indigenous America, European Expansion). The textbook continues in that vein in an excellent summary of the attitude that Native's have taken up since the white man settled the land. "Though ravaged by disease and warfare, Native Americans forged middle grounds, resisted with violence, accommodated and adapted to the challenges of colonialism..." This idea of Native accommodation speaks directly to the Oklahoma experience for in addition to the meme's broad historical context comes to a more narrow frame. The meme posing the question, "wait, so

it's all Indian Country?" presupposed a sense of arrogance precisely; one conjures the astronaut as a white man. The meme effectively uses history to frame the events in a context of white superiority that dictated Native interactions with the white man. In particular, this case was concerning the designation of a large portion of Ohio as Indian land, but that claim was overrun by white people who viewed the land as theirs. In part, this was spread through: the idea of manifest destiny; the white settlers that populated the land; the uprooting of the Indians brought there after the Trail of Tears. With this court case, Oklahoma is questioning whether or not the land it makes up is Indian territory; the Supreme Court says it always has been. The Concept of manifest destiny is this idea that Americans are deserving through a quasi-divine right to colonize and spread their claims throughout the entire United States. However, this was met with bloody means and forced Indian removal and requisition of natives to reservations full of poor land that white people deemed inferior. However, the Supreme Court put it best, blending history, native concerns, and politics. "On the far end of the Trail of Tears was a promise. Forced to leave their ancestral lands in Georgia and Alabama, the Creek Nation received assurances that their new lands in the West would be secure forever."² The Court found for the Natives, thus, why the Court holding a gun, seemingly announces the final verdict to the white man's question— "Always had been." Therefore, this invites a conversation about the place Native Americans have in our society today, and this meme highlights the lack of societal respect.



² https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/19pdf/18-9526_9okb.pdf

The second is this tweet³ by presidential historian Michael Beschloss referring to the constitutional convention, executive powers, and history's long arm. The context that one must know to understand this is the current events surrounding its sending and the history of executive action and powers. The context of this is the reporting from multiple sources of the President's utilization of the pardon power. On that day, the 25th, Michael Flynn was pardoned by President Trump⁴ for lying to the FBI over the course of the Russia investigation and subsequent Mueller investigation. The pardon was a broad pardon than past president pardons have issued.⁵ This is followed by reports of President Trump is apparently considering the use of the pardon power to pardon close associates or even his children. Following even more compelling reporting that there existed a pardon for payment scheme in which political donations would be solicited for a pardon from the President.⁶ These allegations, if true, would be precisely the conduct described by George Mason in 1788. The line "It may happen that some future day, that he might establish a monarchy, and destroy the republic."⁷ This warning from 1788 rings shockingly ominous when contextualized with the presidential actions exhibited by this white house in 2020. This particular phrase and the intimation that he was against presidential pardon serve two functions that will become apparent later. The first one is the warning of our republic's fragility, and the second in the same vein is to invite conversation about the norms and limitation on constitutional powers.

One of history's most extraordinary functions has been to inform, but it also acts to warn future generations of particular problems that might come forth again. With this, the Mason quote evokes the dangers of a democratic institution being undone before one's eyes. However,

³ <https://twitter.com/BeschlossDC/status/1331980499003318275?s=20>

⁴ <https://www.justice.gov/pardon/page/file/1341606/download>

⁵ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/30/politics/michael-flynn-pardon-filing/index.html>

⁶ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55156241>

⁷ Beschloss' Tweet 11/25/2020

one must consider the historical context of the times that the quote was given in 1788. This followed a great battle for independence to secure our freedom from a monarch, so that term is a charged term, especially in that environment. The years before the constitution was established were years of dynamic change: state governments had to be re-ordered; state constitutions established; foundations of government had to be created after the war that didn't exist in their then-present character prior to the revolution. The governments that were made had weak central authority and powerful legislative powers (Yawp Book: The American Revolution, The consequences of the American Revolution). This was to create an environment with a weak central power so none could have too strong of a hold over the government and create an autocratic state wherein their will could be unopposed. However, another thing one must know to interpret this tweet effectively is how fragile the republic was at that time. Shortly before the constitution was established, an internal revolt broke out over farmers being taxed; this led to further review of the decentralized system created in the embers of the revolution. However, some in power viewed the revolt as an attempt to mob rule, others such as Thomas Jefferson, viewed it as a positive thing, where people could redress grievances with their government. These views were on display. The broad fight between a central government or decentralized government was formed and set off for the constitutional convention to debate (Yawp Book: A New Nation, Shay's Rebellion). This only shows how fleeting the founding ideals truly are; the only thing that maintains them and grants them legitimacy is the people in power abiding by their practice. And the people ensuring the government exists to meet their demands, not the demands of the government.

The second function history serves in this context is to present alternatives to current courses of action. For example, stating one of the delegates at the Constitutional convention was

against the pardon invites conversation on the pardon power itself. It reminds people that that power was not preordained or predetermined but forcefully debated. The delegates at the convention debated the executive powers and construction fiercely. On June 1st, James Wilson articulated a controversial idea: that executive power shall be vested within one person. This went against the very ideals of the revolution and the government's early foundation; some felt it created a monarchial branch of government. This caused months of debate and sparked the question of insulating the office from undue influence or exploitation. Finally, the settlement was reached in September, and the executive branch was founded in its early form. (Yawp Book: A New Nation, The Constitutional Convention).

In Beschloss' presenting a quote from the Constitutional Convention, he strikes at the very fabric of our democracy itself. It reminds people that there are centuries of history at stake with reckless presidential action. It's a fair use of historical context and invites laypeople to the conversation with informed opinions and new ideas. However, that is not to say it's not biased, for, in the Mason quote likening the pardon power abuse to a monarch, he is essentially calling President Trump a king. Despite this, though, the quote's shock value is significant because it makes people square the reality with the historical context of the powers of the executive.



The third object is also a tweet⁸ by presidential historian Michael Beschloss, also in regards to Donald Trump's post-election behavior. This time it is about a forty-six-minute video that the President posted online. In it, he claims that the election was rigged and set up against him and his voters undertaking machinations to ensure votes for him didn't count. Trump held that the electoral system was under assault from bad actors and its results were not valid, brandishing data on a chart to bolster his claim.⁹ One only needs a passing understanding of President Johnson to understand the context of this tweet. He was the Vice-President of Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War and ascended to the presidency on the President's death. Despite being Lincoln's Vice-President, his views on the gravest crisis to affect the nation were markedly different from those of the late President. Johnson was a vehement racist and refused to support the reconstruction plan as Lincoln intended. At a time when the United States had fought a war to dictate its future and the place that slavery would have in it, he was the leader in the most divisive time in American history. In the turmoil of the aftermath of the war, Johnson vetoed the Civil Rights Act and refused to support the fourteenth amendment. After he pardoned southern participants in the rebellion, southern states had instituted black codes to force African Americans into societal slavery with apartheid-like conditions. In this climate, he certified that the South had rehabilitated and were fit for reconciliation— The Congress disagreed and refused to seat the new delegations from the South. In addition to leading the country in this era, he also was denied support by congress, and they overrode his veto of the Civil Rights Act shortly after securing the votes to do so. Johnson was also the first president to be impeached, but similarly not removed (Yawp Book: Reconstruction, Politics of Reconstruction).

⁸ <https://mobile.twitter.com/beschlossdc/status/1334532308049780736?prefetchtimestamp=1607208316154>

⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/dec/02/donald-trump-video-statement-baseless-vote-fraud-claims>

Thus, Beschloss's intimation of Johnson, putting out a 46-minute video is strikingly similar to Trump's actions. Both are arguably racists; both were impeached, both presided over the office during divisive times in American history. Thus, the two men share many similarities with their executive style and the overall context of the times they led. In this instance, the use of history is to affirm parallels over time, showing us that we got through an event once, we can do so again and remain intact. If the incompetent or divided leaders are at the helm, it will not be long until the course can be righted, and that is why voting in a democracy is so important. The voice that many died to obtain, keep, and protect, shall not go in vain into the night; it shall continue unabated, as we saw this election year. Despite the onslaught of rigged election claims, we are nowhere near settling our differences with succession and guns. We study history, so we learn the mistake of the past or examine alternatives to issues of that era. It makes it so that we appreciate the lessons that we learn from our history; we do not take for granted the present state of affairs. Beschloss's use of history in this instance is correct, rooted in fact, and an interesting reminder of where we have come from and where we are headed.