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Joe Biden working while covid-sick was not 'white supremacy'.

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President Biden has tested negative for the coronavirus and says he's "feeling great." But even when he was feeling less than great, he seemed compelled to push through: popping cough drops after press calls, working out at the executive mansion, tweeting incessantly as proof of life.

Was this concerning? Yes. Pitiable? Undoubtedly. But was it white supremacy?

Social media feeds roiled over the weekend when a Yale professor tweeted that "POTUS working while having covid infection epitomizes white supremacy urgency in the workplace." The post continued: "Sets a bad example for everyone that he cannot rest. Covid infection is serious, symptoms debilitating for many, and ppl should take time off without working through it."

One laughs. One sighs. Where to begin?

Let's start with the obvious. Joe Biden is president of the United States, a position that calls for a bit more urgency than the average workplace role. The leader of the free world cannot just call in sick. Much as I would prefer my ER doctor to evince a sense of urgency in the workplace, I'd like my president to, as well. This expectation is not "white supremacy." It's a feature of this very specific job -- one that Biden signed up for voluntarily.

To suggest that "urgency in the workplace" is a white supremacist trait also has rather insulting implications. Is sloth the natural state among people of color? Do discipline and organizational efficiency belong to the Anglo-Saxons only?

These are obviously absurd suggestions, and the tweet was quickly deleted. But it wasn't a one-off. Rather, it was a particularly egregious example of an emerging trend: the increasingly indiscriminate deployment of the term "white supremacy" as a criticism of various -- often nonracial, even inoffensive -- traits and actions.

This tactic has been popularized by a subset of less-than-rigorous anti-racism activists and normalized in primarily progressive spaces. And it often meets with justified skepticism only when it comes into contact with the mainstream.

In 2020, the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture was criticized for publishing a document suggesting that traits such as "future orientation" and the ability to handle "delayed gratification" were aspects of dominant White culture. (The museum later apologized.) More recently, the overbroad concept of "white supremacy culture" has become a go-to talking point in diversity, equity and inclusion trainings at a variety of left-leaning organizations.

The expanded use of this term does seem to come from a well-meaning place: an effort to familiarize the general public with the subtler mechanisms of cultural hegemony, to raise awareness of how insidious certain ideologies can be. By promulgating knowledge of how white supremacy works, the theory goes, racial justice can be advanced.

Except that isn't what's happening. In fact, the too-casual use of the term is accomplishing the opposite.

It's important to acknowledge that white supremacy is real. The ideology -- that White people are a superior race and as a consequence deserve to dominate society -- runs through our nation's history and is reemerging in new and virulent manifestations today.

We should be concerned about white supremacy, and we should combat it -- when it appears as "replacement theory" peddled on Fox News, in the form of Patriot Front marchers disrupting community events, or in racially motivated crimes and attacks.

But the Buffalo mass shooter targeting Black shoppers and Biden tweeting pictures of his covid-19 workday are not the same thing and should not be conflated. Doing so flattens and cheapens a truly urgent problem, making it easier to play down and ignore. If everything is white supremacy, nothing is, and nothing needs to be done.

This is why right-wing outlets and commentators have gleefully surfaced these hyperbolic examples of the term's misuse. Every risible conflation makes the term easier to minimize when it is used appropriately and easier to justify ignoring real manifestations of white supremacy when they appear. And much as with the denouncing of every offense as a "violence" or a "trauma," all this crying wolf (or ... White?) makes progressives seem ever more out of touch with reality, ever more unreliable and thus ever more unsuitable for positions of leadership.

The United States desperately needs a better work culture, one that makes space for sickness, recovery and plain old leisure. But if you believe that President Biden should take time off to set a good example for the rest of the country, just say that.

There's no need to shoehorn in "white supremacy" to make the case. If anything, doing so helps it along.

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