

With Their Whining About 'Big Tech,' Republicans Sound Like Democrats

By [John Tamny](#) January 19, 2021

(AP Photo/Manuel Balce Ceneta)

It's a correct article of faith among conservatives that humans aren't static creatures. They constantly evolve, improve, and in particular they respond to incentives.

This has seemingly been forgotten by the Right amid its latest freakout over "Big Tech." Just as human beings aren't static, neither is commerce. It's changing all the time to our betterment. What's relevant and dominant today frequently isn't tomorrow in a dynamic economy like the U.S.'s. Conservatives used to understand this. Indeed, it's realistically defined their approach to policy since at least the late '70s. Reduce tax penalties levied on work and investment so that there's more investment in a future that will make the present appear primitive by comparison. Set people free from onerous taxation so that they can rush the future into the present. Amen to all of that.

The problem is that conservatives are no longer capable of practicing what they preach. They're captive to the present. "Big Tech" and its allegedly "unimaginable power" keeps them up at night, and they go against type in their calls for government to "do something" in response given their errant belief that tomorrow will resemble today. To offer up but one of many examples, a prominent conservative observed last week,

"how nonexistent is the usual remedy to corporate excess: competition. The liberal response for years to any conservative griping about Twitter censorship: Don't like it? Start an alternative. Conservatives did, only to watch the tech giants shut down Parler. We live increasingly in an online world, which a few powerful gatekeepers control."

Crucial is that the author of the above passage is a very reasonable conservative. If readers are curious to understand how some of the more unreasonable conservatives are approaching "Big Tech," they need only Google "Victor Davis Hanson" and "Big Tech." Or watch cable TV. According to too many on the Right, "Big Tech" has a stranglehold on commerce and information. What should terrified conservatives do?

For starters, they should stop biting their nails. It's unattractive. And rather than pull out the victim card as they increasingly do in similarly unattractive fashion, conservatives should resume promoting limited government, a *redu* 

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A better understanding of the history of commerce would also help members of the right who've offered up brain and column space rent-free to supposedly indomitable "Big Tech." If so, they might shift their focus from what exists ("Big Tech") toward what *will exist*. Simply stated, the vanquishers of a "few powerful gatekeepers" are likely not in plain sight. Entrepreneurs eager to disrupt the existing order almost never are. Think about it.

In the 1970s IBM was viewed as an unbeatable monopoly given its heft in big, multi-million dollar mainframe computers. Understand that in the 1970s the very notion of a personal, in-home computer, was haughtily dismissed by the "Big Tech" eminences of the time. Computers were massive in size, but also in price. Think millions. They *surely* weren't an everyman concept.

That was all well and good. Entrepreneurs, by their very name, envision a future that looks nothing like the present. Are you hearing this, conservatives? As a result, visionaries like Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Michael Dell and others set to work on making formerly expensive computers and software accessible to the common man. Government and the pundit class focused on the seen, only for unseen entrepreneurs to erase the present with a much better future that looked nothing like the past.

Gates and Microsoft were the focus of the federal government's ire in the late 1990s due to Microsoft's power in the software and personal computer space, but the unseen was the internet itself. Microsoft was seen as all powerful, but the latter was a view rooted in a technology landscape that was anything but static. Microsoft was a bit slow to recognize the change, and in particular the future meaning of the internet, only for it to be caught unawares as unseen upstarts like Google, Amazon, and Facebook beat them to search, shopping and social media.

And just as a somewhat stodgy Microsoft found itself on trial for its power in the present, Steve Jobs returned to a near-bankrupt Apple. Microsoft helped save Apple with a crucial, \$150 million investment. It's now the world's most valuable company. It seems what consumers really wanted all along was supercomputers in their pockets. Established players in the computer space like Microsoft and Dell didn't see this change coming. Neither did Blackberry.

In the early 2000s the federal government was focused on limiting the growing power of Blockbuster Video. Its ability to purchase competitors was subsequently hamstrung. Missed by Blockbuster and federal ankle-biters was the rise of Netflix from well outside the physical video rental space. Ever focused on making sure "competition" was regular among the existing home rental players, everyone missed the real threat.

That the real threat to established commercial players is nearly always unseen has plainly been forgotten by modern conservatives ever eager to play the victim. The symbol of their present victimhood is Parler. The bullies of "Big Tech" have pushed it offline, so government must "do something." Wake up, Right. It's most certainly the right of companies like Amazon, Apple and Google to choose whom they do business with or help to do business. This is something conservatives similarly used to understand.

Furthermore, their intense emotion is misplaced. Indeed, if commercial history continues to repeat or rhyme as it always has, Parler likely wasn't real competition for today's "Big Tech" to begin with. More realistically, the businesses set to render today's technology powers hopelessly dated are likely unseen. As they always are. Conservatives should recognize this. Instead, they've taken to whining about "big business." They sound like Democrats.

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