



TDS STRATEGY MEMO:

**THE DEBATE OVER THE SONG “TRY THAT IN A SMALL TOWN”
IS AN EXCELLENT EXAMPLE OF A PARTICULARLY DEVIIOUS
RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST TRAP – ONE THAT THE GOP WILL USE
AGAINST DEMOCRATS AGAIN AND AGAIN IN 2024.**

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ACCOMPLISH, HOW IT WORKS AND HOW
TO DEFEND AGAINST IT.**

BY

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The current debate over the country song “Don’t Try That in a Small Town” is, on the surface, straightforward. The song begins by listing outrages that are presumably common in big cities:

*Sucker punch somebody on a sidewalk
Carjack an old lady at a red light
Pull a gun on the owner of a liquor store...
Cuss out a cop, spit in his face
Stomp on the flag and light it up*

In the video version of the song, these acts are illustrated with particularly lurid news footage of urban crime and inner-city/Antifa rioting.

The song then proceeds to warn outsiders what will happen if they try to do such things in a small town.

*Got a gun that my granddad gave me...
Around here, we take care of our own
Full of good ol’ boys, raised up right
If you’re looking for a fight
Try that in a small town.*

For progressives and Democrats the extremist message is entirely clear and unambiguous. It is a blunt threat of vigilante violence against any outsiders—implicitly African-Americans and radicals—who are foolish enough to try to engage in such behavior in small town America.

In fact, critics of the video note that many extremists are aware that the town where the video as filmed has a documented racist past that includes the near-lynching of Thurgood Marshall.

The progressive commentary thus simply interprets the video as a shockingly overt call to vigilante violence which clearly justifies the demand that it should not be promoted.¹

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¹<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/07/20/jason-aldean-try-that-in-a-small-town-violent-fantasy/>
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/music/2023/07/20/jason-aldean-song-video-pulled-cmt-controversy/>

But there is a problem. If the strategy behind the song were simply to issue an overt extremist challenge to non-extremist America the singer would proudly stand behind the song's message and assert his open support for right-wing vigilante action. What he actually does, however, is quite the opposite – he issues a plaintive claim that he is being misinterpreted:

In the past 24 hours I have been accused of releasing a pro-lynching song... [But] there is not a single lyric in the song that references race or points to it – and there isn't a single video clip that isn't real news footage.. "Try That In A Small Town", for me, refers to the feeling of a community that I had growing up, where we took care of our neighbors, regardless of differences of background or belief. Because they were our neighbors, and that was above any differences.²

For progressives, this defense is so patently absurd that it fails the laugh test. Pictures of masked youths robbing grocery stores or urban rioting clearly invokes race and whether the video clips are authentic or not is a complete non sequitur. Equally, the notion that people in small towns "*took care of their neighbors regardless of differences in background*" is beyond absurd for anyone with even the most cursory knowledge of life in the segregationist south. As a result, Democrats easily conclude the defense can be dismissed out of hand.

But this is where the trap occurs. The audience that the extremists are addressing is not sophisticated Democrats. Their real audience is non-extremist Republicans, many of whom were born after the 1970's and have a very limited understanding of the pre-civil rights period. Yes they know that their parents still used the N-word at home when they were growing up and they were aware of the unspoken racial attitudes in the community. But they do not think that robbery and anti-police rioting are legitimate protest or that denouncing them is racist—***and they cannot conceivably understand why Democrats seem to believe that they are.***

Indeed to them, the simpering excuse of the singer does not actually seem patently absurd. It reflects their own hazy understanding of the past and supports the extremists' continual whining that they are being censored which fits into the broader narrative the extremist wing relentlessly promotes.

This is the trap into which Democrats regularly fall – rather than identifying with the majority of Americans against extremism, Democrats find themselves maneuvered into a situation where they seem to support and reinforce the extremists' hyper-polarized view that the only choice is between a right-wing "us" against a left wing "them," the latter opposing the values of most Americans and attempting to censor all opposition.

Extremists will use variations of this trap again and again in 2024 – clearly suggesting some extremist measure or action and then claiming that they are being misunderstood and unfairly censored when they are challenged (Trump regularly uses a variation of this strategy – suggesting an extremist measure and then claiming he was "just joking" while at the same time giving a sly wink to the extremist audience on the side).

²https://twitter.com/Jason_Aldean/status/1681382697875144717

To a significant degree Democrats have permitted this trap to be exploited by the GOP out of a misguided conception of solidarity with Black America which holds that ANY criticism of ANY action by ANY group of African-American activists or their allies is impermissible because it represents a betrayal of the entire Black community and the struggle for justice.

As various recent elections have shown, large numbers of African-Americans themselves do not accept this notion of solidarity.

For Democratic candidates the way out of this trap is to firmly identify with the non-extremist decent people in America who the extremists are trying to win.

A candidate's statement would be something like this:

Let us be clear. Gunpoint robbery and violent rioting are crimes, not protest. No sensible person disagrees with this. But between that extreme and threats of vigilante action there is a right, moral road.

When George Floyd died millions—yes, millions—of white Americans joined with African Americans in peaceful, dignified protest in cities all across America. The films and photographs from those days that can be seen across the internet recorded the massive outpouring of opposition that rose up across the nation to the clear, utterly cruel and inexcusable death which the cameras clearly showed had occurred. The peaceful marchers walked with their children beside them to teach them the true American values – of freedom with justice for all, of the right of every American to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness that is promised in the Declaration of Independence.

My friends, the choice that we face today is not a choice between extremism and chaos but between the decent values that most Americans hold dear and the values of those who reject them.

On election day I hope you will stand together with me and all of the decent, good people in America, in small towns and large cities and in every state across the nation, in standing up for the America we believe in.