



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on March 22, 2023

## Is Secession Fanciful? It's Already Underway, Says Professor

Secession goes periodically in and out of pseudo-elite fashion. When a Republican is elected president, as in 2016 with Donald Trump, liberals in blue (mood) areas sometimes talk about leaving the Union to form their [own republics](#). The media may call this understandable frustration. When leftists control the executive branch and start trampling the Constitution, as in now with the Biden administration, conservatives opine likewise. Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene has done this, warning that civil war is inevitable unless there's a national divorce. Of course, when rightists do it, the media may call secession appeals "dangerous radicalism."



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But there's another way we can label secession: as something already happening.

So says College of Charleston Professor Michael J. Lee, co-author of the book *We Are Not One People: Secession and Separatism in American Politics Since 1776*.

In reality, secession isn't just a fringe idea. A 2021 [report found](#) that approximately 52 percent of Trump supporters and 41 percent of Biden voters "at least somewhat agree" that partitioning the country is prudent.

Yet while lots of Americans clamor for divorce, [writes](#) Professor Lee, many experts claim the War Between the States settled the matter and that secession is illegal. Of course, a war only "settles" a matter until another war (or something else) unsettles it and then, perhaps, settles it differently. As for legality, the late Professor Walter E. Williams [pointed out in 2020](#) that secession absolutely is "legal," and that historical and documentary analysis shows that the states never would've joined the Union had they been told leaving it would be impossible.

Regardless, Lee contends that all this talk misses the point. "Just as there are ways to withdraw from a marriage before any formal divorce," he writes, "there are also ways to exit a nation before officially seceding." We must, he adds, transcend "narrow discussions of secession and the Civil War" and "frame secession as an extreme end point on a scale that includes various acts of exit that have already taken place across the U.S."

Lee states that this "scaled secession" can begin with personal separatist actions, such as an individual avoiding jury duty. It then can move on to "legal maneuvers like interposition, in which a community delays or constrains the enforcement of a law it opposes, or nullification, in which a community explicitly declares a law to be null and void within its borders," he explains.

The academic says that viewed through this lens, it's plain that "secession lite, de facto secession or soft separatism," as he frames it, is already occurring. I explored this matter myself in the 2021 article



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[“The Fight That Lies Between Status Quo and Secession,”](#) in which I pointed out that increasingly common, and *necessary*, nullification efforts were a step toward actual secession.

Lee states that these “escalating exits” are a logical reaction in an increasingly divided country in which people are [retreating into](#) simpatico neighborhoods. “When compromise is elusive and coexistence is unpleasant,” he writes, “citizens have three options to get their way: Defeat the other side, eliminate the other side or get away from the other side.”

The professor then discusses how a group can avoid following a given law. It can:

- Move to the hinterlands, where oversight is limited.
- Use political power (if the group has it) to “buy, bribe or lawyer their way out of any legal jam,” as Lee puts it.
- Get Congress or the courts to grant it a special dispensation.

The professor then provides a number of examples of soft secession, such as wealthy white communities separating from failing school districts and our country’s 35,000 “special tax district” areas (e.g., Disney World in Florida).

Lee claims that this tells the tale. “When groups exit public life and its civic duties and burdens, when they live under their own sets of rules, when they do not have to live with fellow citizens they have not chosen or listen to authorities they do not like, they have already seceded,” he says.

Even more significant, however, are nullification movements such as illegal-alien “sanctuary cities,” “Second Amendment sanctuaries,” and localities refusing to recognize federal drug laws. Lee also mentions separatist efforts such as the 11 counties in eastern Oregon seeking autonomy and reclassification as “Greater Idaho,” secessionist referenda passed in more than a score of rural Illinois counties, and [Texit](#) and [CalExit](#).

Really, though, if we’re to accept Lee’s looser “secession” definition, it then follows that the U.S. is meant to exist in a state of perpetual *de facto* secession. After all, our states are supposed to be largely sovereign — “laboratories” for republican governance, as some put it — with the feds constituting an agent of the states. Thus can Americans move to more politically compatible states, with the recent migration to Florida a good example.

In fact, it is the feds overstepping their bounds and usurping states’ powers that has, in part, moved us closer to hard secession. People are less likely to want to leave the Union if they can, within it, govern their localities as they see fit.

Yet there are other factors, too. Lee writes that in “many ways, America is already broken apart.” I noted this in 2017 in [“The Decline and Fall of American Nationhood.”](#) “We’re not divided,” I wrote. “We’re fractured — religiously, philosophically, politically, socially, ideologically and culturally. In fact, what unites us most today is sin.”

This phenomenon results from numerous factors. One is balkanization via foolish immigration policy, which ignores that not all peoples are equally assimilable.

Moreover, earlier Americans knew we were naturally somewhat “diverse,” but, as President Teddy Roosevelt emphasized in [his famous 1907 passage](#), it must be *E pluribus unum* (Out of many, one); minimizing divisive diversity was prioritized. Yet far from Roosevelt’s insistence that an immigrant must become “in every facet an American, and nothing but an American,” diversity has now become “diversityism”: an irrational, unexplained dogma stating that diversity must be considered a good and



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an end unto itself.

Another major factor is our rampant moral relativism, which makes every person author of his own “values.” Since differences over conception of right and wrong are the most divisive of all (people fight over slavery and abortion, not what flavor ice cream is best), this moral balkanization guarantees that little of substance will unite us.

And who knows? The current discord may continue until enough of us are united in the belief in secession.



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