



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on June 4, 2020

NY Times Staff Outraged Over Senator Tom Cotton Op-ed Supporting Trump

When Arkansas Republican Senator Tom Cotton (shown) was allowed to publish [an op-ed](#) in the *New York Times* on Wednesday supporting President Trump's suggestion that he might have to use the Insurrection Act to quell Antifa-led riots, some members of the *Times* staff lost their minds.



His op-ed was reason itself: "A majority who seek to protest peacefully shouldn't be confused with bands of miscreants," wrote Cotton, adding that while "nihilist criminals" were simply "out for loot and the thrill of destruction ... cadres of left-wing radicals like Antifa [were] infiltrating protest marches to exploit [George] Floyd's death for their own anarchic purposes."

When those protest marches exceed local authorities' ability to maintain order, wrote Cotton, "it's ... time to support local law enforcement with federal authority.... The Insurrection Act authorizes the president to employ the military" to quell the riots and restore order. Cotton reminded his readers that the federal government "has a constitutional duty to the states to 'protect each of them from domestic violence.'"

In normal times, local law enforcement is more than able to keep the peace and restore order when necessary. "But," wrote Cotton, "in rare moments, like ours today, more is needed."

The backlash from *Times* staffers was immediate. Charlie Warzel, an opinion writer for the *Times*, tweeted, "I feel compelled to say that I disagree with every word in that Tom Cotton op-ed and it does not reflect my values." Other *Times* sympathizers such as freelance writer Thor Benson agreed: "I know a lot of New York Times employees feel like they can't speak out right now, so I'll happily say what needs to be said: there should be resignations."

Former *Times* staffers weighed in as well. Tweeted Sewell Chan, a former op-ed writer for the *Times*, "I am reluctant to weigh in on my former alma mater. But the decision to publish Senator Tom Cotton's [piece] calling for troop deployments to quell unrest falls short of sound journalistic practice."

And then there is Roxanne Gay, a contributing writer for the *Times*, who totally lost it. She tweeted, "Running this puts black NY Times writers, editors and other staff in danger." How, exactly, was missing from her tweet. How did Cotton's carefully constructed and reasonable support for a possible future move by the president to use his authority under the Insurrection Act in the event it became clear that states or local municipalities couldn't maintain order and keep the peace work to threaten black writers and editors at the *Times*? She didn't explain.

Gay went on:



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As a NYT writer I absolutely stand in opposition to that Tom Cotton ‘editorial’. We are well served by robust and ideologically diverse public discourse that includes radical, liberal, and conservative voices.

This is not that. His piece was inflammatory and endorsing military occupation as if the constitution doesn’t exist.

The pushback was enough for the editor who approved Cotton’s piece to offer his explanation. Wrote James Bennet:

The Times editorial board has forcefully defended the protests as patriotic and criticized the use of force, saying earlier today that police too often have “responded with more violence — against protesters, journalists and bystanders.”

We’ve also crusaded for years against the underlying, systemic cruelties that led to these protests. Times Opinion owes it to our readers to show them counter-arguments, particularly those made by people in a position to set policy.

We understand that many readers find Senator Cotton’s argument painful, even dangerous. We believe that is one reason it requires public scrutiny and debate.

Bennet got some support from his boss, Times publisher A.G. Sulzberger, who sent a letter to his staff saying that it’s crucial to “provide readers a diversity of perspectives that is all too rare in modern media.”

Thanks to the pushback — coherent or not — it’s likely that op-eds such as Cotton’s, supporting the president, will remain rare at the *Times*.

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