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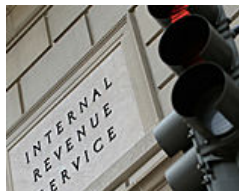
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FEBRUARY 19, 2014 4:00 AM

A Harvard Professor's Dishonest Attack

No, NR has not endorsed Tom Perkins's views.

By Kevin D. Williamson

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Professor Amitabh Chandra

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Kevin D. Williamson

NATIONAL REVIEW endorses Tom Perkins position that whites and men should have more votes than blacks and women." So wrote Professor Amitabh Chandra of Harvard's Kennedy School of

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Government in response to a column, written by your obedient correspondent, that neither endorsed Mr. Perkins's views nor made a single mention of whites, men, blacks, or women. And while I am admittedly personally irritated by the willful mischaracterization of my own views by a third-rate intellectual cheap-shot artist, there is a larger issue here: A self-governing people in a democratic republic requires a certain level of honesty and rigor from our public intellectuals, without which productive political discourse is rendered inert. Harboring intellectual dishonesty is bad for Harvard's reputation, of course, but the more significant fact is that it is bad for self-government.



A little background: On Friday [I wrote a column](#) about Tom Perkins, a gazillionaire financier with a talent for annoying our would-be class warriors. Mr. Perkins, fresh from an ill-considered comparison between anti-“1 percent” invective in the United States and the social conditions that preceded Kristallnacht in Germany (a comparison I described as “an offense against both good taste and substance”), upped the rhetorical ante with this intentionally outrageous argument: “The Tom Perkins system is: You don't get to vote unless you pay a dollar of taxes. But what I really think is, it should be like a corporation. You pay a million dollars in taxes, you get a million votes. How's that?” Suffice it to say that Mr. Perkins's provocative rhetoric had the desired effect. I noted that Mr. Perkins had a point — about taxes. We detest the idea that our relations with the state should be conditioned on income in one context, but we assume that this idea is the very foundation of justice in another. I challenged our progressive friends to articulate a principled position — not an argument from pragmatism, but from principle — under which one is not only self-evidently just but essential, while the other is self-evidently wicked. The point, conveniently communicated in the headline: “Our tax system is morally insane.”

When challenged to do the necessary cogitation to come up with that principled argument, Professor Chandra did the easy thing: cry “Racist!”

The column is linked to above for your inspection, and you will search it in vain for an endorsement of Mr. Perkins's tongue-in-cheek voting scheme or any reference to race or sex. In fact, when I challenged Professor Chandra to point to the sentence in which I endorsed the views he attributes to me, he backed down.

But calling somebody a racist is a bell that cannot be unrung.

There were many Americans, myself among them, who believed, with woeful naïveté as it turns out, that the election of a black man to the highest office in the land would let some air out of the overinflated balloon that is American racial politics. Instead, the presence of a black man in the Oval Office has simply put a loaded rhetorical gun into the hand of every lightly educated Democratic hack and irresponsible political commentator across the fruited plain. I explored this at some length in an essay in the December 31 edition of NATIONAL REVIEW. If I may be forgiven for quoting myself:



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Patrick Deneen on the Strong Versus the Ordinary

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UK Right to Reduce Animals Used in Research

[Human Exceptionalism](#)

As in the case of witchcraft, trials on charges of racism admit spectral evidence. Martin Bashir on the IRS scandal: "Republicans are using [it] as their latest weapon in the war against the black man. 'IRS' is the new 'nigger.'" Touré on Mitt Romney's vocabulary: "[He] said 'anger' twice. . . . I don't say it lightly, but this is niggerization." Jonathan Capehart: Mentioning that Obama went to Harvard is racist "because it insinuates that he took the place of someone else through affirmative action, that someone else being someone white." Lawrence O'Donnell: "The Republican party is saying that the president of the United States has bosses, that the unions boss him around. Does that sound to you like they are trying to consciously or subconsciously deliver the racist message that, of course, of course a black man can't be the real boss?" Janeane Garofalo: "Do you remember teabaggers? It was just so much easier when we could just call them racists. I just don't know why we can't call them racists, or functionally retarded adults. The functionally retarded adults, the racists — with their cries of, 'I want my country back.' You know what they're really saying is, 'I want my white guy back.'" Karen Finney on Herman Cain: "They like him because they think he's a black man who knows his place." Chris Matthews: "It's the sense that the white race must rule . . . and they can't stand the idea that a man who's not white is president. That is real, that sense of racial superiority." Etc., ad nauseam.

Words that I do not expect to write again: Janeane Garofalo is absolutely correct. It is "easier" — far easier — to "just call them racists." "Racist" is practically a magic word in American political discourse, a two-syllable incantation for shutting down debate.

This is part of a programmatic strategy on the part of the Left. The Left has essentially given up argument as a means of persuasion, replacing it with *disqualification*. The strategy of disqualification — take it from a former teacher of rhetoric — is the ad hominem elevated to a grand scale. Never mind that it is a fallacy — it works. If you can reduce, e.g., Sarah Palin to the Tina Fey cartoon of Sarah Palin, you do not have to address her substantive arguments. The added benefit of this strategy is that one has the opportunity to bathe one's self and one's colleagues in a sense of moral and intellectual superiority, which, no matter how ill-gotten, is among the most exquisite of emotions. Thus a political movement full of people too ill-informed to know that Sarah Palin never uttered the words "I can see Russia from my house!" — that was Tina Fey — get to dismiss her as ignorant. The democratic spirit is not without a sense of irony.

Tarring somebody as a racist is the ultimate disqualification in American politics. (That is, incidentally, why every time somebody at this magazine writes something controversial, the opinion is ascribed not to Kevin D. Williamson or Charles C. W. Cooke but to NATIONAL REVIEW corporately — the idea being to disqualify not only the writer but the institution as well; NATIONAL REVIEW is a much more enticing target than I am individually.) It may cheapen the legacy of those who suffered

under real racism, from slavery to Jim Crow, but it is a handy cudgel, and the low-minded among us have no scruple about swinging it at any opportunity.

The problem here is that Professor Chandra is not a television comedian like Bill Maher or a shut-in blogger for Media Matters. He is a professor at Harvard. I have often remarked that whatever one thinks of John Kennedy, he did not deserve to have such an embarrassing mess as that dysfunctional airport named after him. If Professor Chandra is an indicator — and he is — then President Kennedy is nonetheless better memorialized by one of those beaten-up baggage-claim carousels than he is by the institution at Harvard.

Professor Chandra's argument, to the extent that there is one, is that because women and blacks typically have less income than men and whites, then that which serves the interests of higher-income people diminishes those of blacks and women. Even if I had endorsed Mr. Perkins's views — which I did not — this would be a tendentious reading. I could as easily note that Professor Chandra receives a paycheck from an institution with a long and nasty history of anti-Semitism and is currently complicit in a campaign of gross discrimination against Asian Americans. But that would not in fact be a fair representation of the man or his interests. He's not an anti-Semite; he's a huckster.

Properly understood, Professor Chandra's actions are not sloppiness — they are academic dishonesty. He is assiduous in ensuring that his name is always linked to Harvard's, fortifying himself in borrowed prestige. The act of willfully, dishonestly, and maliciously misrepresenting another party's position is the political-science equivalent of falsifying the data in a laboratory experiment in order to support one's preferred hypothesis. We have a great deal of faith in the hard sciences because scientists do not generally falsify data. Political scientists do. Harvard, as it turns out, has a school policy on this sort of thing: "Plagiarism or falsification of research results will ordinarily result in a requirement to withdraw or expulsion." But that is for lowly students. Professors apparently are held to a different standard. I made an inquiry with David Ellwood, the dean of the Kennedy School, as to whether this sort of shabby thing is up to the institution's standards. So far, he has had nothing to say for himself, for the Kennedy School, or for Professor Chandra. I cannot imagine that he would.

I write this in part because I miss teaching my class at The King's College and like to take the occasional opportunity for a bit of rhetorical analysis. But the more important consideration is that this kind of intellectual malpractice must be confronted squarely. I may not be able to shame such persons as Professor Chandra into amending their ways. In any case, those who financially support men such as Professor Chandra should know what they are paying for, and those who hire his students should know what they are getting.

— *Kevin D. Williamson is a roving correspondent for NATIONAL REVIEW.*

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**Jimi in Mich** • 3 minutes ago

Mr. Williamson has indeed been slandered. Let's hope that the excessive usage of such slander weakens its effects; it already has begun around "racism". Mr. Williamson also captures the motive incidentally: "to bathe one's self and colleagues in a sense of moral and intellectual superiority ...". We will have to expose that motive, the technique, and then reawaken actual dialogue.

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Isaac Clark** • 10 minutes ago

There was reason to believe that with the election of a black president, race relations would ease significantly. As the author of this piece points out, such was not the case. Indeed, it seems that rather than improving race relations, a cult of personality has arisen around the person of President Obama. The cult forms a protective bubble around the president, deflecting any and all criticism by shifting such criticism into the nefarious category of racism. It started early, when it became racist to worry about an untested first term senator assuming the mantle of Chief Executive of the United States. An adoring media fed the flames of the cult, and as Barbara Walters astutely noted in a recent interview with Piers Morgan, "we all thought he was some sort of messiah." Barbara just proved the point with one sentence. What is more, the cult was strengthened in the first year when the media decided to float hard ball questions like "Mr. President, what has enchanted you about the office of president?" This is just one example of shielding by media acolytes.

The media acolytes, rather than doing their due diligence, have done so much to feed the president's predisposed vision of himself – an individual that can do no wrong. Such vision has been cultivated over his entire life through pampering

[see more](#)

^ | ▾ • Reply • Share ›

**Scarlati** • 12 minutes ago

Mr. Williamson says, "But calling somebody a racist is a bell that cannot be unrung."

Six years ago, if someone had called me a racist, I would have punched him (or even her) in the nose. Today I would likely respond, "whatever...," because overuse of the word has sapped it of its meaning.

Same with a word like "rape." I used to think rape was a hideously vile act. But once the feminists appropriated the word for less heinous acts — e.g., when a boy pressed ahead despite a vacillating "don't" from his date or a man pressed ahead despite a "not tonight, I've got a headache" from his wife each was accused of rape — the word lost a lot of its punch.

Same thing with overuse of the word "racist."

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



68 · 24 minutes ago

In medieval times only aristocracy had any say in what government could do. Tongue in check provocation by Mr. Williamson was done to bring out inappropriate remark from somebody and hence make a stupid one vote for one tax dollar argument seem legit. Mr. Williamson imperialism was built on principle that all human beings are not equal in their relation with government. If we did one vote for one dollar there will be more government corruption as the rich fight out to get the most bang for their buck.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Rob Leder → 68 · 14 minutes ago

But of course, there is nothing "corrupt" about voters who pay little or no tax giving themselves handouts at the expense of a minority of more productive voters.

^ | 1 v · Reply · Share ›



indykat1 → Rob Leder · 4 minutes ago

Correct. There is nothing at all "corrupt" about voting in one's self-interest. Those who have less are certainly not going to favor those who have more, and vice-versa. If they want to win elections, the "haves" or the "makers" will have to come up with better arguments.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



JolietJake · 32 minutes ago

Good job by you of calling out this pinhead at the Kennedy school, Mr. Williamson. I understand the outrage you feel at being misrepresented, if not libeled.

But don't give air time to a back bencher like this guy. He can't earn the attention himself, so he has attached himself parasitically (and demogogically) to you while pounding the drums of race-baiting.

Don't use your platform to supply oxygen to this guy where he would be utterly unable to generate any traction himself.

I mean look, he's at the Kennedy school. Other commentators have pointed out that even "real" Harvard people are scary. I'll add that this is particularly the case with the Hahvahd types who like to dabble in "public health", as this guy's CV on his Kennedy school website shows that he does.

But Kennedy school! Give me a break.

He has a PhD from the Univ of Kentucky. I'm not tryign to be a snob here. But

[see more](#)

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



cruisin1240 → JolietJake · 26 minutes ago

Kind of amusing that the liberal/left has taken over and is destroying the once great Harvard University. Another example of the left and what they can do when they get the power of control. It never ends well.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**seabass3** · 35 minutes ago

Harvard. I have worked with enough of their grads to know a community collage provides a better education.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Buddy199** · 36 minutes ago

No, Chandra will never admit that he is in the wrong. At best, he and Harvard will issue some meaningless drivel about free speech and vigorous debate, etc.

But, like any bully who gets a surprise punch in the nose, he'll really think twice before doing it again.

Good job, KW.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**cruisin1240** · 37 minutes ago

Professor Chandra of the Kennedy School of Government? If you hadn't introduced him, I would have thought he taught at the AL Sharpton/Jesse Jackson School of Racism.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Doran** → [cruisin1240](#) · 17 minutes ago

Yeah, can't wait for the H1-B South Asian Sufferings At The Hands Of White Oppressive America Movement just around the corner.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**bubba** · 41 minutes ago

Obama was elected to the US Senate by literally disqualifying a series of political opponents at multiple levels.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Rob Leder** · 42 minutes ago

I miss reading Steyn here, but Williamson is rapidly becoming one of my favorites on NRO. Few eviscerate mush-brained Leftists with such clarity and precision.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**benito** → [Rob Leder](#) · 38 minutes ago

Kevin is next in line to be kicked to the curb.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**fivekoverlibor** → [Rob Leder](#) · 38 minutes ago

And he's got the chops to show up down here from time to time to interact. He's a fantastic mind and fantastic contributor.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**benito** → [fivekoverlibor](#) · 37 minutes ago

not for long

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Handy Graph** · an hour ago

For the first 20 years or so of my so called professional career, I came into contact with Harvard graduates fairly often. Mostly of the MBA variety. Routinely they would be given a task. Almost as routinely they would either not perform it, or they would perform something completely counter to it. It was left to others, often me, to clean up the mess. It was like having John Kerry on your boat. All you wanted to do was to get rid of them. "Fire him, transfer him, promote him, but just get him out of the way."

A little later on, I was able to choose with whom I dealt. Here I ran into more senior Harvard grads. Extremely arrogant MBAs from the Executive Program and a smattering of lawyers. I remember a wonderful occasion when I told a consultant that, if he wanted anything more than his exorbitant retainer (The

check had already cleared.), he and his minions would have to do some actual work. He threatened to sue, so I told him that I intended to sue the Harvard lawyer who had referred his firm. The law firm made good on the retainer and was glad to have an excuse, at long last, to fire their guy for cause.

The managing partner later told me that his very large firm had initiated an anti-

[see more](#)

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



popseal • an hour ago

DEBATE 101: slander your opponent when your argument is losing steam, thereby changing the issue using the tactic of 'misdirection by character attack'.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Mark Lang • an hour ago

In general, the left will never allow the "right" to frame their own arguments. Most of the time simply because the argument then becomes self evident - there is no argument anymore.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



J.s. • an hour ago

A frank, open, and honest discussion of race will never be had in public in this country. Any criticism of a certain group of minorities automatically brings out the racism charge.

The discussion has gone underground but it is being discussed on back porches all across American.

Of course the phony intellectuals at Harvard have solved all of the world's problems in their faculty lounges. Obama is the brain washed product they have created.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Handy Graph → J.s. • an hour ago

He brought a lot of baggage with him when he arrived on the banks of the Charles. He was a sponge for dirty water from the time he spent in the jungles of Indonesia.

Hmmm. Dirty water, the Charles, jungles. I'm recalling a song, but can't put my finger on it.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



cruisin1240 • an hour ago

Excellent, as usual, Mr. Williamson. However, I feel that this will be lost on the leftists.

1 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



BMB • an hour ago

No, Mr. Williamson. You will not be able to "shame such persons as Professor Chandra into amending their ways." They have no shame. This is the "end justifies the means crowd" and they are proud of their tactics. Lies for the sake of "the greater good" becomes their truth.

2 ^ | v • Reply • Share ›



Cleetus • an hour ago

The claim of racism is used any time a comment is made that is critical of anything a black person does. It does not matter if the criticism is justified or not, it only matters that their sensibilities were offended. But claiming racism is more than intellectual dishonesty, it also shows intellectual laziness. Instead of forming a critical, well thought out argument to rebuff the criticism, the racism comment is thrown out. At an institution like Harvard where professors are trying to teach their students about learning to think, you would think that being intellectually lazy would be considered a huge sin. I guess not.

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Harrison Leventhal → Cleetus · 30 minutes ago

Even worse, these frivolous claims of racism would have you judge the black person by the color of his skin rather than his words/actions. Didn't MLK advocate the opposite?

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



FMarion · an hour ago

Kevin:

I checked. It turns out that Chandra's race card was cancelled long ago so next time you don't need to provide a principled response--mocking him as a pretentious tool is more than enough.

Seriously, we need to stop paying any attention to claims of racism by lefties because they are never made in good faith and usually aren't really meant to be believed. Its just the way one modern lefties communicate--when one wants to tell another that "it's our treehouse and no conservatives are allowed in" they use the word "racist" instead.

In truth, they are pathetic inhabitants of a pathetic micro-world in which they are all competing to show each other how important and "more-left than thou" they are, and a significant part of that is showing who can yell "racist" the loudest. Since very few of them are capable of doing anything useful, the best thing to do is ignore them and their ugliness.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



David Graf · an hour ago

Where is the link to Chandra's column? I'm probably looking right at it but I don't see it. Thanks!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Doug Light → David Graf · 42 minutes ago

The link is to Kevin's column that the distinguished professor commented about, not the latter's actual column. Beginning of second paragraph.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



David Graf → Doug Light · 39 minutes ago

Doug Light,

Thanks for the clarification as I have not been able to find Chandra's comments online to review them for myself.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Readwhatyouwrite · an hour ago

if he agrees with Perkins, and assumes that minorities and women will have less wealth, doesn't that mean he agrees with exactly what the professor claims he meant. That if you assign voted by wealth, that will automatically lead to less votes for minorities and women, Why is Williamson crying? He got called out for insinuating the exact thing he truly believes. It's not like it doesn't fit in with the republican narrative of wanting to curb voting rights. Even Ann Coulter herself says women shouldn't be allowed to vote. Why is Williamson so mad that he got called out for believing exactly what it is that he believes?

1 ^ | 5 v · Reply · Share ›



KomradCal → Readwhatyouwrite · 15 minutes ago

I understand why you're so confused. Your writing skills are appalling. That tells me your comprehension skills are equally weak. Well, that and the fact you entirely missed Kevin's point just as Professor Mush for Brains missed Mr. Perkins'.

I'd spell out the thesis of Mr. Williamson's piece and what it is you got so very wrong, but I have no faith you'd get it even then. Suffice it say the last line of your post points a very fine point on exactly how deep your

...the end of your post points a very nice point on exactly how deep your profound ignorance runs.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Jonathan → Readwhatyouwrite · an hour ago

Thanks for telling us what Mr. Williamson believes. Or is your comment merely projection? Sooner or later leftists will have to explain why they see racism everywhere, and will insist that there is no criticism of the approved minorities of the day that could possibly be offered in good will.

Just as a point of accuracy, it was the Harvard 'gentleman' who assumed that minorities and women will have less wealth (see above).

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



cruisin1240 → Jonathan · an hour ago

I did give Pethal a round of applause for posting his ignorance and then replying to it with a double shot of the same.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Guest → Readwhatyouwrite · an hour ago

In your world, there are apparently no blacks and/or women with any wealth. I suppose that the only thing blacks can do is shine your shoes, and the only thing women can do is cook your dinner? Good to know.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



cruisin1240 → Guest · an hour ago

Off the rails so early?

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



John Markel · an hour ago

Well done!

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Pethal · an hour ago

When someone says, "I graduated from Harvard", I feel only pity for them.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



edgarb81 · an hour ago

If I Had A Hammer

(Pete Seeger / Lee Hays)

If I had a hammer I'd hammer in the morning
I'd hammer in the evening all over this land
I'd hammer out danger, I'd hammer out warning
I'd hammer out love between my brothers and my sisters
All over this land

If I had a bell I'd ring it in the morning
I'd ring it in the evening all over this land
I'd ring our danger, I'd ring out warning
I'd ring out love between my brothers and my sisters
All over this land

If I had a song I'd sing it in the morning
I'd sing it in the evening all over this land
I'd sing out danger, I'd sing out warning
~~I'd sing out love between my sisters and my brothers~~

see more

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Citizen C → edgarb81 · an hour ago

Hard to believe you could make a living writing and singing stuff like that.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



BMB → Citizen C · an hour ago

Puff the Magic Dragon was deep.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Goosey · an hour ago

If I ever find myself in a debate with a principled liberal with real arguments, I fear I would be so unprepared that I would have to hop on my unicorn and ride out of Narnia at once.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Jim Sweet · an hour ago

Maybe conservative businessmen should simply embargo Harvard University graduates from being hired. It's a sound business decision in my mind.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



fivekoverlibor · 2 hours ago

Mr. Williamson is angry *and I like it!* Get em, sir. Get them, get them, get them!

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



sinz54 · 2 hours ago

Here's a surprise for folks here.

Guess who hired Dr. Chandra as a visiting scholar:

<http://aei.org/papers/health/h...>

He wrote a paper for the American Enterprise Institute that criticized Obamacare and proposed a free-market alternative.

^ | 8 v · Reply · Share ›



KomradCal → sinz54 · 9 minutes ago

So he really IS a good guy. This settles it. Kevin has no point. Wow. If only he knew what you know!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Cleetus → sinz54 · an hour ago

Here's another surprise - people say stupid things regardless of them being liberal or conservative. What is being criticized here is a comment that is patently wrong and demonstrates principles not consistent with what Harvard claims to hold dear. I know this is difficult, but please try to stay on task.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



NiceVice → sinz54 · an hour ago

I too looked at the professor's background...On the surface, he appears to be a reasonable academic, judging by some of his written work.

I would like to read or hear his entire claim regarding NRO, to see if we have the whole story. Sometimes these academics say provocative things to engage otherwise catatonic students in debate, which I can understand. If, conversely, his claim was made as part of lecture or speech, then I believe Kevin is correct...the guy is hawking false wisdom.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



fivekoverlibor → sinz54 · an hour ago

Along with 7 other persons. How is this germane to Mr. Williamson's legitimate rebuke of Dr. Chandra's *individual* transgression of intellectual dishonesty?

9 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



KomradCal → fivekoverlibor · 8 minutes ago

Forgot to mention, Dr. Chandra was not hired by Harvard.



Exactly! It's like claiming Bill Clinton was a good dad. Okay. So what? He still took advantage of a 20-year old intern, disgraced the office of president, and (again) violated his marriage vows. But since Chelsea loves him, what does any of that matter now anyway, right?

^ | v • Reply • Share ›

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