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Revitalizing the Right

DAVID AZERRAD*

Debating the nature of conservatism may well be the favorite hobby of American conservatives. While the question will never be resolved to anyone's satisfaction, it is a pleasant enough pastime to detract from the failures of the American conservative movement to conserve much anything of worth (unless you count the movement itself, in all its sinecurial grifting splendor, as something of worth).

It will soon be 70 years since William F. Buckley famously declared the intention of conservatives to “stand athwart History, yelling stop!”¹ Since then History has proceeded to dispense upon America the forever metastasizing civil rights regime (“Transgender equality is the civil rights issue of our time,” to quote the President);² the largest wave of foreign migration in recorded history (70 million—I would add “and counting” but we have lost count); gay marriage and sex change operations on children (will the normalization of pedophilia be next?);³ the feminization of society; critical race theory's hatred of all things white; and untold trillions of dollars wasted in the name of ending poverty, promoting democracy, and saving the planet.

And so we gather here today, as our country continues its decline, to debate, yet again, the meaning of conservatism. The question, although not without historical interest, is clearly not a pressing political one. The

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1. William F. Buckley, Jr., *Publisher's Statement*, NAT'L REV., Nov. 19, 1955, at 5.

2. @JoeBiden, TWITTER (Jan. 25, 2020, 1:20 PM), <https://twitter.com/joe Biden/status/1221135646107955200> [<https://perma.cc/TLF9-TUTB>].

3. A. Walker & V.R. Panfil, *Minor Attraction: A Queer Criminological Issue*, 25 CRITICAL CRIMINOLOGY 37 (2017).

solution to what ails our late oligarchic republic—if one can even still call it that—is not more conservatism. Nor is a “better conservatism” the solution. Conservatism, as its very name indicates, presupposes a way of life or a regime worth conserving. It presupposes the existence of conservatives—people who feel at home in their own country—and of progressives—people who do not and therefore want to fundamentally change it.

In our age, however, neither the Left nor the Right feel at home in America. Progressives feel alienated from a systemically racist nation that is on the verge of becoming a fascist theocracy (we came close on January 6!), while conservatives do not recognize the country that America has become and feel that every sector of society despises them. Revolutionary passions are running high on both sides.

I think it might be possible to demonstrate to progressives (if not to convince them) that they control every single institutional sector in America, that their pieties are authoritative, that their opposition is weak, and that the young are much further to the left than even they are—in sum, that they have won. Those who used to rage against the machine have now become the machine.

By contrast, I don’t see how I could, in good conscience, convince conservatives that this is still their America. An America in which the government, the media, the schools, the universities, the corporate sector, the mainline protestant churches, Hollywood, the top brass of the military, and the NFL actively promote the anti-American lies of Black Lives Matter and undermine the family through their support of the LGBTQ agenda is not an America that is hospitable to any kind of conservatism to the right of David French’s, at least not in the public square.

There are still, of course, many self-professed conservatives in America but they mostly fail to grasp just how anti-American America has become. As the late, great Angelo Codevilla observed in one of his last essays: “Conservatives’ congenital mistake is to try conserving something that no longer exists by supporting institutions that now belong to a regime so alien to republican life that it treats attempts at citizenship as crimes against the regime.”⁴

Serious conservatives—those who have the stomach to recognize how much ground they have lost and what the country has become—have no choice but to become “revitalizers,” to coin a not particularly elegant term. While there are obviously some elements of America that have survived the progressive onslaught of the past century and a considerable

4. Angelo Codevilla, *Oligarchy, and Remedies*, AMERICAN GREATNESS (May 3, 2021), <https://amgreatness.com/2021/05/03/oligarchy-and-remedies/> [<https://perma.cc/KN5Z-KFBJ>].

number of Americans who remain defiantly patriotic, the primary task of a man of the right today is to revitalize rather than conserve. In some cases, conservatives will need to go even further and become “resuscitacionists.”

The conservative disposition, as it has traditionally been understood, is just not suited to such a task. What is needed in these times are not “unadventurous” men who express “appropriate gratefulness for what is available,” to quote Oakeshott’s famous essay “On Being Conservative.”⁵ Rather, we need bold men who will be spurred by the appropriate outrage at what has been taken from them and disgust at what the country has become to defund, humiliate, and marginalize the centers of power of the Left while building their own or reconquering lost ones.

It is true, as Nietzsche taught, that men cannot walk backwards like crabs. The 20th century cannot be undone. Revitalists must overturn much of the present order while accepting that they cannot rebuild in its entirety the America that was lost (not that that is even desirable). Nietzsche, however, was wrong to claim that “a *reversion*, a reversal in any sense or to any degree is completely impossible.”⁶ Some return to manliness, for example, is not only possible, but actually underway amidst the growing youth revolt against feminized education, processed foods, pornography, and all forms of soma. Life, of course, remains far too comfortable to ever produce the hard men of the past, but we can definitely return to a more edifying conception of masculinity, at least to *some degree*.

If not the uninspiring platitudes of the conservative establishment—tax cuts, school choice, occupational licensing reform, and originalism—what should guide the emerging revivalist Right in its existential fight against our corrupt and anti-American ruling class which actively promotes the pieties of the Left?

The revivalist Right should begin by forcefully rejecting the twin pillars of the globalist American empire: the politics of homogenization and the politics of marginalization. The former aims to eliminate all meaningful differences between peoples and nations so as to create what Kojève called “the universal and homogeneous state.”⁷ The latter, by contrast,

5. Michael Oakeshott, *On Being Conservative*, 2 RATIONALISM IN POLITICS AND OTHER ESSAYS (1991).

6. Friedrich Nietzsche, TWILIGHT OF THE IDOLS 111 (§ 43) (Richard Polt ed., 1997) (1889).

7. Alexandre Kojève, *Hegel, Marx et le Christianisme*, 3 CRITIQUE 339, 356 (August-September 1946).

claims to celebrate difference. It defends all those who have purportedly been marginalized throughout history: blacks, first and foremost, but also women, homosexuals, transgender individuals, Natives, Muslims, Latinx, minor-attracted persons—or pedophiles as we used to call them—and the homeless, to mention but the most prominent “victims.”

While these two political tendencies appear to contradict one another, they can in fact be readily reconciled. If we excise the cancers of whiteness, masculinity, heteronormativity, and Christianity, then the previously oppressed can unite in a beautiful symphony of siblinghood. In short, unity through diversity. The oppressors need not to be literally eliminated (though they could be). In most cases, it is sufficient to subordinate them and deconstruct their identities, e.g. to feminize the men and masculinize the women so that they both meld into an androgynous blob.

Revitalists must therefore defend those elements of Western civilization (and of pre-progressive America) that are under constant assault: masculinity, heterosexuality, Christianity, and white people. Mainstream conservatives would probably agree with the need to defend the first three (if only in theory), but everyone squirms at the mention of white people. This is understandable since we all know that Hitler and the Nazis slaughtered millions with unspeakable brutality in the name of Aryan supremacy. But Stalin, Mao and other communist tyrants killed even more in the name of equality, yet hipsters still wear Che Guevara t-shirt, Rawlsians call for a more egalitarian society, and Democratic Socialists continue to rail against capitalism. Clearly, the invocation of a concept by a genocidal tyrant does not exhaust its meaning.

The revivalist Right can help patriotic Americans *of all races* see that one must defend white people against the Left’s eliminationist rhetoric and policies—in particular, the anti-white discrimination required by our civil rights regime—without being either a white supremacist or a white nationalist. Heirs to the Founding who proclaim their loyalty to the American creed that all men are created equal cannot sit by idly as a particular racial group is demonized, even if millenarian ideologues have in the past fetishized said group (or a variant thereof—the Nazis, after all, would not have considered Slavs Aryans, to say nothing of Jews). The right must confront the virulent anti-white racism emanating from the anti-racist Left.

As the politics of marginalization increasingly celebrates obesity, sexual degeneracy, vulgarity, and ugliness, the revivalist Right should celebrate beauty, strength, health, and large families. Mormonism is one of the fastest growing faiths in America not so much because of its theology, but because Mormons generally lead lives that are appealing to outsiders. Let the ruling class exalt the ugly, lonely, overweight, mentally unstable single women in their 40s and let us celebrate the happily married, good-

looking couple with their large brood. Let's see how many ships they can launch with Lena Dunham's face.

More generally, the Right should celebrate excellence in all realms, from the sciences, to sports, including moral virtue. This simply requires an uncompromising defense of rigorous standards, come what may of outcomes. The Right thus needs to develop the stomach to uphold the meritocratic and colorblind standards that conservatives invoke but will not defend because they have a disparate impact on blacks, women, and other so-called marginalized groups. A revitalized Right must purge its mind of any elements of social justice thinking that undermine its commitment to upholding the norms of civilization.

A right unapologetically committed to vitalism and excellence would offer the country something much more inspiring than both the woke Left and the current Right whose principles, however just, fail to inspire devotion. No one ever died for religious liberty, but millions have martyred themselves for Christianity.

By preaching the gospel of beauty, family, health, and excellence in all realms, such a Right would not only benefit the most broken parts of the country, it would, just as importantly, help win over disaffected elites. While the populist turn on the right is to be welcomed, it should not blind us to the need to form our own elites. As Jeremy Carl recently explained:

J.D. Vance's GOP primary win in Ohio was largely built on his appeal to working-class Republicans. But while Vance's focus on the real needs of working-class Americans is a laudable model for the party, it is not that focus that will make Vance an effective power broker. It is not the J.D. Vance of the holler, but the Vance of Yale Law, the venture capitalist with deep connections to billionaire Peter Thiel and media powerhouse Tucker Carlson, whose wife was a clerk for Chief Justice Roberts, who can exercise power within the American system.⁸

The crazier the Left gets—and given its internal dynamics, it really cannot help but get crazier and ever more unmoored from reality—the clearer the path forward for the Right and the greater its prospects of success. Under no circumstances should the Right attempt to moderate the Left. Never interrupt your enemy when is making a mistake, goes the proverb. And if possible, encourage him to make it more quickly and on an even bigger scale.

8. Jeremy Carl, *Towards a Republican Counter-Elite*, THE AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE (May 19, 2022), <https://www.theamericanconservative.com/towards-a-republican-counter-elite/> [https://perma.cc/VKQ4-RFST].

The Right should be demanding that Harvard only admit students of color, that Netflix only carry shows that feature gay love scenes, and that the *Washington Post* only feature female columnists. As Lenin would say, quoting Plekhanov, “the worse, the better.”⁹ The authority of anti-American elite institutions depends on their actual competence and the subtlety of their propaganda. Let us hasten their demise by encouraging the embrace of diversity and social justice ideology more generally at the expense of competence, credibility, and profitability.

None of these counsels are undemocratic or illiberal, nor do they violate a single clause of the Constitution. All are in keeping with the best of the classical liberal tradition, stretching back to John Locke and the Founders. In truth, it is the current regime and the woke Left that are increasingly illiberal and undemocratic.

These short remarks do not, of course, constitute a manifesto, much less a comprehensive political program. Rather they are meant to provoke the long overdue re-assessment of what the Right in America should stand for. The hour is late. The specter of democratic despotism looms over the nation. If there is hope, it will come from the emerging, defiant Right that will soon push the current conservative establishment into the ash heap of history and reconquer America.

9. V.I. Lenin, *Three Crises*, in 25 LENIN COLLECTED WORKS 174 (Stepan Apresyan and Jim Riordan eds., 1977).