

Telling Us Too Little: The Fearful Inadequacy of Neoconservatism

by [Paul Gottfried](#) (September 2018)



In early August, the neocon-liberal *nomenklatura* delivered a double coup when David French at [National Review Online](#) and Reihan Salam, his colleague and now [feature writer](#) for *The Atlantic*, unveiled a supposedly original way of looking at our present strife. Apparently we're witnessing what French and Reihan regard as a "great white cultural war." Contra the misconception of race-obsessed observers on the Right and the Left, blacks and other racial minorities, we are to believe, are not playing a critical role in this unfolding drama. Quoting his pal Reihan, French goes on to explain: "White bashing is actually a way in which the progressive white elite distinguishes itself from 'lower' white rivals, a form of 'inter-white status jockeying.'" Furthermore,

it's almost as though we're living through a strange sort of ethnogenesis, in which those who see themselves as (for lack of a better term) upper-whites are doing everything they can to disaffiliate themselves from those they've deemed lower-whites. Note that "upper" or "lower" isn't just about class status, though of course that's always hovering in the background. Rather, it is about the supposed nobility that flows from racial flagellation.

Also, even though the white uppers flagellate their own race, once the struggle is over, "they expect to emerge victorious, their status and power intact, in a post-white majority America."

For those who believe that French is suddenly taking the side of the Deplorables, after years of virtue-signaling as an antiracist and Never-Trumper, one should read his remarks more

carefully. White progressives, he assures us, are really the *crème de la crème*. He knows for a fact (or would like us to believe that he does) that these people who are high on his list of socially acceptable friends are “sincere in their abhorrence of racism,” and in their overriding “desire for black and brown Americans to achieve and succeed in the United States.” French also hastens to remind us that, although he comes from somewhere in the South, he “also spent some time living in prosperous quarters of progressive cities.” Watching this fellow working to wiggle out of his Southern Protestant corner, I am reminded of the Jewish prayer, to be recited each morning, thanking the Creator of Heaven and Earth for “not making me a gentile.” Yes, my stomach turns every time I observe French virtue-signaling, like a self-conscious gentile working to show that he’s not really like the other odious *goyim*.

That said, French and his alter ego at *The Atlantic*, it seems, have taken a partly true argument and turned it into a pretext for not looking deeper into a multi-faceted conflict. The idea that our current *Kulturkampf* and its political manifestations entail a confrontation between two different groups of whites is certainly correct, but not particularly instructive. I myself devoted two books, neither of which *National Review* or *The Atlantic* deigned to review but which I’m sure their contributors are aware of, to the “culture war” touched on by French and Reihan. Since [my works](#) on multiculturalism and the post-Marxist Left were widely reviewed in Europe and are coming out this fall in French translation with Editions Toucan, I would be surprised if French and Reihan never encountered my interpretation of the contemporary cultural-political Left. (Of course I wouldn’t expect them to admit it even if they had.)

Clearly there are white groups that are aligned against each other and fighting for political and cultural dominance. But to restrict one's vision of present ideological struggles to this fact is to ignore a much bigger and altogether more difficult picture. It would be like explaining the Second World War by focusing exclusively on deteriorating German-Polish relations over access to the free city of Danzig. That may have been one cause of the accelerating tensions between Germany and Poland in the interwar years, but presumably a lot more was going on by the time that a European-wide war broke out. Looking at the present political and cultural strife, it is obvious that other groups beside the white uppers and white lowers have joined in the fray. For instance, blacks and immigrants, particularly from the Third World, are now integral parts of the leftist alliance. In Western Europe, Muslims have teamed up with feminists and LGBT activists to reshape what used to be white Christian societies. This is certainly not irrelevant to the evolution of the Left, which, by the way, can no longer in any sense be characterized as traditional Marxist. What unites this bloc is not socialism (which is a purely secondary theme), but the desire for cultural transformation and a determination to use the state as an icebreaker for the desired revolution.

French's frenetic effort to present the white uppers as good guys—lest we mistake him for a gun-toting Deplorable! —also overlooks the malice and distrust that drive the “white-bashing” warriors. Some of these whites break into ethnic and/or religious groups that absolutely loathe the largely Protestant rural and working-class elements on the other side. They may dislike them at least partly because, rightly or wrongly, they view them as anti-Jewish or anti-Catholic, or perhaps even more significantly, as “anti-feminist.” Indeed, the white uppers whom French and Reihan are telling us about are mostly women, who, both politically and culturally, are

now well to the left of men.

Hence this gender gap is a key factor in understanding the rise of the multicultural Left. In the US less than one-third of women approve of Trump, even as women present [a much bigger obstacle](#) with respect to maintaining border control than men do. The president's popularity among white men, meanwhile, is soaring well above sixty percent. Needless to say, American women, particularly those with college degrees, don't react to antifascist mobs or Black Lives Matter wreaking havoc with the same revulsion that our "sexist" president elicits from soccer moms. Then there is the gender problem in academia, an important subject on which Heather Mac Donald's *City Journal* [article](#), #MediocrityToo," is worth quoting at length:

The economics field has been hit with #MeToo diversity pressures. A panel at the annual American Economic Association meeting this January charged that gender discrimination was pervasive in economics, an argument that fit into the "larger national examination of bias and abuse toward women in the work force," the *New York Times* reminded readers. If females are underrepresented on economics faculties, it is because of such insurmountable barriers as the percentage of male economists cited in leading college textbooks: 90 percent. Were there comparable female economists who could have been cited for the relevant proposition instead? Unlikely, but in any case, we don't need to know. Is it possible to pursue intellectual inquiry out of love, rather than because you're following someone of your own gender or race? Apparently not. The *Times* bemoaned the "shrinking pipeline of women in economics departments": while females made up 33 percent of first-year Ph.D. students in 2016, only 13 percent of full-tenured professors were females in 2016.

But it takes decades for graduating cohorts to work their way through the system; when those tenured economics professors were students, their cohort was much less than 33 percent female.

Economist Deirdre McCloskey rejects the idea that competitively qualified females are being excluded: "There is nothing like discrimination on the part of hiring committees," she says. Self-selection may come into play, however, she adds, since economics is a "macho field" that pays relatively little attention to the impact of females' family roles on the timing of a scholarly career. Modern-day economics has grown increasingly math-based. The percentage of males who score in the upper range of the math SATs (scoring 700 or more on an 800-point scale) is nearly twice as high as the percentage of female high-scorers. Males outperform females on the macroeconomics and microeconomics AP exams. Males are also more competitive than females, economist Johanna Mollerstrom and others have shown. Such facts have a clear bearing on the composition of a "macho," quantitative field like economics, but they are not allowed to be mentioned in any discussion of "diversity."

Stanford's business school is claiming surprise at a recent whistleblower study showing that it favors females over males in awarding financial aid. The chance that such a practice was inadvertent is zero. But such female preferences in business and economics programs will only accelerate to combat an alleged culture of bias. This week, Dow Jones is rolling out IGNITE, a year-long program in leadership development to create a "truly diverse and inclusive senior leadership team." Participants will receive executive sponsorship, coaching, and personality

assessments, something that many aspiring top managers might value. Participation is limited to women, however, as part of Dow Jones's campaign to reach 40 percent female executive leadership; that 40 percent target is only an initial target. Such efforts are undoubtedly underway at many major news outfits and will only redouble in urgency following #MeToo.

Having obtained equal opportunity, like the nagging housewife feminists remain unsatisfied: only equal outcomes will do, and no matter about maintaining standards of excellence or a competitive edge over the Chinese.

Of course, as they build alliances with other officially aggrieved groups, feminists have no trouble practicing what French characterizes as "white-bashing." This creates a racial division within feminism itself, although feminism's chief target remains white men, or rather, "the patriarchy." Christopher DeGroot [correctly assesses](#) the man-eating hostility of the feminist movement in this keen observation from his essay, "Feminism's Doctrinal Injustice":

Feminism in the last few decades has become a kind of willful self-abasement or psychological masochism to which feminists *must* adhere. That is why they want us to conceive of ordinary men as sexual predators. After all, if men are not forever sexually assaulting women and keeping them back generally, then feminists will have nothing to oppose.

If the incessant demands by feminists for academic positions

by virtue of their victim status are not representations of our cultural struggle, then surely nothing is.

Nor can one properly address our present cultural conflicts without taking into account these critical gender and racial factors. In their respective failures to reckon with the full complexity of contemporary America, French and Reihan recall a pungent observation made by Rousseau in his *La Nouvelle Heloise*: namely, that unlike “ancient historians who memorialized great events with meager means, our contemporaries do exactly the opposite.” Despite their greater resources, they write in a totally forgettable, blatantly self-interested fashion about contemporary subjects, and so long as history is a reliable guide, their works seem fated for the dustbins.

This brings me to another mordant observation concerning the French-Reihan analysis. This cursory investigation does not aim to provide scholarly insight so much as to lay down a party-line about cultural division, which is acceptable to the center and center-left. My friend Jack Kerwick, an academic philosopher, has written at length about what he calls the “[Big Con](#),” which is the media-approved opposition to the center left. This faux opposition often merges with what it’s supposed to oppose and acts as a gate keeper: on its monkey-like watch, “right wing extremist” positions shall not be aired. Those who, like me, say the wrong things continue to notice those pesky variables—racial conflicts and gender conflicts—that “sensitive” observers are supposed to ignore.

[As a biographer](#) of the German legal theorist Carl Schmitt, I may also have the lamentable habit of noticing who really hates whom. Moreover, I believe in the manner of Schmitt that

one's enemies often determines one's friends. Finally, like Schmitt in *The Concept of the Political*, I would argue that those who hope to remove the Political—it being understood as inevitable friend/enemy relations—from human existence, will not cause the Political to disappear. Rather, they themselves will disappear long before human conflict vanishes. French and Reihan seem engaged in this fruitless task, as they try to point us toward a *modus vivendi* in the “great white cultural war.” Presumably, as more and more Deplorables (what the French call *les ploucs*), move into cities and develop enlightened attitudes typical of more “moderate” conservatives like French, they may be able to convince refined white people that they are teachable and even clubbable.

And let us not make any mistakes in this matter. French most certainly has friends and enemies. Among his dearest friends are the nice white uppers whom for the sake of balance he chides ever so gently. His enemies are even more easily discernable; for example, [Donald Trump](#), [Steve Bannon](#), and generally anyone on the unfashionable Right. But, let me repeat, I do not think French's comments on the “white cultural war” offer satisfying answers (for those looking for them, please read my books) so much as they show for all to see that, like the unpopular student in high school, he wants to belong to the *bien-pensants*.

This brings me to one final point, a reflection on whether the US can develop a Right that is worthy of our no-holds-barred Left. Despite my disagreement with the Left on every position that it advocates and is trying to impose on the rest of us, I nonetheless respect its representatives as persistently standing for something without giving a damn about the feelings of its opposition. Indeed, I feel more respect for this Left than I do for what my friends describe as the Big

Con or “cuckservatives.” The Left has presented itself for a real war; while the other side strains not to appear too extreme and even punishes those in its ranks who seem unduly bellicose about delicate subjects.

Having watched Fox-anchors and news interpreters responding to black guests who rage against white people by assuring them that all of us hate “white nationalists” and recognize America’s past racist sins, I eagerly await the appearance of “black conservatives” who have the courage to fire back at black bigots. I also never cease to be amazed by the degree of care shown by “media conservatives” in identifying themselves with moderate feminists and moderate gay rights advocates against the “far Left.” This too is a game of petty positioning in which one sacrifices any chance of maintaining a serious opposition in order to appear “moderate” in the face of one’s enemies.

Then, for good measure, one calls on the government, as I heard on Fox News a few weeks ago, to close down the google accounts of “white nationalists.” I won’t hold my breath until that television network does the same for anti-white black, or anti-male feminist bloggers. Needless to say, I’m not exactly keen on having the government close down bloggers; for, even if I disagree with them, this sets a perilous precedent that would soon lead to greater mischief. After all, I have noticed the alacrity with which the Big Con has been demanding that the government take action against the liberties of people on their right. In a *New York Post* article I read recently, neoconservative law professor [Frank Buckley](#) indicates that he would love to close down Alex Jones. I doubt whether Buckley would express the same urge to curtail the civil liberties of *Huffington Post* or of *Salon*. Who knows what might happen if he did! Perhaps he wouldn’t be invited to faculty parties

anymore, the poor fellow. He might even lose his gig at the *New York Post*.

An even more frenetic attempt by the fake Right to go after enemies on the unacceptable Right can be found in [Jonah Goldberg's defense](#) of "traditional conservatism" against the populist Right, and most recently, against Alex Jones and the Alt-right. Goldberg throws everything but the kitchen sink at Jones, Bannon and Trump supporters, all the while purporting to be the heir of William F. Buckley in defending us against racists and anti-Semites. And yet there are problems with Goldberg's by now familiar pose, and one wishes that he'd simply stick to chatter about his dogs and cats, topics on which he is at least knowledgeable. One, it is not at all clear that everyone whom Goldberg happily befouls is what he claims they are. Certainly, it is hard to imagine that *Breitbart*, which is staffed by Orthodox Jews and passionate Zionists (by the way, I am not allowed to write for that website since my Jewish nationalism has been called into question by its doctrinaire staff), is anti-Semitic. It is also questionable whether Buckley would have denounced the same people whom Goldberg rages at. One may doubt whether Buckley would have defined "the irresponsible Right" in the same way as Goldberg does. (The main reason Buckley denounced other members of the Right was not their failure to seem sensitive on issues that matter to Goldberg, but their insufficient anti-Communism.) Finally, I've yet to discover a single position taken by Goldberg that is even remotely "conservative," unless such positions include recognizing gay marriage, expanding immigration and upholding NAFTA.

It is easy to moralize when you have [no skin in the game](#), and there is a huge difference between functional opposition, of the kind typified by French and his companions at *National*

Review and *The Atlantic*, and a serious opposition to a serious enemy. The “liberal democratic” model, which neoconservatives and their dependents glorify, requires that there be two sides for the system to work: generally speaking, a party of movement and one that provides polite opposition to the more dynamic party. There are of course other players in this show, including expanding public administration and a media priesthood, but one indispensable formal presence in the arrangement I’ve alluded to is a functional opposition. This opposition operates like the present English monarch, who has a role in the English government, but a largely passive one that consists mostly of being around. This functional presence, as in the case of the American conservative movement, sometimes becomes conspicuously silly; for example, when the official opposition, as represented by Goldberg or French, goes after those who might be mistakenly believed to be “conservative” allies. This token opposition lashes out against earnest combatants, who naively think that they’re supposed to oppose the Left rather than play an accessory role in a fixed system.

The system described, with a primarily functional opposition, has not reached a tipping point or crisis, largely because of its relationship to the Left, or to that part of the Left that appreciates its formal oppositional role. This functional “Right” is not really battling the Left. It is ornamental, and the saner heads on the Left recognize this. There is no reason to vent fury on a bogus opposition that exists in order to maintain the semblance of a dialectic. If, moreover, that “Right” is discredited by a more principled and divisive one, then the system that has allowed the social and cultural Left to thrive would be weakened. In fact, it would be necessary at that point to create a replacement for what has been lost; and money and energy would have to be expended in order to replicate the functional opposition that ceased to exist.

It might also be contended that the protests against this “Right” that occurred when antifascists lashed out against Ben Shapiro and other neoconservative debaters on college campuses, further strengthen the functional opposition. For it makes that opposition look like what it’s really not, that is, a threat to the Left that requires a decisive show of solidarity from the other side to prevent the country from going “fascist.” The reality however is much less interesting. The functional Right, with its characteristic fear, seeks “dialogue” with the party of movement. In return it gratefully acts as gatekeeper, preventing a deeper and more sincere opposition from gaining resources and access to the media. In short, David French and Jonah Goldberg are performing their functional role.

Paul Gottfried, paleoconservative philosopher and intellectual historian, was the Raffensberger Professor of Humanities at Elizabethtown College. He is the author of many books, including [*Leo Strauss and the Conservative Movement in America*](#) and [*Conservatism in America: Making Sense of the American Right*](#).

Follow NER on Twitter [@NERIconoclast](#)