



Libertarians Are to Blame for Donald Trump's Racialized Rhetoric?

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Uhhmm no. I don't know who Matthey Sheffield is, other than a liar, but this claim is highly misleading. First off Sheffield starts off rather badly with this,

The figure whose ideas unify Pauline libertarians and today's Trumpists is the late Murray Rothbard, an economist who co-founded the Cato Institute and is widely regarded as the creator of libertarianism.

Nowadays, many libertarians like to portray their ideology as one that somehow transcends the left-right divide, but to Rothbard, this was nonsense. Libertarianism, he argued, was nothing more than a restatement of the beliefs of the "Old Right," which resolutely opposed the New Deal and any sort of foreign intervention in the early 20th century. Many of its adherents, such as essayist H.L. Mencken, espoused racist viewpoints, as well.

While there is considerable truth in most of this, Murray Rothbard is not the entirety of what could be called, broadly speaking, the libertarian movement.

Murray Rothbard is a one of several prominent economists from the Austrian school of thought. This school of thought started with Carl Menger, one of the three co-discoverers of marginal utility theory (the other two being Leon Walras and William Stanley Jevons, some also include John Bates Clark). Menger went on to influence a number of economists including Eugene Böhm-Bawerk, Ludwig von Mises, and Friedrich von Hayek. Rothbard was a student of Mises. Rothbard was also more of an anarchist than a libertarian so his ideas are...well, definitely not common amongst your typical libertarian.

Sheffield also claims that Rothbard co-founded the Cato Institute and by association would like to smear that organization as well. However, what Sheffield does not tell you is that Rothbard left Cato in a rather a huff because...well Rothbard did not play well with others. If you did not like Rothbard's ideas, well there must be something wrong with you. So Rothbard was

essentially forced out of Cato and toddled off to found the Ludwig von Mises Institute with Llewellyn Rockwell.

Sheffield also brings in Rothbard's views on parenting children in his book *Ethics of Liberty*. He notes that Rothbard argued for a market in children. Now I have read most of that essay, but here is the thing, while Rothbard argues that parents should have no legal obligation to care for their children, another prominent Austrian economist might very well argue the exact opposite. Hayek argued that there is a distinction between what is law and what is legislation. Law is something that people commonly come to accept as the norm. Murder is against the "law" because people view murder as bad. Hayek argued that the law is arrived at via a process not unlike evolution. On the contrary legislation is usually done to circumvent the law because the law is what people would normally do. That is, legislation uses coercion to stop people from engaging certain types of behavior—e.g. Prohibition. Hayek would very likely argue that taking care of your children is the law and that yes you have an obligation to do so. Like I said, Rothbard's notions were more than a little out there.

Strangely, Sheffield talks about how conservatives started to move away from Rothbard towards William F. Buckley, Jr. and...zoinks Ludwig von Mises, Rothbard's own teacher. It is as if Sheffield is clueless on who some of these people are. And of course there is no mention of people like Hayek, or other's who could be considered intellectuals that have contributed to the libertarian views such as Ronald Coase, James Buchanan, Gordon Tullock, Elinor and Vincent Ostrom, Armen Alchian, Milton Friedman, George Stigler, and Aaron Director (note that of these people Hayek, Coase, Friedman, Stigler, Buchanan and [Elinor] Ostrom have won the Nobel Prize for economics). One could also make the case for Anthony Downs, Duncan Black (no, not Atrios), Mancur Olson and even Kenneth Arrow (another Nobel winner, and not known for being libertarian, but his work on social choice theory is often part of the discussion).

Yes, Rothbard and Rockwell thought that backing David Duke for the governorship of Louisiana was a good idea. My understanding was that Rothbard saw it as a potential Trojan horse to bring in his ideas of the economy and politics to the rednecks and southern conservatives. But to imply this was a view held by all people who could be considered libertarian is just ridiculous. Similarly with Rothbard's bizarre support for Joseph McCarthy. And Rothbard also supported the presidential bid by Pat Buchanan in 1992 and then shifted over to Ross Perot once Buchanan dropped out. Very odd choices since most economists oppose the protectionism/nativist views of people like Buchanan and Perot.

To be clear, those who adhere to the views of Rothbard are not really your garden variety libertarian minded person. These people refer to themselves as Rothbardians or Paleconservatives and sometimes Paleolibertarians. They see themselves as being something separate and distinct, and if you do not subscribe to their views well you may find yourself cast out of the tribe. One of the few universities that have a strong Austrian school contingent is George Mason University and I'll tell you the people who prefer Rothbard do not like the people at George Mason. At George Mason the professors will talk approvingly of the work of Coase, and Public Choice Theory, and Elinor Ostrom and will dare to use tools such as game theory when analyzing a problem (Rothbardians are rather mathphobic). Rothbardians are more of the mind, if it ain't Rothbard it is nothing. Starting to sound a little bit cultish? Really, the article

should have been, “Where Does Donald Trump Get His Racialized Rhetoric? From Rothbard and Rockwell.” But then most people would go, “Who?”