



Which Side Are You On?

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Trump supporters are now accused of being false nationalists.

In our popular culture, in our novels, in our sociological studies, the reality begins to sink in that we've become an immobile class society. Goodbye *Leave It to Beaver*, hello *Sons of Anarchy*. Sayonara the melting pot, bonjour the new aristocracy. And one sees it in the upper class, conservative revulsion at Donald Trump, the arriviste from Queens.

Now, I like Trump, but I get it if some of my libertarian friends don't. The imagined free market society we thought we lived in no longer exists. On measures of economic freedom we're sinking like a stone, falling behind countries we used to think were socialist, and it wouldn't be getting any better with Hillary Clinton. So you might think that the libertarian, faced with our choices this year, would enthusiastically support Trump. And the truth is that many of them do. But then you get the purist, the libertarian ideologue from the Cato Institute or *Reason* magazine who worries about things like mandatory motorcycle helmets and smoke-free public buildings. I love those guys, and if they want to support some guy who'll get two percent of the vote that's fine with me.

There's another kind of Trump hater, however, one whose revulsion at the candidate reveals a sense of superiority to what he sees as a lower class guy from the outer boroughs. And it carries over to what they're saying about Trump supporters. You know, the guys the *Wall Street Journal* calls "Trumpkins." Or racists, according to the *Washington Post's* Dana Milbank.

People on the right, such as *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg, are less likely to use the R-word, in describing Trump supporters. But it's seemingly what they're thinking. What going on, Goldberg tells us, is not nationalism but "white identity politics," which is a more genteel way of putting it. If people like Trump, it's not because they care about America. Instead, they want to "protect white culture from the forces of multiculturalism, and Christianity from spreading secularism."

Correct me if I'm wrong, but isn't that what they call a dog-whistle? They're not bigots, just angry Christians. They're not racists, it's just that they have this thing about white culture. NASCAR here, lederhosen in Germany.

What they aren't, says Goldberg, is nationalists. Which is interesting, because it's about the first time I've heard a NeverTrumper imply that there's something good to be said about nationalism. And it's about time we talked about nationalism, good or bad.

Nationalism has shown its nasty side in other countries, I'll admit, where it's been linked to racism and Fascism. But that's not the story of American nationalism. People always tell us the dark night of Fascism is about to descend on the United States, said Hannah Arendt, but somehow it always lands in Europe. That's because American nationalism has the self-correcting impulses of a country where the icons of national identity are the liberal principles of the Declaration, the Constitution, and the speeches of Abraham Lincoln. If you oppose our Bill of Rights, you're not a nationalist. Instead, you're not quite an American.

That's why one can have some sympathy with Trump supporters who say they want to "take their country back." Mona Charen tells us they're thinking with their viscera, not their brains. For Eric Holder, it's simply racism, which perhaps is the same thing. But if we've lost a bit of our country, much of the blame may be placed upon progressives, in their schools and universities which have taught a generation of Americans to hate America and its founding principles. If we've departed from that, then I too want to take my country back.

Along with the progressives, the elite right must also take its share of the blame, with its support for unconditional free trade and open borders. If nationalism means anything, it means a preference for natives over foreigners. People who have problems with that pretend that they're more compassionate than the nationalist. They're not. They're not showing compassion for the alien, but instead a want of compassion for their countrymen.

But it's the Trump supporters who are false nationalists, complains Goldberg. They're only a white underclass that is looking after itself. In this, however, I fear he's projecting his magazine's vision of an undeserving white underclass of Oxy sniffers. If lower class Americans have been excluded from jobs by senseless immigration policies, if we've seen wages stagnate for the lower half because of all the barriers to mobility we've erected, then the nationalist should properly seek to address their concerns. And that means taking seriously the issues that Trump has brought into the mainstream, about immigration and trade, issues a Republican elite had suppressed.

I'm delighted if the NeverTrumpers are asking whether something good might be said for American nationalism. Before they accuse anyone of false nationalism, however, they might ask themselves whether they have standing to do so.