

NATIONAL REVIEW

There Is No Right-Wing Equivalent to Political Correctness

It's laughable on its face to suggest otherwise.

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In a new piece, Alex Nowrasteh, an immigration-policy analyst at the Cato Institute, contends that, “Conservatives have their own, nationalist version of [political correctness], their own set of rules regulating speech, behavior and acceptable opinions,” a phenomenon he labels “patriotic correctness.”

If Nowrasteh means that conservatives tend to find conservative opinions more acceptable than liberal ones, well, *duh*. If he means that conservatives tend to object to liberal viewpoints, well, *duh* again. It should even be admitted that, like all collections of human beings, conservatives sometimes succumb to groupthink. But Nowrasteh completely blurs the line between a conservative objecting to a heterodox opinion and a conservative attempting to suppress that opinion by punishing anyone who expresses it. He even throws out the t-word — “tyranny” — to describe this allegedly sinister Bizarro PC.

Nowrasteh reaches back 13 years for some of his first examples, “Freedom Fries” and David Frum’s 2003 cover story on “Unpatriotic Conservatives,” suggesting this description of victims of tyranny started out as a “Things that Annoyed Me Over the Past Decade and a Half” listicle. You may have noticed that everyone calls them “French fries” today; far from being oppressive, the “Freedom Fries” effort garnered widespread mockery and derision. Life went on for everybody Frum criticized. Frum said they stunk, and they told Frum that he stunk. This is how public debate works. It may be messy, but it’s the exact opposite of tyrannical.

Later, he gives a more recent example of a victim of the Forces of Patriotic Correctness: San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick. Has Kaepernick been silenced this year? Yes, mostly by the defenses he’s faced during his team’s twelve-game losing streak. Now, it’s possible that each of the 25 times Kaepernick has been sacked this year, the opposing defensive linemen have cried, “Your personal form of protest is inappropriate and disrespectful to veterans!” while bringing him to the turf, or opposing defensive backs have intercepted his passes while shouting, “Your public support for Fidel Castro is ignorant and morally grotesque!” Perhaps they are, but if Kaepernick feels opposing defenses are punishing him primarily because of his political views, he can console himself with the \$20 million he will earn this season.

Conservatives can be quite loud in their objection to certain figures they deem unpatriotic or insufficiently patriotic. But in today’s America, they don’t have much ability to actually punish

anyone for their views. This is, on balance, a good thing. We can debate the details, but the world in general is better off with the free expression of bad ideas.

We live in a world where Brendan Eich can get tossed from a company he founded over supporting a marriage initiative, ESPN fired Curt Schilling for a Facebook post about transgender bathrooms, bakers get fined \$135,000 for refusing to bake a cake for a gay wedding, and the Department of Justice goes after the Little Sisters of the Poor for claiming an exemption to the Affordable Care Act's contraceptive mandate. At the core of modern leftist-driven political correctness is the idea that the social transgression of holding an unpopular opinion must be met with economic repercussions or legal prosecution. Conservatives may complain loudly and frequently, but so far, they've shown little ability to generate economic repercussions or legal prosecution.

Yet Nowrasteh somehow finds oppressive censoriousness from the right more menacing. "The modern form of political correctness on college campuses and the media is social tyranny with manners, while patriotic correctness is tyranny without the manners." He concludes that the Patriotically Correct hordes "do not hesitate to use the law to advance their goals" and points to efforts to ban flag-burning — still protected under a pair of decades-old Supreme Court rulings — and a Louisiana law that expands the state's hate-crime statute to include the targeting of police officers, firefighters, and EMS personnel. Not exactly the dark night of fascism descending upon America, is it?

Of course, there *is* something wrong with patriotic correctness, but it doesn't seem to have occurred to Nowrasteh: When conservatives loudly protest some public figure who offends them, all they're really doing is playing into the hands of tired leftist performers who hunger for controversy. There is no easier way to get attention — and rekindle a lost reputation for "edginess" and "courage" — than to mock the squares, because any marginal economic punishment they might inflict on you is invariably outweighed by the new fans you'll make on the left.

Patriotic correctness, then, actually redounds to the benefit of those whom Nowrasteh claims are its victims.