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## [Rand Paul and the Paleos](#)

Posted on May 24th, 2010 by Daniel McCarthy



During the Bush years, disciples of Leo Strauss often complained that they were unfairly typecast as neoconservatives. There are many kinds of Straussian, including the [antiwar French conservative Pierre Manent](#), the [libertarian Paul Cantor](#), and even a few [Front Porcher traditionalists](#). Many neoconservatives likewise [insisted that they were not now, nor had they ever been, Straussians](#). The two categories had some significant overlap — especially in Kristols *pere et fils* — but adherents of each thought it unfair to assume the two were coterminous.

[Ross Douhat has now](#) done for Rand Paul and the paleoconservatives what Straussians and neocons claimed had been done to them: Douhat has blended together some overlapping but distinct non-neo varieties of the Right to pronounce Rand Paul a paleoconservative. And by the commutative principle, whatever objectionable things one paleo has said may now be applied to Rand Paul. Thus, the Kentucky Republican's reservations about the Civil Rights Act can be traced not only to libertarianism but to racially minded thinkers like Sam Francis.

Several points of clarification are in order. First, paleolibertarians and paleoconservatives formed an alliance in the 1990s, but they stem from separate origins and have branched out in different ways since then. Murray Rothbard, the original paleolibertarian, was also the original libertarian *simpliciter*, a co-founder of the non-paleo Cato Institute and at various times an ally of Dixiecrats, *National Review*, the League of Stevensonian Democrats, the New Left, and the Libertarian Party before joining forces with paleoconservatives in the 1990s. The other leading paleolibertarians, Ron Paul and his former staffer Lew Rockwell, don't have backgrounds quite so eclectic — Rockwell was an editor for the conservative publisher Arlington House and Hillsdale College back in the day and edited a medical-industry newsletter, Paul got involved in Austrian economics and Republican politics long before the term paleoconservative had been coined in its present meaning. Rand Paul is most closely connected, of course, to his father's views. But if that makes Rand a paleolibertarian, it doesn't mean that he subscribes to some strict body of dogma. One cannot use the commutative principle even to ascribe

Rothbard's views to Rand Paul.

To connect Rand Paul with paleoconservative thinkers is even more of a stretch. He need not have read anything by, say, [Paul Gottfried](#) in order to have arrived at his critique of nondiscrimination law — if he was looking to sources other than the purely libertarian (where [criticism of nondiscrimination law is commonplace](#)), Barry Goldwater and the no-prefix conservatives of the 1960s [would have sufficed](#). There's nothing peculiarly paleo about Rand Paul's domestic policy views: they are [the views that conservatives in general held](#) until around the time of George H.W. Bush administration. His foreign policy, meanwhile, is pitched somewhere between the "humble foreign policy" that George W. Bush alluded to in 1999 and the elder Paul's non-interventionism. This is a blend that appeals to many paleoconservatives, but I don't see any evidence that it derives from Pat Buchanan or anyone else closely identified with paleoconservatism. Rand Paul has various ideas in common with paleoconservatives, but except for those derived from his father — who is more libertarian than paleo — he shares at least as many notions with the conservative mainstream. His landslide win in the Kentucky primary is proof of that.

There are other, greater problems with Douthat's column beyond this general confusion. Take his assertion that paleos are "good at applying their principles more consistently than your average partisan, but lousy at knowing when to stop. (Hence the tendency to see civil rights legislation as just another unjustified expansion of federal power.)" Is Douthat therefore in favor of using nondiscrimination laws to assert homosexuals' rights against the Catholic Church? Does it not look to him as if the defenders of nondiscrimination laws are also — by his own standards — "lousy" at knowing "when to stop?" And again, the problem to which Douthat points is not a paleo problem: most conservatives in the 1960s opposed or at least had strong reservations about federal civil-rights laws. If anything, there's a better case against nondiscrimination laws today than there was then, since racial discrimination is broadly socially unacceptable in all parts of the United States now (and no amount of federal power will eliminate *all* racial discrimination). At the very least, this would seem to be something that even a moderate conservative such as Douthat would want to think about, given the way nondiscrimination laws are increasingly wielded against the religious conscience.

Paleos and libertarians opposed nondiscrimination laws then and now; movement conservatives opposed them then and support them now. Does that, in Douthat's estimation, make non-paleos less "lousy" at determining the limits of their principles? It doesn't look that way to me.

For all that Douthat is at pains to be fair — "there's a lot to admire about this unusual constellation of ideas, and its sweeping critique of American politics as usual," he writes — in this column he acts as a mere enforcer of liberal orthodoxy, damning as bigotry or crankishness deviant views on topics as disparate as the gold standard and World War II. Has Douthat absorbed enough Austrian economics to know why the two Pauls favor a gold standard over fiat currency? Note that Douthat does not present even the hint of an argument, he just dismisses [these monetary concerns](#) as an "obsession." As for Patrick Buchanan's views on World War II, Douthat seems not to have paid attention to *Churchill, Hitler, and the "Unnecessary War,"* which argues in several places that there were more effective ways to contain Hitler (via the Stresa Front, for example) than by Britain offering an impotent war guarantee to Poland. Douthat is content to insinuate evil motives — anti-Semitism — rather than allow that there could be anything worth debating in these matters. It's a poor showing from someone smart enough to know better.

Filed under: [Conservatism](#), [Politics](#), [media](#)

## 10 Responses to "Rand Paul and the Paleos"

1. [Pons Seclorum](#), on [May 24th, 2010 at 5:45 pm](#) Said:

If either paleoconservatives or paleolibertarians are to express their reservations over the 1964 Civil Rights Act, they ought to focus on affirmative action. In order for the act to pass in the first place, LBJ had to ally himself with Republican Everett Dirksen in exchange for an amendment that proscribed racial quotas and, consequently, affirmative action. The illegality of quotas was later flouted by a legal activist in the EEOC and this violation of the 1964 act was to be enshrined in the Griggs decision, heralding the era of implicit discrimination and protected minorities. Henceforth, wherever there were instances of 'disparate impact' it was taken for granted that protected minorities were maliciously discriminated against and that specific evidence of such maltreatment was unnecessary. According to legal activists pursuing 'social justice', there is no explanation for disparate impact but racism all the way down. The consequences have been baleful. The criticism of the CRA can be on the subversion of the act by the legal/ judicial activist chicanery which unlawfully brought about affirmative action and the pervasive quota mentality.

2. **Ken Hoop**, on [May 24th, 2010 at 6:18 pm](#) Said:

After reading Raimondo's takedown of Rand Paul today, I'm not sure the latter is a staunch anything. His pro-nuke Iran and pro-BP remarks are very objectionable.

3. **Tom Piatak**, on [May 24th, 2010 at 6:20 pm](#) Said:

An excellent piece, Dan.

4. **tz**, on [May 24th, 2010 at 6:35 pm](#) Said:

One thing that seems to be missing is that there were two aspects to the act. The first limited state governments from discriminating (which is good and necessary), but the second which invaded private association.

5. **Jack Ross**, on [May 24th, 2010 at 6:44 pm](#) Said:

Kudos to Ken for pointing out the BP remarks, which demonstrate that there is plenty that goes beyond liberal hair-tearing remarks about civil rights that will do in Rand Paul even in a state like Kentucky.

As is so often the case these days, my first thought is that if nothing else Douthat could have done much, much worse, and generally speaking I think he and Dan are both right. Larison also had an excellent take I thought.

6. **Kevin J Jones**, on [May 24th, 2010 at 8:03 pm](#) Said:

Jackass segregationists also made sure the Civil Rights Act of 1964 protected "sex", in a bid to add a poison pill to kill the bill.

They miscalculated and so provided an opening for radical feminism to take over and drive out its competitors.

7. **Chris Moore**, on [May 24th, 2010 at 8:42 pm](#) Said:

This whole episode is just a little bump in the road for Rand Paul, and may actually end up helping him. In his writing's of late, Pat Buchanan has correctly detected a white backlash against the tenets of political correctness and against anti-white racism, of which aspects (such as affirmative action) of the '64 Civil Rights Act are a cornerstone. The liberal and neocon media are gnashing their teeth and going ape about Paul's faux pas right now, but it will all blow over soon enough, and most white voters will be left with the question: He went on and on about how he opposed institutional racism, so why the hell did they try to crucify the guy for speaking up for property rights?

These politically correct authoritarians have become like the boy who cried wolf, and people are sick to death of their Bolshevik hypocrisy and contrived hysteria.

8. **A.C.**, on [May 25th, 2010 at 1:45 am](#) Said:

Pons seclorum-It's a good point; although people know about "liberal judicial activism" in the general sense, I'd bet not many know that the courts basically created "affirmative action", ie, race-based discrimination that is supposed to somehow ludicrously be "positive discrimination". The crazy thing is, conservatives, both of the GOP and the southern Democrat variety back then in '64 predicted all of that, even after the Dirksen changes were made. Even back then, it was recognized that the overwhelmingly liberal do-gooder, our-job-is-to-improve-society courts were going to misconstrue the Acts to basically allow discrimination, just the "good" kind of discrimination, thus imposing the direct opposite of what the Acts were supposed to do. And bloviating "liberal lions" like Hubert Humphrey who are still idiotically idolized today in school textbooks were screaming that that was crazy talk, it was mere racism to oppose these sainted Acts.

9. **A.C.**, on [May 25th, 2010 at 1:50 am](#) Said:

And, like Davis Frum and so many more of these ridiculous talking head pundits, NO, of course Douthat hasn't read Human Action or Man, Economy and State. I seriously doubt he understands economics much at all. Pretty much anyone who employs the pithy childish line of "He even favors going back to the

gold standard(!)...”, as if such an idea is self-evident of insanity, you can pretty much bet dollars to donuts that they’re completely economically ignorant.

10. **RK**, on [May 25th, 2010 at 5:28 am](#) Said:

I no longer have any idea as to where Rand Paul stands on militarism and foreign policy (at least to me, it seems to have been “evolving” towards the neo-con view point). By the way, can someone please explain to me in plain english what he precisely means on the special US-Israel relationship? See his full statement published below:

<http://spectator.org/blog/2010/04/22/rand-paul-and-israel>

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