

THE TORCH

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A Pivotal Moment for American Conservatism

By Jennifer Vermeulen, *Texas Eagle Forum*



In January 2023, I had the good fortune to be offered a position teaching high school American Government at a homeschool co-op in the Dallas area. The previous teacher was retiring from education after many years, so the position came with a mountain of resources, books, and notes. It was both a treasure trove and a daunting undertaking. I soon realized that, while I intended to use some of the books I had inherited, it would be a disservice to the students if I were to try to replace a beloved teacher. After all, the director hadn't hired me to impersonate my predecessor. The director had hired me to teach, and in order to do that well, I would have to draw upon my own wisdom and experience to strike a principled and reasonable balance between the old and the new.

Now, you might be thinking, what does this have to do with being a conservative? To which I would reply: a great deal. You see, the basic question I had to ask myself during that process was, "What do I want to keep?" In other words, *what do I wish to conserve?*

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It is the same question anyone must ask when they encounter someone calling themselves a ‘conservative.’ Like a child playing with a *matryoshka* doll, asking that basic question lifts the proverbial lid, revealing an embedded stack of new, but interrelated, questions that must be answered before your conservative can respond with confidence. These more deeply embedded questions often go unexplored. Our assumptions or adopted positions are typically sufficient for navigating daily life - they’ve worked for us, more often than not, for our family, even for society - so we haven’t necessarily had the need nor the motivation - perhaps, even the courage - to explore our political beliefs very deeply.



But like rattling an unopened nest of Russian dolls, we know something deeper lies inside, even if we don’t necessarily know how it got there.

The term ‘conservative’ is an inherently relative one, which is ironic considering that many conservatives would reject the claims of relativism. But nevertheless, it is true; the term carries almost no substantive meaning aside from what it implies: the desire to keep some *thing* going, or to redeem some *thing* that has been lost or degraded.

But what is that *thing*? Conservatism’s indefinite nature is why a group of individuals with various and opposite beliefs can be lumped together under one label without *total* contradiction. A conservative Islamist, conservative Monarchist, and conservative Republican walk into a bar. It sounds like the beginning of a joke. They certainly will not see eye-to-eye on many things. But they would, at the very least, appreciate each other’s struggles. Because, if there is any attribute conservatives of all stripes universally share, it is the heightened sense of loss that inevitably comes with change.

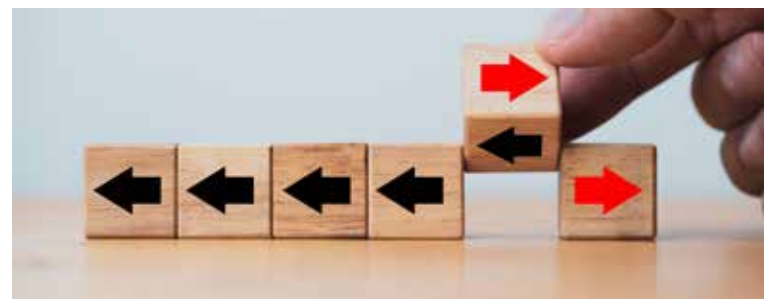
Conservatives do not all share the same opinions, but they do share many of the same fears and attitudes towards tradition and change in the context of community. Here in the United States, the term ‘conservative’ carries specific connotations of right-leaning political beliefs seeking to

preserve or reclaim some feature of traditional Western Civilization, namely the products of classical liberalism, such as the U.S. Constitution, the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment, and/or the adoption of Judeo-Christian values. For the sake of clarity, we will call this particular flavor of conservatism American Conservatism.

According to John Fonte, senior fellow and director of the Center for American Common Culture at the Hudson Institute, “the history of modern American conservatism... can be broken down into three waves”: first wave (1950s-1980s), second wave (1990s-2010s), and third wave (2016-present). The major players from each wave are familiar names in American politics: Barry Goldwater, William F. Buckley, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush, Paul Ryan, Sarah Palin, Donald J. Trump. The visceral reaction a reader might feel towards such a varied group of self-proclaimed American Conservatives - the ones you love and the ones you don’t - proves both my thesis and Mr. Fonte’s: conservatism is about preserving some *thing*, but we haven’t all necessarily agreed on what that *thing* is or how to go about it.

This great variation, one might even say diversity, within American Conservatism is both its beauty and its strength, as well as its Achilles’ heel. The greatest danger inside American Conservatism is that factions and in-fighting will distract us from the real threats, weaken us from within, and drive away potential new members.

Mr. Fonte’s framework provides us the strongest clue for where in-fighting is likely to occur within the expanding and increasingly diverse realm of American Conservatism. First wave conservatives tend to be traditionalists focused on preserving Judeo-Christian values, individualism, and liberty. Second wave conservatives are heavily invested in expanding American influence through globalization, immigration, and foreign policy focused on economic integration backed by the U.S. military. Third wave conservatives exist almost entirely as a reaction to second-wave conservatives, whose dream of being the sole superpower is slipping away and being replaced, instead, with their worst nightmares: a shrinking middle class at home, an ascendant China abroad, rampant inflation, tanking markets, and regional conflicts ready to boil into another world war.





Roughly speaking, those of us who have been around the conservative movement since before 2016 fall into either the first or second wave. But it is this third wave, comprised mainly of populists and centrists orphaned by the radicalization of the Left, that is bringing the most diverse influx of backgrounds, faiths, values, and lifestyles that, I would argue, the Right has seen in decades.

The expanding tent of American conservatism is destined to collapse upon itself if conservatives do not take immediate steps to identify as much common ground as possible beneath our feet. It would be a grave error for old-school conservatives to pick fights with new and potential third wave conservatives over petty issues or past grievances. But where is this common ground to be found among such an increasingly diverse group? I suggest to readers that we will find it in our shared objective reality rather than our individual subjective preferences.

Here's a good rule of thumb: objective reality is that which reasonable people of sound mind can agree on as true. Science is a good place to start: Sex is determined biologically; boys have a general physical advantage over girls; and changing your gender does not change your sex. I would like to believe we can build a solid majority of like-minded people on the basis of those three statements alone. Economic truths are also a good source of common ground: Inflation hurts the poor the most; Middle class wages have stagnated while politicians have gotten rich; High interest rates and the rising cost of housing threaten to cut the next generation out of home ownership. Social truths are a third area where broad consensus can be built: Illegal immigration costs taxpayers over \$150 billion a year; Election integrity is necessary for the proper function of government; Family is the basic unit of society, and the rule of law is the basis of civility.

After nearly a decade of chaos, censorship, cancel culture, and gas lighting, people are starving for truth. American Conservatives need to offer it, unadulterated and unapologetically, to the nation. After all, it is the truth that sets people free. Amen?

When I was going through all the materials I had inherited for my class, my overriding principle was to keep content that was objective. My predecessor had lovingly built this class over many years, but much of the material had been chosen subjectively. This reading assignment or that handout were selected because they aligned with her personal preferences and opinions. However, as an outsider coming in, I was comfortable with setting those particular materials aside because their value was not universal. By excluding subjective preferences, I was not denying my students access to truth. Rather, I was building a class upon objective reality, with naturally broad appeal, so that every student could feel like they belonged, regardless of background or belief. This non-ideological, non-dogmatic approach made the students more likely to listen, less likely to argue, and more likely to engage.

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It's time for American Conservatives to get honest about what we are holding on to that is objective truth versus subjective preference, and be willing to set the latter aside as potential stumbling blocks during this perilous time. The battle for our country will require overwhelming numbers to face overwhelming odds. Everyone who values honesty and truth; who shares in the grief of watching our nation's greatness slip away; who longs in some way for how things used to be; anyone who wants to help find a way back to the goodness and prosperity that has been taken from us and our children has a place among American Conservatives.

Welcome, friends. I'm glad you're here.

We have a country to save. •••

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Hating Men is the Democrats' Campaign Strategy - White men and married families won't find real or meaningful advocates in a political party that has gleefully worked against and mocked their interests and values for the better part of a decade. That much was abundantly clear in the now infamous "White Dudes for Kamala" online gathering. Aimed at garnering support among a demographic that could define the 2024 race, the Zoom meeting showed America the true essence of Kamala Harris' campaign. Leading up to the event, Democrat operative and "White Dudes for Kamala" organizer Ross Rocketto said, "Throughout American history, there's a lot of evidence to suggest that when white men organize, it's often with pointy hats on, and it doesn't end well." EXCERPT FROM: Mattison Brooks, The Federalist, August 7, 2024

Proof of Foreigners Voting Illegally in Virginia - As part of their embarrassing smear campaign against Republicans worried about the integrity of America's elections, legacy media have twisted themselves into pretzels trying to convince the country that foreign nationals interfering in the U.S. electoral system is a nonexistent problem. So-called "journalists" and their Democrat political allies regularly claim concerns about noncitizens registering ahead of and voting in the 2024 election are baseless because it's already illegal for foreigners to cast ballots in federal contests. Yet, for all their hyperbolic grandstanding and opposition to ensuring only eligible Americans have a say in U.S. elections, Democrats have no legs left to stand on when it's revealed that foreign nationals are, in fact, registering to vote. Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin revealed on Wednesday that the commonwealth's Department of Elections has removed more than 6,300 noncitizens from its voter rolls since his administration took office. "Security procedures can only be as strong as the state and federal law which governs voting. Further strengthening of Virginia's election security system will rely on strengthening state and federal law," said Youngkin. SOURCE: Shawn Fleetwood, The Federalist, August 8, 2024

V.P. Pick Tim Walz is No Moderate - In 2023 alone, Gov. Walz (MN) signed into law legislation allowing abortions until birth, medical mutilation of children, the issuing of driver's licenses with automatic voter registration to illegals, requiring tampons in the boys' bathrooms of public schools, and increasing the state budget by 40%. Gov. Walz's record is clear: he is no moderate.

An Olympic Fiasco - Italian female boxer Angela Carini was eliminated from the Olympics after just 46 seconds in the ring fighting against Imane Khelif of Algeria. Khelif is one of two male boxers competing in women's boxing at the 2024 Paris Olympics. "I have never taken a punch like that," stated Carini, who declared the fight "unjust." In a development that surprised precisely no one, Khelif will compete against the other male boxer in the women's category, Yang Liu from China, for the gold medal. Both boxers were found to possess male XY chromosomes during genetic testing performed by the International Boxing Association last year. The International Olympic Committee set aside any safety concerns for the female athletes and knowingly allowed the two men to compete as women.

GREAT AMERICAN QUOTE

"Freedom is never more than one generation away from extinction. We didn't pass it to our children in the bloodstream. It must be fought for, protected, and handed on for them to do the same, or one day we will spend our sunset years telling our children and our children's children what it was once like in the United States where men were free."

- Ronald Reagan

QUOTE OF THE MONTH

"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn."

- W. Cleon Skousen
The Five Thousand Year Leap

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