



Episode 1,259: A Neoconservative's Embarrassing Fall

Guest: Paul Gottfried

WOODS: Before we jump into Max Boot, I want to bring something to your attention you might not know about. But our friend Walter Block over at Loyola University in New Orleans reached a very interesting milestone the other day, and maybe you saw it on the Lew Rockwell blog, but he's now published 100 peer-reviewed articles coauthored with undergraduate students. I don't know of anyone who's even tried that, much less reached 100 such articles.

GOTTFRIED: Right, right.

WOODS: So you would think, Paul, you must — I mean, with your long history of knowing how college administrations work, you must think to yourself, *Why the university must be shouting this from the rooftops. This is amazing, we have a professor who does this for our students. We're so proud to have Walter Block at our university.* You'll never guess, Paul. Not a peep out of them.

GOTTFRIED: No, that doesn't surprise me. I mean, if he had done 100 articles, peer-reviewed articles done with his students on transitioning transgendered people, I'm sure the university administration would be proclaiming this from rooftops. He has the wrong politics. He's a libertarian up, and this is obviously not what university administration wants to encourage or wants to be identified with.

WOODS: And he doesn't believe in the gender pay gap and some of the fashionable things, so he's a sexist and whatever.

GOTTFRIED: Right, right.

WOODS: But anyway, pearls before swine, I guess. But the rest of us think that's pretty darn good. All right, let's talk about Max Boot. Now I have a little bit of a — I don't want to say a vendetta, because that would make it sound like I think about Max Boot. I give him no thought whatsoever. But my awareness of his existence, as I pointed out in my email newsletter the other day, goes back to my *Politically Incorrect Guide to American History* book, which the print edition of the *Weekly Standard* wrote a short but favorable review of, and Max was just beside himself. So he said, well, I'm going to review it on the website. But they already reviewed it [laughing]. But he wanted it to be negative, so he wrote this negative review. But as Pat Buchanan pointed out, Max's review is the same review *The New York Times* would give, so he's got basically an establishment view of American history. So I knew even then the guy was one of these phony-baloney so-called conservatives, and now he's saying

conservatives and Republicans, we ought to — we, he says, we — vote straight line Democratic ticket in November, well, look, I could have told you that 14 years ago when I first had my first dealing with him. So what do you know about this guy? What's your impression of him?

GOTTFRIED: Well, I my impression of him coincides exactly with yours. I do know his family. I know David Frum's family; I know Max Boot's family. His father, believe it or not, is on the far right. In fact, I think every day he mourns the execution of Charles the martyred King of England. He converted to Anglo Catholicism, and the last time I saw Alex Boot, Max's father, he was defending divine right monarchy to me. He utterly despises the son.

WOODS: Oh my gosh, I had no idea.

GOTTFRIED: Yeah, that's remarkable, isn't it?

WOODS: Yeah. Oh, my. In a way, that's almost a personal detail that I feel slightly guilty even knowing about.

GOTTFRIED: Right, right. But the two do not get along. I've never had the impression that Max Boot even fit the minimal requirements of conservatism prescribed or established by neoconservatives. I simply assumed that he was an ordinary Jewish liberal who took a stronger view on interventionism than most other Jewish liberals would. But I've never found any example of deviation from what sort of the established left-liberal position on any social or cultural issue in Max Boot's writing was. It sort of reminds me a bit of Jamie Kirchick, though I don't think they have the same sexual orientation. He's somebody you would think would be on the left, who would be associated with the left — I think it was Jennifer Rubin, who might be another example of that — yet for some reason keeps popping up as a so-called conservative writer. And you know, I also think that this may indeed how far to the left the conservative movement under neoconservative guidance has moved, I mean neoconservative and media conservative guidance has moved. But I think by now, Max may have positioned himself even outside, one might say, the leftist parameters of the so-called conservative movement.

WOODS: I actually think people like the folks you just described, including Boot, would have been on the edge of the Democratic Party of 1960.

GOTTFRIED: Absolutely.

WOODS: Given their social-cultural views, right? They would be basically been unwelcome.

GOTTFRIED: Yes, I definitely agree. As I always enjoy pointing out, that on family issues Rich Lowry and the rest of the *National Review* conservative types and sort of the *Weekly Standard* types would be well to the left of Karl Marx and Fidel Castro. I mean, I don't see anything that would suggest that means that they're social conservatives, except by comparison with the more extreme cultural leftist types, whom they engage in ritualistic debates with. There's absolutely nothing conservative about these people on social issues.

WOODS: He's got a book out now called the *Corrosion of Conservatism: Why I Left the Right*.

GOTTFRIED: Mm hmm.

WOODS: Now, I have not read this book. I don't want to comment on something I haven't read. But on the other hand, I have read his columns. I've read his Twitter feed. I'm pretty sure I know what he's going to be saying in there. But right now, he's basking in the media glow that is shined upon somebody who has this change of heart, because the media is all saying, *Why, Max Boot has grown. And he's saying, Well, thank you very much. And it's in large part due to your wonderful journalism. But of course, I'm still learning.* Who would debase himself like this? I'm embarrassed for the guy [laughing].

GOTTFRIED: I'm not sure that I'm embarrassed by him. I think what he's doing maybe professionally useful. One of the arguments I've been making of late is that people like Max Boot can certainly rejoin conservatism, incorporated at any time they say, *Gee, I was wrong, and maybe we should have voted Republican, and I'll vote Republican next time.* I mean, there was a fixed number of actors in the conservative movement, even though they try to bring along new people like Ben Shapiro. But you know, Boot has been sort of kicking around in that movement for a long time. He was on the editorial board of *The Wall Street Journal*. He wrote regularly for *National Review* at one time. I saw him on Fox News even before he was humiliated by Tucker Carlson the last time he appeared on Fox.

But I think I think there is an opportunity for people like Bill Kristol and Max Boot and others, or David Frum, who have wandered a bit too far to the left to rejoin the movement at any time they want. They're not going to take us into the movement, but they'll certainly take back these, you know, estranged sons or daughters who simply have a change of heart again. So I don't think Max Boot has even closed all doors leading back into the conservative mansion. I think he can return there if he simply indicates that he was wrong about this election.

WOODS: That's could well be. Now, I'm looking — let's point out that we're recording this on October 10th and releasing it on October 11th. So what I'm about to say is going to be a day old, but I'm looking on Amazon at his book. And I have a little experience with this, because the book Max didn't like, *The Politically Incorrect Guide*, did very well. And I know what the Amazon sales rank means. Amazon sales rank, of course, you know, the number-one book is the number-one book, and the number-one-million book is the number-one-million book. But in particular, I know what it means for the fact that Max's book is at number 382 right now. And that's respectable.

GOTTFRIED: Yes, it is.

WOODS: But I'll tell you this. Given that he had a media blitz like no other yesterday — CNN, every major outlet. And if, after being on every major outlet, you're not in the top ten on Amazon, your book is going to tank eventually. I know this as an absolute fact. He should not be at 382 after that. And eight customer reviews? Eight customer reviews means he has no fan base, because —

GOTTFRIED: No, I think you're absolutely right. Y

WOODS: You have 50 reviewers who got that book, read it that night, and reviewed it for you if you had any kind of support base at all. He has nothing. Nobody says, "I'm a Max Boot fan". So he's completely isolated out there. But I'm telling you on this, with that kind of media, he should not be at 382. And I think the reason for this is, frankly, who the hell wants to read this book? Conservatives don't want to read it. Who wants to be lectured to? And left liberals,

you think they care why Max Boots switched from conservatism? Why would they want to read a book about that? They read his column in *The Washington Post*. That's all they need. Who's the audience for the book?

GOTTFRIED: I would guess it would be other neoconservatives who have moved into the Democratic camp in the last six months. No, I agree with you. I mean, I have no idea who would buy his book. I have no idea who would even we read his columns. They're soporific, and you know exactly what the guy is going to say. I mean, it's like reading Dana Milbank, you know, or Cal Thomas. Why waste your time when you can do something more useful like watching a sitcom on TV?

WOODS: Now, we haven't yet gotten to the part of Boot that really, really got me a few months ago before I even knew we had a book coming out, when he announced on Twitter or he linked to an article he had written, in which he came clean and said: all right, look, I now understand that I enjoy white privilege, and I'm going to be learning more and more about the benefits I get from this privilege and the ways that disadvantaged people have suffered conversely. No, no, no. And I thought: okay, well, look, Max, if you want to keep proving my point about what I said about you all those years ago, you are right on track, my friend. So we got that.

And now on Twitter the other day, I found out later, it was a member of the *New York Times* editorial board who said: "Well, Max, better late than never, but remember, we have people in America who have 300 years of experience" — I don't think these people are 300 years old. I think I know what she means — "with racism in America, and it's time for you to listen to them." So she gives him a little condescending lecture. Never a condescending lecture about all the avoidable wars he supported. Those people who died in those wars aren't even people. We don't even need to mention them. But so she gives him a little condescending lecture, and instead of telling her to go take a hike, and you can stick your condescending lecture — he says, "Absolutely. I'm still in learning mode. A lot of things that have been obvious to other people are only now becoming obvious to me." I thought, oh, my gosh. I mean, maybe he does get some professional benefit from this, but I don't care what the professional benefit is. I could not live with myself doing that.

GOTTFRIED: Well, I fully share your view, but I don't think his behavior is alien to conservatism, incorporated. You know, I've watched these people on Fox News being lectured to by black race hustlers. They hardly respond. I mean, they're terrified that if they say anything wrong, they're going to lose their left-liberal friends or their friends in the center left. So this liberal cringe which we saw him engaging in is something that I've seen even authorized conservatives doing. I'm sure he can live with himself. He's making a professional move. I don't think he suffers from a particularly sensitive conscience. I think he may well come out on top, enjoying support from the liberal left, but at the same time not barring the possibility or closing off the possibility of returning to his former friends in the conservative movement.

WOODS: Well, again, this could well be. This could well be, what you're saying about strategic moves and so on. I still just — I try to imagine myself in the shoes of people like this and I just —

GOTTFRIED: That's a mistake [laughing].

WOODS: [laughing] Yeah, that's where I'm going wrong, right there. All right, he says that what he's hoping for is that, maybe, out of the wreckage of the Trump years, out of the ashes of that, we might be able to create what he calls some kind of sensible center-right party. Now, that sensible center-right party, again, would be on the left wing of the Democratic Party of 1960.

GOTTFRIED: Right.

WOODS: But what I want to know is: what do you think the prospects of the Republican Party are in the wake of Trump? Because clearly, I mean, Trump is a phenomenon that I know Sam Francis pointed to in the 1990s, but it wasn't really materializing, and a lot of people kind of gave up on it. I don't think you and I could have predicted there would be a Trump like this. So in other words, this actually is a surprise to me, which is nice once in a while, because I'm never surprised and I like to be surprised once in a while. But, so given that it's such a surprise and it came out of nowhere, maybe given that, what's the likelihood of that, the fact that such an unlikely thing happened, maybe it has legs. Or maybe in four or eight years, it gets swept away in the tide of history and we go back to Mitch McConnell. What do you think is the likely outcome?

GOTTFRIED: Yeah, I would say that the likely outcome is unfortunately the latter. I could easily see Trump being replaced by a Republican Party that looks more like the Republican Party of the Bush family than the populist coalition that he put together. And I could see Bill Kristol and Max Boot returning to such a Republican Party, which on social issues would be well to the left of Fidel Castro, but would represent an adventurous foreign policy committed to global democratic transformation, which would also accommodate the arms industry and generally multinational corporations which give money to the Republican Party. I think that is a possibility. The thing that concerns me is basically the white college-educated female vote. And those people may have moved, particularly on social issues, irreversibly toward the left you know. I don't really see them coming back except to a Republican Party that looks very much like the party of the Bush family. And you know that's a significant demographic that we're looking at.

I also think that everyone, one might say, but, you know, white Christian voters are going to be allied with the left, and the Republican Party's that they vote for is one that will emphasize that it is economically or fiscally conservative, whatever the hell that means, but also socially sensitive. So I mean, Max Booth, I say this with a trepidation, even disgust, say in a sense be representing the future of the Republican Party if the Trump efforts to transform that party fail.

WOODS: Well, every now and again — in fact, just I think a few days ago, as a matter of fact — somebody will say to me the Democratic Party is in big, big trouble. Like, they are going down and it's not looking good for them. And I wonder about that. I mean, obviously you can tell from what you and I are saying that we're not holding out a lot of hope for the Republican Party either. But geez, just when you think, boy, those Republicans are terrible, then you look at the Democrats, and you say, geez, now I remember what their problem was. But I don't have that kind of optimism that the Democrats are in any kind of trouble, because they've got everything on their side: media, entertainment, education. Everybody is trained to be a Democrat in school. Everybody. Every assumption that's taught to you in school is going to lead you into that party. And I think the demographics — the youth, immigrants, all these different groups that are growing — tend to be going into the Democrats.

But on the other hand, couldn't you say maybe there has at some point got to be some backlash against people who scream at people in restaurants and shut down speakers and close down streets to have their protests? After a while, is there a possibility somebody will say: you know what, I think I've had just about as much of these people as I care to stand?

GOTTFRIED: Yeah, you know, I'm considering both hypotheses, but I think I lean more strongly to the first scenario, namely that the Democrats are playing to an extremely large audience, which may not be turned off by what they're saying, which may see these Antifa riots, which the Democratic Party's either supporting or acquiescing, very differently from the way we look at them, that, you know, these people are understandably outraged by Trump, who is a neo-Nazi, who wants to take away women's rights and throw immigrants into jail and kill homosexuals. I mean, I hear these things from academics all the time.

And if you look at polls, for instance, the people who are for and against Kavanaugh, as far as I could see, the majority were anti-Kavanaugh. Even though he was treated disgustingly by the Democrats, even though their outrageous behavior was unprecedented in the way that nominees to the Supreme Court are usually dealt with by the Senate, there was more acceptance of that than rejection. There were also more people who believed Christine Ford's stories, even though they were full of holes, than rallied to the defense of Kavanaugh and his family. And I think this reflects where the political momentum in the country is.

And I totally agree with you. I think demographics, the effect of the media, the educational system, etc., etc., all are inclining the population that we now have more and more towards the left. I don't know where the right is going to come up with its votes. And I say this with profound pessimism, since I obviously loathe the left, the cultural left even more than the Marxist left. But I am extremely gloomy about the prospects of any kind of right-wing revival in the United States.

WOODS: While I have you, let me ask you something that I think a lot of listeners would benefit from an answer to. And that is when we use the word "neocon," "neoconservative," is there a precise definition that you can give for that? Sometimes people just use "neocon" to mean anybody who favors any foreign intervention anywhere, and that's obviously far too broad a brush. So how do you distinguish the neocons, let's say, from, let's say, a garden-variety Republican?

GOTTFRIED: Yeah, I think there's a sociological definition, there's a cosmological definition. They very definitely have a worldview which is somewhat different from that of the garden-variety, vanilla Republicans. They are passionately pro-Israel. They bring with them certain baggage, like they hate Russians and Germans, whom they identify with anti-Semitism. And they are usually much more hawkish about foreign policy than garden-variety Republicans. On social issues, I think they lean farther to the left than the garden-variety Republican. There's also, one might say, a cultural, sociological definition that they're largely people from coastal areas; they're of Eastern European Jewish descent, predominantly, and they usually give voice to the concerns that one would expect from the group from which they come. And Zionism is obviously a vital issue. It's a paramount issue for most of them, although I think it would probably be a mistake to say it is the only issue in their view. Obviously are very much concerned with maintaining a large military presence in the United States, and they're always open to the possibility of engaging in ideological war to spread their notions of democracy which would typically bring them to power as custodians of democracy and interpreters of what democracy means.

So as I said, I think they bring with them a particular ideology, and they also are typically from a certain kind of background. It's sort of the kind of term that some someone said about pornography. I really can't — I think it was a Supreme Court judge. I really cannot give you a precise definition, but we know pornography when we encounter it, and usually when the word "neoconservative" is used, I have the sense that people have at least some idea of what neoconservatives are, besides associating them with an adventurous ideologically-driven foreign policy.

WOODS: Well, let's take somebody like Mark Levin. I don't follow him, so I can't say this for sure. But I feel like there's at least a decent chance that he is — or Michael Medved, for example. The two of them I think probably are reasonably, by 2018 standards, conservative on social issues, so they wouldn't be able to take off every box in the neoconservative camp. But I would say another qualification would be that, more or less, their opinions are within the range of what's considered allowable. So they will not be found anywhere near — like, for example, when I had the temerity to propose that we ought to bring back good, old-fashioned state nullification, *Well, excuse me. We cannot have that, because The New York Times has not given us permission for that, so that will not happen.* Or you know, frankly, tearing down statues, because if we tear down statues, that'll advance social justice. We're going to do the Jacobin tearing down of statues. And by the way, when I say I'm against the tearing down of most of these statues, I get pushback, but I don't care. I think this silly leftism. I mean, for crying out loud, Jimmy Carter stood in front of a Confederate battle flag. Jimmy Carter. So now, Jimmy Carter — what, are these people going to be afraid of Mister Rogers next? This is ridiculous. They're just inventing things to be concerned about. But of course, the neocons would be, *Oh, yes, of course. We have to take dictation from what leftists tell us about such and such cause.* They are absolutely sure to be on the so called right side of history on issues like this.

GOTTFRIED: Yeah, I think those examples are interesting. Mark Levin, who runs some kind of conservative network consortium, prohibits his employees or people associated with his enterprise from appearing on any program with me. He's specifically forbidden this. Now, I'm not a white nationalist. I'm simply a paleoconservative. But obviously he considers me outside the bounds of respectability. He also is fanatically pro-Mark Luther King. He's in favor, as far as I can tell, of pulling down these Confederate statues. Michael Medved is probably somewhere to the left of Levin, and he was very critical of Trump, and he's very much a supporter of the Bush family. Both I think easily fit within the neoconservative camp, though, I would agree, they probably, particularly on social issues, lean toward the right within that camp. But both I think are identifiably neoconservative.

WOODS: I was looking on my feed — I want to just talk for a minute about Trump. I was looking at my feed today, somebody saying, "Nikki Haley is out at the UN. I'm still not tired of winning." And I thought, okay, but how is this considered a win-win, when Trump put her there?

GOTTFRIED: I agree.

WOODS: So he just scored a win against himself. So this is the thing about Trump, is that — I was just on the phone the other day with a friend who could not possibly be more antiwar, who has been very anti-Trump, but who acknowledges: look, the fact is that in his heart of hearts, even though he's not going to completely go to bat for it, he doesn't know what we're still doing in Germany. He wants to get troops out of a lot of places around the world. That's

what they hate him for. And so this is even a guy who might even be a little bit left on some things, but he says, look, that's what they hate him for. And I agree with that, and yet, that's what makes it so frustrating, that this guy whose occasional good instincts are really good and really antiestablishment, for some reason, is in a bubble that makes him appoint Nikki Haley.

GOTTFRIED: Yeah, that's because he really does not have very much knowledge of the right. I don't think he has particularly deep political convictions besides being some kind of generic patriot and wanting to protect American jobs. I think he understands very little about the actors in the conservative movement and who supported him. I found the appointment of Nikki Haley particularly weird, since she had been vocally anti-Trump. By the way, *The New York Post* today in an editorial praises Nikki Haley as the person who stood up against the mob to remove the Confederate flag from being near the state house in Columbia, SC. This apparently was her greatest achievement. Oh, and she also spoke up for Israel. But this is the kind of person that we find, you know, our unconventional, non-orthodox president favoring, or his daughter, who holds rather conventional feminist views. I think people who saw in Trump more than a symbol of resistance to the establishment have been repeatedly disappointed, and I think this will continue to be the case.

WOODS: Before we wrap up for today, let's circle back to Max Boot. I know that — because I actually read a little bit of what he had to say about this. His first book apparently had to do with the war in the Philippines after the Spanish-American War, and he's trying to be wrong on as many issues he can possibly be. But can you comment on this? Because although I think I've read bits and pieces of his opinions on this, because I think I actually criticized him for it, I never actually read that book.

GOTTFRIED: Well, you know, I'm in exactly the same situation. I couldn't bring myself to read that book after reading some of Max Boot's columns. It wouldn't be interesting, however, if you looked at it, because I'm wondering if he justifies the suppression of the Filipinos by the American government because it resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. And by the way, it made a very strong impression on European countries. They thought that this was just something you don't do and that it looked bad. Max, I think does point out in this book, or so I read in a review in *The Wall Street Journal*, that some people may have noted an incompatibility between democracy and what was done to the Filipinos in quelling the revolt. To me, the problem was not with democracy; it was an utterly vicious reaction to what I think was justified. After all, they drove out the Spanish imperialists, and then the Americans came in and imposed at least an equally oppressive form of imperialism. But to answer your question, no, I have not yet read the book, nor do I feel at this point tempted to go back and look at it.

WOODS: Nor do I [laughing]. And I am going to again tell people that Boot's book is called *The Corrosion of Conservatism: Why I Left the Right*, so if you'd like to go read that, I'll link to it on the show notes page, TomWoods.com/1259. But I guess I would ask myself: I have only one life. I have only so much time for hobbies and reading in that life. Is this how I want to spend that time?

GOTTFRIED: No [laughing].

WOODS: But it's just such a fascinating case study. Also, Bruce Bartlett had a similar trajectory. And he was in the Reagan administration, and then he very ostentatiously announced his support for Obama. And I think he expected — because he's been very nasty to

me over the years, not that I judge people on the basis of how nice they are to me. Although, that's not true. I do judge people on that basis.

GOTTFRIED: It's inevitable that we do that.

WOODS: Of course. Why wouldn't I? And think he was expecting a big wave of progressive support, and I think what happened was, most people said, "Bruce who?" And so he's just — I think it pains him that he has no base of support. So he was abusing and attacking me for a long time. And I was saying, well, I don't know, apparently there are enough people who care what I say that they come to my website, listen to my show. And Bruce, you know, why don't you go do something else to have people love you? It's like there's a hole in his heart, and he thought this would fill it, and it just didn't happen. Whereas with Max, I feel like it's much more cold and calculating. Like he's willing to take the slings and arrows if it advances him.

GOTTFRIED: No, I think you're absolutely right. And as I said before, I also think that he understands that anytime he wants to go back to the conservative movement, they will embrace him, providing he says: I've had second thoughts, I made a mistake, and now I'm ready to support the Republican Party again.

WOODS: Well, we'll see if and when that day comes. Obviously, it all depends on what happens post-Trump.

GOTTFRIED: Right.

WOODS: If the Republican Party stays a Trump party, then the benefit of that is Max Boot stays away.

GOTTFRIED: That's exactly right.

WOODS: That would be one silver lining. All right, Paul, thanks so much for your time. We'll have to talk about some more terrible people in the future.

GOTTFRIED: Okay, thank you.