



Episode 1,726: Conservatism in the Age of Trump

Guest: Paul Gottfried

WOODS: Once again, you had a few columns this week that made me think I should get back on here. And they revolved around a similar theme, namely what is going on with the so-called American capitalist class. And when we say that, I even hate to use that kind of terminology, because really, I'm speaking only about the extreme elites among them; I'm not talking about the guy who runs a dry cleaner down the street, but the ones who are in the newspaper all the time and think they're entitled to an opinion on every issue under the sun. Those people are obviously not by any stretch of the imagination conservative. And then you had a column that just happen to mention Michelle Obama and pointed out that, of course, Americans admire Michelle Obama like above any woman in the world, and she's a fatuous, empty repeater of platitudes, and literally nothing more than that, and that is just plenty enough for them.

How do you – I guess this is a rhetorical question, in a way, but how do you fight back in a society that already is completely against you from the get-go? I mean, in the old days we used to – maybe you didn't, but we used to flatter ourselves into thinking that the country was secretly with us, but they just haven't read our magazines or something. I just don't think we can go for that anymore.

GOTTFRIED: Yeah, I think it's an interesting question, because I remember that back in the 1960s, I was a member of the Yale Party of the Right. And we used to console ourselves with the thought that everybody out there in what is now flyover country is on our side. And then we discovered this was not indeed the case, that Michigan was full of leftists and certainly Illinois was and Mayor Daly was about the most conservative mayor you'd be able to elect in Chicago. And we discovered that less and less of what became flyover country, or to use that horrible word of David Brooks' "red states," less and less of this area that was on our side.

And I think there are multiple reasons for that. One is popular culture. Another is the educational system, most of which, of course, is government controlled, but even the parts of it that are not government controlled are also becoming corrupted. It is perhaps a sign of the times that somebody as fatuous, hypocritical, and as thoroughly odious as Michelle Obama becomes the most popular woman in the United States, possibly the most popular woman in what are called Western liberal democracies.

I don't know exactly how you get a handle on this. I think for a very long time, you and I have been struggling against the bogus conservative movement which pretends to be mobilizing against us and is really part of the enemy force. I think that the left, however, will break down. This is something I'm certain will happen, although I will not be around at that time. I

will be too old to see that happen. But it does seem to me that the left is full of contradiction. I have no idea how the members of Black Lives Matter, the gays, the Muslims, the feminists, how all of these people can stick together very long after they've destroyed Western, white, Christian civilization.

These people are a force of destruction. I've compared them to the Nazis, and I think that's an apt comparison, except the Nazis perhaps had a more positive, in some ways, more destructive vision. But these people simply want to destroy. They're a nihilistic destructive force that hate Western civilization and hate those hierarchies and distinctions that are necessary for all civilization. But I don't think that they would be able to survive very long the success of their disruptive work.

Now, if you want to say how can we mobilize, on our side, I think it's very difficult. It's very difficult unless we can control the opposition, which right now we're not doing. I mean, you not only have a left; you have what Sam Francis called artificial negativity in the form of a pseudo-conservative movement. And I think what that does is create an additional problem for those of us who are looking for a solution.

WOODS: This may be a bit of a tangent, but in mentioning the conservative movement you've made me think about I guess something else I wanted to ask you: what your impression has been, maybe just anecdotally, of how the institutions of official conservatism have changed under Trump? I mean, yeah, some of them are Never Trumpers, but four miserable years of being on the outs after eight years of Obama, I mean, these people can't last that long. I think some of them start to come around. Has it changed either the platitudes or the personnel or the mode of operation of any aspect of Conservatism, Inc., the presence of Trump?

GOTTFRIED: I think the changes have been purely cosmetic. For instance, you watch Fox News, you see all these leftovers from the old Bush II administrative. You have Dana Perino, you have Karl Rove, Bret Baier, Chris Wallace, who's probably a Democrat, a kind of Bloomberg Democrat. *National Review* is sort of Never Trump, but they have not lost their place at the table of conservatism. I picked up *The New York Post* today, and it was Jonah Goldberg ranting against Trump as a right-winger and the police force were really racist, and this was in the context of an article that supposedly was telling us the left may have gone too far. To me it is remarkable how little has changed, nor would I expect very much to change unless the conservative movement is reconstructed, which is not likely to happen.

So what you simply get are the people who were there before, and some of them will back Trump, others will oppose Trump, but claiming to be conservatives. And very little else will change. So you have the same cast of characters you had before, and we continue to be excluded, of course. The same cancel culture has remained even more interesting. I mean, the Trump revolution has been like the Reagan revolution: it has been a non-revolution.

WOODS: Now that we've done that, getting back to the left, it's understandable that people might want to believe that what we're dealing with is a matter of debate, and that the more persuasive side will win, and that people who are wrong will be persuaded that they're wrong, and we just need to hash all this out, and unfortunately, we don't have free speech on college campuses, so that limits our ability to debate.

But I just had James Lindsay on the show earlier this week, and he's just out with a book on postmodernism and stuff like that. He says that, of course, there's nobody on that side, at

least the that side of that side, who believes in the idea of a free exchange of ideas. And he doesn't mean this in the trivial sense that if you go to a college campus, you're going to hear a lot of the same ideas repeated without dissent. He means far beyond that, that they believe that it's built into the very structure of oppressive Western society this idea that there is some kind of abstract, impartial reason to which we can appeal. This is actually an instrument of white supremacy, it turns out.

So I would say to anybody remaining who still thinks, well, we need to do our best to just promote our ideas against theirs, that I used to believe that too, that that's what we're all about. And I still believe in explaining myself and defending myself to those people out there who actually can listen. But at this point, you're dealing with people who have come out said that we will not engage in debate with you. We cannot, and you are reprobates, and you are our enemies. Well, at that point, what can you do other than just fight them instead of thinking, if I say this word rather than that word, maybe they won't hate me as much? Forget all that. Forget it. Just fight. Forget trying to appease them, or if I use this word, or if I have my pronouns in my bio, maybe they'll like me more. Forget it.

GOTTFRIED: Yeah, I totally agree with you. I think that any kind of discussion with the left is utterly futile, that in the end, it will be the side that has the most force or the most power that will win. I mean, this is like believing that you could have a debate with Goebbels and Hitler and convince them of your position. It just ain't going to happen. What makes our position, however, more problematic is that the conservative side is complicit in all of this. And I think this has to be emphasized. They cancel us. They're quite happy to be part of the canceled culture as long as they are included in the dialogue with the left, so that you and I may be among the few classical liberals left who believe in something like open discussion, in the 19th century English men's clubs, sense of German men's clubs or whatever. Most of these people do not.

Even the debates, as I've argued for years, are highly stage. They're what the French call the [inaudible]; they're sort of like arranged dialogues between people who basically agree on first things. So we don't even have as much of a position left with which to combat them, as if that would matter, because I don't think that any of this is going to be settled by open discussion. I think people like Jonathan Haidt seem to me to be taking certain addictive substances when they tell us this. He believes that there are people with different emotions or feelings, and some feelings put you on one side of the debate, other feelings put you on the other. Things don't work this way. I think what you have here is really a *Kulturkampf*, a cultural war in the deepest sense. And this will not be resolved by any kind of debate. It will be resolved, one might say, by history, and I think at some point, the leftist alliance is going to break down and begin to turn on each other. And then what is left of the other side will have a formidable task of rebuilding civilization.

WOODS: I don't see any other way for it to go. Now, you mentioned cancel culture on the right. What's interesting of course about that is that the criteria for cancellation are adopted entirely from the left.

GOTTFRIED: Mm hmm.

WOODS: They adopt the entire leftist platform. And they say, well, we don't want to have anybody in our ranks who would be thought of – not who actually is, by the way, but who would be thought of – as violating any of these norms of the left. So don't worry, we will

police ourselves. Notice that this never works the other way. The left doesn't police itself and say, well, we better appease the conservatives by making sure in our ranks, we don't do or say so. It doesn't happen that way.

And then also the other day, I got into a little — here's what's been happening lately. I gave a talk last month or a month and a half ago at the Mises Institute called "The Fact-Free Lockdown Hysteria," and as of this moment, that video has had almost 750,000 views.

GOTTFRIED: I know.

WOODS: So it's done — I don't know, if you weren't one of them, it would have only been 749,999, right [laughing]? But anyway, that was a big surprise to me, that that that did so well. And it keeps going. I mean, it's going to hit a million. It's gone really well. But anyway, so in that talk that I gave, I promoted an eBook that I had written, that's free, on the lockdowns, and I told people in the talk how to get it.

And of course, when you get the eBook, you wind up on my mailing list, so that means I've had a whole bunch of new people join my mailing list who they want the eBook and they're interested in what I have to say but they don't really know about me. So probably some of them I think expected me to be like Charlie Kirk or just mainstream voices on the right. So I thought I would test them last week and see how many of these new people on my mailing list will be put off if I say something negative about the conservative movement. Now, mind you, these people joined my list because they're upset about the lockdowns. The conservative movement has been pretty timid about the lockdowns, with a couple of exceptions. They've been pretty Me Tooing about the whole thing.

So I wrote something not having to do the lockdowns; I wrote one issue about the whole Nicholas Sandmann thing, the Covington Catholic High School student. And I said that even though he later apologized, Charlie Kirk was wrong to have initially pounced on the kid, and then said, *Well, now we have more video, now we see what really happened*. But the idea that you would initially pounce the way some people in the conservative movement did because they see this short video, it fits into the narrative of a stupid, arrogant white kid shouting down the noble Native American. Absolutely zero of that narrative was true. Everything about the story we were told about that couldn't have been more false. And that Native American guy, Nathan Phillips, turned out to be a con man through and through. Everything he said when he was interviewed by CNN about that incident was false. We know that from the video. And yet the instinct on the right was to jump — Ben Shapiro did the same thing. Yeah, I know they apologized later. But isn't it revealing their instinct is immediately to go after that kid, when there's no way a left-winger with a comparable video would have said, "Well, instantly I have to go after the Native American man because I have to appease the conservatives?" It would never ever occur to them to act this way.

And so I wrote this, and I said Charlie Kirk was in the wrong, and I know he's young and he's still learning, but I'm telling you, your instincts are bad if your first thought is, *I better go attack this kid*. Well, I got some pushback on my list, saying you must be jealous of Charlie Kirk, all this nonsense. I have absolutely zero desire to live Charlie Kirk's life. None whatsoever. But that was their response. Instead of saying yeah, you're right, the conservative movement has these awful instincts. And it's not like this is the first time. It repeats itself over and over. I was deeply disappointed in these new subscribers, Paul. Deeply

disappointed. They have apparently not been abused enough by the conservative movement yet. They want more?

GOTTFRIED: No, I think you're right. I've noticed the same thing, that people who read *Chronicles*, our website, are sometimes very critical of us for going after people like Charlie Kirk, for defending some of the things said by Michelle Malkin or Nick Fuentes. And they feel that we're not playing by the rules, and the rules are set by Conservatism, Incorporated. I was struck, by the way, by some of the same things that you noticed with Charlie Kirk and Ben Shapiro. Their instincts are leftist instincts. They're specifically looking for people who – I remember when the conservative movement would try to find nice things to say about Francisco Franco. That was at a time when its instincts were on the right, before Rich Lowry took over the magazine and pushed it all the way into left field. But that's the fate now of *National Review* and most of the conservative movement.

And one another thing that keeps striking me as weird is if you look at *Claremont Review*, they take positions on Reconstruction that are even more extreme than those of Eric Foner, who was a cradle Stalinist, who was defending the Reconstruction government, defending Thaddeus Stevens, defending the civil black legislature whom the Republicans used sort of as a front for taking power. They published this guy Allen Guelzo, who's all the way out in left field. This has become the official conservative understanding of Reconstruction, together with calls to remove Confederate statues. You don't even get pushback from Southern whites anymore. They seem to think this is perfectly fine. They're not even a force of any kind in the conservative movement. They just buy whatever the party line of [inaudible] is on a particular day. I would not deny that not only are we stuck with people like Charlie Kirk and Ben Shapiro, whose instincts are thoroughly leftist; we are also dealing with, one might say, conservatives or a conservative following that also has leftist instincts. And I agree with you, that when we say things that criticize Conservatism, Inc., even those people who claim to be critical of Conservatism, Inc. will end up on defending the establishment against us.

WOODS: That's unfortunately been my recent experience also. Now, in terms of the Republican Party – I don't even want to talk about the Republican Party very much – I would say right now, the thing that makes you an amazing hero is that you're not going along with shutting down all of life because there's a, frankly, trivial increase in risk out there. I mean that is basically what's happened. So I did visit South Dakota a couple of weeks ago, where Kristi Noem more or less kept the state open. She says she doesn't need Trump's assistance plan because her places stayed open. They're not having an unemployment problem. I mean, maybe she's grooming herself for some political future. I don't know. It's funny that Gretchen Whitmer, I guess is her name, in Michigan, who's been horrible and irrational and destructive, was seriously considered vice presidential material, whereas Kristi Noem languishes in obscurity for doing what's obviously the right thing. But that's a pretty low bar: *just let people live*. I just want that. I can't get that from these people.

GOTTFRIED: You're absolutely right. I have friends in Germany with whom I correspond who tell me that everything is locked down, and Merkel's a hero for locking down, even though the economy is languishing, people are jumping out their windows, and so forth. But they do allow anti-fascist groups to demonstrate, which is what you would expect. It's the same thing here.

WOODS: Fascism is the real virus, Paul [laughing].

GOTTFRIED: [laughing] Right.

WOODS: So we have to we have to do that. The whole thing is crazy. Then they just caught Nancy Pelosi, did you see just see this, the video clip of her in a salon that's supposed to be closed and she's not wearing a mask? Same thing happened with the mayor of Chicago, Lori Lightfoot, some months ago. She was at a salon without a mask, and she claimed that she had a mask, but there were no photos of anyone there having a mask. And then it's just case after case of these people getting caught. And of course if you were to ask them, *Well, why did you do that? Don't you know there's a pandemic going on?* The answer would have been, *Well, I made an a risk assessment and decided that it was worth doing.* Yeah, I know, that's exactly what we're saying. We would like to make decisions like this ourselves.

Let's take a complete turn from this topic to say something about *Chronicles* magazine, because *Chronicles* actually played a very, very important role in shaping the way I think, back all the way in the early 1990s, back when I was a subscriber to *National Review*. And by the way, in the early '90s, *National Review* was better than it is now. It's not great, but I mean, Joe Sobrin was still writing for *National Review* in the very early '90s. So I looked forward to getting it. I didn't know any better. I mean, I was just some kid fresh out of high school. What did I know? I see Bill Buckley on public television. That must be what there is out there. And then I came across *Chronicles*, and in fact, the very first article I ever wrote was in *Chronicles*. It was a short piece in 1994, because I was writing about the commencement ceremony at Harvard, what it had been like with Al Gore as our commencement speaker, and just all kinds of crazy nonsense that went on. I wrote that for *Chronicles*, I submitted it, I got it in, and that was a big thrill for me to actually get published, and that was the magazine. So you are the editor now. It's been around for, I would guess since the '80s. And what can you tell us about it?

GOTTFRIED: Well, it's been around since 1977. I applied for the editorship under Leopold Tyrmand, but he would not give it to me because, as he told my late wife, I would immediately start a war with the neoconservatives and he wanted to keep them off his back. So he ended up picking Tom Fleming, whose first act was to declare war against the neoconservatives, but Leopold subsequently died of a massive coronary, which may have been in some ways caused by the outbreak of a war he was trying to avoid. But I'm happy to share that I did receive the editorship at the relatively young age of 77 last year. I just had to wait for it for a while.

WOODS: Persistence pays off.

GOTTFRIED: [laughing] It did in this case, yes. And I am delighted with the Charlemagne Institute, which is now sponsoring it, and we have an adequate and highly competent workforce. So the magazine is going to try to climb back into public view. When you wrote for it in the early 1990s, I think we had as many subscribers as *National Review*. If you remember, the conservative wars were then going on, and our side was — of course, we had the paleoconservative-paleolibertarian alliance, but our side was considered to be a match for the neoconservatives. This is like telling me that in the 1930s, Argentina was economically almost the equal of the United States.

WOODS: [laughing] Right.

GOTTFRIED: [laughing] So we fell into bad times. The neocons pretty much wiped us off the map. And when we took over about a year ago, our subscription list, I think we had about 6,000 people subscribing. According to my executive editor, we once had 23,000 people reading *Chronicles*, so we have a lot of rebuilding to do. We also have to do a lot of rebuilding with the website, which was dysfunctional for several months, but we may be the only paleoconservative magazine around, and we remain very well disposed towards Lew Rockwell and you and the people at the Mises Institute who, if you would like to write for us, we will gladly accept what you send, since we consider you to be an ally. And you did write for us back in the early 1990s, so this would just be going back to a magazine for which you wrote as a very young man.

The problem as I see it is that Con, Inc. does not want anything to do with us. We publish consistently good articles, which are ignored by the conservative establishment. It seems that the treatment that was accorded to me is also being accorded to the magazine, and we're going to have to work very hard to get our articles mentioned somewhere else. For example, I look at *The New York Post* every day, and there's certain people who are considered kosher or orthodox that always get mentioned. Even *Modern Age* gets mentioned. And we at *Chronicles* are never mentioned. I don't suspect that you get mentioned very often either. So we're going to have to do a lot of work to rebuild public relations. In fact, we have a person who is in charge of marketing relations, and I think he has an enormous task ahead of him.

WOODS: Well, I'm just glad that it still exists. Of course, you are fighting the trend against print publications. But on the other hand, I guess I have the feeling that some of our folks, being the cantankerous dissidents we are, probably are more likely to cling to, in addition to their guns and their Bibles and whatever, the print magazine, which I still enjoy getting in the mail, a print magazine. I don't want to read everything online. I want to relax in my recliner with nothing plugged in and flip through a magazine. I mean, I just can't imagine that's so old-fashioned.

GOTTFRIED: Nor can I, nor can I. But most of the people who have stuck with us have exactly the same view, and they love our magazine, and look forward every month to receiving it. And from surveys, I gather that many of the people who like our magazine – and I know that this sort of blows my mind – also like *National Review*, they read *The Hillsdale* pretty much regularly. They look at publications that will have absolutely nothing to do with us, but they do like receiving the print magazine of the month and they read us they read us quite faithfully.

WOODS: What is the website for *Chronicles*?

GOTTFRIED: The website is – well, we have a blog, and then we also have a regular website that makes our printed material available to a general readership.

WOODS: So it's ChroniclesMagazine.org, that's what I mean.

GOTTFRIED: Right, ChroniclesMagazine.org.

WOODS: And what you will find is – I say for my folks, because I have all different kinds of people who listen to me. But you're going to find it very interesting, very high quality, and

there actually are debates, internal debates allowed in *Chronicles* magazine. I just remember the July issue, you had –

GOTTFRIED: It's remarkable. We do believe in the principles of a 19th-century English men's club.

WOODS: Yeah.

GOTTFRIED: We like getting different points of view engaged in discussion. And one of the things I've pointed out is that the conservative movement since the 1950s has been engaged in cancel culture. It became infinitely worse once the neocons were allowed to climb out of their leftist hole and take over the conservative movement in the 1980s, and it's been terrible ever since. But going back to the 1950s when isolationists like Murray Rothbard were kicked out of the conservative movement, this cancel culture and intolerance, unfortunately, has been a permitted aspect of the conservative movement.

WOODS: Well, I do want people to check out *Chronicles*. As I say, it was absolutely indispensable – and Murray Rothbard wrote for it – in getting me to think differently, and it was just great. And I don't know, maybe I wrote four or five pieces over the years in the '90s. And there's no need to bring up any ugliness, but let's just say I briefly had a bit of a run in with the former editor, but we're not going to – why recall unhappy moments when we have Paul Gottfried safely in charge of the magazine now? But ChroniclesMagazine.org, I'll also link to it on the show notes page. On the show notes page, I'll also link to several of Paul's recent columns, so that's TomWoods.com/1726. Well, thank you, Paul, for the discussion this morning, and we'll talk again soon.

GOTTFRIED: Thank you very much.