



Episode 694: After Brexit, American Secession?

Guest: Michael Malice

WOODS: We're talking today about secession and in particular about a column you wrote for *The Observer*. People should read your *Observer* column, for heaven's sake, or we should do an episode on, well, if not each one, then a whole lot of them, because they're always great. So I've got this one linked at TomWoods.com/694, and you wrote it in the wake of the Brexit vote, which was at the time of this airing a couple of weeks ago. And first of all, I assume I know where you stand on this, but a few people kind of surprised me on this. So that was a good thing, right?

MALICE: Best possible thing.

WOODS: All right, so best possible thing. But on the other hand, I get some libertarians who say, yeah, yeah, sovereignty, yeah, but what difference does it make if it's crummy British politicians as opposed to crummy European ones if they're going to have more trade protectionism and more nationalism, so maybe the EU on balance was better. What do you say to those people?

MALICE: I agree with them that it's not about sovereignty at all. I think sovereignty is a shibboleth when you're talking about national versus international, largely. But I think what's wonderful, it's a repudiation of the ruling caste and a moving of the Overton window, and it's telling a lot of people who are self-appointed, you know, kind of apparatchiks that your views don't matter and you don't have the ability — you never had the right, but you don't have the ability to have absolute control as you did quite recently. And ideas that you feel comfortable dismissing and beneath you and you don't even have to engage with, well, the feeling's mutual, and people are going to do what they like and give you the finger.

WOODS: That's exactly how I felt. Honestly, it's secondary to me what the British government decides to do at this point. The fact that something that obviously they did not want to see happen — "they" being all the bad guys; "they" being the globalists and all that — it's miraculous that it occurred. And then of course —

MALICE: It hasn't occurred yet. We don't know that — you know, they have no shame, and they don't have the kind of idea of rule of law like some Republicans like to fantasize, so you don't know what rabbits they're going to keep pulling out of their hat.

WOODS: Oh, that's true. I just meant that the vote came out the way that it did, because the much-vaunted prediction markets were saying that it would be crushed, the Leave vote would be crushed, but it ended up winning. But it reminded me — I think I might have said this on Twitter. It reminded me of the TARP vote, because at first, in the House of Representatives, that didn't go the way they wanted. So they cajoled and twisted arms and bribed, and then they did the vote again. And then, what do you know? The vote came out their way. So of course you can't put this past them, but all the same, it is a sharp rebuke to these people, and I just can't imagine how constitutionally, so to speak, every bone in your body wouldn't want to celebrate that.

MALICE: Yeah, and the other thing is, what's great is it also demonstrates that they're incapable of learning from their mistakes, because in Britain when they had the parliamentary election a year ago, literally every single pollster predicted a hung parliament between conservatives and labor, that neither one of them had a lead. And you know, David Cameron had his big victory, so you would have thought they would recalibrate to some extent and someone would have picked up that this would have happened, and they didn't. So that's a very good thing that they're incapable of questioning their own assumptions, because that's how you end up losing over and over.

WOODS: I just couldn't get over the people who voted Remain, especially the younger people, who were crying in the streets and holding signs, like the idea that they might not be governed by European bureaucrats is completely unthinkable to them. Or they've associated that with the possibility of international cooperation, cultural exchange, as if they just can't do these things themselves. What's the matter with you?

MALICE: I think you're way off on that. I think economics doesn't have those kind of reactions to people. Like if you look at the Great Depression, people weren't hysterical. I think what you have to understand is that for many young people and many certain other types of people, evangelical progressivism very much is a religion, and what they're seeing is kind of schism between their church and their sense of identity, which they identify with their church of, you know, internationalism and all these other things. They've kind of been kicked out, so this is going to cause them some kind of existential and emotional crisis. So this is not just a political thing; this is very much a spiritual thing for them.

WOODS: Ah, that's interesting. All right, that is an interesting way to think about it. Well, your column in *The Observer* is then of course bringing up the subject of secession in the U.S., because there was some talk about Texxit and all that in the wake of all this. And I don't see it on the horizon, obviously, but I personally think it's something that should be talked about, and I find it creepy that it's an obviously reasonable idea that, especially as you say in your column, you have people of such divergent backgrounds, why is it taken for granted by absolutely everybody that we all have to live — it's unthinkable for us to live under two or three or four or five different systems. Why would that be unthinkable? So you favor secession of, what, a state, a group of states, whatever happens? And why? What's good about that?

MALICE: Well, first of all let me just talk a bit about, like, our debate, because me being a Hamiltonian, people are always like, oh, you're for one huge government. When it's going to be growing in perpetuity, my position was, which we didn't get to in the debate, no, you have an organic separation. And people are like, when's the going to be, and I'm like, gee, I wonder if there was a point in American history where organically the states decided to go their separate ways. I wonder when that would be. Maybe 1893? No, that's not it; that's too late. So I think there comes a point in time when people are like, this isn't working out; let's go our separate ways.

And the way I put it in the article is wars don't establish truth; they establish dominance. When someone wins a war, that doesn't mean that they've legally proven their case; it just means they're stronger than the other person. Stalin beat Hitler, you know? It was the Russians who got, as they always love to mention, they got to Berlin before the Americans did. That doesn't validate anything Stalin did ever. And Hitler's not wrong because he lost, you know what I mean? Like what I said in the piece, if he had had some kind of Faustian bargain with Churchill and Stalin, that wouldn't validate his perspective at all.

So the reason that the Left — although I think this is decreasingly the case — can't abide the idea of any kind of secessionism is for them, American history quite literally starts with the Civil War. Everything before that — you know, for people like me, I would say, the pre-constitutional era is almost like prehistory. America starts with the Constitutional Convention, which is also a flawed perspective, because, you've got to pick a point somewhere, but the idea that once the Constitution's there the country changes forever is also false. It's a continuum.

But for them very much it's the Civil War, because before that we were a flawed, evil nation based on slavery, and after that we had the redemption and everything became wonderful. So to them the South has to be constantly attacked and serve as their whipping boy to demonstrate their own virtue to themselves, because for them, I'm a good person because I'm not like those other people who are bad. So if you allow those bad people to leave, you don't know where to base your own morality on, and you don't know where to start your sense of history.

WOODS: So they have to have these people around, even if it means that they themselves have to endure regimes that in their worst nightmares they wouldn't want to have to live with. The idea of separation for these reasons is unthinkable.

MALICE: And their identity is based on the idea of fighting against the George Bushes of the world. Like, it's in their — like for many people, many people are like, I am good because I am opposing this bad person or idea. Humans unite much better in opposition as opposed to unity of purpose — or unless that unity of purpose happens to be the opposition — I mean I'm kind of contradicting myself. So for them, the South and white racists are really the villains, and you need them around to kind of point to and to demonstrate that you're a good person. If you allow them to go away, you kind have of blood on their hands from their perspective. And the idea is, like, yeah, every so often you're going to have a President Bush or people like that, so that's why for

these types, these evangelical progressive types specifically, you constantly have to be agitating and updating your Facebook, and this is their sense of purpose, because otherwise at any moment we could return to, like, barbarism.

WOODS: What would you say to — believe it or not, there are some libertarians — you'll never believe this — who are not altogether in favor of American secession, so let me anticipate some of their objections. I'm not interested in their objection that it's not constitutional to allow secession —

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: I've handled that before, and I'm not even interested in that anymore.

MALICE: That's nonsense.

WOODS: And it is nonsense. But let's say it was just entirely that our concern is that if we allow secession, the states that will be formed out of the secession will be far less liberal in the classical sense, and so on balance, it would be a net bad for liberty. At least if we keep these bad people in the union, we can sort of keep an eye on them, but if they get their independence, well, they'll be imposing segregation or whatever it is on everybody.

MALICE: Yeah, whenever you hear anyone — you kind of let the cat out of the bag. Whenever you hear someone say "keep an eye on," they're not really talking from a libertarian perspective, now, are they? What would happen is if we did segregate out — and the thing is we've never been one country culturally, ever. Ever, ever, ever. We've always had at the very least two separate cultures, and we've only been regarded as a monoculture in any sense thanks to the machinations of Alexander Hamilton. Now, you say it's a bad thing; I say it's a good thing, and that's a separate issue.

But it's true that it's very easy to separate out into two or more groups at least, and what would happen is you would have some period of internal migration, and one half would become more libertarian and one half would become less libertarian or it would be a mix. But then you could further segregate out into four, so you'd have like that kind of Nolan chart, where you'd have the right authoritarians and the right libertarians and the left libertarians and the libertarian authoritarians. And people could live as they choose, and you would actually see evidence of which works better for what your personal values are, and I think that would be great for everybody.

And the point is you're saying you're not seeing it on the horizon, and I disagree. And here's why: thanks to social media, it's increasingly become the case that political discourse has broken down and become impossible in America, which I think is wonderful. Any time there's political discourse and agreement, that can only mean more government, more laws, and more oppression. So I want a complete cessation of any political discourse, because my rights are not up for discussion, let alone a vote. My property is not up for discussion, let alone a vote, so shut up and go away.

And the point I made — I had a friend of mine who's pretty Left, and they were arguing with me on Facebook about this, and it's like, you know what, you're going to have to have a lot of people move. I go, wouldn't you rather have a bad neighbor than a bad roommate? And when you put it in terms like that, it's an absolute no-brainer.

WOODS: Yeah, I actually had never thought of it that way. That is a good way to put it. All right, I understand what you're saying about social media, but my point is that it seems like over the past, let's say, 40 years, the Left takes some issue that's not even on the table, and within a generation everybody's on board. Now, it's not a perfect example, because not everybody's on board, but I remember back in the late '80s, somebody saying, you know, the environment is going to soon be a major American political issue, and I thought they were joking. That's not even on the radar. And now the environment is all over the place. Or whether it's gay marriage or transgender or whatever —

MALICE: Wait.

WOODS: What?

MALICE: I really disagree, because *Silent Spring* came out in, what, '68, '69? Nixon had the EPA. I remember as a kid they were talking about acid rain and the rainforest disappearing.

WOODS: Yeah, but it just — it was nowhere near — if you go back and look at the debates between Bush and Dukakis, it barely is even a blip. I mean, barely. Nothing. Compared to today when the kids are told they've got to recycle everything, and they come home and they badger their parents. But a better example would be gay marriage or the transgender issue. These were not on the radar. People were not agitating for gay marriage really in 1975, and now everybody basically supports it. I'm not sure that can work in reverse. I'm not sure that the other side can say, yeah, I know nobody likes the idea of secession, but you wait, in 20 years we'll all be clamoring for you. See what I mean? I don't think it works the other way.

MALICE: It does work the other way; it just hasn't worked the other way, because for — first of all, there's two points. One of the best, if not the best, essays I've ever read was by someone named Paul Graham — and it's PaulGraham.com/say.html. And he talks about how moral fashions among intellectuals are just like clothing fashions among people who are interested in that sort of thing. And we remember when we were younger there would be AIDS ribbons. Every year you're going to have a new rollout of issues, and this is a cue for people to demonstrate that they're with the program, especially on the Left, because the Left has the microphone.

For decades, at the very least since FDR, the right wing has largely been a "me too" idea. Like, Rand was complaining about this in the late '70s, that America is turning to the right but there's no intellectual leadership, so this is a sort of vacant, wandering-in-the-desert sort of situation. It's only recently that the Right has started fighting back and forcing the Left to respond to right-wing ideas, because four years ago in the

debates, which is not that long ago at all, Candy Crowley and Barack Obama are teaming up against Mitt Romney. Now you have, during the primary debates, you had the Republican candidates chastising the moderators and the audience cheering. So this is the first step in having some kind of right-wing response.

And you're also wrong in this sense: things like the Castle doctrine and things like concealed carry, these have gone from completely not on the table to almost 50 states having passed this on a state-by-state basis. So it's —

WOODS: Okay, no, I'll give you that. And I guess homeschooling would be another example.

MALICE: Homeschooling's a great — I would say obviously this isn't an, air quotes, "Right" idea, but medical marijuana and drug legalization, you know, the Left coopted it for decades because Nixon's the one who introduced it, and that's been a very healthy and positive issue. And I'll just make one more joking comment. In the '70s, people were agitating for gay marriage, and those somebodies where the Libertarian Party.

WOODS: Yeah, that's right, but I mean, basically, numerically nobody —

MALICE: Yeah, obviously —

WOODS: And as usual, nobody noticed the Libertarian Party at that time.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: Yeah. So of course I would like to see this happen. I'd like to see people talking about it. One of my favorite moments in my own life as a public speaker came a couple of years ago at a Mises event where *The Washington Post* had sent a reporter — I guess it must have been last year. They sent a reporter to report on the Mises event on secession, because Ron Paul was going to be there, and basically they expected Ron to talk about secession, and then they were going to say, "Ah, Rand, your crazy old dad is talking about crazy old things." And I knew that SOB from *The Washington Post* was in the room, so I gave my talk basically directly to him.

MALICE: Yep.

WOODS: The whole talk was directed at him. And I was the only speaker he decided not to write about, surprise, surprise, because I said, how can it be that the Iraq War, one of the dumbest decisions ever, that's just an innocent policy difference that we have with each other. No big deal. But simply saying that an arbitrary, invisible dividing line between two geographical locations, simply wanting to shift that in one direction or another, that's the thing that's unthinkable that would get you driven out of polite society. That's incredible to me that the Overton window is open so little, so to speak.

MALICE: Right. And the point I make in the piece is secession not legal from their perspective because they wanted secession for slavery purposes. I mean, it's obviously far more complicated than that, but that's how it's painted. So if the South or if the North, as you know perfectly well — the Northeast wanted to secede first, and my all-time hero after Hamilton, William Lloyd Garrison, wanted to secede because he regarded the Constitution as a "covenant with Hell." And he said the North should secede immediately and have no partnership with this evil South. So there was clearly this idea in the air that secession is something plausible, but it's kind of like leaving an abusive marriage. It's like the husband's hitting the wife, and she gets self-esteem, and she goes, "I don't need to take this anymore," and he's like, "How dare you? You're beneath me. Your role is to stay here so I can hit you as much as I want." Well, she doesn't want it anymore.

So the question people on the Left don't really have an answer to is, the reason for doing something is not necessarily of legal relevance. Do you have a right to secede, and if so, do you have to justify that right and to whom? And slavery is not the reason now, so what grounds do you have for holding these people in place? And as I talk to my friends on the Left, when I say, "Why are you trying to keep arguing with these people when there's no getting through to them?" within seconds everyone I've spoken to has come around to my point of view that this is something healthy that needs to happen. I've encountered no resistance. I'm shocked. It's the easiest of all the issues I've ever talked to people on the Left about to persuade them of.

WOODS: Yeah, and I mean — of course, when I hear people talking about secession, it's always to rally the troops, but it might be helpful for people to say to people who disagree with them, look, you know, I wish you the best and I hope you have a great life and everything, but this just isn't working between us.

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: Instead of, "You're the devil and we want to get away from you." And maybe they are the devil, but just to get them to think in the right way, maybe it's time for us to think about living a different way and to put aside this idea that we have to build gigantic states and be ruled in a top-down fashion. Maybe there's some other option. Now, there's a lot more to talk about, but I want to thank our sponsor.

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All right, Michael, you wanted to say something.

MALICE: Yeah, so this is one of the healthiest aspects of the Trump phenomenon, which is people who are Democrats and people who are progressives, they could wrap their heads around Mitt Romney, John McCain. It's familiar to them. It makes sense to them. They know those arguments. They know where they disagree with those arguments; they know where those arguments are wrong, and their reasons for why those arguments are wrong are reasons I agree with. I mean, the case against Mitt Romney, the case against John McCain, I agree with the Left largely.

The Trump phenomenon makes no sense to them. It doesn't fit in to their mental model, and I think for many people on the Left, a) they're scared, because he's a fire breather and incoherent, and that's fine. But they're also scared, because they've realized, wait a minute, I'm missing something, because this shouldn't be happening. You know, it's kind of like back in the day with the geocentric model of the universe. It's not adding up. Something is wrong here, and when people are confused and — sense of certainty is what evangelical progressivism delivers to people, especially young people and urban people. They are given this model of the world, and it's 100% true, and it's "obviously true," and anyone who disagrees with it is clearly stupid or crazy.

So when that model doesn't explain this Trump thing, or it explains it in, "Okay, it's all racism," but there's clearly more to it than that for someone who's got an IQ above 85, right away they're like, okay, something in my mental map is wrong. So when you approach them with that perspective that you don't understand how these people are thinking, you shouldn't be in the same house with them, they become a lot more amenable to that argument.

WOODS: You know, toward the end of your piece here, you make reference to that book *What's the Matter with Kansas?*

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: Which is, you know, one of these hectoring progressive books about why is everybody so stupid and backward in Kansas. And you know, that is such an opening for me, Michael, given the six long, long years I lived in this state, and I have no doubt that there are many wonderful parts of the state that I never got a chance to see, spending almost all my time in soul-crushing Topeka —

MALICE: (laughing)

WOODS: — but I'm getting out, baby. In fact, by the time people hear this, I'm out. I'm gone. There ain't no more Woods in Topeka. You can look all you like. We're all gone. So what's the deal here? Because when I looked at this at the end of your column, it's not that I'm so vain and I think this column is about me, but at the same time I thought, I wouldn't put it past that SOB to make a Kansas reference just to stick it (laughing). So just flesh that out a little bit, what that's all about.

MALICE: So yeah, it wasn't a dig at you. I'm sorry to disappoint. Barack Obama very famously made that off-the-record-that-was-recorded reference to how Americans cling to their guns and religion and are xenophobes and so on and so forth. And what he was referencing was the argument to this very important book, which I haven't read, called *What's the Matter with Kansas?* And the premise of the book is, given that voting Democrat and being left wing is the correct approach for middle class and poor people, why don't — especially whites — middle class and poor whites vote that way? And it tries to break down — it's basically this kind of Marxist idea of false consciousness that you don't know what's good for you because you've been tricked by

ideology and so on and so forth into doing what's counter to your own interest. So it's really this kind of air-waving shorthand dismissiveness for, like, I don't know how people different from me think, but I know that they're wrong and I know that they're too dumb to realize it, so I'm going to, like, mansplain to them how they don't really get it and how I am the kind of enlightened one.

And again, this also harkens back to the point I make how this is a religion, because with Christianity or with ancient Greek mystery cults, you're initiated. You have this moment of you finding out the truth. And for progressives, that's the same thing. They've found their vision of the world, their utopia, and now they feel bad for the heretics who haven't been saved, and it's their job to kind of bring the gospel to them. It's a barely disguised version of Christianity in the worst sense of Christianity, and I'm not taking that as a dig at Christianity at all, but they think just because they don't believe in a god literally that they're not religious, and it could not be more wrong. I can't imagine any — I'm friends with many born again Christians. None of them are as aggressive in putting forth their ideology as many of my friends on the Left are.

WOODS: If you think that there's the possibility that secession could one day be seriously discussed among Americans — and let me say in parentheses that secession's an easy idea to grasp. It's not like we're asking them to decide Federal Reserve interest rate policy, so that's one merit of the idea of secession. But what do you think needs to happen? What would the steps be? How do you start introducing it into the discussion? Where does this come from? The Heritage Foundation isn't going to support it. The Cato Institute would die a thousand deaths before supporting it. So where does it get started?

MALICE: I think it gets started with the — it's already started, because it's getting started with the increasing breakdown of discourse in Washington. You see it with things like Obama saying he's not going to — unilaterally saying he's not going to enforce immigration policy, which even *New York Times* was, you know, under their breath, but they did say it; they were like, this is kind of unprecedented, and it doesn't really pass the sniff test to us. You see it with things like the Republicans refusing to have confirmation hearings for the Supreme Court. You saw it when the Republicans refused to raise the debt ceiling. And like right now, I was just talking about this on *Red Eye* a few nights back. Hillary Clinton explicitly said during her campaign that she's going to go to Congress first to get her ideas — if she's president — to get her ideas across on guns and on immigration, and I forget; there was a third one. And she said, but if Congress doesn't act, I'm just going to pass the laws anyway.

So you're going to see increasingly both sides digging in their heels. Social media is increasingly forcing people to pick ideological sides and having now room for the middle. And at a certain point, it's just going to be — and you saw it earlier, like last month when the Democrats sat down on the floor of the House and demanded action for guns that way. I mean, when discourse goes away, the options are either force or exit. It's fight or flight. So I think we are seeing — you know, Paul Ryan and Donald Trump aren't talking. As long as you're seeing people refusing to talk to each other more and more, and that's been increasing at an exponential rate in the last, let's say,

five years, that is the path to — At some point, someone in the Democratic Party's going to be like, to hell with — and the Republican Party — to hell with these people; let them live their own barbaric, backwards lives. Fine. You want to call people barbaric and backwards? It doesn't matter what you think of me, as long as you do what I want. You know what I mean? So you can call all the names you want; as long as those people are allowed to live as their culture decides, fine. Everyone gets to be happier.

WOODS: The column is "The Case for American Secession." I'm linking to it at TomWoods.com/694. MichaelMalice.com is Michael's website. Michael, I want to congratulate you, before we go, because D.L. Hughley's book, *Black Man, White House*, which of course you had a hand in —

MALICE: Yeah.

WOODS: — became a *New York Times* bestseller, and that's a tremendous thing and congratulations for that.

MALICE: Oh, thank you so, so much. It's a great book. I really enjoyed it. I don't think your audience would love it, to be fair —

WOODS: And it may not be suitable for work, as they say. I should just warn them.

MALICE: It's not suitable for anybody, because there's a lot of really, really offensive humor in there. But it was a hoot and a half.

WOODS: And to see it — as of the last time I saw it, it was at number seven —

MALICE: Right.

WOODS: — which, by the way, is one slot above the highest your host ever reached, so —

MALICE: Oh, is that right?

WOODS: Yeah, that's super great. I mean —

MALICE: Is that some kind of breakdown?

WOODS: Yeah, that's the way I look at the world. Are they above or below Woods? That's how I look at it. It's all about the host here. All right, thanks again for talking to me. The next time we talk I will be speaking to you from our new little paradise.

MALICE: Awesome.

WOODS: It's going to be a lot of fun. And of course, once the new house is fully built, we're flying you down and you're going to spend some time with us.

MALICE: Oh, in suburban Florida, huh? Oh, I've got plans that night.

WOODS: (laughing) Look, this is going to be one area where you're going to say you were wrong, okay? And we're all going to mark it on the calendar.

MALICE: (laughing) Okay.

WOODS: All right, thanks a lot.

MALICE: Thanks, Tom.