

# Clearing up Jamie Palmer's Paranoid Confusion

by [Paul Gottfried](#) (November 2018)



*Untitled*, Casper Verborg, 2014

**Recently I encountered some critical** comments on my activities, in [published](#) in *Policy Review* (Fall 1987). In the same piece, I indicate that the study of IQ disparities was of interest only to a minority of self-described paleoconservatives. Runway public administration, social engineering and neocon complicity in these problems were the topics that I heard most often raised by my fellow paleoconservatives in the 1980s. The alliance of paleoconservatives and paleolibertarians in the 1990s, which reached a high point in their shared support of Buchanan for president, most certainly did not stress racial issues. Nor, given the presence of Jews in this alliance, was it noticeably

anti-Semitic. Standing against the neoconservative “global democratic revolutionary” foreign policy was perhaps the main issue that united the independent Right in the early 1990s.

After the neoconservatives marginalized the paleoconservative opposition, surviving or onetime members did not likely dream about “ethnostates.” Some converted to a strict Tridentine form of Catholicism, and like the editors of *Chronicles*, railed against the Protestant character of the American founding and American political culture. Others became Eastern Orthodox; some, even passionate Slavophiles. Almost all paleoconservatives of a certain age were terrified of being accused of racism or nativism. This fear may well have been owing to the fact that at one time or another they had opposed Third World immigration on cultural grounds, these persons, like Joseph de Maistre, Edmund Burke, David Hume and many other past thinkers having valued cultural homogeneity; or to say it another way, the compatibility of peoples with respect to living together.

With characteristic cynicism and intellectual laziness, the immigration-enthusiastic neoconservatives charged paleoconservatives with racism and anti-Semitism, even though the former couldn't be bothered to substantively engage the latter's position, despite its long and eminently respectable intellectual ancestry. In response, the defeated paleoconservatives turned away from any subject that might be construed as an argument from heredity. In their relevant statements on the subject one notices a strange tendency to deny any genetic influence on human character development. This is particularly true of onetime paleoconservative Claes Ryn and his disciples. (No, John Derbyshire and Steve Sailer, who do write about possibly genetic group differences, were not really paleos, but entered the Independent Right from

another direction.)

Palmer's attempt to draw a straight line between the paleoconservatives and white nationalism is deeply ignorant and smacks of an underlying agenda. It is driven by the desire to create a pedigree for the alt-right which, on the basis of extremely limited evidence, is linked to an earlier enemy of the neoconservatives. In Palmer's account the neocons wear the white hats, and he strains to present all their opponents on the Right since the 1980s as anti-Semitic racists. But his storyline leaves out critical details. Above all, the neocon's adversaries were a far more varied lot than Palmer conveys.

In his book *Making Sense of the Alt-Right* (2017), George Hawley correctly identifies Sam Francis and me as the major thinkers who influenced the alt-right in its formative stages. Hawley carefully qualifies this relation, however, for neither Francis nor I was an easily categorized paleoconservative. Although he attended paleoconservative gatherings, Francis had his own interests. He devoted most of his career to attacking the cultural Left, but was willing to learn from traditional Marxists. In this respect he and I are akin: I studied under Herbert Marcuse, was a friend and admirer of Christopher Lasch and Eugene Genovese (a Leftist for most of his life), and have always learned from the authentic Left at its intellectual best, rare though it now is. Francis' scholarly focus was on managerialism, not on combatting the Democratic Party for being a front for large corporations. At the time of his early death, Francis left behind reams of typed pages intended to complete or bring up to date James Burnham's study of the managerial revolution.

Toward the end of his public life, after he was fired from a

position at *The Washington Times* through neoconservative machinations, involving Dinesh D'Souza, Francis' opposition to the civil rights revolution hardened into explicit appeals to a white America. Nevertheless, most of his speeches and writings, which went back thirty years, had nothing to do with racial conflict. They do reveal a revulsion for the idea of equality because, for Francis, equality contradicts the natural inequalities among people. What is more, he thought equality was in any case a pretext for allowing new elites to replace older, statelier ones. But again, there was something *sui generis* in the way Francis investigated power structures. It is difficult, for example, to read his analytical studies without discerning traces of a class-based, at least quasi-Marxist view of society. His rightist thinking always made room for Marx and the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci.

Francis despised American democracy as he found it, and yet, like Burnham, thought there was little one could do to restore the American republic to what it had been in centuries past. Although he was a Southerner descended from Confederate veterans, to my knowledge Sam never expressed a kind word about the Lost Cause. He regarded Lincoln's consolidation of the country as irrevocable, and probably thought the same about the modern welfare state. In his discussion of managerial society, he treated capitalist elites as allies of state administrators. Like many a Leftist, he viewed corporate capitalism with particular contempt, as something that was now benefiting a global elite that he despised.

In sum, in his revulsion for the neoconservatives and the idea of equality, in his expedient and usually collectivist approach to economic policy, and toward the end of his life in his invocations of a white America, one finds elements of thought that later became prevalent opinions among some

segments of the alt-right. At the same, at the core of his thinking, Francis was perfectly compatible with classical conservatism, nor is it obvious that his positions were wrong, evil, or what you will.

Despite popular misunderstandings, not everything in the alt-right has been about race. And indeed, Palmer more or less concedes that point, seeing as the immediate danger posed by those whom he associates with the alt-right their “gateway critique of liberal democracies’ troubled status.” It is this rather than white nationalism that may be “rapidly gaining traction among the mutinous, the disenchanting, and all those who yearn for simple answers and thought they had found them in Trump.” One has the impression of being on a whirlwind tour as Palmer reveals his variegated *bêtes noires*, which he pretends are all somehow related. Within a page or so we swing by Holocaust-deniers, or at least those who don’t mind consorting with such types, raging white racists, and callous anti-immigrationists, on to those who have the chutzpah not to believe that the US in its present political incarnation embodies the highest form of political community.

As if in self-parody, Palmer descends into the very paranoid politics that he attributes to the Right. Thus, he insists that alt-right white nationalists and neo-Nazis are “not discrete but exist on a spectrum of radical right-wing thought.” A cheap trick of language, this is much as though one were to say, “The old economic left and the new identity politics left are not discrete but exist on a spectrum of radical left-wing thought.” In this way important distinctions are erased, and so all is one, that is to say, evil. Again, for Palmer, “neo-Nazism is, after all, a kind of White Nationalism, similarly committed to a narrative of racial identity and victimhood.” Does Palmer really believe that all

those who emphasize white identity are ideologically akin to those who want to exterminate Jews? I rather doubt he would regard such communist fellow-travelers as Bella Abzug, Bernie Sanders, and Eric Foner or even the lifelong Communist Party member and historian Eric Hobsbawm as people who planned to put their opponents in Gulags. At least for the Left, where he surely belongs, Palmer would distinguish between the politically silly and would-be mass murderers.

My trilogy on the modern managerial state and its degeneration into multicultural tyranny, my generally sympathetic treatment of the (non-Nazi) interwar European Right, and my thirty-year war with the neoconservatives have all affected non-authorized movements on the American Right. I do not regret that influence—I regret that my effort to purify the American Right of invaders from the social and cultural Left has largely been a failure. Despite my rightist propensities, I am not particularly interested in racial issues, except to whatever extent they can be used to expand the power of the modern administrative state and the multicultural religion that it pushes. Most of my criticism of the civil rights revolution and expanding anti-discrimination supervision have been made in the context of opposing our behemoth, socially-controlling “liberal democratic” regime. Although I don’t writhe in disgust in their presence, I don’t feel the passions that characterize white nationalists. I am much more concerned about the influence of the white college-educated female vote than I am about the votes of non-whites. Women who have been “liberated” from traditional social attitudes are, I think, the most threatening radicalizing force in Western countries today. Of course, I have no interest in strengthening the political Left by bringing in foreign populations that are likely to have the same effect.

Jacob Siegel, in a [long essay](#) for *Tablet Magazine*, published on November 29, 2016, expresses vehement disapproval of my politics. For all that, he at least gets some things straight that Palmer misses. I am not a racialist, though I have repeatedly criticized the conservative establishment for collapsing before black race hustlers. Nor do I bother to condemn white nationalists, though I often find their behavior silly and have [expressly distanced myself](#) from them. The reason for this lack of condemnation is that I am worried far less by these exhibitionists—who have no political or cultural power—than I am by the advancing totalitarian Left. It is true that, like H.L. Mencken in his time, I am no friend of liberal democracy, but even so, attacks on me as a fascist miss the point. I find it a diversion from present reality to scream about the return of Mussolini when we face a different and far worse danger, one that is embedded in our vital national institutions. Little by little, we are collapsing into a post-Marxist Leftist dictatorship, in which [statement](#) about my emotional state in 2008, which left me scratching my head in bewilderment:

If Gottfried was feeling cautiously optimistic in 2008, it may be because he noticed that since Buchanan's first presidential campaign sixteen years earlier, a series of developments in American and global politics had helped to create an environment more congenial to paleoconservative ideas.

This description of my state of mind in 2008, which comes shortly after a quotation from my 2008 Mencken Club speech, is supported by nothing other than Palmer's imagination, or rather, the demands of his political agenda. In 2008, I could look back at twenty years of neoconservatives coming after me, calling universities to keep me out of professorships, warning

presses not to publish me because I was “angry and unhinged,”  
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