

The Alt-Left is Real

When writing this piece, a quote kept rattling around in the back of my head. It was the title of the opening chapter of "[The Feminine Mystique](#)," Betty Friedan's seminal 1963 feminist manifesto: *The Problem That Has No Name*. Apologies in advance, for appropriating and altering three of the quotes I find most meaningful from that chapter, for my own purposes here:

The problem lay buried, unspoken, for many years in the minds of American liberals...

Even so, most liberals still did not know that this problem was real. But those who had faced it honestly knew that all the media dismissals, the academic justifications, the intellectualized double speak and the manufactured outrage were somehow drowning the problem in unreality...

How can any person see the whole truth within the bounds of one's own life? How can she believe that voice inside herself, when it denies the conventional, accepted truths by which she has been living? And yet the liberals I have talked to, who are finally listening to that inner voice, seem in some incredible way to be groping through to a truth that has defied the media."

The Alt-Left Is Real

There is an effort underfoot, in the media and in academia, to declare the Alt-Left a [myth](#), to sweep it back under the rug, to reduce it, in effect, back to being a sickness not spoken of, a problem that has no name. I have had well-meaning friends tell me I should not use the term Alt-Left (or any of its synonyms: Regressive Left, CTRL-Left, SJWism) because they are 'pejoratives' used only by the right to attack the left.

In my experience, this is not true. Like canaries in the coal

mine, liberals who do not (or no longer) subscribe to the Alt-Left ideology have been sounding the alarm about this creeping plague of repressive groupthink for quite a while now. I believe this attempt to dissuade our use of the term Alt-Left is purposeful (even if not consciously recognized by individuals who are doing it) – for how can we discuss something we cannot refer to by name?

When asked to define Alt-Left, I would describe it as a leftist but illiberal authoritarian ideology rooted in postmodernism and neo-Marxism that supports censorship, condones violence in response to speech, is obsessed with identity politics (much like the Alt-Right), and functions like a secular religion that gives its believers a sense of moral self-worth.

It masquerades as a form of liberalism, but it has more in common with authoritarianism than its true believers can (or want to?) admit. [It claims to speak for the marginalized](#), but it either ignores or attempts to hatefully shame members of marginalized groups who do not subscribe to the ideology.

It is not simply Antifa; it is the ideology that undergirds Antifa, and it has swallowed much of BLM and intersectional third wave feminism. It wishes to swallow the whole of the left, the country, the world. It is rooted in nihilism, resentment, and arrogance, though it presents itself as being rooted in equality, justice, and morality. It favors collectivism over individualism, statism over liberty, forced equality of outcome over freedom.

Now...imagine if I had to say that mouthful every time I wished to talk about the Alt-Left because I bought into the notion that to give it a name it would be insulting to fellow liberals. No, to speak of it by name is to out it for what it is and to reduce some of its power.

What's in a Name?

I can't tell you how good it felt when I first discovered the work of Dave Rubin, a reasonable liberal, and realized I wasn't alone in seeing this pernicious belief system for what it really is.

In his video, [Rubin offers](#) that it doesn't matter which term we use, what's important is that we are allowed to identify the problem. "Whatever name you use for this well-meaning yet painfully misguided set of ideas is largely irrelevant. We needed this phrase to identify this backward ideology which puts groups before people. And sometimes you need a label to get people to understand an idea."

Reasonable liberal Maajid Nawaz, widely credited with coining the term Regressive Left, also [made the following observation last year](#):

Today's active, organized left is no longer liberal. A liberal will always prioritize free speech over offense. This behavior, censorship on the organized left, post factual behavior, violence being seen as an option and prioritizing group identity over individual rights. That isn't liberal."

Do yourself a favor and watch the whole video:

Yet another reasonable liberal, Tim Pool, points out that one of the few things Politico gets right about the Alt-Left is that it is a term used by centrist liberals. [Pool says](#), “Yes, I use the term Alt-Left because I want to make sure everybody knows when I say I’m left-leaning, I’m not the kind of person that’s gonna go out and punch somebody in the face or take away their rights because I think mine are more important.”

I’m also a liberal who’s been using the term Alt-Left since I first learned to trust that voice within myself, that voice that denies the conventional, accepted Alt-Left “truths” by which I had been living.

The first time I used it in a public piece of writing was back in May while attempting to articulate my transformation in belief systems in an essay called [On Leaving the SJW Cult and Finding Myself](#). The essay itself was a long time coming. I started to wake up to the creeping authoritarianism and endless internal hypocrisies of the accepted Alt-Left ideology over a year ago. But leaving behind a belief system to which you’ve subscribed for twenty years is a bit like razing your house to the ground and rebuilding from the ground up.

Suddenly you are starting with nothing; everything you thought you knew is suspect. It takes a long time to evaluate each previously held belief and try to discern which ones hold substance. Where before my house had foolishly been built on the shifting sands of postmodernism, this time I want to ensure that, as Dr. Jordan Peterson might say, my house is built on rock.

It makes me think of George Lakoff’s “Don’t Think of an Elephant,” my first introduction to the concept of framing. Lakoff said “Frames are mental structures that shape the way we see the world...Neuroscience tells us that each of the concepts we have – the long-term concepts that structure how we think – is instantiated in the synapses of our brains...If a strongly held frame doesn’t fit the facts, the facts will be

ignored and the frame will be kept.”

I devoured this book when a young SJW. It helped me understand how people could vote Republican and why my right-wing Aunt didn't seem to be swayed to my point of view no matter how many facts I threw at her. What I didn't think too much about was how this human tendency is just as prevalent on the left as it is on the right.

The Frog and the Pot

I am of the opinion that a lot of well-meaning people have become converts to the Alt-Left ideology without even realizing it. Like the parable of the slow boiling frog, if you had told me at the beginning that one day I'd be expected to perform mental gymnastics in order to defend censorship and violence in response to speech, I would have leaped from the pot.

Instead, I was conditioned to accept as gospel each new tenet of SJWism over a period of twenty years. I believed in the essential goodness of the ideology, and in my own essential goodness in preaching it. When facts about the direction it was taking me made themselves known to me, I rejected them because they did not fit the frame. As the ideology became more noticeably toxic, hypocritical, and authoritarian, so too did the tactics of the true believers. Whether in [academia](#), in the [media](#), at [Google](#), or online – the message is clear: dare to step out of line or express an independent thought, and a mob of zealous SJW zombies will come for you. The fear of losing one's job, status, friends or personal safety is a strong motivator in forcing reasonable people to remain silent.

I have received a lot of positive feedback about the sentiments expressed in my writing about SJWism from people all over the political spectrum. Most meaningful to me of these might be the messages I get from fellow liberals who are

going through the same realization, confusion, and fear.

In addition to the public responses [you can read yourself](#), I have received private messages from people in academia, journalism, and entertainment – many of them liberals – expressing that the piece resonated with them and that they were afraid to share it (or presumably in some cases, to express themselves about anything at all). Excerpts from a handful of these are below:

I honestly was scared to tweet that...that's how bad things have gotten. I've nearly lost work...The world has gone mad."

"I have definitely taken notice of so many of my friends on the left going to a dark place."

"It is totally wild. These people are my friends – my community...They're so angry."

"...your piece on the social justice cult affected me more than words can say. After being called 'violent'...because I used a word that someone decided was offensive...I had a bit of an existential crisis about my life and self-worth. Thus, I've been thinking about this quite a bit... I remain committed to the idea that privilege exists and it should be combated through both self-reflection and system action. I also am a proud liberal, and that hasn't lessened. That said, I can't get behind the individual scapegoating, shouting and intimidation in the name of fighting hate, or defining sharing a point of view as "educating" and "labor." Ultimately, the world needs more compassion...I'm trying to get there on talking and writing about some of this a little more publicly, but I don't think I'm quite there yet (also, the fact that I'm on the academic job market makes me a bit hesitant)."

"I saw your posts and they were refreshing. I hate politics but free speech is so important to me...but then I remember I work in TV and Music and I can't say anything that's going to

make me lose my job. It's crazy what's going on right now."

"Just wanted to let you know I'm one of those people who greatly appreciates your voice on social media, but am too afraid of the thought police to voice my support."

Actions Speak Louder Than Words

If the Alt-Left doesn't exist, why are so many liberals and centrists afraid of expressing themselves? Why are so many people self-censoring for their own sense of safety? I was fascinated by the James Damore story, not because I have an opinion on the legality of his dismissal, but because his online stoning and subsequent firing confirmed for me what I already suspected: Google, like most of the tech space, the entertainment space, the academic space and the media space has become a panopticon of Alt-Left groupthink, self-censorship, and fear.

I know this fear intimately. As I started waking up to the illiberal nature of the growing Alt-Left ideology, I held my tongue for a long time out of fear of losing job opportunities, the safety of anonymity, and friends. After all, I built my career, and by proxy a lot of my friendships, from this SJW frame. I don't judge anyone for subscribing to this ideology out of misplaced idealism and a desire to do good; I did for twenty years. Likewise, I don't judge anyone who is currently waking up from it but is constrained by fear. As I tell folks who write me about it: I don't know the exact way to get over it. I suspect it's different for every person. But trust me when I tell you, it is so liberating on the other side.

For those self-identified liberals who may have been seduced by this belief system, by its propaganda, and are fuming at this piece, thank you for reading this far. I believe a part of you is struggling to wake up if you stuck it out this long. I encourage you to start listening to that small voice inside

yourself, the one that tells you when something doesn't seem quite right or reasonable, no matter if it's accepted by all of your peers.

Take a look at who was really at the Free Speech Rally in Boston for starters. This, for example, is Shiva Ayyadurai. You may decide you don't like him because he's conservative, but to call him a "white supremacist" is a dangerous Alt-Left falsehood.

Take the time to listen to [Will Johnson](#) and [Joey Gibson](#), two of the organizers of the Patriot Prayer Rally in SF this past weekend. Their rally was canceled after successful media (and [political](#)) attempts to smear them as "white supremacists" caused subsequent threats of violence from the Alt-Left. Ask yourself if it's not odd that so many so-called liberals are now smearing people of color with whom they don't agree as "white supremacists" ([Charles Barkley](#) is apparently one now too; so Johnson, Gibson, and Ayyadurai are not alone).

Then ask yourself if [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these people](#), or [these students](#), or [these students](#), or [these students](#), or [these students](#) are really fighting fascism, or if they are acting as footsoldiers (some witting, some unwitting) for a pro-censorship and pro-violence ideology. These facts may not fit your frame, but – do the actions depicted here reflect your liberal values?

I read a C.S. Lewis quote some time ago, that has stuck with me during my transformation in thought. Perhaps it will stick with you:

“Suppose one reads a story of filthy atrocities in the paper. Then suppose that something turns up suggesting that the story might not be quite true, or not quite so bad as it was made out. Is one's first feeling, ‘Thank God, even they

aren't quite so bad as that,' or is it a feeling of disappointment, and even a determination to cling to the first story for the sheer pleasure of thinking your enemies are as bad as possible? If it is the second then it is, I am afraid, the first step in a process which, if followed to the end, will make us into devils. You see, one is beginning to wish that black was a little blacker. If we give that wish its head, later on we shall wish to see grey as black, and then to see white itself as black. Finally we shall insist on seeing everything – God and our friends and ourselves included – as bad, and not be able to stop doing it: we shall be fixed for ever in a universe of pure hatred.”

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Keri is Co-Founder of [Whitesmith Entertainment](#). This article was originally published on FEE.org. Read the [original article](#).

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