

Incidentally White

"[T]o speak in general terms of the prototypical Southern conservative we would say first of all that he was not an alienated man."

—M.E. Bradford, "Where We Were Born and Raised"

White nationalism has long existed on the borderlands of disaffected conservatism. Among its several denominations is the movement known as identitarianism, which combines the ideology of white nationalism with language and imagery reminiscent of *Game of Thrones*, an effective nomenclatura and ethos for attracting young males. It purports to be a plea for rootedness, for belonging, for "becoming who you are." As each week seems to bring out a new episode of the long-running tragicomedy *How the West Was Lost*, conservatives are looking elsewhere, beyond the GOP and conventional media, for ideas and organization. Thus, the assertion that we ought to become who we are has at least the ring of truth.

Who or what are we? White people? Well yes, but not just that. White, we are told by the proponents of identitarianism, is the color of Europe. And so, in the context of disaffected American conservatism, the white American must begin to see himself as white, to elevate his own "white racial consciousness," which practically speaking means to identify with the achievements of every white European who has ever existed, to favor white people over otherly colored people, and to promote the interests of white people and European culture. For identitarians, these interests include the eventual disintegration of the United States and the formation of a separate and separatist white state. Whether Jews may apply remains an open question.

The white nationalist will tell you that his point of view is in fact a natural one. *Like favors like*. White, on one hand, might be a mere checkbox on a census form, but in another

sense it is an extension of the natural family. The opposite point of view – the multicultural, multiracial, or for those who ought to know better but are craven or chicken, the “cuckservative” one – is not natural. It has to be beaten into our brains from a young age, so that we might embrace unnature and hate the fact that we are white and/or European. And by golly, the powers that be do just that! Witness *Dora the Explorer* and every kindergarten class in America and Disney Tweens and that dope-smoking professor at the junior college and Barack Obama and the cuckservative GOP: It’s no wonder that white kids and white adults are ashamed of their European heritage. Do they not realize that their ancestor, Homer, wrote the *Iliad*? Or that their distant grandpa Charles Martel drove out the Moors? Or that their cousins Romulus and Remus founded Rome? Or that their other cousin, Alaric, sacked it?

By white nationalist lights, then, a white man in his proper culture would see all of these men and their achievements as belonging to him. This is the natural disposition of the white man. This is what it means to be rooted.

Actually, the opposite is true: White nationalism is in fact a very specific form of rootlessness, an ideology of alienation.

J.S. Bach was a white man. To deny it would be absurd. Yet to say it is also absurd, if by it we intend to convey something truly meaningful about the actual composer of the *B Minor Mass*. And yes, great Odin’s raven, I realize that “white kids” today are not taught to identify with J.S. Bach, or to appreciate the significance of the *Well-Tempered Clavier*, or indeed to love anything about Bach. They are, in fact, taught just the opposite – that Bach was an elite white German European, that he abused his wives by fathering many children by them, that three Zimbabweans banging on gut-drums is just as culturally enriching, that only elite elitists like this stuff any more, that the cello suites are good to study by and for putting babies to sleep, *etc.*, *etc.*

In other words, the left would have us hate Bach because he was white. And yet, the ridiculousness of the left's approach to everything that is deemed the product of whiteness and Europeanness does not prove to us that the opposite is true; that what is damned should be praised in the same terms and for the same reasons; that we should love Bach *because* he was white. To hear and inwardly digest the fact that the father of modern music was white is to learn nothing beyond the level of a three-year-old child, who can put the square peg into the square hole. The genius, the art (which is to say, that which is lovable or praiseworthy) of Bach, or of Shakespeare, or of Homer, is not explained by the fact that they were, in divers times and places, European or genetically Caucasoid.

Well, let me pause right there: It would tell us something about their genius if the ability to bard, or to govern, or to compose could be found on particular exons within the white gene, sequenced just so. But then we would need to start talking not about white racial consciousness but about white supremacy, and determinism, and quanta, and maybe Margaret Sanger was right. Such would be the only relevance of celebrating the whiteness of these men and claiming them as our heritage as white people on the basis of their being Europeans. But what, then, would there be to celebrate, besides the automaton inheritance of genetic endowments? Why, even the triumph of the will is only an illusion, because will is a fiction, a neurological process determined by the evolution of alleles. In which case, we'd be forced to raise unpleasant questions about our heritage from other Europeans who are less desirable (according to some predefined standard of desirability), and that would then bring us back to the barnyard and thoughts of culling.

Regardless, the average temptee of identitarianism isn't spending his days thinking of ways to thin the herd or dreaming of sitting on the right or the left side of the throne in the coming White Nation-State of New Europe. He is

more likely in search of a form of therapy, a kind of topical salve for the muscle aches and sore joints that result from running in the rat race that is modern America. He is seeking a kind of comfort, a sense of belonging and a place to belong, and he finds it, thinly, ephemerally, fleetingly in the lists of black crime statistics, the praise of past European accomplishment, the bare scientific facts about the comparative sizes of brains and genitals among the races, and the ability to post controversial, career-ending comments pseudonymously. As he grows in his newfound faith, he seeks converts and potential fellow travelers in the outside world, looking for teachable moments in the face of tragedies and injustices that can be neatly framed in terms of anti-white, anti-European oppression. Entering stage-right and approaching the water cooler, he says, as if the thought only just occurred to him, "If it's so d*** good for black people to be proud of their heritage, why isn't it good for whites?"

That modern man, adrift in a sea of atomistic individualism, is characterized by alienation is no revelation. The *what*, however, is not the same as the *why*. Man in the modern world – Europe being the font – is taught from the youngest age to hate anything that can be immediately inherited. His sense of self, to borrow the psychobabble, is indeed a casualty. But the modern search for identity is really an attempt to purge the mind of what already is there, in the imagination. The resulting alienation is self-imposed and requires constant reassurance that one's chosen ideology has the most explanatory power. ("Here's another black-on-white crime that *they* won't tell you about!") The self-consciously white man must pretend that his alienation can be explained in purely scientific terms, as a lion struggling against a pack of jackals, each acting on nothing more than instinct, just "being what it is." Man devolves to monkey.

Except man is not a monkey, and even the alienated modern man struggles against something more than brute biological

disposition. If he hates his father, or his hometown, or the memory of his kinfolk, or his neighbor down the street, or the family conversation at the Christmas dinner table, he is disquieted by that hatred. He struggles internally because his passion derives from existential loyalty, from a pull toward his inheritance. He hates himself because he has habituated himself to hate the place where, to borrow the great conservative rhetorician M.E. Bradford's phrase, he was born and raised – the places and the people who are inextricably a part of himself. In short, he has perfected the art of abstraction, of thinking outside of the box of reality, to consider himself as something other than what he is, and always has been.

This is the way of modern man – to believe the lie that nothing true can be inherited, except for the most abstract of traits, such as whiteness, or Europeanness, or Americanness, or humanness. To trade one abstract trait for another as *raison d'être* is to remain in the lie, to pretend that our knowledge of the real is achieved purely, dialectically, apart from anything or anyone else who is real and to whom we owe our loyalty.

Mel Bradford offered a different approach to questions of race, identity, and conservatism, one that focussed on the *societas* of the old South but which applied, as his friend Russell Kirk showed, to conservatives everywhere. Bradford's loyal, confident, and rooted approach was emblematic of his own character, and, as John Langdale writes, "Bradford, to revise and reprise T.S. Eliot, fought with the hope of keeping something alive rather than from the conviction that anything would ultimately triumph." As such, he was interested more in literature than in the flotsam and jetsam of the news of the day or in the divide-and-conquer games that ideologues play.

In his 1985 essay "Where We Were Born and Raised," Bradford describes the typical sort of conservative who grew up in the soil of the colonial South – one who was not afflicted with

white racial consciousness:

His customary "mode of discourse" was not "dialectical"—defined by an interest in first causes and a disposition to seek the truth through refinements of definition or debate—but "rhetorical": reasoning from axiomatic or "assumed" principles, talking to (or pleading with) an audience which he hoped to influence or please.

It is nearly impossible for us today to consider this frame of mind without imposing our own dialectically derived categories, judging their "nomocratic society" in terms of our "value-based" one. Thus, we struggle to believe Bradford when he writes that "Colonial Southerners did not agonize in a fever of conscience over the injustice of the condition of those Negroes who were in bondage among them." That, in part, was the result of their knowledge of history, including the fact that slavery was and remains a human reality; and of their knowledge of sacred Scripture, which tells Christians not to champion international human rights but that it is the duty of slaves to obey their masters, "as unto the Lord," and likewise, "ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him." But it also had to do with the fact that they were not "preoccupied" with their white identity, either in contradistinction to the identity of their slaves, or in some sort of solidarity with the white Europeans of New England. That preoccupation came gradually and eventually, however, whenever their opponents in the sectional conflict pressed ideological questions, and sometimes Southern conservatives answered their opponents on their opponents' terms. The ugliest of Alexander Stephens's rhetoric of scientific racism, now falsely portrayed as some unified dogma of the South, did not represent the inclination of the typical Southern conservative. Why? Because "From the kind of consciousness which sees the self only in relation to something that is 'other' he fought shy; or else hurried

quickly to Hegel's third stage—of purposeful reunion with the inclusive whole.” In other words, his inclination was not toward isolation or alienation, but to get along with others, to whatever degree it was possible. Only by attempting to understand this conservative approach to truth and reality can we who are glad that race-based slavery no longer exists in this country begin to comprehend how a Southern Christian gentleman, such as R.E. Lee, could retain ownership of the slaves he inherited, love his slaves, manumit his slaves, fight for a regime that defended slavery, then urge respect for the conqueror when the war was lost.

The conservative “fights shy” with the ideologue, because he is not alienated from himself or his own people. He accepts who he is, what he was born to be, and he does not see the important questions of life framed in terms derived outside of his inherited tradition, a tradition shaped above all by the Christian faith.

Outside terms that naturally garner a conservative's suspicion include the tenets of a “conservative” ideology. Bradford describes the older Southerner as “coincidentally republican,” but not abstractly or ideologically so, because a conservative does not view anything, including politics, through an ideological lens. To do so would be absurd, from the perspective of history, which has seen good and evil from every kind of regime. We may contrast this with today's ideological conservatives who claim to be natural-law theorists, and who derive somehow from the penumbræ of nature the fact that democratic capitalism is the only arrangement suitable for mankind.

Thus, Bradford wrote optimistically that, with both slavery and segregation forbidden in the South, conservatism there would be “free to appear as more than racial feeling, as conservatism per se, because it is less preoccupied with problems of race than at any time since 1820.” That was overly optimistic. Race now consumes the entire country, including

the South, because ideology consumes the entire country, including the South. Nationalism thrives particularly in the South, which serves as the prime source of human materiel for America's ideological wars. Race is shoved in our faces by the left and the right, not simply as a means of identification but as a determining factor – perhaps *the* determining factor – of our very identity. Having embraced our own alienation, we cannot break free of this preoccupation. We cannot think about the immigration crisis or the refugee crisis without addressing our own self-imposed guilt for being white. We're tempted either to be ashamed of it, or to celebrate it.

What Bradford deemed a "rhetorical approach" to truth did indeed insulate the South for a time from the tyranny of abstraction and manufactured guilt, from the atomistic individualism that bedevils all of American society today. The other insulating factor he points to is the Christian religion, which was incarnate in the South (and elsewhere, to a lesser degree) in the evangelical denominations. The prophylactic against unreality came "in the devotion of these churches to the exfoliation of an *authoritative* gloss on an *authoritative* text," which "made the South more and more immune to 'vain philosophy' and reinforced its rhetorical habit of mind."

This can no longer be said, either of the average church in the South or of the average church anywhere in the United States. Increasingly, texts of Scripture are not treated as established and coherent authorities but as context-free sources of principles that happen to coincide with whatever therapeutic advice on internal improvements – of the self or of society – the preacher feels led to offer. Far from receiving a reinforcing of the rhetorical mindset, one that seeks and embraces axiomatic truth, the average churchgoer today learns to think dialectically, abstractly, from his "lead pastor." The only *Sitz im Leben* that matters is Now.

Modern ideological "conservatism," like nationalism, white

nationalism, and pop Christianity, cannot explain to us reality. They can only distract us, like a drug, from seeing it. Yet it is within our grasp to live with blinders off, to find meaning in the reality of our own families, neighbors, communities, hometowns, and churches – to do good and inspire good in others, keeping traditions alive and passing them on, drawing on the rich antecedents of our civilization without converting our heritage into a cudgel of hubris.

We can afford to be incidentally white, and incidentally republican, but we cannot afford to be incidentally Christian. The Faith, *pace* the identitarians, is not simply the now-oppressed religion of white people. It is the *norma normans* of all our inherited axiomatic authorities, and everyone else's, European or not.

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