

The New Right Activism

A **manifesto** for the counterrevolution. [Emphases added]

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AT JAN 9

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This essay was first published in the culture magazine [IM-1776](#). I highly recommend that you subscribe to IM and purchase a copy of the print edition, available [here](#).

The Right is reorganizing. Most intelligent conservatives, especially younger conservatives, who joined the political fray at a moment of sweeping ideological change, already recognize that **familiar orthodoxies are no longer viable, and that ideas without power are useless.** The Right doesn't need a white paper. What it needs is a spirited new activism with the **courage** and resolve to **win back the language, recapture institutions, and reorient the state toward rightful ends.**

This essay will **introduce the basic principles** of this activism: where it begins, how it might work, and what it must do in order to win. It is not

“conservative” in the traditional sense. The world of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberalism is gone, and conservatives must grapple with the world as it is — a status quo that requires not conservation, but reform, and even revolt.

We don't need to abandon the principles of natural right, limited government, and individual liberty, but we **need to make those principles meaningful** in the world of today. The older conservative establishment, assembling in ballrooms and clubhouses, has marginal influence over public orthodoxy because it **lacks the hunger and grit to contest it**. The energy is with a new generation which no longer accepts tired platitudes, and demands a new set of strategies geared toward truly overcoming the regime — the opaque and coercive set of psychological, cultural, and institutional patterns that has largely replaced the old constitutional way of life.

This movement is in its youth, and it has the virtue of aspiring to something more than the drab, euphemistic world of “diversity and inclusion”; it has the ambition **of re-establishing a political vision that goes beyond procedural values and points toward higher principles**.

The first step is to admit what hasn't worked. For fifty years, **establishment** conservatives have been retreating from the great political tradition of the West — republican self-government, shared moral standards, and the pursuit of eudaimonia, or human flourishing — in favor of half-measures and cheap substitutes.

The first of these substitutes is **the self-serving myth of neutrality**. Following a libertarian line, the conservative establishment has argued that **government, state universities, and public schools should be “neutral”** in their approach to political ideals. But no institution can be neutral — and any institutional authority aiming only for neutrality will **immediately be**

captured by a **faction more committed to imposing ideology**. In reality, public universities, public schools, and other cultural institutions have long been dominated by the Left. Conservative ideas and values have been suppressed, conservative thinkers have been persecuted, and the **conservative establishment** has deluded itself with impotent appeals to **neutrality**.

The popular slogan that “**facts don’t care about your feelings**” betrays similar problems. In reality, feelings almost always overpower facts. **Reason is the slave of the passions**. Political life moves on narrative, emotion, scandal, anger, hope, and faith — on irrational, or at least subrational, feelings that can be channeled, but never destroyed by reason. As sociologist Max Weber demonstrated more than a century ago, politics does not, and *cannot*, operate on facts alone. **Politics depends on values** and requires judgment; political life is not a utilitarian equation — and nor should we want it to be.

Finally, the conservative **establishment** has appealed to the “free marketplace of ideas,” and the belief that the “**invisible hand**” will rectify cultural and political problems organically. But the formation of culture does not proceed like the production of cars, and cannot be conceived the same way. The **chief vectors** for the transmission of values — the public school, the public university, and the state — are **not marketplaces** at all. They are government-run monopolies. In truth, the hand that moves culture is not an “invisible hand” but an **iron hand clad** in velvet — that is, political force.

The adoption of these myths has rendered the Right ineffective, to the point of cementing, as opposed to contesting, the status quo of Leftist hegemony. The radical Left ruthlessly advances through the institutions, and the **Right meekly ratifies** each encroachment under the rubric of “**neutrality**.” In view of the social and cultural wreckage this dynamic had

wrought, it is not merely a matter of preference but a matter of **urgency to break it**. To do this, a new approach is required.

The New Right activism must focus its efforts on three domains: language, institutions, and ends.

As the Gospels state, In the beginning was the Word — and this is true also in politics. Modern political movements have always started with writing: with pamphlets, manifestos, and other publications. The New Right has already generated a high degree of innovation in this respect, spread across a growing network of publications, podcasts, literature, and visual arts. The point is not only to shape the meta-discourse as a matter of “general culture,” but to attack the political discourse directly on individual issues — in other words, to engage in agitprop.

Agitprop doesn't mean sacrificing the truth, but rather, **channeling the truth, toward victory**. Postmodernist theorists who reduced politics to “language games” may have overstated the case, but they were right in one respect: **language is the operative element of human culture**. To change the language means to change society: in law, arts, rhetoric, or common speech. The **Right must build a new vocabulary** to overcome the regime's euphemistic rule, which enacts abuse of power through abuse of language. The point is to replace contemporary ideological language with new, persuasive language that points toward clear principles.

From language begins a longer process of legitimation. **A movement gains legitimacy by taking territory in discourse, the adoption of its discourse by society's elite, and eventually, through elevation of its discourse into law**. Win the argument, win the elite, and win the regime — that is the formula, which traces the path from the pamphlet to power.

Institutions are where the word becomes flesh. The men who shape the discourse must understand that above them stand the statesmen: men of practical affairs who govern, legislate, and rule. **The activist must not forget that he is doing politics, not literature, and balance his desire for intellectual purity with institutional reality.** He must work to legitimize his language in an environment that is often **hostile to his wishes and resistant to any change.** At times, he must conceal his radicalism in the mask of respectability.

In the end, the **work of politics is the work of practical statesmanship.** Those who ignore this reality by appealing to abstract principles always limit their effectiveness. When Thomas Paine wrote *The American Crisis*, he felt the breath of British soldiers at his neck. He understood that the **Revolution had to defeat enemies on the battlefield** and he looked to General Washington as the only man who could do it.

In our time, some conservatives believe it is **enough to lay claim to “individual rights” and “limited government”** as a substitute for managing the state. I, too, support individual rights and limited government, but the decisive **political question** concerns securing those rights. **Who will do so?** And, even if it is limited, what is the proper role of government? These are the issues which are ultimately at stake.

We can agree with Locke that humans enter into society and institute government to secure their natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. **But the twentieth century disrupted this arrangement: the state became engaged in a project to reshape society in its own image.** For a hundred years, conservatives have tried and failed to reduce the size of government: as a percentage of GDP, the American state today is larger than the Chinese Communist state, with no sign of reversing course. Nineteenth-century liberalism is dead and cannot be restored.

The activist must begin with status quo **reality**: the institutions which today shape public and private life will exist for the foreseeable future. The only

question is **who will lead them and by which set of values.** The New Right must summon the self-confidence to say, "**We will,** and by our values."

Conservatives can no longer be content to serve as the caretakers of their enemies' institutions, or as gadflies who adopt the posture of the "heterodox" **while signaling** to their left-wing counterparts that they have no desire to disrupt the established hegemony. Rather, the New Right needs to move from the politics of pamphlets to the **governance of the institutions.**

We must recruit, recapture, and replace existing leadership. We must produce knowledge and culture at a sufficient scale and standard to shift the balance of ideological power. **Conservative thought has to move out of the ghetto and into the mainstream.** And we must be capable of resisting, and perhaps even embracing, a constant barrage of media coverage, with a hundred negative stories for every positive one. **In other words, we must risk ruin in pursuit of victory.**

Why would anyone embrace these risks? Fame, revenge, and power have all been powerful motivations in political life in the past, and they remain powerful today. But in order to realize the ultimate promise of the political, there **also must be something higher — a telos.** [Greek for ultimate end or goal.]

The language of ends has almost vanished from American life, and this disappearance supplies the **greatest opportunity for the New Right.** **Because of its religious adherence,** the Right still has access to the language of ends — the language of God, or, in its more contemporary form, "**Nature and Nature's God.**" My conviction is that ends will

ultimately triumph over means; **men will die for truth, liberty, and happiness, but will not die for efficiency, diversity, and inclusion.**

The best way to counter the degradations of American institutional life is to **remind the public of the fundamental purpose of those institutions, and to communicate that purpose.** What is the purpose of the university? **What** is the purpose of a school? **What** system of government will guide us toward human happiness? These questions provoke doubt and anxiety in the current regime. And no wonder. **The idea of happiness, properly understood, can be revolutionary.**

The current regime has poured trillions into welfare programs, ideological production, family recomposition, and psychotherapeutic intervention, but Americans are more miserable than ever. To again demand happiness — Aristotle's eudaimonia, Jefferson's Declaration — cuts straight through all our postmodern dilemmas. Our regime has lost all sense of why it exists. The men who can rediscover this North Star will have everything they need to motivate others to pursue political life: a motivation which may be obscured but cannot be extinguished. **They will begin the great process of recapturing the language, institutions, and ends of American life.**

The **most important virtue of our time is courage.** In America, there is plenty of grumbling, anxiety, and quiet opposition to the capture of the culture. The **activist** must accept that he **cannot make men courageous, but he can change the system of incentives** so that those in quiet opposition — to put it bluntly, **the cowardly** — make different decisions. The activist must accept the inevitable frustration of victory: there will be those who adopt his positions **after it has become safe.** This is the price of courage, which sometimes only his closest compatriots will understand.

That must be enough. For every Paine, Washington, and Jefferson, there are a hundred nameless men who spilled ink, and blood, for the fight. In our time, the **Right will soon be confronted with a choice: to submit to the current regime, to revitalize the vision of the Founders, or to forge**

ahead into an unknown order. My commitment is to the old means and the old ends, as much as we can rescue them. This will require the spirit of brotherhood, sacrifice, daring, and selflessness. As the battle begins, we will learn and adapt. **But one thing is clear: the fight is here.**

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