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Which Side Are You On? The Answer is Clear for Today's Useful Idiots for the Right

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Which Side Are You On? The Answer is Clear for Today's Useful Idiots for the Right

Abstract

This article is reprinted with permission from [Washington Babylon](#). It is the second in a weeklong series. [Read Part I here](#).

Our thanks to the author, Tony Belletier as well as [Ken Silverstein](#), Editor of [Washington Babylon](#).

Keywords

Glenn Greenwald, Matt Taibbi, Left Journalism

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Cover Page Footnote

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[Note: This is a reprint from [Washington Babylon](#) and part of a series. Read [Part I here](#).]

In 2016 and 2020, Bernie Sanders, a self-described Democratic Socialist, was a viable candidate for the presidency of the United States. In a country where the left was systematically persecuted and whose intelligence services systematically persecute it abroad, such a development is significant and without precedent. Recent polls show half of millennials are well disposed toward socialism. Then, in 2020, a global pandemic took the lives of millions and wrought economic devastation in the United States with the unemployment rate reaching 14.7 percent by official figures. Neoliberalism has never been more discredited, so it stands to reason that within this context a new crop of media opportunists would sprout up to tell people that socialism is dead.

If you're addicted to Twitter you may have noticed something awfully curious going on with a number of famous "progressive" journalists. Have you seen that people like, say, Matt Taibbi, are increasingly concerned with the goings on at college campuses? Have you seen him vomit Rush Limbaugh-style talking points about pointy-headed, elitist academics in their ivory towers or compare "cancel culture" to *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*?

How about Glenn Greenwald? Have you noticed the Pulitzer Prize winning reporter and sworn enemy of the Brazilian right never misses an opportunity to defend Trump and the American right? You've given him the benefit of the doubt, but you can't help but notice that he lies shamelessly and without remorse — like when he claimed that no Parler users invaded the US Capitol, a lie that was demonstrably false even at the time he made it.

Why would the husband of a gay, socialist politician in Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil go out of his way to defend the crazed wannabe tyrant's American counterpart? Surely there is no logical or moral consistency to these two positions? Why are so many others in the media employing the same knee-jerk contrarianism to attack the left and defend the right?

It's no coincidence. There has been a concerted effort among think tanks and their right-wing publications to make inroads in left media and gussy up tired Reaganite claptrap with phony Marxist jargon and edgy shit-posting to make "get off my lawn" conservatism seem counter cultural and hip. Capitalizing on the defeat of Sanders, these think tanks see an opportunity to exploit the ire and distrust of former Bernie supporters towards the Democratic Party and redirect this free-floating hostility to their ends.

Bring in the Clowns

Needless to say a coterie of opportunistic and meretricious influencers are eagerly auditioning to be court jesters for National Conservatism. A few names immediately come to mind: Angela Nagle, Michael Tracey, and the podcast *Red Scare* are some of the big fish, but if we want to learn more, we must take a journey to the Island of Misfit Podcasters.



Michael Tracey: Dork. Dweeb. Loser. Fair Use.

A fringe but thriving new media ecosystem has emerged coalescing around this motley collection of writers, podcasters, trolls and failed artists who now call themselves "critics." If anything unifies them, it is a morbid relationship and antagonism with an abstract "left." That's why so much of their content and branding is self-important posturing about leaving the left, haunting the left, criticizing the left, telling uncomfortable truths to the left, being left-heretics, left gadflies etc.

Rhetorically, their trick is to make use of American confusion regarding political terminology, conflating the left with liberals to discredit the former. For the most part they have no positions beyond knee-jerk contrarianism. They are reactionaries in the most literal sense of the term. They react. Whenever a Democrat does something, it is bad and whenever a leftist does something it is also bad because they are a Democrat or secretly a Democrat or a crypto-Democrat or working on behalf of the Democrats. You get the picture.

Whatever it is, it is a tendency of some kind. They all say the same things. They engage in constant backslapping and mutual PR. They constantly retweet and promote each other. They go on each other's podcasts and they rush to one another's defense whenever they are criticized. If that was it, one could dismiss it out of hand as a fringe political subculture. However, the overlap in subject matter between these influencers and publications affiliated with right wing think tanks leave no doubt about their ties, not to speak of their personal relationships.

A January 2017 *Politico* article describes Julius Krein as a conservative “whiz kid” who apparently was dreaming up ways to cut Social Security and Medicare when bullies were shoving him into lockers in high school. While working for a Boston hedge fund, the 2008 Harvard graduate began a blog called the *Journal for American Greatness (JAG)*, writing articles anonymously under the pretentious pen name of Decius. He was joined by a group of conservative academics affiliated with the Claremont Institute, a California-based think tank. On its website the Claremont Institute describes its mission to provide “the missing argument in the battle to win public sentiment by teaching and promoting the philosophical reasoning that is the foundation of limited government and the statesmanship required to bring that reasoning into practice.” And it sounds like they mean business.

The institute also runs the Center for Constitutional Jurisprudence. “Federal overreach in areas such as health care, environmental protection, and local spending has created an extraordinary number of litigation opportunities which the Center advances by pursuing [sic] strategic litigation from initial complaint all the way through to Supreme Court review,” says its website.

Many of the bright minds at Claremont would stay behind to contribute to JAG's successor, *American Greatness* while Krein went on to found *American Affairs*, a *Claremont Review of Books*-inspired conservative journal established with the quixotic, doomed mission of providing intellectual rigor to “Trumpism.” That project went about as well as one would expect, but the journal did go on to have some influence in online left discourse as we shall see.

Michael Lind is Porcine: It's Funny Because It's True

It might surprise you to know that Michael Lind, the porcine conservative academic, Heritage Foundation alumnus and author of radical screeds such as *Vietnam: The Necessary War*, has a lot to teach young socialist intellectuals about class warfare. In his book *The New Class War: Saving Democracy from the Managerial Elite*, Lind paints a picture of an “uneducated underclass” living in low-density areas and a “metropolitan elite” of university-credentialed professionals who he defines as a “managerial overclass.”



Porcine? Yeah, that was the best possible descriptor, though “dipshit” or “gas bag” would have worked as well. Fair Use.

A synopsis of Lind’s thesis can be found online in the Summer 2017 edition of *American Affairs*. Conveniently for Lind, and the billionaires who fund the Claremont Institute, the amorphous, non-class of moderately better paid university-educated professionals like corporate managers, who seldom have any power on corporate boards, are the real enemy. Even more absurdly, teachers and nurses are grouped within the same class as the actual capitalists who patronize the think tanks who cut Lind a check for his services.

To Lind, it doesn’t matter if you are a waged-worker, and you receive a low wage at that. If you are, for instance, the child of a college educated schoolteacher and go on to take on student loan debt to get a degree before entering the work-force as a poorly paid wage laborer with no benefits, you are not working class after at all. No, you are the scion of a hereditary order of mandarins. Congratulations.

It should be realized from the jump that this is merely a cynical divide and conquer strategy, meant to draw a wedge between college educated and non-college educated workers. While depicting struggling debt peons as the new bourgeoisie is far-fetched, it also grossly distorts the data on the class composition of college attendees, 20 percent of whom come from low-income backgrounds. Some 47 percent come from non-white families according to a recent Pew survey. Nevertheless, this narrative gained a great deal of currency in left media.

Left media influencers picked up where Lind left off, propagating this anti-solidarity talking point and demonizing the “Professional Managerial Class.” In 2019, *Chapo Trap House* host Amber A’Lee Frost penned an essay on this theme in *American Affairs*, lifted largely though bastardized from the great Barbara Ehrenreich. To her credit, she later distanced herself from the publication, but podcast co-host turned guru Matt Christman echoed these talking points in his interminable Vlog sermons.

Lind routinely pens essays in the pseudo-Marxist journal *The Bellows*. *The Bellows* describes itself as “an online magazine for class-centric Left-Populism.” Incidentally, its homepage lists Jeff Vandrew Jr. as a contributing founder of Vandrew LLC, a New Jersey-based wealth management firm, just in case you doubted its left-wing credentials. Not impressed? Little Jeff is the son of Republican dentist/congressman Jeff Vandrew Sr., who in 2020 supported Donald Trump’s efforts to overturn the election.

Almost immediately following the launch of *The Bellows* it became clear that the website would take the most conservative positions possible to avoid alienating its Claremont-affiliated contributors. Hence, it churns out endless pieces suggesting that the populist left and populist right share common goals.

Malcolm Kyeyune a self-described “Marxist” who sees no *contradiction*, as it were, in working for the Swedish conservative think tank Oikos, reiterates Lind’s conceptions of class in a tedious *Bellows* essay entitled “Against the Managers.” In his characteristic style, which is at once maudlin *and* pedantic, Kyeyune argues that expansion of higher education created a new class of “would-be functionaries in numbers far in excess of what the labor market can or could absorb.” So, even unemployed college graduates are dastardly managers in waiting. Kyeune continues:

What we have now on the left and right—on both sides of the Atlantic—is an open and bitter class war. It is a conflict between a growing cadre of imperial lords and the peasantry they hope to subjugate; between the managers and petty nobility of the much-prophesied “knowledge economy” and those they aim to manage.

So, the left are managers or managers-in-waiting while the Right are salt of the earth, scrappy peasants, which conveniently ignores the fact that high-income Americans voted for Trump in substantially higher numbers.

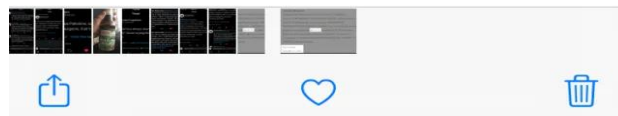
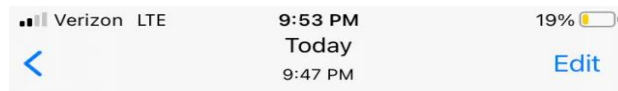
Kyeyune is a frequent guest along with Angela Nagle on *What’s Left?* a podcast hosted by prolific Twitter troll, paralegal and amphetamine connoisseur Aimee Laba, better known as Aimee Terese. She is perhaps the most enthusiastic disseminator of the PMC canard and other crypto-Claremont propaganda.

She’s also a head case. When she’s not reflexively defending Neo-Nazis engaged in anti-PC demonstrations in her native Australia (she deleted that tweet) she’s dunking on the libs, accusing everyone of being a secret Democrat and refashioning conservative talking points with ultraleft gibberish. She also uncritically platforms conservative think tank figures like Manhattan Institute fellow Oren Cass, who, friend to the working man that he is, wants to cut overtime rates and bar public sector unions from supporting and donating to political campaigns. Despite her professed advocacy on behalf of the real working class against the wily PMC, Laba, occasionally gives the game away:

Personnel wise, you need loyal footsoldiers to make populist campaign work, but you also need hungry/class traitors in upper echelons of movement [sic]. The difference between Sanders & Corbyn in 16/17 vs 19/20 is their upper echelons now too well entrenched professionally [sic].

On the ground the working class people doing the grunt work/canvassing etc they're loyal in both cases. But if the pmc layer will be fine professionally regardless of electoral outcome, they're worse than useless (unless you have a legit vanguard of hardcore class traitors).

This quote betrays her genuine contempt for the working class. In her imagination, she's in charge and the hoi polloi are the boots on the ground doing the "grunt work." It's all very understandable when you stop to consider that Laba grew up in Sydney's posh North Shore. She attended Loreto Kirribilli, one of Sydney's most exclusive and expensive private schools, where students are inculcated with a "born to rule" mentality. She's also the daughter of a wealthy Lebanese émigré, which makes her contempt for working people quite a bit easier to understand. (This image below appears to refer to her father. If that's inaccurate, I will update this story.)



Pitiful Failed Artist Adam Lehrer: It's True, But Not Even Funny

Perhaps the most pitiful figure in this milieu is failed artist Adam Lehrer, now cashing in writing embarrassing articles for *American Greatness*. It feels wrong to attack Lehrer; it's too easy. The dopey, New York art hipster *actually* thinks that a rag like *American Greatness* publishes him because he has something of value to say and not because he flatters it and it finds his propaganda useful. His article, "A Marxist Defends the Great Reactionaries," from the first line starts off with a glaring error that exposes this entire crowd as the pseudo intellectuals they are:

What's Left? podcast host Aimee Terese recently tweeted, “Marx and Engels were friends with Balzac, noted reactionary monarchist who they perceived as far more insightful, and his work a much greater contribution to the socialist cause, despite his rank, than all the bourgeois economists, historians and writers of the day.

Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels never met Balzac, let alone counted him as a friend despite being enthusiastic fans of his work. It's clear that *American Greatness* does not have a fact checker, but it doesn't really matter when the point of your publication is to simply churn out vulgar propaganda. It does say something about what kind of an artist Lehrer must be, though, when he has so little pride in his work or self-respect that he doesn't mind looking like an idiot from the start. I won't go into much detail because the article is trivial. It starts off by attacking a straw man abstract “left” that is dismissive of right-wing artists because they are merely reflecting their class interests as members of the Professional Managerial Class and have an interest in dehumanizing right-wing artists to preserve their function as “neoliberalism's ideological manufacturers.”

According to Lehrer, Balzac and hence reactionary artists are aesthetically superior because unlike liberals and socialists who mystify the exploitative nature of capital by working for reform, reactionaries are more revolutionary in seeking to abolish the existing order and return to an earlier one. Who does Lehrer cite to make this point? Michael Lind, of course.

Lehrer goes on to laud the works of writers like Nick Land and Michel Houellebecq, whom I am sure his patrons at *American Greatness* couldn't give less of a fuck about. The point of their project is to lower taxes, cut Social Security and fund wars, not to pontificate on the state of French letters. After receiving heavy criticism for his piece, Lehrer gloated on Twitter that writing for *American Greatness* allowed him to make a living writing and doing his art. As far as I know he's now writing a book about heroin and the avant-garde, which is a 15-year-old's idea of what's cool.

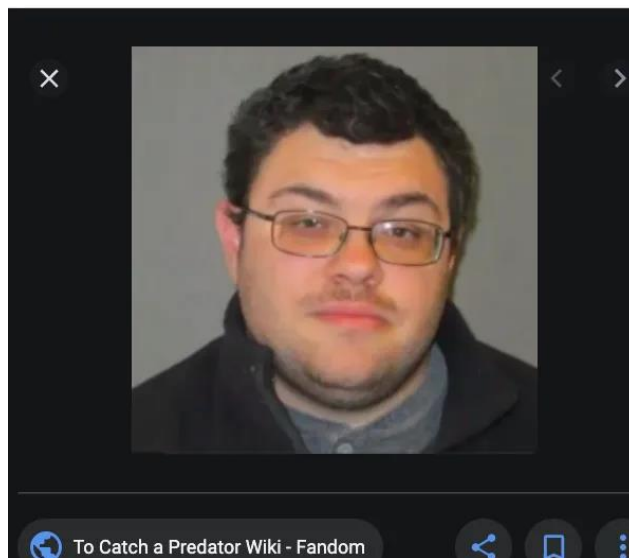
The aforementioned figures comparatively speaking are minnows in this ecosystem and exist to test out rhetoric and see what works. Most often they are ridiculed, but now and then they strike a nerve and are retweeted or promoted by some of the bigger fish, like *Red Scare*, Glenn Greenwald or Michael Tracey, who are very much part of this vile ecosystem and employ the same brand of trolling.



Fox News. Fair Use.

Michael Tracey: The “To Catch a Predator” Connection

Tracey is a journalist who is best known for his resemblance to Jeff Stacy, a convicted sex offender who surfaced in an investigation by Dateline NBC’s *To Catch A Predator*. With the persona of “Left Heretic,” Tracey has garnered a reputation for contrarian takes and poor personal hygiene. Seizing on the free-floating hostility and distrust many jaded ex-leftists feel for the Democratic Party and its disingenuous rhetoric on issues of identity and social justice, Tracey has built a following of nearly 200,000 Twitter followers railing against “wokeness” and casting doubt on the motives of the George Floyd demonstrations because Wendy’s once tweeted “Black Lives Matter.” He is a regular on Tucker Carlson, where he plays the role of the “left gadfly.” He cross-promotes and retweets content from *Red Scare*.



Jeff Stacy Fair Use.

Red Scare is a podcast hosted by Dasha Nekrasova and Anna Khachiyan. The show is adjacent to what is sometimes called the dirtbag left, but is distinct in that it is explicitly socially conservative. They talk at length about their disdain for women, and any woman who works to them is a “girl boss” worthy of ridicule. The political content of the show revolves around aggressive anti-feminism and mild welfare state reforms. The cultural commentary takes aim at “neoliberalism,” which they can’t, unfortunately, define. Thinkers they reference include Mark Fisher, Slavoj Zizek, Camille Paglia and Christopher Lasch. Fisher for his doom and gloom end of history stuff, Zizek, who they’ve never apparently read, but like to roll out for anti-trans critiques, Paglia because she is a libertarian that believes in the “divine feminine,” and Lasch to talk about the family and alienation.

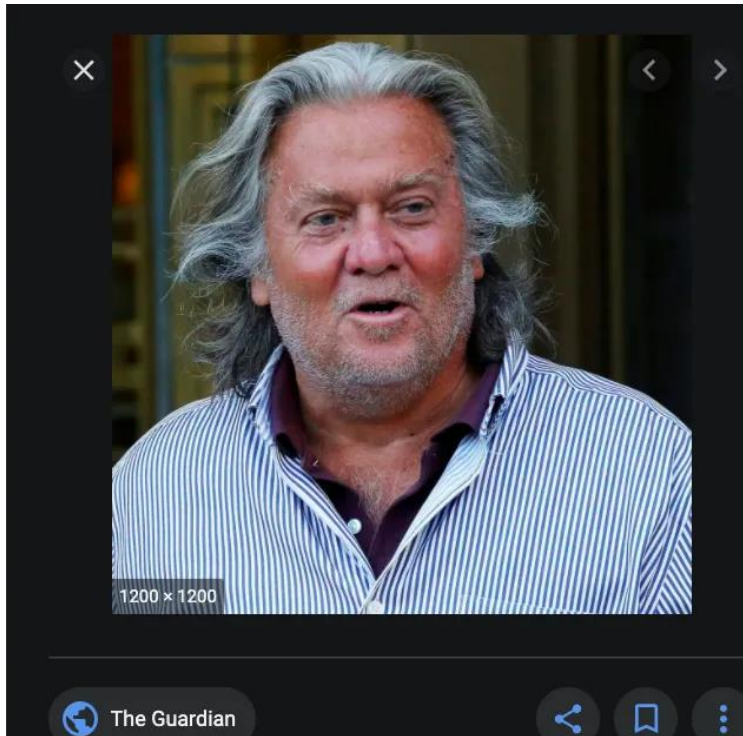


The “Red Scare” cretins. Fair Use.

Peter Thiel, the Silicon Valley venture capitalist and owner of one of the creepiest tech firms around, Palantir Technologies, once quipped that the CIA is a front for Palantir. Thiel also is widely regarded as one of the chief financial patrons for neo-reactionaries like Curtis Yarvin, better known as Mencius Moldbug. What’s more, his critiques of democracy have been a catalyst for what is often referred to as “the intellectual dark web.”

He’s also a fan of *American Affairs* and the National Conservative movement, helping them orchestrate the National Conservative Conference that featured Yarvin, Oren Cass and Tucker Carlson as a keynote speaker, as detailed in a recent piece from *Harper’s*, “Trumpism After Trump, by Thomas Meaney. Khachiyan appeared on *The Portal* with Eric Weinstein, managing director of Thiel Capital, to introduce her naïve, impressionable audience to a figure they would never have heard of otherwise.

Most alarmingly, former Trump advisor Steve Bannon appeared as a guest on *Red Scare* for a chummy, non-adversarial interview. The two frivolous, coked-up dilletantes let him spout his nonsense and come off as a loveable goofball. The whole thing was played for laughs. Bannon endorsed Bolsonaro for president of Brazil and upon his victory invited his son Eduardo to join “his movement in pursuit of a populist nationalist agenda for prosperity and sovereignty for citizens throughout the world.” Bannon also served as vice president of Cambridge Analytica, which “through its partnership with Sao Paulo-based consulting group A Ponte Estratégia Planejamento e Pesquisa LTDA, illegally used the data of millions of Brazilians to create psychographic profiles,” according to *Reuters*.



Their hero. Swoon. Also, were Steve Bannon and Michael Tracey separated at birth? Or was it Jeff Stacy? Fair Use?

Greenwald Literally, or At Least Metaphorically, Kisses Red Scare Ass

These illegal tactics played an important role in helping Bolsonaro build a fake news propaganda network that aided him in winning the 2018 election. There has been ample reporting on this, including in *The Intercept Brasil*. Surely, Greenwald is aware of this and would take the *Red Scare* girls to task for that pathetic excuse for an interview. Not so. Greenwald frequently kisses their asses, recently tweeting to the effect that if he were straight, he'd have them fight to the death and marry the winner. Greenwald has appeared twice on *Red Scare*, taking aim at the left during his second appearance.



Greenwald's tweet. Fair Use.

Greenwald constantly employs the same contrarian trolling techniques as do the most obnoxious betê noires of this scene, and retweets them from time to time. He has plugged Aimee Terese and Twink Rev on at least one occasion. He frequently appears on Tucker Carlson to uncritically

echo the latter's talking points and, almost inevitably, later claims that the Frozen TV dinner heir and bowtie dipshit neocon hawk is a socialist or is at least making the points socialists should be making. Greenwald never misses an opportunity to defend the right and with characteristic vainglorious self-regard professes to take principled stances on issues he clearly does not actually care about. If he is so interested in privacy, why does he scarcely mention Peter Thiel and Palantir as of late?

Lately, he has been on a tear attacking Democratic-led interventions in countries such as Libya with the absurd goal of making the GOP out to be peaceniks who expelled the neocons, despite the fact, to cite one of hundreds that point to the contrary, that John Bolton was Trump's National Security Advisor. He has been making a show of being a principled critic of American adventurism abroad, but these positions do not line up with his actual track record when it mattered. As a grown ass man at 36, he gave the Bush administration the benefit of the doubt on Iraqi WMDs.

Finally, if he is a brave truth-teller and anti-interventionist why doesn't he ever say anything about how his tech oligarch patron Pierre Omidyar interfered in Ukraine's affairs by funding anti-government NGOs linked to USAID and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), such as Centre UA and New Citizen, which he made an "investment" in.

Now, along with Taibbi and Nagle, he's raking in cash at Substack after his highly contrived, profit-maximizing exodus to the platform after dummied up an excuse to leave *The Intercept* — "Those meanies wanted to edit me! How dare they? All I did was write an endless, unintelligible, dishonest screed about [Editor's note: admittedly corrupt] Hunter Biden" — and solidifying his ties to the right. In the end, Greenwald is just like all the other bozos mentioned in this article: a shady, opportunistic huckster who quite possibly are used, wittingly or unwittingly, by domestic or foreign intelligence agencies. Indeed, that's why they are such perfectly useful idiots to their sponsors, whoever they might be.

Hugo Boss and Other Fash Symps

Finally, do these jesters have any actual stances? I think they do, and it plays into their hands not to take them seriously. It lets them off the hook. They are irresponsible pseudo-intellectuals who, like the alt-right, hide behind the mask of irony when called out on their positions. But "we are what we pretend to be," as Kurt Vonnegut wrote in his novel *Mother Night*. Their growing audience of Groypers and fascists take the propaganda they spew seriously, and we should as well. So, what do they stand for? A few things: anti-Black racism, anti-feminism, class collaboration and the "aestheticization of politics," a phrase originally coined by Walter Benjamin.

Why anti-Black racism? Because they believe, roughly, that the demonstrations following the George Floyd murder were a corporate-backed, DNC-sponsored psyop and that the struggle by Blacks for civil and human rights is a laughable distraction. Sometimes their racism is even more explicit. Laba, despite her crocodile tears for "deaths of despair" among the white working class, referred to the murder of George Floyd as the "death of a single smacked out fentanyl addicted ex-con." She has also referred to Floyd as a "lumpen prole," despite his regular wage work

employment as a bouncer and trucker, but her audience clearly understands this to be a dog-whistle, not as an accurate class descriptor. Elsewhere, she has said that Fred Hampton and Martin Luther King would be “intersectional libtards if they were alive today.”



Laba's tweet. Fair use.

Why anti-feminism? Because many of them mock any woman who desires a life beyond the home. Their discourse also contains strange, graphic sexual slang often lifted from 4chan.

Why class collaboration? Because they are constantly suggesting alliances with the “right.”

Why aestheticization of politics? Because they're only adopting this position because they think they're cool. As Adam Lehrer tellingly put it, “When I say a person has bad politics, I mean, that person has an uninteresting and poorly conceptualized politics, and uninteresting politics often makes for an uninteresting view of the world, and an uninteresting view of the world often makes for uninteresting art.” Try harder, Adam, you may attain the political hipsterism you so pretentiously crave.

Class collaboration, racism, anti-leftism, anti-liberalism, irrationalism, preoccupation with sexual matters and enforcement of traditional gender norms and the aestheticization of politics are hallmarks of a certain political tendency that emerged in Europe in the Interwar Period. I'm not a political theorist, so I'll leave that judgment to someone else. Whether you want to call them post-fascists or postmodern irrationalist conservatives, whatever they are, they are useful idiots for the right.

Speaking of the Interwar period, there was one figure who emerged during that time who, like so many of the useful idiots described herein, was a failed artist. There's no need to name this figure and I'm not suggesting these clowns match him in terms of evil, because they clearly do not, but they are emboldening precisely the same lunatic fringe that he did.



Apropos of nothing, a watercolor by Hitler. Tragedy and farce. Fair Use. Fuck You Adolph.

If we're talking more about the failed artist element, I would be remiss not to point out that the Nazis at least had cool uniforms, which were literally designed by Hugo Boss. These people have Pepe the Frog memes. Hilariously, Adam Lehrer refers to himself as a "Dada-Populist." It's bad enough to be fascists or fash symps, but these clowns can't even be cool fascists.

Two years ago so many of the Useful Idiots were ardent Sanders supporters, but it's now abundantly clear that they never had any real commitment to his politics. If they did, they wouldn't be throwing a hissy-fit and going full fash as they are now.

No, they supported him because it was cool to do so at the time. They're hipsters, and hipsters just roll with the tide to appear relevant. They have no taste of their own because hipsters are illiterate nerds. They are simpleminded consumers and repositories of media junk, which explains how they adopted this syncretic and incoherent ideology. Now, with many of them facing middle age, they have a deep anxiety about no longer being perceived as cool. They've ditched the skinny jeans for the brown shirt. Desperately seeking to remain relevant and edgy, they've become pawns in a game played by corpulent, Harvard-educated think tank squares.



The SA unit in Nuremberg, 1929

Image from Wikipedia. Fair Use.

