

course, Patrick Buchanan, who worked in the White House for both Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, has been railing against free trade for decades. Critiques of market economics and big business that cite working-class angst will likely be around for a long time.

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The Case for Nationalism: How It Made Us Powerful, United, and Free

Rich Lowry

New York: Broadside, 2019, 293 pp.

The newest intellectual trend on the American right is building a coherent ideology around the policies and rhetoric of President Donald J. Trump. Conservatives have experience with this. In the 1990s, the moral majority reigned supreme. During the Bush II years, right-wingers adopted a hawkish neoconservatism. Beginning with the Great Recession, right-wingers ditched the neoconservatism and adopted rhetorically moderate free-market libertarianism. Then Trump took over the Republican Party with his anti-trade, pro-entitlement, anti-immigration, and “Make America Great Again” ideology—also known as nationalism.

Thus, many conservatives are seeking to put some intellectual heft behind nationalism as they did with their earlier ideological flings. *National Review* editor Rich Lowry steps up with his new book *The Case for Nationalism: How It Made Us Powerful, United, and Free*. His book is the latest addition to a growing literature that attempts to put ideological meat on the skeletal nationalistic rhetoric of President Trump.

Lowry begins by defining nationalism as love of one’s national culture, language, history, institutions, holidays, and everything good in a nation. According to Lowry, nationalism doesn’t promote hatred of foreigners or other cultures, but it is an expression of love for your fellow co-nationals based on those common traits. Lowry correctly claims that nationalism is a natural ideology that has been with humans for a while, expressed in most countries and governments throughout time.

For Lowry, even though nationalism is natural and has existed throughout human civilization, government policy plays an important

role in nurturing it and indoctrinating citizens in its ethos. Although nationalism is natural, it can't flourish without constant government subsidy and cultural repetition, hammered into children from young ages. Those who object to nationalism do enormous harm to the citizen collective merely by doubting nationalism.

Lowry spends most of his book countering what he calls "the smear against nationalism." The smear, as he sees it, is that many people assume that nationalism is "inherently militaristic, undemocratic, or racist." He defends the democratic nature of nationalism briefly, so this review will focus on whether it is unfair to describe nationalism as inherently racist or militaristic.

Lowry insists that culture and other commonalities bring people together into a nation and that race or ethnicity is not at the core of nationalism. The first problem with Lowry's argument is that the word "nationalism" itself conveys ethnicity. Its Latin root is *natio*, which is a noun for ethnic group, tribe, race, breed, or other divisions by birth. Israeli political scientist Azar Gat's short definition of nationalism is "political ethnicity." Nationalism is therefore the "ism" (or idea) that states should be made up of, and represent the interests of, *particular ethnicities*.

Lowry is culturally constrained in arguing that nationalism is political ethnicity, which is good because modern society is rightfully scarred by ethnicity-based politics. I doubt Lowry even believes nationalism is ethnicity based or that he would embrace nationalism if he believed it was political ethnicity. That makes his enlistment of scholars who define nationalism as political ethnicity even more bizarre.

For instance, Lowry quotes Azar Gat that nationalism is "the doctrine and ideology that *a people* is bound together in solidarity, fate, and common political aspirations" (emphasis added). The definition of "a people" is important here and a lay reader might not dwell on it. That would be a mistake. Gat defines "a people" as "a common and distinctive historical entity between ethnos and nation. In order to be categorized as a people, an ethnos should have a sense of common identity, history, and fate." The word "ethnos" means ethnic group in stilted academic speak. In other words, in his book *Nations: The Long History and Deep Roots of Political Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Gat argues that the basis of any nation is an ethnic group. Lowry quotes him in support of a thesis that is the opposite of Gat's thesis.

Lowry next cites “the great scholar of nationalism Anthony Smith” to argue that nationalism “is the culture that marks off one country from another.” But Smith’s famous book on nationalism is entitled *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, wherein he argues that premodern ethnic foundations are the basis of both modern nations and those throughout history. It’s odd that Lowry doesn’t mention that.

Lastly, Lowry selectively quotes J. S. Mill’s definition of nationalism:

A portion of mankind may be said to constitute a nationality if they are united among themselves by common sympathies which do not exist between them and any others—which make them co-operate with each other more willingly than with other people, desire to be under the same government, and desire that it should be government by themselves, or a portion of themselves, exclusively.

Mill then lists many collinear causes of common national sentiment beginning with, yes, “the effect of identity of race and descent.” Mill goes on to downplay ethnicity somewhat by arguing that the “strongest [source] of all [national sentiments] is identity of political antecedents.” But if most nations were historically bound together by ethnicity, then ethnicities will also have a common history of political antecedents—a point more against Lowry’s definition than for it.

Lowry does nothing to counter, let alone acknowledge, these well-known points about nationalism’s ethnic origins. Instead, by citing scholars who define it as an ethnicity-based ideology, he settles on a definition of nationalism based on national culture. If Lowry had attempted to define a new nationalism shorn entirely of political ethnicity, then this would have been an ambitious and worthwhile book. Such a book would have had to ignore the actual beliefs and opinions of nationalists, but it would have been a praiseworthy effort. Instead, Lowry chose the easier route and redefines nationalism according to his own principles, pretends that famous scholars agree with him through selective and misleading quotes, and that critics who are operating with a *natio*-centered definition of nationalism are the ones smearing nationalism. This tactic is unconvincing.

Because ethnicity has formed the basis for most states throughout history, it would have been better for Lowry to counter that directly. Perhaps, Lowry could respond that nationalism in other countries is

ethnicity based but not in the United States. Indeed, most of his book is about the United States, and the most egregious examples of blood-based nationalism occurred overseas. But Lowry limits his ability to do that by trashing the idea of civic nationalism and stating, repeatedly, that America is a country defined by culture and land just like every other country in the world. The most special thing about the United States, in this worldview, is that we're Americans.

I think Americans are exceptional in many ways, largely because we have a foundational liberal ideology that is so unlike that of other countries. Even so, American nationalists are not exceptional and are very similar to their ideological brethren overseas. A recent Democracy Fund survey asked how important legal, behavioral, and immutable characteristics are for being an American. Everybody agreed that citizenship and respect for American institutions mattered—which is what we'd hope to see in a country founded on a liberal ideology. However, the most nationalistic group of Americans in the survey (called American Preservationists) also thought that ethnic, locational, and cultural definitions were comparatively very important for being an American.

According to the Democracy Fund survey of Trump supporters, American Preservationists are 20 to 50 points more likely than other groups of Trump supporters to say that it is “very important” to have certain ethnic and cultural identifiers in order to be truly American. Of those ethno-cultural characteristics that they value, 69 percent say being born here, 67 percent say having lived in America for most of one's life, and 59 percent say being Christian. Most disturbing, 47 percent of them said that it is very or somewhat important to be of European descent to be truly American.

The case against Lowry's book is not merely semantic. Lowry can redefine “nationalism” all he wants and misleadingly quote scholars to buttress his claims. But polling, history, and common sense show that nationalism has inherent ethno-centric and militaristic characteristics that can't be wiped away by redefining the term. Nationalism is not just “unity,” but unity around those specific concepts. They are some of the most ingrained and tribal within us, and when misused they are, and have been, profoundly dangerous.

Real American nationalists believe in political ethnicity. Lowry should have grounded his nationalism in the reality of that belief, or at least acknowledge that there are many differences among nationalists—such as between those who believe in a civic

nationalism and those who embrace the ethnic side of it. Ethnicity has formed the basis for most states throughout history, but nationalists go further. Since the printing press, modern nationalists mostly use ethnic foundations to build nations for their own political benefit when they gain power.

The *Ancien Régime* in France created modern nationalism. It was spread through the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars as a government propaganda tool to lower the cost of military mobilization. It's cheaper for the government to convince men to fight if they believe they are going to war for a nation of which they are eternally a member rather than for a distant government or monarch whom they don't personally know. That's why the state is central to modern nationalism: it's the chief beneficiary, as national projects are almost always led by the government.

Modern nationalism is based on a core ethnicity, but it builds on that core through social engineering, hence the term "nation-building." French nationalist Emmanuel Sieyes spoke of the need to make "all the parts of France a single body, and all the people who divide it into a single body." At Sieyes's time, France was full of different ethnicities that did not think of themselves as French—the Bretons, Normans, and Basques. He went on to argue "the nation is prior to everything. It is the source of everything."

Another French nationalist, Henri Gregoire, said that citizens had to be "melted into the national mass." The playwright Marie-Joseph Chenier wrote that the goal of the post-Revolution education system was "to form Frenchmen, to endow the nation with its own, unique *physiognomy*" (emphasis added). Forced assimilation of the non-French ethnic groups into an already-existing French ethnicity—represented by the spread of the French language—was the goal of the French nationalists. Until the late 19th or early 20th century, French was the first language of a *minority* of citizens.

There are three variants of modern nationalism everywhere: a government adopts the ideology to justify an increase in its power; an outsider group within the state claims to represent the "true nation"; an outsider group claims to represent a separate nation to build its claims to power or secession. In almost all these cases, the core of the nation is an ethnic group that must be built up and expanded at the expense of other ethnic groups. That is why nationalism can be an ancient ideology that needs to be both created and nurtured by the state, best summed up by the Italian nationalist

Massimo d'Azeglio who said, "Italy is made, but who will now make Italians?"

George Orwell wrote that the "purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality." He went on by stating that nationalism is quite distinct from patriotism, which is a "devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has no wish to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally. Nationalism, on the other hand, is inseparable from the desire for power." Nationalism is the health of the state.

Nationalist aggrandizement of state power goes beyond the domestic and inherently bleeds over into the international arena through militarism. But Lowry claims that those who call nationalism inherently militaristic are smearing it. He argues that nationalism is an ideology of love between strangers in a national community, not of hatred of foreigners. Yet Lowry uses war and militarism as examples to show how nationalism builds national sentiment, the most important component of nationalism. Lowry vigorously praises the boost in national sentiment resulting from the War of 1812, the Mexican-American War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War II in such a way that the reader could be forgiven for thinking that the goal of those wars was to increase national fuzzy feelings between strangers.

In this vein, Lowry heaps cartoonish levels of praise on Theodore Roosevelt and claims that liberals dislike him because they "find his hypermasculine advocacy of the strenuous life ridiculous and offensive to PC sensibilities." I can't speak for liberals, but Roosevelt was an awful president for many reasons having nothing to do with his exercise routine. His support for an income tax, trust busting, overseas military interventions, the creation of the Food and Drug Administration based off a work of fiction, and anti-Japanese immigration rules, to name a few, are enough to tarnish his presidency.

Lowry doesn't heap nearly so much praise on Woodrow Wilson, arguably the most nationalistic president in American history. Wilson mobilized the country for World War I, helped craft government policies to forcibly assimilate immigrants to a government-determined patriotic ideal, created a domestic army of "four minute men" to give patriotic speeches at public events, restricted unpatriotic speech,

censored the press, and generally did more to temporarily create a Prussia on the Potomac than any other politician in American history. Wilson's League of Nations and Teddy Roosevelt's criticism of that idea apparently knocks Wilson down a peg or two.

Lowry heaps special praise on Roosevelt's Great White Fleet that was sent on an expensive cruise around the world. If ever there was a wasteful militaristic vanity project, the Great White Fleet was it. It was obsolete by the time Roosevelt sent it around the world in 1907, having been decisively outgunned by the new dreadnought class of British battleship—named after the *HMS Dreadnought*—that was launched in 1906. But wasting taxpayer money to showcase obsolete battleships in foreign ports is a good thing if it builds national sentiment.

Nationalists in every country have been the most supportive of wars. It's one thing to embrace nationalism and blithely comment that "the right of other people to self-government" is important, but different nationalists disagree over which nations rightly own which pieces of land, whether co-ethnics in different countries should be part of the nation-state representing that ethnic group, and whether some groups of people even constitute nations. When nations disagree over these things, they often fight wars—some justifiably.

Israeli nationalists and Palestinian nationalists disagree over whether the other group is a nation that has a legitimate claim to the contested land in the Middle East. The dishonest nationalist response is to claim that's not a good example because one or the other nation isn't a real nation. But nationalists in both nations think their nation is real, that its claims are superior, and that they are worth fighting for. Of course, if called upon, both would defend their nation with violence. Nationalists' claim that their ideology is not militaristic is like communists' refusal to admit that their ideology would lead to the expropriation of private property.

Lowry does make an important concession that sets his book above those by other nationalist apologists like Yoram Hazony. Economic historian Mark Koyama wrote that Hazony "selects on the dependent variable," meaning that he defines nationalism in such a way as to exclude everything bad ever committed by nationalists. Lowry acknowledges that "where, historically, many nationalists around the world have failed is in not recognizing the right of other people to self-government." Unfortunately, he strangely backtracks on that wise admission by claiming that fascists and Nazis aren't nationalists.

Nationalists aren't all Nazis or fascists, obviously, but it is incorrect to claim that Nazis and fascists are not nationalists.

Carlton Hayes, the late American historian, educator, diplomat, and “pioneering specialist on the study of nationalism,” disagrees with Lowry. In his book *Nationalism: A Religion*, Hayes creates a useful taxonomy of nationalisms. He labels the last species “integral nationalism,” and it includes fascism and Nazism. This type of nationalism attempts to center the nation-state in the life of all citizens and focuses on the ethnic characteristics of the ideology, often seeking to expand the nation-state’s sovereignty to include all co-ethnics living in other countries. Few American nationalists fit into this category, but those who do are certainly nationalists.

The current rise of nationalism is a reminder that both wings of the American political spectrum are hospitable to authoritarianism, whether it's communism on the left or nationalism on the right. Conservatives like Lowry rightly fear and criticize the rise of avowed socialism on the left. They understand the dangers inherent in socialism and communism and the human suffering that inevitably comes with them. But nationalists, mostly overseas, have an ideological history that comes close to the communists for mass slaughter and tragedy.

Like Lowry and nationalism, far too many American left-wingers have embraced or defended communism by “selecting on the dependent variable” and claimed that communist governments that commit humanitarian crimes don’t count because they never tried “real communism.” They attempt to separate the writings of Karl Marx from the regimes inspired by him. In a pinch, some progressives don a Che Guevara shirt and shift their rhetorical emphasis to wage disparities or support for what they mistakenly believe are socialist welfare policies in Northern Europe.

Those on the political right, where I’ve resided for much of my life, correctly mock such arguments. A fair examination of communism’s legacy, from China to the Soviet Union to Cuba, North Korea, and Eastern Europe, reveals the scope of its tragic failure: about 150 million dead in futile attempts to strive for an unattainable and undesirable utopia. Communism is flawed in theory and in practice, resting on long-discredited 18th-century economic theories of value. Excusing it is bad enough; arguing to give it another try is completely unreasonable. The same standard should apply to nationalism.

Like those searching for a clean version of “true” socialism, Lowry spends much of his book attempting to defend and distinguish his

nationalism from the obvious historical examples of its evils and failures. To Lowry, it is not inherently ethnocentric and militaristic, even though that's what it's been to almost everyone else. He primarily does so by selectively and misleadingly quoting scholars of nationalism who disagree with him and, oddly enough, praising the effects of grand military boondoggles and wars. A smear is a false accusation or slander, and although we should politely debate nationalists, we should worry about the ethnocentrism and militarism inherent in just about every real-world example of nationalism. At the very minimum, such well-founded worry is prudence, not a smear. Some political philosophers claim that nationalism is a modern ideology, Lowry's rhetoric makes it seem *post-modern*.

It is blatantly unfair and inaccurate to label every nationalist a fascist, Nazi, or racist. But many people think there is a racial, ethnic, or xenophobic aspect to most forms of nationalism for good reason: there is—as many of the scholars cited by Lowry agree, as do a large segment of the most nationalistic subgroup of American voters. Lowry should have addressed that head on rather than tiptoe around the issue, redefine nationalism, and accuse those who disagree with his new definition of nationalism of smearing his ideology. Lowry's book is unsuccessful.

If you're troubled by the recent right-wing embrace of nationalism and miss the conservatism of years past that embraced religious values, neoconservatism, or free markets, just wait. In a few more years, hopefully, conservatives will shed nationalism and embrace some other intellectual trend with nary an admission that things changed. Perhaps we'll even be lucky enough to read a future book by Rich Lowry making the case for why that new intellectual trend is really the thing that conservatives believe, just don't expect him to reference *The Case for Nationalism*.

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Reason, Faith, and the Struggle for Western Civilization

Samuel Gregg

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Since so often “struggle” is shorthand for “class struggle” (without the redundancy), we tend to forget its equally appropriate use in describing efforts to preserve Western civilization, as Australian-born