



ORIGINAL PAPER

Redefining American Conservatism after 2016: New Intellectual Currents on the Right

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Abstract

Over the past decade, American conservatism has undergone a profound ideological reorientation. Traditionally anchored in a fusionist “three-legged stool” of free-market liberalism, social traditionalism, and hawkish foreign policy, the contemporary right is increasingly shaped by debates over first principles and the meaning of conservatism itself. This paper maps three emerging ideological strands—postliberalism, the Claremont school, and national conservatism—and analyzes how each seeks to redefine American conservative thought.

Postliberal thinkers such as Patrick J. Deneen and Adrian Vermeule critique liberalism for eroding the moral and communal foundations of society, advocating a politics oriented toward the common good. The Claremont Institutemilieu, associated with figures such as Michael Anton, argues that America’s ruling elites have betrayed the constitutional order and promotes a more combative defense of the founding against perceived regime decline. National conservatives, led by Yoram Hazony, emphasize nationalism, cultural cohesion, and skepticism toward globalism, seeking a conservative realignment beyond both liberal internationalism and libertarian economics.

While distinct in emphasis, these currents collectively represent a significant departure from Reagan-era orthodoxy. Using an intellectual history approach, this study traces how they draw on older traditions—including Catholic integralism, Straussian political philosophy, and anti-globalist nationalism—to articulate rival yet overlapping alternatives to fusionist conservatism. Rather than treating these movements as merely reactive responses to Trumpism, the paper situates them within deeper ideological trajectories in American political thought. In doing so, it illuminates how the post-2016 right is not simply undergoing political realignment but contesting the philosophical foundations of conservatism itself, with significant implications for U.S. democracy, political order, and the future of the American right.

Keywords: *Postliberalism; Claremont Institute; National Conservatism; American Conservatism; Illiberalism*

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The 2016 U.S. presidential election is often referenced as a moment of political rupture. Donald Trump's victory has fueled a radical reassessment of conservative thought (Borg 2024, 2233–45) and the emergence of a new intellectual realignment on the American right. Where postwar Cold War conservatism had been unified by anti-communism and free-market economics, contemporary American conservatism increasingly wrestles with fundamental questions about its own identity and purpose. Leading conservative thinkers began openly challenging long-held liberal principles, suggesting that Trump's rise was symptomatic of a deeper ideological shift that is likely to influence the substance of the policies expected from future Republican administrations (Field 2021).

This paper examines the American New Right and its visions for the future of conservatism, as well as its efforts to institutionalize these ideas. I argue that there are at least four distinguishable segments of the New Right: the postliberals, the national conservatives, the cultural militants and the alt-right. Although they sometimes overlap, they promote substantially different views for the future of the United States.

Each of these currents claims a distinct lineage in the American conservative tradition, and each aspires to redirect the core principles of liberal democracy toward a new vision grounded in hierarchy, virtue, and nationhood. They share a family resemblance: all believe that the classical liberal consensus of the late-20th century has failed. They regard the post-World War II conservative mainstream – the fusion of free-market liberalism, social conservatism, and hawkish anti-communism – as a spent force, a “dead consensus” ill-suited to contemporary crises (Ahmari 2025). In its place, they propose a reinvigorated illiberal conservatism that unabashedly embraces hierarchy over equality, order over freedom, and homogeneity over pluralism.

In broad terms, postliberal thinkers (such as Patrick Deneen, Adrian Vermeule) draw on Christian natural law and pre-liberal moral philosophy to recast “liberty” as disciplined submission to the common good, rejecting the liberal ideal of unfettered personal autonomy (Deneen 2019, 73–74). The cultural militants (anchored in the Claremont Institute and inspired by West Coast Straussian thought) put forth a revisionist interpretation of American constitutionalism that sacralizes the Founding virtues and demands a combative defense of the “real” American regime against internal enemies (Field 2021). Meanwhile, the national conservative movement (crystallized by Yoram Hazony's writings and NatCon conferences) champions an organic vision of nationhood and sovereignty, rejecting cosmopolitan liberal pluralism in favor of a homogenous, tradition-minded national order (Quast-Neulinger 2021). Finally, the alt-right represents the underbelly of the New Right, they promote a mixture of paleoconservative, christian nationalist and fascist ideas.

The emergence of these movements signals that American political thought is engaged in an “ideological realignment”- a period in which previously stable coalitions fracture and new intellectual frameworks compete for dominance (Chong, Citrin, and Levy 2022). This paper approaches such realignment as a contested struggle over first principles: the meaning of liberty, the proper relationship between individual and community, and the philosophical foundations of democratic legitimacy itself. The analysis draws on primary texts and manifestos from these movements, as well as scholarly interpretations of their intellectual genealogy, tracing how their ideas have evolved and intersected since 2016.

The analysis will unfold as follows. First, I trace the roots of American conservative thought, showing that today's New Right is part of a long tradition of American anti-liberal thought, rather than as a wholly novel phenomenon. Second, I argue for the classification proposed in this article and examine the four groups in turn. The article concludes by discussing some of the major implications of the rise of the New Right for US democratic future.

Historical Roots: Illiberal Currents in American Conservatism

American conservatism has never been monolithic. It has always encompassed diverse strands that were held together by shared enemies. In the early twentieth century and Depression era, substantial segments of American conservatism embraced isolationism, nativism, and racial hierarchy (Bjerre-Poulsen 2013, 20). Agrarian Southerners defended segregation as integral to civilizational order, while fringe conservatives experimented with eugenics or aligned with the Ku Klux Klan in reaction to immigration and social change. Historian Richard Hofstadter placed the emergence of populist conservatism at the end of the First World War, arguing that disillusionment with American progress fueled a reactionary nostalgia for a pre-modern rural order.

After World War II, such isolationist and conspiratorial currents largely receded as the United States assumed global leadership and anti-communism became paramount (Story 1990). The defeats of Henry Ford's America First isolationists and Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist crusade left these movements marginalized and labeled extremist. Figures like William F. Buckley Jr. deliberately worked to make conservatism "respectable" by expelling extremist elements—most notably by publicly rebuking the John Birch Society in the 1960s (Tanenhaus 2025, 320–326). Yet these expulsions did not eliminate illiberal conservatism; they merely marginalized it.

Throughout the postwar era, paleoconservative impulses periodically resurfaced. Barry Goldwater's 1964 campaign, Richard Nixon's appeals to "silent majority" resentment, and Ronald Reagan's attacks on "big government" all gestured toward a strain of populist conservatism skeptical of liberal elites (Judis 2016, 45–65). In the 1990s, this strain reemerged openly in Pat Buchanan's "America First" nationalism, his campaigns against immigration and globalization, and his warnings about cultural decline². Activists like Phyllis Schlafly opposed feminist reforms and interventions abroad, reviving older themes of hostility toward cosmopolitan elites and preference for tradition and hierarchy. Mainstream conservative institutions like *National Review* consistently distanced themselves from such figures, maintaining the boundary between respectable conservatism and dissident paleoconservatism.

The early twenty-first century provided new openings for illiberal voices. The Iraq War's failures rekindled opposition to foreign intervention, echoing prewar isolationism (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 23–60). The 2008 financial crisis and rise of President Obama intensified economic and cultural anxieties. The Tea Party movement (founded 2009) channeled anti-elite sentiment into calls for reduced government and taxes, yet it also harbored nationalist undertones (Skocpol and Williamson 2012, 52–60). Simultaneously, alternative media—online platforms like Breitbart and publications like *The American Conservative*—cultivated networks of dissident conservatives opposing interventionism, globalization, and multiculturalism. By 2016, these long-suppressed

² Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Great Betrayal: How American Sovereignty and Social Justice are Being Sacrificed to the Gods of the Global Economy* (New York: Little, Brown, 1998), 31-60.

strands—isolationism, ethnonationalism, religious traditionalism, and anti-cosmopolitan sentiment—had coalesced into a significant political force. Trump's campaign did not emerge from nowhere; it synthesized paleoconservative themes, populist grievances, and nationalist rhetoric that had been developing for decades (Green 2017, 82–90). Many of his advisers, notably Steve Bannon, actively channeled these ideas into his orbit. Thus, the scene was set for a post-2016 right that openly embraced illiberal impulses long suppressed in the conservative mainstream.

The Post-2016 Turn: Abandoning Fusionist Liberalism

Throughout the Cold War and beyond, the mainstream American Right, embodied by William F. Buckley Jr.'s *National Review*, championed the institutions of liberal democracy (constitutionalism, free enterprise, individual liberty) as defenses against totalitarianism. This grand alliance, often called fusionism, united libertarian economics with social conservatism under a shared commitment to freedom. In practice, what American conservatives sought to conserve was liberalism itself, understood as a political order of personal liberty undergirded by moral tradition.

After 2016, American conservatives made a decisive pivot from fusionism toward a more nationalist, anti-liberal stance. They explicitly link politics to morality and hierarchy, they “promise to impose a Christian worldview on society,” and denounce the old fusionist alignment as a “regime” of pluralism and equality run by a cosmopolitan elite (Acton Institute 2022). Pluralist society and civil rights are portrayed as threats to virtue and order, rather than civic achievements (KcJacques 2024).

Furthermore, conservative discourse has grown markedly more combative. Prominent right-wing writers now explicitly adopt Carl Schmitt's friend-enemy framework, describing politics as existential “war” (Slade 2024). Vice President J. D. Vance openly proclaimed that “our people hate the right people,” and urged cultivating enmity toward designated enemies (Kristol and Egger 2024). The widespread conservative belief that the left intends to “subjugate” or “exterminate” traditional Americans and that this looming tyranny must be met with equal and opposite force reflects Schmitt's logic almost verbatim. Schmitt argued that a functioning democracy requires homogeneity and he coldly asserted that “if necessary,” democracy means “the elimination or annihilation of heterogeneity” (Democracy Paradox 2020). Though few openly call for abolishing democracy, the new posture comes close. Leaders imply that the nation cannot survive unless its institutions are commanded by those who share the majority's heritage and virtue.

This shift shows how, in the post-2016 right, long-suppressed illiberal impulses (racial hierarchy, moral authoritarianism, exceptionalist nationalism) are re-emerging as central commitments (Pappin 2020).

The New Right is not a monolith, it contains various camps that may disagree what an ideal future looks like. In the next part of the paper I will focus on the four main groups which I believe are at the core of the movement: the postliberals, the national conservatives, the cultural militants and the alt-right.

Postliberal Conservatism

The postliberal current combines Catholic traditionalism with political communitarianism. Postliberals view classical liberalism as a failed experiment. Prominent figures like Patrick Deneen and Adrian Vermeule draw on Aristotelian and Christian thought to reshape conservatism. Deneen's influential book *Why Liberalism*

Failed supplied the movement's most quotable thesis: "liberalism has failed—not because it fell short, but because it was true to itself. (Deneen 2018, 14)" In other words, unfettered individual autonomy has eroded the social and moral fabric that once sustained communities. Postliberals therefore demand a re-grounding of politics in objective virtue and the common good (KcJacques 2024).

Concretely, postliberals advocate a more activist state that enforces traditional norms. They redefine "liberty" not as personal license but as "habituation, training, and education" in self-discipline. For example, Deneen teaches that true education is "the achievement of liberty governed by the discipline of virtue," implying that freedom is found in mastering one's desires, not indulging them (Field 2023).

Sohrab Ahmari, another postliberal thinker, warns that unfettered autonomy leads to chaos; the modern West is "unfree because it is irresponsible, unbounded, unattached," and "to be fully human is to accept natural and traditional limits." (Ahmari 2019) Following older Christian insights, he argues that fully human life means accepting natural limits. In short, postliberals invert the traditional liberal view: citizens are not born free; they must cultivate virtue through habituation and moral education (Field 2023).

In law and governance, their stance is similarly anti-procedural. Vermeule's *Common-Good Constitutionalism* exemplifies this. Drawing on the long Catholic jurisprudential tradition, Vermeule contends that law's purpose is "ordering to the common good," directing society toward peace, justice, and virtue (Vermeule 2022, 10). Judges and officials, he insists, should not see themselves as neutral arbiters focused on text or intent. Instead, they should explicitly advance moral ends. Vermeule scorns conservative originalism as an "obstacle" to real virtue, arguing that strictly following framers' intent can undermine substantive goods like family and faith (Vermeule 2022, 29). His alternative is unapologetically teleological: for instance, courts should favor laws that protect marriage or public morality even if these conflict with libertarian readings of rights (Baude and Sachs 2022). This approach amounts to a kind of modern integralism, where the law "teaches virtue" rather than merely enforcing neutral rules (Harvard Law Review 2024).

Many postliberals openly call for closer ties between church and state. Vermeule goes further and suggests that the separation of church and state is not neutrality but a secular bias that privileges individualism (Waller 2023). He argues for legally recognizing a dominant religion. Contemporary integralist thought, as articulated by scholars like Adrian Vermeule and Gladden Pappin, draws heavily on earlier Catholic anti-liberal traditions, particularly the work of early twentieth-century thinkers who rejected democratic pluralism in favor of confessional states (Waller 2023).

Other postliberals similarly draw on Catholic social doctrine to reject the dogma of free markets. In *Tyranny, Inc.* and essays, Sohrab Ahmari argues that unfettered markets have spawned a new "private tyranny" of corporate power that impoverishes the middle class and erodes social bonds (Lilla 2024). He calls for economic democracy reminiscent of Catholic social teaching. In a column for *The American Conservative*, Ahmari praises Cardinal Manning's example of marching with striking dockworkers, arguing that Catholic orthodoxy can coexist with robust social reform, not just comforting elites (Ahmari 2022).

Like Deneen and Vermeule, Ahmari sees market "freedom" as a myth unless embedded in moral constraints; he urges reforms (e.g. strong labor rights, anti-monopoly laws) to restore the conditions for community and virtue. He also explicitly deplores the "flight of authority" in the modern world. He marvels that "here is one last authority

standing...with a divinely ordained power to decide, to act politically in the truest sense, to bind and loose on heaven as on earth” (Ahmari 2022). In other words, the Pope’s sacramental power (even to change laws) is embraced as a model of ordered freedom, rather than distrusted.

In sum, for postliberals, the separation of church and state has failed to protect the common good, and the liberal focus on individual rights has hollowed out social cohesion. They seek to replace the old liberal architecture with what they call a “theocracy of virtue” – a regime where law is explicitly subordinated to a divine or natural moral order (Ahmari 2019). Their vision inverts the mid-20th century fusionist formula: instead of liberal public values and private faith, they propose public traditionalism and only private toleration of divergence (Field 2023). This is an audacious challenge to the American constitutional tradition, emphasizing duty and hierarchy over rights and autonomy.

National Conservatism

The second branch, National Conservatism, emphasizes a strong, culturally homogenous nation-state and rejects liberal internationalism. The leading figure is Israeli-American theorist Yoram Hazony, whose book *The Virtue of Nationalism* (2018) became a manifesto for this movement (Luban 2021). United around “National Conservative” conferences (NatCons) to share ideas, these intellectuals portray themselves as champions of national identity, viewing language, religion, and shared history as the essence of a nation (Quast-Neulinger 2021, 1091). Hazony is not the only key member of this movement, but as the founder of the Edmund Burke Foundation and the NatCon events, he is the most influential.

Thus, this section will focus mainly on Hazony’s critique against liberalism. Moreover, it needs to be mentioned that under the banner of the NatCon events many members of the factions within the New Right gather. For example, Patrick Deneen, Michael Anton and other intellectuals are active participants in these debates. The NatCon platform serves a multiple role: beyond promoting a christian nationalist view, it acts as a hub for uniting different factions inside the New Right and forming transnational links by organizing conferences in cities like London, Washington, and Rome.

Hazony states the origins of the nation in biblical Israel and 17th-century Protestant covenants: communities bound by a God-woven compact (Hazony 2018, 18). In his view, nationalism is the “best political order,” because it preserves each nation’s traditions and autonomy.

Who is the enemy? For Hazony, it is liberal “cosmopolitanism.” In Hazony’s eyes, post-1945 liberal internationalists (here he highlights John Locke, Immanuel Kant and Habermas) advanced a utopian “cosmopolitanism” that insists peace and progress require erasing national distinctions in favor of a unified global order (Hazony 2018, 6). He pointedly labels today’s liberal order as the “most dangerous imperialism”, accusing it of seeking to abolish independent national regimes through transnational institutions and norms (Hazony 2018, 18). This view turns the conventional narrative on its head: whereas many blame nationalism for 20th-century horrors, Hazony contends that *imperial* ideologies, inspired by Kantian philosophy, are the true menace to freedom.

Religion and culture are central. Hazony argues that American public life “must explicitly reject all forms of egalitarianism” beyond abolishing obvious injustices (Acton Institute 2022). He distinguishes between what he calls “public conservatism” and “private liberalism.” In Hazony’s ideal society, it is assumed that citizens largely share a

common religion and moral heritage. Minorities (Jews, Muslims, gay people, etc.) would live freely in their homes or communities, but they would not shape the public culture or laws. True democracy, he contends, is majoritarian and faith-based, not universalist: he argues that “all nations are born of divine covenant, not consent,” implying that sovereignty is a sacred birthright rather than a negotiated bargain (Hazony 2018, 53–54). Significantly, Hazony praises America’s commitment to civil rights in the 20th century as a just response to racial injustice, but he rejects more recent egalitarian developments. For example, he argues that equalizing liberal doctrines for women, immigrants, or gay people undermine the “strong public culture shaped by the majority” that he seeks to restore (Acton Institute 2022). In practice, he would roll back many reforms of the past six decades to preserve social hierarchies rooted in tradition.

Rather than a liberal civic public order with private tradition, NatCons demand a traditional public order with private neutrality. Hazony calls for an “inverted fusion” where the government actively promotes religion, family, and patriotism while tolerating diversity only off-stage. He explicitly cites Viktor Orbán’s Hungary as an exemplar of “illiberal democracy,” and Orbán has made guest appearances at NatCon gatherings.

Furthermore, National Conservatism often functions as a bridge between conventional democratic politics and overtly undemocratic currents: it presents itself as a respectable, “distinguished” movement even as it flirts with “blatant anti-pluralist and anti-democratic alliances” to achieve its aims. NatCon conferences have convened under one roof Trumpists, Straussians, Catholic integralists, and alt-right members, such as admirers of Bronze Age Pervert or even Curtis Yarvin (Sitman and Adler-Bell 2024). At the same time, NatCons insist they support democracy, but only a democracy redefined in communal terms. As Hazony puts it, he does “not want to live in any place” that doesn’t cherish liberty, but he blames the late-20th-century “public liberalism” for hollowing out American society (Acton Institute 2022). By their lights, the true freedom worth preserving is collective freedom: the nation’s freedom from foreign domination or internal change, and the cultural freedom of the majority’s heritage.

In short, National Conservatism represents the repackaging of America’s ethno-majoritarian tradition. It revives a vision from the 19th and early 20th centuries: government as the protector of a homogeneous community, not as a neutral umpire among equals. Whereas Enlightenment liberalism defined America as a union of individuals under abstract rights, Hazony & co. define it as a covenanted whole anchored in faith and blood. This call to “make America a Christian nation” is sold as a moderate adjustment of policy, but its logic – subordinating liberal equality to nationalism – is a profound breach with classical American democratic thought (Quast-Neulinger 2021).

Cultural Militants: The Claremont Straussians

Another key strand is often labeled the Claremont or Straussian wing. Centered on the *Claremont Institute* (California) and affiliated thinkers (notably at Hillsdale College), these writers see themselves as guardians of the Founders’ moral vision. Influenced by Leo Strauss and his student Harry Jaffa, Claremont intellectuals insist that the American Founding was animated by timeless truths and civic virtue, not mere interest. Charles Kesler, a senior Claremont scholar, argues that modern conservatism became “insufficiently political and insufficiently American. (National Endowment for the Humanities 2019)” He and others critique their colleagues for ceding the language of justice and equality to the Left; they want to revive the Founders’ own republican ideal – one in which citizens are willing to sacrifice for the common good. For them, the

Declaration's creed ("all men are created equal") is an objective principle worth defending (Pinkoski 2020). This outlook contrasts with East Coast Straussians (who were more reserved) and with mainstream conservatives who had focused chiefly on markets or tradition.

What distinguishes the Claremont camp is their militancy. Over time they came to view American politics as a life-or-death struggle. This was vividly encapsulated by Michael Anton's September 2016 essay "The Flight 93 Election." Anton warned that the 2016 vote was akin to the passengers of Flight 93 during 9/11: "charge the cockpit or you die." In his metaphor, a Hillary Clinton presidency meant "certain doom," whereas Trump offered a chance (even if risky) to save the republic Claremont Review of Books n.d.). By framing electoral politics as existential struggle requiring extraordinary courage, Anton articulated Claremont's defining conviction: polite debate was obsolete; only patriotic audacity could arrest national decline. Many establishment conservatives were shocked by Anton's apocalyptic tone and dismissed it as alarmist, but his argument struck a chord with a base that felt betrayed by elites. In Anton's telling, American conservatives faced a regime-threatening enemy within, and only extraordinary patriotic aggression could avert national collapse (Papadopoulos 2020).

This militant stance is grounded in a conspiratorial reading of modern history. Claremont writers portray American progressivism (from Woodrow Wilson on) as a "second Constitution" that supplanted the Framers' principles with a technocratic elite (Kesler 2014). They analogize today's identity politics and multiculturalism to past totalitarian threats. For example, the Trump-era *1776 Commission* (whose leadership included Claremont's Kesler and Ryan Williams) explicitly labeled progressivism and critical race theory as existential challenges on par with Communism or Fascism. In this narrative, there exists a hidden enemy inside: an entrenched academic-media-bureaucratic "ruling class" whose anti-Americanism undermines patriotism and virtue (Anton 2016). Anton has complained that too many self-styled conservatives prefer "ostrich-like denial" – insisting "everything is fine" – while foundational American ideals are "under mortal threat" (Anton 2023). He and his colleagues bristle at conservatives who "bow and scrape" to the very elites undermining law, limited government, virtue, morality, religion, and free speech. In Claremont's telling, such timidity is tantamount to surrender. True patriotism, they argue, may require outrage and radical measures. Anton's later writings, for instance, float scenarios as dramatic as a "Fourth Turning"-style crisis or even a Caesar-like figure to reassert order if the left's "corrupt oligarchy" cannot be checked (Anton 2023). Other Claremont figures have gone so far as to suggest that America is already effectively split into "Americans" and "anti-Americans," implying that loyal citizens must rally as if in a domestic Cold War (Lindzen 2020).

Claremont does not limit itself to ideas; it cultivates influence. The Institute boasts a *Publius Fellowship* program that since 1979 has trained students and young professionals in its philosophy. Hundreds of alumni – journalists, lawyers, congressional staffers, academics, activists – have risen through this network (Claremont Institute n.d.). Many now occupy key positions in media, policy, and politics. Notable examples include Michael Anton himself, who served in both of Trump's administrations, using those posts to amplify the "America First" creed he had honed at Claremont (Schwartz 2025). Another is Charles Kesler, who co-authored the *1776 Report* on patriotic education under Trump, embedding Claremont-style reverence into official curriculum proposals (Executive Office of the President 2020). In these ways, Claremont has carried its vision into the

mainstream: from think tanks to the halls of government, its creed of militant patriotism and Founding fidelity has been propagated.

Today, this “cultural militant” branch of the New Right firmly believes that American survival hinges on a combative defense of virtue. Through outlets like the *Claremont Review of Books* and *The American Mind*, and via its fellowship alumni, it has spread a vision of “total and unflinching allegiance” to the Founders’ ideals (Field 2021). Claremont Straussians see the progressive critique of America’s past as dangerously corrosive; instead, they urge conservatives to revere the Founding and revive classical republican civic virtue. In short, they have transformed reverence for the American regime into a call to arms: the republic must be fought for as if on a battlefield.

Radical Illiberals: The Alt-Right’s Fringe

Beyond these relatively mainstream intellectual camps lies a more radical fringe, often grouped under the broad label “alt-right.” This current is explicitly anti-liberal and authoritarian, though its members vary in style. Taken together, figures like Curtis Yarvin, “Bronze Age Pervert,” and Nick Fuentes form an illiberal counter-Enlightenment on the right. Each rejects core democratic principles in favor of hierarchy and mythic purpose.

Curtis Yarvin (alias Mencius Moldbug) is the foremost neo-reactionary theorist. Beginning in the late 2000s on his blog *Unqualified Reservations*, Yarvin developed a sweeping “case against democracy,” arguing that the American government is fundamentally ruled by an unelected “Cathedral” of left-leaning elites (academics, media, bureaucrats) who manipulate elections (Prokop 2022). Democracy, in Yarvin’s view, “produces only incompetence and chaos.” His solution is radical: he proposes reorganizing the government like a Silicon Valley firm under a single sovereign CEO with “absolute power”, advised by a board (Yarvin 2010). Yarvin explicitly rejects egalitarianism and popular sovereignty; he frames his ideal regime in terms of efficiency and engineer-like mastery over society.

Critics call it a thinly veiled monarchy, but he counters that monarchy is older and more stable than 20th-century ideologies (*Unqualified Reservations* n.d.). Though decidedly fringe in origin, Yarvin’s anti-democratic ideas have exerted a notable influence on the broader American right after 2016. By his own account, Yarvin “stopped believing in democracy” in the mid-2000s and began writing his blog in 2007. A decade later, elements of his worldview found an audience among the cadres of Trump-era conservatism. Venture capitalist Peter Thiel – an early Trump backer – was reading Yarvin by 2009 and echoed his disillusionment with democracy (famously writing “I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible”) (Prokop 2022). Both Thiel and former Fox News host Tucker Carlson developed enough fascination with Yarvin to discuss his ideas at length. More concretely, Vice President J.D. Vance and other members of the Republican Party acknowledged Yarvin as an intellectual inspiration.

If Yarvin represents a coolly analytical case for ending democracy, the figure known as Bronze Age Pervert (BAP) does so in a flamboyantly cultural and philosophical key. BAP, the pseudonym of Costin Alamariu, represents the alt-right’s Nietzschean strand. His self-published 2018 manifesto *Bronze Age Mindset* became a cult hit among young internet reactionaries (*The Hedgehog Review* n.d.). In emphatic, meme-laden style, BAP denounces modern liberal society as decadent and weak. He extols the “heroic ideals” of antiquity – strength, daring, spiritedness – and scorns the “slave morality” of equality and comfort (*Claremont Review of Books* n.d.).

Universal rights and bourgeois decency, he argues, are tools for the weak to bind the strong. Instead, society should be led by fierce, almost mythic elites – today’s would-be warriors – while the masses (“bugmen”) are discounted (Russell n.d.). BAP’s book rejects feminism, multiculturalism, and liberal tolerance; it even hints at a natural hierarchy of race and sex.

Although published outside traditional channels, *Bronze Age Mindset* exploded in popularity on fringe forums and among dissident conservatives by 2019 (The Economist 2021). Even Michael Anton praised it, noting how its “nihilistic vigor” appealed to youth disillusioned with mediocrity (Claremont Review of Books n.d.). This helped legitimize the text in New Right circles. Similarly, BAP’s themes have seeped (often implicitly) into more respectable debates. Some Catholic and traditionalist writers have even lauded his “masculine primordiality,” arguing that the rebellion against liberal modernity can be harnessed for religious renewal (The Hedgehog Review n.d.). In effect, BAP’s alt-right ideas have become a bizarre kind of catalyst: he and his devotees exemplify a raw anti-egalitarian ethos that resonates with strands of postliberal and nationalist thought. The popularity of *Bronze Age Pervert* demonstrates just how far the Overton window has shifted; ideas once considered fringe Nietzschean radicalism are now discussed among mainstream conservatives as sources of youthful vigor.

Finally, Nick Fuentes represents the alt-right’s street-level, identity-centric faction. A young American nationalist, Fuentes mixes Catholic integralism with white nationalist polemics. On his livestreams and at his America First rallies, he rails against every pillar of liberal democracy: voting rights, pluralism, secularism, equality – all are denounced as betrayals of a traditional social order (Fuentes 2023–2025). Fuentes explicitly champions a “Catholic” vision of America: in his words, “You’re either a Catholic or you’re with the Jews.” He longs for a return to “Catholic monarchy...Crusades...Inquisitions. (Sheffield 2022)” He openly calls for banning homosexuality, non-Christian religions, and non-traditional family life.

He has approvingly invoked the medieval Church’s authority and even praised modern theocrats. For example, after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021, Fuentes lauded the Taliban as a model for a “conservative, religious” government and joked that he seeks “Catholic Taliban rule” in the United States (Levy 2021). In Fuentes’s ideal world, liberal democracy – which he blames for secularism, social ills, and “decadence” – would be replaced by authoritarian rule enforcing pre-Enlightenment Catholic social norms. On his live-streams, he often literally cheers, “I’m a reactionary... I support autocracy,” and derides the 21st century as “trash” compared to a romanticized bygone era (People For the American Way n.d.). Democracy, in his words, has given America nothing but “obesity...divorce, abortion, gay marriage...pornography...[and] diversity.” By contrast, Fuentes rants, “Catholic autocracy [has a] pretty strong record. Catholic monarchy...just war...crusades, inquisitions – pretty good stuff. (WBEZ 2022)”

He has denied the Holocaust and uses antisemitic tropes without apology (Owen 2022). Unlike Yarvin or BAP, Fuentes is not a theorist of government; he is a provocateur and organizer. He leads the “Groypers,” a radicalized youth movement that in 2020 even launched its own “America First” conference to supplant CPAC (Institute for Research & Education on Human Rights 2020). He gained attention when President Trump met him at Mar-a-Lago (accompanied by rapper Kanye West), prompting outrage over Trump’s hospitality to a Holocaust denier (The New York Times 2022). Fuentes lies at the extreme fringe even of the New Right, but his existence underscores the full-throated rejection of liberalism animating some right-wing youth. Where mainstream conservatives recoil at

his language, Fuentes's message is clear: democracy and pluralism are worthless, and a racialized, authoritarian Catholic order is the true path.

All three personalities reject political equality, individual rights, and secular neutrality, and they openly disdain the core liberal premise that citizens have inalienable rights regardless of race or creed. In the volatile post-2016 climate, the NatCon events became a platform for these currents: early conferences included Catholic integralists (like Ahmari and Deneen), Straussians, and even admirers of Yarvin and BAP mingling under one tent (Patterson 2022). The presence of Yarvin at a NatCon meeting or the warm reception of BAP fans there showed how fringe ideas have seeped into the conservative mainstream.

At the same time, significant boundaries remain. Claremont Straussians still promote the Founders' equality rhetoric, and they stop short of advocating monarchy. Postliberal Catholics reject overt racism and publicly distance themselves from Nazi analogies, unlike Fuentes. But broadly speaking, all these currents share a family resemblance: they are disenchanted with the old fusionist conservative creed and increasingly illiberal in spirit. They are dissatisfied with procedural democracy and intolerant of elite secular culture. The differences among them are often one of degree. Fringe theorists provide the raw, uncompromising arguments (monarchy for Yarvin, Nietzschean hierarchy for BAP, racial crusade for Fuentes), and more mainstream New Right figures then temper and adapt those ideas into policy proposals or cultural arguments. For instance, Deneen's assertion that "liberalism has failed" has become a rallying cry beyond the integralist niche, and proposals to dramatically centralize executive power echo Yarvin's anti-bureaucracy bent.

In short, ideas that were once confined to an "alt-right" fringe now exert real influence. The techno-monarchism of Yarvin, the Nietzschean elitism of Bronze Age Pervert, and the white supremacist vision of Fuentes each represent an outright repudiation of the Enlightenment creed of liberty and equality. Yet all three have intersected in tangible ways with the broader New Right. Together they supply the most extreme counter-Enlightenment strand on the American right: a set of arguments suggesting that the liberal experiment has failed, and it is time to resurrect older hierarchies (Field 2021). Even if these visions remain partly fringe, they now echo (in moderated form) in think tanks, podcasts, and conferences of the nationalist right.

Conclusion

The four currents mapped above – postliberal Catholic integralists, nationalist authoritarians, Claremont Straussians, and the radical alt-right fringe – mark a sharp break with Reagan-era conservatism. Together they illustrate a comprehensive ideological overhaul: each recasts liberty, equality, and pluralism as threats rather than foundations. All four envision a political order grounded not in individual rights or neutral governance, but in hierarchy, moral virtue, and unified identity. Though differing in emphasis, they share a conviction that liberal democracy's 20th-century consensus is exhausted. The post-2016 right thus looks to older European and pre-modern models – divine law, national covenant, martial virtue – as the remedy for what they see as decadence.

These currents pose a profound challenge to the principles that have underpinned U.S. politics. Their rise signals that ideas once taboo – overt majoritarianism, official religion, even hereditary or technocratic rule – are now back in the conversation among conservative intellectuals and policymakers. If translated into policy, such ideas could

erode civil rights, weaken checks and balances, and remake the country as an ethno-religious commonwealth.

On one hand, the New Right's arguments remind us why the Enlightenment ideals of individual liberty and universal rights were adopted in the first place: they protected a pluralistic nation from tyranny of majority impulses. The New Right is, in effect, a counter-Enlightenment questioning that legacy. Their intellectual ferment thus serves as a stark reminder of the foundations of American democracy – and how fragile they may become if the nation embraces a more illiberal path. On the other hand, these debates also reflect real anxieties about social fragmentation and identity in America. The fact that such divergent strands have coalesced suggests the existing political system has left many citizens feeling unheard or threatened by change.

The transformation from fusion to fracture within American conservatism thus represents more than an internal conservative dispute. It signals a fundamental challenge to liberal democratic norms. The stakes, as New Right recognizes, extend far beyond partisan political competition to encompass the basic character of American political order itself.

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