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# CLAREMONT

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Book Review by John Fonte

## IDENTITY THEFT

*The Plot to Change America: How Identity Politics is Dividing the Land of the Free*, by Mike Gonzalez.  
Encounter Books, 272 pages, \$28.99



FOR YEARS, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION'S Mike Gonzalez has been an astute critic and active opponent of "identity politics." He completed *The Plot to Change America* just before the "1619 riots," which saw rampaging mobs—indulged by Democratic office-holders, sympathetic journalists, woke corporations, and leading universities—tear down statues of Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ulysses S. Grant...even Frederick Douglass. This lawlessness and its rationalization constitute a direct assault on the American Founding's symbols and principles, and a thorough repudiation of the American way of life.

Where did all this contempt for America's people, principles, and culture come from? Gonzalez's book digs deeply into the origins, ideology, funding, and major organizations and actors of the forces promoting this revolution. Examining how the artificial racial categories of "Hispanics" and "Asians" developed, Gonzalez highlights the critical role played by

McGeorge Bundy and the Ford Foundation in creating the National Council of La Raza (now UnidosUS) in 1968, which claims to speak for all "Hispanics." He discusses the seminal election in 1949 of leftist Mexican-American politician Edward Roybal to the Los Angeles City Council with the help of the Communist Party, former Vice President Henry Wallace, and activists like Saul Alinsky. (After 13 years on the city council, Roybal went on to serve 30 years in the U.S. House of Representatives.) Inspired by the Black Panthers, Berkeley graduate student Yuji Ichioka co-founded the Asian American Political Alliance (also in 1968) and coined the term "Asian-American." The radical feminist Kate Millet drew heavily on the work of Frederick Engels in her influential book, *Sexual Politics* (1970).

Gonzalez focuses on the role the U.S. Census has played in promoting artificial group consciousness and group preferences. He personally led the successful opposition to the Census Bureau's official creation of a new

preferential group category, Middle Eastern and North African. (Full disclosure: I assisted him in this effort.)

RECENTLY, THE CLAREMONT INSTITUTE'S Jeremy Carl has argued that groups like Black Lives Matter (BLM) are motivated by anti-white racism rather than class, Marxism's defining obsession. Race, ethnicity, and gender have indeed replaced class in woke ideology. The conceptual framework of a Manichean "narrative of oppression" is, however, utterly Marxist. In this binary, all politics is a struggle between groups that oppress and ones that are oppressed. Racial, ethnic, and gender conflict has absorbed and displaced class conflict in 21st-century Marxism. As *The Plot to Change America* shows, the theoretical bridge between old and new Marxism was built by Antonio Gramsci, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and particularly Herbert Marcuse.

Gonzalez's analysis of immigration policy is less persuasive. He criticizes conservative



immigration restrictionists, asserting that newcomers will “naturally gravitate toward the mainstream” (i.e., vote like native-born Americans) and distinctive ethnic groups will gradually disappear through intermarriage. But continuous mass immigration of low-skilled workers has hampered assimilation and undermined conservatism. One can only observe what has happened to Ronald Reagan’s California. Historically, the immigration restriction legislation of the 1920s fostered the patriotic assimilation of Ellis Island immigrants justifiably celebrated in World War II movies.

**F**IRST AMONG THE SOLUTIONS TO identity politics put forward in *The Plot to Change America* is to “follow the money” and “cut it off.” Gonzalez notes that a 2011 Congressional Research Service report “catalogued nearly three hundred federal statutes that specifically” list “race, gender, or ethnicity as factors to be considered in the administration of federal programs.”

Gonzalez does not discuss Christopher Caldwell’s argument in *The Age of Entitlement* that a “rival constitution” (and supporting culture) based on racial-ethnic-gender group rights has emerged in America since the mid-1960s. This rival constitution, writes Caldwell, is incompatible with, and meant to replace, the Constitution that governed the nation from 1789 until the ‘60s. Implicitly, Gonzalez calls for defeating this rival constitution and the culture that promotes it.

The author points to scholarly papers by Roger Clegg, Gail Heriot, Hans von Spakovsky, and Elizabeth Slattery detailing the executive orders and congressional legislation necessary to disable this balkanizing rival constitution. Gonzalez argues that “racial preferences and racial categorization are joined at the hip.” Therefore, the Census Bureau should stop using the artificial racial categories it created in the 1970s, such as “Hispanics,” and “Asians.” Instead, it could list citizens and residents by nation of family origin: Cuba, Mexico, China, Italy, etc. The president has the power to abolish these artificial categories by rescinding Office of Management and Budget’s policy directives.

The administrative-judicial structure of what Gonzalez labels the “Grievance Industry” is sustained by “woke” cultural forces whose *fons et origio* is our debased educational system at both the university and K-12 levels. What do we do about education? About the

anti-American curricula of Howard Zinn and the *New York Times’s* 1619 Project?

Gonzalez describes New York city education chancellor Richard Carranza, the man in charge of the largest school system in the world (1.1 million students), as the “face of the damage.” Carranza ordered all principals and superintendents to undergo training “to root out ‘white-supremacy culture,’” he writes. Recently, the New York city schools have announced they will introduce BLM “themed lesson plans” in the fall focusing on “systemic racism, police brutality, and white privilege.”

**G**ONZALEZ REMARKS, “WE NEED NEW schools,” suggesting more school choice, private schooling, and charter schools. Perhaps, but many private, parochial, and charter schools are as woke as New York’s public ones. Gonzalez’s stronger recommendation is for state legislatures and governors “to start weighing in.” They “control the purse strings for [public] universities and have ultimate control over K-12 curriculum.” He argues that “[s]tates can pass laws that enforce First Amendment rights on campuses; they’re not, like embassies, foreign territory.”

Gonzalez is right—indeed the story is larger. For the past few years, Republican state legislatures have introduced, and sometimes passed, laws to defend free speech and promote intellectual diversity in taxpayer-funded public universities. Unfortunately, Republican and conservative state legislators are split between two blocs.

Many establishment Republican and libertarian state representatives, influenced by the Koch brothers network, hope that the public universities will reform themselves. Koch and their allies, including the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), eschew “intrusive” measures and support non-binding policies that urge universities to adopt the voluntary “Chicago Principles” endorsing free speech (named for the university which developed and recommended them), while also imploring state universities to consider greater intellectual diversity.

Another “civic republican” group of state legislators, backed by the Goldwater Institute and the National Association of Scholars, proposes remedies not dependent on the good will of academic mandarins. This more vigorous approach will have real consequences for students who shout down speakers, and establishes an oversight system to reveal if

universities are suppressing free speech. The Koch-ALEC model has no provision to discipline students who “de-platform” speakers, nor any serious oversight mechanism.

To date, the overly solicitous Koch-supported approach to higher education reform appears ascendant among Republican state legislators. This way, legislators can tell constituents that they stood up for free speech, while also assuring university lobbyists that they will face no serious consequences for failing to adhere to the symbolic, essentially toothless measures the legislators have enacted. In K-12 education, few state and city elected officials have challenged curricula that denigrate America’s heritage and promote racial-ethnic-gender group rights over our common citizenship.

**I**N THE CONCLUSION OF *THE PLOT TO Change America*, Mike Gonzalez declares, “What you do with this information is now up to you.” Implicit in his analysis is the notion that “identity politics” represents a revolutionary assault on the American regime in the Aristotelian sense. We must make this point explicitly: a woke America will constitute a regime change, just as its affiliated rioters and theorists intend. The new regime, based on rejecting equal justice before the law in favor of group rights for the “oppressed,” has established a rival adversary culture.

In this sense, the woke regime poses a threat analogous to the antebellum challenge to American republicanism from an entrenched Southern oligarchy. Do we really believe that Aristotelian “civic friendship” is even possible with elected officials who are either contemptuous of, or, at best, indifferent to, the irredeemable debt that we, as American citizens, owe to George Washington and our Founding Fathers?

The election of 2020 is not primarily about taxes, big government, COVID-19, candidates’ personalities, or even the Supreme Court, important as that is. The election of 2020, like the election of 1860, is a regime election. As such, patriots must frame it as a choice between those who wish to preserve the American way of life and those who, for political, cultural, ideological, financial, psychological, and virtue-signaling reasons, are eager to demolish our priceless inheritance.

*John Fonte is a senior fellow of the Hudson Institute and author of Sovereignty or Submission: Will Americans Rule Themselves or be Ruled by Others? (Encounter Books).*

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