



David Mamet: How a Liberal Playwright Became a Conservative

That was my case from the 1930s to the 1950s, when the Democratic Party was not quite as leftist as it is today. I voted for Stevenson as opposed to Eisenhower, because Stevenson was the kind of candidate any intelligent New York liberal would vote for. But when it came to Kennedy against Nixon, I switched and voted, for the first time, for a Republican. I had broken out of the cocoon.



I voted for Nixon because, as an anti-communist, he was against handing over French Algeria to the Muslim communists, which Kennedy favored. Nixon, of course, had gained great popularity as the anti-communist Senator who sent Alger Hiss, the Soviet spy, to jail. That led to his becoming Vice President under Eisenhower. But it was the war in Algeria that led me to The John Birch Society. JBS founder Robert Welch was impressed with what I had written about Charles de Gaulle's betrayal of French Algeria, and he invited me to address the JBS Council (advisory board) at a meeting in Chicago, which I did. At the time, I was an editor at Grosset & Dunlap in New York, and surrounded by liberals. But it was my anti-communism that led me into the Republican Party.

While I was a member of Tom Brokaw's Greatest Generation, who experienced the Depression and World War II, David Mamet, born in Chicago in 1947, is a Boomer who experienced all of the political turmoil surrounding the Vietnam war and the cultural euphoric fantasia of Woodstock. He became a famous playwright, screenwriter, and film director. You may have seen some of his films: *The Untouchables*, *The Verdict*, and *Wag the Dog*. He was nominated for an Academy Award, and one of his plays, *Glengarry Glen Ross*, was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. But in his latest book, *Secret Knowledge: On the Dismantling of American Culture*, he writes in the Acknowledgments:

I had never knowingly talked with nor read the works of a Conservative before moving to Los Angeles, some eight years ago [2002]. I am indebted to very patient friends and teachers I met here, who inspired me to seek some understanding of the political process.

I would particularly like to thank Endre Bologh and Rabbi Mordecai Finley. They introduced me to



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the works of Milton Friedman, Friedrich Hayek, Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele, and, so, began my efforts at self-education; and to Jon Voight, who, among other acts of kindness, gave me Whittaker Chambers's [book] *Witness*.

As anyone can see, it is possible to spend the first 50 years of one's life in America without having spoken to or read the works of a single conservative writer. Indeed, Mamet — his mother a teacher and his father an attorney — was sent to the Progressive Francis W. Parker School in Chicago, which he hated. He writes:

I loathed school. I never opened a schoolbook, I failed every test given to me (I was sent back from second to first grade, and was enrolled in remedial reading classes). It never occurred to me to point out the books that occupied all my leisure time, and suggest that perhaps they left me little time for Dick and Jane ("Oh Dick, see Spot run. Run, Spot, run. Jane see Spot run," et cetera).

The habit, inculcated at school and at home, of thinking myself a failure, persisted through my school career, and, of course, it is to this ingrained assumption that I, in moments of despair, confusion, or indeed, boredom, default.

He then went on to study at liberal Goddard College, in Plainfield, Vermont. Founded in 1863, the college had as its first president Royce Pitkin, a progressive educator and follower of John Dewey and other proponents of "educational democracy." It has a "learner-designed" curriculum and is a member of the Union of Experimenting Colleges and Universities.

Many writers have graduated from Goddard without having read a single work by a conservative author. Goddard is part of the liberal cocoon that makes sure that its graduates emerge from its hallowed halls with liberal blinders. They then go on to shape American culture to fit their liberal outlook. They have learned to avoid having contact with any conservatives who might contaminate them. As members of the leftist herd, they dare not step out on their own and risk ostracism. Mamet stepped out big-time, and is now one of the most astute and informed critics of the Socialist Left. He writes:

Our culture is being destroyed by the Left.... The Left embraces Socialism, the herd mentality of slavery, as it offers the, to them, incalculable benefit of freedom from thought.... Our politicians, left and right, are, to belabor the metaphor, the wastrel son: they are free to spend, to chase fantasies, and to squander resources, for the resources are not theirs, and there is no penalty for their misuse or loss.

That explains how our politicians have been able to accumulate a national debt of over \$15 trillion and, like Barney Frank, one of its perpetrators, can retire and live happily ever after on a handsome pension. Nobody goes to jail for bankrupting the United States. It reminds me of all of those top officials at the FBI who failed to examine the laptop and luggage of one of the individuals involved in the 9/11 plot because they were afraid it would be illegal to do so. Their timidity and negligence resulted in the horrible deaths of 3,000 individuals, some leaping out of the windows of the Twin Towers, and the destruction of millions of dollars of property. Not to mention the pain suffered by the surviving families. And the FBI officials all got raises!

Mamet is equally critical of his Boomer generation. He writes:

The great fault of my generation is ingratitude. The ignorance stemming therefrom leads to folly destructive of the very world which, while it may not be the unachievable, inchoate utopia the Left



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desires, is a wonderful place to live in, and has given us a great country.

My ungrateful generation, rich and poor, has been living off a trust fund: the productivity of our parents, and of the 200 or more years of those who preceded them.

All of those Wall Street Occupiers are among the ingrates Mamet speaks of. They cannot understand that it is our free-enterprise system, and the free market in ideas that has brought prosperity and happiness to the greatest number of people in history. He comments:

All the old canards can be found, as if new-discovered, today on the nearby Volvo: "The Population Explosion: It's Your Baby"; "Wind Power"; "War Is Not the Answer"; "Coexist." No wonder the Left embraces Socialism, the largest myth of modern times and the most easily debunked; for it is a religion, and the tests of actual membership in any religion are likely to include an endorsement of their Foundation Myths....

It is to a dramatist, which is to say, to an unfrocked psychoanalyst, stunning that that which has sustained the Left in my generation, its avatar, its prime issue, has been abortion. For, whether or not it is regarded as a woman's right, an unfortunate necessity, or murder, which is to say, irrespective of differing and legitimate political views, to enshrine it as the most important test of the Liberal, is, mythologically, an assertion to the ultimate right of a postreligious Paganism.

Socialism is a religion based on a malevolent philosophy of history. That is why it leads to dictatorship, shortages, famine, and mass murder. I wonder how many Wall Street Occupiers would like to live in Cuba or North Korea? Mamet sees through it all and sums up the case for conservatism very nicely in these paragraphs:

America is a Christian country. Its Constitution is the distillation of the wisdom and experience of Christian men, in a tradition whose codification is the Bible.... The result of a 230-year-long experiment is the triumph of Judeo-Christian values. We have created peace and plenty for more citizens over a greater period of time than that enjoyed by any other group in history.

This triumph is not due to altruism, nor to empathy, nor to compassion, but to adherence to those practicable, rational rules for successful human interaction set out in the Bible.

We wonder how many of David Mamet's liberal friends will bother to read his book or be converted by his very persuasive arguments. But it is always a great moment for conservatives when a highly talented independent American intellect crosses the line and comes over to our side. Hopefully, Mamet's example will encourage other intellectually curious liberals to finally pick up a conservative book and read it.



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