

11-27-2011

Newsroom: L.A. Times: Bogus on Buckley

Roger Williams University School of Law

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life

Recommended Citation

Roger Williams University School of Law, "Newsroom: L.A. Times: Bogus on Buckley" (2011). *Life of the Law School (1993-)*. 229.
https://docs.rwu.edu/law_archives_life/229

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives & Law School History at DOCS@RWU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Life of the Law School (1993-) by an authorized administrator of DOCS@RWU. For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.

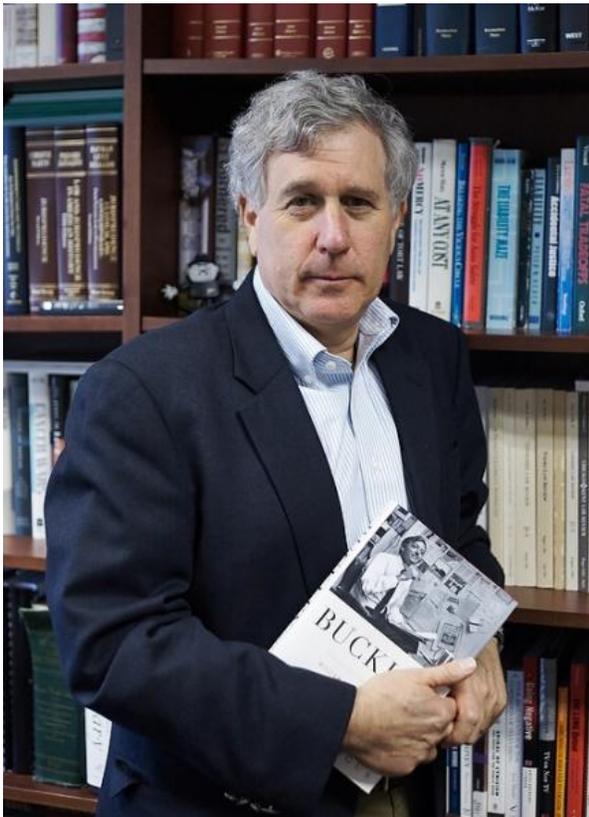
Newsroom

L.A. Times: Bogus on Buckley

Professor Carl Bogus appears in the Los Angeles Times discussing conservative icon William F. Buckley, the subject of Bogus' latest book.

From THE LOS ANGELES TIMES: "Op-Ed: God and man and William F. Buckley" by Professor Carl T.

Bogus



November 27, 2011: The modern conservative movement began 60 years ago with the publication of a book by a 26-year-old first-time author. Reflecting on that work teaches us something important about the nature and trajectory of modern conservatism, about the energy that propelled the movement and about serious problems with the movement today.

The book was "God and Man at Yale." The author was William F. Buckley Jr.

GAMAY (as conservatives often call this iconic work) was an attack on the young author's alma mater.

Buckley excoriated Yale for two things:

First, he complained that Yale's economics instructors were not indoctrinating their students in a pure version of laissez-faire economics. Buckley claimed that less than half of the economics department advocated that ideology, which Buckley called "individualism." The rest were Keynesians who advocated some governmental regulation of the economy, and therefore as Buckley saw it, economics training at Yale was "thoroughly collectivist."

The term collectivist still has bite today, but when *GAMAY* was published it had a menacing connotation. Collectivism was associated with totalitarian regimes and their rulers: Josef Stalin of the Soviet Union and Mao Tse-tung of China, whose forces were killing American soldiers in Korea. Moreover, some on the right were ominously warning that even if the American military successfully defended the ramparts of freedom abroad, Keynesian economic theories would lead America down a slippery slope into collectivism at home.

Second, Buckley argued that although Yale's religion department was academically "everything one could wish" for, it was failing to "proselytize the Christian faith." One course, though taught by a Christian, was a "completely non-dogmatic examination of the philosophies of religion." Another religion professor, who was also an ordained minister, kept "his convictions largely to himself." Buckley found this unacceptable.

What was leading Yale astray? The problem was the university's mistaken belief in academic freedom. Buckley argued that academic freedom was a myth. Yale would surely dismiss any faculty member who advocated racist or anti-Semitic views, and a recent president of Yale had declared that the university would not "knowingly hire a Communist." Yet Yale foolishly failed to demand that its faculty promote individualism and Christianity.

In *GAMAY*'s preface, Buckley wrote his two most historically important sentences. "I myself believe," he declared, "that the duel between Christianity and atheism is the most important in the world. I further believe that the struggle between individualism and collectivism is the same struggle reproduced on another level."

Thus did Buckley conflate economics and religion. The world was engaged in an existential struggle between good and evil, and purity in Christianity and laissez-faire economics were essentially intertwined and part of the good. As Buckley saw it, John Maynard Keynes was not merely incorrect in arguing that some governmental regulation of the economy was desirable. He was leading the West down a path to perdition.



Illustration of William F. Buckley, who wrote "God and Man at Yale." (Nancy Ohanian / For The Times)

One cannot understand the modern conservative movement without appreciating this sentiment. That is what it is — a sentiment — rather than an articulated argument. But sentiments are more powerful than logic or analysis.

From its origins in 1951, the conservative movement has perceived itself not essentially as an advocate for a more effective political philosophy but as a bulwark against evil. Though many liberals may be naive rather than malevolent, they are nonetheless leading America into something foul and wicked.

It is this sentiment that has imbued the modern conservative movement with so much fervor. It is what motivates the bombast of Rush Limbaugh and many imitators. It is why Ann Coulter books are titled "Treason," "High Crimes and Misdemeanors," "Guilty: Liberal 'Victims' and Their Assault on America" and "Demonic."

The sentiment also explains why so many Republican presidential candidates do not believe in evolution. Many on the right equate Christianity with conservatism, and demand purity in both.

Beyond their Mormonism (and Mitt Romney's flip-flops), this is the sentiment (or lack thereof) that separates Jon Huntsman Jr. and Romney from the rest of the Republican field. Huntsman and Romney do not exude the fervor of crusaders, and when periodically they try to do so, they appear inauthentic.

The crusading sentiment made more sense during the Cold War, when America faced a truly collectivist, atheistic and nuclear-armed adversary. It is becoming increasingly discordant with the times, and that is why some Republican candidates with considerable support strike non-conservatives as weird.

It is paradoxical that William F. Buckley Jr. — who, more than any other individual, infused the conservative movement with the sentiment of battling evil — enjoyed warm relationships with liberals such as John Kenneth Galbraith, Murray Kempton, Allard Lowenstein and George McGovern. Buckley was a crusader, but he was also a person of great and essential goodwill.

That should be Buckley's greatest lesson to all of us, whether on the right or the left. If there is something that can save us — from our own excesses, our own foolishness, even our own brilliance — it is essential goodwill.

Carl T. Bogus, a professor of law at Roger Williams University, is the author of "William F. Buckley Jr. and the Rise of American Conservatism."

Copyright © 2011, [Los Angeles Times](#)

For full story, click [here](http://articles.latimes.com/2011/nov/27/opinion/la-oe-bogus-buckley-and-american-conservatism-20111127). [<http://articles.latimes.com/2011/nov/27/opinion/la-oe-bogus-buckley-and-american-conservatism-20111127>]