

The Attackers: Review of David Mamet's Book, The Secret Knowledge by National Review's Daniel Foster: From "Brain-Dead Liberal" to Right-Wing Conservative

1. In a review of Mamet's book by Daniel Foster in the July 4 issue of *National Review*, Mamet expresses these very same conclusions leading to his conversion to "conservatism":

... the epic sham of "Diversity" for its own sake, and of Liberalism's byzantine articulation of political correctness as a means of stifling dissent, are among Mamet's primary targets. ... he holds a number of strident positions—on the inefficacy, on its own terms, of wealth redistribution; on the exigency of the traditional family; and, perhaps most of all, on the silliness of global-warming alarmism—that rank as the highest treasons among the bicoastal elite that is Mamet's milieu. (p. 40)

Mamet's politics are by and large those of the mainstream American conservative: a government of enumerated powers that enforces contracts and adjudicates disputes, provides for the common defense, and maintains national infrastructure, but steers clear of economic planning and ambitious redistributive schemes. He's for tax cuts and sensible deregulation of commerce, against affirmative action, cap-and-trade, and Obamacare.

The subtitle of the book refers to "The Dismantling of American Culture," and that is its defining preoccupation. Mamet knows that a principle contribution of conservative thought to the conduct of politics is the understanding that culture predates law; that law presupposes a robust, ready-at-hand culture residing in the collective unconscious; that culture cannot be legislated and that legislation is indeed impossible once a culture has become debased. He understands that progressive liberalism's great sin is the ignorance of these facts, its folly the attempt to control by bureaucracy that which was hitherto governed by unspoken, and indeed unspeakable, rules of human intercourse evolved and elaborated over countless generations. The result of the Left's attempt to preempt culture with "multiculturalism" and the other elements of "social justice" is the bringing to an awkward consciousness of that which had been previously handled unconsciously. This makes liberalism, among other things, *exhausting*.

The replacement of culture with the legislation of social justice, writes Mamet, brings about an effect ... exacting "a great cost in bringing to the conscious (unprepared and unskilled) mind those decisions worked out over time. One cost is confusion: angry feminists ... grieving children, and a growing disbelief not only in the possibility of domestic accord, but of the efficacy of the free market."

“The Good Causes of the Left may generally be compared to NASCAR; they offer the diversion of watching things go excitingly around in a circle, getting nowhere.” “It is not the absence of government, but the rejection of culture which leads to anarchy.”

Equally affecting is Mamet’s understanding ... of the connection between Judeo-Christian values and the success of the American experiment. The “irreducible understanding,” he says, that is the precondition of both Biblical and constitutional Law is the idea “that all human beings possess both a conscience”—understood here as our capacity to intuit our Divine, or at least unalienable, rights and duties—“and that free will necessary to allow them to either reject its dictates or to formulate them into habit.” In other words, though man is neither perfect nor perfectible, he is *accountable*, and that is enough for justice: not a “social justice” that attempts to level the unequal distribution of talent and fortune among men by the continued accretion of power to the state, but a rational, predictable system of laws that protects us from violence and graft and that holds us, with respect to one another, *to our word*. Such a system alone can give us the breathing room to maintain those norms of intercourse that we call a tradition, a civil society, a culture.¹

¹ Daniel Foster, “A Hard Man’s Witness,” *National Review*, July 4, 2011, 40–42.