

Tribes

Another **nice, long essay** by Bill Whittle. This time he's a bit – cross.

Mon, 09/05/2005 - 23:46 | [digg](#) | [del.icio.us](#) | [permalink](#)

Not only a bit - cross

Also a little bit - of a blathering idiot. But that may be his mouth talking; all the sheepdogs I have ever known have been all action and no talk. Plus they are usually a tribe of one and they wear no particular color.

If he is one of those sheepdogs and not a sheep in sheepdog clothing he belongs in the hundred mile rim of catastrophe along with all those other sheepdogs doing something.

by a reader on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 01:46 | [reply](#)

Re: Not only a bit - cross

We do not always agree with everything that Whittle says, but could you cite one of the blatherings that you consider especially idiotic?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 02:13 | [reply](#)

"Pinkos"

I agree wholeheartedly with the use of the phrase "blathering idiot" to succinctly describe Mr. Whittle.

I have not the patience for a full post-mortem of his hateful, psychotic rant, but shall merely present a couple of focused criticisms for now:

(1) His Pink/Grey dichotomy is ridiculous. Firstly, Pinkness and Greyness, as he defines them, have Absolutely Nothing Whatsoever To Do With Each Other - it's like categorising people into the Beethoven-lovers 'versus' the Southern-hemisphere-dwellers. For instance, why on earth should permissiveness (a 'Pink' attribute) run counter to, say, respect for science (a 'Grey' attribute)?

(2) Something I find particularly repugnant here is the latent

homophobia:

The Pink Tribe is all about feeling good: feeling good about yourself! Sexually, emotionally, artistically... without regard to... natural law

I shall be most unimpressed if 'the world', which purports to be socially liberal (at least in respect of this particular issue) now tries to make excuses for him.

(3) I know I said two before, but I can't resist poking fun at Whittle's "Clinton Pink, Bush Grey" verdict. I mean, which of those two believes in 'intelligent design'? I'd give a long list of other examples of how Clinton is more in touch with reality than Bush, but ID is the only instance where 'the world' is itself sufficiently in touch with reality to see that I'd be right.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 05:16 | [reply](#)

Re "Pinkos"

Could you explain how this passage

That has nothing to do with me being white. If the blacks and Hispanics and Jews and gays that I work with and associate with were there with me, it would have been that much better. That's because the people I associate with – my Tribe – consists not of blacks and whites and gays and Hispanics and Asians, but of individuals who do not rape, murder, or steal.

is consistent with the essay being an expression of homophobia? Is it also secretly an expression of hatred of all the other groups that he says are in his 'Tribe'?

by [Editor](#) on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 12:12 | [reply](#)

Just because the psycho is in

Just because the psycho is inconsistent doesn't mean he's good.

It's tempting to say 'the psycho doth protest too much'. I mean honestly, when in your life have you ever seen someone make the rhetorical gesture of insisting on their own lack of prejudice 'at gunpoint'. If it really happened that someone demanded acknowledgement of their unracism at gunpoint, would you be more or less inclined to think the person was harbouring objectionable views? Actually, though, I don't have enough evidence to honestly call him a racist, but my point (2) remains.

I didn't make that quote up by myself.

Whether or not you're prepared to call it latently homophobic (I certainly am) you can't deny that it runs counter to the ethos of

your own website (perhaps even more so if I were to take out those

...'s and quote the whole passage).

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 14:03 | [reply](#)

Clarification

(Sorry about the double post, by the way!)

What runs counter to the ethos of 'the world' is not the *definition* of pinkness but the fact that Whittle is associating it, on the one hand, with the mentality of all the people who looted, raped and murdered in New Orleans, and on the other, with 'nongreyness' (this is where my point (1) comes into play - so I suppose (1) and (2) are two aspects of the same point, at the end of the day). Since greyness seems to be nothing other than a mixture of practicality, intelligence and scientific-mindedness, Whittle's opposition of greyness to pinkness implicitly makes the claim that anyone in favour of artistic and sexual freedom must be lacking those qualities.

(An unrelated point follows.)

I can see that what Whittle is really trying to contrast, with his Pink and Grey routine, is 'denial of reality' vs 'acceptance of reality', though why these qualities should be regarded as marking out disjoint 'tribes' (when in fact, people usually accept some realities but deny others), and why permissiveness should equal denial of reality, are both beyond me. And he holds up the neocons in the White House as paragons of the latter (rofl). OK, well why are they refusing to acknowledge global warming, then, and putting it all down to a Giant Left-Wing Conspiracy?

Oh, I forgot, you guys it's all a big conspiracy too.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 14:33 | [reply](#)

post 1

Hmm, first Whittle is a homophobe.

Now **The World** is run by double-post-a-phobes.

Might this constitute a *pattern* of imagining bigotry?

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 21:45 | [reply](#)

post 2

i sure hope I'm right that u r imagining the double-post-a-phobe thing.....

-- Elliot Temple

<http://www.curi.us/>

by **Elliot Temple** on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 21:46 | [reply](#)

All your usual acumen on disp

All your usual acumen on display I see. Good work, Elli.

by Neil Fitzgerald on Wed, 09/07/2005 - 23:25 | [reply](#)

The World and Bill Whittle

As we said, **The World's** political views are not the same as Bill Whittle's. However, we do not believe that everyone who disagrees with us in any way is an idiot or a psychopath.

Nor do we tend to attribute events to 'big conspiracies'. In fact we have a bit of a **thing about conspiracy theories**. We don't think they're true. (Or are we just 'protesting too much', to cover up our latent conspiracism?)

By the way, where is the evidence that President Bush believes in 'Intelligent Design'? We see only evidence that he has been fooled into thinking it's a serious theory because, like most people, he has a deficient grasp of the nature of science. And where is the evidence that 'the neo-cons in the White House ... are refusing to acknowledge global warming'? Certainly they are reluctant to waste trillions of dollars on a largely religious ritual whose effect on the climate would be barely perceptible at most. But, as far as we can see, their **policies and statements about their policies** take the existence of climate change for granted.

by **Editor** on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 00:05 | [reply](#)

replies galore

-Okay, so Whittle's Pink/Grey "dichotomy" is neither sharply-defined nor all-encompassing. But are you honestly claiming you didn't understand the categorization and had major disputes w/ how he categorized folks?

-"Permissiveness", properly defined, might be considered to run counter to respect for science if for example the scientific method, as applied to human nature by examining history, would reveal that humans behave in wicked ways (and are more unhappy) absent moral and legal codes, and in lesser but still harmful ways when perverse incentives/moral hazards are present. As I think it would.

-I don't see the "homophobia" at all. That passage could be read (and was probably intended) as simply a condemnation of (heterosexual) "free love". The fact that you saw the phrase "feeling good about yourself... Sexually" and thought Whittle must have been talking about homosexuality is... odd.

-Bush is certainly (at least in his public/political persona) more receptive to "Intelligent Design" (though as **The World** points out, there's no evidence he actually 'believes in' it per se) than Clinton. You're saying that this makes Bush more "Pink" than Clinton? Are you using Whittle's definition of Grey vs. Pink, or one of your own

invention? I don't read Whittle's essay as setting up "Grey" as "reality-based" (including materialistic) and "Pink" as "not reality-based" as such, which seems to be what you have in mind. I think we can stipulate that Bush's worldview is more informed by faith than Clinton's. If you think this fact makes Bush more "Pink" (qua Whittle) than Clinton then you didn't read Whittle's piece closely.

-So Whittle might be a racist (albeit you "don't have enough evidence to honestly call him" one) because you look askance upon the fashion in which he, anticipating the charges of racism that his piece would engender from such as yourself, states that he is not? Heh.

Finally, a substantive point:

"Whittle's opposition of greyness to pinkness implicitly makes the claim that anyone in favour of artistic and sexual freedom must be lacking those qualities."

Or at least, doesn't have those qualities in the combination and amount that is characteristic of those who are "Grey". Sure. You seem not to know this: Whittle's "Tribe" setup is a *grouping*, not a "definition" per se. He is observing patterns among people and that many people generally fall into one category or the other. So it's not a "definition" in the sense of "Since you're Pink, ergo X". It's more like, "X, Y, and Z are true of you... these are Pink tendencies... so you lean 'Pink'". You can argue that this pattern doesn't exist and that Whittle is wrong to think that it does, or you can argue that Whittle is wrong in some or most of the categorizations he has put forward, but you haven't done either (except to say that Bush can't be "Pink" because he supposedly believes in "Intelligent Design", which is a non sequitur).

"I can see that what Whittle is really trying to contrast, with his Pink and Grey routine, is 'denial of reality' vs 'acceptance of reality', though why these qualities should be regarded as marking out disjoint 'tribes' (when in fact, people usually accept some realities but deny others), and why permissiveness should equal denial of reality, are both beyond me."

They're fuzzy groupings, generalizations. Yes, some people really have a problem with extracting generalized groupings from observations, though I don't understand why.

"And he holds up the neocons in the White House as paragons of the latter (rofl)."

What's a "neocon" exactly, and which people in the White House are them? Remember, you don't like fuzzy, general categorizations... :-)

" OK, well why are they refusing to acknowledge global warming, then, and putting it all down to a Giant Left-Wing Conspiracy?"

Who "refuses to acknowledge" global warming? Global warming (lowercase), if it means anything, = the world getting warmer (on average - how that average is to be taken, must be defined BTW)

according to measured temperatures. Has Bush or someone else refused to acknowledge the existence, or accuracy, of the temperature record from circa 1850-2000, and the mathematical fact that it evinces a warming trend (assuming of course that it does)?

Perhaps you mean to refer to "Global Warming" here, i.e. the hypothesis that (1) the earth's temperature will get significantly warmer in *the future* due to a particular, easy to understand heat-trapping effect people have identified and termed "the greenhouse effect" and the hypothesis that this "greenhouse effect" will dominate all other effects present in the oceano-atmospheric system (as well as fluctuations in the sun's energy output), (2) this warming will be bad (for us) in general, and (3) we can reverse it significantly by altering our behavior in some realistic way (and in a way whose benefits outweigh the costs).

Problem is, it's still untrue to claim that Bush "refuses to acknowledge" this hypothesis. I'm quite certain he acknowledges that the hypothesis exists (as do I). That's not the point. I guess what you are really "accusing" Bush of is being unwilling to stake our economy on the hypothesis, in toto, being correct. Well yeah. I am too.

It's just a hypothesis after all, buttressed (perhaps - I'm not even sure one can honestly say it's buttressed) by some (who knows how accurate or complete) computer modelling. Also, ALL of (1), (2), and (3) have to be true for the action you presumably desire to be worthwhile. I'm not even sure that (1) is true, myself. It looks as if **The World** is (understandably) stuck on (3). Either way, this all is a hypothesis which is only as strong as its weakest link. So why would we alter our entire domestic policy and hamstring our economy based on a hypothesis with so little evidence behind it? Is that "acknowledging reality", or its opposite? Is "But still, let's just sign Kyoto anyway, or at least string along the process/talks, because we need to get along, besides, we can fix the details later" (Clinton's evident stance) based on reality, or its opposite? Ok, I know your answer to that. As you know mine - and Bush's.

by blixa on Thu, 09/08/2005 - 04:13 | [reply](#)

Re: replies galore

Re homosexuality, I think he means this passage: "do their own thing without regard to ... natural law". Homophobes consider homosexuality unnatural, right?

by a reader on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 00:34 | [reply](#)

Oh, I see

Good point. Another example: Race bigots consider race-mixing unhealthy. I say "Don't be unhealthy." Therefore I must be a race-bigot!

That was fun :-)

by blixax on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 21:50 | [reply](#)

Blixax, master of logic, and y

Blixax, master of logic, and yet a race bigot. What an unlikely combination! :-/

-- Elliot Temple
<http://www.curi.us/>

by [Elliot Temple](#) on Fri, 09/09/2005 - 22:30 | [reply](#)

Code Words

One of these days **The World** might do a post on code words, those words in conjunction that have an implicit meaning for the doctrinally informed. Some examples for consideration?:

Natural Law
Climate Change
Neo-Con
Intelligent Design

On the other hand, this could post might seem to border on the edge of Conspiracy Theory. To clarify, I wonder if these words are born into the world of political discussion fully formed, or are they someone's intentional invention. Add code words of your choice and the daffy definitions that might go with them. It could be fun!

by a reader on Sat, 09/10/2005 - 01:52 | [reply](#)

Sorry it took me a while to r

Sorry it took me a while to return, but in truth I was rather ashamed of my unwarranted outburst at Elliot Temple. However, I see that blixax has written a thorough reply, deserving of consideration.

- "Permissiveness", properly defined, might be considered to run counter to respect for science if for example the scientific method, as applied to human nature by examining history, would reveal that humans behave in wicked ways (and are more unhappy) absent moral and legal codes, and in lesser but still harmful ways when perverse incentives/moral hazards are present. As I think it would.

Well, I guess that's possible, but when a polemicist like Whittle writes a diatribe like that, it can surely be taken for granted that his targets are *not* just some tiny, defenceless, powerless groups/ideologies, but rather, ones that hold some sway and are worth the effort of attacking. And to the best of my knowledge, there is no significant groundswell of public opinion in favour of a total absence of moral or legal codes. However, there *is* a

significant battle of ideas going on in American right now around

such issues as gay marriage and whether gays should be allowed into the priesthood and so on (perhaps there are others, but my ignorance of US politics prevents me from reeling off a list). The 'live' issue of abortion rights also springs to mind. Therefore, the most reasonable conclusion I can draw is that Whittle was indirectly referencing the 'permissive' sides of *those* debates. Perhaps I'm wrong, but at least you can see the logic in my madness.

-I don't see the "homophobia" at all. That passage could be read (and was probably intended) as simply a condemnation of (heterosexual) "free love". The fact that you saw the phrase "feeling good about yourself... Sexually" and thought Whittle must have been talking about homosexuality is... odd.

OK well one of the main reasons for the association I made was that in this country (the UK) the colour pink just *is* associated with homosexuality for some reason (gay men in particular). Perhaps I was wrong in leaping to the conclusion that it's the same in America. As for Whittle's phrase "feeling good about yourself... Sexually", well let's do some of that free association Whittle recommends: Brainstorm some possible reasons why a person might not feel good about themselves sexually. I'd be surprised if 'because they're homosexual (and happen to live in one of the less tolerant parts of our society)' wasn't one of the first ideas that came into your head.

But fair enough, maybe I was seeing a bit more than he really implied. However, even if that's true, my point about permissiveness being opposed to the desirable attributes of greyness remains...

So it's not a "definition" in the sense of "Since you're Pink, ergo X". It's more like, "X, Y, and Z are true of you... these are Pink tendencies... so you lean 'Pink'"

Ah. You're right, I hadn't fully grasped that point.

You can argue that this pattern doesn't exist

That's precisely what I would argue. I have anecdotal evidence: I spent a few years in academia, going to conferences and meeting various people (mathematicians). A substantial majority of those I conversed with leaned to the liberal sides of the various 'moral issues' I mentioned above, and Whittle would thereby be inclined to call them 'Pinks'. At the same time, I judged that these people had far greater understanding and respect for science than the general public, and moreover a much greater willingness and ability to base their political opinions on reasoned argument, and even science when possible. This qualifies them as 'Greys'. I tentatively predict that this tendency towards simultaneous Pink and Grey is to be found throughout the world's scientific community, which therefore stands as so massive a counterexample to Whittle's 'pattern' as to make it useless. I suspect David Deutsch, with his much wider experience of academia, will be able to corroborate this.

If you think this fact makes Bush more "Pink" (qua

Whittle) than Clinton then you didn't read Whittle's piece closely.

I beg to differ.

(a) Pinkness, as best I can tell, incorporates the attribute of believing something irrational because it makes you feel good. ID is irrational. But it makes the religious right feel good.

(b) Greyness seems to incorporate the attribute of respect for the best scientific theories, even to the extent that they may contradict hopes we hold dear. Clinton, by rejecting ID, exhibits greater respect for science than Bush.

-So Whittle might be a racist (albeit you "don't have enough evidence to honestly call him" one) because you look askance upon the fashion in which he, anticipating the charges of racism that his piece would engender from such as yourself, states that he is not? Heh.

Are you honestly unfamiliar with the phenomenon of the phrase "Now I'm no racist, but" prefixing a racial attack (not that it necessarily does here)?

What's a "neocon" exactly, and which people in the White House are them? Remember, you don't like fuzzy, general categorizations... :-)

Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, for instance.

Perhaps you mean to refer to "Global Warming" here, i.e. the hypothesis that (1) the earth's temperature will get significantly warmer in *the future* due to a particular, easy to understand heat-trapping effect people have identified and termed "the greenhouse effect" and the hypothesis that this "greenhouse effect" will dominate all other effects present in the oceano-atmospheric system (as well as fluctuations in the sun's energy output), (2) this warming will be bad (for us) in general, and (3) we can reverse it significantly by altering our behavior in some realistic way (and in a way whose benefits outweigh the costs).

Yes. I mean (1), (2) and (3). Overwhelmingly, the leading scientists in the field accept (1) and (2) and the first half of (3). As proof, I point to [Naomi Oreske's paper](#).) The cost-benefit thing, admittedly, falls outside their area of expertise. However, a point is reached where the severity of (2) makes it perverse, to say the least, that we're already doing the best we can cost-benefit-wise.

I shall make no defense of Kyoto, as I don't know enough about it. But some market-based system of "carbon-trading" seems an obvious and relatively painless catalyst for the necessary research into greener energy.

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