Letter from Washington
Samuel Francis*

Tabula Rasa

If George Bush accomplishes nothing else in his lifetime, he has at least earned a secure niche in future editions of "Trivial Pursuit." Not since Martin Van Buren trounced the Whigs in 1836 has an incumbent vice president been elected to the White House. The lackluster record of Andrew Jackson's successor perhaps does not inspire optimism about the new administration, but, as most Americans who bothered to vote probably realized, it will beat the socks off what Michael Dukakis would have offered.

Among those voters who cast their ballots for Mr. Bush were most American conservatives, who had never previously supported him but who finally signed on with enthusiasm. Having wasted their ammunition in fighting for Jack Kemp, Pat Robertson, Robert Dole, and Pierre DuPont, conservatives now came to imagine that Mr. Bush's fusillades against Mr. Dukakis represented their own victory, and they gladly galloped off with him to pump their last rounds into the Democratic corpse.

But despite the Bush victory, the brute fact is that American conservatism is beginning to resemble downtown Beirut in its political and philosophical disintegration. Mr. Bush himself is nothing if not an incarnation of the large yacht club that has spawned Lodges and Rockefellers, and for all the bravado of

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"morning in America" and "we're ready to lead," the Taft-Goldwater-Reagan wing of the GOP, along with the Old Right, the New Right, the neo-conservatives, the First, Second and Third Generations, the libertarians, the evangelicals, the Southern, Catholic, and Neo-Medieval Rights, and the many-splintered school of Leo Strauss all were dispatched to the showers.

No doubt most of these grouplets will survive in the recesses of their own political, philosophical, and tax-exempt caverns, and the nether portions of the Bush administration may provide a source of relatively honest income for many. But none has much prospect of setting the pace of the Bush administration. Mr. Bush's main campaign advisers and Cabinet officials are not known to be the sort of men who will snooze their afternoons away while the guardians of the damp brow and the pure heart march off with the government.

The political decline of the American right is matched -- perhaps even caused -- by its philosophical decomposition, and no text better illustrates the disintegration of the conservative mind in the last few years than Professor Charles R. Kesler's introduction to a recent anthology of conservative essays. Keeping the Tablets: Modern American Conservative Thought, edited by Mr. Kesler and William F. Buckley, Jr. is a revised version of a collection originally published by Mr. Buckley in 1970. As the new title suggests, the current edition purports to pronounce an orthodoxy to which the American Right should adhere.

But the tablets Mr. Kesler offers are etched in a strange tongue. While his anthology retains selections from such major

conservative minds of the present and recent past as Russell Kirk, James Burnham, and Willmoore Kendall, Mr. Kesler seems to regard most of these as rather like museum pieces, exhibited mainly for their quaintness. He makes it his business to re-define American conservatism in such a way as to exclude from it what once were considered its representative voices.

It is Mr. Kesler's contention that the Declaration of Independence, or rather five words from it, is the "central idea," as Abraham Lincoln called it, of our political tradition. The success of liberalism, Mr. Kesler thinks, is due to the liberals' misappropriation of this idea, with the result that "it has become easy for modern liberals to seize the moral high ground on virtually any issue." Conservatives may gain power if, like the left, they "know the magic words needed to unlock our highest traditions." His counsel, then, is to resist the left not by rejecting its incantations to equality but by stealing them, and by relegating to the back shelves those formulations of conservatism that do not center on equality or which interpret the Declaration and the American tradition differently.

> "The American republic," writes Mr. Kesler, claims to be based on self-evident truths, first among them that "all men are created equal." Properly understood -- meaning an equality of rights, not of virtue, wisdom, or talents, an equality reflecting man's humanity, i.e., his place in nature and the universe -- this <u>is</u> self-evidently true. But it has not fared well with the majority of conservative thinkers over the past few decades....

Yet Mr. Kesler nowhere explains why the Declaration should be

taken as the defining document of the American tradition, let alone why the "created equal" formula should define the Declaration itself. Had he found space in his 450-page collection for M.E. Bradford's essay "The Heresy of Equality," he would have afforded his readers an opportunity to learn how the Declaration may be read in other ways. He and Mr. Buckley included two essays by Harry Jaffa, Mr. Kesler's mentor, but could find no room for Mr. Bradford's article, itself a reply to one of those by Mr. Jaffa. Whatever may be said of human beings, some essayists apparently are more equal than others.

Nor does Mr. Kesler explain in what way it is "self-evident" that all men are created equal. Were it so, why does anyone deny it, and why are there not only conflicting conservative understandings of what the slogan means but also different liberal and socialist interpretations? If the phrase means "equality of rights," what are these rights? Is that the same as "equality of opportunity," and is it possible to have real equality of rights or of opportunity unless there is first equality of condition? Does not a serious commitment to "equality of rights" as the ideal around which political, legal, social, and economic institutions are to be built drag us ineluctably toward a levelled wasteland over which a leviathan state presides for the enforcement of equality and in which a political and economic regimen centered on and driven by envy and by what President Washington called the "spirit of innovation" prevails?

"Russell Kirk, Friedrich Hayek, and Irving Kristol," Mr. Kesler writes, "would agree that a healthy nation cannot really be

dedicated to any proposition or abstract truth, because a nation is a kind of spontaneous social order emerging from historical experience and the unguided evolution of market and cultural forces." This kind of traditionalism, which avoids universalist assertions, in Mr. Kesler's view accounts for the conservative failure "to bring about a genuine political realignment." "The difficulty is that conservatism seems to have no clear commitment to those principles or, more precisely, that it does not seem to understand why they are so important. It has not yet learned the vernacular of American politics, despite its great and numerous successes."

For all his critique of conventional conservative traditionalism, however, Mr. Kesler nowhere offers a defense of the truth of the philosophical abstraction he espouses. His defense of equality as the center of the American order is merely that it is our tradition, "our ancient faith," as Lincoln put it, and this line of defense does not differ in form from the arguments of other, conventional conservative traditionalists such as Mr. Kirk, Bradford, or Kendall, except that they make a historically more literate case for their very different reading of what the American tradition is.

One suspects that Mr. Kesler offers no philosophical defense of his idea of equality because there is no such defense. John Locke (and Thomas Jefferson, in so far as he was Locke's disciple) presumed an anthropology of the "state of nature" and a "social contract" that never existed. The natural equality of rights by which Mr. Kesler wants to define America as a political order is

entirely derivative from Lockean fiction. It cannot stand in the absence of this fiction, nor can Locke's view of government and society as artifical products of the universal consent of its members. Pace Mr. Kesler, the U.S. Constitution was not "made" at Philadelphia in three months, but in the long and complex evolution of European, British, colonial, and post-colonial history. At no time in the eighteenth century were Americans in a "state of nature," and the state and federal constitutions they drafted were in no way Lockean social contracts.

Whatever facile charms Mr. Kesler's egalitarianism may possess, it has managed to miss the point of the teaching that traditionalists have long asserted. That point is to defend an inherited way of life that cannot be reduced to easy formulas and neat slogans, and which philosophical texts and legalistic charters by themselves cannot adequately articulate. When conservative leaders have understood, and based their campaigns and policies upon, this concrete, specific, and habitual ethos, which, as Kendall perceived, Americans understand "in their hips," they have prospered. When, like Mr. Jaffa's other disciple, Rep. Jack Kemp,[**] they have followed Mr. Kesler's counsel, they have failed miserably.

Political success, of course, is of less importance to those who keep the real American tablets than the task of preserving the tablets themselves. As long as they are intact, we will be able to distinguish them from counterfeits such as Mr. Kesler offers,

[**] -- See Jack Kemp, "Democratic Equality: A Conservative Idea?" Intercollegiate Review, XX (Spring-Summer, 1985), 51-55.

and there will be some firm ground from which their keepers may challenge, rather than merely mimic, those who try to erase them.

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Letter from Washington

Samuel Francis*

The Drugged War

When President-elect George Bush announced a week before his inauguration that his new "drug czar" would be former Education Secretary William Bennett, the air began to seep out of the tires of his new presidency before it even got on the road. With minimal qualifications to head President Reagan's Education Department, Mr. Bennett succeeded in leaving Washington's youngest bureaucracy even more bloated and expensive than it was when he took it over. With absolutely no qualifications to run the nation's much ballyhooed "war on drugs," Mr. Bennett, before he's done, may well manage to drive the whole country to drink.

Having penned a 70-page doctoral dissertation, published a short, ghost-written, and inconsequential tract on affirmative action, and endeared himself to a cabal of neo-conservative journalists and cash cows, Mr. Bennett was deemed competent not only to run the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Department of Education but also to appoint himself the unofficial guru of "values," "Western civilization," and other slogans that trip too easily from the lips of 1980s conservatives. Nevertheless, Mr. Bennett had administered the National Humanities Center in Chapel Hill and could plausibly claim to know something about approving grants of public moneys to academics unable to finance their esoteric interests through private patrons. But

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even this spectral qualification does not pertain with regard to his new career as Mr. Bush's paladin in the crusade against junk and its peddlers.

Had Mr. Bennett ever participated in a drug arrest, had he ever worked for a law enforcement agency, had he ever conducted a criminal prosecution, had he ever held a top-level security clearance, had he ever dealt with a Third World government or with any of the thugs who habitually run such regimes, then his reincarnation under Mr. Bush as the coordinator of drug policy might also be somewhat plausible. But the truth is, he has performed none of these elementary functions of criminal justice, and when he appeared with the president-elect in January to share the limelight of his new job, his first stratagem in the war on drugs was to promise to quit smoking.

A week later Mr. Bush, during his inaugural address and in one of the displays of rhetorical passion that he has learned to indulge, intoned that the scourge of drugs will stop. If his new czar accomplishes nothing other than avoiding contracting emphysema, that will be progress of a sort, but it will do nothing to sweep up the human garbage responsible for the multi-billion dollar traffic in poison that afflicts the United States. Unless it is swept up, the scourge will continue and eventually will consume the country entirely.

Americans and some of their leaders seem to understand this, and last year Congress mustered its nerve to pass a mammoth anti-drug bill. But the new law, which created the post Mr. Bennett now holds, is the kind of measure in which congressional con

artists have come to specialize. The law establishes tough penalties for "recreational" use of illegal drugs and permits (but does not require) the death penalty for some murders committed by some drug pushers. Barely a hundred executions have taken place in the United States in the thirteen years since the death penalty was restored, and since more than three times that many murders occurred in Washington alone last year and nearly fifty murders took place here in January, the carefully constricted use of the scaffold that the new law allows is probably just for show. Mainly what the law does is increase the amount of federal funds devoted to therapy and education rather than law enforcement. Currently, only about a quarter of federal spending on drug control is directed to such efforts. Under the "omnibus drug bill," that proportion will rise to 50 percent this year and 60 percent thereafter.

The emphasis on therapy and education as the preferred means of fighting drugs and their consumers rather than the criminals who make and sell them reflects the now platitudinous idea that, as Mr. Bush himself has said, "The answer to the problem of drugs lies more on solving the demand side of the equation than it does on the supply side, than it does on interdiction or sealing the borders or something of that nature. And so it is going to have to be a major educational effort, and the private sector and the schools are all going to have to be involved in this." The corollary, of course, is that the government shouldn't waste too much time in slamming down organized criminals, smugglers, pushers, and their private torpedoes, that the way to fight drugs

is through all the arts of managerial manipulation in which American civilization has come to excel.

Another corollary is that you don't appoint as drug czar someone who is serious about the use of force, including lethal force, against the satraps of the drug empire. Mr. Bennett, The New Republic revealed last year, once sent a memorandum over to the Justice Department recommending that the U.S. military "should do to the drug barons what our forces in the Persian Gulf did to Iran's navy." That sound terrific -- except that we didn't do very much to Iran's navy in the Persian Gulf. What we mainly did in the Gulf, in the aftermath of Iranian mine and missile attacks, was to take out a few oil platforms after carefully warning the sea-going mullahs aboard them to get out of the way. We sent a few of the Ayatollah's boats to the bottom and dried off some of his jolly tars after they landed in the drink. If we follow an analogous course of action against the drug barons, the American taxpayer may wind up paying for their sons' college educations.

Mr. Bennett, however, also has made noises about waging what he calls "all-out war on drugs -- with more resources for police, more prosecutors, more convictions." Whether his tenure as drug czar will be as ferocious as it sounds remains to be seen, but personally I'm growing tired of hearing about the various "wars" -- against poverty, crime, energy shortages, AIDS, terrorism, illiteracy, and child abuse -- that professional bureaucrats periodically declare on whatever crisis crept into the headlines last week.

The truth is that American political culture no longer

permits the prosecution of any kind of war because the elites that prevail in politics, the economy, and the culture rule and think in terms of manipulation, deception, and sheer fraud rather than force. Whatever problems, threats, and challenges they perceive they define in such a way that only manipulation and not coercion can respond to them. Not only do they manipulate the problem itself but also, through public relations and image-mongering, they string along the American public. Criminals are to be rehabilitated and not punished; foreign threats are to be negotiated away or bribed with foreign aid and not fought; and war is redefined as "defense" and delivered into the hands of technocrats-in-uniform whose clearest sight of a battlefield is a computer simulation.

Of course, government-by-manipulation serves the interests of those who are expert in it. In the case of the "drug war," professional therapists, teachers, patriotic entertainers, youth counsellors, social scientists, and the army of P.R. technicians who jerk the images and symbols of mass "education" will accumulate small fortunes by battening onto the provisions of the new drug law and digging into the ample funds it places in their hands. Their ideas, knowledge, and opinions will provide the strategies by which the "war" is to be fought, and no doubt Mr. Bennett will have them in the front lines. How their onslaught will be received by the real czars of the global narcotics trade -- the Colombian, Jamaican, Asian, and home-grown gangsters who murder whole families for fun and command wealth and weapons that some nations would envy -- may easily be foreseen.

In reality, there is no foe in the war against drugs that could not be well met by a county sheriff armed with a wad of Red Man, a couple of .12-gauges, a local posse, and a few yards of strong rope. But the Supreme Court, the ACLU, the Justice Department, the Congress, and the witch doctors of the therapeutic-managerial state have long since taken care of that kind of response. Now we have to depend on the wit, wisdom, and collected memoranda of Mr. Bennett. I hope he's successful in giving up cigarettes.

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Letter from Washington

Samuel Francis

Our Nation, Your Money

Ever since 1914, when the unity of European socialism was virtually shattered by the decision of some share-the-wealthers to support their own nations over the claims of the international class struggle, a furtive little thought has been gnawing at the progressivist mind like a mouse chewing on a rafter. That thought is the suspicion that nationalism and socialism, so far from being natural enemies, are in fact symbiotic creatures. Despite the pretense of the bourgeois chieftains of the left that the workers of the world despise their own countries, governments, and cultures, people who actually work for a living seem to have an embarrassing affection for political leaders and movements that assert national, racial, and cultural solidarity while at the same time renouncing liberal capitalism as a machine of national exploitation and destruction.

The obvious example, of course, is Adolf Hitler, who succeeded in making the phrase "national socialism" a synonym for tyranny and genocide, but Joseph Stalin is no less in the same camp. From the 1920's Stalin began to mutter anti-German, anti-Semitic, xenophobic, and ultra-nationalist sentiments that eventually served him well in the 1940's, when he had to deal with a real foreign threat. Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, the Sandinistas, Tito, Nkrumah, Sukarno, and similar gentlemen all beat the same drum of consolidating their own races or nations around hatred for private, often foreign, financial, commercial,

agricultural, and industrial wealth. Richard Nixon remarks in his memoirs how on a trip to Italy in 1947 he noted that "the leaders of postwar European communism understood the power of nationalism and were appropriating that power."

Totalitarian national socialism, however, is generally dismissed as an aberration. The truth, as every damp-eyed parlor pink still insists, is that real socialism rejects the parochial bonds and institutions of nation, race, and culture, that it looks forward to a planet unified by equal distribution of wealth and universal liberation from the confining chains of irrational group loyalties and identities. Still, the working and lower middle parts of the social spectrum, which are supposed to provide the troopers on the long march to the new Eden, persist in giving their votes to politicians who, even in the political mainstream, entertain a different vision.

Neither the British Labour Party nor the post-New Deal Democrats in the United States could have exercised the kind of mass following and political power they have enjoyed had they not swigged on the potent brew that nationalism and socialism compose. While the leaders of the two parties in their inner councils often glowed over the prospects of "one world" and crafted their foreign policies toward that end, they had enough sense not to carry their true beliefs to the polls. Harry Truman's penchant for combining chauvinistic strutting with solicitude for the common man makes him about as reasonable a facsimile of Benito Mussolini as the United States has yet sported. Nor may it be entirely accidental that John F. Kennedy's best known public

utterance -- "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country" -- is largely a paraphrase of a concluding sentence of The Dynamics of War and Revolution, written in 1940 by Lawrence Dennis, then the leading exponent of an American fascism. "A nation is a nation," wrote Dennis, "by reason of what its citizens have done for it rather than because of what it has done for them."

As long as the democratic left persuaded American workers that it combined nationalistic pride with concern for their economic interests by reaching into other people's pockets, it prospered. Only since its leadership passed into the hands of George McGovern and his crew, who have tried to delete the nationalism, has its electoral fortunes sunk. The nationalist rhetoric of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and Mrs. Thatcher began to attract the rank and file supporters of the left to conservative causes. Only in the last few years have some of the more percipient leftists begun to realize their error and tried to rectify it by talking once more about family, community, and nation.

Yet if conservatives have flourished in the last twenty years because their opponents have abandoned or compromised nationalist themes, the right has discovered only part of the secret formula that yielded a mass following for the left. The right in America and Western Europe remains stridently pro-capitalist and voices its social and economic ideas in an individualist and universalist rhetoric derived from classical liberalism. Its solidarist invocations of nation, family, community, and cultural tradition

are fundamentally at odds with its attachments to an abstract individuality and a cosmopolitan "market" that refuses to discriminate against the color of money.

The result is a political dialogue between two rather incoherent voices, what seems to be an irresolvable destabilization of each ideological camp, and the gradual erosion of their distinctive identities as competing alternatives for conducting government. The left sneers at national and cultural loyalties but offers an economics naturally suited to the collective aspirations of its constituency in the underclass. The right bubbles about opportunity, growth, and private gratification, but also serves up affirmations of national and cultural bonds.

The confusion became clear in last year's presidential campaign. Missouri Democrat Richard Gephardt and Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis sounded the horn of "economic nationalism," but whatever success this theme might have enjoyed was drowned out by their refusal to break with the liberal universalist mainstream of their party and its tradition. American workingmen might fear losing their jobs to Japanese competitors, but they're even more afraid of Willie Hortons let loose by the humanitarianism of the left. On the right, Rep. Jack Kemp managed to neutralize whatever nationalist sentiments his anti-communist foreign policy might have roused by promising virtually to ignore the interests and concerns of white, middle-class Republicans in the primaries. "I don't want the Republican Party to be an all-white party, an all white-collar party, a

business party or a middle-class party," he told Republican voters in Michigan in 1987, and he promised to compete with the Democrats "not just in the Sun Belt but in the ghettoes and the barrios." Suburban Republicans who had seen their old neighborhoods become ghettoes and barrios probably were less than excited at Mr. Kemp's vision of their party's future.

The contemporary American right's commitment to the universalism of "democratic capitalism," to unrestricted immigration, egalitarianism, "global democracy" and a "global economy," and the supremacy of private aspirations over public goods prevent it from taking advantage of the natural conjunction of collective aspirations that nationalism and socialism represent, as does the left's contempt for national identity, cultural traditionalism, and anything else that stands in the way of global progress toward the One Big Lump. Given the track record of national socialism in this century, perhaps this deadlock is to the good; but evidence is accumulating that it won't last.

Simply because intellectual and political elites have dismissed the symbiosis of nationalism and socialism as an aberration, except when they've figured out how to exploit it, is no reason to pretend it isn't there or that it won't be around in the future. Andries Treurnicht's Conservative Party in South Africa and relatively successful similar movements led by Jean Marie Le Pen in France, Carl Hagen in Norway, and Bernhard Andres in West Germany suggest that the partnership is still going strong. In the United States Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Coalition is

a thinly veiled effort to synthesize the economics of international socialism with the non-white and anti-Western racial solidarity of the Third World (whether located in Soweto or in Miami).

Mr. Jackson, however, enters the stage from the left, but there are other actors who speak their lines from the opposite direction too. This decade's counter-cultural analogies to the hippies of the 1960's are the skinheads, who are no less pathetic than the drug-soaked flower children, though more dangerous physically. And, lastly, there is the Hon. David Duke, former Klansman, who beat the brother of an ex-governor of Louisiana in a race for the state legislature in February, despite the concerted opposition of Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Lee Atwater, and the clergy and media of his district. Mr. Duke and the skinheads may not know much about economics, socialist or otherwise, but they seem to have tapped into a subterranean stream in the Western mind that in the 1990's could again emerge as a powerful political force. The twentieth century is not over yet, and those who ignore the continuing presence of the forces that created it may wind up staring them in the face for a while longer.

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Letter from Washington

Samuel Francis*

A Zeitgeist of Another Color

Among the many questions about the new presidency of George Bush with which the lips of Washington were afroth this spring was whether Lee Atwater is for real. The 37-year-old head of the Republican National Committee who made the name of Willie Horton as familiar to American households as the Domino's Pizza gremlin is one of the few genuinely interesting people in an administration that seems chiefly notable for its skills in paper shuffling. Mr. Atwater is a gifted amateur guitar player, an assiduous student of the political thought of Aristotle and Machiavelli, and an utterly pitiless political consigliere whose genius at designing electoral landslides for the aspirants wise enough to hire him derives from his understanding that citizens usually vote against, rather than for, a candidate. But the question that Washington pundits were pondering this year had less to do with Mr. Atwater's musical talents, his philosophy, or his skills as a campaign Svengali than with the honesty of his announced commitment to lead black voters out of their bondage in a Democratic Egypt toward the promised land of the Grand Ole Party.

Mr. Atwater would seem to be an unlikely Moses. The native South Carolinian began his political career as an intern for Sen.

Strom Thurmond, and many of the clients whom he has favored withhis professional counsel over the years have probably wondered if Mr. Thurmond, in his later career, had not gone a bit soft on the civil rights issue. In the 1970s Mr. Atwater was an enthusiast for a conservative-Republican strategy that sought the votes of what he called "the populists ... lower- and working-class whites" whose "chosen leaders were hard-core segregationists." Having done his part in making this strategy a success through the solidification of formerly Democratic white Southern or ethnic working class voters in the Republican presidential constituency, Mr. Atwater would appear to be entirely at sea in any serious effort to sway the political hearts and minds of black citizens.

Nevertheless, Mr. Atwater embarked on his mission manfully. He denounced ex-Klansman David Duke in Louisiana and eagerly accepted an invitation to join the board of trustees at historically black Howard University. But when Howard students exploded in protest of Mr. Atwater's appointment (as well as of the crumbling walls of Howard's dormitories), the shadows of reality began to creep across his vision of a color-blind Republican Party.

Mr. Atwater, of course, did not invent the idea of "luring" (as Republican strategists often put it) blacks into GOP ranks. Back in the 1970s his predecessor at the RNC, Bill Brock, also talked about it, and more recently the idea has become a staple of the Republican banquet oratory of George Bush, Ronald Reagan, Newt Gingrich, Jack Kemp, and Bill Bennett, among other stalwarts of

the party.

Their strategy is simple and appealing. As Mr. Atwater himself puts it, "we have entered into a post-civil rights era, civil rights are not the driving force," and a growing black middle class will find a party that appeals to its economic interests, long thwarted by liberal paternalism, attractive. With few memories of segregation and with fundamentally conservative values on the family, crime, schools, and neighborhoods, middle class blacks ought to recognize that the future belongs to the party of Lincoln. Whatever the errors of the Republican past, such as some very strenuous and unpleasant opposition to civil rights legislation, American blacks should see that only the Republicans can realize Martin Luther King's dream of judging people by the content of their character rather than by the color of their skins.

The exponents of this strategy can adduce an impressive string of black community leaders and intellectuals to support it. But there are a few inconvenient truths about blacks in contemporary America that ought to cool Republican and conservative enthusiasm for the strategy. The insurgency against Mr. Atwater at Howard University this spring suggests some of them.

The students who seized buildings at Howard, prevented Mr. Atwater from speaking, and refused to shut up or sit down or go away until he resigned from the board were about as middle class in their backgrounds as blacks in the United States today can be. They also were intensely aware of the racial ambiguities of Mr.

Atwater's political biography. They knew all about the Willie Horton business and showed no appreciation for the lame line that Horton's race was not explicitly mentioned in the original TV ads. Mr. Atwater is anything but a fool. He knew he had walked into a trap and that if he hung around trying to explain himself, he would be strung up by his heels and exposed. His whole strategy and plans for the next several years would be washed away in the next few days. He therefore did what any astute disciple of Machiavelli would do; he resigned and thereby defused the whole issue. The students went back to their dilapidated dormitories in the belief they had routed the foe.

Mr. Atwater's embroglio at Howard ought to suggest to him and other Republican strategists that the black middle class is not about to desert the party and the programs that created it, and that it is deeply aware that the party is Democratic and the programs liberal. "Middle-class blacks," say political scientists Michael Dawson of the University of Michigan and Gary Orefield of Chicago, "more than poor blacks, have been the beneficiaries of court and legislative interventions in the private sector, moving up the economic ladder on affirmative action programs, minority set-asides and other programs often opposed by Republicans." They point out that middle class blacks, far more than whites, have benefited from direct government employment. "A much higher percentage of blacks have achieved middle-class status through the public sector than whites." Whatever the black middle class might think about the social and moral issues, economically it wouldn't exist without liberalism and its legacy, and its support for free-

market, small-government candidates and ideas would be tantamount to class suicide.

Moreover, say Professors Dawson and Orefield, middle class blacks are more conscious of racial and housing discrimination than poor blacks. After all, it's the former who are trying to move out of the inner city and into white neighborhoods, and it's probably fair to infer that black racial consciousness is most intense among the middle class. Just as nationalism served the psychic, social, and political needs of the Euro-American bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century, so a species of racialism (sometimes none too subtle) serves black middle class aspirations today.

But the Republican strategy to attract black votes ignores this consciousness, just as it ignores American national consciousness in its prattle about "global democracy," human rights, and a global economy. Mr. Atwater, Jack Kemp, Bill Bennett, and Newt Gingrich love to talk about the Lincoln legacy and the ideals of Martin Luther King, but that legacy and those ideals, at least in popular mythology, are liberal, egalitarian, and universalist. The racial consciousness espoused by black leaders such as Jesse Jackson is a horse of another color. It doesn't want to integrate with white institutions but to legitimize non-white ones. It doesn't want to join Western culture but to extirpate it. It doesn't want to share and share alike, as nice liberals and neoconservatves want, but to dominate. That's why Mr. Jackson ran around with explicit racists like Louis Farrakhan, and that's why Mr. Farrakhan can meet comfortably

with explicit white racists like Tom Metzger.

It's also why Mr. Jackson wants blacks to start calling themselves "African-Americans," in the tradition of Stokeley Carmichael and Rap Brown. It's a label that helps to delegitimize black inclusion in American society and to formulate a new identity based on racial solidarity with the non-white peoples of the world. Dr. King himself planted the seeds of this growth with his observation, in his Letter from the Birmingham Jail, that the American black in the civil rights movement "has been swept in by what the Germans call the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa, and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean, he is moving with a sense of cosmic urgency toward the promised land of racial justice." But you can't ride the tiger of racial consciousness for long before it slips its reins and begins hunting for something other than the right to sit in the front of the bus.

American blacks are indeed rejecting liberalism, as are American whites. But that doesn't mean that either group will find the universalism and egalitarianism that today travels the country under the name of conservatism any more to their taste. In regurgitating the premises of the same, indigestible liberalism, Mr. Atwater and his wunderkinder at the Republican National Committee are walking into a trap that Aristotle and Machiavelli would have been wise enough to avoid.

Letter from Washington

Samuel Francis*

Three Men and the Yuppies

In the 1950s, American conservatives, subscribing to what Clinton Rossiter called a "thankless persuasion," were a hard-shelled, pig-eyed lot who took no prisoners and asked no quarter. National Review, in a once famous but now largely forgotten editorial in its premier issue, vowed that its mission was to stand athwart history and cry stop. Admittedly, this was hardly the most fetching advertisement with which to inaugurate a political and intellectual movement, but it reveals the grim mentality of the American right of that era.

In the 1980s,the new breed of conservatives, of whom Rep. Newt Gingrich and Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp are representative, is at pains to distance itself from that mentality. Its exponents seize every opportunity to make known their differences with a school of thought and politics that scorned the enlargement of the state and the slogans of "mandate," "crusade," and "vision" that legitimized it. What is now somewhat deprecatingly called the "Old Right" despised the notion that the government should help redesign the society it was supposed to protect, expressed contempt for the utopian effervescence of progressivism, and espoused a deep loyalty to and affection for its country and the historic culture and people who defined the

country.

What some are calling "progressive conservatism" parts company with the Old Right on all these fronts. Last winter, during a Republican strategy conference at which Mr. Gingrich and his court presided, the talk was all about how to sever whatever links remain between the conservatism of the past and the translucent future that the new Minority Whip wants to personify. "We're going to have to start talking, for example, about civil rights and affirmative action [to appeal to black voters] in ways that we haven't before and that may offend some conservatives," one "key conservative theorist" was quoted as saying. "We have to have a caring, humanitarian, reform Republican Party," said Mr. Gingrich himself, "that accepts the burden of being a governing conservatism, not just an opposition conservatism." "We have to get over the hump of being the parsimonious, anti-compassion, anti-humanitarian party which really doesn't care if people starve in the streets as long as the budget is balanced," said Republican strategist Jeffrey Eisenach, one of Mr. Gingrich's close advisers. "I never thought frankly," said New Right leader Paul Weyrich, "that I would sit in a Republican meeting and hear the terms 'crusade to save the children'."

Mr. Kemp too seems enthusiastic about the new role that the federal government will enjoy. Early in his brief-lived campaign for the presidency in 1987, Mr. Kemp promised that "'Getting the government off the backs of the American people' will be no one's slogan in 1988. Making government more efficient and more effective will be the thing this time. I've never understood why

conservatives positioned themselves against government." Mr. Weyrich added, "the truth is that some of us believe in government activism.... too often, we have attempted to reject the obligation welfare represents, the obligation to the poor, the homeless, the unemployed and the disabled. ... We accept the obligation welfare represents."

The zest for government activism appears to be the center of the new vision prophesied by the triumvirate and its ideological outriders. That alone would dissociate it from the anti-statist conservatism of the past, but more is involved in the transfiguration of the American right than a mere tactical change of instruments by which its political leaders may work their will.

The changes in thought and rhetoric that distinguish the "progressive conservatism" of the triumvirate and its supporters from its predecessors of the Old Right reflect a significant social and demographic transformation of American political culture. Whereas Old Right conservatism was by and large the expression of the interests, values, and aspirations of the American bourgeois elite, the triumvirate and its political formulas express those of a relatively new elite of urbanized, technocratic professionals who make their living and gain power and status in mass organizations. This new "managerial" elite, as James Burnham called it, displaced the older bourgeoisie as the dominant force in politics, the economy, and culture in the early twentieth century. Between the Depression and the end of World War II it seized power at the national level and in the 1960s through the New Frontier and the Great Society embarked on what it

thought would be the final mop-up of its bourgeois rival.

The new elite found a rationale for its aspirations to power in the ideology of liberalism, which offered justifications for the enlargement of the state and its fusion with other mass organizations -- corporations and unions in the economy, mass universities, large foundations, and the mass media in the managerial cultural apparatus. The cosmopolitan and universalist ethos of liberalism served to challenge bourgeois moral and social codes and attachment to local and national institutions, while liberal meliorism and progressivism legitimized the new elite's application of its technocratic and managerial skills to government, the economy, and society.

With the exhaustion and discrediting of liberal ideology in the 1960's and 1970's, however, the elite had to formulate a new ideology. This is where "progressive conservatism" comes in.

In the 1980s, the younger members of the managerial elite came to be known as "yuppies," and though they questioned many of the policies of New Deal-Great Society liberalism, they retained its cosmopolitan and essentially materialistic values and showed little hesitancy about using governmental power against **persistent social and cultural institutions** to create "openness," "opportunity," and "democracy." They also became enamored of new technologies that seemed to promise all sorts of secular salvations, from the end of war and poverty to the global unification of government and culture, and which offered endless frontiers for the utilization of their esoteric skills.

"Progressive conservatism" and its ideological siblings are

designed to capture and mobilize the young (now tending toward middle aged) urban professionals of the managerial elite. The Republican Party may not need them to win elections -- they have plain old middle Americans, who have nowhere else to go, for that -- but it does need them to govern. The federal government, the congressional staffs, and the think tanks and media institutions on which neo-conservatives and progressive conservatives depend simply can't operate without them.

The union of the Republican Party with the managerial elite and its apparatus in the government means the end of an era in American political culture. Since the New Deal, the Taft-Goldwater-Reagan wing of the Republican Party has preserved as a norm of American politics opposition to "big government" and the "rendezvous with destiny" that history had supposedly arranged for us. The articulation of that norm set an important boundary to the public discourse in which political issues were debated.

But now that kind of bourgeois conservatism and its determination to stop history and get off has become a moribund political and intellectual force, because the social formation that supported it and the values and interests of which bourgeois conservatism was an expression are extinct or dying. The "progressive conservatives" and their following come not to praise, let alone restore, the bourgeois order but to bury it; not to stand athwart history and cry stop but to clamber on board, toot the horn, and press the throttle full steam ahead. If there is to be any resistance to or restraint on the managerial state and its interminable war against what remains of American culture,

it can come from neither the progressive conservatism of Mr. Gingrich and Mr. Kemp nor the bourgeois conservatism of the Old Right but from some new force that has not yet taken shape.

Letter from Washington

Samuel Francis*

Left, Right, Up, Down

Since the time of the French Revolution, the labels "left" and "right" have served as universal symbols on the road atlas of modern politics. The exact meaning of the symbols has never been clear, especially when they are applied outside the narrow streets of practical politics and extended to the broader ranges of philosophy, religion, and even aesthetics. Nevertheless, like "A.M." and "P.M." or "A.D." and "B.C.," left and right have become indispensable to the mental and verbal organization of otherwise incomprehensible phenomena.

Because they originally pertained to the different sides of parliamentary assemblies in the wake of the French Revolution and served to distinguish those, on the left, who supported the revolution and its legacy from those, on the right, who opposed it, left and right might retain some clear meaning if employed in that sense. In so far as the ideological legacy of the revolution is captured in its motto of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," and in so far as contemporary politics still revolves around these terrible pleasantries, then we might continue to lump certain schools of politicians and political thinkers as "left" and others as "right."

But throughout the 1980s (and probably henceforward) such

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schools seem to be out for a long vacation. What is called the "right" in American politics today seems to invoke and take seriously all the slogans and cliches that derive from Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity and which would ordinarily locate their exponents on the left. Its champions talk of the "global democratic revolution," universal "human rights," "equality as a conservative principle," and the final emancipation of mankind from war, racial and national prejudice, tyranny, and poverty through universal economic and technological progress. No noble savage of Enlightenment lore nor his less noble descendants who pulled the ropes of the guillotine in the Year One would raise an eyebrow at the rhetoric and ideology of the contemporary American right.

Things aren't much different on what is called the "left." While once only rightish pessimists such as Spengler or Henry Adams talked about the decline, suicide, or dissolution of the West, today that theme is a staple on the rubber chicken circuit of liberal Democrats. Newly elected Democratic Majority Leader Richard Gephardt sounded the theme when his colleagues elevated him to his new post in the House, and last year he ran his presidential campaign on the issue of "economic nationalism," which Michael Dukakis also picked up when his own campaign ran into trouble. Whatever the economic merits of their ideas, that issue presupposes the reality and significance of national identity and contradicts the universalism implicit in the "Fraternity" that sans culotte armies spread across Europe in the 1790s.

Moreover, Washington Post columnist Richard Cohen, whose writings usually seem to be archetypal expressions of what the conservative collective unconscious wants liberals to say, recently penned a column that older conservatives ought to find unexceptionable. Mr. Cohen inveighed against the homogenization of America through shopping malls, fast food emporia, motel chains, housing developments, and "restorations" such as those in Williamsburg and Old Town in Virginia. The ideological premise of such homogenization, of course, is again the cosmopolitanism and universalism that informed the French Revolution and which liberated souls such as Mr. Cohen have trumpeted throughout their careers. Whether he has as yet grasped the contradiction between his recent column and his lifelong convictions I do not know.

One gentleman of the left who has grasped it, however, is the radical historian Christopher Lasch, whose recent writings reveal a profound suspicion of the abstractions that lurk in Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. In a recent essay in the New Oxford Review, Mr. Lasch dwells on his intellectual autobiography, showing how his personal and intellectual development eventually led him to shatter the very idols of the left to which he had paid homage all his life. Noting that the left's own road map of America was divided between New York and Washington on the one hand and what it regarded as "the vast hinterland beyond the Appalachians -- the land of the Yahoo, the John Birch Society, and the Ku Klux Klan" on the other, Mr. Lasch expressed his emerging disenchantment with the contours of that map.

> By the late 1970s and early 1980s I no longer had much confidence either in the accuracy of

> this bird's-eye view of America or in the progressive view of the future with which it was so closely associated. "Middle Americans" had good reason, it seemed to me, to worry about the family and the future their children were going to inherit. My study of the family suggested a broader conclusion: that the capacity for loyalty is stretched too thin when it tries to attach itself to the hypothetical solidarity of the whole human race. It needs to attach itself to specific people and places, not to an abstract ideal of universal human rights. We love particular men and women, not humanity in general. The dream of universal brotherhood, because it rests on the sentimental fiction that men and women are all the same, cannot survive the discovery that they differ.

Mr. Lasch's thoughts in this passage, one would think, would induce our keepers of the conservative flame to spread a feast of welcome for him. But don't unfold your napkin just yet.

Mr. Lasch neither calls nor thinks of himself as a conservative, and in that he is probably wise. Were he to do so, passages such as the one quoted above would be greeted with the most vituperative abuse from those who claim that title today. The self-appointed swamis of the right, from their yachts and Alpine retreats, would compare him to excrement, even as they perspired over the closing of the American mind and preached the virtues of pluralism. Cries of "anti-Semite," "xenophobe," "nativist," and even "agrarian" would pierce the walls of his study and silence his animadversions on the subjects of progress and universalism. His academic career would be threatened by unsolicited phone calls to his dean from spiteful colleagues. The tories who prance through the parlors of Manhattan and Georgetown would make sedulous inquiry as to his thoughts during the civil

rights movement while awarding bountiful grants to decrepit social democrats and second-rate defectors from SDS. Were Mr. Lasch to spread his sails to the winds from the American right today, he would soon find himself marooned in an archipelago of small towns, intact families, and agrarian communities far from the political sea lanes plied by the clipper ships of self-proclaimed "conservatives."

Alas, Mr. Lasch is not typical of the contemporary left, however, nor are the ruminations emitted by the estimable Cohen or the honorable Gephardt. Mr. Lasch is correct that the mainstream of left-liberalism in America today remains nearly comatose with dread of the mainstream of America itself. But the great fear on the left seems to be matched on the right by an almost equal aversion to the American heartland. The contemporary right by and large much prefers the pina coladas of the secularized, deracinated megalopolis of the Northeast and the California Fringe to the white lightning of the piney woods, the Rockies, and the Great Plains.

Today, the right talks and thinks like the left, and the left, sometimes, sounds like the right. That kind of confusion suggests that both labels have outlived their usefulness and ought to be put to sleep. They have become prisons that house so many different and conflicting forces that the interests, values, and aspirations incarcerated in them are unable to find coherent political expression.

The political conflict of the future is likely to be not on the horizontal plane between left and right but along a vertical

axis: between a Middle American substratum, wedded to the integrity of a distinct national and cultural identity, on the one hand, and, on the other, an unassimilated underclass in alliance with an alienated and increasingly cosmopolitan elite that has subsumed left and right and shares more common ground with snappily dressed Soviet commissars and Japanese corporate executives than with farmers in Kansas, small businessmen in Ohio, union members in Detroit, or fundamentalists in Alabama.

That conflict, of course, is not new, and the American right has waxed fat and happy by claiming to represent one side of it. But today its enchantment with global democracy, a global economy, and a global culture that will displace national particularity render that claim transparently fraudulent. If the remaining nucleus of American civilization is to survive, it will have to find a new label by which to identify itself and new guardians to lead its struggle.

Letter from Washington

Samuel Francis*

An Illusion of the Future

Barely a week after the Tienanmen Square massacre, Ronald Reagan showed up in London to deliver himself of some post-presidential opinions. As the nation's newest elder statesman, Mr. Reagan received international headlines for his speech, which turned out to be a long variation on his best-known line from "Death Valley Days": Progress is our most important product. "His main theme," reported The Washington Post's David Broder, "was that the new communnications technology is undermining authoritarian governments everywhere, or, as he put it, 'the Goliath of totalitarian control will rapidly be brought down by the David of the microchip.'"

The biblical source of Mr. Reagan's metaphor is suggestive, and the former president is not alone in believing that the post-industrial technology of microchips, lasers, satellites, personal computers, and biological engineering is closely connected with the Almighty. The most lyrical exponent of this new creed is probably George Gilder, who two years ago in The American Spectator warbled rhapsodically of the high-tech utopia that now slouches toward Bethlehem to be born.

"The Message of the Microcosm," according to Mr. Gilder, is that technological progress not only improves the material

standards of human life but also is revolutionizing human relationships around the globe.

> The worldwide network of satellites and fiber optics, linked to digital computers, television terminals, telephones and databases, sustain worldwide markets for information, currency and capital on line 24 hours a day. Boeing 747's constantly traversing the oceans foster a global community of commerce. The silicon in sand and glass forms a global ganglion of electronic and photonic media that leaves all history in its wake. ... In an age when men can inscribe worlds on grains of sand, conventional territory no longer matters.

Mr. Gilder evidently believes that human nature itself is about to play leapfrog. Not only territorial conventions but also most other institutions around which human history has revolved are on the way to obsolescence. "An onslaught of technological progress was reducing much of economic and social theory to gibberish. For example, such concepts as land, labor, and capital, nation and society -- solemnly discussed in every academic institution as if nothing had changed -- have radically different meanings than before and drastically different values. ... No one shows any signs of knowing that we no longer live in geographical time and space, that the maps of nations are fully as obsolete as the charts of a flat earth, that geography tells us virtually nothing of interest where things are in the real world."

But there seems to be even more in Mr. Gilder's vision of the new age than merely secular economic and political miracles. Technology itself, in his view, appears to be a manifestation of something beyond this world. "Listening to the technology," he prophesies, "opens us to a new sense of the music of the spheres,

a new sense of the power of ideas, a new integrated vision of the future of humanity. The microcosm is a new continent and its exploration brings richer rewards than were won by any earlier planners. It is the authentic frontier, invisible and invigorating, and closer to the foundation of reality and the reality of God."

Mr. Gilder's prose-poetry is overblown and sometimes incomprehensible, but many self-proclaimed conservatives share the same, essentially religious vision of a technological millennium emerging as part of a divine blueprint for mankind. Nor is this vision a particularly new one. In the nineteenth century also, many observers slavered over the gadgets of the Industrial Revolution quite as ecstatically as any yuppie of the 1980s. The Victorian writer Charles Kingsley, for example, after visiting the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851, also was transported by what he saw. "The spinning jenny and the railroad," he wrote, "Cunard's liners and the electric telegraph, are to me ... signs that we are, on some points at least, in harmony with the universe; that there is a mighty spirit working among us ... the Ordering and Creating God."

Imagine the surprise of such visionaries had they lived to see the kind of cosmic harmony that the technologies of World Wars I and II brought about. Mustard gas and machine guns, nukes and napalm might have cooled somewhat the incandescent fantasy of nineteenth century progressivists that God was on the side of the biggest steam engine. Kingsley, like Mr. Gilder and President Reagan, seems to have missed the elementary point that technology,

regardless of how clever or helpful to human labors, doesn't change the oil that lubricates the human motor, and it doesn't displace or diminish the apparently bottomless human capacity to think up wicked things to do with machines.

Tienanmen Square is case in point. Not only did the elder statesmen of Beijing discover some rather ungodly applications of tanks and machine guns but also their secret police have cleverly rigged up television cameras on street poles to keep their eyes on any small knots of lesser comrades who might be inclined to express opinions about any subject other than the local humidity.

Technology of the same principle, of course, is already widespread in American stores for the purpose of detecting shoplifters and purse snatchers, and this summer Maryland and Virginia state police were seeking federal funding for a combination radar-photography system that would take pictures of vehicles exceeding the 55 mile-an-hour speed limit and their license plates. Vehicle owners would then be sent a summons through the mail and held liable for the speeding fine. In deference to the mating habits of the Beltway, the photograph itself would not be mailed to the presumed offender "for fear that it might reveal the embarrassing presence of another party in the car," according to The Washington Post. "The evidence in photo radar is almost ironclad," spouts William T. Newman of the Arlington County Board. Think of the cosmic harmony Deng Tsiao Ping could create if the Red Guards were as techologically advanced as Arlington.

Stripped of its pseudo-theological plumage, the faith of the

New Age right in a technological salvation for mankind reduces to nothing more than the most puerile superstition of the Enlightenment and its Marxist and behaviorist inheritors, the belief that human beings are the products of their historical environment and that with the amelioration of the environment, men and women will also be improved -- "will be as gods," as someone once said. Historical reality has exploded this myth many times over, from the Reign of Terror to last summer's bloody picnic in Beijing, but, like any superstition, the myth seems to be impervious.

In the last couple of centuries, the myth has gone through three distinct stages and now seems to be metamorphosizing yet again. In the first stage, the hostile environment was political, and the myth promised that if dynasties, aristocracies, and established churches were overthrown, and at least some of the people given the vote, the problems of mankind would be solved. The second stage, after political emancipation proved to be pretty much of a flop, centered on the economy. Politics was only a mask for property, you see, and if only wealth were redistributed and equality established, humanity would really be on the move.

By the mid-twentieth century, when this stage of the myth began to come a cropper as well, the myth entered its third stage by concentrating on social and cultural institutions as repressive forces. On the left, this stage is still kicking in the form of crusades against the family, "racism," national and regional identities, and the chief villain of the age, the white heterosexual middle class male.

But already the myth is beginning to shift its shape again in the form of a revolt against nature itself through technological thaumaturgy. In this guise, the environmentalist myth identifies as its chief enemies the biology of human reproduction and the social institutions based on that biology as well as such inconvenient facts of nature as the inevitability of death and, for folks like Mr. Gilder it seems, the confinements of time and space. Once mankind has been photosynthesized through technological globalism, paradise is sure to be just around the corner. This time, however, the revolt against nature is not confined to the left but also envelops the "right." Indeed, if anything is being transcended in the last years of the century, it's not nature and its rules but rather any meaningful distinction between right and left, as both camps regurgitate the same superstitions of the Enlightenment in new and more dangerous forms. And people wonder why it is, in an age that considers the constraints of nature as obsolete, repressive, and irrelevant as chastity belts, that book stores are full of volumes on astrology and occultism, that teenagers practice Satanism, and that cults, pseudo-sciences, and all kinds of nutty social irrationalisms flourish.

Letter from Washington

Samuel Francis*

Equality with a Big 'E'

When the 80th Annual Convention of the NAACP gathered in solemn conclave in Detroit last July, the delegates listened approvingly to Executive Director Benjamin Hooks call for "civil disobedience on a mass scale that has never been seen in this country before." Mr. Hooks was upset that the Supreme Court recently delivered itself of some rulings against affirmative action, and he threatened unprecedented shenanigans if Congress "is reluctant" to reverse these rulings through legislation. But Mr. Hooks's rhetoric was familiar to the delegates' ears. Martin Luther King, Jr., whom the NAACP once criticized for being too reckless, long ago developed the politics and oratory of intimidation into a high science.

What surely but pleasantly surprised the delegates was to hear, the following day, rhetoric not very different from that of Mr. Hooks from the lips of a member of the Bush administration, a former Republican congressman, and one of the more clamorous claimants to the now-vacant throne of American conservatism. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Jack Kemp did not, it is true, threaten to chain himself to the lamp posts on Capitol Hill if elected public servants choose to vote against his wishes. But he did succeed in rather subtly endorsing the core of the political ideology that has animated the NAACP and the rest of the

American left for most of this century. If, after Mr. Kemp's remarks in Detroit, he is still regarded as a conservative, Phyllis Schlafly might as well hire Allen Ginsberg as a consultant on family policy.

Mr. Kemp began his speech with warm praise for Mr. Hooks, and that might be dismissed as a mere obligation of courtesy. But the housing czar proudly repeated Mr. Hooks's endorsement of him for his present position at HUD. Mr. Hooks "said I was a liberal with a big 'L' on relations between the races," beamed Mr. Kemp, "And, Ben, I won't let you down." He kept his commitment to uplift Mr. Hooks throughout the rest of the speech, affirming "what a thrill it was the other day to sit next to Ben Hooks at the White House, as President Bush and distinguished civil rights leaders and Members of Congress celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a milestone on the road to freedom and justice."

After generous applications of progressivist boiler-plate from Dr. King, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson, and after praise for, among others, Hubert Humphrey and W.E.B. DuBois, Mr. Kemp got down to business. He cheered "the boycotts, the sit-ins, the marches, the legal challenges" of the 1950's and '60's -- "I wasn't there, but I wish I had been" -- as "Chapter One" in what promises to be a kind of civil rights equivalent of a Russian novel. "Chapter One" was "about freedom and justice, about removing legal barriers, about full rights for each and every one of us as American citizens." But "Chapter One" is not the end of the story. "At the dawn of a new millennium," sang Mr. Kemp, "we

are engaged in a new chapter of this ongoing revolution, for as you in the NAACP have said so well, 'The Struggle Continues'." "Chapter Two" (how many chapters there are Mr. Kemp didn't say) will be "about economic prosperity, about jobs for everyone, and growth, and a bigger pie and more seats at the table." The specific contents of Chapter Two, in Mr. Kemp's reading, include enterprise zones, tax breaks, privatization of public housing, and a good many other ideas that he intends as "free market," "entrepreneurial," or opportunity-enhancing alternatives to liberal paternalism.

Such alternatives may or may not be enacted and may or may not work if they are, but they seem to be harmless enough and are probably worth trying. The problem with Mr. Kemp's speech, and with the general approach to American blacks that his fellow Republican out-reachers such as Newt Gingrich, Lee Atwater, and President Bush are articulating, is not that they want to rely on free enterprise to ameliorate the material life of blacks but that they encase their ostensibly free market policies in a rhetorical and conceptual framework that contradicts them.

In affirming that Chapter Two is "not only about a chance to drive a truck, but a chance to own the truck ... not just a chance to have a job, but a chance to own the company," Mr. Kemp implicitly conceded that the much-touted equality before the law, which Chapter One was supposed to have achieved, wasn't enough. After recounting statistics of black economic progress in recent years, the secretary explicitly assured his audience that

"clearly, this is not enough."

> It only serves to remind us how far we have to go. Over half a century ago, Franklin D. Roosevelt saw one-third of a nation ill-clad, ill-housed, and ill-fed. By 1987, the GNP had increased eightfold; and still -- 56 years after FDR's statement -- one-third of black Americans remained below the poverty line ... ill-clad, ill-housed, ill-fed.

Behind all of Mr. Kemp's invocations of the free market and the individual unfettered by cumbersome laws and economic regulations, there lies the hidden assumption that it is the duty of government (specifically, the federal government) not only to ensure economic opportunity for all citizens alike through equality before the law, but also to ensure economic success. If Mr. Kemp happens to believe market rather than paternalistic policies are the best instruments to carry out this supposed duty, he has nevertheless granted a basic precept of socialism in acknowledging that the state ought to be involved in the design of economic results, and that if those results are not equal, they aren't just.

That, of course, is what the NAACP wants to hear. It's what most of its delegates and members believe; it's what Dr. King, Hubert Humphrey, and Dr. DuBois (who joined the Communist Party at the age of 98) believed; and it's why Mr. Hooks is so mad about the Court's rulings against affirmative action, the purpose of which is to fix the results whenever race is a factor in the competition. It's also why, for all Mr. Kemp's apologetics for his past, his party, and his political persuasions, the NAACP is not going to listen to his endorsement of the "market," the "opportunity society," or other slogans of entrepreneurial

capitalism. Those slogans, if taken seriously, presuppose a limited and neutral state, equality before the law but not of condition, and a "level playing field" on which all the players compete under the same rules. Whether such classical liberal ideals are at all possible or desirable is another question, but they are utterly incompatible with the kind of governmental intervention in social and economic arrangements for the achievement of particular results that the NAACP demands and is willing to break the law to obtain.

By recapitulating not only an affirmation of egalitarian social reconstruction through political means but also a celebration of the liberal heroes, icons, and slogans of the civil rights movement, Mr. Kemp and his fellow out-reachers may in fact gain the votes of black Americans and perhaps even the support of Mr. Hooks and the NAACP. But let us not deceive ourselves that such gains would represent any victory for "conservatism." Rather they would represent a consolidation of liberal values and the crystallization of the liberal mentality among blacks and their (largely self-appointed) leaders as well as among (largely self-proclaimed) conservatives. They would constitute the modern equivalent of finding out which way the crowd is running, getting in front of it, and announcing yourself as its leader. Once conservatives accept, as Mr. Kemp evidently does, the legitimacy of egalitarian reconstruction, it will be far easier to continue and revive reconstruction through the bureaucratic paternalism in which black Americans remain trapped and in which their leadership maintains a powerful vested political interest than through the

entrepreneurial renaissance that Mr. Kemp promises.

A different approach that conservatives might use to attract not only black but also more white votes is to talk about (and deal seriously with) things that really matter to most Americans -- crime and the need for swift, certain, and strong punishment for it; the family, community, religion, and other social institutions that control violence; and the senselessness of a centralized, bureaucratic, social engineering government that not only impedes "opportunity" but also displaces and destroys the social bonds and disciplines that are the only real creators of opportunity or of the ambition to use it well.

Maybe this kind of rhetorical and conceptual framework, reflecting genuinely conservative ideas, wouldn't gain Mr. Hooks's endorsement, and maybe black Americans are already so enslaved to Mr. Hooks, the NAACP, and the other lobbies of the civil rights establishment that they wouldn't buy it either. But there's more to political leadership than winning votes, and maybe conservatism with a big "C" is what politicians who claim to be conservatives and serious public leaders ought to be talking about.

[Chronicles, December, 1989]

Principalities and Powers

Samuel Francis

If conservatives carried revolvers, they'd probably reach for them at the sound of the word "nationalism." Perhaps it's just as well they don't carry revolvers, since nationalism usually makes its appearance armed with considerably bigger guns. In the Europe of Metternich and Castlereagh, nationalism was the vehicle for the revolutionary destruction of dynastic and aristocratic regimes and the parent of all sorts of modern nastiness. "From the French Revolution," wrote the conservative Anglo-Polish historian Sir Lewis Namier, "dates the active rise of modern nationalism with some of its most dangerous features: of a mass movement centralizing and levelling, dynamic and ruthless, akin in nature to the horde."

American conservatives have never been much more enthusiastic about nationalism than their European counterparts. The opposition to ratification of the U.S. Constitution was led by country gentlemen who knew very well that Alexander Hamilton's national unification meant merely the consolidation of northeastern dominance over the states and their distinctive subcultures. For the first seventy years of the United States' lifetime, the main political conflict revolved around whether the nationalists of the Northeast would succeed in impressing their thumbprints on the wax of the new republic. That, as Richard Weaver saw, was the issue in Daniel Webster's debates with South Carolina's Sen. Robert Young Hayne, and the concrete meaning of

Webster's "Liberty and Union" speech was that the republic should be unified around the northeastern goals of economic expansion and national power.

As every schoolboy knows (or used to know, back when teachers told schoolboys about Abraham Lincoln), those goals eventually triumphed, and the "equality" that Lincoln and his supporters preached with their terrible swift swords was largely a mask for an orgiastic ethic of producing and consuming, the Great Barbecue that culminated only in the present century. In Lincoln's day and under his leadership, northeastern financial and industrial centers finally gained enough material power and resources to crush their rivals. It was neither patriotism nor piety that ultimately made the unum prevail over the pluribus, but the acquisitive habits that Lincoln's "equality of opportunity" rationalized and which modern advertising, credit instruments, mass media, and government-managed demand succeeded in creating.

Be all that as it may, the United States today is a unitary nation-state, as much as traditionalist conservatives may be loath to admit it. If you don't believe it, travel to a city other than the one in which you live. You will discover that just about any place you visit in the United States today looks almost exactly like the one you left. Fast food palaces, shopping malls, mammoth supermarkets, hotel chains, modern highway networks, office buildings, high rises, and parking lots now define the public orthodoxy of the nation. If you visit bookstores, look at television, go to the movies, or listen to music or the news in any American city, what you read, see, or hear will be very much

the same as in any other city. On a recent visit to Atlanta, I listened to the local TV news. It was all about child abuse, drug busts, and local political corruption -- exactly the same as in Washington. Only the street names had been changed, and not to protect the innocent.

National unification of the United States has meant the destruction of local and regional variations and their homogenization under a regime of centralized power -- economic and cultural as well as political. But homogenization doesn't stop at the water's edge. The universalist and cosmopolitan formulas that justified national unification -- equality of opportunity, human rights, economic growth, and material progress -- don't distinguish beween one nation and another, and ultimately they demand the abolition of national distinctiveness and identity just as easily as they do the homogenization of subnational regional and cultural particularity. The forces that bring Kentucky Fried Chicken to Nebraska and Nevada, disseminate the political insights of Rivera and Donohue to housewives in Wyoming, and decide how small businessmen in Birmingham should provide for the safety and health of their workers also will export such progress to the rest of the world. Indeed, the logic of this century's technological unification, and the interests of the elites that created and run it, dictate that the unity of the nation make way for the homogenization of the world.

The globalist dynamic is working itself out even now. The September issue of Scientific American was devoted to the topic

of "Managing Planet Earth," and the thesis of Paul Kennedy's The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers, that the United States is in a condition of decline, is routinely exploited to justify the management of decline so that the United States, in Professor Kennedy's words, can "adjust sensibly to the newer world order." Secretary of State James Baker and Mikhail Gorbachev become almost weepy when they talk about the "transnational issues" that will fill the diplomatic platters of the future -- arms control, conflict management, global environmental and economic policies, and, of course, drugs. American servicemen already are in South America to help its governments perform what ought to be entirely domestic law enforcement functions against the Medellin Cartel, itself a transnational corporate state. Global democratization is only one part of the effort to envelop the entire planet in a post-industrial web that will strangle local cultural, economic, and political autonomy.

Some Americans, especially the cosmo-conservatives in Manhattan and Washington, may fantasize that globalization will yield another "American Century," with Yankee know-how tossing institutional and ideological candy-bars to fetching senoritas in the Third World. But blue-collar workers in Detroit and construction men in Texas probably have a better grip on the realities of globalization as they watch their own jobs disappear before Asian competition and illegal immigrants. Globalization doesn't mean that America will prevail, but that it will vanish among the electrons and laser beams by which the planet is to be

held together, just as Midwestern small businesses and Southern family farms vanished into the financial and industrial grids of the nineteenth-century nationalists.

But compared to what globalism has in store for us, nationalism looks pretty good. If what remains of the Middle American nucleus of American culture is to survive, it will have to evolve a new nationalist consciousness capable of resisting the global managerial system and of challenging its domestic apologists. This means that the main instruments of globalization -- the internationalization of domestic law and policy through gradual subordination to transnational organizations and treaties; the internationalization of the economy through free trade and investment; and the internationalization of the historic American population itself through mass immigration and the delegitimation of the European roots of its culture -- have to be decisively repudiated.

It also means a radical rejection of what historically has been the basis of American nationalism -- the cult of economic growth, material acquisition, and universal "equality of opportunity" -- and its reformulation in a new myth of the nation as a distinctive cultural and political force that cannot be universalized for the rest of the planet or digested by the globalist regime. Finally, it means that Middle America, for once, will have to get its act together to challenge the power of the ideological globalists who now prevail in the nation as both the "left" and the "right."

"In every republic," wrote Niccolò Machiavelli, "there are two parties, that of the nobles and that of the people." The former "have a great desire to dominate, whilst the latter have only the wish not to be dominated, and consequently a greater desire to live in the enjoyment of liberty." In the American republic, the "nobles" have corresponded to the forces that sought the unification of the country under their own formulas of egalitarian and acquisitive nationalism and who now beat the drum for global homogenization. The "people" have consisted of those groups and sections that have resisted unification, that wanted only to be left alone, and who sought, as Weaver described Hayne's idea of freedom, "protection to enable him to enjoy things, not a force or power to enable him to do things."

But the mere "wish not to be dominated," as the anti-federalists, the Confederates, the agrarian populists, and, most recently, the grassroots adherents of the New Right wanted, has not sustained their independence and freedom or the integrity of their cultural institutions. If what remains of such forces are serious about resisting being swallowed by the new transnational colossus, they will have to recognize that they can do so only by dominating -- that is, by becoming "nobles" themselves, by uniting in a new Middle American nationalism, and by putting aside the divisions and distractions that have turned them into the victims of fortune instead of her master.