

by Samuel Francis

The Survival Issue

Long ago in March 1989, in the first column I wrote for this space, I noted that President George Bush shared with only one other American chief executive (namely, Martin Van Buren) the distinction of having been elected to the White House from the office of the Vice-President. I also commented that “the lackluster record of Andrew Jackson’s successor perhaps does not inspire confidence about the new administration,” a remark that, generously interpreted, might be considered a prediction of Mr. Bush’s defeat four years later. But even with all the generosity that *Chronicles* readers are capable of mustering, it was at best merely a tongue-in-cheek prophecy. Just think what I could prognosticate if I ever got serious.

One serious prediction that wafts up from the tea leaves of the 1992 election is that American conservatism, at least in the form in which it has been known since it first began to materialize in the late 1940’s and early 1950’s, is now defunct, and you don’t need to be a swami to understand why it died. The Bush administration and Mr. Bush’s defeat delivered the *coup de grace* to the organized American right, even though the terminal signs had been evident for some time. In the days after the election, of course, a squadron of professional conservatives delivered themselves of all the reasons why the Republican loss of the White House was really a tremendous victory, but no one paid much attention to them. Like Glendower, they could call spirits from the vasty deep, but no apparitions materialized in response to their incantations.

Perhaps the most compelling evidence that mainstream conservatism is defunct is that the very concept of what conservatism means has evaporated, even for those who regard themselves as its high priests. The day after the election, *Washington Post* reporter E. J. Dionne quoted a high-ranking official of the Heritage Foundation on the continuing relevance of conservative ideas. “What do you mean that conservative ideas didn’t work in the 1992 election?” she

protested. “They worked for Clinton.” Only a few days later, as Spike Lee’s new film *Malcolm X* was about to debut, an editorial writer for the *Wall Street Journal* published a column entitled “Malcolm X, Conservative Hero.” It ought to be evident that a movement that claims both Bill Clinton and Malcolm X as its icons is simply meaningless, and you don’t have to be a political neanderthal to wonder what either one of these champions has to do with anything remotely resembling “conservatism” in any sense.

Of course, the authors of such sentiments were simply trying to paint the pallid countenance of the conservative cadaver with the only cosmetics they possessed. Totally ignorant of what the cadaver looked like when alive, they merely swiped some make-up from the dressing table of the left and applied it in a vain and vulgar attempt to resurrect a zombie for the right. Indeed, for the last several years the application of cosmetics is what the mainstream right has been reduced to. Ever since Mr. Bush in 1990 violated his pledge not to raise taxes, professional conservatives have kicked and screamed vociferously, but in 1992 they wound up supporting him anyway in a desperate effort to pretend, to themselves as well as to their dwindling number of followers and donors, that they still retained political clout at the highest level of national politics. As the electoral judgment day drew nigh, their efforts reached an almost comic, but definitely pathetic, pinnacle.

The week before the election, a group of about 45 professional conservatives summoned a meeting in Washington that was originally planned as a “wake” for the Bush administration, which was facing a rout because, you see, it had deserted conservative principles. But in the last part of the same week, as the assemblage was about to convene, Mr. Bush began to rally a bit in the polls, and it started to look as though he might win after all. The 45 stalwarts at once changed their tune, and when they emerged from their huddle, they proclaimed their unanimous endorsement of Mr. Bush. Indeed, his recent rise in

the polls was due, they announced, to his return to “conservative roots,” though when his conservative roots bore no branches in the actual voting a few days later, the pundits and gurus of defuncto-conservatism labored late into the night to explain how Mr. Bush’s ideological defection was responsible for the disaster. Had the defuncto-cons harbored sufficient integrity to separate themselves definitely from Mr. Bush when he first began to go wrong, they could today more convincingly purport that his defeat was indeed due to his abandonment of their “principles,” whatever those might be. But, having swaddled themselves in him, his administration, and the increasingly distasteful Republican Party under his tutelage, the organized right is unable to extricate itself from the wreckage of last November.

No small part of the more general reason for the demise of American conservatism has been the importation into the ranks of its leadership in the last decade of the very species of ignoramuses, opportunists, and sloganeers who imagine that Malcolm and Mr. Clinton are men of the right and who snatch at every fluff in the political breeze to prove that they and their “movement” are within grasp of ultimate victory. But the even more general reason is that history has passed conservatism by, and that fact implies a reorientation of American politics such as has not been seen since the New Deal or before.

The American Right centered around three principles, which may be formulated in an over-simplified way as anti-communism, small government, and cultural traditionalism. Of the three, none remains intact, at least as the first generation of conservative architects constructed them. Anticommunism is simply irrelevant today, and even when the Soviet Union still had breath in its body, the anticommunist cause was subtly redefined in terms of a crusade for global democracy and a new global regime thinly disguised by the trappings of nationalism as a *Pax Americana*. “Small government”—a strict constructionist, laissez-faire, and decentralized state—was also redefined, sometimes subtly,

sometimes brazenly, as the post-Reagan right embraced the civil rights movement, supply-side economics, the “imperial presidency,” a “progressive conservative” defense of the welfare state, certain forms of judicial activism that suited the Reaganites’ immediate partisan and ideological agendas, and other extensions of the American megastate constructed by the left in this century. “Cultural traditionalism,” of course, remains a catchword of the right today, though conservative airheads have increasingly denuded it of any concrete content. In their version of cultural traditionalism, “family values” mean whatever you say they mean, Americans have “religion” but no particular faith or church, and, if not yet Malcolm X, then at least Martin Luther King, Jr., is taken as an exemplar of American ideals on the same level as Washington and Jefferson. Any notion that America is the product of a distinctive and particular people and their institutions and that the nation cannot exist or survive apart from them is alien and repugnant to the mainstream leadership of those who regard themselves as conservatives today, and even the description of America as a “Christian nation,” as Mississippi’s Governor Kirk Fordice discovered shortly after the election, is greeted with derision and fear by the national leaders of the Republican Party.

What remains of American conservatism today seems largely to be centered around economic and fiscal issues—controlling or limiting taxation, cutting the budget, and dealing with the deficit (for those who think that the deficit is even an issue). What no one seems to have noticed, however, is that, absent the “small government” ideals of the Old Right, those issues too become meaningless. If conservatives are now committed to a kind of Tory welfarism and if, even after the end of the Cold War, they continue to support the foreign policy and military apparatus of the Cold War state in the form of foreign aid, troops abroad, etc., how can they possibly expect to cut the taxes or limit the spending necessary to maintain these structures and functions? It is all very well to smirk about the costs of the franking privilege and various barrels of pork, but these perennial and egregious examples of “waste” are not significant portions of the federal budget.

Moreover, it has become a commonplace of American politics that so many

Americans of all kinds and constituencies now depend on “welfare” and similar benefits dispensed by the federal leviathan that it is politically impossible for any one party or movement to get itself elected and preside over a balanced and fair reduction of federal entitlements. The budget crisis in the United States will be solved when and only when a coalition of constituencies gains power and proceeds to slice out the entitlements of everyone who is not part of the coalition. But no one imagines that entitlements will ever be reduced in accordance with the small-government, political-neutralist principles that animated the Old Right from the days of the New Deal.

The word and concept of “conservatism,” then, have been rendered all but meaningless, though it is to be expected that those who make use of the word and concept will prosper under the Clinton administration, and while it might even come to pass that some of them will eventually be elected to one office or another, it is doubtful that any of them will ever be able to govern, unless they further delude themselves that the left is really the right and thereby gain the applause and approval of the nation’s dominant political and cultural forces. “Conservatism,” to be sure, is able to raise money, increase subscriptions for its journals, attract some followers, and perhaps even win elections, but it is unable to govern because it does not control or even have strong allies within the dominant culture. It is uninterested in culture, except insofar as “culture” serves as a convenient bumper-sticker for electoral purposes, and in the last election conservatives proved that they cannot even make effective use of their vaguely and rapidly defined cultural issues.

What, then, is to be done? Gaetano Mosca, the Italian political scientist of the late 19th century, wrote that the “Social Darwinist” conception of human society was somewhat misplaced, because the competition among and within human societies is usually not a “struggle for existence” or survival, as Social Darwinism taught, but rather a “struggle for preeminence, which is really a constant phenomenon that arises in all human societies, from the most highly civilized down to such as have barely issued from savagery.” The real issue in most social conflicts, from war to elections, is not about physical sur-

Never Forget GOLD

If your best friend were in the rare coin business, you couldn't get this quality for less.



U.S. 1866-1899 “Coronet Liberty”
\$5 Gold Half Eagle, Extra Fine

Only \$179.⁰⁰

Why are we selling guaranteed Extra Fine 19th century U.S. \$5 gold pieces at this rock-bottom price? Simple: to get you to try us. Because once you're acquainted with the way we do business—our strict grading, prompt delivery, personalized service, money-saving discount catalogs (“the best in the industry”) and free research reports—we're betting that you'll want to continue ordering from us.

A terrific offer! Historic “Coronet Liberty” gold half eagles are America's most popularly collected classic gold coins. And, especially in uncertain times, gold has been one of man's best friends. Because of opportune timing, we now offer sharply detailed Extra Fine quality for far less. Even if you had a friend or relative in the coin business, we doubt that you could get a better deal—or get coins selected with greater care.

Hurry, while they last. While supplies last, we'll sell guaranteed Extra Fine U.S. “Coronet Liberty” gold half eagles for just \$179 each or 5 for \$850. Limit 5. (Order #10133). No dealer orders accepted. Dates range from 1866 to 1899 (no 1900s). The coins are conservatively graded by our ANA-trained experts and come with a certificate of authenticity. 30-day home examination: money-back guarantee. To order by credit card, call toll-free 1-800-451-4463 at any time. Or send your check or money order to: International Coins & Currency, Inc., 11 E. State St., Box 218, Dept. 2618, Montpelier, VT 05601. Add just \$2 for postage. Don't miss this opportunity! All orders subject to acceptance.

Serving collectors for 18 years.

vival but about which groups will prevail and subdue other groups. For most of American history since the Civil War, American political conflicts have not been about survival but about preeminence, about which group—parties, ideologies, factions, regions, coalitions—become preeminent. That has also been true of the conservative-liberal conflict since World War II, because the conflict was largely over which direction the American megastate would lurch and who would control it, not whether there would be a megastate, much less whether there would be an America.

Yet there comes a time in the history of many societies when survival is the issue, although even then the “survival issue” is closely connected with the “preeminence issue.” In the election just past, some candidates—Ross Perot and James Stockdale, for example, and, at least by implication, Pat Buchanan—began to whisper, ever so softly, that for America that time has now come. The

issues that began to mutter in this past election—economic digestion by foreign powers, the danger not only of crime but of outright anarchy, cultural disintegration under the impact of massive immigration and militantly antiwhite and anti-Western multiculturalist movements—have to do with whether the American nation, as a political unity and as a cultural identity, will live or die.

Conservatism, as it came to be defined in the Reagan-Bush era, has nothing to say about such issues because it refuses to admit their relevance, and it refuses to admit their relevance because most of its exponents are preoccupied with proving that they are compatible with the same political and cultural forces that have brought the nation and its civilization to the brink of destruction, with proving that Malcolm X and Mr. Clinton are really conservatives and that immigration and unrestricted free trade are really tonics for the nation. Indeed, the defuncto-cons typically regard

some of the most dangerous of such forces as signs of health. If, however, the survival issues now arising are not addressed by political forces capable of resolving them, the nation, its culture, and its people are likely to go over the brink and not come back. It won't be conservatism that resolves them.

The passing of conservatism, then, cannot be mourned. Like any species that slips into the evolutionary twilight, it was unable to respond to the challenge it encountered, and good riddance to it. The task for Americans who are intent on the survival of their nation and its civilization now is not to revive anything like the species that has just expired but to evolve a new movement, a new political and ideological category that transcends left and right, capable of perceiving the current challenges and formulating the measures necessary to meet them. With a slate clean of the defuncto-cons, we now may be able to create such a movement. c

ERIC VOEGELIN INSTITUTE

Dr. Ellis Sandoz, Director

(College of Arts and Sciences, LSU)



Research, conferences, and publications on Political Philosophy and Constitutional Government

Louisiana State University

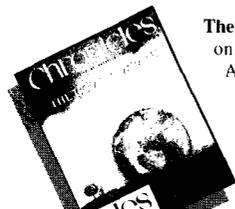
240 Stubbs Hall

Baton Rouge, LA 70803-5466

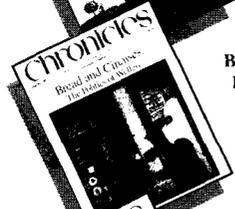
In Defense and for the Future of Civilization

For information, call: AC 504/388-2552 • FAX 504/388-2540

THE YEAR IN REVIEW



The Coming Wrath—January 1992—Samuel Francis on James Burnham and the managerial revolution, Andrei Navrozov on democracy and dictatorship, Tomislav Sunic on the future of nationalism, and Harold O.J. Brown on the prophecies of Pitirim Sorokin. Plus Chilton Williamson, Jr. on Deep Ecology, William Grigg on the case against the Boy Scouts, and Anne Marie Morgan on the bureaucracy of getting married.



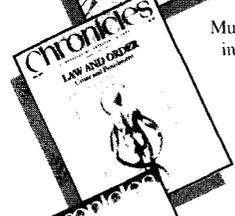
Bread and Circuses: The Politics of Welfare—February 1992—Allan Carlson on how federal housing policies have contributed to the breakup of the family, William Murchison on the doctor and the state, and Christina F. Jeffrey on Social Security as family policy. Plus Barbara McCarthy on welfare and illegal immigration, and Jeffrey Tucker on Housing and Urban Development.



Faces of Eve: Goddess, Starlet, Poetess—March 1992—Janet Scott Barlow on the devolution of women on the screen, Thomas Fleming on marriage as the real right to privacy, and R.S. Gwynn on American women poets. Plus Betsy Clarke on the politics of rape, Anne Marie Morgan on the new technology of fertility control, and Kenneth Craycraft on Mary Ann Glendon's *Rights Talk*.



The Spanish Americas—April 1992—Richard Estrada on the Hispanic contributions to American culture, Mario Vargas Llosa on the difficult rise of the Latin American novel, Chilton Williamson, Jr. on bullfighting in Juárez, Mexico, and poems by Jorge Luis Borges. Plus Brad Linaweaver on Albert Jay Nock, William Murchison on LBJ, and Murray Rothbard on violence in New York City.

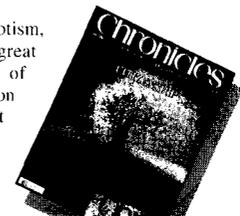


Law and Order: Crime and Punishment—May 1992—Thomas Fleming on the role of the executioner, Philip Jenkins on the drug war and personal liberties, Graeme Newman on the case for corporal punishment, and Theodore Pappas on vigilante justice. Plus Murray Rothbard on street crime, Llewellyn Rockwell on vagrancy law, Richard Irving on taxi drivers and minority crime, and a firsthand account of life in prison.

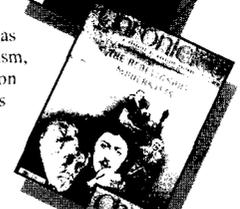


Restoring the Republic—June 1992—Clyde Wilson on the republican approach, Samuel Francis on the nationalist approach, and E. Christian Kopff on the Augustan compromise. Plus Thomas Fleming on why we have the government we deserve, Theodore Pappas on Japanese-American trade, Chilton Williamson, Jr. on illegal immigration, and Murray Rothbard on repudiating the national debt.

Citizenship—July 1992—John Lukacs on patriotism, Richard D. Lamm on why great nations need great citizens, Richard Flatman on four models of citizenship, and Peter Schuck and Rogers Smith on why citizenship should be based on consent and not birth. Plus Thomas Fleming on the rebirth of nationalism, and Samuel Francis on the Buchanan Revolution.



Reactionary Modernism—August 1992—Thomas Molnar on Céline and French reactionary modernism, Peter J. Stanlis on Robert Frost, J.O. Tate on Wyndham Lewis, and Larry Woiwode on Dos Passos. Plus David R. Slavitt on the novels of 1991, Justin Raimondo on Ayn Rand as plagiarist, Bill Kauffman on Sinclair Lewis, and Chilton Williamson, Jr.'s review of R. Emmett Tyrrell's *The Conservative Crack-Up*.



Rotten to the Core: American Colleges—September 1992—Thomas Fleming on literature and the curriculum debate, Robert Weissberg on the life of a campus conservative, E. Christian Kopff on a true classical curriculum, and student reports on political correctness at the University of Florida, Grinnell College, and Georgetown University. Plus Laura Rogers' exposé of the Parents as Teachers program.



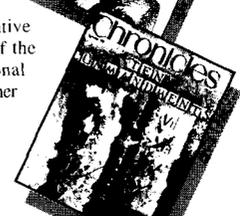
1492: Italians and America—October 1992—Christie Davies on blaming Columbus, E. Christian Kopff on Margaret Fuller in Rome, Chilton Williamson, Jr. on pseudoscholarship about Columbus, and Samuel Francis on *The Godfather* as political metaphor. Plus Thomas Fleming on the changing frontier, David R. Slavitt on Lorenzo Da Ponte, and Thomas O. Jones on Columbus' descendants.



Ain't Freedom Grand: The 1992 Election—November 1992—Donald Warren on the empty voting booth, William J. Quirk on the unrepresented middle class, Thomas Fleming on the Electoral College, James S. Fishkin on deliberative polling, and Samuel Francis on the passivity of the electorate. Plus Allan Carlson on proportional representation, and Theodore Pappas on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s early plagiarisms.



Ten Commandments—December 1992—A round-table discussion on the Decalogue—by Thomas Molnar, Gary North, Frank W. Brownlow, Allan Carlson, Jacob Neusner, Theodore Pappas, Murray Rothbard, E. Christian Kopff, Harold O.J. Brown, and George Garrett. Plus Philip Jenkins on the panic over priestly pedophilia, Sally Wright on Malcolm Muggeridge, and William Wilson on C.S. Lewis.



BACK ISSUE ORDER FORM

1 to 4 issues \$5.00 each; 5 to 9 issues \$3.00 each (postage & handling included);
10 or more issues \$2.00 each (postage billed separately)

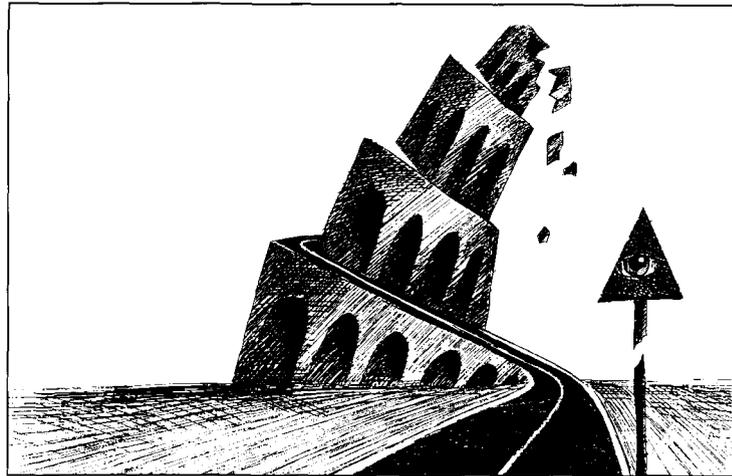
Date	Qty.	Cost	Date	Qty.	Cost
January 1992	_____	_____	July 1992	_____	_____
February 1992	_____	_____	August 1992	_____	_____
March 1992	_____	_____	September 1992	_____	_____
April 1992	_____	_____	October 1992	_____	_____
May 1992	_____	_____	November 1992	_____	_____
June 1992	_____	_____	December 1992	_____	_____

Total Enclosed \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

Mail with check to: Chronicles * 934 North Main Street * Rockford, Illinois 61103



Igor Kopechinsky

A League of Our Own

by Thomas Fleming

Nineteen ninety-two was an opportunity for Americans to reflect on both their past and their future. In less than a month, we celebrated the birthday of Columbus and the transfer of power from the New Deal to the Big Chill, from the civics-class pieties of George Bush to the *Penthouse* improprieties of Bill Clinton.

I watched a good part of the campaign from an Italian vantage-point. I went to Italy primarily to speak about Columbus and the American tradition and to continue my very limited education in things Italian. At the end of the month, I was more confused than ever about Italian politics, but—as is always the case—I had learned something about my own country.

A year or so ago, a part-Italian friend took me to task for saying that Italy was in crisis. Without admitting I was right then, he now acknowledges the real sense of emergency that exists everywhere in Italy. At the end of the summer, the middle classes were practically up in arms against the government's handling of economic questions. Faced with mounting debt, the government ordered property-owners to pay a second round of real-estate taxes. All over Italy, people lined up to pay the impost and avoid the threatened penalties, only to discover that no one knew how much was owed, and, besides, the government had not printed up the tax forms.

The government wanted the extra money, in part, to pursue its futile plan to stabilize the lira on world markets. After hearing, day after day, that the lira would never be devalued, businessmen woke up one morning to read of the devaluation. Even opponents of the policy were outraged, and one businessman told me that the regime had forfeited any claim to be taken seriously.

The Italian economy is in ruins; none of the major parties inspires confidence even in loyal members; the Mafia is murdering every judge and prosecutor who stand in its way. In the midst of this crisis, the labor unions—pampered and coddled by the government—are once again threatening strikes that will shut down the entire country, just like in the good old days of the 1970's. I got up early one morning in Genoa to

catch the train to Milan, and when I asked the desk clerk to call me a cab, she gave me a crude version of Hotspur's response to Owen Glendower's boast that he could summon spirits: "But will they come when you do call for them?" Somewhere in the monologue I picked out the most dreaded word in Italian vocabulary: *sciopero* (strike).

The unions have a right to be unhappy. After squandering vast sums of money on monetary stabilization, the government decided to balance the budget by cutting health benefits. The unions—part of the party-state that governs the country—went along, but when the most powerful union leader in Italy attempted to hold a rally, he was attacked by union members who have joined the Lega Nord, a coalition of localist movements in Northern Italy that preaches a doctrine of economic liberty and political decentralization.

The Lega has increased its share of the vote in every recent election and is now the dominant party in the rich industrial North. In response to the double taxation, Lega's leaders called for a tax protest; their answer to government-controlled unions is to form their own unions; and their solution—only half in jest—to the collapse of the lira is to coin their own money, the Lega.

The ruling coalition is terrified. Opinion polls in Monza and Varese, two wealthy cities in Lombardia, gave the Lega 35 percent or better in the next mayoral elections—high figures in a country with dozens of parties. The government responded to these polls by postponing the elections. Umberto Bossi's threat, reported in the *Corriera della sera* last September, could not have been plainer: "If the government will not reverse its decisions, a march on Rome could start from Milan to ask for the North's secession."

Bossi's hand was strengthened by a recent victory in Mantova, a city outside the center of the Lega's strength. For the first time in years the Socialists openly campaigned together with the former Communist Party leader, Achille Occhetto, in a popular front with the Greens for the sole purpose of defeating the Lega, but when the votes were counted the Lega Nord polled 34 percent, roughly double what the second-place