

# From Household to Nation

The Middle American Populism of Pat Buchanan

by Samuel Francis



Anna Myreck-Wodtcki

If there was any major difference between the presidential campaign of Pat Buchanan in 1995 and his first run at the Republican nomination in 1992, it was the relative calm with which his enemies greeted the announcement of his second candidacy and his rapid move last year to the forefront of the Republican field. Rabbi Avi Weiss and his goon platoons still found time and someone else's money to dog Buchanan's steps from New Hampshire to California, and occasionally some other hired thug, usually a failed neoconservative politician, would emerge from the political graveyard to moan about Buchanan's "fascism," his "nativism," or his "racism." But in general, even Buchanan's most left-wing critics found the man himself likable and many of his ideas compelling. Tom Carson of the *Village Voice* traveled with the Buchanan Brigades in Iowa last spring, and despite the agony of enduring a couple of weeks slumming in the Heartland, he could not help but be drawn to the popular insurgency the candidate was mounting. "I've been waiting my whole life for someone running for president to talk about the Fortune 500 as the enemy," Mr. Carson told Buchanan, "and when I finally get my wish, it turns out to be you."

Of course, there was criticism. In the early stages, its main thrust—from conservatives—was that Buchanan could not possibly win the nomination, let alone the election, and that his image as a fringe candidate, the notorious organizational weaknesses persisting from the 1992 campaign, and the lack of

adequate money this time would stop him from becoming any more than a divisive vote-taker from real winners like Phil Gramm. By the end of the year, the Texas Republican had largely faded from the discussion, though his bottomless pit of contributions kept him in the race. The more recent polls show Buchanan leading or matching Gramm in key early states like New Hampshire and Iowa, and by last summer Pat's fund-raising was outstripping that of the Texan's opulent money machine. It was beginning to look as though the boys who put their dollar on Mr. Gramm had backed the wrong pony.

But despite Buchanan's emergence as a major candidate, most serious observers believed he could not win the nomination, let alone the election, and that belief itself, widespread among conservatives preoccupied with getting rid of Bill Clinton, threatened to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. For those on the right who want only to oust the incumbent resident of the White House or impress their friends with invitations to the court soirees of the next Republican successor to the presidential purple, winning the election is all that matters, and Buchanan's supposed unelectability was enough to make them lose interest. But the courtiers and professional partisans miss the larger victory the Buchanan campaign is on the eve of winning. If Buchanan loses the nomination, it will be because his time has not yet come, but the social and political forces on which both his campaigns have been based will not disappear, and even if he does lose, he will have won a place in history as an architect of the victory those forces will eventually build.

The importance of the Buchanan campaign lies not in its capacity to win the nomination or the national election but in its

*Samuel Francis is a nationally syndicated columnist and a contributing editor to Chronicles.*

organization of those forces into a coherent political coalition. That coalition includes the remnants of the "Old Right," as well as various single-issue constituencies (pro-lifers, anti-immigration activists, protectionists) to which Buchanan is one of the few voices to speak. But it would be a serious error to squeeze Buchanan into an orthodox conservative pigeonhole from which he is merely trying to lead a replay of the Goldwater campaign, the candidacies of John Ashbrook or Phil Crane, or the Reagan movement, and especially in the last year he has expressed and developed ideas with which most adherents of the conventional American right—mainstream conservative, paleoconservative, or libertarian—are not comfortable. But conventional conservative doctrines today are virtually extinct politically, for the simple reason that the social groups that found them expressive of their interests and values no longer exist or no longer are able to command a significant political following, and as a result, conservative ideological candidates like Alan Keyes or Robert Dornan who insist on campaigning on those doctrines rise no higher than two to three percent in the polls. One major reason for the underestimation of Buchanan's prospects and for the surprise with which most analysts have greeted his unexpected success lay in their mistaken assumption that Buchanan was simply yet another right-wing protestor, calling the party and those parts of the nation that would listen to him to pick up the torch of doctrine and wave it until the waters of political and cultural darkness extinguished it. The reason Buchanan has not been submerged is that the torch he carries illuminates new social forces that only now are forming a common political consciousness. What is important about these forces is not that a campaign centered on them does not now win major elections (indeed, it would be a fatal error if they succeeded in winning prematurely) but that the Buchanan campaign for the first time in recent history offers them an organized mode of expression that will allow them to develop and mature their consciousness and their power.

Those forces consist, of course, of the broad social and cultural spectrum of Middle America. Middle American groups are more and more coming to perceive their exploitation at the hands of the dominant elites. The exploitation works on several fronts—economically, by hypertaxation and the design of a globalized economy dependent on exports and services in place of manufacturing; culturally, by the managed destruction of Middle American norms and institutions; and politically, by the regimentation of Middle Americans under the federal leviathan.

The significant polarization within American society is between the elites, increasingly unified as a ruling class that relies on the national state as its principal instrument of power, and Middle America itself, which lacks the technocratic and managerial skills that yield control of the machinery of power. Other polarities and conflicts within American society—between religious and secular, white and black, national and global, worker and management—are beginning to fit into this larger polarity of Middle American and Ruling Class. The Ruling Class uses and is used by secularist, globalist, antiwhite, and anti-Western forces for its and their advantage.

The interests that drive Middle American social and political forces are considerably different from those that drove the groups that generally supported one or another version of "conservatism" in the era during and after the New Deal. Old Right conservatism was a body of ideas that appealed mainly to businessmen of the *haute bourgeoisie* and their localized, middle-

class adherents, a social base that 20th-century social and economic transformations effectively wiped out. Old Right conservatism defended a limited, decentralized, and largely neutral national government and the ethic of small-town, small-business, Anglo-Saxon Protestantism. As the social base of the Old Right withered in the post-Depression and post-World War II eras, the political and intellectual right essentially divorced itself from these declining interests and forces and evolved new and far less socially rooted ideologies that represented almost no one outside the narrow academic and journalistic circles that formulated them.

By the 1950's and 60's, "movement" conservatives habitually quibbled with each other over the subtler points of their doctrines like late medieval Scholastic theologians, and the doctrines themselves—a bastardized libertarianism that only vaguely resembled its classical liberal and Old Whig ancestors, globalist anticommunism that slowly garbed itself in the costumes of Wilsonian democratism, and increasingly abstruse metaphysical and theological ponderosities—attracted none but dissident intellectuals and proved useless as vehicles for transporting a mass following to electoral victory.

Neoconservatism, emerging in the late 1960's and early 70's, was even worse. Far less cerebral than the abstractions churned out by 1950's conservative intellectualism, but quicker on the draw when it came to political showdowns, neoconservatism gained the adherence of no one but still other eggheads alienated from the establishment left and contemptuous of their newfound allies on the right.

Given the collapse of the social base of the right and the addiction of right-wing intellectuals to ideological navel-gazing, the political right could no longer develop serious political strategies. All it could do was pick up odd clusters of voters who were fearful of crime, resentful of racial integration, worried about communist takeovers, eager to remove federal fingers from their pockets, or passionate about the defense of business interests, the last subject never straying far from what remained of the right-wing mind. One way or another, the right managed to keep congressional seats and occasionally win the odd presidential election, but its victories were flukish, depending on the foibles of the opposition, and it was unable either to penetrate or dislodge the dominant culture created by the left or to win the firm allegiance of Middle Americans. There was enough in the rhetoric of Richard Nixon's "New Majority" and Ronald Reagan's appeal to Southern and blue-collar Democrats to stitch together momentary triumphs, but the persistent residues of pro-business conservative ideology and the failure to deliver on social and cultural commitments to Middle American constituencies prevented the consolidation of an enduring coalition with real roots in existing social forces and the culture those forces supported.

Middle Americans, emerging from the ruins of the old independent middle and working classes, found conservative, libertarian, and pro-business Republican ideology and rhetoric irrelevant, distasteful, and even threatening to their own socioeconomic interests. The post-World War II middle class was in reality an affluent proletariat, economically dependent on the federal government through labor codes, housing loans, educational programs, defense contracts, and health and unemployment benefits. All variations of conservative doctrine rejected these as illegitimate extensions of the state and boasted of plans to abolish most of them, and Middle American allegiance to political parties and candidates espousing such

doctrine could never become firm. Yet, at the same time, the Ruling Class proved unable to uproot the social, cultural, and national identities and loyalties of the Middle American proletariat, and Middle Americans found themselves increasingly alienated from the political left and its embrace of antinational policies and countercultural manners and morals.

Thus, there emerged a chronic Middle American political dilemma: while the left could win Middle Americans through its economic measures, it lost them through its social and cultural radicalism, and while the right could attract Middle Americans through appeals to law and order and defense of sexual normality, conventional morals and religion, traditional social institutions, and invocations of nationalism and patriotism, it lost Middle Americans when it rehearsed its old bourgeois economic formulas. Middle American votes could be won by whichever side of the political spectrum was better at feeding anxieties over cultural rot or economic catastrophe, but neither an increasingly antinational and countercultural left nor an increasingly pro-business right could expect to stabilize Middle American political loyalties sufficiently to sustain a national coalition.

The persistence of the division of the political spectrum into “right” and “left” has therefore served to prevent the formation of a distinct Middle American political consciousness and the emergence of a new identity synthesizing both the economic interests and cultural-national loyalties of the proletarianized middle class in a separate and unified political movement. But today and in the future this division will no longer obtain. Middle American political loyalties are ceasing to be torn between a left and a right that are increasingly convergent and indistinguishable. Aside from the ideological castration of the spokesmen of both sides in recent years, the main cause of the evanescence of right and left lies in the triumph of economic globalization.

The globalization of the American economy (and culture and population) not only presents a more immediate threat to Middle American economic interests than the prospect of the libertarian and pro-business let-'em-eat-cake policies of the right but also strips the right of its capacity to appeal to Middle Americans at all. As champions of the globalist right like Jack Kemp, Phil Gramm, Steve Forbes, Newt Gingrich, Ben Wattenberg, George Gilder, Robert Bartley, Julian Simon, and George Will never tire of explaining, globalization means the disappearance of nationality, of cultures closely linked to national identity, probably of national sovereignty itself, and even of the distinctive populations of which nations are composed. By signing on to globalization, then, the right has effectively metamorphosed itself into the left and forfeited the sole grounds of its appeal to the nationalism and social and cultural conservatism that continue to animate Middle Americans. The right may still thump its chest about crime and abortion, and its leaders may still thunder about sex and violence in movies they have never seen, but even on these issues the right's obsession with economic uplift as a panacea for crime, welfare, and moral decline emasculates its older defense of national interests and cultural order. The only reason the Republican Party has not already jettisoned its anti-abortion positions, and the only reason Bob Dole continues to complain about movies and television programs, is the influence of the large, militant, and well-organized “religious right,” itself a Middle American movement though one that can never exert more than a limited appeal.

Having denuded itself of any reason for Middle Americans to support it, the right can no longer expect the Reagan Democrats to return to the Republican column. Given a choice between only the globalist right and the equally globalist and countercultural left, Middle Americans may well support the latter (they did so in 1992 by voting for Clinton over Bush), because at least the left can be expected not to gut the entitlement programs with which Middle American economic interests are linked. The 1994 Republican congressional sweep was less a mandate for the GOP than a frenetic quest by alienated voters to attach themselves to some political entity that just might resist the Ruling Class and its regime and embrace the agenda of Middle Americans. There was little danger of that from “revolutionaries” like Mr. Gingrich, and in the past year or so the sprouting of militia groups, the land war in the Western states, the religious right itself, and the popularization of conspiracy theories that at least symbolically convey the hostility and hatred with which the popular mind regards the federal leviathan and the elites attached to it testify to the political and cultural alienation that now stalks through the nation.

While Buchanan rightly distances himself from the more bizarre and pathological expressions of Middle American unrest, no candidate in the fields of either party has so clearly adopted the central message of the Middle American revolt. His columns and commentary in the months prior to his announcement of his candidacy began developing an economic doctrine that radically departed from conventional free-market and free-trade ideology, the main source of Middle American distaste for Republicans of the mainstream right. Buchanan continues to support economic deregulation, a flat tax, and the abolition of taxes on inheritances, family farms and businesses of less than \$2 million, but in his last months as a commentator he devoted a series of columns to attacking the “myth of Economic Man” and formulating what he called “a conservatism of the heart” and “economic nationalism,” pegged on his active opposition to NAFTA, GATT, the World Trade Organization, and the \$50-billion Mexican bailout.

The core of his message consists of a rejection of the thinly masked economic determinism espoused by Kemp, Gramm, and Gingrich and an affirmation of the primacy of cultural identity, national sovereignty, and national interests over economic goals. Increasingly, his economic nationalism seems to define and drive his whole candidacy, informing even his cultural conservatism, though the concept of “economic” implicit in his writing and speeches is considerably broader than conventional concepts of either the left or the right. “Economics,” it should be recalled, derives from Greek words meaning “household management,” and the purpose of economic life in Buchanan's worldview is not simply to gain material satisfaction but to support families and the social institutions and identities that evolve from families as the fundamental units of human society and human action.

Thus, his “America First” foreign policy is more than the isolationism preached by the old America First Committee and considerably more than the neo-isolationism supported today by most paleoconservatives. For Buchanan, “America First” implies not only putting national interests over those of other nations and abstractions like “world leadership,” “global harmony,” and the “New World Order,” but also giving priority to the nation over the gratification of individual and subnational interests. Protectionism, to replace the federal taxes Buchanan

would abolish and to “insulate the wages of U.S. workers from foreign laborers who must work for \$1 an hour or less,” follows from his economic nationalism, reflecting the economic interests and identity of the nation, just as a defense and foreign policy follows from his political nationalism, reflecting the political interests and identity of the nation. So, for that matter, does his support for curtailing, through a five-year moratorium, all immigration, legal as well as illegal.

Buchanan’s nationalism appears to break with the specter of individualism that has haunted American conservative ideology since the 1930’s. It is based on the premise that the individual outside social and cultural institutions is an abstraction, and it probably shows Buchanan’s debt to Catholic social theory rather than the atomistic and acquisitive egoism that descends to the libertarian right from John Locke. In one column, Buchanan supported the “humane economy” espoused by the Catholic Austrian School economist Wilhelm Röpke in contrast (not quite accurately, as I am told) to the acquisitive economic individualism of Ludwig von Mises. More recently, the *New York Times* quotes him as remarking,

We have to ask ourselves as conservatives what it is we want to conserve in America. I believe in the market system, but I don’t worship the market system. I don’t worship at the altar of economic efficiency as I believe some so-called conservatives do. To prefer a 100,000-hog confinement to hundreds of family farms, it seems to me, is not conservatism. I mean, that’s to worship as a super-market civilization.

Yet, while Buchanan’s nationalism may tweak the noses of right-wing individualists, it also breaks significantly with the large-state nationalist tradition of Europe and American Hamiltonians, for whom the centralized state defines and even creates the nation. Unlike liberal protectionists like Richard Gephardt, Buchanan seeks to use tariffs as substitutes for federal taxes, not as additional taxes. His statement of principles endorses “restoration of the 10th Amendment,” holding that “many functions of the federal government are, de facto, unconstitutional” (he might have added de jure as well) and encompassing abolition of major cabinet-level departments. He also calls for stripping federal judges of power through judicial term limits, “voter recall of renegade federal jurists,” and eight-year reconfirmations of Supreme Court justices. For Buchanan, in contrast to large-state nationalists, the nation is fundamentally a social and cultural unit, not the creation of the state and its policies, but a continuing, organic body that transcends individuals and gives identity to itself through a common way of life and a common people. It is the national culture, embodied in the way of life and the people themselves, rather than the national state, that defines the nation, and hence cultural traditionalism is as central to Buchanan’s nationalism as swollen statism is to European and Hamiltonian nationalists. The “cultural war” for Buchanan is not Republican swaggering about family values and dirty movies but a battle over whether the nation itself can continue to exist under the onslaught of the militant secularism, acquisitive egoism, economic and political globalism, demographic inundation, and unchecked state centralism supported by the Ruling Class.

Also unlike the conventional right, Buchanan does not confine his criticism of the Ruling Class to federal bureaucrats. Though he denies that he considers “big business an enemy,”

he told Tom Carson of the *Village Voice*, in a line he has repeated elsewhere, “I just think a lot of modern corporate capitalists—the managerial class basically—has no loyalty to any country anymore, or any particular values other than the bottom line.” The remark points to a conception of the Ruling Class as fundamentally disengaged from the nation and culture it dominates, and resembles similar views of 20th-century ruling elites voiced by Joseph Schumpeter, the late Christopher Lasch, and James Burnham, among others.

---

Buchanan’s loyalty to the GOP is touching, especially since almost no Republican leader or conservative pundit has much good to say about him, and the loudest mouths for the ‘Big Tent’ are always the first to try to push him out of it.

---

Buchanan thus seems to share the perception that the fundamental polarity in American politics and culture today is between a deracinated and self-serving Ruling Class centered on but not confined to the central state, on the one hand, and Middle American groups, on the other, with the latter constituting both the economic core of the nation through their labor and productive skills as well as the culturally defining core that sustains the identity of the nation itself. The economic interests as well as the cultural habits and ideologies of the Ruling Class drive it toward globalization—the managed destruction of the nation, its sovereignty, its culture, and its people—while those of Middle Americans drive them toward support for and reinforcement of the nation and its organic way of life. The implicit recognition of this polarity by the Buchanan campaign places him firmly on the side of Middle Americans more clearly than any other political figure in the country today.

The only figure who could rival him for that role is Ross Perot, but Perot’s ideas, despite their focus on Middle Americans, are far less sophisticated, far less visionary, and far less radical than those of the former columnist and presidential speechwriter. Perot appears to have little grasp of the nature of the Ruling Class as a systemic entity, and his tirades against the central state never seem to rise above the level of grouching about corruption, incompetence, waste, and fraud. Perot seems to lack any perception of the structure of the state as problematic and confines his criticism merely to the abuse of the state structure. Buchanan’s critique of the central state, at least implicitly, is shaped by his comprehension that the flaws

of the state as it is presently structured derive from its control and exploitation by the Ruling Class, that the elites themselves are the real enemy and that the state, while far too large and intrusive, is simply their instrument. Control of the state by a social force or elite different from the forces that now control it could shape the state to support Middle American interests and values rather than crush them.

Hence, Buchanan has rattled free-market antistatist conservatives by his support for higher unemployment benefits for displaced workers, and last fall he tossed a brick at congressional Republicans who were insisting on cutting the growth of Medicare. "Instead of going after Medicare," Buchanan told New Hampshire factory workers, "we ought to start dealing with foreign aid, end those \$50 billion bailouts, start dealing with the World Bank loan guarantees." He explained to Tom Carson that "I think government can fairly be used" to restructure tax incentives and penalties to discourage businesses from moving their operations overseas. Buchanan's antistatism is genuine, but it rightly focuses on dismantling the present state as the present Ruling Class has constructed it; he does not purport to be an anarchist who imagines the state is an unnecessary and unmitigated evil, and "anarcho-libertarians" drawn to his America First foreign policy need to understand that Richard Nixon's former speechwriter would have no hesitation in making full use of the constitutionally legitimate powers of the federal government. They also need to understand that reducing the leviathan to its constitutionally legitimate powers would not excite any but their most eccentric phobias of statism.

Neither the antistatist right nor cultural conservatives have any good reason to be uncomfortable with the new identity Buchanan is building, though Economic Men like Kemp and Gramm and neoconservative apologists for the federal leviathan have plenty of reason to resist him and the new political horse he is saddling. If the antistatists bridle at his protectionism, they will at least get the satisfaction of replacing much of the current tax structure of the state with tariffs, and the Old Right has long recognized that cultural and moral destruction is in large part driven by the swollen state and the powers of social management it has usurped in education, the arts, and the imperial federal judiciary. Buchanan explicitly vows to disman-

tle these parts of the leviathan, and given the Middle American social structure that today must underlie any serious political resistance to the federal megastate and the Ruling Class it supports, the Old Right has no practical alternative anyway.

Yet, if Buchanan has one major flaw as a spokesman for and an architect of the new Middle American political identity that transcends and synthesizes both left and right, it is that he exhibits a proclivity to draw back from the implications of his own radicalism. This became evident in 1992, when he insisted on endorsing George Bush and even on campaigning for him, and last year he also vowed to support the Republican ticket even if he was not the nominee. Any such commitment on Buchanan's part should be contingent on other candidates' commitment to support him if he is nominated, but so far none has bothered to do so. Buchanan, for all the radicalism of his ideas and campaign, remains deeply wedded to the Republican Party and to a conservative political label, and he tends to greet criticism of his deviations from conservative orthodoxy with affirmations of doctrine. Last year, as conservative criticism of him increased, his response was that "the only area of disagreement I have [with traditional conservatives] is trade, and that's crucial to bringing back the Perot voters" to the Republican Party.

Buchanan's loyalty to the GOP is touching, especially since almost no Republican leader or conservative pundit has much good to say about him, and the loudest mouths for the "Big Tent" are always the first to try to push him out of it. Even today, many Republicans try to blame the 1992 defeat of George Bush's inept and lackluster bid for reelection on Buchanan's now-famous speech at the Houston convention, a speech that was the only memorable event of the whole proceeding and which Buchanan himself continues to defend and even to distribute as literature for his present campaign. But, touching or not, Buchanan's refusal to break even more definitely with a conventional conservative identity and with a Republican Party whose leadership fears and despises him, his beliefs, and his followers is a serious error. I recall in late 1991, in the aftermath of a wall-to-wall gathering at his home to discuss his coming campaign, I told him privately that he would be better off without all the hangers-on, direct-mail artists, fund-raising whiz kids, marketing and PR czars, and the rest of the crew that today constitutes the backbone of all that remains of the famous "Conservative Movement" and who never fail to show up on the campaign doorstep to guzzle someone else's liquor and pocket other people's money. "These people are defunct," I told him. "You don't need them, and you're better off without them. Go to New Hampshire and call yourself a patriot, a nationalist, an America Firster, but don't even use the word 'conservative.' It doesn't mean anything any more."

Pat listened, but I can't say he took my advice. By making his bed with the Republicans, then and today, he opens himself to charges that he's not a "true" party man or a "true" conservative, constrains his chances for victory by the need to massage trunk-waving Republicans whose highest goal is to win elections, and only dilutes and deflects the radicalism of the message he and his Middle American Revolution have to offer. The sooner we hear that message loudly and clearly, without distractions from Conservatism, Inc., the Stupid Party, and their managerial elite, the sooner Middle America will be able to speak with an authentic and united voice, and the sooner we can get on with conserving the nation from the powers that are destroying it.

## LIBERAL ARTS

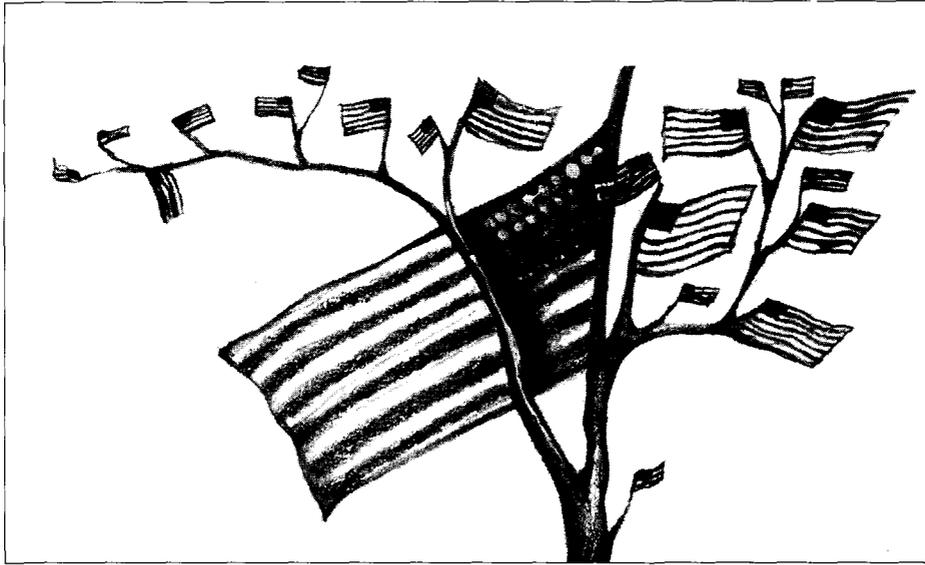
### THE CROSS OF GOLD

"We do not come as aggressors. Our war is not a war of conquest; we are fighting in the defense of our homes, our families, and posterity. We have petitioned, and our petitions have been scorned; we have entreated, and our entreaties have been disregarded; we have begged, and they have mocked when our calamity came. We beg no longer; we entreat no more; we petition no more. We defy them."

—William Jennings Bryan, 1896

# Who Can We Shoot?

by Bill Kauffman



Anna Myreck-Wódecki

Who better to kick off a discussion of American populism than Henry James? In *The Portrait of a Lady* Sockless Hank had Henrietta Stackpole define a “cosmopolite”: “That means he’s a little of everything and not much of any. I must say I think patriotism is like charity—it begins at home.” Likewise, a healthy populism must be grounded in a love of the particular, or else it is just a grab bag of (mostly valid) resentments.

James understood the consequence of the Spanish-American War to be “remote colonies run by bosses”; expansion diluted true patriotism and would “demoralize us.” His diagnosis is still sound, though the American people are now cast in the role of the Filipinos. The alliances and friendships concreting as the American Empire staggers through caducity and hastens, one hopes, to a long-overdue demise are every bit as refreshingly meet as those spawned in the depths of Manila Bay: a backwoods hippie wearing a “Buchanan ’96” button is descended from the sturdily Republican poet-editor Thomas Bailey Aldrich, who announced in 1899 that he would not “vote for McKinley again. I would sooner vote for Bryan. To be ruined financially is not so bad as to be ruined morally.”

The dire predictions of the anti-imperialists came to pass: gentlemen such as James and Aldrich were no match for Teddy Roosevelt. A century later Newt Gingrich, TR’s biggest fan, haunts our demoralized land. Gingrich may never have bagged an elk, but he is much like his heroes, the cousins Roosevelt and Harry Truman: a picked-on kid raised on war games who probably can’t throw a baseball as far as Olive Chancellor could.

When asked about his provenance by a fellow graduate student, Gingrich replied, “I’m from nowhere.” So were most of the blustery swindlers who disgraced the populist label while rising to prominence in the 1970’s and 80’s. They are the gas-

conading “populists” of the right who operate out of Northern Virginia post office boxes: Big Bad Foes of the New World Order who dwell in sprawling apartment complexes and could not name a neighbor if their lives depended on it. Anticommunist and pro-nothing, they cozened money out of credulous TV addicts for Ollie North and before him Jonas Savimbi—one of them dreamt of nominating his ebon god for President in 1988, if only that xenophobic native birth clause in the Constitution had not disqualified the Angolan. Today they trumpet “family values” from the mountain tops of junk mail, while down below in Chevy Chase their neglected children enter Riot Grrrl suicide pacts.

The populist “left” of the Dark Age was no better: it consisted of a few earnest student council presidents trudging door to door in strange neighborhoods gathering petition signatures to save the whales or the ozone layer, anything so long as it had nothing to do with the workaday lives of the lunkheaded proles who answered the doorbell.

But as Newt himself might crow, it’s the beginning of a new age, and vascular American populism is resurgent. You can tell because *Newsweek* and that hoary and reliable enemy of the Old Republic, the *New Republic*, portentously invoke Richard Hofstadter’s hilarious *The Paranoid Style in American Politics*—which ascribed all dissent from the Cold War Vital Center consensus to mental illness—and Alan Brinkley (Hofstadter born to a TV star) is trotted out to explain, like the girl in the Lou Reed song, why “down to you is up,” and why anything smacking of popular rage is not really populism.

They want populism to be Rush Limbaugh and Common Cause, and I am very sorry to indulge in hate speech, but we are talking Daniel Shays and the Loco Focos and Tom Watson and Huey Long and their swelling band of offspring who are gathering under the Tree of Liberty. (If you can’t beat ’em, co-opt ’em. How the corporate media clamored for an independent

---

Bill Kauffman is the author of *Every Man a King, Country Towns of New York, and America First!*