

by Samuel Francis

The Grinch Who Stole Kwanza

The political plum on last year's Christmas pudding, so to speak, was *l'affaire* Lott, which, erupting at the birthday party for retiring Sen. Strom Thurmond in early December and continuing until Trent Lott's less-than-voluntary resignation as Senate majority leader three weeks later, threatened to ruin Kwanza for just about everybody. The Lott crisis was an unhappy one for President Bush and the Republican Party because it forced them to think about their real political base of middle-class whites—not a few of whom are Southerners—rather than twaddle on about the entirely fictitious coalition of blacks and Hispanics mobilized by the GOP's ethnic sensitivity. The President could not simply dump Mr. Lott as unceremoniously as he would have liked, because that would have alienated the millions of white Southerners who saw nothing wrong with the senator's comments. But neither could Mr. Bush keep Mr. Lott as majority leader, because keeping him would have been a plum pudding in the faces of the real custodians of the Republican conscience, namely, the Rev. Jesse Jackson, the Rev. Al Sharpton, and the millions of American blacks whose votes Mr. Bush continues to imagine he can win. The President was thus reduced to the coy stratagem of having his brother Jeb, governor of Florida, and Secretary of State Colin Powell denounce Mr. Lott; by allowing surrogates who had no business saying anything about the senator to say what they did, he slyly communicated to the nation, his party, and Mr. Lott himself that he wanted the majority leader to walk the plank. Once Governor Bush and Secretary Powell had spoken, it was clear that Mr. Lott would have to resign almost immediately, and so he did.

The Mississippi senator's defenestration would have been a largely insignificant event had it not revealed some of the underlying realities of American politics and especially the realities of what currently passes for American conservatism. Mr. Lott had few defenders, and even those who did defend him hastened to do so not on the merits of what he said about Mr. Thurmond's segregationist presidential campaign of 1948 but rather on the assumption that he did not really mean

what he seemed to have said. That defense was probably accurate; you do not become Senate majority leader these days by saying what you really believe, and, if Mr. Lott really did disclose the fruits of his meditations on race, segregation, and the course of American history since 1948, it was likely the first and only time in his entire career that he spoke the unvarnished truth about much of anything.

What was significant about the Lott affair was not what he really meant or believes, nor what he and his supporters chose to say, but what his foes said—and not the obvious and predictable ones on the political left. Of course, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Sharpton chose to strut and rant about Mr. Lott's remarks, and, of course, a good many Democrats eager to make what political gains they could from it did so as well. But the foes who really did Trent Lott in and made it impossible for the Republicans to defend him or for President Bush to keep him were the neoconservatives. Had they not immediately denounced Mr. Lott and demanded his resignation, he might well have come through the crisis successfully.

The neoconservative onslaught was immediate and total. Almost to a man, their spokesmen damned Mr. Lott's remarks: "disgraceful" (David Frum); "indefensible" (Jonah Goldberg); "ludicrous" (William Kristol); "appalling" (Charles Krauthammer); "shameful" (a public statement issued by four Republican appointees to the Civil Rights Commission, led by neoconservative race guru Abigail Thernstrom); *etc.* Neoconservative ex-football-star Jack Kemp panted that, "until [Mr. Lott] totally repudiates segregation and every aspect of its evil manifestation," the Republicans would continue to suffer damage from his remarks. According to the *Washington Post*, the quarterback demanded that Mr. Lott "go before a civil rights group and make a major speech about race and racial reconciliation in the New South to help clear the air."

The hostility of the neocon press gang was essential to the collapse of whatever political support Mr. Lott could have garnered for himself. Had there existed a corps of conservative columnists and commentators willing either to defend what



he said or to dismiss his remarks as irrelevant and harmless, the majority leader might have been able to retain his position. Facing the nearly unanimous opposition of those who now constitute the permissible "right," however, he had no ground to stand on and no defenders to whom he could point. He could not say to President Bush or his fellow senators, "Stand up for me: My strong support in the media shows we can keep public opinion on our side," because he had no support in the media even from the right (save Pat Buchanan and Robert Novak), and, without such support, he could hardly expect to win or even to keep any allies. Foolishly, having lost the right and whetted the salivary glands of the left, he tried to placate the black left by his ill-advised and disastrous interview on Black Entertainment Television, an act that only hastened his demise.

Mr. Lott's collapse was unfortunate because, for all his personal weaknesses and evasions, he was a reasonably reliable conservative vote in Congress, as his record shows. We could expect nothing radical from Mr. Lott as majority leader, but we could also expect him to do little harm—far less harm, for example, than Newt Gingrich did when, in the 1980's, he led House Republican support for such measures as the Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday, extension of the Voting Rights Act, and sanctions on South Africa, all of which Mr. Lott opposed.

The difference in the voting records of Mr. Lott and Mr. Gingrich, a neoconservative hero, should tell us why the neocons were so eager to purge the Mississippian from the Senate leadership, and, if it does not, their motives soon became clear in their own columns. As Charles Krauthammer wrote, "Neocons have been the most passionate about the Lott affair and the most disturbed by its meaning."

Why? Because many neoconservatives are former liberals. They supported civil rights when it meant equality between the races, and they turned against the civil rights establishment when it began insisting that some races should be more equal than others. Neoconservatives were particularly appalled by Lott's endorsement of [the original civil-rights movement's] antithesis, Thurmond segregationism. Not to denounce it—on grounds not of politics but of principle—would be to lose all moral standing on matters of race.

By itself, this is a fair statement of what neocons really want—much fairer than what most of them have said on the subject before, when they have tried to pretend that they were just regular old conservatives after all. The regular old conservatives, of course, as *National Review* and similar conservative organs of the 1950's and 60's consistently made clear, never defended either the "civil-rights movement as originally defined" or its political goals, which, quite aside from racial issues, involved a direct and transparent attack on constitutional principles as well as a concerted subversion of Southern social institutions.

Nevertheless, Mr. Krauthammer's honest statement of neoconservative goals and the whole Lott episode generally served to set off yet another volley from his fellow neocons in another effort to redefine the American right along lines acceptable to, and congruent with, the left and to denounce and expel the paleoconservatives. That was the burden of columns appearing almost simultaneously with that of Mr. Krauthammer by such neocon sages as David Frum and Jonah Goldberg, who once again ranted and raved about the "racism of the past" to which the noble neoconservatives "feel no allegiance" (Goldberg) and the "inescapable racialism and the obsessive antisemitism that one finds among the paleos" (Frum; the "racialist" and "antisemite" that he refers to are Steve Sailer and Charlie Reese, respectively, though you may be certain that Mr. Frum could find others if he cared to).

The neocons exploited the Lott episode to help discredit and expel paleoconservatives even further from the political mainstream. That much would be fine with paleos, who, for the most part, have long since abandoned any desire to share the same movement with the neo-

conservatives. Less and less does one hear among paleos the call for "taking back" the organs and institutions of the conservative movement; more and more paleos grasp that they and their rivals on the right are two different breeds that share about as much in common as German shepherds and Persian cats, and those paleos see the need to define themselves as an entirely separate movement, with their own organs and institutions. What the neocons were doing, however, went further than yet one more "purge" of the paleos.

By denying any allegiance to the "racism of the past," however, the neocons were renouncing not just the real "racism of the past," which most conservatives of every stripe have long done, but the perfectly legitimate conservatism of the past—the conservatism Senator Lott's voting record represents. The neoconservatives were trying to create a conservatism that openly embraces not just the "civil-rights movements as originally defined" but most of what the "civil-rights movement as currently established" demands—the renunciation of the Confederacy and its symbols and icons; the acceptance of Martin Luther King, Jr., his holiday, and his creed of "radical reconstruction"; the extended Voting Rights Act of 1982; acts of international aggression against such nations as South Africa simply because their racial policies differ from those endorsed by the left and the pseudoright; and, finally, the mass immigration, multiculturalism, and antiwhite hatred of today. Having swallowed virtually every claim of the left that European-American civilization is a "racist" order and that such "racism" is too wicked and irredeemable to be tolerated, the neocons move merrily and logically down the road built by the left to outright rejection of the entire civilization and the people who created it. What else does their insistence that America is an "idea," a "proposition," or a "creed" mean but the abandonment of the historic reality of American culture and tradition in favor of the

most abstract and meaningless utopia and the embracing of the antithesis of what remains, even today, a respectable and defensible conservatism?

At least, it was respectable and defensible until the neocons invited themselves into the discussion. Their contribution—and this is what lent the Lott episode a significance beyond that of the ordinary cut and thrust of day-to-day politics—was to assist the left in delegitimizing the respectable and defensible conservatism that seeks to protect and defend a particular civilization and people. What neither the Democratic Party, the Reverends Jackson and Sharpton, the *Washington Post*, nor anyone else in the panoply of the left could accomplish, the neoconservatives were able to complete—because they had already established themselves, with the help of the left, as the legitimate voice of the permissible right.

It is likely that the long-term effect of the Lott episode—even more than the Republicans' abandonment of the "Southern strategy" (denounced by Bill Kristol in the wake of the Lott affair) or their pretended adoption of the "Hispanic strategy"—will be to push the party even further to the left on race, immigration, and "civil rights." As the dominant voice of the right, the neoconservatives have shown that they will not hesitate to destroy a senior conservative Republican leader if he deviates from their ideological preferences and premises on such issues and that there can be no media and, therefore, no significant political support for such a leader. The neoconservatives now define what is and what is not respectable and defensible conservatism, and their definition does not include the voting record of Mr. Lott—or of Barry Goldwater, Jesse Helms, Strom Thurmond, and most other conservatives. At the present, there is no significant political force in American politics able to challenge their claim that they are the only legitimate expression of the political right. Maybe it is time somebody started just such an alternative force. c

MOVING?

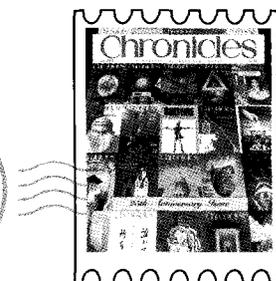
Send change of address and the mailing label
from your latest issue to:

CHRONICLES

Subscription Dept.

P.O. Box 800,

Mount Morris, IL 61054



by Scott P. Richert

Small Is Beautiful

The City of Rockford is broke. That does not mean, of course, that it is insolvent or bankrupt; after all, it is rather hard for any government with the power to tax to end up in that position (though some occasionally do). Like so many other cities of its size today, however, Rockford has projected expenses for the coming fiscal year that far outstrip expected revenues from taxes and other sources—in other words, what any father, looking at his household budget, would define as broke.

The power to tax, however, provides the city with a different set of options from those available to the father. In this current economic slump, the head of a household does not have many ways of increasing its revenue; he may be lucky simply to keep his job. By necessity, he either has to cut expenses (the prudent, though possibly painful, course) or to borrow to make ends meet, pushing those expenses further into the future to a time when, he hopes, he will have a little more cash in his pocket. The city, however, can generate more revenue through a simple majority vote and, thus, avoid the issue entirely. And that, unfortunately, is what Rockford's aldermen have chosen to do.

On Monday, February 3, the council voted to increase the telephone tax by 500 percent (from one percent to six percent), to tack a five-percent tax onto the city's water service, and to increase garbage-collection fees by \$24 per year. While the city did delay about \$3 million in capital purchases and laid off a total of 29 full- and part-time employees to close its \$7.5 million budget gap, the aldermen failed to address the underlying causes of skyrocketing city expenses. Four of the fourteen aldermen voted against the telephone tax; only two voted against the water and garbage fees.

Ald. Frank Beach delivered an impassioned speech, arguing that the city had failed to consider all possible cuts and that the tax increases would only compound the problem by further impoverishing Rockford taxpayers and driving businesses (which have to pay the increased telephone tax on every line) out of Rockford, and, a week earlier, Ald. Pat Curran had pointed out that unionized

city employees were not being asked to give up anything—even a portion of their raises—to help balance the budget. (Rockford taxpayers fund the healthcare of each city employee to the tune of \$12,000 per year—a plan that far outstrips those of most private-sector workers.) Most of the “debate,” however, sounded like the Bush administration's rhetoric over its Iraq policy, with alderman after alderman declaring that the “easy thing to do” would be to vote against the tax increases and congratulating himself for his “courage” in raising taxes in order to maintain the current level of city services.

There were some interesting moments, however, that the local media failed to notice. Ald. David Johnson, a Republican, announced that he would be voting for the tax increases because, he argued, he had no choice: The cost of city services cannot be significantly trimmed because the growth in those costs has been driven largely by the expansion of Rockford through annexation. Over the last ten years, during which Rockford's population rose by 7.7 percent (or 10,689 residents), the size of the city has increased from approximately 45 square miles to approximately 60, an increase of 33 percent.

The problem, as Alderman Johnson later acknowledged in an interview, is that the cost of fire and police protection, of snow removal and street repair, and even of water, sewer, and garbage collection, may be driven more by geography than by population growth. Rockford police today need to cover one third again as many miles as they did in 1990, and firemen need to be prepared to respond to emergencies in areas farther removed from existing stations. Much of the cost of garbage collection is road time, and the cost of providing and maintaining water and sewer lines depends less on the number of houses connected than on the length of the mains and the sewers.

Because deannexation is not really an option, there is no easy answer to the current budget shortfall, but there is an obvious step that the council could take to keep from making it worse: Quit annexing unincorporated areas of Winnebago County. Responding to a multitude of



studies over the past two decades that show that, in the long run, the costs of annexation usually outweigh the additional tax revenues, cities across the United States have taken a more cautious approach to annexation, often requiring developers (who typically make the annexation requests) to pay for a cost-benefit analysis before they will consider an annexation proposal.

Here in Rockford, however, at the same meeting where the tax hikes were approved, the council voted 14-0 to approve one annexation proposal and 13-1 to approve another. (Bob Greene, the Democratic alderman from Ward 1, the fastest-growing ward in the city, voted against annexing property that would be added to his ward.) In light of those votes, it is hard to believe that the council is taking the budget crisis seriously.

With the highest crime rate in the entire state (higher even than Chicago's!) and property taxes that are still, even after the end of the school-desegregation lawsuit, some of the highest in the country, Rockford needs to get its priorities straight. Yes, refusing to annex more property will undoubtedly slow down development, but, since the American Farmland Trust consistently ranks Northern Illinois as one of the most endangered farming areas in the country, that may not be such a bad thing. And with Rockford now occupying about 12 percent of the geographic area of Winnebago County, developing new population centers—and new centers of political power—may benefit the county as a whole.

Just a little over a week after the council meeting, the local Gannett paper reported that Aurora may have surpassed Rockford as the second-largest city in Illinois. I think we should let the title go. What Rockford needs now is a healthy contingent of Little Rockfordians. c