

Conservative Crack-Up

Is George W. Bush a conservative? In the title of his book, *Impostor*, Bruce Bartlett sums up his view of the claim that George Bush is the great conservative of the

Baby Boomer generation. In *Rebel-in-Chief*, Fred Barnes contends that Bush is redefining conservatism and has, in his brilliance and boldness, often surpassed the gold standard, Ronald Reagan.

At the heart of the clash between the authors lie colliding views of what constitutes conservatism in 2006.

What does it mean to be a conservative? And if George Bush has governed as one, how do we explain his collapsing support, when the economy is growing at 4 percent and the Dow is back over 11,000? Is 60 percent of the nation rejecting conservatism? Or just George Bush?

Consider three issues on which conservatives yet remain united: judges, taxes, and sovereignty.

In nominating judges who reject the activism of the Warren Court and its progeny, Bush has a record superior to that of any president in modern times. Justices Roberts and Alito put him within one justice of succeeding where his predecessors since Ike have foundered or fallen short.

On taxes, Bush peeled back marginal rates and rolled back U.S. revenues below 17 percent of GDP.

On sovereignty, Bush's rejection of the Kyoto treaty on global warming and his refusal to submit U.S. armed forces to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court have the backing of conservatives and also the nation.

On these three crucial issues, where the Right remains united and Bush has delivered, he seems to have succeeded with the country.

It is on four issues where no conservative consensus exists, and where populists are in open rebellion, that the old Reagan coalition has shattered: trade, immigration, foreign policy, and Big Government.

Bush's failure to veto a single bill, the soaring sums for social spending, the deficits of 3-4 percent of GDP in good times, have demoralized pay-as-you-go Republicans. The question for the Right is: are we still fiscal conservatives? Do deficits matter? Is a balanced budget in a growing economy the only course consistent with political principle?

Conservatives are split also on free trade and globalism. Always have been. In 1962, the diehards who opposed JFK's Trade Expansion Act were named Thurmond, Goldwater, and Prescott Bush.

But in Middle America, the loss of three million manufacturing jobs, a trade deficit that in January crossed the \$820 billion mark, the impending death of GM and Ford, the Wal-Martization of working America are sending the Reagan Democrats packing. Had Kerry been less of a wind-surfer and more of a populist, he could have ripped Ohio and the presidency away from Bush on the jobs and trade issue.

On immigration, there is no Middle American constituency for amnesty or bringing guest workers in to take jobs Americans cannot accept at the pay offered and still support their families. The *Wall Street Journal* may babble on about open borders and globalization, but to Americans who seek to conserve the country they grew up in, this is the

stuff of national sellout.

It is, of course, Iraq, and the growing despair over the lives lost, the soldiers wounded and maimed, the absence of an Iraqi government to take control that has taken a toll on Bush. If the Mexican War was "Jimmy Polk's War" and World War I was "Wilson's War," Iraq is surely Bush's war. Upon its outcome hangs his legacy.

Yet no matter that outcome, the day of the interventionist appears to be over. Whatever we do to or about Iran, years will pass before this country marshals another large army and sends it into some strange and hostile land to establish "democracy."

Thus, the GOP and the conservative coalition at its heart are as irreconcilably divided over many Bush policies as is the nation.

Is immigration too high? Should illegal aliens be given amnesty? Do we really need guest workers? Is a border fence essential to our security and survival as one nation and people?

Do these mammoth trade deficits matter? Is outsourcing good for us? Should we pursue the Bush democracy crusade? Is Bush's intervention in Iraq a model for America or the kind of historic mistake America must never again make?

The crisis for conservatives is that while there is no consensus, there is also no debate. John McCain, the likely successor as party leader, is as committed to the Bush policies as Bush himself. And his rivals seem to echo McCain.

What is the alternative the nation is likely to be offered by the Democrats? Hillary, who supports free trade, open borders, amnesty, the war in Iraq, etc.

Question: Is the future decided no matter what the people want? Have the establishment and corporate money killed politics? ■

[daughters of the revolution]

Room of Her Own

Feminism's long journey from "Is this all?" to having it all to being liberated by less.

By Kara Hopkins

MODERN FEMINIST LORE dates its first chapter from 1963, when Betty Friedan found the original desperate housewives vacuuming their spotless ranch houses—in high heels, natch—and heard them asking, "Is this all?"

Hate Friedan if it suits—anyone who told Phyllis Schlafly, "I'd like to burn you at the stake," would have earned the Right's ire, absent the rest of her radical cargo. The feminist matriarch's early Marxist affiliations are well documented, and her *Feminine Mystique* ranked seventh on *Human Events'* list of the "most harmful books" of the last two centuries. But she tapped sufficient angst to sell three million copies and compel millions more American women to trade aprons for power suits and kitchens for corner offices. So swift was the sea change that their daughters would not ask "Is this all?" but "Can you have it all?"—and then wonder if they wanted it.

It's fashionable in the salons of the Right to dismiss the full freight of feminism without examining its manifest. With a flick of the pen, the whole movement can be blamed for "Ruining Our Schools, Families, Military, and Sports" as it is in the subtitle of Kate O'Beirne's new bestseller. But even so ham-fisted an indictment carries a concession: this was a revolution that left fingerprints on all spheres. To caricature it as the project of a handful of hags who struck out

on the dating market is to ignore the essential question of why feminism found such fertile soil. The debating ploy is as common as it is lazy: spotlight extremists as emblematic of the whole, for if one's opponent can be cast as moronic or malicious, what need for argument? But no club is that exclusive.

Feminism certainly wasn't. Following Friedan's death last month, on her 85th birthday, Germaine Greer waltzed over her grave, telling *The Guardian*, "Betty was disconcerted by lesbianism, leery of abortion and ultimately concerned for the men whose ancient privileges she feared were being eroded. ... The world will be a tamer place without her."

That ungracious obituary wouldn't have surprised Friedan, who admitted, "I'm at odds with the radical feminists because I'm not anti-marriage and anti-family. I always thought it was dangerous to go against the idea of the family. I don't even like the phrase 'women's liberation' because that idea of being set free from everything doesn't seem right to me." No boilerplate feminist, Friedan saw men as "fellow victims," not "the product of a damaged gene" (Greer) or "rapists, batterers, plunderers, killers" (Andrea Dworkin). She didn't share *Ms.* editor Robin Morgan's belief that marriage is a "slavery-like practice," arguing instead, "I believe in marriage. I think intimacy, bonding, and families have value."

That's not to say that Friedan should be remembered as some kind of closet conservative. She did, after all, jot the fateful initials NOW—later incarnated into the National Organization for Women—on a napkin and was instrumental in founding the National Abortion Rights Action League. She memorably called American homes "comfortable concentration camps," and despite pretty words for the nuclear family was unable to hold her own marriage together. Her children would recall eating TV dinners "way beyond the recommended limit."

Both sides of the political divide could, therefore, attack Friedan for ideological impurity, and with ample cause—best evidence that the movement her question sparked was never as monolithic as critics claim. Had it been as venomous as the extreme representatives, feminism could have gained no foothold in Middle America. Housewives didn't clamor to join Valerie Solanas's SCUM—Society for Cutting Up Men—which was never more than a treehouse club. Deeper social currents were at work, so that what might have receded into the realm of curious sociology—as Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 effort had—became instead a mainstream movement populated by millions of average women.

The project began innocently enough: when surveying her Smith College classmates for their 15-year reunion, Friedan