

Looking for Mr. Right

“I was conservative yesterday, I’m a conservative today and I will be a conservative tomorrow,” declared Fred Thompson to the Conservative Party of New York,

billing himself as the “consistent conservative” in the GOP race—in contrast to ex-mayor Rudy Giuliani.

In his defense, Rudy cites George Will as calling his eight years in office in the Big Apple the most conservative city government in 50 years.

Truth be told, Thompson was reliably conservative in his Senate years. But so, too, has John McCain been, and Ron Paul, Duncan Hunter, and Tom Tancredo. Hunter, however, splits with Thompson and McCain on trade. Paul disagrees with all six of them on the war. And Tancredo assails McCain for backing Bush’s amnesty for 12-20 million illegal aliens.

Will the real conservative please stand up? Or perhaps we should recall John 14:2, “In my father’s house there are many mansions.”

Sixty years ago, Robert A. Taft was the gold standard. Forty years ago, it was Barry Goldwater who backed Bob Taft against Ike at the 1952 convention. Twenty years ago, it was Ronald Reagan who backed Barry in 1964. Reagan remains the paragon for the consistency of his convictions, the success of his presidency, and the character he exhibited to the end of his life. About Reagan the cliché was true. The greatness of the office found out the greatness in the man.

Reagan defined conservatism for his time. And the issues upon which we agreed were anti-Communism, a national defense second to none, lower tax rates to unleash the engines of economic progress, fiscal responsibility, a strict-constructionist Supreme Court,

law and order, the right to life from conception on, and a resolute defense of family values under assault from the cultural revolution that hit America with hurricane force in the 1960s.

With the collapse of the Soviet Empire and the breakup of the Soviet Union, anti-communism as the defining and unifying issue of the Right was gone. The conservative crack-up commenced.

With George H.W. Bush came the advent of what Fred Barnes, then of *The New Republic*, hailed as Big Government Conservatism. Some thought the phrase oxymoronic. But when Bush stood at the rostrum of the UN General Assembly in October 1991 to declare that America’s cause was the creation of a New World Order, the Old Right reached reflexively for their revolvers.

In 1992, with foreign policy off the table, the Bush economic record a perceived failure, and Ross Perot running on protectionism and populism, Bush refused to play his trump card with the Clintons: the social and moral issues he and Lee Atwater had used to beat poor Dukakis senseless in 1988. And so, George H.W. Bush lost the presidency.

Now 15 years later, what does it mean to be a conservative?

There is no Pope who speaks *ex cathedra*. There is no Bible to consult like Goldwater’s *Conscience of a Conservative* or Reagan’s “no-pale-pastels” platform of 1980. At San Diego in 1996, Bob Dole told his convention he had not bothered to read the platform. Many who heard him did not bother to vote for Bob Dole.

Today, the once great house of con-

servatism is a Tower of Babel. We are Big Government and small government, traditionalist and libertarian, tax-cutter and budget hawk, free trader and economic nationalist. Bush and McCain support amnesty and a “path to citizenship” for illegals. The country wants the laws enforced and a fence on the border.

And Rudy? A McGovernite in 1972, he boasted in the campaign of 1993 that he would “rekindle the Rockefeller, Javits, Lefkowitz tradition” of New York’s GOP and “produce the kind of change New York City saw with ... John Lindsay.” He ran on the Liberal Party line and supported Mario Cuomo in 1994.

Pro-abortion, anti-gun, again and again he strutted up Fifth Avenue in the June Gay Pride parade and turned the Big Apple into a sanctuary city for illegal aliens. While Ward Connerly goes state to state to end reverse discrimination, Rudy is an affirmative-action man.

Gravitating now to Rudy’s camp are those inveterate opportunists, the neo-cons, who see in Giuliani their last hope of redemption for their cakewalk war and their best hope for a renewed struggle against “Islamofascism.”

I will, Rudy promises, nominate Scalias. Only one more may be needed to overturn *Roe*. And I will keep Hillary out of the White House.

A Giuliani presidency would represent the return and final triumph of the Republicanism that conservatives went into politics to purge from power. A Giuliani presidency would represent repudiation by the party of the moral, social, and cultural content that, with anti-communism, once separated it from liberal Democrats and defined it as an institution.

Rudy offers the Right the ultimate Faustian bargain: retention of power at the price of one’s soul. ■

The Creativity Conceit

America will always be number one, won't it?

By Eamonn Fingleton

TOKYO—Almost everything the Apple computer company sells these days comes with this memorable statement of origin: “Designed by Apple in California, Assembled in China.” The implication is obvious: a few brilliantly creative, latte-quaffing, hybrid-driving Americans did the real work, while low-skilled Chinese assembly workers, laboring in serf-like conditions and earning a few dollars a day, meekly did the rest.

Certainly that is how it looks to American globalists. Citing Apple's iPod at a Virginia trade conference a few months ago, former U.S. Treasury Secretary John Snow commented, “China gets to do what they do well: low-value manufacturing. America gets to do what we do well: return on intellectual capital. It's good for both of us, but I would rather be on our end of that.” The “Designed in California” message has been presented in similarly triumphalist terms by the Cato Institute's chief trade commentator Daniel Griswold.

Such talk panders to one of the most consequential illusions of contemporary American economic thought: the idea that by dint of its unique creativity alone, the United States can count on remaining the world economy's top dog in perpetuity. Widely shared by intellectuals on both sides of the U.S. political divide, this assumption goes a long way toward explaining the electorate's relative apathy in the face of the collapse of America's erstwhile world-beating manufacturing sector.

Yet the idea that Americans enjoy some sort of special lock on creativity is

obvious nonsense. As the Harvard-educated Japan historian Ivan P. Hall points out, it is just “smug ethnocentric American complacency—little more than whistling in the dark.”

Of course no one disputes the fact that America's past record of inventiveness has been extraordinary. Probably close to one-third of all the major inventions of the last 100 years have been American.

The question is where this enormous burst of creativity came from. Most Americans assume it sprang from a supposedly uniquely creative American culture—a culture that is thus considered an inexhaustible source of economic out-performance going forward.

The truth is more prosaic and—for anyone concerned about the sustainability of American economic leadership—quite chastening. What really made the difference was that, thanks to factors that were to prove all too transitory, 20th-century Americans had greater opportunities for invention. Because they were richer, far more of them studied advanced engineering and science. Moreover, taking the century as a whole, America's huge corporations greatly outspent foreign rivals in research and development.

The problem is that other nations are now not only catching up but in some cases drawing ahead. America's vulnerability has been succinctly summed up in a study by the technology-policy analysts Pat Choate and Edward Miller. In a report to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission in 2005, they commented, “The United States'

economy is so large and powerful, and its scientific and technological leadership has long been so overwhelming that the nation could ignore potential technology-based flaws, traps, and dangers. But that era is quickly ending.”

Before considering the outlook in detail, let's first dispose of the misconception that America's “culture of freedom” is a crucial advantage in innovation. Clearly culture in the broadest sense has some relevance. Absent a certain basic level of freedom, creativity does not flourish. But the bar is set quite low. While a nation as brutally authoritarian as today's Burma may not excel in innovation, many quite straitjacketed nations down through history have made major scientific and technological breakthroughs.

For a start, none of the most inventive cultures of antiquity—China, Mesopotamia, or Egypt—counted as a civil-liberties Utopia. Nearer our own time, Nazi Germany, fascist-era Japan, and the old Soviet Union all displayed considerable inventiveness. The Japanese, for instance, developed such path-breaking innovations as the Mitsubishi Zero, which proved the most lethal fighter plane in the air in the early days of World War II.

Clearly the lesson of history is that if America's maximalist concept of individual freedom is a factor at all, it is hardly decisive. All the evidence is that something else is much more important: money.

By and large the wealthier a society is, the more inventive it tends to be. Just ask any of the thousands of brilliant Western European scientists and