

Arts & Letters

BOOKS

[*Bringing America Home: How America Lost Her Way and How We Can Find Our Way Back*, Tom Pauken, Chronicles Press, 204 pages]

Whatever Happened to Conservatism?

By Daniel McCarthy

THE AMERICAN RIGHT, like Marlon Brando in "On the Waterfront," could have been a contender. Bill Clinton's defeat of George H.W. Bush in 1992 cleared the way for a new wave of conservatives to storm Congress, state governments, and the inner sanctums of the Republican Party itself. Although Newt Gingrich became the symbol of this revolution, a truer representative was Thomas Pauken, elected chairman of the Texas GOP in 1994. Where Gingrich was an apostle of futurist Alvin Toffler, with but a passing interest in conservative thought, Pauken had drunk deeply of the ideas of James Burnham, Willmoore Kendall, and George Carey—whose student he had been at Georgetown University.

The Texas press and political establishment reacted in horror to Pauken's "takeover" of the Republican Party. It was as if Pat Buchanan had become chairman of the RNC. Christian conservatives had been indispensable to his victory, as they were to the nomination of right-leaning Republican candidates across the country. (The media referred to many of these as "stealth candidates,"

though most were outspoken about their antiabortion, anti-tax, and pro-Second Amendment views.) The party's old guard resented the intrusion of these uncouth newcomers, but the '94 elections vindicated the Right. The public demanded an alternative to Clinton-style liberalism that GOP moderates could not supply.

"We had a bumper sticker which read 'Stop Clinton, vote Republican'; and we could not print them fast enough to satisfy the demand," Pauken recalls in *Bringing America Home*. "By their rhetoric and their actions, liberal Democrats like Bill Clinton and Ann Richards put the Reagan coalition of economic and social conservatives back together again—against them." Yet that November also brought to power a team that would soon do to the Right what the Right had done to moderates of George H.W. Bush's ilk. Bush's son George W. defeated "Ma" Richards to become governor of Texas, a victory engineered by the Machiavellian mind of Karl Rove. Both already recognized Pauken as an enemy.

"Fred Barnes, the editor of *The Weekly Standard*, did not have to remind me of the difficult situation I was in," Pauken writes, "when he called to tell me that Bush and Rove had described me as 'their least favorite Republican in Texas.'" The state chairman was committed to a philosophical ideal; Bush, like his father, demanded personal loyalty. And Rove, like Gingrich, saw the Right as nothing more than a path to power. "A religious agnostic, Rove was surprisingly adept at mobilizing evangelical conservatives behind the Bush campaign for president," Pauken observes. "Karl got Ralph Reed, the former leader of the Christian Coalition, put on Enron's corporate payroll as a 'consultant,' which freed Reed to work

for Bush's nomination in 2000. Reed helped deliver social conservatives," as did Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, whom Rove also courted.

The Right hit its high-water mark between 1994 and 1997, a period roughly coinciding with Pauken's time as Texas GOP chairman. Those were years in which the Republican majority in Congress had yet to be completely tamed by Washington and actually rolled back part of the welfare state; Buchanan's second run for the White House almost derailed Bob Dole's nomination; and Ron Paul returned to Congress. Jesse Helms and Bob Smith sat in the Senate, while colorful right-wingers like Steve Stockman and Helen Chenoweth could be found in the House. Even California had, by its own lights, a conservative governor in the fiscally disciplined, anti-immigration Pete Wilson. If there was not another Goldwater or Reagan on the horizon, at least it seemed clear where the activist and emotional energy of the GOP lay—with outlawing abortion, slashing taxes, repealing gun-control laws, and perhaps even rethinking foreign policy. For the first time in decades, Republicans started to sound like the peace party as they denounced "nation-building" and resisted Clinton's interventions in the Balkans.

Three emerging types of conservatives laid the bedrock of this right-wing renaissance. Groups like the Christian Coalition supplied the electoral muscle—millions of voters and, perhaps more importantly, cadres of committed activists in the tens of thousands who seized the machinery of Republican organizations in states across the Midwest and South. Veterans of the "New Right" that had arisen in the 1970s, such as Paul Weyrich, lent expertise in crafting populist policies and electoral strategies; they emphasized morals and

culture over economics and dreamed of restoring blue-collar Reagan Democrats to the GOP by appealing to their values and class interests. And paleoconservative intellectuals uncovered a “usable past” and sketched a vision of what America should be.

These tendencies had their differences with one another, but they added up to a syndrome quite distinct from the ideology of the *Wall Street Journal* or the old conservatism of the Cold War era. The new varieties of the Right coincided in the person of Pat Buchanan, who drew throngs of religious conservatives to his banner—including a young city councilor from Wasilla, Alaska named Sarah Palin—and laid out a working-class populist “conservatism of the heart.” His brain trust was paleoconservative, and if he had won the Republican nomination in 1992 or 1996, the GOP might have a very different philosophy today.

Pauken also brought these threads together, as his new book reminds us. *Bringing America Home* is part-memoir, part-manifesto of the conservative coalition that would have been—if

prices of everyday goods through the ionosphere and could not help but be regressive. (Imagine a 17 percent federal VAT added to the state and local sales taxes you already pay.) Would the harm to consumers be offset by benefits to producers? Even if so, it’s hard to imagine the consuming many making that sacrifice on behalf of the producing few. Conducting the War on Terror by proxy, meanwhile, may lead to outcomes little better than those so far achieved by direct intervention. Such a strategy would be just as certain to generate blowback and risks undercutting Pauken’s wise advice that the U.S. adopt a more even-handed approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What’s more, 20 years after the fact, who can now argue that the superpowers’ vicarious struggles in Angola or El Salvador were pivotal to the Cold War’s outcome?

On the other hand, Pauken is indubitably correct about the perverse incentives our tax code creates for corporations to ship jobs overseas and accrue massive debts—which are write-offs where savings would be tax

Pauken’s ideas spring from impeccably conservative sources. Yet they are unlikely to get a serious hearing on today’s Right. Grassroots activists are rarely exposed to noninterventionist or economic nationalist alternatives to the orthodoxy that prevails within the conservative movement. Republican leaders, despite the Religious Right “takeovers” of the 1990s, espouse an agenda very much the opposite of Pauken’s: backing Wall Street against Main Street, soft-selling the social issues, and beating the drums for democratization projects around the globe. How did the Right fall so far, so quickly, from Pauken’s victory in 1994 and the Buchanan Brigades of 1996 to the total triumph of Bush and Rove?

“In one sense, success has led to our downfall,” Pauken suggests. “When conservatives made the Republican Party the majority party in America, the opportunists, pragmatists, and phony conservatives moved in and took control of the Republican Party, and of the conservative movement itself—all in the name of ‘conservatism.’” Fewer lampreys attached themselves to the Right in earlier years for the simple reason that conservatism did not look like a winning bet. Pauken, like Whittaker Chambers, thought he had joined the losing side of history: “The attraction of conservatism to so many young people in the early 1960’s lay purely in its principles,” for there was little prospect of advancement.

By the late 1980s, however, the Right clearly had a future, and so “neoconservative leaders took advantage of the post-Reagan period to extend their influence over conservative opinion outlets. They placed their supporters in key positions in academia, the media, and the foundation world, and they increasingly positioned themselves (and those on the right who shared their worldview) to be the ‘voice of conservatism’ to the outside world.”

Even that might not have prevented the rise of a populist, traditionalist Right, had the coalition behind figures like Buchanan and Pauken not frac-

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George W. Bush and the neoconservatives had not remade the Right in their own image over the last decade. Pauken prescribes an unflinchingly pro-life and morally traditional platform, an economic program that seeks to revive American manufacturing and would permit states to ban usury once more, and a foreign policy of proxy warfare—modeled on Reagan’s campaigns against Soviet influence in Latin America and Africa—in place of large-scale military intervention in the Islamic world.

The merits of some of these proposals are debatable. The revenue-neutral, border-adjusted VAT Pauken recommends in place of corporate, estate, and some payroll taxes would send the

liabilities. Likewise, he is right to wonder how liberal and neoconservative presidents can afford to alienate Russia, a land that ought to be “a natural ally in combating the threat of militant Islam.” And the stances he counsels against abortion and homosexual marriage not only reflect what conservatives profess to believe but have proved to be consistent winners at the ballot box. Pauken is far, however, from thinking that politics can redeem culture. Quite the contrary: he cites John Gray and Camille Paglia—not exactly conservatives—on the vitality of religion to moral and aesthetic renewal. Solzhenitsyn looms large in these pages.

tured. Already in the late 1980s, the crackpot theology of Christian Zionism had begun to take root among many evangelicals. For them, devotion to the State of Israel would match or surpass opposition to abortion or gay rights as the paramount political concern. (Pat Robertson's friendliness to Rudy Giuliani during the 2008 campaign attested to this ideological shift.) In the superficially placid foreign-policy environment of the 1990s, this mutation went unnoticed. Once the attacks of 9/11 brought America directly into conflict in the Islamic world, however, its significance became unmistakable.

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But there is more to the story. Neoconservatives have also understood, far better than paleoconservatives, that the religion of America is America. Evangelicals in particular demand affirmation of the shining city on the hill, a redeemer nation clashing with worldly and supernatural forces of darkness. The very Catholic self-doubt and ethical shading of "paleo" morality is a poor fit for voters accustomed to a personal, enthusiastic religion. The paleos are in more ways than one "anti-charismatic."

Neoconservatives may also have understood American patriotism better. For the paleo, patriotism means Burke's little platoons—not of soldiers but of civil society—and the sentiments in Chesterton's *Napoleon of Notting Hill*: "The patriot never, under any circumstances, boasts of the largeness of his country, but always, and of necessity, boasts of its smallness." But Republican voters conceive of patriotism as something else, a vast idea having to do with "amber waves of grain" from "sea to shining sea" and universal values of the sort spelled out by President Lincoln. And of course, all Americans "support the troops." For the paleoconservative,

that means not wishing to see them killed or deployed in unconstitutional wars. Neoconservatives can offer a more visceral kind of support—not only for the lives of the troops but for their mission, which the neocons firmly believe can be won. Again, the nuances to which paleos are susceptible weaken them in the face of Fox News conservatives, who are always prepared to assert monochromatic truths.

These are not qualities thoughtful conservatives can jettison, since they are at the heart of why Tom Pauken's or Pat Buchanan's approach to public policy is superior to Karl Rove's or

William Kristol's. They address reality; they accept human imperfectibility, including American imperfectibility, even the imperfectibility of the U.S. Army. And these are not necessarily losing positions—the American public is closer to the paleo than the neocon view of the Iraq War. While full-blown economic nationalism is probably a non-starter, many paleo economic policies have at least as good a chance of being accepted today as the neocon policies that have proved disastrous over the past decade. Pauken's ideas do have support.

But the very vehicle that once might have brought ideas like his to the American people is now a barricade preventing them from reaching voters. The conservative movement adamantly opposes any kind of industrial policy, a humbler foreign policy, or too much emphasis on social issues. Wall Street, John Hagee's evangelicals, and Rovian opportunists have built an unbreachable wall of ideology. Any candidate who affirmed Pauken's views could not make it through a Republican primary in most states, perhaps including Texas.

American politics has channels, both

formal and informal—the formal ones are elections and parties, the informal ones are opinion-forming institutions such as magazines and think tanks. These mediate what reaches the public. To get ideas before the voters requires using such institutions. Conservatives created some of their own in the years between Goldwater's defeat and George W. Bush's victory. But those channels are now controlled by the alliance of neoconservatives and Republican professionals. Reclaiming them for the Right would require either winning back Christian conservatives or finding another electoral bloc even bigger—this would be the bottom-up approach—or else practicing the arts of infiltration as skillfully as the neoconservatives once did to strip them of their funding and intellectual prestige.

Paleoconservatives are ill-suited to wage this kind of institutional warfare, however. Their heroes are almost without exception the losers of history—Jacobites, Antifederalists, Confederates, the Old Right. Each of these lost causes may have had its merits, and affirming them all has the advantage of providing critical distance from the Whig interpretation of history. Yet the example they set creates a temptation to quietism or romantic gestures. Sam Francis called the old traditionalist conservatives "beautiful losers." Over time, that is what some paleoconservatives have become.

But not Tom Pauken. He remains in the political fray, as head of the Texas Workforce Commission under Rick Perry. He's fought the good fight within the Nixon and Reagan administrations, each of which was divided between moderates and conservatives. He knows how the game is played. *Bringing America Home* and his earlier book, *The Thirty Years War*, contain valuable lessons. The most valuable of all, though, is that politics matters, and defeatism comes at a price the principled Right, and the country, cannot afford to pay. ■

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[*The Legacy of the Second World War*, John Lukacs, Yale University Press, 208 pages]

World War Without End

By John Willson

JOHN LUKACS SAYS in the introduction to his remarkable book *A Thread of Years*, referring to a friend of a friend, “he writes, not for a living, not for reputation, but because he can’t help it.” Lukacs responds in his own voice, “Not quite—but I can’t help writing this.”

He’s chosen an interesting title for his latest book, *The Legacy of the Second World War*, implying, as in his *Confessions of an Original Sinner* and *Last Rites*, that there is something to hand on to the next generation. “Legacy” is from the Latin *legare*, “to bequeath,” and although Lukacs’s title says that it is the Good War doing the bequeathing, he is too.

Reading a book by John Lukacs is always an adventure. On the one hand, he assumes that you have read all the others; on the other hand, he repeats the substance of the others so that you won’t forget and adds something sufficiently provocative to draw you to the next one—or perhaps to cause you to throw this one against the wall a few times. We see here familiar Lukacs themes: nationalism, not ideology, was the major force driving countries and conflicts in the 20th century; the two great wars were triangular contests, especially the second, a “gigantic global struggle” between Western parliamentary democracy, Communism, and National Socialism; the great leaders directing the struggles, Churchill and Roosevelt, Hitler and Stalin, are best understood as nationalist statesmen (with Churchill being the greatest and Hitler the most extraordinary); an emphasis on the will and character of Great Men (“during the Second World War a few men ... governed the history of the world”); and the elusive, if

seductive, idea of national character.

Stephen Tonsor said in response, “Sometimes the argument verges on the clever but absurd. To call Hitler a ‘statesman’ is akin to calling Genghis Khan a statesman and comparing him to Augustus or Charlemagne.” Most of the widely respected historians of World War II—I think here of the great Gerhard Weinberg—have come to their conclusions about the ideologue Hitler based upon extensive archival research, of which Lukacs is generally contemptuous (the converse of the utter contempt that Weinberg has for non-archival historians). How we approach the study and understanding of history is at the heart of John Lukacs’s legacy and should be the main subject of any discussion of his books.

The legacy of World War II on one level is straightforward. World War I begat World War II, which begat the Cold War. World War II completed the destruction of old-fashioned colonial empires. Eventually, the Western parliamentary democracies won, although not unambiguously.

World War II (and now we get more Lukacsian) more or less completed the end of the long Modern Age. Lee Congdon, writing a wonderful appreciation of Lukacs’s work, says that his “love for the civilization that evolved during the some 500 years of the Modern, European, Bourgeois Age is manifest in all of his work,” along with his “conviction that bourgeois civilization was dedicated to the cultivation of the interior life, one distinguished by a sense of privacy, a love of disciplined liberty, a recognition that truth is more important than justice, and a bias in favor of permanent possessions and residence.” If World War II brought this age to an end, it follows that it also revived “barbarism.” Paul Johnson argues that the almost universal acceptance of relativism was responsible for what Lukacs calls barbarism, but under either name the war introduced a new age of horror, the morally problematic postwar “trials” to the contrary notwithstanding.

Lukacs’s assertions about some aspects of the war—and John Lukacs is

not afraid to assert—have struck many observers as eccentric, and most of them appear in this volume to one extent or another. To wit: Hitler was an extreme nationalist rather than a racist (may he not have been both?); he did not want a world war; he was “the most extraordinary figure in the history of the twentieth century”; national socialism was always much more popular than communism; if a Republican (he names Hoover and Taft) had been president in 1940, Hitler would have won the war; American “obsession” with anticommunism injured its politics, perhaps permanently, and contributed to the growth of a thuggish kind of nationalist democratic populism. On this last point, Lukacs doesn’t say it, but he may well believe that the new dark age will be characterized by competing national socialisms. He really disliked Joe McCarthy, and in another place declares Whittaker Chambers “wrong, wrong, wrong!” that the great challenge to the West was the religion of communism, “Ye shall be as gods.”

His strong opinions aside, John Lukacs’s great contribution to the study of World War II, and to the study of history in general, is the central insight of his greatest book, *Historical Consciousness*. I’m paraphrasing here, but he says that if one has a proper understanding of human nature, one does not need a philosophy of history. He rejects all forms of determinism, and thus all forms of ideology. “History and the novel have certain things in common,” he writes in *A Thread of Years*. “History has not yet had its Dante or its Shakespeare. That will come one day,” though not perhaps from Lukacs’s pen.

He does not bow down to the standards of the American Historical Association, and he has never tried to clone himself through graduate-student sycophants; in an important sense he is anti-professional. He admires the great Dutch historian Johan Huizinga and the now almost forgotten Carlton J.H. Hayes, who pioneered the study of nationalism and sold more books than any other historian of the 20th century.