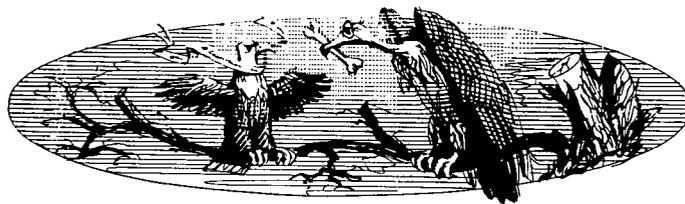


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# THE NATION'S PULSE

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## THE REPUBLICANS IN MID-AMERICA

by Kent Owen

This winter Midwestern Republicans have more to worry about than who is going to win their presidential nomination. If one can tell the continental drift from an Indiana vantage—a shaky perch with partially obstructed sight-lines—it looks as though George Bush will come out on top. His standing with state committees from Ohio to Nebraska and Minnesota to Missouri is very good, and his appearances at fund-raising dinners and party rallies have left favorable impressions, even on those inclined to doubt that his performance is as remarkable as his resume. With such a base of organizational support, the Vice President must be described as the decided favorite, if not quite a cinch.

What bothers Republican insiders is the hard-to-calculate strength of the Reverend Pat Robertson's Christian fundamentalists, who last year surprised standard-bred Michigan Republicans by taking over enough precinct delegate selections to become a forceful presence in the state committee. At the time, the uprising was publicized as embarrassing to the party regulars who should have seen it coming, namely the Bush supporters. Because of the relative complexity of the process (or, more accurately, its simplicity and ease of access), the Michigan choosing-bees, like the Iowa caucus system, are vulnerable to onslaughts by church bus-loads of Republicans-come-lately. Just as the Democrats were caught napping in the last Illinois primary by Lyndon LaRouche's opportunists, so might the Republicans of Iowa, Michigan, and elsewhere in the Middle West find themselves overwhelmed by Robertson's raiders who know how to sign up voters, pack them at polling sites, and control meetings.

Conventional Republicans can be fervent in their loyalties, but few are used to dealing with the likes of hot-eyed religionists who hold their cause to be the will of God. In campaigns past, whatever the width of their differ-

ences, Republicans were self-consciously genteel, alarmed at the thought of a scene. Though often complacent as becomes the better sort of people, they were correct, unless, of course, there were some higher principle to be served. For Republicans of this kidney, it's bad form to intrude religion into politics, not only because it offends the canons of taste, but also because it threatens to undo common sense. Besides, it's damned unnerving to play politics with people so earnest that they talk in tongues, think in theological categories, and believe themselves divinely commissioned.

If the Iowa caucuses were to produce a large vote for Robertson, large enough to discomfit George Bush and Robert Dole, it might be useful mischief. Until now, ordinary Republicans, particularly Midwesterners, have welcomed newcomers with the tacit understanding that nothing much would change as a result: refugees from FDR's Democratic New Deal coalition were taken in as provisional members in the hope that they would soon adapt themselves to the GOP's way of doing things. For Midwestern Republicans that way has usually meant a deliberate avoidance of combative, confrontational intra-party politics. At the same time, for all the outward shows of single-minded unity, Republican activists have at one another with about the



same amount of pettiness that special-interest Democrats work up among themselves. But Republicans have seldom been challenged within their own councils by so intense and insistent a crowd as the Christian rightists. None of the extremist groups of the past—Birchers, Liberty Lobbyists, reactionaries—ever made deep, lasting inroads. That absence of internal opposition made for a smug centrism, which eventually co-opted almost every ideologue and upstart.

Evangelicals and fundamentalists are changing the way Republicans conduct their affairs, making the party, at least in Michigan and Iowa, less clubby and relaxed. On the evidence of how the Robertsonites are behaving in Iowa, overthrowing party regulars with parliamentary maneuvers and caucus-packing forays, the GOP's custodians are going to have to get tougher and shrewder, prepared to repel boarders with weapons sharper than sweet reason and good fellowship. The trick, of course, is to keep the loyalty—at least the votes—of the Robertsonites without letting them grab control of the party organization. Generally, crusaders expend their energies in one grand campaign and then wander away, once the novelty wears off. Midwesterners pride themselves on their staying power—they either come of pioneer stock or acquire what it takes to settle—and that old habit of not giving in to adversity, of not panicking in the face of attack, should enable them to succeed.

Despite the machinations of his followers, Pat Robertson himself has not made much headway. His rictal grin, phony as a Lions Club tail-twister's, inspires derision among the normally tolerant, who recall the visage of Jimmy Carter and shudder. The parsonly soothingness of his speech also sticks in the craw. Obviously, the travails of the last year do little to quicken the public's confidence in television evangelists, whether they are soliciting prayers, cash, or votes. The Rev. Mr. Robertson claims an exemption from the obloquy heaped on his shadier

brethren, for he can exhibit more reputable tokens of achievement—bachelor's and law degrees, experience in the broadcasting and education industries, random civic involvement. Unless Midwestern Republicans acquire a taste for moralizing—a decent respect for the less objectionable pieties and hypocrisies is our custom—they will not make Mr. Robertson their candidate, although they may have to put up with his more determined supporters for some time to come.

If the GOP's right most faction can't find a winner in Pat Robertson, the clear alternative is Rep. Jack Kemp. Why his campaign should be in the doldrums in the Midwest as elsewhere is puzzling. Then again, any politician with such a passion for the intricacies of economics is likely to lose voters who fail to grasp the romance of marginal utility or the Laffer curve. The ex-quarterback from Buffalo is as lively and quick-witted a stump-speaker as the GOP can provide nowadays (Sen. Alan Simpson of Wyoming may hold the edge), and he gives off a pep-rally cheeriness, that of an earnest, presentable fellow who can balance the outlines of deep thought with the concerns of an urban social worker. Somehow or other Congressman Kemp's level of enthusiasm, whether for urban enterprise zones, tax rate reduction, or social safety nets, stays at a uniformly high pitch. In a hoarse, energetic delivery he makes everything sound much the same, every proposal, every project, every scheme propounded without the slightest doubt as to its wonder-working power. Through it all darts the suspicion that these are recently acquired items, the discoveries of an autodidact who has not yet formed the connections that derive learning from knowledge. In short, Mr. Kemp has already proved himself useful in the ventilation of issues—the campaign would be stuffier without him—but he is regarded from a Midwestern perspective as a back-up, not a starter. Those who admire his record

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Kent Owen is Indiana editor of *The American Spectator*.

in Congress and think him underrated are willing to have him as Vice President, which may be his proper niche.

Maybe somewhere in Chicagoland, Alexander Haig can find support for his bluff, gruff, but ill-defined campaign. The general's hard-boiled pragmatism should appeal to urban Republicans whose appreciation of superbly executed careerism could light on no fitter exemplar. Still it is curious that this most prominent soldier-statesman since George Catlett Marshall (except, of course, for Dwight D. Eisenhower) rouses a fever of distrust. Opportunism rarely disqualifies men from public office, unless such nimbleness of timing and positioning seems blatantly overreaching. Which in General Haig's case may be the trouble. While he attracts few adherents among Midwestern Republicans, he draws watchful notice because he seems ready to saber his rivals in the coolness of debate. General Haig's place in the campaign is less one of serving to stress such issues as the Strategic Defense Initiative and the reduction of intermediate-range nuclear weapons than of provoking a unilateral attack from one of his fellow candidates. In these parts the smart money is betting he will be the first to fall, unless Pierre du Pont beats him to it.

Governor du Pont had, before the cavalcade of television panels, piqued more than routine interest with unconventional views on restructuring the Social Security system and mandatory drug testing in public schools, notions bound to be controversial. Indiana Republicans who have dealt with him through the Hudson Institute, the think tank based in Indianapolis, whose board of directors he had chaired, speak highly of him and his accomplishments in Delaware, which may have been harder for a du Pont to bring off than one would suppose. But Pete du Pont has already come a cropper in the TV steeplechase. His gibes at George Bush seemed petty and peevish, and his emphatic concern for the baby boomers' future burdens overplayed. Thus, whatever his motives, he has given the impression of a man who accepts bad advice from his handlers and comes to grief because of it. Then, too, he suffers from a disability he shares with Mr. Bush: a patrician appearance and manner of speech that must be given a regular-guy treatment for mass consumption. Although his chances are scarcely encouraging, he is the one Republican candidate who hints at holding more substance in reserve—intelligence, breadth of intellectual curiosity, administrative forcefulness, potentiality for resourceful leadership—than he has so far been able to display on television. Indeed, it is within the gift of that fateful medium

to make sound and thoughtful men appear vague, and the shallow and glib appear decisive. Mr. du Pont is a man worth keeping in mind for other kinds of public service.

To no one's surprise the real struggle for the Republican nomination is between George Bush and Robert Dole. The senior senator from Kansas

should expect built-in support from the Middle West, and that he has, particularly in the western reaches. If his late summer appearances in Indianapolis were a fair sample of his powers, he fell short of the expectations of many Republicans who were ready to join his camp, not because of any firm opposition to the Vice President but because of doubts that he can be elected against, say, Mario Cuomo, if it

should come to that teasing eventuality. What Republicans say they like about Senator Dole is toughness and determination. That sense is reinforced by his sardonic wit, taken to indicate he is smart, can look out for himself, and sees through courtiers and phonies. Some who have heard him speak, both extemporaneously and from texts, report the senator is less articulate and cogent than they had supposed. When

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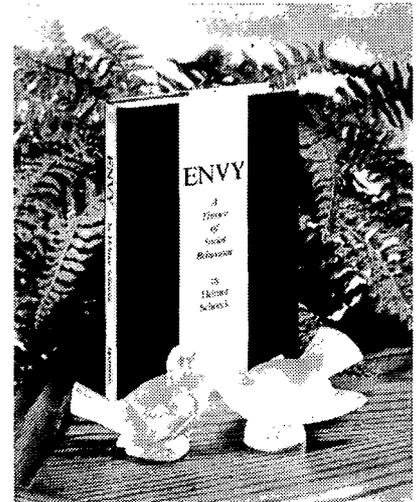
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it comes to specific issues, Mr. Dole is identified primarily with deficit reduction, restoration of economic stability, and broader-based prosperity, all of which are sensible concerns in the Middle West. Republicans who have watched him operate at close range insist his commanding presence enables him to work his will in negotiations. However, legislative talent, like the legendary prowess of Lyndon Baines

Johnson, may not register so strongly on Americans at large beyond the confines of the Capitol. The problem becomes one of how to dramatize as vividly as possible the forcefulness of the Dole personality, which comes across as coarse-grained, rough-edged, flat, and flinty, not unlike much of Kansas itself.

All the same, Midwestern Republicans are by no means opposed to Bob

Dole. On the contrary, the American national character they see in him is what they see in themselves: straightforwardness, tenacity, clear-eyed realism best expressed in earthy, well-informed common sense. In many ways those are the qualities they also see in George Bush. It is simply that they know and like Mr. Bush better. Probably, no presidential candidate in the history of the Republic has ever been

so abused for being a gentleman. To his sorrow and the nation's, Mr. Bush has been mocked for scrupulous loyalty to the President, conscientious discharge of the duties entrusted to him, and for convictions about honor, integrity, and the obligation of public service for those who enjoy the privilege of good fortune. The knavish taunt of "wimp" attacks Mr. Bush's gentle breeding and good manners, mistaking gentlemanly virtues for weakness and vacillation. (Our egalitarians are quick to shame courtesy as a grave offense to a militantly classless America in which rudeness ought to be the standard.)

No doubt it's unfortunate Mr. Bush reveals a boyish exuberance that is less than becoming, his voice tightening to a whine. He is not naturally eloquent, and his words are often too casual, even downright banal. But these are hardly moral defects. One senses in him and, moreover, in Mrs. Bush and their family, a wealth of decency, kindness, and urbanity, cultivated knowledge of what ought to matter most in life. In an age when the characters of public officials and eminent citizens in general are exposed to merciless scrutiny, it is reassuring to have George Bush in the thick of things. There is about Mr. Bush a sense of proportion, a disposition to act in moderation, a self-assured capacity for learning the common good, unimpeded by dogmatism, ideology, or sentimentality.

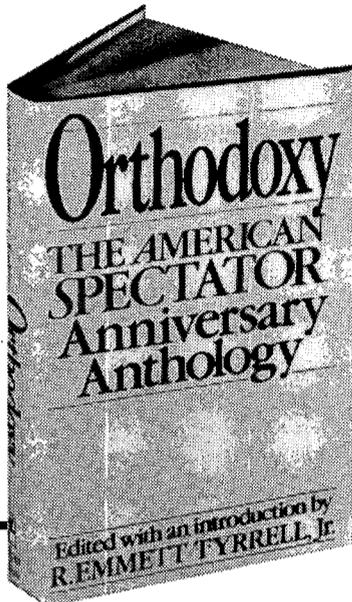
Nowhere in America does the question of character count for more than in the Middle West, where one's judgment and conduct, private and public alike, have never been matters of mere fashion. Consequently, Midwestern Republicans have reason to believe George Bush is that finest of public men, the principled idealist whose actions are tempered by the lessons of history and an understanding of the changing elements of real life.

With the exception of Parson Robertson, none of the Republican candidates rouses his Midwestern supporters to unseemly passion. In fact, the antics of the Robertsonites confirm the Midwestern Republican's conviction that sound politics, like sound government, requires caution and moderation, a deliberate refusal to be lathered into reckless enthusiasm. In a sense, this makes the difference between *settlement* conservatism and *movement* conservatism: the understanding reached through considered experience that the whole of a man's character must count for more than the partiality of his faith in ideological or theological abstractions. It is also why interoceanic America can generally resolve the tensions and conflicts of the age more wisely than the nation's bicoastal extremists. That is, if we just don't get too cussed smug about it. □



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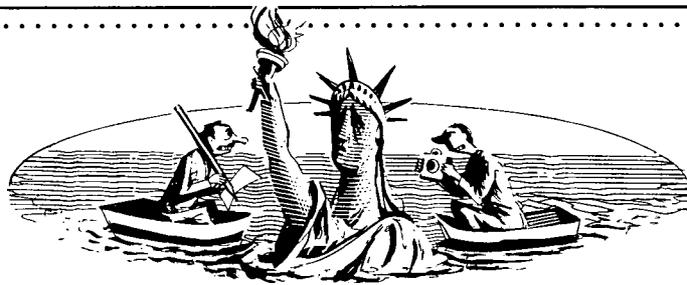
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# PRESSWATCH

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## WHEN THE SOVIETS COME TO WASHINGTON

by Michael Ledeen

The coverage of the summit is probably best left to the drama critics and the psychoanalysts, but a few points are appropriate.

First, the West has been enthusiastic about every new Soviet dictator, and cheered every announcement of the "liberalization" of the Soviet economic system. Thus, Lenin's New Economic Policy was greeted with hosannas back in the 1920s, Stalin was hailed as a moderate, Khrushchev's thaw was considered a new era, Andropov was the consummate liberal, and even the colorless Chernenko was given high marks for his open-mindedness (for the few months when people believed he was actually alive). Thus, the highly positive treatment of Gorbachev is not new; it is a continuation of a 70-year old pattern of Western response to events in Moscow.

Second, the summit marked a new high (or low) in the Kremlin's efforts to achieve "moral equivalence" with the United States. The very fact that Western pollsters now consider it routine to compare the popularity ratings of Gorbachev with those of Reagan indicates that there are many people who put them on the same political plane.

Third, in many ways Gorbachev received a gentler treatment from our journalists than Reagan did, and this is also traditional; even Khomeini got the "kid gloves" treatment when he was living in the suburbs of Paris, and Qaddafi's memorable NBC interview was remarkable for its gentleness. The toughest questions at the marathon Gorbachev press conference in Washington came not from the lambs of our press corps, but rather from British correspondents (and, surprisingly, from Mary McGrory, the sole American exception) who reminded the Soviet dictator that he had said a summit which consisted solely in signing an already agreed-upon INF treaty, and which did

not make concrete progress in regional and other matters, would be a failure. Why was this not a failure? Gorbachev didn't like the question, and gave the journalists short shrift. Yet almost all of our people—from the White House to the newsrooms—were eager to usher in the "new era" of East-West relations, and didn't press the issue (at least in public—I am told that at the meetings with "intellectuals, academics, and journalists" at the Soviet Embassy there were some tough questions, to which Gorbachev responded quite huffily).

Fourth, although the Soviet promise to withdraw from Afghanistan is now seven years old (so far as I know, the first time it came up was during the first Haig-Gromyko talks way back in 1981—and Gromyko raised it all by himself with no prompting from the American side), it is often taken seriously, both by American diplomats and by American journalists. One would think that intense skepticism would have set in long since.

The two best assessments of the summit that I found were a charming op-ed piece by David Aaron in the *New York Times*, in which he marveled at the media's compulsion to fill the airwaves with summit-related material, even when that required them to interview each other, and an upbeat article by Zbigniew Brzezinski in the *Wall Street Journal*, which proclaimed Reagan the winner 3 to 1. He's right, but the victory may be pyrrhic; any President who believes that a new era is at hand, and that Gorbachev doesn't

believe in the eventual triumph of Communism, might make some serious mistakes down the road a bit.

Meanwhile, it behooves us all to pay tribute to the *Los Angeles Times* which between October 25 and November 7 ran an eight-part series (in which only seven, oddly, were identified as part of the series) on the Soviet Union under Gorbachev. The *Times* sent a bevy of correspondents to produce the series: Dan Fisher, William J. Eaton, Robert Gillette, Stanley Meisler. To be sure, there are many weaknesses in the articles (Sovietology is a modern form of metaphysics, and it's a tough act to perform), such as the opening salvo by Fisher and Eaton on October 25: "Gorbachev is off to an impressive start. Since he came to power three years ago, the Kremlin leader has managed to substantially alter the traditionally forbidding image of his country abroad."

Fair enough, but they should have pointed out that this always happens. To their credit, Fisher and Eaton then continued with the crucial point, one which is often overlooked: "[The new image] is vital in order to ease international tensions and gain the breathing space and Western technology he needs to carry through his reforms." To which we can only add, "reforms are beside the point; he needs the technology from us in order to survive."

There is a certain innocence that seems inevitably to attach itself to American coverage of the So-

viet Union, such as when we hear:

Fyodor Buriatsky, a journalist and consultant to the party's Central Committee, estimated in an interview that one-third of the people actively support the Soviet leader's program, another one-third are against it, and the balance are taking a wait-and-see position.

Now unless I am totally mistaken, there are no Soviet "journalists" in our sense of the word; there are only writers who serve the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. And what could possibly provide the basis for the tripartite division of Soviet public opinion? Does the KGB now conduct polls? And would Mr. Mainstreet Soviet citizen tell the truth to pollsters? This sort of quotation deserves some warning flags for the unwary reader.

On the other hand, the *Times* series provides a first-class examination of daily life in the Soviet Union, ranging from rock stars whose records circulate, samizdat-style, among the young, but who do not perform publicly (and who receive royalties so small you need a computer to calculate their tininess), to patients in hospitals who need transfusions only to find that there is no blood bank, and get some blood from the anesthesiologist. The wretchedness of human existence is well described, as is the continued failure of the economy. As Robert Gillette put it,

Nearly three years after Gorbachev's rise to power, the supply of meat and butter still falls far short of demand, as evidenced by continued rationing in a number of provincial cities, where adults are limited to as little as a kilogram . . . of meat and sausage and 200 grams . . . of butter a month . . . The late Soviet leader Leonid I. Brezhnev postponed resolution of the housing shortage from 1980 to 1990; Gorbachev has put it off to the year 2000 . . .

Furthermore, Gillette found Soviet officials who confirmed that the Kremlin "now devotes a much larger proportion of its gross national product to military spending than does the United States, as Western intelligence agencies have long contended." But Gillette does not point out that it is still



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