



Dramatic Democrats

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

New York

The Democrats have returned from the Big Apple! But they are scarcely the boisterous, ebullient bunch from days gone by. Fruit juice tipplers have replaced most of the beer guzzlers and dispelled the cigar smoke. The party of Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion is now the party of Yoghurt, Yoga, and Bumper Stickers.

Yet this is unquestionably a great political apparatus. True, the party is at odds with itself—"odd" being the *mot juste*—but the Democratic party contains the most prodigious collection of political dramatists ever assembled in a party, short of National Socialism's or Marxist-Leninism's spellbinders. For half a century the Democrats have given us practically all of our political myths, melodramas, epics, and even our barbaric political superstitions. They have come up with our catchiest slogans and prettiest lapel pins, and I, for one, am still touched by that little girl back in 1964 who picked the daisy that blew up the world.

The Republicans at their best are the party of scare tactics, mudslinging, and Willie Horton—we have this on the authority of our transcontinental corps of Democratic writers and pundits. The Democrats at their best are the party of *Camelot*, *Sunrise at Campobello*, and *Give 'em Hell, Harry*. In this century only one Republican has surpassed his

R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. is editor-in-chief of The American Spectator. This article is an adapted and expanded version of an essay that appeared in the Wall Street Journal.

Democratic adversaries in the art of self-dramatization, and that was Ronald Reagan, an ex-Democrat.

In recent years, as the fragmentation and radicalization of the Democratic party has worsened, its idealists and tireless campaigners have actually sharpened their artistic skills, transforming themselves into legendary figures and their ideas into The American Credo. Consider Governor Clinton. He is Georgetown-schooled and Oxford-trimmed. He is a modern, progressive cosmopolitan who remains vulnerable to the hallelujah wails of that old-time religion. He is a policy whiz kid but with a special touch for the poor, the black, the

unlettered. Naturally, he is a jogger and widely read. He is Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield and almost any Kennedy. Consider Governor Cuomo. He is a ballplayer. He is a tough guy. He is large-souled. He can cry in public, but get mad too.

He also is a reader—all Democrats are readers!—partial to Teilhard de Chardin, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Garry Wills. He is a supra-Catholic, pious but superior to priests, nuns, and his local cardinal, with whom he is in a spectacular metaphysical row. He is a scholar of A. Lincoln and perhaps St. Augustine. He flays George Bush over the American economy, though the Hon. Cuomo's state and its largest city, the financial center of America, are practically in bankruptcy. No contradiction is too grotesque for his powder and mascara. He is numbered among the grandest orators of our age, along with the Rev. Jesse Jackson and someone by the name of Ann Richards.

Do you detect incongruities? Fear not, the Democrats' political dramatists will blend them all into compelling legends. They have done it so many times before. They turned an artless rube from Plains, Georgia, known for his mean streak, into a loving humanitarian, too good for Washington and too bright for politics (as though being bright and being ignorant are irreconcilable). They took a rich Harvard patrician from the 1900s and an equally rich Harvard playboy from the 1940s and turned both into statesmen with an uncommon empathy for poverty, suffering, being black—in sum, things they knew little about. Would not a rich

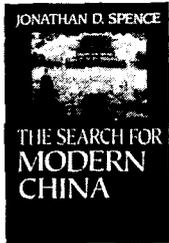
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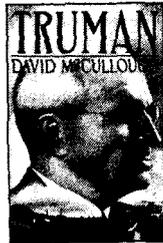
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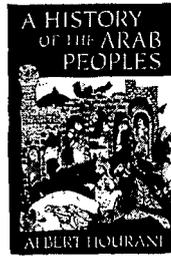
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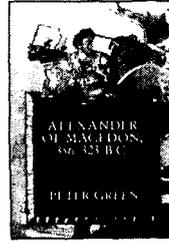
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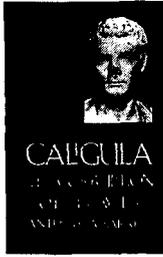
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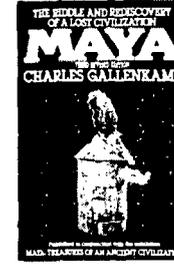
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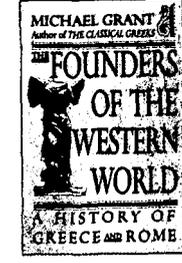
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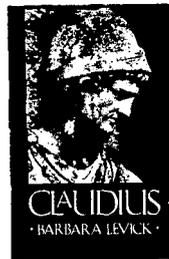
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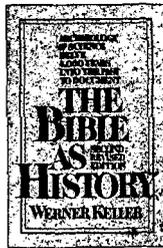
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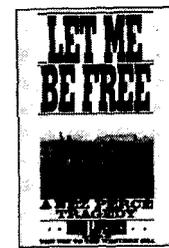
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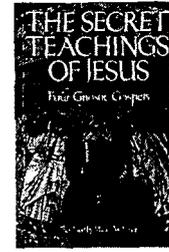
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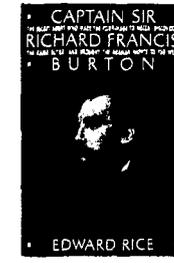
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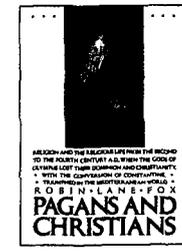
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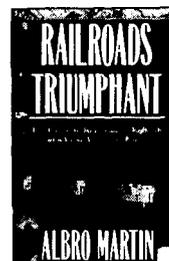
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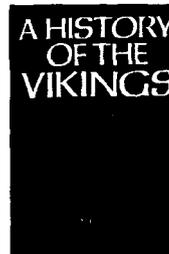
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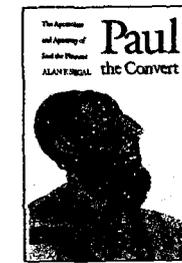
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Yale-bred patrician, heroic in war and seasoned in the rough-and-tumble of Texas business, covet such a team of dramatists?

I have in mind, of course, George Bush, but take my word for it—he is almost wholly oblivious to such artistry. He is a Republican. After much research and meditation, I have come to the conclusion that Republicans (conservatives) and Democrats (liberals) have vastly different temperaments. Alas, it is not in the conservative temperament to dramatize one's political ideas or persona. George Bush resists the suggestion that he transform his private behavior into public virtue. That, he would complain, is "scripting" a life; and he is against scripting. Being a gentleman of conservative temperament, he believes his private life should remain private and unmarketed, though I have personally gathered much incriminating evidence that George Bush is a reader, a thinker, and a man in sympathy with humanity.

The Democrats in our time have mastered what we shall call "masked politics." Like guests at a masked ball the Democrats don attractive disguises. Republicans do not have the guile for masks. The Democrats recognize the usefulness of masking their belief in government regulation, high taxation, and social engineering behind the diverting costumes and sonorous dicta of the environmentalist, the consumerist, the feminist, and so forth. When the Republican is faced by one of these masked politicians he has not the wit to recognize that he is looking into the face of a Democrat and responding to a Democrat's demands. He thinks he is simply responding to the noble desiderata of America's political culture. Consequently, to a large extent, the Democrats control its values and rhetoric. As I have elaborated in my recent book *The Conservative Crack-Up*, the Democrats have successfully polluted American political culture with their political ideas and panaceas. They have created a *Kultursmog*. All Americans are victimized by it. When George Bush responded to what he perceived to be a national clamoring for a balanced budget, a clean air act, and quotas, he was caught in the *Kultursmog* of his political adversaries. There are effective conservative policy responses to the good causes of fiscal responsibility, the environment,

and civil rights, but they are not to be found in the polluted atmosphere created by the furtive practitioners of masked politics.

For Republicans to stand steadfastly by their conservative principles they will have to avail themselves of their own dramatists. Very few of them recognize the need. For them to dispel the *Kultursmog* they will have to expand the size of the conservative counterculture created in recent decades by a string of conservative think tanks and intellectual magazines. Until they take such action they will be trapped in the Democrats' *Kultursmog*, responding to the liberals' legends and bugaboos.

That, as the present presidential campaign makes clear, is ruinous for Republicans. Eric Breindel, the astute editorial-page editor of the *New York Post*, observed the other day, "There's nothing remotely healthy about this state of affairs. A corrupt public discourse promotes an unwillingness to face reality. And problems can't be resolved unless they're named and acknowledged."

We are now well into the second longest Republican presidential ascendancy of this century. Twelve years into Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal the culture of America was alive with New Deal enthusiasms and enthusiasts. The enthusiasts were writers, artists, policy makers, for instance, Robert E. Sherwood, Virgil Thomson, and Rexford G. Tugwell. Pulitzer and other prizes had been won by New Dealers active in and out of government. Who from the Bush Administration has made a similar appearance in our culture? And, for that matter, did President Reagan's administration do any better?

In part this is because the keepers of the *Kultursmog* are not the champions of pluralism and diversity that they claim to be. Yet conservatives, with their belief in markets, could have done better than merely cry "liberal bias." They could have employed their own conservative political dramatists, who have been proliferating at the conservative think tanks and magazines for years. During both the Reagan and the Bush Administrations, Republican leaders were urged to bring in their own intellectuals, as did JFK and FDR, and then—following the Democrats' example—send them off into high-profile

government positions, conferring on them the prestige that they need to fight the battles of cultural politics outside government.

What is more, Republicans could have given their own journalists access to the White House. They could have encouraged books, articles, documentaries. Friendly Democratic writers set out whole bookshelves of hagiography even during the Carter drear. The Democratic output for those four years dwarfs the Republican output for the last twelve. The Republicans could have opened their administrations to friendly artists and thinkers; they never did. Given this obtuseness, they ought not to complain too loudly about "liberal bias in the media."

With their obvious money-raising talents, the Republicans could have acted even more ambitiously than the New Dealers and New Frontiersmen. In fact, they still have time. Adam Meyerson, the gifted editor of the Heritage Foundation's *Policy Review*, urges that former secretary of education Bill Bennett be set the task of founding a first-rate conservative university. Twenty years and \$150 million ought to do the trick. Then, too, the conservatives need a television network. The corporation that owns ABC is run by Republicans of a distinctly conservative stripe. Surely these executives ought to perceive the profitability of breaking with the conformity of the other networks, the same kind of conformity that led Detroit to lose much of its market to Europe's and Japan's diverse products. If ABC is not interested in increasing its market, certainly Rupert Murdoch should be.

Finally, such information producers as the *Washington Times* and the editorial page of the *Wall Street Journal* have demonstrated that there are alternatives to the *Kultursmog*'s conception and presentation of news and commentary. Great Britain's conservatives have seen the value of challenging their left's dominance of culture. British conservatives now control something like half of British media—and they recently kept control of #10 Downing Street in a squeaker. But let us not remind our Democrats of that unhappy event. Let us congratulate them on the power of their pens even as we hope they run out of ink this fall. □

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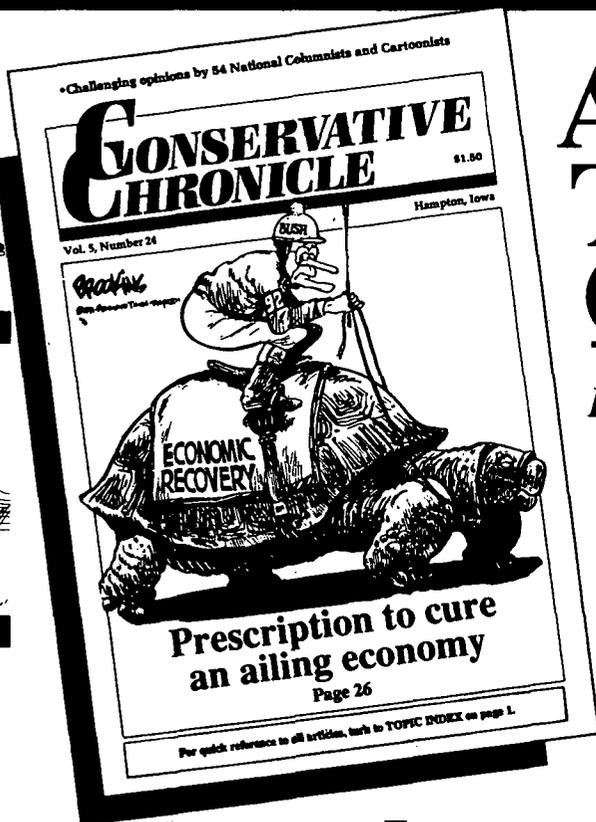
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Strange New Respect, 1992

by Tom Bethell

In recognition of his school prayer and abortion rulings, Justice Anthony Kennedy recently received the Strange New Respect Award for 1992. The award ceremony, attended by prominent journalists, was held in the Georgetown garden of a retired Washington publisher. I was fortunate enough to attend, the ground rules specifying that no one present, other than Kennedy himself, could be identified. The award was actually presented by a well-known liberal columnist with a northeastern newspaper, who has become a tremendous Kennedy admirer. To those who may not have heard, the Strange New Respect Award is given to political figures who betray their conservative supporters after moving to Washington. Such people are usually said to have “grown.”

Kennedy, of course, went to the Supreme Court with strong support among conservatives and pro-lifers, and a general expectation that he would not let them down. Now he has “surprised friend and foe alike.” He has also hired a law clerk trained by Laurence Tribe, Harvard’s best-known progressive thinker.

Kennedy was also honored with the prestigious Taney Medal, which from time to time is awarded to justices who uphold the neglected constitutional doctrine that “the legislative will must remain subordinate to the judicial power of the Supreme Court.” The most recent recipient was Justice Harry Blackmun. The medal is named after Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, who presided over an 1857 ruling of the court, *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, which oddly prefigures *Roe v. Wade* (1973).

In its recent case, *Planned Parent-*

Tom Bethell is The American Spectator’s Washington correspondent and a media fellow at the Hoover Institution.

hood v. Casey, the Court reaffirmed *Roe*, with three of the five justices appointed by Reagan and Bush (O’Connor and Souter, in addition to Kennedy) joining Blackmun and Stevens. Everyone at the ceremony was delighted and even surprised that Republican Presidents had managed—from the point of view of their supporters—to choose so poorly. Kennedy was feted for his “growth,” and reporters present were smiling broadly at rumors (thought to emanate from Kennedy’s law clerks) that the Justice has become very attentive to his newsclips. His “courage” was much praised, but there was a certain amount of grumbling at Robert Bork’s contrary view that the *Casey* ruling was “intensely popular with just about everybody Justices care about: the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the three network news programs, law school faculties, and at least 90 percent of the people Justices may meet at Washington dinner parties.”

In the *Dred Scott* case, Chief Justice Taney found that, constitutionally, Congress had no power to prohibit slavery in the Territories, because such a prohibition would constitute a “taking” of private property. In *Roe*, Blackmun found that, constitutionally, state legislatures had no power to prohibit abortion in the states, because such a prohibition would interfere with the “right to privacy.” Both cases used constitutional rhetoric to preempt legislative action. Taney, like Kennedy, was a Catholic and a decent fellow who was “personally opposed” to slavery and “personally kind to Negroes,” according to one of his biographers. But he would not allow his personal beliefs to interfere with his judicial duties as he saw them. Slaves, like the unborn, were not considered to be “fully human,” but were to be regarded as the property of their owners (mothers).

Dred Scott was a slave, but at least he emerged from his encounter with the Supreme Court in one piece. “This doughty gentleman of color has become the hero of the day, if not of the age,” the St. Louis *Washington Union* reported in 1857. Barnum’s Hotel in St. Louis supported him as a public attraction, “and while life lasted he enjoyed himself hugely,” according to another Taney biographer. Taney was praised by some newspapers (“The decision in the Dred Scott case must be a *finality*, so far as federal legislation is concerned,” the Richmond *Enquirer* editorialized), reviled by others, and as for himself, serenely confident “that this act of my judicial life will stand the test of time and the sober judgment of the country.”

It was widely expected at the ceremony that Justice Souter would also win Strange New Respect. He had stood shoulder-to-shoulder with Kennedy in the abortion and prayer cases. Three days after the *Casey* decision was announced, Fox Butterfield wrote a Souter Has Grown story for the *New York Times*, a good specimen of the genre, and in writing it Butterfield in effect nominated Souter for the award. But there was a last-minute decision to withhold it from the reclusive Justice, because of an apparent and little-noted conflict of interest in the abortion case.

During Souter’s confirmation hearings in September 1990, Howard Phillips of the Conservative Caucus testified that in February 1973, when Souter was a member of the board of trustees of Concord Hospital, “he participated in a unanimous decision that abortion be performed at that hospital. . . . Similarly, Dartmouth Hitchcock Hospital, which is associated with the Dartmouth Medical School, has performed abortions up to the end of the second trimester. During