



## A Quarter-Century

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

**T**his magazine is now twenty-five years old. That is old enough to drink and to vote; and, if you review the choices we had in the late election, it helped to do both simultaneously.

I founded the magazine while studying for a graduate degree in history at Indiana University. The first few issues were put together at my off-campus residence, a house trailer that one would think Indiana University had now turned into a literary shrine.

But no, I am told university officials had our rusting old cocoon destroyed, fearing as they did that the virus might spread or that this relic of literature and rebellion might some day be used as a prop for a growing cult of personality.

Actually, the virus did spread. The anti-radical students who joined the staff (two, Publisher Ron Burr and Kapellmeister Baron Von Kannon, are still with me) were fetched by the free-market ideas of Milton Friedman and a hawkish stance toward Communism—all in all, the politics of Governor Ronald Reagan and of MP Margaret Thatcher. In 1968 many of us went to the Republican Convention to demonstrate in support of the Governor's valorous—if brief—campaign. Over the next few years, encouraged by the likes of Bill Buckley and Irving Kristol, and with the active participation of their generation's sons and daughters at large throughout the Republic, this magazine became the national magazine of non-radical students. As I recently wrote in *The Conservative Crack-Up*<sup>1</sup>: "Unlike the *New Republic*, the *Nation*, or any of a half-dozen wisen-

heimer magazines that in recent years have come and gone to the ooohs and amens of the culturati, *The American Spectator* originated as an off-campus magazine created solely by students. . . . *The American Spectator* was born wayward and destined to be skeptical."

**I** was at pains to lay out the magazine's origins and early adventures in that book, and I am at pains to do so again here, because the popular conception of the 1960s generation as radical and left-wing is demonstrably false. The vast majority of 1960s youth were not radical. In 1972 they voted for Richard Nixon; they supported the war in Vietnam, along with the rest of the American people, almost to the end. In recent studies it has become clear that the 1960s generation rarely smoked dope, engaged in zoo sex, or demonstrated for or against anything. My compeers were much like my colleagues at the early *Spectator*, but apparently the recent fabricators of American history want to avoid this prosaic truth. And now that the Savior Clinton is breaking out his bell-bottom trousers, dusting off his peace symbols, and preparing to welcome the surviving Mamas & Papas into the White House for granola wine, we are going to have to endure another—perhaps somewhat sanitized—reprise of 1967's "Summer of Love." Well, please remember that in that mythic summer, with Beethoven thundering in the background and plenty of beer in the refrigerator, my pals and I were pasting up the first issue of what has for twenty-five years pinned the tail on these donkeys while keeping the record straight and amusing.

Amusing! More amusing than Vaudeville! Than Monkey Island at the Zoo! Than almost any foreign trip undertaken by Jimmy Carter! Since the 1960s America has endured the longest period of reform in its history. TR's Square Deal had a beginning and end, so did the New Nationalism, the New Deal, the New Frontier, and even the grotesque and frequently criminally insane Great Society. The real zealots of the 1960s (as distinguished from the more modestly deranged types within the Kennedy and Johnson governments) have roared and stamped their feet for a quarter century; and with their personal liberation claptrap, their social engineering, their food phobias, their New Age revelations, and all the other absurd and risible guff these fevered buffoons show no signs of sobering up or shutting down. How could all this not have been a most amusing time for us? Now, with a second-rate governor from a third-rate state strutting into the White House convinced that he is an intellectual aristocrat but a poor boy made good, a moral colossus but a swank, a Baptist but a post-Christian cosmopolitan, and—who knows?—a man but somehow a woman, the amusement has just begun!

**T**he *American Spectator* has gone through several different phases. In the 1970s we were the first magazine of the conservative movement to welcome wayward Liberals into our pages. Eventually, such wandering Liberals as Kristol, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Elliott Abrams, and other co-conspirators came to be known as neoconservatives. They were to be among the most effective of Reaganites. In the early 1980s,

<sup>1</sup>Simon & Schuster, 319 pages, \$23.

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# Forbes

# MY

After 1986 I felt like a skilled surgeon who's been locked out of the operating room and watches through the glass in horror as some first-year medical students go to work on a patient. They're cutting him open while referring to textbooks but they're turned to the wrong chapter.



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when the Liberal mandarins presiding over American *Kultur* began to fear that Reaganism might sweep them off into concentration camps somewhere in Kansas, the mandarins treated us very cordially. *The American Spectator* was dubbed Washington's new "in" magazine, though we were still located in Bloomington, Indiana. Then about 1984, when the mandarins discovered that Reaganism did not have to be feared as a force in *Kultur*, we were indulged sweetly no more. The mandarins polluted *Kultur* with more quaint left-wing politics than ever before. It became what we call *Kultursmog*, though no environmentalists joined *The American Spectator* in attempting to contain this repellent politicizing. We tried to rouse the Reaganites to influence *Kultur* as the New Deal and the New Frontier once did. We failed.

Now *The American Spectator* has begun a new phase. We are discomfiting Washington with the unwanted scrutiny of our investigative journalists. Our circulation has soared to over 114,000—up from some 30,000 nine months ago—and *The American Spectator* has become the conservative magazine of investigative journalism. Yes, of course, we shall continue to review the *Kultur* and fumigate the *Kultursmog*. For a certitude, we shall continue to review books and the arts from a conservative perspective. There will remain essays and reports on public policy. My solemn, public-spirited philippics against the Republic's public nuisances will not be adjourned. But we shall add to the repast a nutritious course of investigative journalism. It will originate on Capitol Hill, in the bureaucracy, the political back rooms, wherever skull-duggery and threats to the taxpayer and to the Bill of Rights might be conjured up.

For twenty-five years my colleagues and I have had a grand and gaudy time. Many have departed our offices, bringing their talents to other publications and to broadcast studios. But all of them are together with me in this: we thank our readers, our advisers, and our financial supporters for their interest, their companionship, and even the occasional spitball launched our way. But is it not now time for Indiana University to place at least a bronze plaque at the scene of our first crimes? Had I robbed banks à la John Dillinger or made a couple of moody movies à la James Dean, the solemnizing would have been performed long ago. □

## It's a Boy!

Bring on the clichés! Heap high the platitudes! I suppose one of the reasons I wanted to see George Bush win this election was that such a win would have been almost unprecedented. Our journalists would have had to come up with a few original observations. The newspapers and airwaves might have been blank for days.

Now, however, we are going to have to endure endless flapdoodle about "The Baby Boomers Come of Age," "Clinton Up From The Log Cabin," and "The Comeback Kid." And then there is the jogging prop. George Bush jogged excessively to be sure, but most political watchers had the decency to avert their gaze. Boy Clinton and Boy Gore are going to be ubiquitously jogging around in their underwear, and wearing infantile hats and relating personal details that might embarrass even a gossip columnist.

There is a certain variety of American male that seems to think the further one proceeds into middle age the more one should act like a small boy. Do not be surprised if on inauguration day Bill enters the White House wearing a baseball cap backwards and riding a skateboard, while his Vice President flies a kite out back by the Rose Garden. On the campaign trail, Bill assiduously wore his baseball cap and even a *Rolling Stone* T-shirt. Next he will be wearing a Grateful Dead T-shirt and insisting that he has acne.

In contemporary American politics a presidential race is there for the incumbent to lose, not for the challenger to win. As I wrote in the early 1980s—much to the discomfort of my fellow conservatives—the 1980 election was not a mandate for Ronald Reagan's conservatism but a rejection of Jimmy Carter's liberalism. This election has seen a rejection of George Bush's conservatism, such as it was. In both elections, the voters quite properly recognized that their President's public philosophy had damaged the economy and in Jimmy Carter's presidency it had dam-

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aged foreign policy as well. Jimmy Carter's liberalism was state-of-the-art: Keynesian monetary policy, price controls on energy, moral superiority everywhere, and—let me add—dozens of new policy breakthroughs to further what seems to be modern liberalism's fundamental goal, to wit, social disintegration.

George Bush's conservatism was not quite state-of-the-art. In fact, many conservatives saw in it great gobs of liberalism for moderate Republicans, as the President distanced himself from Reagan by breaking his pledge on taxes, allowing federal bureaucracies to reregulate the economy, and approving a civil rights bill that foreordains quotas, plus a disabilities bill that will enrich thousands of lawyers pursuing thousands of nuisance suits.

The economy was sluggish in the main because of the heavy burden of taxation and regulation, most notably the neurotic regulation of bank loans by bank regulators who have caused a credit crunch that is inimical to economic growth. Still, George Bush was at least to some degree conservative, though ideologues of the left are going to have a very hard time claiming that his policies have been an extension of the policies of Ronald Reagan. They will try, of course, because they live in an illusory world filled with evil conservatives and saintly liberals. Real issues such as economic growth do not fetch them.

Such issues do fetch the electorate. The most telling results of the election were, first, that an extraordinarily high number of voters turned out to vote for Ross Perot, the most successful third-party candidate since Teddy Roosevelt; and, second, that in every state where the electorate could vote on term limitations the measure won, and usually by huge margins. The American people have grown exceedingly impatient with Washington. Owing to the way our politicians have rigged the system, the electorate's impatience has been futile for years. In this election even the most insulated Washingtonians must have gotten a glimpse of the electorate's dissatisfaction.

Boy Clinton insists that he is in sync with the people and that he brings new

*(continued on page 95)*

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## Georgia (Ave.) on My Mind

by Tom Bethell

A week before the election I had dinner with a group of British journalists. All had recently arrived in the country, all had bought copies of the "Gennifer Flowers" issue of *Penthouse* at the airport, and all were amazed at the media blackout of the story. The Clinton campaign's least-convincing denial of his involvement with Flowers was the response to reports that the governor's car and driver had been spotted in her apartment driveway a number of times. Some of his aides lived in the same building, said campaign manager Betsy Wright, so he was there on official business. Gennifer's most trenchant comment—"A man who will cheat on his wife will lie to the American public"—is not a refrain likely to be picked up by the U.S. news media. Flowers says that Clinton has "two big moles on his back." Next summer, will a vacationing President Clinton appear in public without a shirt on?

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Two weeks after the election the Clintons came to Washington and went to dinner with Vernon Jordan, a civil rights leader who has done well by doing good; and with Pamela Harriman, a remarkably successful social climber from England. The Clintons also attended a reception given by the radical-chic Children's Defense Fund. On hand was the actress Glenn Close, who personally felt "a huge sense of hope and relief" that Hillary would soon be in the White House. Miss Close has a four-and-a-half-year-old daughter and until now has "despaired over her future and the future of other children in this country." She expects that Hillary will be a "huge force" at the White House.

It is good to know, incidentally, that

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the founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, the sainted Marian Wright Edelman, sent her own children to Sidwell Friends, one of the more expensive and exclusive private schools in Washington. For her own children, at least, Marian put safety and education ahead of merely ideological considerations. Al and Tipper Gore have also sent their children to private school in Washington. Let us hope that they continue to do so, and that Bill and Hillary likewise send Chelsea to a private school.

On the same visit, the President-elect took a much publicized stroll along the 5200 block of Georgia Ave. NW, which is five miles from the Capitol Building. According to a friendly page-one article in the *Washington Post*, Clinton "strolled Georgia Avenue yesterday like a regular guy, handing out high fives, sampling Chinese food and greeting a fellow Georgetown University alumnus with a hearty 'Yo, my man!'" The same story described the area as "one of the city's prime black business districts." A few days later, after the metal detectors and interlocking street barricades had been removed, I decided to go and see Georgia Ave. for myself.

I traveled on the No. 70 bus, past Howard University, where the students are mostly black. For those who knew Washington in decades past but have not returned, the city has been in steady decline for years. It's especially noticeable as you leave Union Station and head west along Massachusetts Avenue for a few blocks. Then turn north, and you're on the road to Georgia Ave.

You pass through a dreary landscape of deserted city blocks, with nothing but weeds and rubble on display; boarded up buildings, their entrances sometimes cemented off with cinder blocks; torn, forlorn posters ("Student Shut 'em Down Day, May '92," "African Liberation Day

'92," "Fight Genocide: Vote Against the Death Penalty, Nov. 3"); potholed streets; abandoned liquor stores; rusted signs; smashed glass; broken casements. Everything is ground down with dirt, depression, abandonment, futility, and neglect.

The population of the District of Columbia has declined from over 800,000 in 1950 to just under 600,000 today, a 25 percent drop, and the decline is continuing. White flight has been succeeded by black flight, as Charlotte Allen pointed out in a detailed article in the *Washington City Paper* recently. These things are not acknowledged by officialdom or reported in the mainstream press. "At the District of Columbia Office of Planning," Allen wrote, "where the government demographers work, an atmosphere of denial straight out of an Elisabeth Kubler-Ross handbook prevails."

Along with New York City, Washington, D.C. has since World War II been one of the main laboratories of the American liberal experiment. We are only beginning to see the magnitude of the disaster. And we cannot expect the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post* to tell us what happened, since they have played a key role in promoting the experiment. For the last twelve years, of course, it has been easier and much more preferable to blame everything on the Republicans—Ronald Reagan in particular. One of the more delightful aspects of Bill Clinton's election is that Democrats are finally going to have to take responsibility for Democratic policies—which have unfortunately been pursued all along. (All right, Reagan made an effort in his first two years in office to stem the tide.) I suppose for another year or two the liberals will continue blaming urban chaos on the legacy of Reagan, or whatever, but the day is coming when they are going to have to