

“POLITICALLY CORRECT” is this year’s catch phrase, and before Christmas it will be as stale as the new miniskirt or yesterday’s George Will. Always willing to outdo themselves in gullibility, decent Americans are routinely writing letters to the editor or calling up Rush Limbaugh to protest the infamy of thought control on the nation’s campuses. Even though the platitudes of Allan Bloom, Roger Kimball, and Dinesh D’Souza keep popping up in all the fashionable places, no one—certainly no one in the conservative press corps—has the least suspicion of what is going on.

As Frank Brownlow makes all too clear in this issue, the corruption of academic life is not a new story. Sometime after the First World War universities moved quickly to abolish requirements, lower standards, and introduce bogus disciplines like home economics, social work, and physical education. Foreign languages and philology were replaced with soft courses in literary interpretation, and by the 1960’s students were taking for credit courses in mystery novels and world literature surveys taught by professors who had learned none of the necessary languages.

I spent twenty years hanging around colleges and universities, first as student and then as professor. I have never regretted my departure. With a few distinguished exceptions, my teachers and colleagues were dull-witted, lazy, and militantly anti-intellectual. The brighter students catch on early, and in my last year of full-time teaching, one of them asked me—as politely as he could—if a grown man didn’t have something better to do with his life than pander to students and hang around with losers, by which he meant my colleagues.

The problems of higher education today are not the fault of Marxists, feminists, or minority scholars. Most faculty members are ignorant boors, and the radicals are no exception, but there are intelligent feminists and incompetent conservatives. As I once

tried to explain to a chapter of the National Association of Scholars, their task was to de-politicize, not to re-politicize the academy, and every time they hired or promoted a colleague on the basis of politics, they were augmenting the enemy’s strength. Better a wise Turk than a foolish Christian.

But the crusade against political correctness proceeds on the opposite principle, and instead of seeking to reform our institutions of higher learning many disgruntled liberals and their lite-conservative allies wish only to replace the leftist hegemony with the centrist liberal hegemony that ruled the academic roost until the end of the 1960’s.

—Thomas Fleming

**THE OBSCENE CARNIVAL** of digging up an American hero who died 141 years ago has come to an end. No arsenic was found in Zachary Taylor’s remains, proving that he was not poisoned, which any competent and sensible historian could have told you without this grotesque and impious exercise. (Even if significant traces of arsenic had been found, it would, in fact, have meant nothing. Arsenic was an ingredient in many medicines and embalming fluids in common use in 1850, and its presence would not have proved conspiracy and poisoning.)

We did not learn anything about American history before the Civil War from this business. There was never the slightest possibility that we would do so. The affair tells us a lot, however, that will never be acknowledged, about our intellectually and ethically degraded present; more specifically, it reveals that what passes for the official view of earlier American history is not only ignorant but warped. No society has ever devoted more resources to historical study than modern America, and no society has ever so wantonly cut itself off not only from understanding but from identification with its own past.

This foolish exercise should never

have been permitted by Taylor’s descendants. There used to be better standards. It is little known, but in the early 19th century there was an effort to remove George Washington’s remains from Mount Vernon to the Capitol. It was quietly but firmly refused by the family, backed by overwhelming Virginia public opinion. It would have been an unseemly and un-republican spectacle, an invasion of privacy that would have made Washington’s tomb hostage to whatever band of politicians happened to get control.

It was alleged that President Taylor’s symptoms at the time of death suggested poisoning, doubtless by proslavery advocates. Any historian familiar with the period knows the imprecision of medical data and records from that era, and would be extremely cautious in drawing any conclusions from them, especially one so drastic as a presidential assassination. But what gave a fraudulent plausibility to the story was something that is in the air: the belief, or rather faith, on the part of vast hordes of petty intellectuals that any and all evils and enormities, real and imagined, must be traced back to Southerners, and particularly to Southern slaveholders.

The issues that were current in 1850 were quite complicated. It would take several pages to explain them fully, and even then it would be beyond the intellectual capacity of a television news anchor or congressman to understand. But, broadly speaking, they did not involve being for or against slavery, contrary to what the media have repeated *ad nauseum*, for in fact almost no one respectable was against slavery, except in mild and marginal ways. The differences involved the political and economic balance of power between the North and South in regard to the future of the new territory acquired in the Mexican War, further complicated by the efforts of two political parties to maneuver for advantage while muddling and compromising the issues, as American poli-

ticians always do.

There was a wide variety of viewpoints. Though a Southerner and a slaveholder, Taylor was a conservative Whig who took a moderately Northern stand on the issues, as indeed did many Southern Whigs. The differences involved were quite heated, but hardly clearcut enough to provoke assassination. An assassination theory is only given plausibility by anti-Southern paranoia: the belief that Southerners killed people who disagreed with them. The Old South produced some tough and violent customers, including Old Rough and Ready himself, but they were not the kind that went around poisoning people. It would have been totally out of character. The abolitionists, not the slaveholders, produced the John Browns and Edwin Stantons. Congressman Brooks of South Carolina *publicly* thrashed Charles Sumner, who had unquestionably slandered his state and his family, because he knew Sumner was too cowardly to accept a challenge. Brooks would have scorned a clandestine assault.

Taylor himself, a genuine and heroic soldier though a naive politician, would have repudiated the hysteria of a "slave power conspiracy." Anyone with any sense of context can see the absurdity of the assassination business. Would Taylor's family have had no suspicions? Within a little over a decade Zach Taylor's son-in-law was president of the Confederate States and his son one of its best generals, yet his death is used to slander Southerners. And an ideological phantasm becomes not only a historical interpretation but the cause of legal and scientific actions.

This incident fits a very familiar pattern. Whenever economic, social, and psychic tensions grow in "mainstream" America, there is a clamor of anti-Southern hysteria. It has happened over and over again. As racial hatred and social pathologies intensify in northern cities, it is utterly predictable that establishment intellectuals will escalate their war against Southerners and Southern history.

This is illustrated to perfection by William Freehling's recent book, *The Road to Disunion, Vol. 1*, which purports to be a new history of the coming of the Civil War, and which is a sort of background cover for the nasty Taylor business. This book was hyped for

twenty years while in preparation, something that is almost unprecedented in academic circles. Its publication immediately catapulted the author from an already prestigious position at Johns Hopkins to an endowed chair at SUNY-Buffalo.

While the book is well researched and even slightly original in marginal ways, and not without a certain cleverness, it is, substantially, as a work of history, an absurd cartoon. It literally reeks and drips with poisonous and near-paranoiac hatred not of slavery but of Southern whites, and, indeed, of almost all of American history.

Even the academic historians have kept some distance and not been entirely persuaded by the book's pretension to be major and classic history. This so-called narrative is full of 1960's slang. The portraits of antebellum American statesmen are at best quarter-truths, but even what truth there is in them has been said a thousand times before by a thousand different writers. The book tells us exactly less than nothing about its subject, in the sense that a quarter-truth is worse than nothing at all.

The success of this book and the Taylor autopsy, which are both based upon a common and false interpretation of history, do tell us that the liberal intellectuals are under terrific pressure. Faced with a moral and social wasteland in modern America, what could be more convenient than to blame the old Southern slaveholding class for all our ills? It gives one such a nice and safe feeling of superiority and freedom from the necessity of any real thought or decision. Whatever the evils of past states of society, which are always easy to find, it is a fact that the Southern planter class of the 18th and 19th centuries provided the preponderance of the most able and honorable Founders and nourishers of the American Republic, and that American society has gone downhill in every way except material wealth since they were destroyed.

If, as the Kerner Commission has made a convention, the Old Southern system of slavery is the cause of all the ills of modern American society, why is it that the further away we get from the plantation, in time and space, the worse the pathologies grow? Or, to put it another way, why, a century and a

quarter after the end of the Civil War, is racial hatred, not to mention crime, illegitimacy, and drugs, worse in Chicago than in South Carolina?

In the meantime, we Southerners need an anti-defamation league, though that is not our style. We have learned the hard way the value of patience and a half loaf, and the danger of pushing points of honor too hard, and we have a primitive loyalty to this country, under the foolish delusion that it is still ours.

A vastly disproportionate share of the reservists called up for the late Arabian adventure were from the Southeastern States. Everyone wants representation on the Supreme Court. Southerners, the people who more than any other founded the country and wrote the Constitution, have a representation on the Supreme Court of zero, even though we make up a third or more of the people. Yet, still, we Southerners allow a smirking Yalie to gull us out of our votes by a pretense of fellowship with Baptist ministers and country singers. It speaks well of our hearts but not of our heads.

—Clyde Wilson

**THE WORLD COUNCIL** of Churches convened its Seventh Assembly at Canberra, Australia, early in February 1991, just in time to pronounce a verdict on the Persian Gulf War. The W.C.C. opposed the war on two grounds: that all war is wrong, and that it is not permissible to fight war to right an injustice unless one also fights all wars to right all injustices. The most striking expression of the first position came in a resolution brought by the German churches, calling on the Assembly "to give up any moral or theological justification for the use of military power, be it in war or other forms of oppressive security systems, and become advocates of a just peace." The motion was withdrawn when it became evident that there was insufficient time for the Assembly to act on it, but apparently it did reflect the sentiment of the majority: that just war doctrine no longer has any place in the thinking of the W.C.C. With respect to the second objection, the statement finally issued by the Assembly called on the United Nations Security Council to

"enforce with equal vigor its earlier resolutions on the territorial integrity of Lebanon, the division of Cypress [and] Israel's withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967."

The W.C.C. also took the opportunity to throw as much cold water as it could on plans to celebrate 1992 as the quinquecentennial of Columbus' discovery of America: "We call upon the international religious community and government to resist participating in activities celebrating 1492 designed without input from indigenous people and to join with indigenous people in the celebrations and commemorations they have planned." Logically, this would mean that Catholics could not celebrate the spread of the Gospel to the New World, nor could Protestants remember with anything other than embarrassment their efforts to establish a model Christian society in the wilderness.

This same anti-Western bent is found in a recent issue of the *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, where Harvard professor Diana L. Eck writes, "At a time when the U.S. was mesmerized by the momentum of war, it was clear that the massive armed presence of the West was deeply resented by people throughout the world with a history of Western subjugation." Elsewhere in the same issue, Melanie A. May, a visiting lecturer at Harvard, published a Lenten sermon, preached February 27 in the Divinity School Chapel, calling the war blasphemy and giving, among other things, this reason: "Because an American Air Force colonel, just back from one of the 3,000 bombing raids in 14 hours, can respond to a question about what he would do next by saying, 'Well, first I promised to buy my

crew coffee . . . and then we'll get right back to work.' Back to work. Back to killing. . . . The truth of this war is blasphemy because American citizens are so far spared the feeling and the flesh of fear—though not those of sorrow—that hold the Palestinian people and Israeli citizens, along with Iraqis and Kuwaitis, hostage."

It seems the delegates to the W.C.C. as well as Mmes. Eck and May would have preferred the assembled allied forces to have refrained from using their superiority in weaponry. Would they have felt better if there had been massed columns of infantry charging the entrenched Iraqis after the fashion of Napoleon? Or perhaps mounted knights, as used by the French at Crécy, or an infantry phalanx, as used successfully by Alexander the Great in the same region? And would the war have been more moral, less blasphemous, if the United States and its allies had suffered massive casualties? The anti-war position of the W.C.C. and Mmes. Eck and May would make sense from a position of consistent pacifism, but this isn't the basis of their argument. Instead, they temper their reproaches for the U.S. actions in the Gulf with calls for action elsewhere. One suspects that if the United States were to overthrow the government of South Africa by force, they would not call it "blasphemy."

What is involved here, as the attacks on quinquecentennial celebrations of Columbus' voyages of discovery reveal, is hostility to the West in general and to Christendom in particular. It is true that the Spanish *conquistadores* dismantled the indigenous empires of the Aztecs and the Incas in Mexico and South America, and that they were not gentle about it. This is not a matter of great credit or pride to the Christian West, but is it so unusual in the course of human history that it deserves special mention for particular execration? Is it not also true that the Muslim Arabs destroyed the old Persian Empire and the East Roman Empire and made repeated attempts to conquer the European mainland? No one says, "Christians are justified in hating Muslims because of their conquest of Constantinople and of Spain, because of their conquest of Hungary and their siege of Vienna." Perhaps the memory of the Crusades *explains* much of the

Muslim resentment of Christians and the West, but it can hardly be said to *justify* it.

In another Andover Chapel sermon printed in the same issue, a staff assistant at Harvard Divinity, Virginia M. Pierce, reproves the United States for having prepared for the Persian Gulf War for ten years and offers her interpretation of Islam as a "religion of peace." Let's be serious. Muslims have *never* been persecuted as a matter of policy by Christians, and yet Islamic regimes generally forbid evangelization and punish the conversion of Muslims to Christianity severely, frequently by death. No real or nominal Christian or member of any other non-Islamic religion is punishable by law in any Christian state for becoming a Muslim. Moreover, Islam did not stretch its sway from the Pyrenees to the Pacific by peaceful missionary work. On the other hand, Christianity spread throughout most of the ancient Roman world *in opposition to the power of the state*, not by military conquest. The Christians of Egypt and North Africa, of Gaul and Greece were won to their faith when it was still proscribed and persecuted. The Muslims of Egypt and Syria, North Africa and Asia Minor were won to Islam after their states had been conquered and when they could derive financial and other benefits from conversion.

Apparently the only "holy war" that is recognizable in some ecclesiastical and academic circles is the war against Christianity and nations tinted with that faith. Christians even outbid one another to cast scorn on and to apologize for their own traditions and faith. Conservative Christians may disagree with this behavior, but with few exceptions they too are cowed into tacitly acquiescing, as in the allegation that the Crusades were something of which Christians should be uniquely ashamed, whereas the *jihad* is only natural and a thing of which Islam may properly be proud.

When we consider the way in which the W.C.C. fawningly receives "guests of other faiths," giving reverent attention to their supercilious criticisms of Christianity, one finds it hard to realize that the ecumenical movement had its origin, early in the century, in the Christian desire to become more effective in world evangelism. It is one thing

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to be hospitable, generous, and tolerant; it is quite another to abandon one's strongest convictions for the sake of an urbane and cosmopolitan eclecticism.

—Harold O.J. Brown

**F**ROM A BLACK background an eerie, white sphere illuminates three ice cubes in a glass of clear liquid. At first, there is nothing special about the pallid image, except maybe the lack of color. But look again. Below the glass the bold white letters read "ABSOLUT SUBLIMINAL." Something tugs at your memory. The word "Subliminal" triggers your reaction, unlocking a latent urge inside you. The ice cubes, of course. They want me to look into the ice cubes. There, barely visible, lurks the ghostly prize, your Pavlovian reward, the words "ABSOLUT VODKA."

The ad, which made its debut on the back cover of the *Atlantic Monthly* last year, would seem to give itself away. But in so doing it willfully resurrects a favorite child of American folklore: the subliminal advertisement.

In large part, our preoccupation with the rival claims of cigarette and cornflake ads, and our self-conscious fears of dandruff, body odor, hairy legs, and baldness do not tell the whole story of advertising. From the carny barker to the billboard, practically anything goes when it comes to getting our attention. If bright colors and sexual come-ons are not enough, even the most suspicious and skeptical consumer cannot resist a subliminal suggestion hidden in an ad. The idea behind subliminal advertisements was simple. We were never supposed to be aware of them.

Whether or not we were ever a nation of zombies, cryptically manipulated by Madison Avenue, is open to debate. What we are is a culture of ads. America's churning myth-factory makes or breaks our common parlance. The most effective advertising campaigns are ultimately the ones we talk about. The key to selling a product is often making it a conversation piece, especially among kids, and what better way than to throw the savvy consumer a spitball, an ad campaign just tricky enough to pique our interest, to make the product a household word. If nothing else the myth of subliminal ads did just that: it caught our attention. Hyp-

notic suggestions may have been ineffective, but the *Zeitgeist* of subliminal ads, like that of UFO's, caught fire. Ads were no longer simply thought of as one-way streets of seduction that hit you on the head with pleading one-liners. They became curiosities. Who knew what evil lurked in the details, what sinister command we were being slipped.

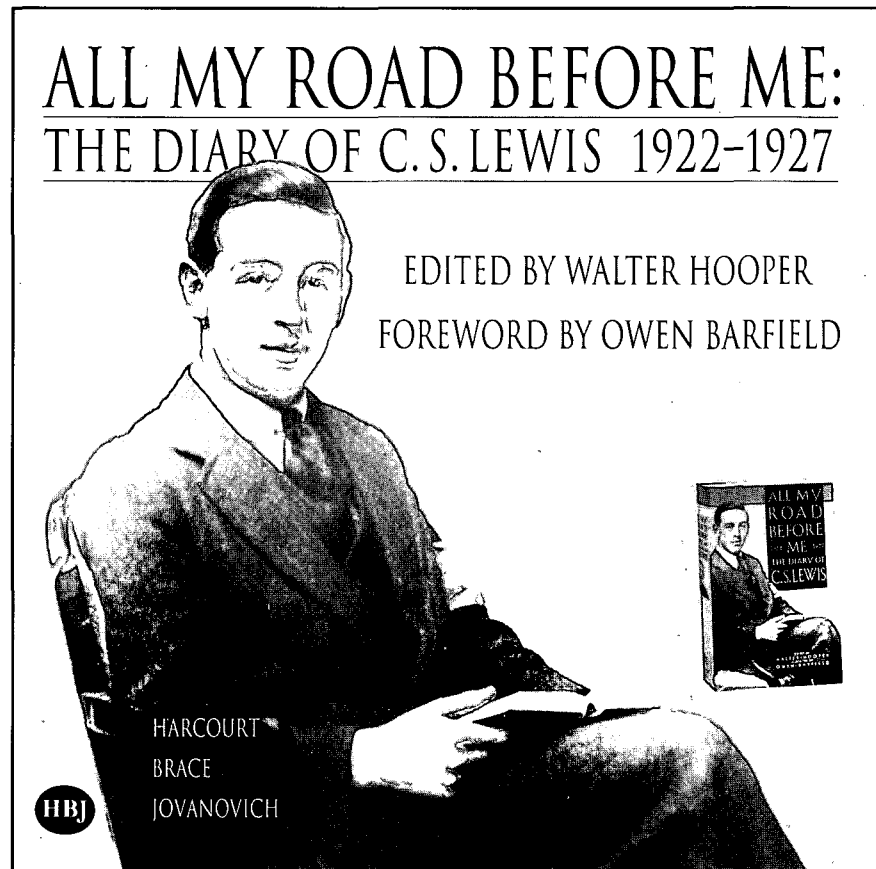
So we talked. The idea behind subconscious suggestion—that if it was there we could not possibly see it—was forgotten. Our skeptical eye freely turned on the ads, attempting to ferret out any indication of foul play. The byways of the American grapevine lit up with countless stories of manipulation. Unleashed, the unfettered lore of subliminalism flourished. S-E-X spelled out on a model's back and skulls in ice cubes are the stuff of legend. Who was not initiated to the Big Screen without a warning about encoded messages that drove mass audiences to the candy counter? There is the now-infamous pack of Camel unfiltered cigarettes. You either see a sexu-

ally aroused man or a voluptuous nude woman painted into the camel's leg.

The "Absolut" ad revels in America's advertising *Zeitgeist*. It is a tribute to the myth of subliminal ads. The shock-value of sex, violence, and mysticism may be gone, but their mystique remains. The bold letters spelling out "ABSOLUT SUBLIMINAL" at the bottom of the ad beg us to question the content of the ice cubes overhead. But we have been tricked. Where we expected to find the taboo of a death image we find instead a corporate logo.

In fact, "ABSOLUT SUBLIMINAL" could easily be rewritten "ABSOLUT-LY OBVIOUS." The ad encourages a symbolic reading over the original idea behind subliminalism, for it is not covertly selling to our primary emotions of fear, anger, and desire. Its target is our national myth-factory. For all its emblematic allusion to consumer engineering, the ad takes the guise of a clever joke, distilling subliminal advertising into nothing more than a pop-culture phenomenon.

—Daniel Mendel-Black



SEPTEMBER 1991/11

# Principalities & Powers

by Samuel Francis

If the American Republic is defunct, and if most Americans no longer subscribe to the classical republicanism that defined the Republic as its public orthodoxy, what is the principal issue of American politics? Ever since the Progressive Era, the issue that has divided Americans into the two political and ideological camps of “right” and “left” has been whether or not to preserve the Republic. The Progressives (at least their dominant wing) argued that the small-scale government, entrepreneurial business economy, and the localized and private social and cultural fabric that made a republic possible was obsolete at best and at worst repressive and exploitative. They and their descendants in New Deal-Great Society liberalism pushed for an enlarged state fused with corporations and unions in the economy and with massive, bureaucratized cultural and educational organizations. In contrast, the “right” pulled in the opposite direction, defending the Republic and the social and economic structure that enabled republicanism to flourish, but with less and less success and with ever-diminishing understanding of what it was doing.

Today the conflict over that issue is finished. The Progressivist empire has replaced the old American Republic, and even on the self-proclaimed “right” today, virtually no one other than the beleaguered paleoconservatives defends republicanism in anything like its pristine form. The collapse of the conflict over republicanism is the main reason why the labels “left” and “right” no longer make much sense and also why—much more than the end of the Reagan administration and the Cold War—the “conservative coalition” of the Reagan era is falling apart. Mr. Reagan’s main legacy was to show his followers, who for decades grouched and griped against “Big Government,” that they too could climb aboard the Big Government hayride and nibble crumbs at its picnic. With such “conservatism” now centered mainly in Washington and its exponents happily dependent on the federal megastate, the historic *raison d’être* of the American “right” has ceased to exist. Such con-

servatives no longer even pretend to want to preserve or restore the old Republic, and it now turns out that even when they said they did, it was all pretty much a charade anyway.

Nevertheless, the end of the conflict over the Republic and of the battle between left and right does not mean that there are no conflicts at all. Indeed, the American imperium, having few roots in the population except insofar as it can feed its client constituencies, is riven by conflicts. The empire might be able to strike back, but it has never been able to formulate its own orthodoxy that would distinguish it from traditional republicanism and provide a consensus that could discipline conflicts. That indeed is why the megastate has retained the forms of republicanism. Unable to legitimize itself through the ideology of Progressivist liberalism, it steals the clothes of its republican predecessor to justify its revolutionary agenda.

At the heart of the empire—or megastate, or managerial regime, or leviathan, or whatever you want to call it—there is a vacuum, and the main issue of the last decade of this century and the first decade of the next will be over what is going to fill that empty space. The ability to fill it, to articulate a public orthodoxy for the country, is in large part what it means to be master of the imperium, for whoever is able to acquire enough cultural power to define what the megastate is supposed to do and for whom it is supposed to do it will achieve Antonio Gramsci’s “cultural hegemony” and will carve his own initials on the blank slate of the empire.

One of the principal contestants for hegemony in the megastate will be the largely Middle American constituency of the now-decapitated American right. The end of the left-right conflict and the absorption of its leadership within the megastate means that the mass following of the right has become a body without a head. That following thus finds itself, its interests and values, unrepresented in the contest for control of the megastate of the next century, and that situation cannot last. Sooner or later, if Middle Americans are not to become extinct, they will generate a new, independent social and political

identity or consciousness and will construct a movement based on that consciousness that will demand not only representation in, but also dominance of, the regime.

But they will not, as their forebears did, demand republicanism. Middle Americans are a diverse bunch, consisting of small businessmen in manufacturing, small farmers burdened with debt and confronted with absorption by agribusiness, and white ethnic blue-collar workers who find their jobs disappearing because of foreign competition and their advancement thwarted by megastate-mandated racial and gender quotas. What these and similar groups share, despite their diversity, is a common frustration with the megastate in its present structure, along with a seemingly paradoxical dependence on it.

Their frustrations might lead them toward a revival of classical republican, small-government conservatism, but their dependence on the state forbids it. Middle Americans are as much wrapped up in the tentacles of the megastate as the elite that runs it or the underclass that is its main beneficiary. Middle Americans buy their homes with loans provided by the federal government. They educate their children in public schools and send them to colleges, themselves recipients of federal funds, with federal student aid. They work for corporations regulated by and linked to the state and are members of labor unions protected by federal laws. They receive federal farm subsidies, and the food they produce and eat, the highways on which they travel, the air they breathe, and the television they watch all are subject to the laws and regulations of the federal megastate. Most Americans, Middle or not, lodge few objections to this kind of regimentation; what they do object to is that it doesn’t work all that well—that is, that they don’t get from it as much as they want or expect—or that federal regimentation often seems to help others more than it helps them. Middle Americans don’t object to the megastate in principle, but they do object to it in practice.

Hence, the agenda of an authentic Middle American political consciousness would include retaining many of