



Act II, Winning an Election

by Nicholas Lemann

The day that I had my job interview at *The Washington Monthly* a new issue had just come into the office. In huge type, the cover said, CRIMINALS BELONG IN JAIL. It's a sign of how much the liberal world has changed that at the time, February 1976, this seemed shocking to me—it was the kind of thing that you just couldn't say, even if it was true. In order to restore vitality and intellectual honesty to liberalism, much of the psychic energy of the magazine in those days was devoted to raising all the points that liberals felt shouldn't be discussed because it would give the conservatives ammunition. But the assumption was always that liberalism would remain the reigning creed in America. We were not trying to move the Democratic Party to the right. We were not ourselves moving to the right. We were trying to make liberalism even better and stronger than it already was.

Even more than the urge to avoid issues like crime and defense, the aspect of conventional liberalism that the magazine most disliked was its elitism—its snobbery and its mistrust of politics, which seemed rooted in a belief that most people simply weren't very bright. So it's ironic, and sad, that *The Washington Monthly's* greatest success over the 20 years of its existence has been in influencing the liberal elite—not about elitism, but about issues. On most public policy questions, the Eastern Establishment, such as it is these days, has come around to the positions this magazine has been advocating since its founding. You can bet the rent that the next Democratic presidential candidate will point out that criminals belong in jail.

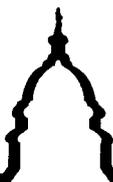
The problem that nags the most right now is that the acceptance of *The Washington Monthly's* positions is limited to a fairly small group. Neoliberalism, in essence if not by its unfortunate name, would win in a referendum taken among journalists and policy analysts. But it's still death on election day because of what comes after the "neo." The 1988 presidential election was especially depressing in this regard, because George Bush,

unlike Ronald Reagan, is not a great political candidate, and seemed to draw his electoral strength mainly from tapping a reservoir of public distrust of liberalism. The unpopularity of liberalism is obviously rooted more in "populism" than in substantive disagreement; conservatives have been able to sell most people on the idea that liberals are powerful and contemptuous, the way bankers used to be in Thomas Nast cartoons. Liberal elitism and conservative presidential landslides are intimately connected. *The Washington Monthly* doesn't really need an infusion of new ideas right now; its 20-year-old ideas are still the right ones. The next great task for the magazine is figuring out how to bring about the political triumph of neoliberalism—and doing this will require completing the great piece of unfinished business in the establishment, which is overcoming its suspicion of democracy.

There are three prevailing theories about how to revive the Democratic Party in presidential politics. One, which might be called the Sam Nunn theory, holds that the Democrats should become more conservative, especially on defense and foreign policy, and thus win back the South. Another, the Barney Frank theory, is that if the Democrats could rid themselves of a few exotic positions (such as the idea that criminals don't belong in jail) they would get the middle class back. Finally, according to the Bob Kuttner theory, if the Democrats ditch the social issues and fully embrace class- and constituency-based economic politics, they could build a working-class majority. All these theories have crucial flaws. The Nunn theory assumes that the South is winnable for the Democrats, which last fall's election results call into question. The Frank theory takes away the Democrats' negatives without adding positives. The Kuttner theory seems to work only in hard times.

Neoliberals are frequently accused of lacking a political base—except for journalists, it's often added with a snicker. Actually, there is an encouraging historical parallel for the position of neoliberals today, which is the Progressives. They too proceeded from an interest in government to a mastery of politics; Progressivism first flowered among journalists and reformers, and elected local and state officials before it was a force in national politics. In retrospect the key to the Progressives' political success was not their clever stitching together of con-

Nicholas Lemann, an editor of The Washington Monthly from 1976 to 1978, is national correspondent for The Atlantic.



WHO'S WHO

You're not going to believe it! Among those **George Bush** has named to his commission on ethics in government is none other than our old friend from Watergate days, **Fred "White Gloves" Fielding**. The president doubtless feels that Fielding's experience will be essential when the commission considers the more sensitive moral issues involved in safecracking. . . .

Another old friend of Who's Who, **Robert Kimmitt**, the man who didn't ask **Dan Quayle** the right questions, has been rewarded with one of the choicer plums in the State Department hierarchy as undersecretary for political affairs. Insiders say his real role will be to monitor the activities of the National Security Council for **James Baker**. . . .

Speaking of the NSC, the senior staffers named so far—**Robert D. Blackwill**, **David C. Miller Jr.**, **William Working**, **Richard Haass**, and **Karl D. Jackson**—confirm the signal given by the president's selection of **Brent Scowcroft** and **Robert Gates** that the council is unlikely to play a dynamic or bold role but that it will be competent, professional, and without a trace of the corruption or sleaze that marred its reputation during **Ronald Reagan's** incumbency. . . .

James Pinkerton, whom our readers will recall is the man who first realized that **Willie Horton** could win the election for George Bush, has been rewarded with a job on the White House staff. . . .

If you have a problem with the Treasury Department, you might give **Joe Califano** a call. Why would a Democrat like Califano, who played such a prominent role in the Johnson and Carter administrations, have any influence with a Republican Treasury Department? Because one of his proteges, **John H. Robson** will be deputy secretary. . . .

Further evidence that **Craig Fuller** has not lost his influence with the Bush administration comes from the invitation he has received to join the lobbying firm headed by **Anne Wexler** and **Nancy Reynolds**. They are regarded as far too savvy to take on a partner whose calls won't be answered. . . .

It may be that **Dan Quayle's** lack of enthusiasm for his press spokesman, **David Beckwith**, will be even greater when he learns that while working for *Time* last year, Beckwith helped compile

the file for *Time's* harshest article about Quayle. . . .

In—White House: Director of Administration—**Paul W. Bateman**. Cabinet Secretary—**David Q. Bates Jr.** Assistant to the President for Issue Analysis—**Richard C. Breeden**. Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs—**Frederick D. McClure**. Special Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs, House—**Gary Andres**. Executive Assistant to the Chief of Staff—**Edward M. Rogers Jr.** Assistant to the President for Communications—**David F. Demarest**. Assistant to the President for Special Activities and Initiatives—**Stephen M. Studdert**. Director of Presidential Advance—**John G. Keller Jr.** Executive Secretary, Economic Policy Council—**Lehmann K. Li**. Executive Secretary, Economic Policy Council—**Kenneth P. Yale**. Associate Counsel to the President—**Lee S. Liberman**. Director, White House Military Office—**Col. Antonio Lopez**. Director, Office of Political Affairs—**James R. Wray**. Deputy to the Chief of Staff—**Andrew H. Card Jr.** Assistant to the President for Economic and Domestic Policy—**Roger B. Porter**. Deputy Assistant to the President for Policy Planning—**James P. Pinkerton**. Director of Congressional Affairs—**Gordon B. Wheeler**. Deputy Director, Office of Management and Budget—**William Diefenderfer III**. *Commerce:* Undersecretary for Trade Administration—**J. Michael Farren**. Undersecretary for Export Administration—**Dennis Kloske**. Undersecretary for Economic Affairs—**Michael R. Darby**. Assistant Secretary for Trade Development—**Michael Sharzynski**. Assistant Secretary for Economic Policy—**Thomas Duesterberg**. Assistant Secretary for Import Administration—**Eric Garfinkel**. *Defense:* Deputy Secretary—**Donald Atwood**. Undersecretary for Policy—**Paul D. Wolfowitz**. *Energy:* Secretary—**James D. Watkins**. *Interior:* Secretary—**Manuel Lujan Jr.** *Labor:* Secretary—**Elizabeth Dole**. *State:* Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs—**Richard L. Armitage**. Assistant Secretary for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs—**John H. Kelly**. Undersecretary for Security Assistance, Science and Technology—**Reginald Bartholomew**. Undersecretary of Management—**Ivan Selin**. Undersecretary for Political Affairs—**Robert Kimmitt**. Ambassador to Japan—**Michael H. Armacost**. *Transportation:* Secretary—**Samuel K. Skinner**. *Treasury:* Assistant Secretary for International Affairs—**Charles H. Dallara**. Assistant Secretary for Policy Development—**Hollis S. McLoughlin**. General Counsel—**Edith E. Holiday**. *Veterans Administration:* Secretary—**Edward J. Derwinski**. *Agencies and Commissions:* Director, Peace Corps—**Paul D. Coverdell**. Administrator, Agency for International Development—**M. Alan Woods**. Administrator, Small Business Administration—**Susan S. Engeleiter**. Administrator, Environmental Protection Agency—**William K. Reilly**. Director, United States Information Agency—**Bruce Gelb**. Director, Office of Personnel Management—**Constance Berry Newman**.