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# The Year the Clock Broke

How the world we live in already happened in 1992

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"The end of history will be a very sad time."
—Francis Fukuyama

AS 1992 DREW CLOSER, A SPECTER HAUNTED the Republican Party establishment—the white-robed specter of David Duke. The former grand wizard of the national Ku Klux Klan had literally gotten a facelift for the television cameras and managed to make a credible run for the governorship of Louisiana. Even though he was soundly trounced in the state's November 1991 runoff, which delivered the office to the comically corrupt former

Democratic governor Edwin Edwards, who dodged a racketeering conviction in his previous term, Duke was still out there lurking on the fringes of the American right, threatening to primary George Bush.

"We've been sending a message," Duke said in his concession speech. "Next year, you'll have the message being expanded all over the nation." In Washington, D.C., a group of disaffected hardline right-wing political operatives heard his message loud and clear. They saw in David Duke the path to reshape America, formulating the brand of backlash populism that would finally come of age in the era of Trump.

The Louisiana gubernatorial election of 1991 was indeed a fight over that great floating signifier of American political life—populism. But in Louisiana populism was not just a vague label; it was institutionalized, both in style and substance. The remnants of Governor Huey P. Long's "Share Our Wealth" redistribution program from the 1930s remained on the books. Edwards was certainly closer kin to Long's rollicking, drawling bonhomie. He was still a "*laissez les bon temps rouler*" guy in the laissez-faire world of Reaganomic austerity.

Both candidates had legitimate claims to the legacy of Long's populism. After Long's assassination in 1935, "The Share Our Wealth" banner was taken up by America Firster anti-Semites like Father Coughlin and Gerald L.K. Smith. While Duke railed against welfare that he said mostly benefitted blacks at white expense, he defended a cornerstone of Louisiana's populist policy regime, the Homestead Exemption, which made the first $75,000 worth of

property tax free. The exemption was the material foundation of the largely white, small property-owning lower middle class—those hardy, self-reliant people of American populist lore.

# My Tribe, Your Klan

Duke's protest candidacies created a problem for the leaders of the national Republican Party—not because he was so extreme, but because he hugged so closely to their own proven playbook. As liberals were quick to point out, his racial appeals were largely couched in the language of Reaganism: he lambasted taxes, "welfare dependency," affirmative action "quotas"; "reverse discrimination"; he talked about a "welfare underclass," and fixated on black crime. This was really nothing you couldn't find in the conservative columns of any newspaper or in the speeches of any old GOP retail politician. In 1989, he told ABC's Sam Donaldson, "I do believe that there is a difference between whites and blacks. I think that there is an I.Q. difference. But I think the way to determine a person's quality and qualifications is in the marketplace of ideas. . . ." That same year the center-right think tank the American Enterprise Institute started to support Charles Murray's research on race that would culminate in the publication of the *The Bell Curve* in 1994.

Bush had vetoed the Civil Rights Act of 1990, calling it a "quota-bill." The Senate had tried to override his veto—and failed by one vote. Duke was lurking in the gallery for the vote; afterward, he crowed to the news cameras outside the Capitol that he had killed the bill. A series of Supreme Court decisions in the late eighties had made it harder for women and minorities to sue for discrimination, and the 1990 bill was supposed to remedy this. Conservatives said it

would force employers to hire quotas of minority workers to avoid lawsuits, hurting qualified whites. In 1991, a compromise version of the bill was up for consideration and by late October, as Duke had captured a strong plurality in the initial Louisiana primary, the Bush administration decided to act. A senior administration official told reporters that in reviving the measure, the White House "wanted to refute the charge that David Duke is related to Republican positions."

To the GOP's right flank, this was Bush's second great betrayal. Bush's midterm decision to raise taxes after his "read my lips" speech had already infuriated the conservatives. Syndicated columnist and *National Review* senior editor Joe Sobran was making threats. "The first law of politics is that you punish anyone who double-crosses you," he wrote. "So conservatives may deem a Bush defeat not only a desideratum but a necessity if they are ever to control the Republican Party again." Taxes may have seemed like a bigger deal politically—after all, tax cuts were the heart of the entire Reaganite movement—but the rage unleashed by the Civil Rights Act was of a special quality.

# Life After the Crack-Up

In Washington, the conservative movement was foundering on the shoals of fuck-all-to-do. By the end of the 1980s, listlessness and infighting began to set in. In some corners of the American right the Reagan years were regarded as a failure. In 1987, *The American Spectator* had a forum on "The Coming Conservative Crack-Up." Its editor, R. Emmett Tyrrell, author of *The Liberal Crack-Up*, put the

splintering movement's existential plight to readers forlornly: "As the Administration loses steam, we ask: Was it foreordained? Will life sour still more for conservatives?"

The sudden end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union made everything worse. Militant anticommunism long provided the great fixative that bound the factions of the right together. The loss of the USSR was so traumatic that the John Birch Society went into full-blown denial: Birch officials insisted the breakup of the Soviet Union was a K.G.B. ploy to get the West to drop its guard.

Who was the main enemy now? On the right, the answer increasingly was one another. In the 1980s, the conservative movement split into two warring factions—neoconservatives and paleo conservatives. The two sects fought over ideas, but also resources: comfortable think tank positions and administrative posts; grant money and the allegiance of the idle army of increasingly ideologically restive conservative activists who could scare up campaign contributions and votes.

The tribes huddled around their magazines, from whose pages they launched their slings and arrows. The capital of neoconland was Norman Podhoretz's *Commentary*; major outposts were Tyrrell's *The American Spectator* and Irving Kristol's *National Interest*. Podhoretz and Kristol's sons went into the family business. In the paleo mind, the Podhoretzes and Kristols were like two great feudal dynasties that would shower fellowship money on loyal retainers. The prominence of these two Jewish families in the conservative movement fed darker fantasies, too. Hawk-eyed for signs of the

anti-Semitism, even self-identified neoconservatives—who by no means were all Jewish—came to regard the epithet "neocon" as a code word for "Jew." And sometimes it certainly was.

The paleos, as they were the first to point out, were not so well-endowed as their rivals. This fed an already considerable bitterness. They had one little think tank, The Rockford Institute, which produced one little magazine, *Chronicles*. The publication's Southern Catholic editor, Thomas Fleming, had founded *The Southern Partisan Quarterly Review*—a slick organ of neo-Confederate nostalgia—in the late seventies. While the paleos may have been poorer in funding, they did have one big bruiser in their corner: Pat Buchanan. By the dawn of the nineties, Buchanan was America's most prominent conservative, a veteran of the Reagan and Nixon White Houses, and a panelist on the McLaughlin Group, with his own nationally syndicated column and CNN show.



# The Two Americanas

These factions maneuvered for control and influence over the central nervous system of the conservative movement—the Heritage Foundation, with its ever-growing coffers, and William F. Buckley's *National Review*, where the great movement gatekeeper still wielded pontifical powers of excommunication. *National Review* had grown closer to the neoconservatives in the age of Reagan and Bush, but still published prominent paleos, including senior editor Joseph Sobran, whose incorrigible penchant for Jew-baiting resulted in his demotion to "critic-at-large" and eventually his dismissal.

Two different visions of America divided these sects—or to be more precise, two different versions of Americana. The neoconservatives, many of them disillusioned liberals and leftists who fled the Democratic Party out of disgust with the New Left in the sixties and seventies, largely still upheld America as land of Lincoln and F.D.R. As the self-conscious sons and grandsons of immigrants, they pledged their allegiance to the America of Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty. They viewed the civil rights movement as a point of American national pride, even if they materially worked against its gains. They believed some form of the welfare state should exist. And many believed that the United States had an obligation to spread democracy around the world—even at the point of a bayonet. To the paleos, the neos were still just so many liberals—or worse.

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Pat Buchanan had a soft spot for the idyllic fifties, but for the most part the whole second half of the twentieth century was a wash to the paleo mind. The New Deal, The Second World War, The Civil Rights Movement, The Great Society, Immigration, Organized Labor, The New Left, The Vietnam War, opposition to The Vietnam War—the paleos regarded all these baleful forces as betrayals of the Old Republic. If the neocons held up mid-century New York as the height of U.S. civilization, the paleos wanted to go much further back, preferably to the nineteenth century.

The paleo aesthetic was American Gothic: white-sided Presbyterian and Congregational churches in small towns; stern, industrious folk; farmers, homesteaders, and frontiersman. Added to this was the

myth of the gallant South and the Lost Cause. Many were Catholic traditionalists, but they praised the character-annealing rigors of the Protestant ethic. In the paleo junk shop of discarded historical forms, the dour Puritan roundhead made a strange peace with the chivalrous Southern cavalier. Their imagination resembles nothing so much as the rainy-day transports of a boy who lines up all his toy soldiers from different periods in a grand alliance—here's a knight, there's a cowboy, here's Davy Crockett, there's a Special Forces commando. And for all its eclectic-yet-selective evocations of white civilizational virtue, the movement's sentimentalism and romance was also steeped in Spenglerian gloom: the writing of this cohort of paleo thinkers is shot through with a deep cynicism, even nihilism, and a hard-hearted notion of power that questions democracy itself.

# Dialectics of Duke-ism

When the paleos saw David Duke panicking the Republican establishment they perked up from their usual rounds of brooding. In November 1990, Duke was in Washington for the Civil Rights Act vote; he dropped by the offices of the *Washington Times*, the conservative alternative to the *Washington Post* owned by Reverend Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church. One of the editors Duke met with was Samuel T. Francis.

The unsigned editorial that came out of the visit was almost certainly penned by Francis—the headline was "David Duke's Revolution." Duke had become a "symbol" of what voters thought is wrong with America, the broadside enthused: "What is wrong . . . is that squeaky minority and special-interest wheels get the taxpayers' grease from politicians who seek only the perpetuation of their own power and privileges and that the serious problems confronting

American society—the economy, taxes, crime and moral and cultural dissolution—get nothing but promises, platitudes and rhetoric."

Francis also wrote another article about Duke's visit under his own byline, sporting the headline "Respectable racism?" Francis wrote, "The interview [Duke] gave suggests that he has not only managed to separate himself from Klan-like racism but also formulated a message new to American politics, a message that might be called 'respectable racism.'"

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Francis went on: "The distinguishing feature of that creed might be expressed as the acceptance of race as a biological and social reality, as opposed to the denial of race that both conservatives and liberals have endorsed."

Francis had been a senior aide to Senator John P. East, Jesse Helms's conservative understudy from North Carolina. Born into a well-to-do family in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Francis was part of what the novelist Walker Percy called the "Tarheel Conspiracy," a circle of conservative intellectuals at UNC-Chapel Hill that included Thomas Fleming, future editor of *Chronicles*.

His teeth stained by a pack-a-day Pall Mall habit, Francis was described by one writer as a "fearsome toad." Glowering behind his thick glasses, he had a temper. When the leaders of a church group came to lobby Senator East to support sanctions against apartheid

South Africa in 1985, they met with Francis. "If I had my way, I'd stomp people like you into the earth," he exploded in the midst of a profanity-laden tirade. The mild-mannered East reprimanded him, but kept him on as an aide.

An admirer of the political thought of *National Review* senior editor James Burnham, Francis took on his master's belief that the history of all hitherto existing society was just a churn of domination. New elites periodically emerged, and, using a combination of force and fraud, coerced the masses into supporting their political conquests. The ex-Trotskyist Burnham had simply stripped Marxism of its eschatology—there was no end to this process, no class or group actually represented the aspirations of mankind as a whole; they only *pretended* to.

Wheelchair-bound from polio and suffering from hypothyroidism, Senator East committed suicide in 1986. Cast into the flotsam of New Right *ronin* trying to find a purpose in mid-eighties D.C., Francis landed a gig at the *Washington Times*. Francis quickly earned himself a column and became the clearest-eyed and most pugnacious writer on an editorial page that sometimes descended into caviling about flag burning. But nothing short of a Middle American revolution—or a counter-revolution—was enough for Francis.

# Promoting the Paleo Diet

As the Bush White House began agitating to repel the invading Iraqi forces in Kuwait, Pat Buchanan created a media firestorm from his perch on the McLaughlin Group, curtly announcing that the only real backers of American intervention in the Gulf were Israel, and

the Jewish state's "amen corner in the United States." While neoconservative and liberal opinion makers lambasted Buchanan's statement that Congress was "Israeli-occupied territory," they did not detect how the jibe echoed the neo-Nazi talking point that the United States was ruled by a "Zionist Occupied Government." Buchanan was sounding a muted reveille to the darkest reaches of American opinion.

*National Review* came out in support of intervention in the Gulf, but Joe Sobran was allowed to give his dissenting view. After Buchanan, Sobran was the big anti-Semitic bête noire of the neocons. In 1986, he used his nationally syndicated column to give qualified praise for the white nationalist magazine *Instauration*, writing that it was "often brilliant, covering a beat nobody else will touch, and doing so with intelligence, wide-ranging observation and bitter wit. It is openly hostile to blacks, Jews, and Mexican and Oriental immigrants."

The neoconservatives flipped out and Buckley tried to persuade his senior editor to take it easy. But Sobran was unrepentant; the editor in chief of *National Review* also tried to reassure readers that his senior editor regarded anti-Semitism and all ethnic prejudices as "sinful, despised by God, and therefore despised by man."

Responding to the Buchanan controversy, Sobran sounded a rather different note. "Jewish claims are being cut down to size in various ways," he wrote. "It's coded by a lot of Jews as anti-Semitism. I don't think it is. It's more like counter-Semitism.'' He said he wanted to diminish "the excessive moral prestige Jews have in the media and the public square." If this be sin, Sobran seemed to be arguing, good paleos should be making the most of it.

It was in the run-up to the Gulf War that Joe Sobran, Sam Francis, and Pat Buchanan started to meet for dinner at a Chinese restaurant called the Hunan Lion in McLean, Virginia. In his cups, Sobran, a former academic, would regale his cronies by acting out scenes from Laurence Olivier's version of *Richard III*, even doing the hunchback—no doubt to the bewilderment of their fellow patrons. One can't imagine he skipped the famous soliloquy: "To entertain these fair well-spoken days, I am determined to prove a villain."

The trio would repeat this dinner date every month for a decade. Their columns began to echo each other. Buchanan: "If communism was the god that failed the Lost Generation, democracy, as ideal form of government, panacea for mankind's ills, hope of the world, may prove the Golden Calf of this generation." Sobran: "Now that democracy has overthrown communism, we can turn to the problem of how to overthrow democracy." Francis: "Serious conservatives ought to ponder whether the failure of the Reagan experiment means that conventional conservative policies can be implemented in a mass democracy." And Francis and Sobran urged their friend, who had flirted with the idea in 1988, to run for president.

# Winter of Discontent

By the fall of 1991, Operation Desert Storm was just a memory and America was in the midst of a recession. From its Gulf War high of 89 percent, Bush's approval rating sunk below 50 percent. Credit had run out. The Reagan eighties ran on debt. Everyone borrowed—both consumer and commercial debt ballooned. Real wages were stagnant; people still borrowed. By 1989, in David Duke's Jefferson Parish, income from wages dropped 6.5 since 1982, but income from dividends, interest, and rent rose 19 percent.

Driven by a wave of deregulation in the early part of the decade, lenders aggressively sought out markets. Investment bankers created new instruments to finance corporate take-overs, issuing "speculative-grade" or junk bonds as miracle funds. Real estate was the hot ticket; banks freely lent to developers who couldn't borrow fast enough. As the FDIC put it in its postmortem, "Prices soared, construction skyrocketed, and banks seemed prosperous." Then everything went south.

First the savings and loans started to fail. S&Ls had been modest financial institutions that helped middle-class people deposit their savings and buy a house with a mortgage. Since the Depression, they were tightly regulated and prevented from making exotic loans. In the early eighties they were struggling, so the Reagan administration, with broad bipartisan support, deregulated them.

The S&Ls got into speculative markets like junk bonds and commercial real estate and appeared to make a fantastic turn-around. But underneath the surface, they had billions in bad loans on their books; many were actually insolvent but regulatory forbearance allowed them to keep going. At the end of the eighties, they began to fail in the thousands. Since their deposits were federally guaranteed, taxpayers bailed them out.

Then Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 sent a shock through the system: oil prices soared and the bottom fell out of the already stalling housing market. A credit crunch set in; unemployment rose. Foreclosures and bankruptcies started to pile up.

There were two great avatars of the eighties debt craze: junk-bond wizard Michael Milken and Donald Trump. By November 1991, Milken was in jail for financial fraud and Trump was going bankrupt, defaulting on his payments for Taj Mahal Atlantic City. Trump

appeared before the House Task Force on Urgent Fiscal Issues, and told Congress, "I truly feel that this country right now is in a depression. It's not a recession. People are kidding themselves if they think it's a recession."

# The Earl of Duke

The polls were looking worse and worse for Bush—70 percent disapproved of the way he was handling the economy. The time was approaching for Buchanan to make his move. While covering a David Duke rally in Evangeline, Louisiana, Buchanan was mobbed by Duke supporters who urged him to run.

In an October 23 column, shortly after Duke's surprise showing in the first Louisiana primary, Buchanan laid out the strategy the Republicans should use to co-opt the insurgent's message. "The way to deal with Mr. Duke is the way the GOP dealt with the far more formidable challenge of George Wallace. Take a hard look at Duke's portfolio of winning issues and expropriate those not in conflict with GOP principles." Buchanan continued, "in the hard times in Louisiana, Mr. Duke's message comes across as Middle Class, meritocratic, populist, and nationalist."

Two days after Buchanan's column came out, the White House and Senate Democratic leadership agreed on a compromise Civil Rights Act. In next week's column, Buchanan was apoplectic: "Using the totemic term 'fairness,' neo-socialists have effected an immense transfer of wealth from producers to a parasitic government. Elected by small business and Middle America, this administration has betrayed both." Over the phone with his sister Angela "Bay"

Buchanan, Pat made up his mind. "He kept going on and on about neoconservatives," Bay later told Buchanan's biographer Timothy Stanley, "I couldn't see how any of it matters, but he was obsessed."

"It's a go," Bay told the *Washington Times* in mid-November; the paper put the announcement on A1. "His platform in many ways is expected to parallel that of Louisiana state Rep. David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan wizard, who is in a surprisingly close race for governor of his state," the article noted. The White House tried to act blasé. "Oh, the bug bites everyone once in a while," the president joked.

# Revolt of the Lomans

It was in the sullen north that Buchanan wanted to make his stand; either he would grievously wound Bush with a strong showing in the February New Hampshire primary, or do the unthinkable and win. New England was particularly hard hit by the recession: the real estate bubble burst there before it collapsed in the rest of the country. One *Boston Globe* columnist called New Hampshire "the Willy Loman of our states: small, pushed-around, insignificant in the long run, crowded to the edge and the back row when anyone talks about the Big Picture." And much as life had turned out for Loman, the glory days of New Hampshire were clearly past; and what was left felt both hollow and humiliating. Sanguine developers had built too much retail space in Nashua; now the empty stores glutted the market.

By the end of 1991, unemployment in the Granite State was above the national average. Between 1990 and 1991, bankruptcies had increased 86 percent—and had increased a breathtaking 538

percent since 1985. The FDIC had to bail out five of New Hampshire's biggest banks. There were bigger forces at work, too: globalization was winding down a textile industry that had grown up with the industrial revolution, and the end of the Cold War was killing defense jobs. Pease Air Force Base closed, the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard laid off seven hundred workers and threatened to lay off 1,800 more, and Sanders of Nashua, which built the radar jammers that allowed the Air Force to rule the skies over Iraq, laid off 1,200 workers, more than a third of its workforce. If anywhere was ready to hear Buchanan's protectionist message of economic nationalism, it was New Hampshire.

At his home in the tony D.C. suburb of McLean, Virginia, Pat Buchanan plotted his northern campaign with the who's-who roster of New Right operatives. The activists who had ginned up the populist groundswell for Reagan, like Heritage Foundation founder Paul Weyrich and direct-mail maven Richard Viguerie, rubbed shoulders with enthusiastic young College Republicans, while Buchanan's portraits of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson looked down on them. Bay Buchanan, a veteran of Reagan's campaigns, would run the show.

# America Worst

Buchanan delivered his announcement speech on December 10, 1991, at the State House in Concord, New Hampshire. The room was thronged with reporters and Pat's backers. He declared that victory in the Cold War had "not brought with it an end to history." Buchanan declaimed that "beyond these shores, a new world is being born for which our government is unprepared, and we are unprepared. The dynamic force shaping that world is nationalism."

He called for "a new nationalism" that would put "America first," which he said meant "our Western heritage is going to be handed down to future generations, not dumped onto some landfill called multi-culturalism." Buchanan only obliquely referred to himself as a conservative at all, preferring to incant variations on "America first."

Polls showed Buchanan in the 20s; he would have to get about 35-40 percent of the vote to qualify even as a viable protest candidate. There was another problem: just about the same time Pat gave his announcement speech, a special issue of *National Review* was reaching subscribers.

> If Duke was pretty good at TV, Buchanan was an absolute master. He went to every campaign stop mic'ed up so they'd get everything.

Almost the entire issue was dedicated to a long essay by William F. Buckley entitled "In Search of Anti-Semitism"; Joe Sobran and Pat Buchanan were the main subjects. With characteristic opaqueness and logic-chopping, Buckley hemmed and hawed his way through the evidence and finally concluded, "I find it impossible to defend Pat Buchanan against the charge that what he did and said during the period under examination amounted to anti-Semitism, whatever it was that drove him to say and do it: most probably, an iconoclastic temperament." But in a footnote Buckley called the linkage between Buchanan and Duke "morally irresponsible."

Hitting the shows the day after his announcement, Buchanan embraced that same linkage—and indeed, flipped the script on Duke. He told NBC's *Today*, "David Duke, I think, has been reading

a lot of my past columns and if he keeps it up and keeps stealing my themes I think we're going to go down to Louisiana and sue him for intellectual property theft." This was the man who wrote a column calling for Republicans to "expropriate" Duke.

And if Duke was pretty good at TV, Buchanan was an absolute master. He knew how to dominate panels, to deal with interviewers, he gave reporters total access, and he went to every campaign stop mic'ed up so they'd get everything. He knew how to show a softer side to the cameras. At a mall in Manchester, Buchanan sat down next to a man in fatigues who was unemployed and apparently homeless. Buchanan said if the cameras intimidated him, he could send them away. He said they did; Buchanan didn't send them away. He asked if the man was on welfare, which the man claimed not to be. Buchanan wished him good luck and a merry Christmas and moved on, cameras in tow. A few weeks later he called for the chronically homeless to be jailed.

Buchanan sailed into Duke's wind and stole it completely; not surprisingly, Duke's own presidential bid promptly foundered and sank. People who once were part of Duke's contributor base now sent their money to Buchanan instead.

Bush wasn't doing such a great job campaigning, either. The Andover and Yale-educated Connecticut WASP had maybe the worst common touch of any American politician since John Quincy Adams. In an effort to relate to the people, he made a sojourn to a J.C. Penney to buy socks. Instead of going to New Hampshire, Bush sent the malapropic Quayle. Bush opted instead to look presidential by booking a trip to Japan; the junket cemented the impression that he cared more about foreign policy than what was going on at home. Visiting a factory in New Hampshire, Buchanan told a worker, "You

vote for me, my friend, and there won't be all those foreign trips. Japan, China, Korea and Germany—we've been supporting them for so long and they're putting nothing back."

# Chaos and Old Night

As New Year's rolled by, race was beginning to worry the Democrats as a campaign issue. Thomas and Mary Edsall published their book *Chain Reaction*, cautioning Democrats that their "censorious set of prohibitions against discussion of family structure among the black poor, absent fathers, crime, lack of labor-force participation, welfare dependency, illegitimacy, and other contentious race-freighted issues" was fueling the right-wing backlash. Massachusetts congressman Barney Frank wrote an op-ed in the January 13 *New York Times* headlined "Race and Crime: Let's Talk Sense": "Race and crime together show the 'notsaposta' syndrome at its worst. Liberals are notsaposta take note publicly of the fact that young black males commit crimes in a significantly higher proportion than any other major demographic group." A week earlier, two black kids in the Bronx were set upon by four white teens, who beat and robbed them and covered them in what police believed to be white shoe polish. The attackers yelled, "Y'all are going to be white today."

In the middle of campaigning, Buchanan went back to D.C. to attend the second-annual meeting of the John Randolph Club at the Ramada Renaissance near Dulles Airport, which took place between January 17 and 19, incidentally the same hotel the Iran-Contra middlemen met with CIA agents. Buchanan was to deliver the keynote address, but another speaker stole the show: the president of the Randolph Club, a libertarian economist named Murray N. Rothbard.

> "How long are we going to keep being suckers?" Rothbard demanded. "When are we going to stop playing their game, and start throwing over the table?"

When the neoconservative press unleashed a salvo against *Chronicles* and the Rockford Institute, they brought the paleos a new ally. Rothbard had been looking for action since his 1981 purge from the libertarian Cato Institute; he was ensconced in the backwater Ludwig von Mises Institute, plotting intrigues in the tiny and irrelevant Libertarian Party. With accusations of anti-Semitism flying, Rothbard knew he could make himself useful to substantiate the "some of my best friends are Jewish" defense.

Rothbard said he was celebrating his "return home to the right wing, after thirty-five years in the political wilderness." He found himself in the middle of a campaign that was shaking the foundations of the conservative movement that had cast him out: "We have suddenly vaulted from the periphery to a central role in the American right," he proclaimed. Like Moloch—"the fiercest Spirit That fought in Heav'n; now fiercer by despair"—addressing pandemonium in *Paradise Lost*, Rothbard called for open war against the "Menshevik" establishment of neocons and liberals.

Ranging over the entire history of postwar America, and highlighting the supposed dilution of the right wing into a loyal opposition of the liberal project, he mocked Buckley's anti-Semitism essay and accused the *National Review* editor of having "purged the conservative movement of the genuine Right." He asked the crowd, "How long are we going to keep being suckers? How long will we

keep playing our appointed roles in the scenario of the Left? When are we going to stop playing their game, and start throwing over the table?" He urged them to stop calling themselves "conservatives . . . gentle souls who want to *conserve* what Left-liberals have accomplished" and embrace the mantle of the "radical right" or "radical reactionaries." He told them to reject the liberal "psychobabble" that labeled them "paranoid," "resentful," or possessing "status anxiety."

Summoning the ghost of Joe McCarthy, Rothbard declaimed, "the proper strategy for the Right-wing must be what we can call 'right-wing populism,' exciting, dynamic, tough, and confrontational, rousing, and inspiring" leadership "that could short-circuit the media elites, and to reach and rouse the masses directly . . . In short, we need the leadership of Patrick J. Buchanan."

Then Rothbard reached his furious coda:

> With the inspiration of the death of the Soviet Union before us, we now know that it can be done. With Pat Buchanan as our leader, we shall break the clock of social democracy. We shall break the clock of the Great Society. We shall break the clock of the welfare state. We shall break the clock of the New Deal. . . . We shall repeal the twentieth century.

The place went wild. "Up to Murray's speech it had been a pleasant, almost scholarly atmosphere," an attendee recalled. "Murray's speech changed the tone. At the conclusion, the crowd leapt to their feet, cheering wildly, ready to storm the capital. I have never seen anything like it. Some even had tears in their eyes."

# Son of the Old South

The night of the New Hampshire primary, February 18, exit polls showed Buchanan and Bush neck and neck. By the time Buchanan took the stage after 10 p.m. it looked like he still had around 40 percent of the vote. "Tonight what began as a little rebellion has emerged into a full-fledged middle-American revolution," he told the crowd. "We are going to take our party back from those who have walked away and forgotten about us." (When the night was over, he had 37 percent of the vote; Donald Trump got 35 percent when he won that primary in 2016.)

For reasons of temperament and policy alike, Buchanan polled miserably among women voters; fortunately for him, more than half of the people who showed up to vote in New Hampshire were men. Buchanan's early lead was driven by unemployed guys going to the polls because they didn't have anything else to do. Buchanan played up his bully-boy image, making a number of roguish asides to reporters who asked about his penchant for fighting in his youth. To the wounded heirs of American masculinity in New Hampshire, Buchanan had an undeniable appeal. Even if these forgotten men realized at some level that the textile mills weren't coming back, Buchanan gave their despair shape and direction.

In the February issue of *Chronicles*, Sam Francis had an essay entitled "The Education of David Duke." Francis mused that "it's possible that future historians will look back on the Louisiana gubernatorial election of 1991 as a turning point in American history." He freely conceded that liberals were "dead right" about their belief that "David Duke represents the logical culmination of

the conservative resurgence of Ronald Reagan," and then went on to identify what he thought was the true essence of the Reagan revolution:

> Reagan conservatism, in its innermost meaning, had little to do with supply-side economics and spreading democracy. It had to do with the awakening of a people who face political, cultural, and economic dispossession, who are slowly beginning to glimpse the fact of dispossession and what [it] will mean for them and their descendants, and who also are starting to think about reversing the processes and powers responsible for [it].

In the states of the Confederacy, Buchanan leaned heavily into the oldest romantic myth of white dispossession. In Georgia, with cameras in tow, he gazed up admiringly at Stone Mountain, the massive bas-relief monument to Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis. He told supporters there that the Voting Rights Act was "an act of regional discrimination against the South." In the midst of a dramatic downpour, he stopped to lay flowers at the grave of his great-grandfather William Martin Buchanan, a Confederate soldier who he claimed owned a plantation. He vowed to avenge his ancestor's capture by Sherman by winning in Georgia.

Courting fringe constituencies presented very little downside. An AP reporter overheard Buchanan's New Jersey volunteer coordinator, Joe D'Alessio, compare interracial marriage to the cross-breeding of animals. D'Alessio was forced to resign, but no one at the time reported that D'Alessio was also the state chairman of Willis Carto's racist Populist Party. Nor did the media catch that Boyd Cathey, Buchanan's North Carolina chairman, a member of the ultra-traditionalist Society of Saint Pius X was senior editor at *Southern Partisan* and on the board of the editorial advisory committee of *The*

*Journal of Historical Review*, a publication of the Carto-founded Institute for Historical Review, the center of organized Holocaust denial in the United States.

Even though Georgia's economy was in much better shape than New Hampshire's, Buchanan nearly repeated his showing, getting just shy of 36 percent of the vote. (Trump got just shy of 39 percent when he won the Georgia primary in 2016.) But on Super Tuesday a week later, the Buchanan primary bubble burst. The attacks were getting more serious, too. Neoconservative columnist Charles Krauthammer in the *Washington Post* stopped beating around the bush and flat-out called Buchanan a fascist.

# Patterdammerung

Buchanan was running out of steam. The plan was to target Michigan, where the aged Russell Kirk served as the Buchanan team's largely honorary campaign chief. General Motors had just announced plant closures—it would close the Willow Run plant in Ypsilanti, destroying four thousand jobs and its plants in Flint and Saginaw, another six thousand jobs. Buchanan's team believed his message of protectionism would resonate with the shell-socked autoworkers. Buchanan wanted to go to one of the closed General Motors plants to set a dramatic scene of American decline. But United Autoworkers Local 1776 refused to let him have his photo op and locked him out. Bush had run an ad saying that Buchanan drove a Mercedes-Benz. The workers inside heckled Buchanan as he stood out in the snow and shouted back, "come out and talk to me." In its dreary Alamo, American organized labor had made its last stand against the phony patriotics of America First populism.

In Chicago, Buchanan had a better time. Visiting the Ukrainian Cultural Center, he affirmed, to cheers, his belief in the innocence of John Demjanjuk—the retired Ukrainian auto worker deported on charges of sending thousands of Jews to their deaths as a concentration camp guard. The Lithuanians and Croatians, who likewise had seen Buchanan champion the nationalist aspirations of their homelands, also gave him a warm welcome. At an Irish pub he visited, the patrons were "cheering their heads off." But it wasn't enough. Buchanan got just around a quarter of the votes in both states. His heart wasn't in it anymore.

Just as Buchanan had stolen Duke's thunder, now it was H. Ross Perot's turn to steal Buchanan's. Two days after Buchanan's strong New Hampshire showing, the Texas billionaire went on Larry King Live and, after insisting he didn't want to run for president, he said, "if you're that serious—you, the people, are that serious—you register me in fifty states." Perot was folksier and less abrasive than the barking Buchanan; he talked about "fixing things" and "creating jobs." He talked trade and Japan, but managed for the most part to avoid the racist sneers of Buchanan and Duke. (He did fumble on the stump at one point when he addressed the NAACP as "you people.") He shared Buchanan's anti-establishment fervor, but it rang truer because he was actually from outside the Beltway. A wave of volunteers got to work to get Perot on the ballot and by April, the insurgent third-party candidate was well on his way to being on the ballot in all fifty states.

> Perot had his finger in one of the wounds in the American psyche that drives populist energy on the right.

Perot had a grassroots movement at his command. During the Vietnam war, he provided support for the families of prisoners of war. In the 1980s, he became a prominent advocate of the POW/MIA movement, which fostered the belief—the myth, some would say—that some missing in action soldiers from Vietnam were still alive as prisoners. For the families of missing soldiers this fueled hope that their loved ones were still alive. For others, it was a potent symbol: America left *something* in Vietnam and they would rescue it. The crusade also had a strong antiestablishmentarian flavor: many POW/MIA activists were convinced that the government was covering up the existence of prisoners and frustrating rescue attempts.

In the early eighties, Perot had shown a minor Caesarist streak when he funded an armed expedition by an ex-Green Beret named Bo Gritz into Laos to search for POWs. Gritz testified to Congress that he had seen POWs in captivity but the photographs taken by his agent had been "set wrong" so he could not offer positive proof. In 1988, Bo Gritz was briefly David Duke's Populist Party running mate; in 1992, he was at the top of the party's ticket. For his running mate, Perot chose Admiral James Stockdale, a POW during the war. Stockdale had deep ties to the paleo world: he was a board member at the Rockford Institute and contributed to *Chronicles*. With his connection to the POW/MIA issue, Perot had his finger in one of the wounds in the American psyche that drives populist energy on the right.

Buchanan's presidential campaign eventually ran aground after a plainly desperate bid to exploit white racial resentments in the wake of the April 1992 Los Angeles riots protesting the verdict in the Rodney King beating case. Riots raged in L.A. for nearly a week; in the aftermath, Buchanan visited the National Guard and told the TV

cameras with the troops behind him, “There was one way to stop this riot, it wasn’t with a new model cities program announced from Washington, it was with superior force dealing with hooligans, criminals, and thugs.”

A few days later, with next to no evidence, Sam Francis blamed illegal immigrants for the riots, writing “while politicians and ideologues exploit the riots for their own purposes, Americans can expect only further disorder unless illegal immigration is halted.” Buchanan followed suit, saying the riots were the product of people “coming into this country illegally and helping to burn down one of the greatest cities in America.” He called on the president to build a wall along the border: “If I got a third of the vote in the Republican primary in California, Mr. Bush would be building that fence in July and August.” He got less than 20 percent.

## Slouching toward Houston

Buchanan officially ended his campaign in June, with his Hail Mary pass on the L.A. riots coming up short. Despite all the acrimony, Buchanan was negotiating a primetime speaking slot at the Republican National Convention in Houston. He promised his followers, “Houston is a truce line, not a surrender. Houston is going to be a beginning. We’re going there to serve notice that the revolution that launched here may be suspended through November. But then it begins again and begins anew: To take our country back, to take our party back from those that walked away from us.”

Immediately after wrapping up his campaign, Buchanan had to be hospitalized for heart surgery. Bay carried on the negotiations with the RNC and secured her brother his coveted slot at the convention in August, speaking before Reagan, so long as he unambiguously endorsed Bush.

Conspicuously absent in his blustering Houston speech was any variation on "America first"; no "nationalism," new or old; no "Middle American revolution." The middle class does get a shout out, at the expense of the animal kingdom: "America's great middle class has got to start standing up to these environmental extremists who put birds and rats and insects ahead of families, workers, and jobs." In the most emotional part of the speech, Buchanan recalled his visit with workers in New Hampshire:

> There were those workers at the James River Paper Mill, in Northern New Hampshire in a town called Groveton—tough, hearty men. None of them would say a word to me as I came down the line, shaking their hands one by one. They were under a threat of losing their jobs at Christmas. And as I moved down the line, one tough fellow about my age just looked up and said to me, "Save our jobs."

What also remained was the paleo consciousness of America as a battlefield; the closing metaphor was the L.A. riots—troops vs. wild urban minorities:

> The troopers came up the street, M-16s at the ready. And the mob threatened and cursed, but the mob retreated because it had met the one thing that could stop it: force, rooted in justice, and backed by moral courage. . . . And as those boys took back the streets of Los Angeles, block by block, my friends, we must take back our cities, and take back our culture, and take back our country.

But all in all, the speech was hard-edged Reaganism, well shy of Francis's fever dreams of revolution. As it turned out, it was too hard-edged for Reagan himself: the speech went overtime and pushed the former president out of prime time and the tone was out of keeping with the Gipper's sunniness.

"The convention got out of hand," a planner told William Safire. "We had in mind stressing the good family values, positive stuff that nobody can complain about. But we gave Buchanan prime time at the start—what a mistake—and he let loose with all the vicious stuff. Then, when our innocuous family values came on, it was tainted—we seemed to be endorsing Pat's gay-bashing and the platform's 100 percent anti-abortion plank." When George Bush admitted it was a "mistake" to go back on his "read my lips" pledge; the crowd whooped and hollered. The party was running away from its establishment, and Bush was on his way to defeat.

# Canaries in the Gemeinschaft

Over the summer and fall, Francis printed his reflections on the campaign in *Chronicles*.

> In the dialectic solvent of Francis's mind, every shining truth is revealed as brass plating over a shoddy core.

In a two-part series called "The Buchanan Revolution," he showed no sign of disappointment at Buchanan's failure at the polls, but gave an upbeat optimistic analysis of the events of the preceding months: "The authentic populist revolt of 1992 that has surfaced in the campaigns of Mr. Duke, Mr. Perot, and Mr. Buchanan is the most powerful current in American politics today, but it will not succeed by virtue of its own momentum but only by finding leadership that is able and willing to carry it to enduring and meaningful power." He set his Middle American revolutionaries the task of seizing cultural power to delegitimize the elite: "It must construct its cultural base not on the metropolitan elites of the dominant culture but on emerging forces rooted in Middle American culture itself." But Francis doesn't specify what this counter counter-culture would look like.

In fact, it's not clear what it is about America that Francis actually likes and wishes to see held up. In his June 1992 essay "Nationalism, Old and New," he contended that America never had an adequate national idea. To Francis, the old nationalisms of Lincoln and Hamilton were just ideological masks for the underlying material avarice of a basely commercial society. Francis called for a new American mythos:

> The myth of the managerial regime that America is merely a philosophical proposition about the equality of all mankind (and therefore includes all mankind) must be replaced by a new myth of the nation as a historically and culturally unique order that commands loyalty, solidarity, and discipline and excludes those who do not or cannot assimilate to its norms and interests. This is the real meaning of "America First": America must be first not only among other nations but first also among the other (individual or class or sectional) interests of its people.

He demanded "affirmation of national and cultural identity as the core of the new nationalist ethic" to fight off "massive immigration, a totalitarian and anti-white multiculturalist fanaticism, concerted economic warfare by foreign competitors, and the forces of antinational political globalism." But again, he seemed only to be able to define his true Americans negatively: "They are the Americans sneered at as the 'Bubba vote,' mocked as Archie Bunkers, and denounced as the racists, sexists, anti-Semites, xenophobes, homophobes, and hate criminals who haunt the dark corners of the land." In the dialectic solvent of Francis's mind, every shining truth is revealed as brass plating over a shoddy core; and by self-consciously identifying his myth as a myth, he tacitly admitted it wasn't true.

# Dons Ascendant

In October, as the election approached, Francis put punditry on hold to write a long dialectical essay called "The Godfather as Political Metaphor." For Francis, the Mafia family lead by Vito and then Michael Corleone represented a natural, traditional, patriarchal form of community trying to secure itself against an artificial,

modern, rootless American society. He used the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies's opposition of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* to set up this conflict: "The three pillars of *Gemeinschaft*—blood, place (land), and mind, or kinship, neighborhood, and friendship—are all encompassed in the family." Very much by contrast, "the essence of *Gesellschaft* is rationality and calculation, expressed in such modern organizations as corporations . . . and the formal, impersonal, legalistic, bureaucratic organization of the modern state."

As the *Godfather* saga unwound, Francis was forced to admit that the Corleone enterprise is just another business, too—it's really not different from the society it's resisting assimilation into: "For all the contrast between legitimate and criminal society, at last, when the final mask is torn off, there is no difference at all; the Corleone family is based on fraud as well as force, and it does indeed melt into and become indistinguishable from America." In the end, even the romance of The Family is yet another charade covering up the reality of power and greed.

Murray Rothbard loved *The Godfather*, too. In a 1990 pan of *Goodfellas*, he celebrated Coppola's films as opposed to Scorsese's. While *The Godfather* films depicted "an epic world, a world of drama and struggle," Rothbard complained that Scorsese portrayed the Mafia as sordid: "the violence is random, gratuitous, pointless, and psychotic; everyone, from the protagonist Henry Hill (Ray Liata [*sic*]) on down is a boring creep . . ." Rothbard even thought that the *Godfather* reflected his own worldview: "Organized crime is essentially anarcho-capitalist, a productive industry struggling to govern itself." (Evidently, he forgot he also called the state, his great enemy, a "criminal band.") So, one might ask, what's the difference? Certainly, a very thin veneer of fantasy separates burlesque grasping from the romantic epic of power and wealth.

As early as the Reagan years, Francis called for Middle Americans to ally with a populist, "Caesarist" presidency to accomplish their revolution, just as the French bourgeoisie aligned themselves with Napoleon to cement their power. He didn't know it yet, but his Bonaparte was right there the whole time. On November, 9, 1992, the week after election day, *New York* magazine put Donald Trump on the cover in a fighter's stance—*Fighting Back: Trump Scrambles off the Canvas*. The recession was lifting; Trump was finding new creditors. Here was the future leader of Francis's authentic nationalism, which he hoped would outshine all past self-conceptions of the American republic. Francis didn't live to find out that the Don would be more *Goodfellas* than *Godfather* and thus he was spared the confirmation of what he seemed to know at heart: that his new nationalism was, as Trump would say, fake.

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