

Some years before, I had been Vice President for Administration at New York University, which, in many respects, was run by Catholics and supported by Jews. They were some of the smartest and amusing people with whom I had ever worked. Surely, my old pals at NYU would find my predicament funny and would have a clever plan of escape.

Their solution was simple. Just bring my case to the most important member of the Jewish community that I could reach. With a little bit of help and introduction, I was scheduled to meet with Morris Abram, the chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, a sort of Old-Testament papal figure in New York. He was a Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, a man of considerable influence.

It was set. The Commissioner of Customs would set out for Canossa in a week.

But what in the world would I say when I got there? I knew how to brief the President of the United States but not Ambassador Abram. My quandary was solved, however, by the man in charge of all Customs agents, Assistant Commissioner Bill Rosenblatt. He told me not to worry. He would handle the meeting.

In the taxi from the airport to Manhattan, I asked Rosenblatt what the plan was. He pulled out a loose-leaf binder marked Top Secret. All the pages bound inside were also marked Top Secret. "What the hell are you doing?" I cried. "Don't worry," he said. "This is just a bunch of routine reports that I stamped Top Secret. There is nothing even Confidential in here. I know these fellows. He will like this, feel he is being brought in on the real information, and send us on our merry way."

Ambassador Abram was a charming and avuncular man. I liked him right away. Best of all, he liked the Top Secret binder. Rosenblatt was right. Amba-

sador Abram was deeply pleased that he was being given a look inside our Operation Exodus. He further seemed to catch on quickly that I was not running anti-Israeli hit teams.

We returned to Washington. James Baker was pleased. George Schultz was appeased. The Israeli agents were never

prosecuted—the cases against them vanished like water into sand. As for the neocons, they finally made it to Damascus. I only got to Canossa. ■

William von Raab was the U.S. Commissioner of Customs during the Reagan and first Bush administrations.

This Land is Your Land

Taking a Stand with the Southern Agrarians

By Mark Royden Winchell

ON OCT. 30 AND 31, 1980, a group of scholars and other interested persons gathered on the campus of Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. to celebrate the 50th anniversary of an unusual book. In November 1930, Harper and Brothers published *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*. The driving forces behind this volume were four poets who had been associated with each other at Vanderbilt a decade earlier and had been instrumental in publishing the *Fugitive: A Magazine of Poetry* from 1923-25. Up until 1925, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, and Robert Penn Warren had been primarily interested in literature and largely indifferent to economic and social issues. During the second half of the 1920s, however, they became increasingly conscious of their identity as Southerners and their social responsibility as Southern intellectuals. Although the reasons for this growing regional consciousness were as diverse as the men themselves, the great external catalyst was undoubtedly the scorn heaped upon the South as a result of the Scopes Monkey Trial in the summer of 1925. Thinking Southerners either had

to agree with the characterization of traditional Southern culture as backward and unenlightened or formulate a philosophically cogent defense of that culture. The New South liberals of Chapel Hill, N.C., and elsewhere chose apology and assimilation. Ransom, Tate, Davidson, and Warren chose explanation and defense.

In addition to the four major *Fugitive* poets, eight other like-minded Southerners contributed to *I'll Take My Stand*. In opposing modernity, especially industrialization, these 12 appeared defiantly out of step with their age. In the best of times, they would have been accused of reactionary sentimentality. Coming 13 months into the Great Depression, their book was widely scorned as a formula for social and economic disaster. At a time when many desperate people were willing to entertain radical left-wing solutions to the national crisis, the Agrarian program had few adherents.

In one sense, the debate between the Agrarians and their progressive adversaries (including the administration of Vanderbilt University itself) was a variation on the 150-year-old debate between Alexander Hamilton and Thomas Jeffer-

son. By 1930, the Hamiltonian vision had triumphed everywhere in the United States except for the South and a few isolated pockets of rural culture elsewhere in the country. Advocates of the New South wanted to make that victory total. The Agrarians, however, believed that the Faustian bargain being offered to the South would result in the region giving up too much for too little. (It is

Lanier (one of three surviving contributors to *I'll Take My Stand*) made several favorable references to the environmental scientist Barry Commoner, presidential candidate of the ultra-left-wing Citizen's Party. One might have wondered whether the extreme conservatism of 1930 had become the cutting-edge radicalism of 1980.

In 1930, industrialism and progress

even saying bad things about *I'll Take My Stand*. They were simply ignoring it. And the primary spokesmen for the group had neither the money nor the contacts necessary to create a political infrastructure. Then, when things seemed hopeless, the Agrarians found a sympathetic ear in the New York editor Seward Collins. From 1933-36, they published over 70 articles and reviews in his magazine, the *American Review*. A man of intense but transitory enthusiasms, Collins was briefly attracted to Agrarianism as an alternative to the seemingly doomed system of democratic capitalism. When he switched his allegiance to Italian fascism, however, the Agrarians cut their ties with Collins and began looking for new allies. The result was a liaison with the Kentucky journalist Herbert Agar.

While serving as London correspondent for the *Louisville Courier-Journal* from 1929-33, Agar discovered the British Distributist movement. Although the Agrarians had probably never heard of the Distributists at the time they published *I'll Take My Stand*, the two groups shared several key principles. These included opposition to the dehumanizing effects of industrialism and a fear that greater economic centralization would result in diminished personal liberty. Because the Distributists—G. K. Chesterton, Hillaire Belloc, and others—were overwhelmingly Catholic, they attributed the excesses of capitalism to the spirit of Protestant individualism. In 1936, a coalition of Agrarians, Distributists, and other economic devolutionists published a collection of essays called *Who Owns America?: A New Declaration of Independence*.

With 21 essays, *Who Owns America?* was a more diverse collection than *I'll Take My Stand*. Because Herbert Agar (who co-edited the volume with Allen Tate) was consciously trying to influence the Roosevelt administration, the book is filled with the policy wonkery of

THE AGRARIANS WERE NOT CONTENT WITH CONSERVING THE EXISTING CONSENSUS—THEY WANTED TO TURN THE CLOCK BACK.

doubtful that even they could have imagined the contemporary Sunbelt, with indistinguishable shopping malls stretching from Phoenix to Atlanta and a landscape of high-rise hotels with revolving restaurants on top.) Although their warning went largely unheeded at the time, *I'll Take My Stand* remains in print over seven decades later, even as more topical social manifestos have been largely forgotten.

If Agrarianism had seemed quixotic in 1930, it was virtually incomprehensible to the politics of 1980. The movement was originally understood to be an extreme manifestation of Southern conservatism. On the Tuesday after the Vanderbilt symposium, however, the first president elected from the Deep South since James K. Polk was defeated for re-election by the widely acknowledged conservative candidate. One suspects that both Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan would have troubled the Agrarians. A nuclear engineer and agribusinessman, Carter was clearly a product of the New South. (Eugene McCarthy once called him a "third-generation Snopes.") Reagan, on the other hand, was the favorite of industrialists, who talked the talk of *laissez-faire* capitalism while walking the walk of corporate welfare. During a discussion session at the 1980 conference, Lyle

were widely considered to be synonymous. Therefore, anyone who opposed industrialism was conservative, if not downright reactionary. But as the ravages of pollution and urbanization became apparent, those who preached concern for the natural and human environment increasingly came to be labeled socialists or worse. Socialism, however, depends on centralized solutions to national problems. Like most traditional Southerners, the Agrarians favored local control of local communities. One is tempted to think of Agrarianism as an early example of Left-Conservatism, which, according to Norman Mailer, involves thinking "in the style of Karl Marx in order to attain certain values suggested by Edmund Burke," except that the Agrarians were more radical than Marx and more conservative than Burke. If Marx detested capitalism, he saw it as a necessary and inevitable prelude to socialism. Precisely because they agreed with this analysis, the Agrarians were not content with conserving the existing consensus—they wanted to turn the clock back to a time before huge economic power had been concentrated in the hands of corporate capitalists and government bureaucrats.

By 1933, the Agrarian movement seemed dead. Critics were no longer

a bygone age. Nevertheless, the passion for decentralization that runs through its pages is as timely today as it was in 1936. (The Intercollegiate Studies Institute issued a handsome reprinting of the book in 1999.) This is true in large part because it helps to explain differences in the conservative movement that are far more apparent in 2003 than they were when the Agrarians celebrated their semicentennial in 1980.

One of the fundamental differences among conservatives since the breakup of the Reagan coalition has been over the size and power of government. Historically, Southerners have distrusted centralized authority in Washington. If that used to be the universally held conservative position, it is no longer the case. Neoconservatives and other establishment figures see themselves as nationalists and internationalists. If Southerners are not the only people who argue for decentralization, they are the only ones who fought a war over that principle. It is surely no accident that the battle flag of the Confederacy has become the unofficial banner of devolutionists from the breakaway states of the former Soviet Union to the Quebec separatists in Canada.

As several of the Agrarians and their allies sought to break up concentrations of wealth and property, others focused on the dangers of concentrated government. Two years after the appearance of *Who Owns America?* Donald Davidson published a book of essays called *The Attack on Leviathan: Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States*. In 1989, Russell Kirk recalled happening on this book while browsing through the library at Michigan State as an "earnest sophomore" over 50 years earlier. "It was written eloquently," Kirk notes, "and for me it made coherent the misgivings I had felt concerning the political notions popular in the 1930s. The book was so good that I assumed all intelli-

gent Americans, or almost all, were reading it." In fact, *The Attack on Leviathan* was remaindered after selling only a few hundred copies in the decade after publication. It has been reissued at least twice, however, most recently in 1991 by Transaction Publishers as part of Kirk's Library of Conservative Thought.

One of the essays appearing in *The Attack on Leviathan* had been Davidson's contribution to *Who Owns America?* Its title, "That This Nation May Endure: The Need for Political Regionalism," ironically alludes to Lincoln's obsession with preserving the political integrity of the union but offers a much different prescription for achieving that end. By this point in his career, Davidson had become convinced that America was neither "one nation indivisible" nor an association of sovereign states but a congeries of regional cultures. National unity could be preserved only if that fact were acknowledged and respected. Although the issue of secession had been settled by the Civil War, regional differences had not been obliterated. The subjugation of the South by the federal army

genial face. The Agrarians believed that industrialism, with its promise of the good life, did wear such a face.

Nearly seven decades after Davidson wrote his defense of regionalism, one is struck by his celebration of cultural diversity. In the last decade of the 20th century, that concept became a shibboleth of the cultural Left. In practical terms, "diversity" all too often came to mean a racial and ethnic spoils system enforced by the protocols of political correctness. The idea of a national or American culture, which had once been championed by political liberals, now came to be seen as a conservative (or perhaps neoconservative) notion. It is interesting, though probably pointless, to wonder whether Davidson would have altered his vocabulary had he lived to see the cause of multiculturalism extolled by black race hustlers, radical feminists, and militant homosexuals.

We now live in an age when a reconstituted remnant of the Old Right is questioning the rapacity of multinational corporations, which subordinate every other human value to the profit motive.

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was a military act with political consequences, but it could not impose an alien culture on a conquered territory. To use a distinction popular in our own time, the unionists were authoritarians interested only in political control. The totalitarian sensibility, however, insists on controlling the hearts and minds of people as well. In the 1930s, Nazism and Communism unmistakably posed that threat by joining the totalitarian sensibility with the brute power of the state. But totalitarianism is perhaps even more insidious when it wears a benign and

These same paleoconservatives are also challenging a concept of nationalism that requires uniformity at home and imperialism abroad. In performing their cautionary role, however, they find themselves at odds with what passes for the national conservative consensus. (Former *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz has written that the paleoconservatives have been on the wrong side of all the important cultural issues because they were too heavily influenced by T. S. Eliot and the Agrarians, "who despised capitalism, industrialism,

and bourgeois democracy.”) In this battle, the Agrarians can provide much intellectual sustenance.

While we should certainly go back and rediscover Agrarianism for ourselves, its principles have never totally disappeared from conservative thought. Richard M. Weaver, who is considered one of the founding fathers of modern conservatism, was influenced by John Crowe Ransom and Donald Davidson at Vanderbilt and by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren at Louisiana State. (Weaver is sometimes called the Saint Paul of the Agrarian movement—too young to have been one of the original 12 but the most effective evangelist of the cause.) M.E. Bradford studied under Davidson at Vanderbilt and did more than any other scholar of our time to demonstrate the relevance of traditional Southern values to contemporary political issues. As we have seen, Russell Kirk, who taught us all that there is such a thing as a conservative mind, was a Northern admirer of the Agrarians.

Certainly, one of the challenges now facing any political philosophy is to find a way to achieve harmony in an increasingly pluralistic society. Properly understood, the qualities of diversity and tolerance are more natural to a conservative than to a schematic leftist mindset. Among his “six canons of conservative thought,” Kirk identifies an “affection for the proliferating variety and mystery of traditional life as distinguished from the narrowing uniformity and equalitarianism and utilitarian aims of most radical systems.” Decentralization—political, cultural, and economic—is one way of maintaining and enhancing that proliferating variety. As the copperhead poet Robert Frost reminds us, “good fences make good neighbors.” ■

Mark Rayden Winchell's latest book is Too Good to Be True: The Life and Work of Leslie Fielder.

Are We Safer?

Why Bush's terror chief resigned before the war

By Arnaud de Borchgrave

- Did the war to change regimes in Iraq jeopardize the war on terror?
- Did the war on Iraq detract from Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan?
- Did the war on Iraq rob domestic security of manpower, brainpower, and funds?
- Did the war on Iraq weaken the administration's counterterrorism alliances abroad? Did the war on Iraq spawn a new generation of al-Qaeda recruits?
- Did the administration fail to push the Saudis hard enough to address their own terrorism problems?
- Did the war detract from America's international prestige and respect?
- Did the war jeopardize the ideals America stands for?

The way the three wars—al-Qaeda, Iraq, and Afghanistan—are being reported, the answer would have to be affirmative to all eight questions. And most foreign editorials, from Buenos Aires to Berlin and from Copenhagen to Cape Town, have reached that conclusion.

Administration officials are quick to dismiss these foreign fulminations as gratuitous Bush-bashing. Trouble is, former administration officials for two presidents, Ronald Reagan and George Bush 41, make the same points and ask the same questions, albeit *sub rosa* and *sotto voce*. None—Democrat or Republican—wants motivations and patriotism impugned.

Until now, that is. Rand Beers—the man who succeeded the legendary Richard Clarke as the White House counterterrorist czar and mysteriously quit after eight months on the job—has gone public. Having served in three Republican administrations, including Reagan and Bush 41, Beers scanned from 500 to 1,000 pieces of “threat information” intelligence that crossed his desk daily—and nightly. He has since joined the John Kerry for president camp and spilled a few beans to the *Washington Post*—sufficient evidence for Bush loyalists that he was a traitor in their midst.

But former ranking Republican officials are also faulting the current administration for failure to anticipate Iraq's post-war problems. “We should have declared a victory,” said one ex-White-House and Defense official, “and started pulling out right after Baghdad fell. Now we're trying to get other friendly powers to share the policing burden but Iraq is already a tar baby.” Two months after President Bush declared the war over, the Pentagon budget assumptions expected to have cut back boots on Iraqi soil to 75,000 troops. Instead, some 150,000 are still deployed.

Republican strategists are ruing the day when more soldiers will have been killed in peacetime action than in the three-week war. Rosy forecasts of Iraqi oil fields pumping out almost three million barrels a day by the end of 2003 and five million by the following summer have snaffled. Some Republicans can see an economy still heading south and