

GOOD OLD DAYS

When Russell Kirk came to Harvard to address its 1970-71 Institute of Politics "Symposium on the Coevolution of British and American Conservatism," he shared Daniel McCarthy's concern that few undergraduates would have heard of or read the founding documents of the conservative tradition (Nov. 6). But after a few days, Kirk confessed he was encouraged by the curricular prominence, at least at Harvard, of Burckhardt, Gibbon, and Hume, if not Burke, Smith, and Hayek or Mises. Departing, he pronounced his delight in the institutional continuity of a place where in coming to political equilibrium with the Puritan tradition, the Enlightenment had yielded so much timber for the framers of *The Federalist*.

Kirk was preceded as a speaker by M. Stanton Evans and followed Bill Rusher. The few who came to hear them and a half-dozen others were rapt, but only a handful were politically active as young Republicans. It is curious that while *soi disant* libertarians, Randoids, and YAF luminaries introduced themselves, as was the custom before discus-

sion with the speakers began, neither I, nor the symposium's other convener, George Nash, the historian of conservatism whom McCarthy mentions, can recall any Harvard contemporaries now famed as neoconservatives bothering to attend, though the works of a certain philosopher from the University of Chicago were naturally incorporated into the symposium by our faculty advisor, professor, and later senator, Moynihan. I suspect Kirk and Strauss would alike be blissfully relieved to find their names scarcely figure in the parody of conservative thought booming forth on contemporary talk radio and yak TV.

RUSSELL SEITZ

Cambridge, Mass.

NO FAITH IN WAR

Thanks to Doug Bandow for the article questioning my fellow evangelicals in America (Oct 23). Evangelicals, along with many others, were deceived as to the true motivations of the government in going to war in Iraq.

The great act of killing must force all to examine carefully any justifications for it. This alone would end threats against Iran and lead to repentance on Iraq. Were the deaths of all these people justified? Was attention paid to the reasons given to start the killing? Was the malicious intent of the opponents proved beyond a shadow of a doubt—or even close? To all these questions, the answer is no.

ROBERT BYERS

Toronto, Ontario

TRUE BELIEVERS

I appreciate your magazine's commitment to principle. I subscribed to and read *National Review*, *American Spectator*, and *World* during the '90s and into this decade.

Now I find *The Nation* to be a more reliable and intellectually well-founded journal than those that seem to have abandoned themselves to blind party

boosterism. The intellectual prostitution and pimping is unseemly and disconcerting. How can people you used to respect when they criticized the Democrats have become so slavish, even in some cases sounding positively Soviet in timbre?

Isn't that a sad place for a conservative to find himself? But then, I've always thought that when truth and manmade ideology clash, the choice ought to be for the truth.

About the only place we differ is on the matter of immigration and rights for immigrants. I think that the great majority of them are being pushed away from their natural propensity to support conservative values by conservatives' distrust of them, which leads to *de facto* discrimination. They only gravitate towards liberalism because liberals defend them, for on just about every other issue their practical experience makes them conservative.

In any case, whatever your views, continue to value the truth. There's no higher calling.

MAX SOUTHALL

via e-mail

TAC THERAPY

I would like to suggest that a future issue of *The American Conservative* be devoted to how we can avoid giving in to despair and hopelessness when we see how our Republic is crumbling all around us. In other words, how can we continue to stand for what is right and live responsible lives in a dying age when all seems lost?

MARK VEHOSKI

via e-mail

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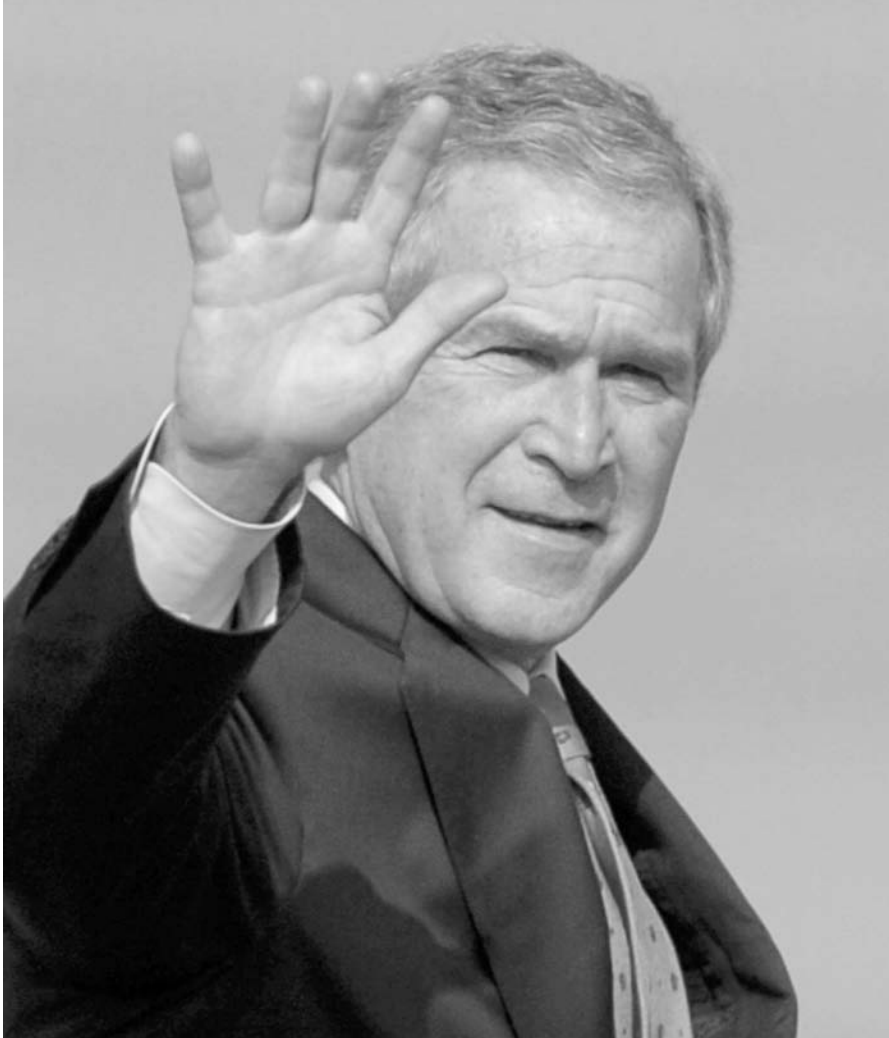
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[IRAQ]

WORDS FAIL

Bush press secretary Tony Snow now asserts that his boss's Iraq strategy is "not a stay the course policy." Americans should immediately forget that Bush was repeating the phrase throughout the summer whenever he wanted to contrast his Iraq plan with "cut and run" Democrats of War Party lore. But the Bush policy of campaigning by slogans seems to have run into a cul de sac. Last year, a political consultant advised the White House that Americans would continue to back the war if they thought there was a "plan for victory." The administration listened and followed the advice.

No, it didn't develop a plan for victory—which is impossible given the nature of Iraq, the Middle East, and the United States. But it did pretend to. The White House staff even ordered up a huge banner with the words "Plan for Victory" emblazoned over and over and deployed it as a speech backdrop. When photographed from any angle, Bush would have the word "victory" in the background.

Unfortunately, this had little impact in Iraq, where the carnage accelerated. Apparently it was unpersuasive even to Bush's political base, so it was abandoned.

We don't yet know what the White House will come up with to replace "stay the course." What is needed is not a new slogan but a new policy: one that recognizes that a "democratic" and unified Iraq is not in the cards, that America will not retain military bases in Iraq, and that the war was a blunder. It would be wonderful if that painful and necessary process could begin before 2009.

[MEDIA]

EXTREMIST MAKEOVER

TAC was interested to learn that in the current issue of *Foreign Policy* Joshua Muravchik has penned an "Operation



JOHN DARKOW WWW.CAGLECARTOONS.COM

Comeback" memo for the neocons, an outline of how the storied group could improve a reputation badly soiled by the Iraq catastrophe. Not since Krushchev's 1956 speech denouncing Stalin provoked a collective bed-wetting among America's Communists has a political faction been so undermined by real-world events. No group in American history agitated for a senseless war longer, or more successfully, than the neocons campaigned against Saddam. George W. Bush finally came through for them. But as Muravchik acknowledges with understandable understatement, Bush's policies have achieved "uncertain success."

Muravchik refuses—just as did most Communists, when confronted with their doctrine's real-world record—to acknowledge that anything was wrong with the idea itself. Invading a sovereign country on the pretext of distorted intelligence in order to "transform the political culture" of the Middle East was just fine. But the neocons are perhaps guilty of being "glib about how Iraqis would greet liberation." And they were overly enthusiastic about Don Rumsfeld's technological transformation of the military, which spared them the task of fighting for higher defense budgets and a larger army.

So how should the group rebrand themselves? Boldly, Muravchik calls for

neocon commissars to "volunteer" to take over the training of U.S. Foreign Service officers "in the war of ideas"—and ensure that one "graduate" of this training program is assigned to every U.S. overseas post. And of course, prepare for the next war—Muravchik believes we have to bomb Iran soon, an idea whose consequences are probably worse than invading Iraq. And finally, recruit Joe Lieberman into the Republican Party, so he can run with McCain or Giuliani.

Maybe it's just us, but given the neocon record, we doubt that hiding in Lieberman's shadow or volunteering to give ideological training to U.S. diplomats will be enough for a successful makeover. A sincere apology to the American people and the Iraqi people would be a better starting point.

[POLITICS]

A PALER SHADE OF BLUE

Eager to scare their base to the polls on election day, Republicans have taken to reciting the roll call of left-wing Democrats who would gain power if the liberal party won a majority: Nancy Pelosi, John Conyers, Charlie Rangel. Rarely do they mention Jack Davis.

Davis, who is leading Republican Congressman Thomas Reynolds of New