

cent opinion, they say as much as they can and no more. Lacking support in the solid middle of the country, they build a majority out of elites, interest groups, and the functionaries of the massive government they have built. Then they call themselves the party of the people and brand their enemies oligarchs and plutocrats. Against all odds, they defend what they have won over the past three generations. And more: they extend it here and there, ever alert for the small opportunity, even when the large one is foreclosed.

These are people who understand the use of power. They conceive themselves the engineers of the future. The mission is clear (Hillary: "our mission is to change what it means to be a human being in the 21st century"). The methods are available and familiar. The Army is trained and motivated. Their tool is the government. The matter upon which they work is us. They are political men and women.

Compared to these people, Republicans today act under principles that give rise to political restraint. They would make poor despots. They are reluctant rulers. That quality is also their defect. In competition with the opposing party, they are less likely to entrench themselves, to build lasting institutions to enforce their principles, to oust their opponents for good and all. This is the contemporary form of an old problem in politics. Despots are numerous and good at seeking power, whereas statesman who know and seek justice with real effectiveness are rare. That is what makes political history such an unhappy tale.

The answer to the problem is George Washington and such as he. He was a political man (like, incidentally, the three authors of

essays), not a priest, nor simply a private citizen who took a little time to do public service. Compared to the despot George III, he was more resolute, even lethal (he crossed the Delaware on Christmas night to destroy a British force). King George formed the obvious opinion that George Washington would become our king. After Yorktown he took solace in the thought that the new king George would be a despot, and the people of America would desire their old monarch. A minister told him that the ruthless and lethal Washington intended to resign his commission and let the people choose a government. Startled, King George responded: "if he does that, he is the greatest man alive." Such men are necessary, from time to time, if we are to have free government.

George Washington possessed both principles and an art. The principles addressed not our salvation, but what Lincoln called our "political salvation." That is not the same thing as salvation simply, but it is a high thing, possible in light only of the highest things, and inseparable from their pursuit. The principles of political salvation give us guidance in political action specifically. George Washington derived a practical and political guide from a great abstract truth. Without disguising his own greatness, he made it possible for others to rule themselves. This was his life's work. He possessed a large body of knowledge, and he gained a vast experience, organized around that work and specifically relevant to it. No carpenter or architect, or sculptor or musician, mastered his art in all its parts better than the Father of our Country did the ruling art.

These three noble and eloquent essays take steps toward the re-

covery that is necessary to preserve the last best hope of mankind on earth. Other steps remain. We need not just a party of principle, as opposed to a party of government. We need a party of principle devoted to decent government, steeped in how to run one. Its members will have to know that the principles by which they act are not economic or religious, but political — "American." Its leaders will be political men, adept at the art, practicing it for all they are worth, deserving of honor for what they do. They will remind us not only of the overarching fact that God is greater than we. They will show us how to do His will in politics. "Resistance to tyrants," ran the revolutionary slogan, "is obedience to God."

Arnold Steinberg

In the absence of the Soviet threat, and even with majority control in Washington, conservatives flounder. Bill Rusher is right that it's time to reaffirm Judeo-Christian religious tradition, but many natural allies of conservatism believe these values should be reaffirmed without government intrusion. Too many conservative meetings seem like religious revivals; we forget that a reform like school choice is meant to get the government out of education, and that's what we need — to get the government out of things. Oddly, even a neutral government would be an acceptable improvement over the *status quo*, in which the government and public schools appear to embrace a counter culture. When the University of California extends marital benefits to unmarried persons,

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the government is not taking a neutral position, it's advocacy, using state tax dollars taken from citizens by force.

Too often, conservative elected officials appear angry and confrontational. They are unwilling or unable to communicate outside the base. They mistake the important principles of resisting collective groupings and resisting enforced diversity with the need to communicate to a variety of people and to make them feel welcome. Proposition 187 was needlessly depicted as anti-immigrant and anti-Hispanic. Proposition 209 would have won by more if Republicans had proudly and positively rallied around it instead of apologizing for supporting it.

In the end, politicians can only do so much, and changing our culture is more important. The conservative movement should be much more than politics, but too often it has been reduced to a caricature of religious zealots seeking to enforce their virtue through political power. Elections come and go, but values are here to stay.



Journalists

Harold Johnson

William Rusher rightly reminds us that conservatives, for all their triumphs of recent years, are still locked in battle with the left over the fundamental character of the culture — or at least they *ought* to be battling upon that front, because our ideological foes certainly are. The Soviet menace has evaporated like the witch of the West doused by Dorothy, and market

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economics have triumphed over the sophistries our college textbooks touted, but the more basic conditions of a sustainable liberty — the moral norms that undergird order in a free society — remain under assault.

This is a peril that should summon even the libertarians to the ramparts, because the freedoms they cherish require an infrastructure of social order. Yet when the California Supreme Court does the bidding of social nihilists and strikes down the parental-consent law for minors' abortions, the conservative movement cannot rouse itself to respond. The limp effort to place a constitutional amendment on the 1998 ballot petered out in a bog gurgling equal parts apathy, incompetence, half-heartedness, and distraction. One might have thought that electoral considerations, if nothing else, would have prodded some major GOP donors and political leaders into action. Having such a measure on the ballot would have given gubernatorial candidate Dan Lungren a winning hand when his Democrat opponent inevitably raised abortion as an issue. When parental consent and parental rights frame the abortion debate, liberals lose.

But the importance of the issue goes beyond transitory political strategy. Lady Thatcher summed it up at September's International Conservative Congress when she identified as a major "Threat to the West" the "*systematic attack on the traditional family*" (her emphasis). "(T)here has recently been a full-scale and deliberate assault on the institution of the family itself — on the innocence of childhood, on the man's role as bread-winner, on the binding sacramental nature of marriage," she said. "We conservatives are not, most of us, saints: but even as sinners, above all

perhaps as sinners, we have a duty to resist the attack on the family that threatens the West at its foundations." Alas, it is a duty that the conservative movement in California, either because of confusion or flabbiness, has not risen to with the urgency that events demand.

Joseph Farah

Boys, boys! You're all missing the point. The future of California has little to do with what we think of as "political leadership" and electoral victories.

For far too long, conservatives have been waging their war of ideas in the political arena alone. Meanwhile, the left and its fellow travelers have conquered every single cultural institution that shapes the way Americans think. Some of the most influential of those institutions — like the entertainment industry — are based right here in California. But, I'm also talking about the press, the foundations, the universities, the schools, the trade unions — even the churches, for heaven's sake!

God bless Tom McClintock, one of the most visionary, tenacious, and courageous California politicians. But, Tom, we can't win the all-important culture no matter how effectively we play politics. And without the culture, long-term we're fighting a losing battle for the hearts and minds of the people. Remember this: Politicians don't lead, they follow. Ever notice what happens to politicians who hang around Washington or Sacramento too long? Even some of the best of them get corrupted. They fall under the sway of the conventional thinking — establish-

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