

would likely be required reading in that survey as well.

The time has come to stop speaking of Western American literature at all. The term has increasingly little meaning except as a buzzword for critics for whom "the new regionalism" is indeed new; it evokes not Thomas McGuane but ten-gallon hats, high noon and not ten seconds till midnight, and it will not suffice. Not long before his death last year A.B. Guthrie remarked that "a good book is not 'regional.' It is a good book because it is a good book. . . . William Faulkner and Eudora Welty weren't regional writers." Sound words, surely. But, Guthrie went on to add, "Trying to fight the [Western] myth, I tell you, is a losing fight. I'm afraid people want to think about the West in terms of Tombstone." They will do so as long as the categories by which writing set outside the Boston-Washington corridor is arranged remain fixed in booksellers' racks, publishers' lists, and college offerings.

Sequester Gary Snyder, Gretel Ehrlich, Leslie Silko, Frank Waters, Barry Lopez, Terry Tempest Williams, Amy Tan, Rick Bass, and Rolando Hinojosa-Smith in a room and you'd surely get lively discussion about the West as a place and as a source of inspiration. You would not, however,

be left with a literature in the sense of, say, the cocktail-circuit New York School of poets, and surely not of the fisticuffs of Norman Mailer and Gore Vidal battling one another in a city and culture far, far away. If writing that merely happens to be set in the West is of a superior quality, then we are properly addressing American literature, period. (As long, that is, as the canon-busters permit the notion of American literature itself to stand.)

Such distinctions are never likely to make their way into the consciousness of the trans-Fall Line East, where the important cultural decisions are made. A region can be a center; in the case of Western writers, it's a corral with a gate that can't be kicked open, as claustrophobically confining as one of Don De Lillo's Manhattan lofts. Just as the American West remains an economic colony, it is sure to remain a cultural colony as well, the source of comforting mortal tales of civilization's progress for Atlantic seaboard living rooms. His Bill of Rights daily erodes, but Jefferson's survey of the American landscape endures.

*Gregory McNamee is a freelance writer and editor living in Tucson, Arizona.*

## Notes From a Writer of Trash

by Richard S. Wheeler

The most important datum about Western fiction is that it is at the absolute bottom of the literary heap, somewhere below pornography. English professors would cavil at calling Westerns literature; they prefer to categorize Westerns as subliterate, or entertainment.

Few, if any, educated people read Westerns. The higher the cultural and academic attainments of the reader, the less likely he will be to crack one open. He will read other category fiction, such as mysteries or science fiction, without embarrassment. But you will never catch him reading Westerns. Westerns sell least well in the upper Midwest and East, the areas with the largest numbers of college-educated people. They sell best across the South and in the Rocky Mountain states, where tastes are the most primitive. They sell around military bases, a sure sign that they appeal to the semiliterate. It is known also that Westerns appeal most to graying males, yeoman blue-collar types who have never gone beyond high school, allegedly the least imaginative and progressive elements in society.

Because Westerns are not considered significant literature, they are not usually reviewed. Most newspaper editors of the book page have never assigned a category Western for review. The *Library Journal* and *Kirkus* review a few hardback Westerns for the edification of librarians, but that is about the extent of attention paid to category Western fiction. You will find nothing about Westerns or those who write them in book news columns. You will not see Western authors on TV or radio talk shows. Western authors are never lionized at parties, and acquire no groupies, fans, or imitators. You will not find Western authors at the National Book Awards. They are never asked to lecture at great universities and neither do they become adjunct professors. Here and there you'll find college courses on Western fiction, but it usually turns out that the professor didn't mean *that* kind of Western fiction; he meant Wallace Stegner and Edward Abbey and Tom McGuane and James Welch and Louise Erdrich.

### LIBERAL ARTS



#### A FAMILY MAN WITH AN APPETITE FOR WOMEN

As *Los Angeles Times* reporter Paul Richter wrote on June 7, "At 59, [Edward] Kennedy is the patriarch of a legendary political family, standard-bearer of American liberalism, conscientious family man and lawmaker with few peers. He is also, in some portraits, a man of flawed judgment with an appetite for women, liquor and ostentatious risks."

—from *Notable Quotables of the Media Research Center*, June 24, 1991

You will rarely see Western novels or authors come under academic or critical scrutiny, except to condemn them.

This is not the case in more respectable categories. Mystery authors are much acclaimed, even among literary professors and critics. People like Rex Stout, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, or John MacDonald are regularly studied, admired, analyzed, and acknowledged to be serious and gifted novelists. More recently Elmore Leonard has been accorded that status—but not for the several excellent Westerns he wrote before turning to mysteries. Nothing illustrates the difference in attitude better than encyclopedia entries. The New Columbia Encyclopedia, for example, has entries on Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, Dashiell Hammett, and Rex Stout, but not one for John MacDonald. When it comes to Western writers, things are different: there is a patronizing entry on Zane Grey, and one for Conrad Richter, and that's it. There is no entry for Pulitzer Prize-winner A.B. Guthrie Jr., Dorothy Johnson, Max Brand (Frederick Faust), Luke Short (Frederick Glidden), Ernest Haycox, Walter von Tilberg Clark, William McLeod Raine, Will Henry (Henry Allen), Jack Schaefer, or Louis L'Amour. One must ask: are all these people unworthy of recognition, or is it simply their misfortune to have written in a field that has always been patronized by critics and professors?

In recent years academic leftists have begun to assail category Western fiction. For example, English Professor William Kittredge of the University of Montana regularly attacks Westerns as being racist, sexist, and imperialist, and makes no bones about his hope that Westerns will vanish forever. His views are replicated by, roughly, the membership of the Modern Language Association. They associate Westerns with a frontier period when white men behaved shamefully: exterminating Indians, ruining the land, wiping out buffalo, demolishing the fragile ecology of the West, all from greed. Moreover, they associate Westerns with false and romantic views of human nature, in which self-reliant people achieve their goals, and such virtues as courage, loyalty, and integrity really count. Such people, many of them in the publishing industry itself, regularly

pronounce the death of Westerns, and one detects malice in the threnody: Westerns obstruct the proper understanding of a guilty, racist, voracious white America and delude people into supposing they control their own destinies.

In addition to all these burdens, Westerns suffer from an image fixation. Almost anyone can tell you what a Western is: it's a story that involves a lot of horseback riding and six-gun fights; a story in which the characters are cardboard, especially the women; a story full of action and short on theme; a story in which the hero will say "Yup," and "No, Ma'am" to a schoolmarm heroine and then ride off into the sunset; a story in which the author does not deal seriously with the human condition, but seeks merely to entertain; a story that presumes the superiority of white civilization and the inferiority of Indian or Hispanic culture. Everyone knows this; it's a given, and that is why intelligent and educated and sensitive people don't read Westerns and why professors condemn them.

But what everyone "knows" really isn't accurate. The majority of modern Westerns bears little relationship to any of these clichés and assumptions. No other genre is so beset by wrong preconceptions, held by people who have no intention of ever finding out whether their notions are accurate.

Thus, the environment in which Western fiction is produced is largely arid. People on the left dislike Westerns for ideological reasons, while people on the right ignore them as trash literature fashioned by pulp writers. People in all walks of life think of them as horse opera or shoot-em-ups. Then add to that the universal scorn or indifference of academics and critics and the pop press (you don't see Western authors featured in *People* magazine or the Sunday newspaper supplements or the checkout counter tabloids).

Miraculously, Westerns refuse to die, even when the odds are as long as they are. Each month, the drugstore paperback racks acquire a gaudy collection of new titles. Each month several hardcover publishers of Westerns offer more of their wares to librarians. People are buying them even without the prompting of publicity, critical acclaim,

or social approval. In spite of the indifference and hostility, Westerns flourish, and the worse the environment, the more it prospers.

How can that be? The most obvious reason is that there exists in the United States a large pool of literate people, many of them ardent readers, who are utterly indifferent to fad and fashion, hype, media blitzes, academic and ideological vogues, and politics. These people are not finding the type of storytelling they enjoy in mainstream literature and turn instead to category novels, especially those in which traditional moral and ethical values inform the story. They make up their own minds about what to read, and are therefore relatively immune to the blandishments of ideologues. For them, Westerns speak to what is possible and exciting and grand in human nature; to the heroic. These people are not necessarily old, not necessarily traditional, but simply independent. They'll continue to buy and read Westerns, no matter how scathing the condemnations of academics and critics.

Another factor is the unusual malle-

## LIBERAL ARTS



## VIVE LA FRANCE

*Interviewer:* "In Anglo-Saxon countries, most men prefer the company of other men."

*Mme. Edith Cresson, 57, Prime Minister of France:* "Yes, but the majority of these men are homosexual—perhaps not the majority—but in the USA there are already 25 percent of them and in England and Germany it is much the same. You cannot imagine it in the history of France. . . . Frenchmen are much more interested in women; Anglo-Saxon men are not interested in women and this is a problem that needs analysis. . . . A man who isn't interested in women is in some way a little maimed."

—from the *London Observer*,  
June 16, 1991

ability of the Western form. From the beginning, Westerns have adapted themselves to contemporary belief. Early stories had a great deal to do with character and the fate imposed by character. Later stories dealt with the lone individual preserving his integrity and life against the forces of social conformity. In recent decades, they have reflected modern racial concerns: the protagonists are likely to be Indians or Hispanics or their white sympathizers, while the antagonists are invariably rapacious whites. The perfect example is *Dances With Wolves*, Michael Blake's eminently successful book and screenplay in which the Indians and a white ally are the protagonists and the army is the antagonist. To anathematize all Westerns as racist, sexist, and imperialist, as Professor Kittredge does, is to miss the radical differences in Westerns from decade to decade and the flexibility of the genre. Westerns have frequently reflected the social concerns of modern times, even though they are nominally about the frontier and the settlement of the continent. And even in the bad old days when many stories treated Indians as antagonists, there was a powerful countervailing sympathy for Indians whose lands and living were ripped away from them. I do not know of any period in which Westerns lacked sympathy for Indians, although many early stories revealed a white cultural chauvinism that held that the red man's salvation was to become like whites, or else die off as a result of their atavistic ways.

Another, and perhaps the boldest, of my propositions is that some Westerns are excellently written. Beleaguered Western novelists, operating in an arid and hostile milieu, have been forced to tell good stories and tell them well, or face extinction. Some Westerns are amazingly powerful. Western novelists have also escaped the literary fads of minimalism and nihilism that have turned serious literary fiction into a sea of decadence and triviality. The Western novelist can and does treat large themes—justice, death, love, loyalty, mercy, personal integrity—themes that mainstream novelists consider hopelessly clichéd and *passé*. Readers of Westerns therefore find the very grandeur and depth of understanding that one has always associated with the

best mainstream authors.

For several years now, one of New York's most important agents, Nat Sobel, has attended the conventions of Western Writers of America, just to see what the Western genre is all about. His clients are largely important mainstream novelists. A year or so ago he shared his observations about Westerns with the assembled authors and editors: he had discovered, he said, that Western authors are doing some of the best writing in the whole of American literature, and that they are being treated shabbily by publishers—far worse than the authors in any other category, or those writing mainstream fiction. Mr. Sobel was correct. Some remarkable novels are being written in the Western field by novelists who would be celebrated for their abilities if they were writing in any other genre.

There are two basic types of Westerns: the romantic (or mythic) and the realistic. Neither is in any danger of extinction, although the mythic Western is currently in decline. The mythic story is not really about the West, but about character. It is rarely set in a geography of actual places. The frontier and its lawlessness and hardships serve merely to focus the story on the protagonist's strengths and weaknesses. The mythic story is largely an affirmation: in the end, justice is done and good triumphs and the manliness, courage, and integrity of the hero prevail. These stories are lightly researched and could be set most anyplace—not just the American West. Max Brand, Luke Short, and Louis L'Amour wrote mythic stories, along with the majority of Western novelists.

The other type is about the frontier West itself. It is intensively researched and essentially a historical novel. Its protagonists do not necessarily triumph, and are likely to be flawed. They certainly don't serve the mythic purpose of affirming our national character. These stories tend to be more complex, reflecting the human condition in all its tragedy and triumph. These realistic Western novels are on the ascendant and may dominate the genre in the future. Many Western novelists have written both types. Jack Schaefer, for instance, wrote the classic mythic story *Shane*, and a powerful realistic novel of the West, *Monte Walsh*.

It is worth noting that the mythic Western is the variety that has come under attack. The mythic Western offers a vision of American manhood that many find intolerable. Even more intolerable to them is the underlying message: that it is possible for strong people to work out their own salvation, largely by adhering to traditional norms of conduct and belief. If the minions of the Modern Language Association attack such stories with amazing vehemence, it is because they fully understand the grip that these Homeric stories have upon the soul of the nation. Some of the criticism is certainly justified.

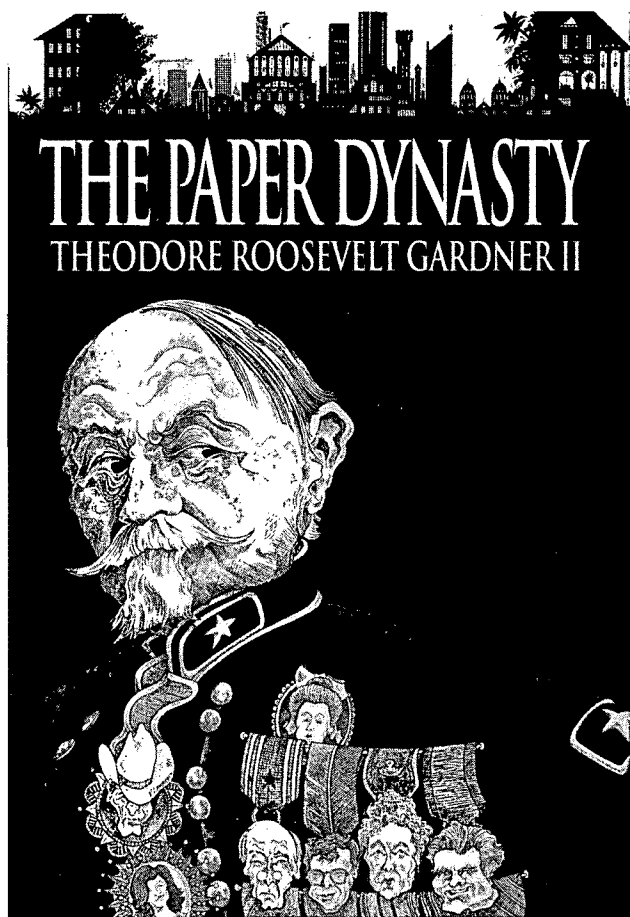
The women typically found in the mythic Western are sketchy and subservient, and the mythic story is often dismissive of the Indians who were displaced by the onslaught of white civilization. But I suspect that the most important reason why the critics despise the mythic Western is simply that it celebrates a glorious, bold, and enterprising America. It celebrates the grandeur and uniqueness of the Republic.

The future of the Western is not in doubt, unless its detractors take the final step by resorting to censorship. Many of those who wish to abolish the Western have brushed close to advocating that ultimate weapon, and Professor Kittredge fervently wishes Westerns would go away. Perhaps some day Westerns will be sold under the counter, the way Henry Miller was fifty or sixty years ago. But I think it is more likely that the day of the fanatics will pass, and Westerns will return to eminence, cherished by Americans in all walks of life. Once, not so long ago, Westerns were a source of national joy; they were our unique contribution to world literature (some would argue that the hardboiled private eye story is also an original American contribution). Westerns were once published by the most prestigious houses, including Alfred Knopf, and serialized weekly in the *Saturday Evening Post* and other magazines. That sort of popularity and acceptance may not return, but whenever Americans feel good about their country, you'll see a reemergence of the Western.

*Richard S. Wheeler is the author of over twenty Westerns. He lives in Big Timber, Montana.*



# THE ULTIMATE HOW-TO BOOK



An explosive novel of enormous HOW-TO proportions.

Crackling entertainment.<sup>1</sup> ... informative and spellbinding.<sup>2</sup> As much fun as a highminded gossip column.<sup>3</sup> ... enjoyed it from beginning to end ... if you like saga stories, and newspapers, don't miss this.<sup>4</sup> Outrageous metaphors... massive and memorable characters ... simply good reading.<sup>5</sup> ... vituperative attack on the Los Angeles Times newspaper and its founding family... intriguing novel.<sup>6</sup> ... not very good.<sup>7</sup>

1. Publishers Weekly 2. St. Joseph, Missouri *News-Press/Gazette* 3. Los Angeles Copley's *Daily Breeze* 4. Oklahoma Tribune Review 5. Idaho Press 6. Pasadena Star-News 7. Los Angeles Times

14 and more HOW-TO books wrapped in one beautiful binding. Read it to improve your life!

Learn How to:

- ✓ ... reverse the politics of a leading newspaper.
- ✓ ... beat the unions.
- ✓ ... make a fortune in real estate.
- ✓ ... do inside trading within the law.
- ✓ ... reap success from failure after 40.
- ✓ ... buy a newspaper from a man who doesn't want to sell — when you are broke.
- ✓ ... buy a house with no down payment.
- ✓ ... marry the boss's daughter when the boss hates you.
- ✓ ... build a music center after legions have failed.
- ✓ ... get a stubborn husband to change his mind.
- ✓ ... build one of the world's leading cities from a cow town.
- ✓ ... move your business from a sorry competitor to total dominance of the market.
- ✓ ... get a job you thought was rightfully yours after it was given to someone else.
- ✓ ... get a job in top management if the owner can't stand you.

600 pages, \$23.45 ISBN 0-9627297-0-1  
At your favorite bookstore or phone:  
(800) 777-7623, fax: (213) 544-3545



ALLEN A. KNOLL, PUBLISHERS

# Are You Fed Up With the One-Party System in Washington, D.C. ?

*If multi-party politics is a good idea for Eastern Europe and South Africa, why not try it here in America?*

Help build a ...



**U.S. TAXPAYERS PARTY** ... with a new agenda for America!

■ **Constitutional Budget:** We need more than a balanced budget. Disapprove any and all Federal expenditures which are not specifically authorized in the U.S. Constitution.

■ **Equal Taxation:** The income tax is not only an insidious invasion of privacy — it is totally unnecessary to cover constitutional spending requirements. Equality before the law should not depend on what you earn or what you pay.

■ **Institutional Reform:** Our goal is a depoliticized, degovernmentalized society with market accountability.

Government regulation and subsidy diminishes liberty. To the degree that government exercises legitimate authority, political accountability is essential: electoral, bureaucratic, and judicial. We favor tenure limits, elimination of pensions for elected officials, and an end to special advantages for Big Media.

■ **Religious Liberty and Constitutional Rights:** Jefferson correctly warned that "to compel a man to furnish funds for the propagation of ideas he disbelieves and abhors is sinful and tyrannical." We will terminate advocacy subsidies of all kinds, including Federal funding of education,

while preserving every word of the Bill of Rights: private property rights and freedom of association shall not be diminished. The right to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

■ **American Nationalism:** We say "no" to the New World Order. Withdraw from unaccountable supranational institutions — UN, IMF, World Bank, etc. Terminate special privileges for central banks and multi-national corporations. Deploy SDI. End foreign aid, except to protect vital U.S. security interests. Rebuild U.S. industrial strength with deregulation and abolition of corporate taxes.

## PRAGMATISM DOESN'T WORK!

*America is in trouble, and the politics of conventional ambition and political pragmatism are not working.*

*We face crises which are, at once, economic, geostrategic, institutional, and, above all, moral. The dumbing-down of school textbooks, the insidious vulgarity conveyed on television, and the degrading humanist culture portrayed and purveyed on our movie screens has helped produce a nation of sheep, spectators who reject the very premises of our nation's Godly heritage, and who too often lack the discernment, or knowledge of history, to reject the*

*incremental, escalating, political confiscation of our individual liberties and national autonomy.*

*Time is not on our side. Time is running out. If you want to do something about it, join in launching a new movement which has the potential to slow the tide, and to turn it.*

*Our strategy is simple, but effective: to establish a party of principle which will have the option of withholding political support from either or both major political parties whenever it is determined that the lesser of two evils can be the worst outcome*

*of all.*

*Politicians like to win elections. If they need us to win, and if our price is not personal power, patronage, or payoffs, they will be forced to reward us in the currency of policy and principle—or suffer the consequences.*

*But our objective is more profound than to merely achieve victory or defeat in particular electoral contests. Our goal is to recast the entire dialectic of American politics away from humanistic, socialist materialism, and back in the direction of Biblical, constitutional liberty.*

- "No" to the New World Order
- Abolition of the IRS and the income tax system
- Judicial accountability
- "No" to the UN, IMF, and World Bank
- Execution or restitution to fight crime
- "No" to abortion
- Term limitation
- No bailout of Gorbachev
- Abolition of civil service
- No fiat money
- Withdrawal from entangling international financial, political, and

- military alliances
- No transfers of resources and technology to America's enemies
- Deploy SDI
- "No" to gun control
- Reverse government restrictions on the development of U.S. energy resources
- "No" to pensions for elected officials
- Eliminate special political privileges for media moguls
- No government-guaranteed loans, investments, or banking arrangements
- Restore control of Federal elections to the state and local level
- "No" to environmental extremism

- End the Social Security tax
- "No" to U.S.-funded education
- Transfer Social Security contributions to individually protected private retirement accounts
- "No" to statehood for D.C.
- Abolish Federal regulatory commissions
- "No" to quotas
- Reduce Federal government land ownership and use restrictions
- "No" to pro-homosexual subsidies and regulations
- Abolish the FEC
- Private charity — not government welfare

## HELP MAKE HISTORY!

JOIN THE UNITED STATES TAXPAYERS ALLIANCE

I want to help implement the USTA strategy for conservative victory and build a U.S. Taxpayers Party.

- ☐ by helping achieve ballot qualification
- ☐ by becoming or recruiting a candidate
- ☐ by contributing funds. Enclosed is my check, payable to USTA, for:
  - ☐ \$75 (students \$25) — USTA Charter Membership
  - ☐ \$1000 — Member, USTA National Committee
  - ☐ \$10,000 — Member, USTA Executive Committee
- Or: ☐ \$25 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ \$5000 ☐ other \$
- ☐ Please charge my credit card: ☐ MasterCard ☐ Visa
- Account number: \_\_\_\_\_ Exp: \_\_\_\_\_
- Cardholder's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Please send more information about your proposal, strategy, and principles. Enclosed is a check for \$25.
- ☐ Please keep me on your mailing list
- ☐ Please notify me of training workshops and conventions

The IRS has determined the USTA to be a 501(c)(4) organization, exempt from Federal income tax. Contributions to the USTA are not tax deductible. Corporate and individual donations are welcome in any amount.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone (optional) (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

CHR



**U.S. TAXPAYERS ALLIANCE**

450 Maple Avenue, East  
Vienna, Virginia 22180



*"You have been sold out by both major political parties. How much longer will you put up with it? Join me as a charter member of the U. S. Taxpayers Alliance, and help me put America back on the right track."*

— Howard Phillips

My name is Howard Phillips, and I ask you to help me give America a new birth of freedom.

Since 1974, I've led The Conservative Caucus (TCC), a non-profit policy action group which has fought for less government, traditional American values, and victory over Communism.

For more than 30 years, I've been working against a corrupt cultural, financial, and political establishment which rejects the heritage of American liberty and has set our beloved country on a track to disaster.

During the Nixon Administration, as head of two U.S. government agencies—I got a solid four-year education in just how badly the Federal government is permeated with waste, corruption, moral cowardice, and destructive ideological activism.

As director of the U.S. Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO), I made enemies of whom I remain proud, as I battled to terminate grants and contracts which were being used as ideological patronage for the radical Left—and fought to erase "Great Society"-era regulations which had been carefully crafted to insulate from electoral accountability a national network of well-paid neo-Marxist organizations.

After a decade of Reagan and Bush, the Washington-based conservative movement is at a dead end. Grass roots supporters have grown weary of the battle, frustrated by political betrayal, and seemingly impotent to achieve significant victories on issues they care about.

Those who control the government have been only marginally inconvenienced by anti-establishment protest — because, in the context of the present two-party system, "fed up" Americans have "no place else" to go on election day.

With your help, that will change. In 1992, and voters across America will have an effective means to "throw the rascals out".

That's why I urge you to join me in launching a new U.S. Taxpayers Party.

**OUR GOAL:** To launch, in time for the 1992 elections, a new political party which advances principles and policy objectives consistent with the Bible and the Constitution of the United States, whose purpose, both by fielding its own candidates, and by co-endorsing, where appropriate, candidates of other parties, is to establish, in the context of the American political process, a right standard for civil government and an electoral rallying point for those who, in agreement with our purposes, choose to join us.

**STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:** We proceed from the premise that the only legitimate purpose of civil government is to safeguard our God-given rights to life, liberty, and property.