

## Talk of the Town

by Wayne Lutton

### I Heard It Through the Grapevine: Rumor in African-American Culture

by Patricia A. Turner

Berkeley: University of California Press; 276 pp., \$25.00



Many black Americans are convinced that they are the targets of a vast array of white-authored schemes designed to spike their food with contraceptives; force them to engage in self-destructive behavior, especially drug addiction; and kill them, to use their bodies for medical experiments or out of simple malice. In her new book *I Heard It Through the Grapevine*, Professor Patricia Turner of the University of California-Davis recounts some of the rumors circulating among blacks of these alleged conspiracies on the part of white Americans.

For example, Kool and Marlboro cigarettes, Coors beer, Tropical Fantasy (a soft drink), and Church's and Kentucky Fried Chicken are among the items widely believed to contain secret ingredients that sterilize black males. (The exploding urban black illegitimacy rate suggests that this campaign is not working.) Although there is no tasteless, odorless drug that can selectively sterilize blacks, so persistent are these "urban legends" that the Food and Drug Administration has been called in to conduct expensive tests of fried chicken and soft drinks. The Ku Klux Klan (sometimes in cooperation with South African interests) is believed to be the moving force behind the distribution of tainted food, as well as the maker of the popular athletic wear that urban blacks

literally kill for. Adidas, Converse, Nike, and Reebok are among the businesses rumored to be owned by the Klan or by South African companies, or both. One company, which sold clothes under the Troop label, eventually went bankrupt after its brand name was said to stand for "To Rule Over Oppressed People," and the linings of its jackets and shoes were supposed to contain messages like "Thank you, nigger, for making us rich."

Professor Turner reports that many blacks are convinced that the federal government is harvesting them for use in medical research. As an instance of this she cites the string of 28 black children murdered in Atlanta between 1979 and 1981. Though Wayne Williams, a black homosexual record promoter, was convicted for the crimes, rumor persists that he was railroaded into prison and that the real culprit was the Atlanta-based federal Center for Disease Control, which supposedly used their bodies for cancer research or, alternatively, to extract a fluid found only in black testicles. While the government has, in effect, been subsidizing the black birthrate through various Great Society welfare programs, opinion polls indicate that more than half of all blacks are convinced that the government is likely involved in a number of genocidal plots directed against them. Chief among these are the proliferation of drugs throughout the inner cities, and—even more sinister—the introduction of the AIDS virus, believed to have been hatched in a government laboratory.

The author emphasizes that these tales are given credence by educated blacks, not just ghetto dwellers. Professor Turner relates that when she provided Believers with empirical evidence to the contrary, they accused her of being "taken in" by the White Power Structure. An aspect of this topic that Turner does not explore is what some of the consequences of this rumormongering may be for whites. If even college-educated blacks believe that whites are contaminating food and fostering genocidal programs, is it any wonder that black violence against whites is escalating?

Wayne Lutton is associate editor of *The Social Contract* quarterly.

## New Right, New Wrong

by Paul Gottfried

### Beyond the New Right: Markets, Government, and the Common Environment

by John Gray

New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall; 195 pp., \$34.50



John Gray's latest book, an anthology of essays, confronts unflinchingly the state of conservatism in the Anglo-American world. Resistant to the happy talk about a conservative renaissance in the 80's, Gray, a Whiggish Oxford don and a scholar of classical liberalism, stresses the ineffectiveness of the respectable right in both the United States and his own land. Though President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher accomplished fiscal trimming and administrative cuts, the managerial states in their countries did not change significantly as a result of their efforts. The administrative structure of these governments remained intact, and centralized control of what used to be called "civil society" continued to grow, after only minimal interruption. The therapeutic and victimological features of this control, which American paleoconservatives have rushed to expose, are not unrelated to the structural problems sketched by Gray: they represent merely a (perhaps Protestant) variation on a form of socially destructive management characteristic of the modern West. In America we celebrate this system as "liberal democracy," though it has little to do with either freedom or popular self-government, imposed upon us as it is in the interest of "values" and "sensitivity."

The strongest aspect of Gray's critique of the New Right, by which he means the Thatcher-Reagan brand of 1980's conservatism, also betrays, ironically, the weakness in his arguments. Gray charges the Thatcherites and Reaganites with having resorted to material factors in their attempts to explain human conduct, as if monetary and tax reforms could improve social relations and pub-



lic virtue, as if a reduction in corporate and marginal tax rates could restore the work ethic and the integrity of the family. Despite this linkage, Gray notes, altered fiscal policies effected no important change in the moral climate of either Great Britain or the United States; those social goods the New Right attributed to capital accumulation and lower taxes stemmed rather from cultural and religious attitudes. One cannot recreate those attitudes, Gray insists, simply by putting a different spin on the economy.

It was the social morality, abetted by preexistent material conditions, of low-church Protestants that provided the major breakthrough in the British Industrial Revolution. But the Protestant spirit of individuality that contributed to a lawful society, as well as to economic growth, in 19th-century England will not likely be brought back by reprivatizing English industries or by lowering corporate taxes. The cultural and social context is no longer there; nor will the administrative state that has consolidated its power in the present century go away.

Indeed, Gray argues, the modern welfare state no longer controls even itself, having been invaded by the "neo-feudalites" long sponsored by that state. Civil service and public education unions have mobilized "victimized" minorities, and corporate lobbyists have occupied and colonized the still widely praised "democratic welfare state"; together they have created the "new Hobbesian dilemma," an anti-sovereign state that has become the battlefield in the war of all against all. Unlike Hobbes's Leviathan, which monopolizes violence for the sake of ending civil strife, the government described by Gray has neither stability nor authority: it is the state of nature misrepresented by its occupants as the pacification of strife. But as long as powerful interests, some protected by the national media, can benefit from using the state apparatus, they will continue to do so; and they will silence their opposition by applying a coercive administration against those they marginalize.

Gray maintains that we must take this historical situation for granted. For example, we cannot hope to return to the pre-welfare state, though it may be possible to fix, as Gray seeks to do, those functions the national government can effectively perform without being overly intrusive. Gray, moreover, believes that

one can no longer halt multiculturalism in Great Britain, in view of the Third World immigration that has already taken place there. What a reformed welfare state might try to do, however, is support and nurture "real pluralism," i.e., the cultural life of transplanted Third World communities residing in its country; and while Gray shows unseemly enthusiasm for the cultural transformation of the old Protestant England that he obviously admires, his point nevertheless deserves attention. Perhaps in light of recent developments, there may no longer be a reasonable course for conservatives to follow, except to shore up the Third World communities in their midst. From a conservative perspective, it may be better to help Indian immigrants retain certain aspects of Hindu village life than to surrender them to feminist reeducators.

There are nonetheless two problems with Gray's position. One, he surrenders too much to the "given" historical situation, which it is possible to oppose even while recognizing. If the welfare state is indeed as oppressive and unjust as Gray asserts, how can its leaders be expected to adopt his suggested reforms? And if the "conservative" administrations of Reagan and Thatcher made so little headway against "big government," why should their governments bow to Gray's merely literary opposition? Certainly they have no interest in restoring families and upholding communities, as opposed to isolating individuals and redefining social identities. (Gray's proposed reforms remind one of the wistful lament "If only Hitler had been nice to the Jews!") Gray describes the American and British welfare states in even more caustic terms than do libertarians such as Lew Rockwell and Murray Rothbard, but then he turns around to suggest how the regimes might reform themselves in several steps.

Two, if culture really does drive politics and economies, as Gray intimates, what hope is there of restoring freedom in the multicultural states of England and America? It seems that multinationals, the managerial state, and public policy foundations have profoundly affected American culture and morality. They have certainly influenced our social attitudes, patterns of community, and sense of national purpose. Yet, if Gray is right—and I believe that he is at least partly correct—can English liberties flourish again among Hindus and Mus-

lims, even among the members of those groups who have become British subjects? Gray rightly notes the historical moment at which liberal bourgeois societies developed, mostly in the Protestant West. More than other classical liberals of my acquaintance, he is aware of the historicity of the liberal heritage. Given the particular circumstances in which that heritage arose, he is properly contemptuous of the fiscal cure-alls by which the New Right seeks to resurrect it. (It is also possible, as he speculates, that the managerial state is itself the creator of some political liberty.) From its tolerance of administrative manipulation, one may conclude that our population has become hopelessly servile. Yet, do we improve the prospects of our own liberation by encouraging state-sponsored cultural pluralism? Will the further colonization of the West bring us back to something resembling Whiggish liberty—or will it take us even farther away from that goal?

*Paul Gottfried is a professor of humanities at Elizabethtown College in Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania.*

## The People at War

by William R. Hawkins

**A Democracy at War: America's Fight at Home and Abroad in World War II**

by William L. O'Neill

New York: Free Press;  
480 pp., \$24.95



"The wars of peoples will be more terrible than the wars of kings!" So predicted the young Winston Churchill as the new century dawned in 1901. The world wars (two hot, one cold) that have marked the decades since have validated Churchill while contradicting the glib predictions that "global democracy" would bring a new century of world peace.

This is not just a recent development. An enormous amount of social energy was unleashed during the rise of the nation-state, an energy that had carried Western civilization to its apex during Churchill's early days as an imperialist-adventurer. Regardless of whether a