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On the Middle American Uprising

Chronicles does like to keep a good debate going. Samuel Francis's bugle call ("A Banner With a Strange Device," February 1994) for economic nationalism was another interesting alignment of Main Street conservatism with the dirigiste left. Come the Middle American political uprising, I'm still wondering, what sort of policymaking might we actually expect? Is your model France? Japan? India? America of the high-tariff era? Please provide a better road map.

I understand that your shopkeeper capitalism is distinct from the corporate variety. But isn't it at odds with the entrepreneurial dynamic as well? Mr. Francis wants to protect the high-wage jobs of his fellow Americans. You can't do that, in a static sense, without barring the mold-breakers who at least temporarily diminish the value of traditional output, and I doubt you could do that even if you wanted to. The Postal Service pays well, but its days as a dominant carrier are numbered—even with a legal monopoly—if you consider electronic transmission as a competitor. In the end, the only real countervailing force to capitalism (in whatever form we have it) is the state, and even with you as its curious ally, the state is losing.

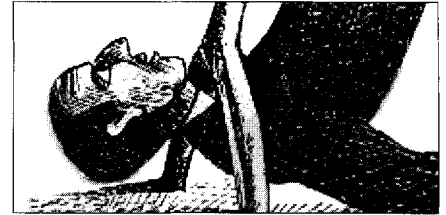
Your nostalgia for a former America is one that many of your fellow citizens—though certainly not all—would share. But it's likely to be preserved only in a museum. All living organisms change; the economic forces reshaping the world can be delayed, but with perverse effect. Correct as you may be in damning the destruction of the old, you cannot stop it. You can *not* stop it.

—Tim W. Ferguson
Wall Street Journal
Los Angeles, CA

The Editors Reply:

The real issue is the federal principle: the right and duty of nations to protect themselves against other nations and empires like the U.N. or the E.C.; the right of states to guard their interests against national and international governments; the right of families and indi-

viduals to mind their own business without interference from any government agency—in other words, an entirely decentralized political and economic order. The effect of NAFTA or E.C. regulations or U.N. treaties, unfortunately, is to suck all the decision-making power up to the top of the tree, away from the roots of all creativity: the individual, the family, the entrepreneurial firm, the local community.



Economic creativity is only a small part of what is at stake, because all the productive elements of society are being corrupted today—scholars and scientists, poets and painters, priests and soldiers. If we had to choose between two situations—a creative economy with a stagnant social, aesthetic, religious, intellectual order or a stagnant economy in which arts and letters flourished and people led decent lives—we would unquestionably choose the latter.

The trouble is, the choice is not that simple. Expanding economies are also cultural golden ages—fifth-century Athens, 12th-century Pisa, etc. But there is always a simple decision-rule: Does a measure or policy tend to promote the concentration of wealth and power at higher levels or does it tend to devolve it? In this regard, we have sympathized with progressive/populist attempts to control big business, just as we have always deplored their fantasy that such control could be exercised by the federal (or even state) government. For similar reasons, as much as we would like to contain the problems of unassimilated immigrants, we are opposed to identity cards, routine searches, and the English Language Amendment.

Ultimately, the rise and fall of civilizations is only partly determined by economic and political forces. Malaria seems to have destroyed Pisa, but laziness and dependency is the more usual disease. Mr. Jefferson and his friends foresaw all of this, hence his doctrine of periodic revolution as the only guarantee of republican government.

THIS ISSUE OF CHRONICLES, we are pleased to report, has been funded in part by a special grant from the Alex C. Walker Educational and Charitable Trust of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

DONNA SHALALA, Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, recently said at a press conference: "We have the knowledge and the technology to prevent the spread [of AIDS]. What we have lacked until now is the political will." The press conference was held to introduce the latest government-sponsored nightmare: a series of commercials, putatively designed for AIDS prevention, which openly advocate, for the first time in a federal government program, the use of condoms "consistently and correctly." The ads are targeted at young adults aged 18 to 25 and are part of larger "community-based" crusades to make the world safe for promiscuity. All the major television and radio stations have agreed to run the ads, although only NBC and FOX have agreed to do so without any restrictions on the time or content of the advertisements, a fact that caused an outburst of applause from the reporters covering the press conference. Some stations, in an attack of conscience, agreed to run the more explicit ads only after tags promoting abstinence are added. Even with these minor alterations, the response to the condom commercials is a striking contrast to the networks' almost-total rejection of a series of pro-life spots funded by a private foundation.

The ads themselves, designed by the firm of Ogilvy & Mather South for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, contain various scenes not suitable for reprint in a family magazine, although they are already being broadcast into the living room of every American family—except those smart enough not to own a television. Secretary Shalala calls the ads "sophisticated," and so they are: they feature cute dialogue and high-tech animation, and some include various popular performers to trumpet the party line, so as to grab the attention of the mass of zombies that is their intended audience. Some of the nine new spots (it is said) promote abstinence as the best policy for avoiding sexually transmitted diseases; the ads,

however, indicate no place for young adults to obtain information on why refraining from sexual activity might be a good thing yet provide a hotline to find out more about correct condom use.

What is most disturbing about the defenses offered by the government for these ads is the blithe assurance that these advertisements are only a matter of health policy, of "knowledge" and "technology," as if questions of sexual conduct have ever been considered only matters of health. The commercials, it is true, concentrate primarily on reducing the risk of contracting AIDS and, by derivation, other such diseases; no mention is made of illegitimacy, and of course there is no discussion, above the level of personal preference, of the advantages, moral and social, to avoiding promiscuous conduct until marriage or at least a mature age. No, these commercials, like most such government programs, treat their charges as animals with virtually no self-control. The government line is that well, of course, abstinence is best (strictly in terms of disease prevention), but we all know how kids are going to behave, and so we have to be "sophisticated," explain to the rutting youngsters that the act of procreation is a dangerous and disease-ridden one, and teach them to treat every partner as a possible death sentence.

Nowhere does it seem to occur to the Brain Trust in Washington or Atlanta that a segment of the population might think these advertisements just a bit too sophisticated for their simple tastes and consider them an affront to values—like chastity, or parental supervision, or traditional norms regarding matters of intimacy—they hold dear. What becomes clear is that while promoting the use of condoms might have some health benefits (although the scientific evidence is not as certain as the CDC would like us to believe), the deeper result of a program like this is to strike yet another blow at the traditional beliefs of the American people. Citizens in some states are already winning small victories against this new type of subversion. The Texas Board of Education has approved an abstinence program, from which parents can remove their children if they find it inappropriate, and in New York a court has just struck down New York City's policy of providing condoms

to students without their parents' knowledge or permission, ruling that such a program violates parental rights.

Shalala and company claim that the commercials are only a small part of the total government package, that other "community-based" programs can take a more flexible approach to respond to the needs of the members of various locales. This answer strains credulity. Can we really believe that local programs promoting other messages will survive and not be either strangled by a lack of federal funds or attacked with the bogus charge of "imposing morality"? Already, left-wing and homosexual activists are pressing for more explicit commercials, saying that the present ones do not give how-to instructions clearly enough. In Washington, there is no question as to whether regular citizens or militant activists have the greater influence. That the commercials ignore the plain statistical fact of the disease's victims is yet a further sign that social engineering, and not solely health policy, is at the root of this new campaign.

—Gerald Russello

YETTA M. ADAMS, an eccentric and meddlesome bag lady, died on a bench outside the concrete walls of the Department of Housing and Urban Development last winter. If this had been the 80's, her death would have been cited as a consequence of budget cuts, greed, and flint-heartedness. But thanks to a friendly press and a political team skilled at spin control, HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros used the occasion to grandstand for putting more cash in the government's coffers.

In a Washington-style act of contrition, HUD Secretary Henry Cisneros decried homelessness and promised an immediate \$25 million in new spending. Nobody asked why the \$28 billion the department spent last year did not prevent Adams' death or why a tenth of one percent increase would make any difference now. Many people, including local family members, had tried to talk Ms. Adams into a shelter. Plenty of space was available the night she died. For reasons known only to her, she refused help.

Claiming to be grief-stricken, Mr. Cisneros pounded out an op-ed for the