

George Wallace and the Tea Party

by Tom Piatak

MANY OF THOSE seeking to understand the Tea Party movement have tried to find historical parallels, and one that has been suggested is the George Wallace movement. Both movements have comprised voters feeling that the America they grew up in is being taken from them, and their strength in the electorate is roughly comparable. George Wallace drew 13 percent of the popular vote in 1968, after polling as high as 20 percent, and the comprehensive poll of the Tea Party movement published by the *New York Times* on April 14 found that 18 percent of voters consider themselves members of the Tea Party.

But there are significant differences as well. Wallace's greatest support came from lower-middle- and working-class whites, and Wallace famously sought to defend "this man in the textile mill, this man in the steel mill, this barber, this beautician, the policeman on the beat" against "pointy-headed intellectuals," "bearded bureaucrats," "anarchists," and "lawbreakers." Thanks to decades of free trade, America now has far fewer workers in textile and steel mills (though the intellectuals and bureaucrats seem to be doing just fine), and the demographic profile of the Tea Party reflects this. Indeed, as the *New York Times* headline trumpeted, "Poll Finds Tea Party Backers Wealthier and Better Educated," with 70 percent of Tea Party supporters having at least some college education, as opposed to 53 percent of the general public, and 14 percent of Tea Party supporters having a postgraduate degree, as opposed to 10 percent of the general public. Fifty-six percent of Tea Party supporters reported a family income above \$50,000 per year, as opposed to 44 percent of all Americans, and 20 percent of Tea Party supporters reported a family income over \$100,000 per

year, as opposed to 14 percent of the general public. Since 32 percent of Tea Party members are retired, versus 18 percent of all Americans, these income figures likely understate the degree to which the Tea Party, when compared with Americans as a whole, is better off.

In addition, the Tea Party seems somewhat indifferent to the social and cultural issues that have been an important component of American conservatism since the 1960's, even though Tea Party members are generally more conservative on those issues than is the general public. When asked to name the most important problem facing the country, 69 percent of Tea Party members point to the economy or the size of government, with only 1 percent naming such perennial concerns of the American right as immigration and abortion, and 45 percent state that reducing the size of the federal government should be the main goal of the Tea Party movement. As grave as our economic problems are, these answers suggest that the Tea Party movement is less radical than its supporters and detractors claim and than the Wallace movement was. Voicing support for libertarian economics and concern over the size of government are, after all, permissible avenues of dissent for American conservatives and increasingly the only forms of dissent permitted them. As Sam Francis argued in these pages in an essay on the legacy of Russell Kirk (*Principalities & Powers*, September 2004):

Kirk's classical conservatism was a welcome relief from the tedious and barren libertarianism that strutted about during and after the New Deal and has since managed to thrive as the domi-

nant ideology in the contemporary conservative mind. . . . Recognizing only one problem ("the state") and only one solution ("individual liberty"), libertarianism offers nothing to those concerned with the impending destruction of their civilization by forces that are largely irrelevant to its twin obsessions.

To their credit, many in the Tea Party do seem to be concerned about the impending destruction of our civilization, but they have yet to grasp the nature of the forces bringing about that destruction and what must be done to avert it.

The Wallace movement, despite its failure to attain power, reconfigured American politics by breaking apart the New Deal coalition. It appears likely that the Tea Party movement will bring about nothing more consequential than a second Contract With America. Far from representing an incipient Third Force in American politics, the Tea Party so far represents the militant arm of the GOP, with Tea Party members less likely than the general public to say America needs a third party. Newt Gingrich is the current political figure most admired by the greatest number of Tea Party members, and 57 percent even have a favorable view of George W. Bush. Two thirds of Tea Party members have always or usually voted Republican, 54 percent have a favorable view of the Republican Party, and an overwhelming 92 percent have a negative view of the Democratic Party. The thoroughgoing leftism of Barack Obama has certainly succeeded in reviving the GOP, but the opposition to Obama has not yet coalesced into the type of force capable of transforming American politics, much less of reviving the American nation whose continuing decline the Tea Party rightly laments.

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Regional Cinema

by Clyde Wilson

The Last Confederate

Produced by Strongbow Pictures
Directed by A. Blaine Miller
and Julian Adams
Written by Julian Adams
and Weston Adams

Firetrail

Produced by Forbesfilm
Written and directed by
Christopher Forbes

LIKE IT OR NOT, movies are the main art form of our time, the storytelling medium that reaches the largest audience and captures the attention of us all, high and low, wise and foolish. It is also arguable that movies, like literature and architecture, reflect something of the soul of the particular nation that produces them. If so, we indeed need to be concerned about the American soul.

Until the late 60's, our cinema—whether contemporary or costume drama, comedy, Western, or war film—reflected a general baseline of Middle American values. It was not usually great art, but it was consoling entertainment and a source and reflection of a national consensus. And it portrayed with sympathy the real “diversity” of this far-flung Union—New England, the Big Apple, the Old South, the Midwest, and the West.

The catastrophe known as the 60's—marked by a collapse of morals, political fanaticism and violence, multiculturalism, and the ever-tighter centralized control and enforced uniformity of all phases of life by the bicoastal elite—coincided with the degradation of American cinema. Now we have godless nihilism and self-indulgence, violence for violence's sake, every form of sexual promiscuity, filth for the

sake of filth, and “creativity” generally limited to technological fantasy, sequels, prequels, dramatization of comic books, and rip-offs of European and Japanese stories. The masters of our multicultural monoculture have little talent but plenty of power and money, and our cinema now reflects their minds and souls.

This is not the whole picture, of course. There are still “independent” productions that portray actual American people and situations and that manage to come to public attention. It is not difficult to produce a good book or a good movie. The problem is getting anyone to hear about it and finding a distributor. The mass media seldom reflect anything but the works our masters want to be celebrated and the absence of those works they want to be censored or ignored. All you need to remember is the reception given Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and Ron Maxwell's historical epic *Gods and Generals*.

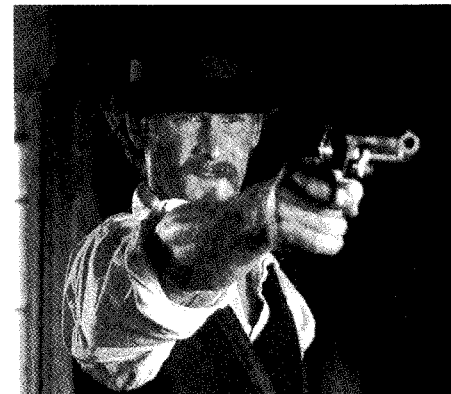
Amazingly and refreshingly, two excellent new and old-fashioned films, *Firetrail* and *The Last Confederate*, have appeared close together and are available on DVD. They doubtless have faced and will face the distribution problem, but they give a comforting indication of what American cinema could be if it were decentralized and reflected the true “diversity” of what is left of our real country. Real American culture has always been regional, for that is the only way that our vast Union can be fairly represented and where remnants of the real America are still to be found.

Both of these films deal realistically and movingly with an unfashionable subject—the experiences of the people of South Carolina in the winter of 1865, when they became victims of the first large-scale American exercise of total war (something

which is still denied by establishment historians but can be proved a thousand times over by the documents of the time). General Sherman's March is even yet regarded in some quarters as a great feat of arms and military genius. Actually, it involved little war other than skirmishes with outnumbered cavalry and home guards and was a calculated destruction of the means of civilian life—houses, private valuables and heirlooms, food, barns, crops, livestock, schools, churches, convents, whole towns. The high point was the deliberate torching of the surrendered and occupied city of Columbia, previously admired for its loveliness.

Both movies are products largely of regional inspiration and regional talent on both sides of the camera and reflect genuine regional memory, a thing rare in America and even rarer in the movies. Even some critics who have boggled at “nostalgia” for Southern traitors and slavers have acknowledged that the films carry a great deal of “authenticity.” Indeed they do. As renderings of historical experience they are faithful and subtly artistic. Costumes, action, dialogue, and personalities carry conviction as a representation of the real historical experience of certain Americans. Those audiences who have viewed these films in limited release have been enthusiastic.

Firetrail is produced by independent filmmaker Christopher Forbes and is based on the 2005 romance novel by “Lydia Hawke,” though it rises far above



Julian Adams in *The Last Confederate* ©Solar Filmworks