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people and not animals."

We should all care for those who need our help. But such aid is something more than simply giving quarters to homeless people whom we may never meet again or doling out meals in a soup line that treats recipients as faceless, interchangeable, and forgettable. *The Tragedy of American Compassion's* greatest achievement is that it shows how aid should be provided and gives ample evidence that private, voluntary aid did a great deal to help people whom we would now consider part of the permanent "underclass."

The American welfare state is intellec-

tually exhausted, surviving, as are most government programs, on the inertia of the Democratic Congress. Contending that welfare should be abolished has done little to change the nature or structure of these programs. Marvin Olasky's arguments may prove to be the ones that ultimately ensure that private welfare programs can once again do a better job in helping the poor than their massively subsidized government counterparts.

*Contributing Editor Martin Morse Wooster is a writer, editor, and researcher living in Silver Springs, Maryland.*

## **Power to the People—Again**

BY STEVEN HAYWARD

**Populism and Elitism: Politics in the Age of Equality**, by Jeffrey Bell, Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 193 pages, \$21.95



Mike Luckovich  
ATLANTA CONSTITUTION

Jeff Bell is probably dying to write the sequel to this book.

Within days of its official release in May, our jaunty vice president launched *l'affaire* Murphy Brown and his attack on Hollywood and media "elites." And Bell's book is a virtual subtext to the Ross Perot phenomenon—the rise of which Bell anticipates in one passage. If being able to say "I told you so" is truly among

life's most sublime pleasures, Bell should be sporting a big grin right now.

Abstracted from these fortuitous events, however, this is an odd book. It is reminiscent of John Adams's observation that the Declaration of Independence "contains nothing that wasn't hackneyed two years before" in the Continental Congress. *Populism and Elitism* advances the usual take on liberal elitism, "values"

MIKE LUCKOVICH

politics, the 1960s, and the causes of the constipated Republican realignment. Bell even includes a retail version of Francis Fukuyama's "end of history" thesis.

Political sophisticates would be hasty, however, to dismiss *Populism and Elitism* for being either obvious or pedantic. A close reading of the key passages reveals a layering of subtlety and careful distinctions. Bell suggests that the real division between populism and elitism is not so much ideological class conflict but temperament: Populists have confidence in the people's capacity to set social and political standards and make important decisions about how to run their lives, while elitists believe the people are incompetent to do so and wish to define the parameters of social and political life themselves. The elite, in other words, desire to be a de facto National Bureau of Standards and Practices. Hence, elitists exist across the political spectrum.

The most powerful elites—in entertainment, in the media, in higher education—are of course liberal or statist. This provides the overlay for the Quayle project. Bell devotes much of this book to explaining why the liberal elites have not been chastened by the poundings their values have taken in recent national elections.

**B**ell's book is important because his intended audience—the Republican leadership elite (one might call it the Busheoisie)—doesn't have the first clue about most of his key themes. For a party and an administration of ambition without purpose, Bell provides a useful reality check.

The fundamental fact of our time, for Bell, is that our political culture is still working out the divisions generated by the upheavals of the '60s. It is a mistake, Bell's argument implies, to suppose that the Democratic Party and its liberal elites face an irremediable crisis on account of recent drubbings in national elections and are therefore destined to follow the recent path of the British Labour Party, which plans to cut its special-interest ties to labor unions and disavow explicit socialism. Bell

provides a useful reminder that the end of radical socialism does not entail the end of egalitarianism or the politics of equal result. But this battle will be fought not on the old familiar ground of economic policy but in the fever swamps of "values." In this arena, the liberal elites are endlessly resilient.

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It is astonishing that the party that won the last national election through an appeal to "values" does not have a better grasp of this. Although Republicans are adept at running on "values," they fully appreciate neither Bell's insight into the divide between elitism and populism nor the opportunity open to them were they to capitalize rightly on populism.

This isn't to suggest that Bell buys into the simple "us vs. them" theme that Republicans seem to think they can exploit forever at four-year intervals. Bell understands that the liberal elites may succeed in undermining conservative populist sentiment over time through the relentless crusade to establish—*wait for it*—"moral relativism" as the preeminent principle in American society.

Although there is little new to say about the worn-out subject (Bell makes the obligatory nod toward Allan Bloom in his analysis), Bell sharpens the issue by pointing out how value relativism relates to the liberals' cherished goal of egalitarianism; if all "values" are equal, it follows eventually that politics must make people equal as well. Not justice, but relativism, requires leveling. Call it

socialism with a Heideggerian face.

The confluence of Bell's book and Quayle's Murphy Brown argument provides an opening to one of the hot new trends among intellectuals on the right: "cultural conservatism." But Bell's careful analysis of populism and elitism in the age of moral relativism implies that the "cultural conservatism" of the Quayle project is not in the end a winning strategy. Although cultural conservatives can rightly cheer what might be viewed as an attempt at "Charles Murray for the masses," it isn't clear that the war over cultural "values" is best fought in the arena of public policy. This is the liberal elite's home field, and home-field advantage usually wins.

**T**o be ultimately successful, a genuine strategy to exploit a (perhaps only temporary) gulf between populist and elitist "values" must seek to diminish the public and political sphere for the liberal elites' values. This means shrinking the state. In other words, whether a single mother ought or ought not to have a child should not be a national political issue.

The relentless politicization of every aspect of private life reveals itself to be a form of low-grade totalitarianism. Washington cannot counteract Hollywood. To attempt to do so, Quayle-style, without shrinking the state is most likely to aggravate the problem. The Quayle project has not yet challenged the fundamental statism of our era, which sees every social problem as a political problem that requires the attention and action of Washington.

Washington could, had it the will, remove the public-policy incentives for low-income women to emulate TV characters. Such a policy would not simply cut programs but would also remind citizens that they are citizens, with responsibilities as well as rights. Not simply government, but the sufficiency of the private sphere is the deeper issue. Refusing to aggrandize the political illusion would give a whole new meaning to the old Reaganite slogan, "Just say no."

*Contributing Editor Steven Hayward is research and editorial director for the Pacific Research Institute in San Francisco.*

# MYTHING THE POINT

BY THOMAS W. HAZLETT

**H**ave you ever marveled at those successful members of disadvantaged minority groups, those who have somehow surmounted large odds to make it big in America? Aha, you disgusting bigot! You just can't control your primordial racist impulse to minimize the ravages of the white man's insidious institutional oppression. Why, you must harbor the soul of a Nazi.

Such a lashing is very close to what kept readers of the world-famous *Washington Post* from sitting down for several days this summer. In a remarkable journalistic episode of "Don't move, or I'll shoot," *Post* subscribers were bombarded with this front-page news last June: "Myth of Model Minority Haunts Asian Americans: Stereotype Eclipses Group's Problems."

This gem lands a politically correct sucker punch: Just when patriotic Americans might be feeling good about seeing discriminated-against nonwhites being rewarded for their pluck and persistence with a median family income (for all Asian-Americans) 19 percent above the general population's, they are laid cold with a haymaker on the tragedy of "model minority" status.

Of course, Asian success in White America is a bit more fearsome to Anglo sociologists than it is to wealthy suburbanites named Kim, Singh, or Tanaka. The Yellow Peril is fearsome to rabble rousers of the right for genetic reasons and to ideologues of the left for tactical ones. American (or Hong Kong) capitalism must not be given credit for transforming poor yellow into bright green. That would unsnap the dogmatic link between "white racism" and "free enterprise" and make the government look klutzy. Federal aid has done so little for Asians (outside of that generous housing program for Japanese-Americans during World War II) while heaping largesse on far less financially successful groups.

Native Americans, for instance, have

had billions spent in their name by their very own U.S. government department for the past 100 years. Yet they come in dead last in just about every measure of economic or social status. Could lead the unsophisticated to spot a dangerously suggestive correlation.

The *Post* marshaled an impressive array of facts to dismiss this silliness. The crack investigative journalists at the paper found that "while there are many Asian Americans far above the U.S. median, many also fall far below it." Unbelievable! I trust they held the presses after unearthing this late-breaking news: Asians both above and below the national average! (Apparently, the boys and girls of Lake Woebegone—all above average—are now the national norm. Their disappointment level will be way above the mean!)

A professor of Asian-American studies at Wesleyan informed us that "the 'mythology of success' has been an enormous disservice to Asian Americans who find this characterization does not at all reflect their own experience." This prompted the *Post* to comment, "Critics say the stereotype not only ignores the plight of those who don't fit, it overstates the achievements of Asian Americans....Worse, they say, it exposes Asian Americans to resentment and racial hostility and exacts a heavy toll in the stress it places on many who can't live up to those high expectations."

If we intimidate and humiliate the Asians, at least we pay them well for their decimation. Asian-American families make, at the median, 18 percent more than whites, double the income of blacks. But recent Asian immigrants who are just beginning to work bring the Asians' numbers way down. The more-established Japanese-Americans, for example, boast a median family income 37 percent above that of the U.S. population as a whole.

But don't you dare, honky boy, think of this as "success." That would be "insulting and condescending," said the

*Post*, "especially when an Asian-American small grocery store owner is hailed as a great success where a similarly well educated white would be thought of as a failure." You people (as Ross Perot would say) probably thought Asians needed role models, but these pseudo-heroes are simply used to making whites comfortable about racist oppression.

**S**uch perverse constructions of ethnic-studies scholarship thrill pale audiences, titillating white guilt (just as angry black rap music is overwhelmingly sold to white teenagers). Manipulating Caucasian hopes and fears is good clean sport, safely removed from the difficult and consequential business of devising workable, innovative ways of helping disadvantaged minorities up the economic ladder. Putting whiteness in the spotlight as a clumsy, awkward socioeconomic stage performer gives the entire community something to gawk at and more: instant proof of the ongoing existence of, if not lynch squads, racial insensitivity.

As Shelby Steele has so neatly delineated, identifying the existence of injustice grants the victims entitlement coupons payable by their oppressors. Empowerment via victimization is public-policy gold in them thar hills. I just hope—for *their* sake—that other minority groups don't become wealthy like the Asians. Because rising incomes could, for instance, tragically lead to the "myth of black success." And then white taxpayers will simply ignore the plight of Africans. There goes the neighborhood block grant.

But not to worry. Given the sophisticated design of our current array of social programs and our time-tested system of welfare dependency, I believe that the poor and disadvantaged are pretty well out of harm's way.

*Contributing Editor Thomas W. Hazlett teaches economics and public policy at the University of California, Davis.*