

What's Wrong With the Right?

Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism, by Samuel Francis, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1993, 237 pages, hardcover, \$37.50.

Samuel Francis, a nationally syndicated columnist with the *Washington Times* and a contributing editor of *Chronicles* magazine, has earned a well-deserved reputation as a defender of traditional values, as a perspicacious observer of contemporary life, and as one of the outstanding philosophers of the present-day movement favoring an end to internationalism and big government and a true renaissance of old-fashioned Americanism. The present volume, which is comprised of a series of essays published over the past 12 years, deals with a diverse array of subjects, all related by certain overarching themes.

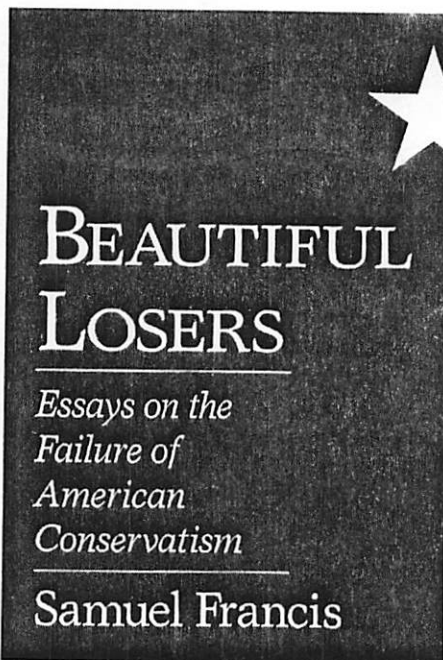
Derailed Conservatism

There is a strong tendency among American conservatives to so ideologize their outlook that they often find that they have cut the ground from beneath themselves. The support given by some conservatives to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is a perfect case in point. "Since conservatives should stand for maximum freedom in the marketplace and for free trade," these misguided ones rationalize, "then it follows that we must give the legislation our wholehearted endorsement, ignoring the rather suspicious fact that Bush, Clinton, and the internationalist clique around them support NAFTA." Throwing their support to NAFTA is exactly what many conservatives did, and doubtless these same folk will be struck with wounded surprise when, a few months or years from now, the American people curse them for their folly.

Dr. Francis seeks to define our response to such issues in the cold light of fact. The 12 Reagan-Bush years did much to derail rational thinking among conservatives and the time has come to put our house in order.

First, we must recognize that the in-

cessant hurrahs, insipid posturing, and self-congratulatory rhetoric of the "Reagan Revolution" were utterly sterile and quickly gave way to quacksalvers like George Bush, Jack Kemp, and Bill Clinton. That "revolution" was, in truth, little more than a gaudily painted drop curtain behind which the same "old elite," as Francis suggests, continued its ruinous rule.



Second, the author insists that we must take heart. There exists in this country the basis for a genuine conservative revolution, a revolution by what he calls the MARs — "Middle American Radicals." These men and women are not radicals in the leftist sense, of course, but they are so described because they aim at revolutionary change, of the sort that would bring power to those who carry the lion's share of the tax burden. Middle American Radicals, were they to gain this power, would demolish the welfare state, establish an "America First" foreign policy, dethrone plutocratic internationalists, grant appropriate authority to our local police to keep our streets safe and put criminals behind bars, halt legal and illegal Third World immigration, restore the integrity of our borders, and so forth. In other words, MARs would re-

institute all of the values, virtues, and precepts of their forebears.

More McCarthys Needed

As in all revolutions, there are inherent risks in contesting the political and economic power of a reigning establishment. Our enemies are definitely playing for keeps and are not likely to abide by notions of sportsmanship and fair play if their stranglehold on this nation — and their malignant dreams of unlimited power in a one world super-state — are threatened. Dr. Francis, in the moving and inspiring essay "The Evil That Men Don't Do," cites the experiences of the great Senator Joseph McCarthy as an example of the kind of opposition we may expect to generate among our adversaries. Senator McCarthy discovered, too late perhaps, that to challenge the position of the ruling elite is to bring down upon one's head the unmitigated wrath of the combined forces of big government, big media, big business, and the pampered mandarins of academia. Senator McCarthy's very existence, Francis contends, "was a threat to their [the establishment's] interests and power and was ultimately incompatible with their dominance in the United States." McCarthy was consequently not only driven to an early grave by the self-styled forces of official "tolerance" and "moderation," he is still, to this day, so reviled that his very name, the author notes, "is probably the most hated name in American history."

Clearly, to be so universally despised can only mean that the good senator must have frightened the proverbial wits out of the liberal establishment, so much so that they still break into cold sweats thinking about him. It was not principally his anti-communism that terrified them, Dr. Francis writes, but that he revealed "the relationship between communism and the elite" and that he launched "a militant challenge to and rejection of the elite...." Senator McCarthy turned a glaring spotlight on the connection between international communism and this country's ruling elite and "held it up, squirming and screaming, for all the American nation to see.

And what the nation saw, it did not like."

Though we must learn from McCarthy's example, and hopefully avoid some of his mistakes, we can nonetheless count the Gentleman from Wisconsin a great hero for the nascent revolution of the Middle American Radicals. Francis comments:

In recent years, particularly under the Reagan Administration, attempts have been made to formulate a more "responsible," a more "credible" and "respectable," version of conservatism that pays lip service to the anti-liberal and anti-establishment ... constituency but which in fact seeks to defuse its militancy and consolidate it into the apparatus of elite power. It is no accident that many of the older exponents of this "neo-conservatism" were themselves among the foremost critics of

McCarthyism in the 1950s and 1960s and that many of its younger exponents take the lead in urging the repudiation of McCarthyism and other symbols of militancy by "responsible conservatives."

To repudiate McCarthyism, however, would be to accept not only the establishment but also the premises and agenda on which it operates, for the complex of public and private bureaucracies that compose the establishment is inseparable from the environmentalist, utopian, and social engineering functions that the premises and agenda of liberalism express and rationalize. The American Right, then, if it is serious about wanting to preserve the nation and its social fabric and political culture in any recognizable form, must continue to embrace Joe McCarthy and the kind of militant, popular, anti-liberal, and antiestablishment movement that he was the first to express on a national scale.

George Will Case Study

We see, then, that one can separate the tradition-minded sheep from the neo-conservative goats by comparing

their respective attitudes towards the late senator and what he was striving to do. We have recourse to other litmus tests as well. We may, for one thing, examine the positions of self-proclaimed conservatives on matters such as egalitarianism and the "civil rights" movement of the '50s and '60s. The author surveys these crucial issues in a particularly trenchant chapter, "The Case of George Will."

Establishment conservative George Will, we read, is a defender of egalitarianism and thinks that Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement of the post-World War II period were just grand. Mr. Will regards forced racial in-

tions, the public treasury, and the social order.

Know the Enemy

The point of all of this, which should be evident by now, may be expressed concisely in an old aphorism: *better an avowed enemy than a pretended friend*. In other words, better a Stalin or Khrushchev who bluntly tells us he intends to bury us, than a Gorbachev or Yeltsin who plots the same thing under the cover of "reform" and "democracy"; better a Clinton who sets off alarm bells everywhere, than a crypto-liberal Bush who puts the country to sleep. The failure of American conservatism is, more than

anything else, a failure to distinguish pretended friends from true friends and, at the same time, to distinguish talk from action. Moreover, it is a failure to draw a sharp line of distinction between the ideas of the present elite and those of genuine conservatism. In the words of

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tegration and that cavalcade of transparent demagoguery known as federal civil rights laws as the "most admirable achievements of modern liberalism" and as "explicit and successful attempts to change (among other things) individuals' moral beliefs by compelling them to change their behavior."

Pseudo-moralistic breast-beating is stock in trade for George Will. Francis deftly punctures Mr. Will's balloon of hyper-heated pomposity and corrects his more grotesque errors in history and elementary logic:

It is not clear [that the changes imposed by the civil rights revolution] have led or will lead to more justice and tolerance or to greater racial harmony. They certainly did damage to the Constitution by allowing the national judicial and legislative branches to override state and local laws. They also damaged the political culture by popularizing and legitimizing the idea that every conceivable "minority" (women, sexual deviants, the handicapped, and all racial and ethnic groups) may use the federal government to satisfy its ambitions at the expense of local jurisdic-

Samuel Francis:

By allowing itself to be assimilated by the regime of the Left, American conservatism became part of a social and political force that, if not in decline, is at least confronted by a rising force that seeks to displace it, even as the regime of the Left displaced its predecessor. If the American Right can disengage from the Left and its regime, it can assume leadership of a cause that could be right as well as victorious. But it can do so only if it has the wit and the will to disabuse itself of the illusions that have distracted it almost since its birth.

That is why conservatism did not change the course of history, despite its apparent victories in the early 1980s, and that is why it did nothing to prevent the ongoing dispossession of the American middle class by a federal welfare state run amok. Samuel Francis' magnificent book is a powerful signal to conservative Americans that a fundamental change in our strategy and tactics is now a matter of life or death. ■

— FR. JAMES THORNTON