# Conservatives Against Capitalism: The Conservative Critique of Capitalism in American Political Thought

by

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Abstract

CONSERVATIVES AGAINST CAPITALISM: THE CONSERVATIVE CRITIQUE OF CAPITALISM IN AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

by

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It is commonly assumed that American conservatives, past and present, unreservedly support free-market capitalism. This dissertation, an intellectual history of conservative anti-capitalist thought in America, will challenge this assumption. It traces the historical development of a tradition in the American conservative discourse focused on the tension between conservatism and capitalism. This conservative tradition is characterized by opposition, critique and ultimately, accommodation with capitalism. While this critical tradition is no longer as central to the conservative discourse as it once had been, it illustrates how conservatives have attempted to reconcile conservative values, institutions, and tradition with the dynamism of capitalism.

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Contents

# INTRODUCTION

## Conservatives Against Capitalism

I.

In 2010, the American conservative movement was in disarray. Conservatives were struggling to deal with President Barack Obama's mandate of a more assertive government role in economic life while facing dissension in their own ranks. The Tea Party movement split conservative intellectuals and splintered the Republican Party. It grew out of a populist perception that the status of the white middle class was threatened and that their needs and interests were ignored by the government. While the movement made its public appearance following President Obama's election, its origin lay in many conservatives' deep disappointment with the direction that political conservatism has taken in the United States under the leadership of George W. Bush.

Even before President Bush completed his second term, some in the conservative movement had begun to question his conservatism: How is it that a conservative president could create a vast federal prescription drug plan for the elderly, increase federal control over education, channel billions of dollars to religious organizations for social welfare programs, and balloon the federal budget to unprecedented levels? Jeffrey Hart argued that Bush was hardly a conservative not only because of his support for the "incomprehensible and ruinously expensive" prescription drug plan and his "disastrous" adventure at nation-building in Iraq, but also for being an "unshakable ideologue...adhering to beliefs disconnected from actuality," such as supply-side

economics.[1] Bruce Bartlett suggested that Bush was a conservative "impostor" because of the recklessness of his economic policies and the expansion of the size and scope of the federal government to unprecedented levels.[2] Speaking for many, Richard Viguerie argued that conservatism has somehow been betrayed by big government conservatives that rule the GOP.[3] Indeed, are not American conservatives supposed to be doctrinaire enthusiasts of the virtues of the unregulated market and visceral opponents of social welfare, federal programs, and political centralization? Have American conservatives lost faith in free-market solutions? Have they acceded to the welfare state? What happened to the Reagan-era conservative mantra "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem"? Is political practice so far removed from political theory and ideology? Why have conservatives in power not acted as we have come to expect them to act?

A study of nearly two hundred years of American conservative thought helps to answer these questions. Although it is commonly assumed that conservatives are consistent supporters of the free market and opposed to the state—and indeed, the most important conservative economists such a Ludwig von Mises, Frederick Hayek, and Milton Friedman were laissez faire enthusiasts—this assumption does not reflect the American conservative tradition as a whole.[4] Throughout American history, conservative

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[1] Jeffrey Hart, "Ideologie Has Taken Over," *Washington Monthly* (October 2006), http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2006/0610.hart.html

[2] Bruce Bartlett, *Impostor: How George W. Bush Bankrupted America and Betrayed the Reagan Legacy* (New York: Doubleday, 2006).

[3] Richard Viguerie, *Conservatism Betrayed: How George W. Bush and other Big Government Republicans Hijacked the Conservative Cause* (New York: Bonus Books, 2006).

[4] While making exceptions for a handful of conservative thinkers, scholars of American conservatism presume most conservatives are free-market enthusiasts. See Charles W. Dunn and J. David Woodward, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Landham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003); Gregory L. Schneider, *Conservatism in America since 1930: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Since 1945*,

thinkers have recognized the destructive effects of laissez-faire capitalism on individuals, traditional institutions, communities, cultural heritage, and the social order. In fact, since the Industrial Revolution, American conservatives have offered a penetrating critique of laissez-faire capitalism and endorsed various alternatives to it ranging from a program of economic decentralization to a conservative welfare state.[5]

Over the last two centuries the conservative critique of capitalism has developed from the pro-slavery thinkers' radical repudiation of capitalism to one that generally accepts capitalism as the only economic alternative. Yet even the most accepting of contemporary conservatives are aware of the tension between the fluidity of a free market system and the rootedness and stability of tradition. Challenging capitalism's power to trump, distort, and consume the forces of tradition, heritage, culture, and community, conservatives have offered a number of alternatives to laissez-faire capitalism that involve the state actively intervening in the economy. There is, in short, an important tradition in American conservative thought that is as critical of laissez-faire capitalism as it is of the liberal welfare state or the socialist alternative.

This survey will make several contributions to the study of American conservatism and political thought. First, it will recover a forgotten tradition of

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(Wilmington, Delaware: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996); Stephen Eric Bonner, *Ideas in Action: Political Tradition in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1999); Stephen L. Newman, "Liberalism & the Divided Mind of the American Right," *Polity* 22.1 (Autumn, 1989), pp. 75-96; David Gress, "Conservatism in Europe and America," *The World & I* (October 1986) .

[5] The idea of an American conservative welfare state is different from the European formulation of it. Gosta Esping-Andersen, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990) characterized conservative welfare states as "strongly corporatist" where "a state edifice is perfectly ready to displace the market as provider of welfare." The idea of an American conservative welfare state is much closer to what Esping-Andersen characterized as a liberal welfare state except that in conservatives' vision the role of the market and traditional associations in providing welfare is even greater. According to Esping-Andersen, the liberal welfare state is a state in which "means tested assistance, modest universal transfers, or modest social insurance plans predominate." In addition, "benefits cater mainly to the low-income working class, entitlement rules are strict and often associated with stigma, benefits are typically modest, and the state encourages the market, either passively, by guaranteeing only a minimum, or actively, by subsidizing private welfare schemes."

American thought that has challenged the core values and normal operating procedures of unbridled capitalism. Next, it will show that this tradition has changed over time, conservatives having gone from a robust critique of capitalism to a more nuanced vision of a conservative welfare state. Finally, it will show that while certain elements of the Bush administration's domestic policy may have seemed contrary to conservative ideals, they were in fact the product of a long-standing tradition—and evolution—within American conservative thought.

II.

This study will fill a void in the vast literature on American conservative thought by examining a conservative tradition that is both statist and critical of capitalism.[6] Scholars of American conservatism have noted that individual conservative thinkers have expressed ambivalence about capitalism. But none has identified an ongoing critique of capitalism from the right or systematically analyzed the development of such a critique. George Nash, the premier intellectual historian of the right, makes only a passing reference to the critique of laissez-faire capitalism in the work of Peter Viereck, Russell Kirk, and Robert Nisbet.[7] Alan Crawford devotes a small section of his work to the New

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[6] I define capitalism as an economic system where the means of production are privately held and operated for profit. It is a system of resource allocation where prices are based on the law of supply and demand. It is premised on the idea that self-interested individuals participate in a competitive market where they buy and sell their goods, services, and labor. As Adam Smith put it in *The Wealth of Nations*, " it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantage." Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (New York: The Modern Library, 2000) p. 14. It is a system where the vast majority of people earn their living by selling their labor-power for a wage to the owners of the means of production. The driving forces of the system are profit maximization, accumulation of capital, and the incessant need to innovate and expand in order to remain competitive. In capitalism, writes Ellen Meiksins Wood, "the production of goods and services is subordinate to the production of capital and capitalist profit. The basic objective of the capitalist system, in other words, is the production and self-expansion of capital." Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London: Verso, 2002 [1999]), p. 2-3.

[7] See Nash.

Right's critique of contemporary capitalism.[8] Jerome Himmelstein correctly argues that there is rift between libertarians and traditionalists over "pristine" capitalism. "Although not thoroughly anti-capitalistic," writes Himmelstein, "many traditionalists viewed existing capitalism as part of the problem."[9] Tod Lindberg points to a neo-conservative critique of capitalism.[10] And in an article titled "Endgame" Corey Robin observes that neo-conservatives have worried that the free enterprise system has made the United States inept to the task of empire.[11] While these individual works offer some insight, none of them fully accounts for the longevity, breadth, depth, and variation of the conservative opposition to or dissatisfaction with capitalism in the United States.

Perhaps the anti-capitalist thought in American conservatism has been little discussed because of the Hartzian assumption that the U.S. is thoroughly liberal.[12] While scholars have disputed Hartz claim arguing that in addition to the liberal political tradition, a classical republican tradition and a nativist illiberal tradition the claim that America's economic tradition is thoroughly capitalist is more generally accepted.[13] This has been especially true in the literature on American conservatism. Yet, as this work will illustrate, this has not always been the case. For one, prior to the U.S. Civil War the Southern slave system offered an economic model that was rooted in the tradition of half

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[8] Alan Crawford, *Thunder on the Right: The "New Right" and the Politics of Resentment* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).
[9] Jerome L. Himmelstein, *To the Right: The Transformation of American Conservatism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), p. 55.
[10] Tod Lindberg, "Neoconservatism's Liberal Legacy," *Varieties of Conservatism in America*, ed. Peter Berkowitz (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2004), pp. 129-158.
[11] Robin, Corey. "Endgame: Conservatives After the Cold War," *Boston Review* (February/March, 2004) http://bostonreview.net/BR29.1/robin.html
[12] Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America* (New York: Harcourt, Bruce, Javanovich Publishers, 1955).
[13] On America's multiple traditions see Rogers M. Smith, Civic Ideals: Conflicting Ideas of Citizenship in U.S. History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997). For a great study elements of English medievalism in economic life that had been transplanted to the U.S. see Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

of the states in the union. After the defeat of Southern slavery, for lack of an established alternative, conservatives could not reject capitalism outright. However, the fact that conservatives did not reject capitalism entirely does not mean that they completely endorsed it either. In fact, many conservatives were rather ambivalent economic liberals. It is out of this ambivalence to capitalism that there emerged a conservative tradition rich with criticism of and alternatives to the prevailing economic order.

The most detailed analysis of the conservative critique of capitalism, upon which the present study builds, is Eugene Genovese's *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism*.[14] Genovese suggests that the conservative critique of capitalism is rooted in the Southern conservative tradition, which was formulated by the antebellum pro-slavery thinkers, the Southern Agrarians, and the paleoconservatives of today. Genovese's scholarship has done much to illustrate a conservative tradition that is critical of capitalism. However, he sees this critique exclusively as the product of the Southern tradition. His analysis, therefore, ignores the critiques of capitalism offered by conservatives outside the Southern tradition. These conservatives include Theodore Roosevelt, Peter Viereck, Robert Nisbet, Russell Kirk, and the neoconservatives, all of whom have had greater influence over the trajectory of American conservatism and public policy than Genovese's southern critics. The present study remedies Genovese's oversight by broadening our understanding of the variety of thinkers who properly belong in this critical tradition and by illustrating the diversity of thought within it.

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[14] Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitation of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Any study of American conservatism immediately encounters the problem that self-described conservatives and scholars of conservatism often fail to agree upon a definition of conservatism. In an influential article "Conservatism as an Ideology," Samuel Huntington suggests that there are three theories of conservatism. First, is what he calls the "aristocratic theory" of conservatism that defines conservatism as a historically specific ideology of the feudal-aristocratic classes opposed to the French Revolution, liberalism and the rise of the bourgeoisie at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century. The second theory of conservatism he poses holds that conservatism is not a historically or class-specific ideology but is instead a philosophy committed to universal values such as "justice, order, balance, and moderation."[15] And finally, there is the situational theory of conservatism that sees conservatism as devoted to defending the established order and institutions and reflecting a disposition toward gradual reform rather than radical change. Huntington suggests that the situational theory is the closest approximation of the conservative archetype, Edmund Burke.

The United States has never had a historically specific conservatism of the feudal-aristocratic classes although many defenders of slavery went to great lengths to prove otherwise. Therefore, the task of defining American conservatism has focused on the latter two theories, which account for the variety of conservatives surveyed in this work. For instance, Peter Viereck and Clinton Rossiter, among others have argued that the defining characteristic of conservatism is a disposition to conserve established traditions and institutions, which in post-World War II American include a regulated capitalism and

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[15] Samuel P. Huntington, "Conservatism as an Ideology," *The American Political Science Review* (June, 1957), pp. 454-473.

the liberal welfare state. Conversely, Russell Kirk, Robert Nisbet, and others suggest that conservatism is "an autonomous system of ideas" that is defined by universal values that are applicable in all historical circumstances. Kirk argues that conservatism is "a way of looking at the civil social order." While conservatives have defended a wide variety of social orders and social institutions, there are several general principles to which conservatives "in some degree may be said to have agreed implicitly." According to Kirk these include beliefs in all of the following: a transcendent moral order to which society ought to conform; the belief in social continuity or an organic social order; the prescriptive value of tradition or, in the words of Burke, "the wisdom of our ancestors"; prudence, which translates into a commitment to slow reform rather than radical change; variety and inequality as essential to social stability; human imperfectability and therefore the imperfectability of social institutions.[16]

American conservatism is further complicated by the diversity in the substance of its ideas. Alan Brinkley suggests that conservatism is "not easy to characterize" since it lacks ideological "consistency and clarity" and encompasses a "broad range of ideas, impulses, and constituencies" that are "conflicting and incompatible."[17] So internally conflicted is the conservative tradition that Nash refrains from defining conservatism at all. In the widely praised and influential *The Conservative Intellectual Tradition in America since 1945*, Nash writes, "I doubt that there is any single, satisfactory, all-encompassing definition of the complex phenomenon called conservatism, the content of

[16] Russell Kirk, "Conservatism: A Succinct Description." *National Review* (September 3, 1982), pp.1080-1104.
[17] Alan Brinkley, "The Problem of American Conservatism," *American Historical Review* (April, 1994), pp. 409-429.

which varies enormously with time and place. It may even be true that conservatism is inherently resistant to precise definition."[18]

Students of postwar American conservatism see it as an amalgam of two strands of thought: traditionalism and libertarianism, held together by a mutual aversion to communism. In a 2008 empirical study of contemporary conservatism, John Zumbrunnen and Amy Gangl conclude that the two "separate and distinct" stands "uneasily coexist" under the umbrella of American conservatism.[19] Traditionalist conservatism is a political perspective that esteems social order, hierarchy, and social stability. It promotes traditional values and institutions such as the family, religion, the nation, heritage, and established custom. These conservatives express an aversion to rapid change. Traditional values are supposed to transmit a sense of continuity across generations, and bind individuals together in mutual dependence, responsibility, and duty. These established relations and traditions ground individuals in their communities. They give individuals a sense of belonging, without which they would feel alienated, frustrated, and alone. They also give individuals greater meaning in life, imparting a standard by which they ought to conduct themselves and evaluate behavior, institutions, and designs for social change. Most important for this work, traditional institutions and culture are fundamental to a capitalist society because they restrain individual self-interest, temper the instability that is a by-product of the incessant demand for innovation, expansion, and change within the competitive market, and mitigate the disintegrative social effects of the market.

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[18] Nash, xiii.

[19] John Zumbrunnen and Amy Gangl, "Conflict, Fusion, or Coexistence? The Complexity of Contemporary American Conservatism," *Political Behavior* (2008), pp. 199-221.

Libertarian-inclined conservatives' central concern is ensuring freedom and individualism. For libertarians, society is an association made up of self-contained contractual relations among free individuals. As such, an attempt to direct social relations in the name of the common good or some transcendent values erodes individual freedom and leads to totalitarianism. Libertarians advocate a capitalism largely free of government regulation. They argue that the free market is a fundamental component of political liberty. It is a bulwark against collectivism and the state, which are seen as threats to individual liberty and community. Capitalism is conducive to the development of individual character. It is the most efficient mechanism for the allocation of labor, goods, and services. More than any other economic arrangement, it has enabled large populations to live in material comfort. It is inherently just and natural because it rewards talent, intelligence, ingenuity, hard work, and merit.

Both traditionalist and libertarian conservatives are hostile to the liberal welfare state because they view it as the product of social engineering experiments rooted in abstract rationality and a belief in equality and human perfectibility. Such experiments are often taken to be harbingers of socialism or communism. Libertarians argue that the fiscal and regulatory policy of the liberal welfare state is misguided, counterproductive, and an assault on individual freedom. For traditionalists, the liberal welfare state undermines the family and local community, which are necessary restraining mechanisms on human self-interest.

Despite their shared opposition to the liberal welfare state, there is a clear tension in the conservative camp concerning the value assigned to individual freedom, and thus to the free market, for order and the traditional community. A belief in the sanctity of

private property and a mutual anti-communism have held traditionalists and libertarians uncomfortably together. Indeed, the Cold War was the pivotal moment in the conservative critique of capitalism. It was in this period that the traditionalist critiques of capitalism were de-emphasized. Anti-communism transformed the conservative discourse over capitalism into a debate between capitalism and communism and nothing in between. The Cold War was the moment when traditionalists reconciled themselves to capitalism and dropped their most radical indictments of the economic system.

However, with the fall of Soviet communism the fissure within America conservatism between traditionalists and libertarians has again become a source of open tension. For libertarians the aim of political society is the freedom of the individual, which is threatened not only by the state but also by traditional institutions. In the words of Frank Meyer, a pivotal figure in post-World War II conservatism, "unless men are free to be vicious they cannot be virtuous. No community can make them virtuous."[20] For traditionalists, society is not merely an assemblage of individuals spontaneously pursuing their own self-interests. Established social institutions are the transmitters of virtue and the basis of social harmony and stability. As such, traditionalists often reject or are uneasy with laissez-faire capitalism and a minimally vigilant state. Indeed, traditionalist journals such as *Modern Age* have feature articles with titles such as "Conservatives and Libertarians: Uneasy Cousins," "The American Conservative Movement of the 1980s: Are Traditional and Libertarian Dimensions Compatible?", "Conservatives and Libertarians View Fusionism: Its Origins, Possibilities, and Problems," and "Traditionalism and Libertarians: Two Views," all of which are testament to

[20] Nash, p. 160.

conservatives' failure to reconcile individualism and the free market with community, order, and stability.

Though suspicious of political centralization, traditionalists see a role for the state in strengthening traditional values and institutions and guaranteeing social peace and stability. While traditionalists agree that capitalism undermines traditions and values that conservatives prize, they do not agree about which values and traditions are most urgently in need of conservation. For some traditionalists the emphasis is on preserving and regenerating a sense of nationalism, for others it is a yeoman republic, for others still it is slavery. Moreover, traditionalists also disagree over the extent and role the state should play in conserving and promoting the values, traditions, and institutions they esteem most.

III.

The critique of capitalism in American conservative thought seems to have developed along two tracks: a radical track and a reformist one.[21] The first track offers a radical critique of the established form of capitalism, repudiating the centralizing tendency of capitalism and providing a thorough-going alternative that idealizes the decentralized way of life of the slave plantation, the yeoman family farm, or petit-bourgeois, white Middle America. Originally, the defenders of slavery criticized capitalism in language similar to that of radicals on the opposite side of the political spectrum. Like many leftists, conservatives criticized capitalism for exploiting, alienating, and immiserating the producing classes; for inculcating a self-centered and self-interested economic individualism; for creating a class of dependent but difficult to

[21] The reform track of conservatism to which I refer has been otherwise variously called "progressive," "big government," and "corporatist" in the conservative literature.

control “wage slaves;” and for undermining the traditional institutions that historically have restrained egoistic individualism and forestalled class antagonism. For pro-slavery thinkers, capitalism was more exploitative than slavery: it severed the personal bonds among individuals that are the basis of mutual obligations that restrain human self-interest. George Fitzhugh and the pro-slavery thinkers of antebellum America were by far the most uncompromising critics of capitalism, contrasting its inhumanity and amorality with an idealized vision of order, community, and mutual regard located, they argued, on the Southern slave plantation. They defended the institution of slavery as the polar opposite of an amoral and disintegrative capitalism.

Among 20th century conservative critics, John Crowe Ransom, Allen Tate, Frank Lawrence Owsley, Lyle H. Lanier, Andrew Nelson Lytle, and Donald Davidson offered the most radical indictment of capitalism. The subject of chapter three of this work, the Southern Agrarians, claim that these thinkers, as they were collectively known, believed capitalism diminished or threatened art and culture by turning them into commodities. Influenced by nineteenth-century conservative critiques, the Southern Agrarians indicted capitalism as an economic system destructive of community and personal relations. The focus of their critique was corporate capitalism, which they saw as dispossessing an inherently traditional and conservative yeoman class. The Southern Agrarian alternative called for a radical program of corporate expropriation, decentralization, and the redistribution of land to landless whites on the model of an agrarian republic. The Southern Agrarians sought to restore to the U.S. a sort of Jeffersonian yeoman class of farmers living according to the rhythms of nature, in awe of God, and rooted to their local community, culture, and heritage.

Today the ideas of this radical track are voiced by paleoconservatives, albeit in a significantly modified form. Unlike their predecessors, paleoconservatives do not indict the productive relations under capitalism as inherently exploitative and alienating. Instead, they lament how the free movement of finance, goods, and people under global capitalism threatens the ethnic, racial, and language groups that have built and maintained the republican tradition of the United States. Worship of the market and of profits gives capitalism a cosmopolitan ethic that undermines American identity. While they oppose both global capitalism and the liberal regulatory and welfare state, they embrace an American ethnic nationalism through which the state is transformed into an instrument for the benefit of the white "middle American radical."

The second track of the critical tradition, which currently occupies the conservative mainstream, is critical of capitalist instability, arguing that capitalism foments class conflict and that it perpetuates a set of egoistic values that threaten the polity and the economic system itself. These theorists accept large, centralized, bureaucratic enterprise, but they endorse government action to restrain the excesses of capitalism and, through development of the welfare state, to encourage a value system that is less self-interested and more civic-minded. The roots of this track can be traced to Theodore Roosevelt, Brooks Adams, and Peter Viereck; its contemporary exponents include Irving Kristol and the neo-conservatives, and the administration of George W. Bush.

This second track emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in the hands of Theodore Roosevelt and Brooks Adams and briefly influenced public policy during Roosevelt's years in the White House. For Roosevelt and Adams the selfish pursuit of

private interest and unrestrained economic competition created a culture focused on egoism and commerce that was leading the nation to internal discord and international weakness. Capitalist greed made capital an "irresponsible sovereign" that created fertile ground for radicals, revolutionaries, and other agitators to prey on people's discontent. Roosevelt argued that capitalist rapacity was undermining the capitalist system itself: capitalist greed and egoism needed to be restrained in order to save capitalism. Roosevelt and Adams therefore envisioned a strong active state administered by an enlightened bureaucratic apparatus acting as a restraint upon big capital.

Adams and Roosevelt believed that capitalist life was essentially decadent and boring and that it made men and the nation effeminate and feeble. "We cannot…be content to rot by inches in ignoble ease within our borders, taking no interest in what goes on beyond them, sunk in a scrambling commercialism," wrote Roosevelt.[22] He longed for the strenuous life, the life of "desire and power to strive after great things."[23] The life of "striving for great things" was not to be found in corporate boardrooms or on Wall Street but in the civilizing mission of empire. Through a regulated economy together with an imperial foreign policy the class divisions and social instability might be transcended by a new spirit of national unity and purpose.

The two decades between 1945 and 1965 were heady times for American conservatives. The liberal welfare state erected in Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal provided the political context for major debates among conservatives over the direction of modern American conservatism. The publication of *The Road to Serfdom* in 1945 by Hayek and *Human Action* in 1949 by von Mises revived the libertarian defense of

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[22] Theodore Roosevelt, *Theodore Roosevelt: An American Mind*, ed. Mario R. DiNunzio (New York: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 185.
[23] Roosevelt, p. 184.

capitalism, which had been rendered suspect by the Great Depression. In 1949 Peter Viereck published *Conservatism Revisited: A Revolt Against Revolt*, which sought to divorce conservatism from a mere legitimization of capitalist wealth, reviving a traditionalist brand of conservatism that esteemed traditional values, stability, order, and community. Much of the conservative critique of capitalism in the 1950s and 1960s centered on the deleterious effects of capitalism upon community and the traditional institutions that helped restrain economic individualism. However, unlike earlier critiques, there was little discussion of the effects of capitalism upon the worker and labor, or of exploitation and alienation. Despite the disappearance of this radical critique, there began acrimonious debate among conservatives over how to contain the threat to community and conservative values posed by both laissez-faire capitalism and the burgeoning liberal welfare state.

Viereck recognized that the natural dynamism of the capitalist system destroyed community and produced atomized individuals.[24] He suggested that the proper task of conservatism was to preserve the established order, which included the regulatory and welfare state. He supported some New Deal programs and the unionization of labor as a means of restoring community within a dynamic capitalist system.[25] Robert Nisbet, by contrast, focused his criticism on the propensity of the state, as well as the capitalist economy, to centralizate and monopolize. For him, capitalism had been made possible by the growth of a powerful state, which over the course of its development destroyed centers of authority lodged in associations and communities.[26] In *The Quest for Community*, Nisbet argued that a centralized state and capital created atomized

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[24] Peter Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited* (New York: The Free Press, 1962 [1949]), pp. 20, 134.
[25] Viereck, pp. 36-39.
[26] Robert Nisbet, *The Quest for Community* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 105.

individuals by destroying communities and associations that helped restrain rapacious and exploitative individualism. In the tradition of Burke, Nisbet argued that a successful capitalism depended on non-capitalistic entities for its survival.[27] Although he recognized that a centralized power such as the state or monopoly capital was more efficient at delivering aid or services than traditional associations had been, he worried that centralized power co-opted the functions of traditional organizations, generated a crisis of authority, and produced alienated and atomized individuals.[28]

Heated dispute raged within conservative circles over how the tension between capitalism and community was to be reconciled. Indeed, conservatives openly and acrimoniously differed over what exactly there was left to conserve as well as over the proper role of the state in a conservative polity. While both Viereck and Nisbet distrusted centralized political power Viereck endorsed some New Deal social programs and emphatically argued that Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Adlai Stevenson were part of America's conservative tradition.[29] Nisbet opposed the liberal welfare state but did envision a role for the state in helping to re-legitimize traditional associations. Government, he believed, must recede from the provision of social services and transfer authority back to traditional associations, meanwhile helping them to provide social services.[30] Viereck wrote kindly of trade unions, and with Nisbet, maintained that they were a conservative force because they were the embodiment of "organic society" or "intermediaries" between the atomized individual and the bureaucratic centralized state.[31] Viereck's antidote was, however, far too liberal for Russell Kirk, Frank Meyer, William F.

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[27] Nisbet, p. 68.
[28] Nisbet, p. 54.
[29] Viereck, p. 127.
[30] Nisbet, p. 270.
[31] Viereck, p. 136; Nisbet, p. 240.

Buckley Jr., and the editorial staff of the *National Review*. And so by the mid 1950s, Viereck was effectively banished from the conservative movement.[32] It was during this period when the two main strands of the conservative critique of laissez-faire capitalism were most openly and fully debated and when the ideas that would come to be embodied in the contemporary conservative welfare state were first formulated.

Contemporary neoconservatives are the descendants of the conservative welfare state tradition of Brooks Adams, Theodore Roosevelt and Viereck. Irving Kristol writes, "[Neo-conservatives] are impatient with the Hayekian notion that we are on 'the road to serfdom.' Neo-cons do not feel that kind of alarm or anxiety about the growth of the state in the past century, seeing it as natural, indeed inevitable."[33] Like Roosevelt and Viereck, the neoconservatives argue that state intervention in economic life is not always opposed to conservative principles. Unlike Roosevelt, who constructed only fragments of the regulatory state, and unlike Viereck, who sought to conserve the liberal welfare state of the New Deal, Kristol sought to formulate a specifically conservative welfare state. While critical of Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society and a forceful advocate for cutting many welfare state programs, Kristol continued to maintain that in order for capitalism to survive, some of its most harmful effects needed to be ameliorated by what he called a "paternal" or "social insurance" welfare state, i.e. the New Deal. Kristol's "paternal" welfare state would reform—rather than abolish—welfare and would continue to provide Social Security and Medicare.[34]

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[32] Nash, p. 142.
[33] Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion," *The Neocon Reader,* ed. Irwin Stelzer (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 35.
[34] Kristol, "The Conservative Welfare State," *The Neocon Reader*, p. 143.

Kristol, Daniel Bell, and the neo-conservatives also reconstituted the indictment of capitalism offered by Roosevelt and Adams that asserted that the capitalist ethos eroded the values necessary for its survival; that capitalism emasculated individuals and undermined national strength and unity; and that capitalism led to a boring and nihilistic social and political existence. Instead, neoconservatives argued that capitalism undermined its own moral foundations, specifically, the Protestant ethic which had helped form personal character and curtailed the passion for self-gratification.[35] Capitalism was undermining itself by making passé the personal virtues upon which it was built. While Kristol and Bell admitted that bourgeois values such as hard-work, thrift, and delayed gratification might be pedestrian and boring, these character traits were necessary restraints on otherwise unbridled economic individualism.

Recent neoconservatives, however, are no longer satisfied with the formulation that capitalism will undermine itself. According to Lindberg this critique has been eclipsed by the realization, in neoconservative circles, that it is "harder and harder to find evidence regarding the 'depleting moral capital' of capitalism."[36] Lindberg continues:

> I take this view of the reliance of capitalism and market economics to be conventional wisdom now—and, moreover, to be correct. Perhaps the system is eventually doomed to collapse under the weight of its cultural contradictions—but not necessarily *soon*, and not beyond the ability of sound public policy to effect a delay. The sensible mind having been opened to the possibility that the system was not so quickly destined for the ash heap of history, it was thereby opened to the possibility that the system was not destined for the ash heap of history at all.[37]

Lindberg is certainly correct that contemporary neoconservatives no longer argue that capitalism erodes its moral and ethical foundations. Capitalism has proven to be

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[35] Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1979), p. 63.
[36] Lindberg, p. 145.
[37] Lindberg, p. 146.

remarkably resilient, and Kristol's foreboding has not come to pass. Yet, neoconservatives have not altogether departed from a critique of capitalism, as Lindberg assumes.

Rather than calling for a restoration of the Protestant ethic or denouncing the installment plan as Irving Kristol had done in his earlier work, contemporary neoconservatives complain that capitalism diminishes civic-mindedness and deprives the nation of its strength and will to power. As Theodore Roosevelt argued nearly a century earlier, neoconservatives suggest that the nation needs to be rescued from its boredom, decadence, and narrow focus on self-gratification. The post Cold War world has given America an exceptional opportunity to realize global peace and prosperity via imperial endeavors. William Kristol and David Brooks argue that contemporary capitalist economic arrangements have a deleterious effect on the character of individuals and the nation. Capitalism, they claim, undermines not capitalist values but masculinity, martial values, civic responsibility, national unity and strength. It has created individuals and national character un-befitting a strong nation and empire.[38] Through a renewed imperial project, neoconservatives, seek to mitigate the egoistic values that capitalism fosters and renew a spirit of national community.

For centuries European conservatives recognized the destructive nature of capitalism on established institutions, sensibilities, and traditions and were able to repudiate it because they had an alternative in feudal and aristocratic institutions.[39] It is

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[38] Robin, "Endgame."

[39] For a discussion of European conservative anti-capitalism, see the chapter on Justus Moser in Jerry Z. Muller, *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Western Thought* (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), pp. 84-103; Michael Lowy, "The Romantic and Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization," *Theory and Society* (November, 1987), pp. 891-904; Robert Sayre and Michael Lowy, "Figures in Romantic Anti-Capitalism," *New German Critique* (Spring-Summer, 1984), pp. 42-92.

assumed, however, that since the United States lacked these institutions, capitalism was something that American conservatives did not challenge. Indeed, American conservatives could not unconditionally repudiate capitalism as many continental European conservatives had done. However, as this study will illustrate a critique of capitalism does, in fact, exist in the U.S. It is distinct from its European counterpart and takes a specifically American character in the way that it has always attacked capitalism but has also tried to reconcile it with American and conservative values and institutions that capitalism seems to undermine. Given the constraints of the conservative discourse in America, namely that capitalism has been part of the American tradition from the very beginning, the American conservative critique of capitalism is unique.

American conservatism is not a monolithic body of thought, even when it comes to capitalism. To pigeon-hole conservatives as enthusiastic advocates of laissez-faire capitalism is to overlook a long tradition that has been both critical of laissez-faire capitalism and has offered alternatives to it. Within this critical tradition, conservative thinkers have challenged capitalism on a number of fronts, including its deleterious social, cultural, and political impact. From these critiques, conservatives have offered various alternatives that reject laissez-faire economics and the liberal welfare state. To be sure, contemporary conservatives are less anti-capitalist than conservative critics once were, but this does not mean that they are opposed to state intervention in the economy. The Tea Party refrain to President Obama's attempt to reform health care of "keep government out of my Medicare" suggests that not only is the conservative public suspicious of government, but that it also believes that Medicare is something to which it

is entitled.[40] The "compassionate conservatism" of George W. Bush and the anti-globalization economic nationalism of the paleoconservatives are manifestations of a critical tradition that has been searching for a conservative alternative to laissez-faire capitalism.

IV.

Most surveys of American conservative thought are organized by—and focus on—individual theorists or groups of theorists such as libertarians, traditionalists, neoconservatives, and so on. This study, by contrast, will focus on a specific and hitherto unexplored theme in conservative thought—the critique of capitalism—and how that theme, with its associated vision of an alternative society, has developed over time. This is not, therefore, a study of a body of thought associated with one thinker. Instead, it is a study of an element in the writings of various thinkers and how that element is representative of the conservative ideas at a given time. My method is historical, situating the development of ideas in the economic, social, and political soil from which they have sprouted and examining how the changing material context affects those ideas. After all, the theorists presented here not only were writing about the abstract concept "capitalism" but were also reacting to the social reality that they believed capitalism had a role in creating. Historical context also helps explain why certain critiques of capitalism were emphasized at a given moment and why they may have become secondary or completely ignored in another. It thus aids in accounting for the success or failure of the alternatives that conservative critics of capitalism have offered in place of the social, political, economic, and intellectual status quo.

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[40] Kate Zernike, "With No Jobs, Plenty of Time for Tea Party," *New York Times* (March 27, 2010).

In chapter one I examine the critiques of capitalism offered by Southern defenders of slavery such as John C. Calhoun, James Henry Hammond, and George Fitzhugh in the decades leading up to the Civil War. In chapter two I analyze the critiques of Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt and their commitment to statism and imperialism as alternatives to a disintegrating decadent capitalism. The subject of chapter three is the Southern Agrarian indictment of industrial capitalism and the yeoman farmer ideal to which they pointed as an alternative. In chapter four I examine the critiques of capitalism offered by post-World War II conservatives such as Peter Viereck, Russell Kirk, and Robert Nisbet and their attempt to disentangle conservatism from laissez-faire capitalism and define the characteristics and substance of a conservative welfare state. In chapter five, I explore the neoconservatives' cultural critique of capitalism, their statism, and renewed quest for empire. And, finally, in chapter six I analyze the populist, nationalistic, and xenophobic critiques of global capitalism by paleoconservative thinkers Patrick Buchanan and Samuel Francis.

# CHAPTER I

## Emerging Capitalism and its Conservative Critics: The Pro-Slavery Critique of Capitalism in Antebellum America

Capital is a cruel master.

George Fitzhugh[1]

### I. Introduction

In *The Slaveholders Dilemma*, Eugene D. Genovese argues that the origins of Southern anti-capitalist conservatism lay with the pro-slavery thinkers of the antebellum period.[2] Indeed, pro-slavery conservatives of the Old South, John C. Calhoun, James Henry Hammond, and most uncompromisingly George Fitzhugh, among others, offered the most cogent, bitter, and sustained critiques of capitalism in the history of conservative thinking in America.[3] Central to their critique of capitalism and their defense of slavery was their indictment of the wage system as a key source of social disorder, radicalism, and revolutionary upheaval in the first half of the 19th century American North and Western Europe. In contrast to the disintegrative effects of the Northern free labor system, argued pro-slavery thinkers, the paternalistic order of the Old South that slave productive relations made possible was better equipped to mitigate the antagonism between the owners of the means of production and the laboring masses and insure the

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[1] George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All! or Slaves Without Masters* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 20.

[2] Eugene D. Genovese, *The Slaveholders Dilemma: Freedom and Progress in Southern Conservative Thought, 1820-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992).

[3] There is excellent scholarship on the diversity of pro-slavery thinking. Genovese. *The Slaveholders Dilemma*; Drew Gilpin Faust, ed., *The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Eric L. McKitrick, ed., *Slavery Defended: The Views of the Old South* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

existence of a hierarchical social order and social stability upon which progress and civilization is founded.

The Southern slaveholder critique of capitalism has its roots in and was intimately bound with the defense of slavery from attacks by abolitionist intellectuals, journalists, members of the clergy, and sympathetic elected officials both in the United States and in Europe. They used these arguments against the free labor system against abolitionists who attacked Southern slavery but ignored the brutalization, misery, and suffering of the wage laborers in the North. However, the slaveholder critique of capitalism and their concomitant defense of the South's "peculiar institution" should not be dismissed as merely the arguments of a self-interested ruling class intent on preserving their position of economic, social, and political class privilege. Their critique and analysis of the social consequences of capitalism is insightful and penetrating, not the least of which because they saw themselves and the Old South as a distinct social order from the capitalist world of the North and Western Europe. The idea that drives the pro-slavery thinkers' arguments against capitalism is their commitment to social order and stability. For them, capitalism undermines both by fostering class warfare, a spirit of selfish individualism, and the wide appeal of radicalism, all of which are ingredients for revolutionary upheaval and a return to barbarism. In the words of Fitzhugh, "Free society," of which the wage labor system was a central component, "everywhere begets Isms, and that Isms soon beget bloody revolutions."[4]

For pro-slavery thinkers the root cause of the incompatibility of capitalism and the maintenance of social order and stability is capitalist productive relations, in particular the system of wage labor. Pro-slavery thinkers argued that capitalist productive relations

[4] George Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 10.

were more exploitative and immiserating of the laboring classes than feudal or slave productive arrangements. According to the defenders of slavery, free laborers were worked harder, longer, and with greater intensity. In return they received a mere pittance of the fruits of their labor. And, perhaps most importantly, they were cast out when their labor was no longer employed profitably. This exploitative and rather tenuous relation between the owners of capital and the laborers, which made Northern capital so profitable and life of the wage earner so miserable and insecure, brought the antagonism between employers and the employed into high relief. Their relations are purely instrumental, severed from any human significance and moral obligation. The result is that the "front ranks" to use Calhoun's terminology, do not exert enough control over the laboring masses and in turn the laboring masses lose any sense of allegiance to their social superiors and established institutions.

In direct contrast to capitalist productive relations, pro-slavery thinkers argued that Southern slave productive relations generate more benevolent, less exploitative productive relationship because they are based on paternalistic bonds of mutual obligation. Labor relations in slave societies were therefore more harmonious than those in free societies, which made the South more consonant with order and stability and less susceptible to democratic inroads on property or the influence of radical doctrines making popular headway in the North and in Western Europe.

II. Emerging Capitalism in the U.S.

The intellectual and political debate over the issue of slavery and abolition has a long history in America stretching back to the colonial era. Slavery had been defended on numerous grounds, sometimes in contradictory fashion. These included the practical

necessity of slavery as essential to the economic development of the South and the U.S. Many defended slavery as a means of averting race war. Ethical and theological justifications for slavery cited Scripture and argued that slavery served God's purpose by "civilizing" and "Christianizing" Africans. Some cited pseudo-scientific evidence arguing that blacks were physiologically and intellectually inferior to whites.[5] Others justified slavery in the abstract as the proper station for the "inferior" irrespective of race. Beginning in the 1830s these justifications for slavery were joined with arguments stressing the positive good of slavery comparatively beneficial for slaveholders, slaves, and society than the system of free labor. Drew Gilpin Faust, among the foremost scholars of antebellum pro-slavery thought, suggests that the defense of slavery in the 1830s changed not only in "style and tone" but also in "substance."[6] She suggests that proslavery thought became more "self-conscious and systematic" as a reaction to the strengthening of anti-slave sentiment following the Missouri debates in 1818-1820 and the flood of abolitionist propaganda in the 1830s.[7] According to Peter Kolchin, in the late antebellum period the defense of slavery became "less hesitant, tentative, and apologetic…more insistent on the positive virtues of slavery and the society it fostered."[8]

An important element of that substantive change in the proslavery narrative had to do with the transformation of American capitalism then under way. In the thirty years preceding the Civil War a critique of the wage system became standard among thinkers

[5] See Josiah Nott "Types of Mankind" and Samuel Cartwright "The Prognathous Species of Mankind," *Slavery Defended*.
[6] Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery* p. 5.
[7] Faust, *The Ideology of Slavery* pp. 4, 9.
[8] Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery: 1619-1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), p. 191.

defending Southern slavery.[9] The defenders of slavery defined the South and its productive relations in paternalistic language and attributed the stability of the Southern polity directly to the slave mode of production. Key to their defense of slavery was their attack on the system of wage labor and its disintegrative economic, social, and political consequences. The defenders of slavery attributed the incidence of pauperism, food riots, strikes, the appeal of radical doctrines, and other expressions of class conflict in the North and in Western Europe as the consequence of the system of wage labor. The slave South remained largely free from these social convulsions because, as pro-slavery thinkers saw it, because of the paternalistic system of production based on slave labor were mutually beneficial to master and slave and the antidote to the perennial antagonism between the owners of the means of production and labor. It was a critique that could not be effectively made until the mid-1820s when the United States began to industrialized and its urban, wage-earning population grew rapidly.

There has been considerable scholarly dispute with regard to whether the Old South was really all that distinct from the capitalist North. James Oakes in *The Ruling Race* argues that southern slaveholders were just as concerned with efficiency, market fluctuation of crop prices, rationalization and routinization of work patterns, and profit maximization as were Northern capitalists. Rather than being distinct from them, argues Oakes, the slaveholder was the South's version of the industrial capitalist running "factories in the fields."[10]

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[9] By 1860 the attack on Northern wage labor was common fare among pro-slavery thinkers and a rejoinder to Abolitionist arguments against Southern slavery. Wilfred Carsel, "The Slaveholders' Indictment of Northern Wage Slavery," *The Journal of Southern History* (November., 1940), pp. 504-520.

[10] James Oakes, *The Ruling Race: A History of American Slaveholders* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982).

Critical of Oakes' view have been Eugene D. Genovese, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Peter Kolchin, who have argued that the slave South was distinct from the capitalist North. According to Genovese, while the Southern slaveholders operated in an international market in the exchange of goods their relations of production remained "pre-bourgeoisie." The slaveholding ruling class of the antebellum South governed over a system that was, "based on slave relations of production and yet deeply embedded in the world market." Therefore, according to Genovese and Fox-Genovese, " in this essential respect, the Old South emerged as a bastard child of merchant capital and developed as a non-capitalist society increasingly antagonistic to, but inseparable from, the bourgeois world that sired it."[11] As the authors have argued the Southern slaveholder was a hybrid that was distinctively more paternalistic than their industrial capitalist Northern counterparts.[12]

These interesting scholarly debates notwithstanding, I am not so much concerned about whether the slaveholders actually were capitalists, or pre-bourgeois patriarchs, or something in between. Instead, the concern here is how the defenders of slavery saw themselves and the social order they were defending. Pro-slavery thinkers self-image was certainly paternalistic. For them, the Old South had clear distinctive characteristics distinguishing it from the free labor North. This paternalism was rooted in slave productive relations that influenced all other forms of social life in the antebellum South. Slavery was central to Southern life and came to be equated as its distinctive feature. As Kolchin argues, in the half-century before the Civil War, slavery and the idea of the South

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[11] Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Fruits of Merchant Capital: Slavery and Bourgeois Property in the Rise and Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 5.
[12] See Genovese, *The Slaveholders Dilemma*; Fox-Genovese; and Kolchin.

were inseparable in pro-slavery intellectual discourse.[13] While few defenders of slavery would go so far as Fitzhugh and Hammond and defend slavery in the abstract as a system appropriate regardless of race, even more tempered pro-slavery critics of the free labor system, like Calhoun, highlighted the essential paternalism of the master-slave productive relation.

In the years following the War of 1812 to the beginning of the Civil War the United States was a nation in the midst of significant economic and political transformation. Advancements in technology and mechanization transformed the nature of the American economy. In particular, an improved power loom transformed the cotton textile industry from a cottage industry into a factory system enterprise.[14] A predominantly rural agrarian nation was becoming increasingly urban and industrialized. The populations of established east coast cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Baltimore multiplied, burgeoned by the large number of immigrants fleeing the European continent and the marked decrease in death rates as a result of greater stability in the food supply.[15] As the North began to industrialize manufacturing output and wage-labor employment surged dramatically. While the self-employed and the slave labor force in the U.S. quadrupled between 1800 and 1860, the wage-earner labor force grew twenty-fold.[16] According to historian Eric Foner, by 1860 the number of wage-earners

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[13] Kolchin, pp. 190-193.
[14] Joseph G. Rayback, *A History of American Labor* (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 50.
[15] See David R. Meyer, *The Roots of American Industrialization* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), p. 27. Between the years 1800 and 1860 New York City grew from a city of 79,216 to an urban center of 1,174,779. Philadelphia' population grew from 61,559 to 565,529. Baltimore was a city of 26,514 inhabitants in 1800 and a city of 212,418 inhabitants in 1860. Boston's population grew from 24,937 to 177,840 in 1860.
[16] Stanley Lebergott, "The Pattern of Employment Since 1800," *American Economic History*, ed. Seymour E. Harris (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1961), pp. 281-310.

outnumbered the self-employed members of the American labor force.[17] The changing character of American capitalism from one characterized by small independent producers to one that was increasingly industrial and based on the division between capital and labor signaled to many perceptive thinkers the social and political changes to come.[18]

Thinkers from across the political spectrum sensed that the social, political, and economic world that they had known in the first few decades since the nation's founding was being radically altered by the emergence of wage-labor capitalism. Artisans and other skilled workers were gradually replaced by machines and the cheap unskilled labor needed to operate them. Open conflict between a rising capitalist class and a growing wage-earning working class became more frequent and intense.[19] Workers banded together forming Laboring Societies and organized Workingmen's political parties. Through these associations the working class participated in labor actions with increasing frequency, demanding higher wages, the right to strike, the 10-hour workday, restrictions on monopoly, the redistribution of property, as well as political rights.[20] These popular democratic movements pushed the political system toward greater inclusiveness and

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[17] Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), p. 59.

[18] Economic historian disagree on the precise year of the "take off" of the Industrial Revolution in America. However, as Louis M. Hacker suggests it is widely agreed upon that by the year 1860 the U.S. was already an industrialized nation. On competing theories of industrial development in the U.S. see Louis M. Hacker, *The Course of American Economic Growth and Development* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1970), p. 69.

[19] See Philip Foner, *History of the Labor Movement in the United States*, vol 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1947). Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492-Present* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003), pp. 211-251.

[20] Edward Pessen, *Most Uncommon Jacksonians: The Radical Leaders of the Early Labor Movement* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1967); Rayback; Michael J. Thompson, *The Politics of Inequality: A Political History of the Idea of Economic Inequality in America* (New York: Graduate Center, 2005); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

political equality by winning universal white manhood suffrage.[21] Radical republican indictments of capitalism emphasized the ways in which the wage system robbed the laborer of the fruits of her labor, made her condition miserable, while enriching the owners of capital. They also closely linked economic life with political life arguing that capitalism undermined the America's republican political institutions and egalitarian commitments immortalized in the *Declaration of Independence*. Radicals sought to democratize social life by advocating a Jeffersonian inspired small producer vision of economic life that gave substance to the promise of political equality. Egalitarian thinkers like Thomas Skidmore, Stephen Simpson, Langston Byllesby, John Pickering, and a young Orestes Brownson welcomed the democratization of American political institutions during the Jacksonian Era, but warned against the danger to republican institutions resulting from the vast inequality of wealth and power produced by emerging capitalism. For them emerging industrial capitalism signaled a form of domination and dependence characteristic of European feudalism and Southern chattel slavery.[22]

Radical reformers in the mid-nineteenth century sought to liberate workers from the oppressive yoke of capitalist domination by taking on the banks, breaking up large industrial enterprises, and advocated for policies directed toward greater economic equality. Their schemes were informed by the Lockean social contract theory embodied in the *Declaration of Independence* and the civic republicanism of the Anti-Federalists. For conservative thinkers liberal ideas of natural rights, equality, the contractual nature of society and government were erroneous philosophical abstractions with no basis in

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[21] In the four decades before the Civil War the states amended their constitutions by dropping property qualifications for the franchise. By 1860 every state in the Union had eliminated property qualifications for the vote. See, Foner, p. 52.

[22] Thompson, pp. 57-98.

experience. Calhoun and Fitzhugh argued that while it is true that humans are by nature self-interested they are not born in a "state of nature" with rights prior to and opposed to society. Nor are they born free and equal. As Hammond stated in *A Letter to an English Abolitionist*, "I repudiate, as ridiculously absurd, that much lauded but nowhere accredited dogma of Mr. Jefferson, that 'all men are born equal."[23] Along with the ancients, conservatives argued that humans are by nature a social and political beings. Society developed organically, not out of a social contract. Humans are born into social relations characterized by hierarchy and authority. Fitzhugh cited Aristotle and most importantly Robert Filmer's *Patriarcha* for his view of society and government as social organizations modeled on the patriarchal family. It is only in society where humans can in the words of Calhoun "preserve and perfect himself."[24] In addition, there is no such thing as society without government. Government, according to Calhoun, is necessary because it controls self-interested individuals and classes and insures the preservation of society and social life. Government is thus not only necessary for human existence but has its origin in human nature since humans cannot live in a social state without some mechanism to control and mediate between conflicting individual and class interests. These conservatives viewed Lockean social contract theory was dangerous because it laid the philosophical foundation for egalitarianism and an individualistic ethic that questioned the philosophical justification for an organic and divine understanding of the origin of society, government, and social institutions and relations based on hierarchy, inequality, and authority. These relations bound individuals to each other in a mutually

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[23] James Henry Hammond, "A Letter to an English Abolitionist," *The Ideology of Slavery*, p. 176.
[24] John C. Calhoun, *A Disquisition on Government and Selections from the Discourse* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1953), p. 6.

dependent community, each with a distinct set of rights and obligations that made order and stability possible.

For pro-slavery thinkers, even ones like Calhoun that did not discard all of liberal theory, wedding the notions of equality and liberty and combining them with the miserable condition of the Northern working class pointed to popular democratic inroads against property and all established institutions. According to Fitzhugh, "All modern philosophy converges to a single point—the overthrow of all government, the substitution of the untrammeled 'Sovereignty of the Individual' for the Sovereignty of Society, and the inauguration of anarchy. First domestic slavery, next religious institutions, then separate property, then political government, and, finally, family government and family relations, are to be swept away. This is the distinctly avowed programme of all able abolitionists and socialists."[25] Southern defenders of slavery worried that the insecurity, misery and exploitation experienced by the laboring classes under capitalism made radical agrarian and socialist doctrines appealing. Were these doctrines to gain a mass following, as conservatives continually worried they might, the hierarchical social order and social stability is imperiled by revolution making a return to barbarism inevitable.

## III. The Conservative Critique of Capitalist Exploitation and Immiseration

The pro-slavery critics of capitalism were not a philosophically united lot. Some expounded a racial theory of slavery suggesting that it was only appropriate for an inferior race of people. Hammond defended Southern slavery as, "a moral and humane institution productive of the greatest political and social advantages."[26] Several thinkers repudiated the race theory of slavery and defended slavery in the abstract as in the words

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[25] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 190.
[26] Hammond, "A Letter to an English Abolitionist," *The Ideology of Slavery*, p. 170.

of Fitzhugh, "the natural and normal condition of labor whether white or black." Fitzhugh rejected the assumptions of Lockean liberalism and erected his defense of slavery on the basis of experience, tradition, and natural inequality. More commonly, as with Calhoun, most pro-slavery thinkers retained liberal assumptions regarding progress while qualifying the notion that "all men are created equal" to mean equality under the law, for white men, at least. Likewise, many believed that slavery and capitalism were not mutually exclusive. Despite these differences among pro-slavery thinkers themselves there is a theme that united them all. The pro-slavery critique of capitalism was driven by a materialist theory of revolution, which suggests that social upheavals are the products of a degree of economic exploitation and immiseration. The defenders of slavery did not critique capitalism out of a sense of distributive justice, concern for individual liberty, commitment to a republican political economy, or interest in each individual realizing his or her human potential. Instead, their critique of capitalist exploitation centered on the belief that due to their precarious and miserable condition the wage-earning class will be transformed into a radical, ungovernable, revolutionary force. Unlike the North and Western Europe where the conditions were fertile ground for radicalism the slave-holding South, wrote Hammond, was devoid of the "remarkable religious Isms…Mormonism and Millerism…Shakers, Rappists, Dunkers, Socialists, Fourrierists, and the like," because "there is no material here for such characters to operate upon."[27]

Along with classical liberals, republicans, socialists, Southern conservatives believed that wealth and value was the product of the labor that had been expended to create it. According to Calhoun:

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[27] Hammond, "A Letter to an English Abolitionist," *The Ideology of Slavery*, pp. 180-181.

> Let those who are interested remember that labor is the only source of wealth, and how small a portion of it, in all old and civilized countries, even the best governed, is left to those by whose labor wealth is created. Let them also reflect, how little volition, or agency the operatives in any country have in the question of its distribution—as little, with a few exceptions, as the African of the slave holding States has in the distribution of the proceeds of his labor.[28]

For the defenders of slavery the exploitation of labor was something that existed in every form of civilization. It was the bedrock of the timeless accomplishments of the greatest civilizations of the western world including the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. According to Calhoun:

> There never has yet existed a wealthy and civilized society in which one portion of the community did not, in point of fact, live on the labor of the other. Broad and general as this assertion, it is fully borne out by history. This is not the proper occasion, but if it were, it would not be difficult to trace out the various devices by which the wealth of all civilized communities has been so unequally divided, and to show by what means so small a share has been allotted to those whose labor it was produced, and so large a share to the non-producing classes.[29]

Egalitarian inclined thinkers pointed to the exploitation of labor as the source of oppression transforming economic, social, and political relations into ones of domination and dependence contrary to the maxim that "all men are created equal." Meanwhile, southern conservatives defended the exploitation of labor and the class structure as a consequence of natural inequality and necessary for social progress. Natural rights and the idea that "all men are created equal" are dangerous fictions without basis in history, experience, or sound judgment. As a result of the natural inequality of humans, which is

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[28] John C. Calhoun, *The Papers of John C. Calhoun* vol. XIII pp. 66 (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1980).
[29] Calhoun, *The Papers* XIII, pp. 395-396.

everywhere observable, there is as a result, an inequality of condition. It is this inequality of condition "between the front and the rear ranks," according to Calhoun, "which gives so strong an impulse to the former to maintain their position, and to the latter to press forward into their files…this gives to progress its greatest impulse.[30] James Henry Hammond in a 1858 speech in the U.S. Senate echoed Calhoun's thinking that a pre-requirement for progress and civilization is the exploitation of a class. Hammond dubbed this exploited class of laborers the "mud-sill of society".

> In all social systems there must be a class to do the menial duties, to perform the drudgery of life. That is, a class requiring but a low order of intellect and but little skill. Its requisites are vigor, docility, fidelity. Such a class you must have, or you would not have that other class which leads progress, civilization, and refinement. It constitutes the very mud-sill of society and of political government; and you might as well attempt to build a house in the air, as to build either the one or the other, except on this mud-sill.[31]

Yet, despite accepting on principle the exploitation of one class by another the defenders of slavery saw in capitalist productive relations a harshness and dehumanization that was distinct from what they conceived to be a milder form of exploitation under feudalism and Southern slavery.

The slaveholders' critique of wage labor consisted of several propositions. According to historian Wilfred Carsel the slaveholder critique of wage labor made the following assumptions: the condition of the free laborer, already miserable, was getting worse; that the free labor system was itself a form of slavery; and that the wage system,

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[30] Calhoun, *Disquisition*, p. 44.
[31] Hammond, "Mud-sill Speech," *Slavery Defended*, pp. 121-125.

or wage slavery, was worse than Southern chattel slavery.[32] This perspective was ubiquitous among Southern pro-slavery critics of capitalism. In *Exposition and Protest*, Calhoun recognized how capitalist productive relations tended toward increasing exploitation and making the condition of workers more miserable. "Under the operation of the system, wages must sink more rapidly than the prices of the necessaries of life, till the operative will be reduced to the lowest point—when the portion of the products of their labor left to them, will be barely sufficient to preserve existence."[33] William J. Grayson in his poem "The Hireling and the Slave," compared the existence of the feudal serf and the Southern slave with that of the European wage laborer. He concluded that the misery and pauperism so commonplace in Western Europe was the consequence of the free labor system.

> There, unconcerned, the philanthropic eye
> Beholds each phase of human misery;
> Sees the worn child compelled in mines to slave
> Through narrow seams of coal, a living grave,
> Driven from the breezy hill, the sunny glade,
> By ruthless hearts, the drudge of labor made,
> Unknown the boyish sport, the hours of play,
> Stripped of the common boon, the light of day,
> Harnessed like brutes, like brutes to tug, and strain,
> And drag, on hands and knees, the loaded wain:[34]

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[32] Carsel, p. 504.
[33] Calhoun, quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Vintage Press, 1989), p. 105.
[34] William J. Grayson, "The Hiriling and the Slave," *Slavery Defended*, p. 60.

Edmund Ruffin in *The Political Economy of Slavery* explained how Northern industrialization and the accumulation of capital was predicated on the ever increasing immiseration of the producing class.

> When the greatest possible amount of labor is thus obtained for the lowest amount of wages that can barely sustain life and strength of labor, there has been attained the most perfect and profitable condition of industrial operations for the class of capitalists and employers, and also for the most rapid increase of general and national wealth. But these benefits are purchased only by the greatest possible amount of toil, privation, and misery of the class of laborers under which they can live and work.[35]

For his part, Fitzhugh understood that the exploitation and pauperization of labor was the source of wealth inequality under capitalist productive relations. "All capital is created by labor," declared Fitzhugh, "and the smaller the allowance of the free laborer, the greater the gains of his employer."[36]

Pro-slavery thinkers also understood that the exploitative productive relations of the free labor system reached beyond the workplace where the laborer was daily being robbed of the fruits of his labor. Among the repercussions of these productive relations were the appalling conditions of poverty and misery that became widespread in cities in the North and in Western Europe. Hammond argued that one "would meet more beggars in one day, in any single street of the city of New York, than you would meet in a lifetime in the whole South."[37] Grayson held that capitalist Europe was marked by social ills such as drunkenness, prostitution, disease, pauperism where "unburied corpses taint the

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[35] Edmund Ruffin, "The Political Economy of Slavery," *Slavery Defended*, p. 78.
[36] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 25.
[37] Hammond. "Mud-sill Speech," *Slavery Defended*, p. 123.

summer air, and crime and outrage revel with despair."[38] Fitzhugh, having traveled outside of the South only once in his lifetime, a short trip to New Haven, Connecticut to debate abolitionist Wendell Phillips, learned much about the exploitation and misery of the laboring classes second hand. He read British Parliamentary Reports on the conditions in England's textile mills and iron mines, criticisms of industrial capitalism by English Christian Socialists and drew heavily on British conservative journals such as the *Westminster Review*, *Blackwood's Magazine*, the *North British Review*, and the *Edinburgh Review*, which he quoted extensively in *Cannibals All*. Fitzhugh identified with Benjamin Disraeli and Tory socialism. But he was most profoundly influenced by Thomas Carlyle's critiques of laissez-faire of Manchester economics.[39] Reminiscent of a famous passage from the *Communist Manifesto*, which there is no indication that he had read, Fitzhugh suggests that the free laborer's troubles do not end once his hours of toil are over:

> Capital, irresponsible capital, begets, and ever will beget, the immedicable vulnus of so-called Free Society. It invades every recess of domestic life, infects the food, its clothing, its drink, its very atmosphere, and pursues the hireling, from the hovel to the poor-house, the prison, and the grave. Do what he will, go where he will, capital pursues and persecutes him.[40]

Many conservatives thought that capitalist exploitation was both materially and morally worse than other productive relations like feudalism and chattel slavery. While many of the defenders of slavery esteemed European feudalism none of them thought it was desirable or realistic to establish European feudalism on American soil. Yet, many of

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[38] Grayson. "The Hireling and the Slave," *Slavery Defended*, p. 61.
[39] C. Vann Woodward, *American Counterpoint: Slavery and Racism in the North-South Dialogue* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1971), pp. 114-115.
[40] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, pp. 202-203.

them thought highly of the bonds that bound lords and serfs in an unequal but mutually dependent and personal relation. Defenders of slavery thought that the Old South was the closest approximation to feudal relations possible in the U.S. Pro-slavery thinkers often illustrated, in idyllic fashion, the reciprocal, sentimental, and mutually advantageous nature of the intercourse between the Southern slave owner and his chattel. They used these alternative modes of social and economic production as a measure by which capitalist relations were evaluated.

Because of the impersonal nature of the capitalist mode of production where the measure of value and success of a relationship is determined on a spreadsheet the personal, human relationship upon which human sympathy, generosity, and benevolence is founded was lost. For the defenders of slavery the idealized feudal manor or the Southern plantation created a self-sustaining community replete with personal interactions between persons throughout the hierarchy. Under capitalism the relationship between the strong and successful, or the owners, on the one hand, and those who toiled on the other had been reduced to use Carlyle's phrase, which Fitzhugh cited, the "cash nexus." Drew Gilpin Faust in her study of Hammond's 1836-1837 travels to Western Europe emphasizes how he abhorred how his relations with innkeepers, drivers, and personal servants were dominated by financial transactions which he took as "ego-threatening" and "anxiety-provoking" for fear of being taken advantage of and cheated.[41]

Pro-slavery thinkers idealized feudal lords and Southern slave masters as paternalistic models of human charity, justice, mercy, affection, and protection. Indeed for pro-slavery thinkers, whether their defense of slavery rested on abstract or racial

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[41] Faust, "A Slaveowner in a Free Society: James Henry Hammond on the Grand Tour, 1836-1837," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* (July, 1980), pp. 189-206.

foundations, they all agreed that slavery's most morally redeeming characteristic was that it was an institutional arrangement that obligated the strong to afford protection for the weak.

On the other hand, the capitalist was often portrayed as the embodiment of unadulterated mechanistic brutality. According to Senator Hammond:

> The primitive and patriarchal, which may also be called the sacred and natural system, in which the laborer is under the personal control of a fellow-being endowed with the sentiments and sympathies of humanity, exists among us. It has been almost everywhere else superseded by the modern artificial money power system, in which man—his thews and sinews, his hopes and affections, his very being, are all subjected to the dominion of capital—a monster without a heart—cold, stern, arithmetical—sticking to the bond—taking over the "pound of flesh,"—working up human life with engines, and retailing it out by weight and measure.[42]

Cold, hard, competitive, calculating, and unmerciful was the capitalist as vilified by the defenders of slavery. In a competitive economy the capitalist was devoid of human identity and a sense of fellowship or sympathy for others. Fitzhugh writes in typically bombastic fashion:

> You are a Cannibal! and if a successful one, pride yourself on the number of your victims quite as much as any Fiji chieftain, who breakfasts, dines, and sups on human flesh—and your conscience smites you, if you have failed to succeed, quite as much as his, when he returns from an unsuccessful foray. [43]

The capitalist was the prime destructive and conquering agent of the epoch. "We contend," wrote Fitzhugh, "that it was the origin of the capitalist and moneyed interest government, destined finally to swallow up all other powers in the State, and to bring about the most selfish, exacting, and unfeeling class despotism."[44]

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[42] Hammond, "Letters on Slavery," Carsel, p.513.
[43] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 17.
[44] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 107.

Pro-slavery thinkers made much use of the contrast between atomistic capitalism and protective Southern chattel slavery. In a passage the captures the essence of the contradistinction Fitzhugh wrote:

> Capital commands labor, as the master does the slave. Neither pays for labor; but the master permits the slave to retain a larger allowance from the proceeds of his own labor, and hence "free labor is cheaper than slave labor." You with the command over labor which your capital gives you are a slave owner—a master, without the obligations of a master. They who work for you, who create your income, are slaves, without the rights of slaves. Slaves without a master![45]

Having indicted Northern capitalism for its exploitative productive relations and for the miserable conditions in which much of its population lived Southern defenders of slavery then proceeded to illustrate how the institution of slavery protected those most likely to be victimized by capitalist relations. Key to the slaveholders' contention that the free labor system was more exploitative than slave productive relations were the arguments made by proponents of capitalism who boasted of capitalism's efficiency and profitability. Pro-slavery thinkers turned those arguments meant to praise the free enterprise system into arguments condemning it. Fitzhugh, lambasted Northern capitalists for boasting of the efficiency and profitability as an unequivocal admission of their exploitation of the laborer and indifference toward the miserable state the laborer is left in when his labor has been used up. Fitzhugh argued that slavery was less efficient and less profitable precisely because it allowed slaves to keep a larger reward for their labor while capable of work and afforded protection and aid when he is no longer able to

[45] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 17.

work.[46] Thus the defenders of slavery, at least in their self-image, distinguished themselves from the owners of wage laborers by spurring the priority of profitability and efficiency. Instead they thought of slave-owning as a selfless contribution to the human race. Hammond writes, "We [slave owners] must, therefore, content ourselves with our dear labor, under the consoling reflection that what is lost to us, is gained to humanity; and that, inasmuch as our slave costs us more than your free man costs you, by so much is he better off.[47]

Even Calhoun could not refrain from stoking the paternalistic self-image of the slaveholder. In a speech on the Senate floor in 1837 Calhoun made an unflattering comparison between the condition of the Southern slave and the Northern free laborer. In this passage Calhoun very clearly stated that the Southern slave is better treated as chattel than the free laborer under capitalism:

> I may say the truth, that in few countries so much is left to the share of the laborer, and so little extracted from him, or where there is more kind attention to him in sickness or infirmities of age. Compare his condition with the tenants of the poor houses in the most civilized portions of Europe—look at the sick, and the old and infirm slave, on one hand, in the midst of family and friends, under the kind superintending care of his master and mistress, and compare it with the forlorn and wretched condition of the pauper in the poor house.[48]

The central point in the comparison of capitalism with chattel slavery was not merely that the latter was less exploitative of the laborer than capitalism. It was taken for granted by pro-slavery thinkers that laborers are exploited under all of these systems. Instead, the point of the comparison was that Southern chattel slavery bound the laborer to his

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[46] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 15.
[47] Hammond, "A Letter to an English Abolitionist," *Slavery Defended*, pp. 184-185.
[48] Calhoun, *The Papers* XIII, p. 396.

superior (slave owner) in relations of mutual dependence. It was a paternalistic relationship that placed obligations on the lord or master to protect and provide for his subjects in time of plenty and scarcity. Under capitalism these bonds did not exist. The capitalist's obligation to his workers ended with paying compensation for their labor in the form of wages. If the laborer was unable to find employment for whatever reason, be it because there is no employment to be found, or he is too sick, too old, or too infirm for gainful employment it is not the fault of the capitalist nor is it his obligation to offer aid.

> Now, under the delusive name of liberty, you work him [the laborer] "from morn to dewy eve"—from infancy to old age—then turn him out to starve. You treat your horses and hounds better. Capital is a cruel master. The free slave trade, the commonest, ye the cruelest of trades.[49]

In the nineteenth century it was not uncommon for republican and socialist critics of capitalism to employ the concept of wage slavery to describe the dependent condition of the factory worker. For them, wrote Eric Foner, "the metaphor of wage slavery drew on immediate grievances, such as low wages, irregular employment, the elaborate and arbitrary work rules of the early factories…But at its heart lay a critique of economic dependence."[50] Indeed, the idea that emerging capitalism was producing a state of economic dependence was central to the economic critique of radical republicans at the time. According to these radicals, republican institutions required that its citizens be economically autonomous agents acting in the interest of the common weal in an environment of independence, relative equality, and public spiritedness. But radicals were not the only ones employing the concept of wage slavery in their critique.

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[49] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 20.
[50] Eric Foner, "Free Labor and Nineteenth Century Political Ideology," *The Market Revolution in America*, eds. Melvyn Stokes and Stephen Conway (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), p. 105.

Conservatives, Calhoun and Fitzhugh all did so as well. As was the case for radical republicans, for conservatives the idea of wage slavery or comparing capitalist labor to slave labor implied economic relations of dependence and domination. Unlike latter conservatives who could only imagine government as an agent of coercion and subordination, antebellum Southern conservative critics saw coercion taking place in capitalist economic relations. They pointed to the very real prospect of eviction and starvation as coercive masters compelling the "free laborer" to be exploited by capital in a competitive market economy. "Capital exercises a more perfect compulsion over free laborer than human masters over slaves," declared Fitzhugh, "for free laborers must at all times work or starve."[51] However, unlike radicals who sought to liberate the laboring classes from these despotic relationships with employers into which they had been forced by economic necessity, conservative critics argued that the combination of despotism and liberty emerging out of capitalist relations was detrimental to the livelihood of working class individuals. The problem with capitalism was not that it created economic relations of domination and subordination in the workplace. The problem was that capitalist economic relations were based on a contractual relationship that bound the employer and the employee, albeit in a very unequal relationship, to a time-bound exchange of labor for wages. Beyond that arrangement and other rules and regulations that governed the behavior of the employee during employment hours, the employer and the employee had no more obligations to one another. As a consequence, under the contractual relationship the employer could not exert adequate governance over his laborers after the workday was over as had the feudal lord or the slave master.

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[51] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 32.

Fitzhugh argued that the wretched and dependent condition of free laborers in Great Britain and in the Northern states of the Union was not the product of acts of selfishness and greed on the part of individual capitalists. He understood that the competitive system forced both individual capitalists and individual laborers to act in selfish and self-seeking ways. In a competitive system altruism is an act of "suicidal self-sacrifice", Fitzhugh argued. Thus the antagonism between individuals and between classes was an inevitable byproduct of capitalism. In *Sociology for the South*, Fitzhugh wrote that Hobbes was wrong when he described the state of nature as a state of war. Humans are naturally social and gregarious animals, he maintained. Instead, wrote Fitzhugh, the state of war more accurately described the antebellum capitalist North, "a civilized state of universal liberty and free competition."[52]

IV. The Conservative Critique of the Capitalist Ethic

An essential aspect to the conservative indictment of capitalism in the antebellum period was the moral ethic the economic system inculcated. The morality of capitalism is "simple and unadulterated selfishness", wrote Fitzhugh.[53] Pro-slavery conservative critics of capitalism argued that plantation life created a social environment conducive to personal intercourse between master and slave through which bonds of mutual affection, goodwill, generosity, and respect were established. These paternalistic relations of dependence and control, they argued, made less harsh and exploitative the extraction of surplus labor. These personal relations formed the basis upon which the mutual obligations of master and slave were exercised. The obligation of the slave, of course, was to be obedient and work productively on his master's plantation. In return the

[52] George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1965), p. 32.
[53] Fitzhugh, *Sociology* p. 20.

master's obligation was to protect the slave from the dangers of the world beyond the plantation. Only under this hierarchical relation, argued the defenders of slavery, could the exploitation and misery of the weak (the slave) be minimized. But for defenders of slavery these paternalistic relations were justifiable on grounds beyond that they were less exploitative of labor and afforded a more secure material existence for the producing class than was had in the free-labor North. In a competitive labor market the relationship between the employer and the employee is devoid of human significance. As has been already noted, the defenders of slavery of understood how human labor had been commodified in the North and once it could be no longer profitably employed the laborer was left to fend for herself.

On the other hand, the way pro-slavery thinkers saw it, not only did the slave owner give a greater share of the fruits of the slave back to him in the form of daily sustenance, shelter, care and protection in old age, but established personal relations with his slaves. Slave owners knew their slaves' names and families, marked occasions such as weddings and harvests, and commonly took great interest in their slaves' religious instruction. Of course this was only one half of the paternalistic relation a slave owner had to his slaves. The other side of it, the sexual exploitation of female slaves, the cruelty of corporal punishment, and the trauma of family separation as many slaves were sold or forced to accompanied their masters moving West, were dismissed as wild exaggerations and untrue, or ignored.[54] Instead an economy based on chattel slavery allowed for the practice of Christian morality of caring for the weak, the sick, the old, the helpless, and

[54] Kolchin, pp. 120-127. See also Hammond, "A Letter to an English Abolitionist," *The Ideology of Slavery*.

infirm. Northern wage labor, argued Fitzhugh and other defenders of slavery made Christian morality impracticable.

> Christian morality can find little practical foothold in a community so constituted that to "love our neighbor as ourself" or "to do unto others as we would they should do unto us" would be acts of suicidal self-sacrifice. Christian morality, however, was not preached to free competitive society, but to slave society, where it is neither very difficult nor unnatural to practice it.[55]

Instead of the virtues of Christian morality, capitalist morality completed a revaluation of values where former vices of "avarice, circumspection, and hard dealing" were regarded as virtues.[56] The capitalist morality of "let us alone, save who can, and the devil take the hindmost" created relationships between individuals and classes that made it nearly impossible for individuals to act morally toward one another.

> "[the] moral code [that of political economy] is one of the purest selfishness. Neither the Epicurean, nor the Sadducee professed as low, selfish and groveling amorality as that which our prevalent political economy inculcates.[57]

As a consequence of the sheer misery, poverty, and atomistic condition of the masses an environment where widespread violation of Christian strictures governing licentiousness and crime was almost inevitable. Defenders of slavery were fond of reminding their readers of the prevalence of crime in Great Britain and in the Northern states of the Union contrasting those morally corrupting environs with the absence of immoral behavior among the producing classes under European feudalism and in the slave states of the Union.[58] Pro-slavery thinkers recognized that by liberating the poor laborer from the master's authority to compel moral and religious instruction, deference and obedience to

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[55] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 30.
[56] Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, p. 38.
[57] Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, pp. 115-116.
[58] Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, pp. 35-36.

the personal rule characteristic of domestic slavery and instead enslaving the laborer to the impersonal rule of the capitalist market where his labor is commodified, exploited, and his condition made miserable it was no surprise that workers gravitated toward radicalism.

V. Capitalism, Class Conflict, and the Threat to Social Order

For the defenders of slavery it was the paternalistic relations of personal domination and control that was key to the social benefits of the slave system. The culmination of the conservative indictment of capitalism in the antebellum period lay in capitalism's tendency toward exacerbating class conflict. Pro-slavery thinkers understood the essential conservatism of paternalism and its role in maintaining social order. "Wherever paternalism exists," writes Genovese, "it undermines solidarity among the oppressed by linking them as individuals to their oppressors."[59] The Northern contractual wage system lacked this stable, long-lasting paternalistic relation. Since their wages were inadequate and their employers were under no obligation to offer aid and protection in times of crisis workers turned to mutual aid societies, unions, and political associations for protection, aid, and identity. It was in these organizations where wage-laborers built solidarity and grew conscious of their collective strength. In these associations the seeds of radicalism germinated. Fitzhugh thought of such associations as dangerous but he knew they were attempts to fill a vacuum of protection and aid provided by the paternalism of the institution of slavery in the South absent in the North.

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[59] Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York:Vintage Books, 1976), p. 6.

Theodore R. Marmor correctly argues, Calhoun's critique of Northern wage slavery was primarily concerned with its effects on the stability of Northern society.[60] In a letter to James F. Simmons in 1847 Calhoun warned, "Where wages command labor, as in the non-slaveholding States, there necessarily takes place between labor and capital a conflict, which leads, in process of time, to disorder, anarchy, and revolution."[61] For pro-slavery thinkers the exploitation and misery of wage labor, capitalist imperatives toward hard dealing, profitability, efficiency, and in the words of Fitzhugh, a social organization of "slaves without masters" described the social and economic environment of the antebellum North. A spirit of egoistic selfishness as the overriding ethic necessary for survival in free society. It brutalized the laboring masses and resulted in extreme material deprivation and misery which produced a political and social environment conducive to the popularization of radical ideas and class war. The comparison between capitalism on the one hand, with feudalism and chattel slavery on the other, that conservative thinkers often made regarding the level of exploitation and immiseration of the working class and the lack of protection and aid provided by the strong and successful to the weak served to highlight the source of heightened class tensions in the capitalist world of the North and Western Europe. According to Fitzhugh, "in the absence of domestic slavery, men are placed in competitive and antagonistic positions toward each other. This separation of interest and antagonism begets continual rivalry, hatred, intense discord and war, which political economy exasperates and increases, by encouraging exclusive devotion to men's self-interest."[62]

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[60] Theodore R. Marmor, "Anti-Industrialism and the Old South: The Agrarian Perspective of John C. Calhoun," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* (July, 1967), pp. 377-406.
[61] Calhoun, *The Papers* XXIV, p. 190.
[62] Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, p. 200.

Ultimately, the concern over the level of cooperation between classes that the relations of production afforded under capitalism on the one hand, and chattel slavery on the other, were important because they indicated how the competing economic systems averted or aggravated class conflict. Writing to Thomas Clarkson, an English abolitionist, Hammond declares, "Stability and peace are the first desires of every slave-holder, and the true tendency of the system…scenes of riot and bloodshed, as have within the last few years disgraced our Northern cities, and as you have lately witnessed in Birmingham and Bristol and Wales, not only never have occurred, but I will venture to say, never will occur in our slave-holding States."[63] The fear for Hammond, Calhoun, Fitzhugh and other pro-slavery thinkers was that the misery capitalism wrought on the laboring classes in the North made them susceptible to the radical ideas then in circulation of which abolitionism and socialism were a part. They believed that the movements that these ideas spawned were not only threats to Southern slavery but all of the institutions that control self-interested humans from constant conflict. In the preface to *Cannibals All!* Fitzhugh warns, "the banners of Socialism and, more dangerous because more delusive, Semi-Socialism, society is insensibly and often unconsciously marching to the utter abandonment of the most essential institutions—religion, family ties, property, and the restraints of justice."[64]

Pro-slavery critics of capitalism recognized that the radical economic and social transformation that the emergence of wage-labor capitalism brought had serious political repercussions. Combined with the liberal doctrine of liberty and equality proclaimed in the *Declaration of Independence* these conditions were fertile ground for revolution.

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[63] Hammond, "A Letter to an English Abolitionist," *The Ideology of Slavery*, p. 179.
[64] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 6.

Calhoun feared that the 1848 revolutions that swept across Europe might infect the consciousness of the American working classes.[65] As capitalist exploitation and immiseration spread throughout the country enveloping greater numbers of people, and as the suffering and misery of the working class became more acute, class conflict, conservatives worried would inevitably intensify. "Every city," wrote Calhoun, "was destined to be the seat of free-soilism…Socialists, Communists, Anti-Renters, and a thousand other agrarian sects that…threaten to subvert the whole social fabric."[66] The fear was that as the material condition of wage laborers was made gradually more miserable, socialist ideas challenging the growing inequality in wealth might sound more appealing to the dispossessed masses and result in a revolutionary assault on not only property in slaves and capital but republican institutions as well. "So rampant and combative is the spirit of discontent wherever nominal free labor prevails, with its ostensive privileges and its dismal servitude," Hammond argued, that, "Nor it will be long before the "free States" of this Union will be compelled to introduce the same expensive machinery, to preserve order among their "free and equal" citizens…The intervention of their militia to repress violations of the peace is becoming a daily affair."[67] For Hammond the threat to property posed by radical movements in non-slave states would necessitate large and expensive standing armies. Standing armies that were so abhorrent to the republican sensibilities of American citizens. The way the defenders of slavery saw it, the greatest threat to order and stability were the conditions in the free

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[65] Charles M. Wiltse, "A Critical Southener: John C. Calhoun on the Revolutions of 1848," *Journal of Southern History* (August, 1949), pp. 299-310.
[66] Cited in Marmor, p. 387.
[67] Hammond, "A Letter to an English Abolitionist," *The Ideology of Slavery*, p. 177-178.

labor North which inspired radical ideas and movements. The defenders of slavery believed that the South because of slavery offered an alternative to Northern instability.

Despite their critique of capitalism, which in some ways rivaled those of American egalitarians and European Socialists, pro-slavery critics of the system of free labor were not wholly anti-capitalist. None wanted to see it overthrown by revolutionary upheaval. Even critics like Fitzhugh and Hammond who defended slavery in the abstract, thought enslaving white wage labors impracticable. This would have required a revolution in its own right. They wanted to prevent revolution and instability not create it on their own. Both Southern slavery and Northern capitalism were inegalitarian hierarchical systems reflecting a natural inequality where the few are "by nature born to command and protect, and law but follows nature in making them rulers, legislators, judges, captains, husbands, guardians, committees and masters."[68] Abolitionism, like socialism, sought to invert this natural order of things by making all equal and as a consequence make the weak, the unfit, and ignorant masses rule. The socialists, wrote Fitzhugh, have "point[ed] out distinctly the character of the disease under which the patient in laboring, but see no way of curing the disease except by killing the patient."[69]

To avert revolution, antebellum period pro-slavery thinkers took pains to remind the Northern elite of their mutual interests. They attempted to devise constitutional mechanism like nullification and the concurrent majority to arrest democratic inroads on property. In *Disquisition on Government,* published posthumously in 1853, Calhoun theorized over a constitutional mechanism that would preserve the rights and interest of a minority facing the will of a democratic majority. Calhoun's proposed concurrent

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[68] Fitzhugh, *Sociology*, p. 178.
[69] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 24.

majority was a constitutional mechanism intended to preserve the interests of Northern capital from popular democratic inroads as it was to safeguard Southern slavery. While the argument in the *Disquisition* is very theoretical eschewing reference to the American social, political, and economic scene one cannot help but get the sense that Calhoun was reflecting on the impact of contemporary social transformations when he wrote:

> For as the community becomes populous, wealthy, refined, and highly civilized, the difference between the rich and the poor will become more strongly marked, and the number of the ignorant and dependent greater in proportion to the rest of the community. With the increase of this difference, the tendency to conflict between them will become stronger; and as the poor and the dependent become more numerous in proportion, there will be in governments of the numerical majority no want of leaders among the wealthy and ambitious to excite and direct them in their efforts to obtain the control.[70]

His remarks regarding the exploitation of labor by capital and the various radical movements threatening the "social fabric" in the North indicate as much. As Calhoun made clear when he wrote that the advantage of governments of the concurrent majority over those of numerical majority was that "they admit, with safety, a much greater extension of the right of suffrage" the concurrent majority was a device intended to make the class status quo safe for democracy. The concurrent majority would have been a mechanism that diluted the political power of the burgeoning and politicized laboring class who were gaining access to the ballot box across the nation.

Pro-slavery thinkers continually urged Northern capitalists to recognize their mutual interests with Southern slaveholders in protecting property. According to Calhoun:

> Looking to the future, I can see no hope of a complete restoration of our system, till the men of wealth and talents in the North, shall become convinced, that their true interest is to rally on the South and on Southern doctrines.[71]

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[70] Calhoun, *Disquisition*, p. 36.
[71] Calhoun, *The Papers* XIII, p. 138.

In the "Mud-sill" speech Hammond warned the Northern elites of the dangers of an exploited and politically empowered class of wage slaves:

> Our slaves do not vote. We give them no political power. Yours do vote, and, being the majority, they are the depositaries of all your political power. If they knew the tremendous secret, that the ballot-box is stronger than "an army with banners," and could combine, where would you be? Your society would be reconstructed, your government overthrown, your property divided…[72]

And Fitzhugh in his more sober moments called for a coalition of Northern and Southern property, writing, "We think that by a kind of alliance, offensive and defensive, with the South, Northern Conservatism may now arrest and turn back the tide of Radicalism and Agrarianism."[73]

As Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, two of the most prominent scholars of Southern history have argued, the Old South was a hybrid system with "pre-bourgeois" labor relations yet "deeply embedded in the world market." The Southern slaveholder was a hybrid, part capitalist and part patriarchal lord. As such, pro-slavery thinkers sought alliance with Northern capital as a means to suppress labor agitation in the capitalist North and abolitionist attacks on Southern slavery and safeguard the various institutions that make civilization possible.

## VI. Conclusion

The idea that drives the pro-slavery thinkers' arguments against capitalism is their commitment to social order and stability. For them, capitalism leads to class warfare, a spirit of selfish individualism, and radicalism, all of which are ingredients for revolutionary upheaval and a return to barbarism. The argument that capitalism poses a

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[72] Hammond. "Mud-Sill Speech," *The Ideology of Slavery*, pp. 123-124.
[73] Fitzhugh, *Cannibals All!*, p. 245.

fundamental threat to social order and stability is not unique to the defenders of slavery. With variations, this is a central tenet of the conservative critique of capitalism to which Right-wing critics of the economic system return to time and again. However, no conservative thinkers in the American tradition rival the pro-slavery thinkers in directly challenging capitalist productive relations as explicitly as they did in the antebellum period. The Southern critics of capitalism in the antebellum period were able to do so because they had a viable alternative in the form of chattel slavery. To be sure the critique of the capitalist ethic and its tendency toward instability and class conflict would reoccur in the conservative critique of capitalism, but capitalist exploitation and immiseration would no longer be central to the conservative critique.

Following the Civil War and the defeat of Southern chattel slavery, the social base of the pro-slavery critique of capitalism was destroyed and the conservative critique of capitalism witnessed a rapid decline. Slave owners were expropriated of their chattel but without any compensation for their years of servitude their economic, political, and legal condition following the end of Reconstruction was little better than slavery.[74] Among the defenders of slavery, many were nostalgic for the old slave South. Economic domination and a century of segregation, discrimination, political and legal disenfranchisement, intimidation and terrorism against blacks suggests, the white elite were able to retain much of the relations of domination and control well after abolition. Even an uncompromising proponent of slavery like Fitzhugh, accepted the Confederacy's defeat in the Civil War. He worked for the Freedman's Bureau as a local court agent charged with supervising labor contracts between freedmen and farm employers. He even,

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[74] Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, Seymour, eds. *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture After Slavery* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992).

according to Harvey Wish, came to terms with monopoly capitalism as embodying the "attractive feudal ideals" of the paternalistic orders, which he so admired and defended.[75] Indeed historian Laura F. Edwards argues that, "the law of master and servant continued to structure all labor relations…both law and practice positioned all common laborers as nominal dependents within their employers' households. When workers lived on their own their employers legally could and actually did exercise broad supervisory powers over their lives on as well as off the job."[76]

As the nineteenth century roared on with railroad tracks crossing the nation, oil fields sprouting in Pennsylvania and California, huge manufacturing firms employing thousands of people and churning out millions of dollars in goods every year, gigantic financial institutions with investments and controlling interests from coast to coast, the migration and immigration of millions of wage laborers adding to the population of America's cities both great and small, and a thoroughly individualistic social philosophy, conservative appeals for organic gradual change and duty and obligation became ideas associated with an antiquated past. But as industrialization proceeded unabated, the instability of the market became more enveloping and severe. As the conflict between labor and capital became more intense, pervasive, and bloodied the pro-slavery conservatives' warnings of the incompatibility of the capitalist wage system and social stability proved to be more than the ravings of an overzealous self-interested ruling class. To be sure, pro-slavery thinkers were protecting their interests, but in doing so they also saw something about capitalism that went beyond self-interest. Capitalism failed to solve

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[75] Harvey Wish, *Ante-bellum Writings of George Fitzhugh and Hinton Rowan Helper on Slavery* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1960), pp. 13-14.

[76] Laura F. Edwards, "The Problem of Dependency: African Americans, Labor Relations, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South," *Agricultural History* (Spring, 1998), pp. 313-340.

the perennial problem of class conflict. Capitalist productive relations based on free labor, they argued, were highly exploitative and reduced the worker to an increasingly miserable condition fostering social revolution. As the great Pullman, Homestead strikes and thousands of other labor agitations of the latter part of the nineteenth century indicated, class antagonism became a reality of American social, political, and economic life. It was a reality which forced some conservatives to rethink the discarded paternalist ideal of the defenders of slavery.

# CHAPTER II

## In Search of the Warrior-Statesman: The Critique of Capitalism of Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt

If we want everything to stay as it is, everything has to change!

Tomasi di Lampedusa[1]

### I. Introduction

In *Rebirth of a Nation*, Jackson Lears calls the period between the end of Reconstruction and World War I an age of regeneration. "Seldom if ever in our history," writes Lears, "have longings for rebirth played a more prominent role in politics."[2] Historian Robert H. Wiebe described the political project of the time period as a "search for order."[3] Indeed some believed that the United States was in a state of disarray and decline resulting from the ascendance of a decadent business mentality, a lack of public-spiritedness, a corrupt political class, and bitter class conflict. Some worried that as America was becoming more urbanized and diverse attracting immigrants of so-called "inferior races" from Southern and Eastern Europe and China, America's Anglo-Saxon heritage and cultural superiority was being threatened. For many, political life lost its ennobling character as political machines dominated the governments of many cities using public resources for their own personal fortune and aggrandizement. The federal government was hardly better where, as many believed, the "special interests" commanded all three branches.

Meanwhile, despite a number of devastating economic crises businesses grew and merged into trusts operating on a national scale, employing thousands of workers, and

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[1] Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Leopard* (New York: Pantheon, 1960).
[2] Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: Harper, 2009), p. 4.
[3] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

making millions in profits. By 1910, notwithstanding Theodore Roosevelt and William Howard Taft's publicized "trust-busting" campaigns, one percent of the nation's manufacturers accounted for forty-four percent of the nation's total industrial output.[4] Giant investment firms and banks like JP Morgan were among the most powerful institutions in the nation controlling investment and lending from coast to coast. These powerful financial institutions exerted political influence everywhere from small town city councils to the White House. With corporations operating on a national scale the conflicts between labor and capital took on national significance and threatened the economy of the whole country. After the Haymarket Massacre in 1886, the violent suppression of workers at Andrew Carnegie's Homestead Steel Plant in 1892, the federal intervention in the Pullman Strike in 1894, and thousands of strikes all across the nation many agreed with Theodore Roosevelt's sentiment that the struggle between capital and labor was the greatest challenge facing the nation.

As a reaction to the upheaval during this transformative period in American history there emerged a distinctive type of conservative political thought critical of capitalism. This strand of conservative thought was critical of laissez-faire capitalism, imperialistic, and statist. [5] It attempted to reconcile corporate capitalism with national unity and

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[4] James A. Henretta, et al, *America's History: Since 1865*, Third Edition (New York: Worth Publishers, 1997), p. 665.

[5] There has been years of debate among historians and conservatives respectively whether Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt can accurately be labeled conservative. Historians and scholars of American Conservatism who count TR as a conservative are Daniel Aaron, *Men of Good Hope* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961 [1951]); John Morton Blum, *The Republican Roosevelt* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Melvyn Dubofsky, *The State and Labor in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994); William H. Harbaugh, *The Writings of Theodore Roosevelt* (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc., 1967); Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989 [1948]); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism* (New York: The Free Press, 1977 [1963]); Clinton Rossiter, *Conservatism in America* (Cambridge: University of Harvard Press, 1982 [1955]). Regarding the conservatism of Brooks Adams see among others Daniel Aaron in *Men of Good Hope;* Timothy Paul Donovan, *Henry Adams and Brooks Adams: The Education of Two American Historians* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1961); Charles W. Dunn and J. David

strength. This strand of thought is best expressed by Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt.[6] Influenced by evolutionary theory Adams and Roosevelt nevertheless grew increasingly critical of the strictures of laissez-faire capitalism. They believed that the underlying assumptions of individualistic capitalism that emphasized the selfish pursuit of private interest and unrestrained economic competition was a recipe for domestic discord and international weakness rather than the vehicle for social progress as William Graham Sumner and other apologists for laissez-faire claimed. In fact for Adams and Roosevelt, it was the emphasis on commerce and egotism which permeated America's politics and culture that pointed to the evolutionary regression and decay of the nation and its people.

Roosevelt and Adams did not seek to replace capitalism with an alternative economic system. Nor did they seek to decentralize economic enterprises according to Jeffersonian republican political economy. Instead, they attempted to construct a paternalist imperial state administered by public spirited elite legitimized by a plebiscite and empowered to regulate corporate capitalism and direct it toward national aims. Admittedly, Roosevelt and Adams were conservatives of an atypical sort. They embraced big business as an inevitable product of evolutionary development. Indeed, they welcomed business centralization as an invaluable component in America's strength on the world stage. They believed that corporate capitalism needed to be controlled and regulated by the

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Woodard, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003 [1996]); Allen Guttmann, *The Conservative Tradition in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Ronald Lora, *Conservative Minds in America* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1971); Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind* (Chicago: Regnery Company, 1953); Jay A. Sigler, *The Conservative Tradition in American Thought* (New York: Putnam, 1969).

[6] Other prominent exponents included Henry Adams, John Hay, Henry Cabot Lodge, and Alfred Thayer Mahan. Historians have labeled this group "the little imperialist elite." John P. Mallan, "Roosevelt, Brooks Adams, and Lea: The Warrior Critique of Business Civilization," *American Quarterly* (Autumn, 1956), pp. 216-230.

federal government in the interest of the Anglo-American nation in their evolutionary competition for survival. For Adams and Roosevelt, political centralization and economic regulation was not a choice, but a necessity. Going backward by decentralizing business, or doing nothing and letting the laissez-faire market reign, was for both thinkers akin to national suicide.

For Adams and Roosevelt the fundamental threat to the nation's survival and strength was the fact that capitalist society failed to generate a stable and virtuous elite whose dedication to the national interest would triumph over their own self-interest. The capitalist ruling class was decadent, made soft by luxury, narrow-minded, and lacked the public-spiritedness necessary for a ruling elite.[7] They were incapable of the sort of general thinking required to administer the American empire which was necessary to dissipate class conflict and insure social progress. Adams and Roosevelt sought to regenerate an elite whose authority and learned statesmanship would save capitalists from the consequences of their misrule and take on the world-historical responsibilities of a historically progressive race. Their critique of capitalism, in essence, was an elite theory of capitalist deformation.

A reoccurring theme in the American conservative tradition critical of capitalism is the idea that the capitalist elite have been in various ways an ineffective ruling class.[8] It has been a ruling class that has prioritized class rule and private profit rather than the interests of the whole body politic. Roosevelt and Adams' elevation of the strenuous life,

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[7] For the emasculating character of commerce see Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism Before its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); J.G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

[8] This idea that capitalists are not an effective governing class can be found in Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1950 [1942]), pp. 135-139. Also Arthur Schlesinger Jr., *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998 [1949]), pp. 11-34.

the martial and imaginative character type, and the depreciation of the capitalist life preoccupied with moneymaking is part of this broader critical current of thought in the conservative intellectual tradition. Adams and Roosevelt's alternative pointed to a resurrection of a countervailing passion to counterbalance a nation, its culture, and in particular, its ruling class that was animated exclusively by self-interested commercial considerations.[9] As Lears correctly notes in *No Place of Grace*, Adams and Roosevelt's "warrior critique" of business civilization does not denote a total hostility to capitalism. Indeed, their critique of the bourgeois type and glorification of the martial type was not meant to completely eliminate the former. Roosevelt had written that Spain had accomplished this very thing and as a result "has sunk to a condition just above that of Morocco."[10] The problem with modern society, according to the warrior critics, is not that there is such a creature as the bourgeois type or the Economic Man, but that he has become dominant. As the defenders of slavery before them, Adams and Roosevelt worried that capitalist life was unable to generate an elite capable of securing domestic security and social order. The intellectual opponents of the thinkers in this conservative critical tradition were not only radicals dedicated to the destruction of the inegalitarian economic, social and political order. The warrior aristocrat conservative critique of capitalism was an attack on the intellectual tradition that prioritized the rule of the market over all other social and political concerns, especially those of the nation as a whole.

The defenders of slavery in antebellum America had a ready-made alternative ruling class to the capitalist, the slave owner. They pointed to the social benefits of order, harmony, and stability which were made possible by the paternalist arrangements of

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[9] See, Hirschman.

[10] Theodore Roosevelt, "The Law of Civilization and Decay," *The Works of Theodore Roosevelt, vol. XIII* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1926), pp. 257.

Southern slavery. Post-bellum conservative critics had no such alternative to the social strife of laissez-faire capitalism and the rule of the Economic Man. Thus, Adams and Roosevelt were forced to search elsewhere for the conservative element.

For Adams and Roosevelt the solution to the problem of capitalism required the renewal of a martial, public-spirited character among the ruling class. Their alternative pointed in a different direction than the plutocratic status quo, the populism of William Jennings Bryan, or the Eugene Debs' socialism. The close of the American frontier in the 1890s forced conservatives to look beyond America's borders for an arena where the character-building struggle of a national ruling class could be realized, domestic tranquility secured, and the progress of the race/nation immortalized. The forum for such an ambitious project was an American empire. Adams and Roosevelt justified American imperialism for its unifying and reinvigorating domestic potential and from a racist belief in Anglo-American superiority. For the warrior-aristocrats, imperialism was a necessary component in the evolutionary struggle for supremacy among nations and the vehicle by which a virtuous spirit among the ruling class would be regenerated.

## II. The Economic Man and the Law of History

Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt were friends who had a tremendous impact on one another. Historian Daniel Aaron has written that Adams had more influence over Roosevelt's thought than anyone else. They reviewed each other's published works, corresponded often, Adams advised Roosevelt during his 1912 Bull Moose campaign for the presidency, and they had mutual friends of the likes of Henry

Cabot Lodge.[11] Adams was the theorist and Roosevelt the practitioner. According to Matthew Josephson, "the terms in which [Adams] defined the dilemma of society, faced with the choice of violent proletarian revolution or social decadence eating at the top of the society, were always present in [Roosevelt's] writings and speeches."[12] They were both, as Aaron has argued, "pseudo-progressives." Men whose reformist or progressive policies were animated by deeply conservative assumptions.

Adams and Roosevelt were both heavily influenced by evolutionary thought. They both assumed a competitive evolutionary nature to social development. For them national unity and strength was necessary for the American republic to triumph in the struggle with other nations for survival and supremacy. In *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (1896), Adams offered a theory of history based on the scientific laws of mass, energy, and acceleration. The theory of history purported to explain the rise and decline of societies. Adams argued that civilizations oscillate between barbarism which is characterized by economic dispersion and concentration characterized by intense economic competition. According to the theory each historical stage produces its own character type that becomes dominant until the conditions change so that this character type becomes antiquated. In earlier stages of society when economic activity was widely dispersed and there was little economic competition human energy was animated by fear. Human energy was expressed in martial and imaginative, or warlike and priestly ways. As a result, the martial and priestly classes were the dominant ruling classes in society. However, as society became more peaceful and commercial centers grew the preservation

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[11]See Aaron; Arthur F. Beringause, *Brooks Adams: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1955); Charles Hirschfeld, "Brooks Adams and American Nationalism," *The American Historical Review* (January, 1964), pp. 371-392.

[12] Mathew Josephson, *The President Makers: The Culture of Politics and Leadership in an Age of Enlightenment, 1896-1919* (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1964 [1940]), p. 61.

of life was no longer dependent on war or on the fear of the unknown, but on economic well-being. Instead of human energy mobilized by fear, it became activated by greed. As economic competition for material well-being intensified the qualities of a martial and imaginative character type became obsolete. The martial type was then superseded by the economic character type. A society lead by the Economic character type becomes mired in static decadence and softness. Ultimately, Adams argued, under the pressure of intense economic competition and the rule of the Economic Man human energy is exhausted, the society succumbs to war from within or invasion by a more martial people. The result is disintegration and decay, and the cycle begins anew.

Adams offered numerous historical examples proving the validity of his theory. For instance, Adams argued that the Roman Republic and Empire attained dominance because of the supremacy of the martial type of character embodied in the Roman husbandman-soldier. As the Roman Empire grew in economic and territorial size its economy became more concentrated as large landowners and usurers dispossessed the martial small husbandmen-soldier class and transformed them into mere peasants. As this trend toward concentration continued the people began to be animated not by fear, as they had been before, but with greed, which had become the elemental motive and virtue of the era of the Economic Man. When this character type became dominant Rome no longer produced citizens of the martial character type. Most importantly, for Adams, Rome failed to produce generals, the elite of the martial character type, which was a social revolution in its own right commencing the beginning of the decline of Rome.[13] This martial elite was key because they not only fought to defend and expand the empire, but also united the disparate interests in it. They provided the leadership, and hence the

[13] Brooks Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1943 [1896]), p. 91.

authority, that people feared and respected. Once this elite class dissipated Rome was destined to decline.

At the close of the 19th century Brooks Adams feared that America and western civilization was destined to follow the same course of decay as had the Romans.[14] In the conclusion to *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, Adams mourned the passing of the martial elite in the modern western world:

> The ideal statesman had been one who, like Cromwell, Frederic the Great, Henry IV, William III, and Washington, could lead his men in battle…the aristocracy had professedly been a military caste. Only after 1871 [in France] came the new era, an era marked by many social changes. For the first time in their history the ruler of the French people passed admittedly from the martial to the monied type, and everywhere the same phenomenon appeared; the whole administration of society fell into the hands of the economic man.[15]

Overall, Roosevelt agreed with Adams' theory of history and endorsed his veneration of the martial spirit. Roosevelt wrote a positive review of Adams' *Law of Civilization and Decay* in which he called it a "brilliant book" and a "distinct contribution to the philosophy of history."[16] Yet he thought Adams' conclusion regarding America's inevitable decline to be far too pessimistic.

In the decades following the Civil War America went through rapid economic and territorial expansion, bold technological innovation, intense competition, great economic and demographic fluctuation, business and industrial centralization and consolidation, and increasingly violent class antagonism.[17] Perhaps no other half-century in American history witnessed such revolutionary economic transformation and accompanying social

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[14] Roosevelt, *The Works XIII*.
[15] Adams, *The Law*, p. 326.
[16] Roosevelt, "The Law of Civilization and Decay," *The* Works, pp. 242-260.
[17] Steven J Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998); Eric Foner, *The Story of American Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998); Martin J. Sklar, *The Corporate Reconstruction of American Capitalism, 1890-1916: The Market, the Law, and Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1988]); Wiebe; Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States:1492-Present* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2003 [1980]).

unrest than it had from the 1870s to the beginning of World War I. Railroads tied the country into one large production and consumer market, as it never had been before. Innovations in business management strategies created a new kind of business enterprise. Nationally organized vertically integrated firms employed the latest in mass marketing strategies. National mail-order merchants delivered goods to the most rural of places while in urban areas department stores offered thousands of wares under one roof. All of these novelties contributed to the development of a national consumer market in which standardized goods were both produced and consumed by Americans residing in New York or in California and everywhere in between.

Through these developments in communication, transportation, business management, and consumption American businesses grew by leaps and bounds. Some employed tens of thousands of workers around which entire towns and communities were organized. Great wealth and economic power was amassed in oil, coal, iron, steel, railroads, banking, retail, etc. The captains of industry and finance accumulated wealth and resources surpassing the total revenues of many states in the Union. Yet, the American economy regularly spiraled into crisis in 1873-1877, 1883-1885, 1893-1897, and 1905. These market fluctuations enriched some and ruined many more. The 1893-1897 depression was the worst to date. Twenty percent of the working population was unemployed, 642 banks failed, and 16,000 businesses were forced to close.[18] Meanwhile, as the economy gradually recovered a record wave of business mergers and acquisitions took place. By the late 1890s the concentration of business enterprises was unprecedented. Of the seventy-three largest companies in 1900, fifty-three had not

[18] Zinn, p. 277.

existed three years earlier.[19] The price of this bonanza for the wealthiest and most powerful of Americans was a steep one paid for by the working classes whose wretched living and working conditions were the subject of exposes by journalist and authors including Jacob Riis, Upton Sinclair, William Hard, and many others.

The socially explosive potential of these conditions worried Roosevelt and Adams. The conflicts between capital and farmers and laborers (the two latter groups were by no means united) was a serious threat to social stability that conservatives prized. The Granger Movement, the radical unionism under "Big" Bill Haywood and the Wobblies, along with Eugene Debs socialists, and in particular, William Jennings Bryan's popular Presidential candidacy in 1896 instilled fear of revolution in conservatives. While Roosevelt and Adams agreed with their grievances Roosevelt and Adams detested socialists, radical labor leaders, Populists, radical reformers, or journalists exposing the abuses of capital and the misery of workers, farmers, and their families. Roosevelt derided journalists who exposed the abuse, corruption, and injustice of corporate America as "muckrakers." He accused them of insincerity and incitement of social unrest. In an 1896 campaign speech entitled "The Menace of the Demagogue," he equated Bryan, Debs, Jacob Coxey, and others to the Reign of Terror of Marat, Barrere, and Robespierre.[20] In apocalyptical fashion Roosevelt argued that Bryan, then the Democratic and Populist candidate for president, was "against morality and ability," aiming to "tear down the men of means, virtue, and talent", and if elected would "substitute a government of a mob, by the demagogue, for the shiftless and disorderly and

[19] Henretta, p. 665.
[20] Roosevelt, "The Menace of the Demagogue," *Theodore Roosevelt: An American Mind,* ed. Mario R, DiNunzio (New York: Penguin Books, 1995 [1994]), p. 116.

the criminal and the semi-criminal."[21] At one point Roosevelt advocated "taking ten or a dozen of [the Populist] leaders out…standing them against a wall and shooting them dead."[22] The belief that politics was a life or death struggle permeated Roosevelt's career. In 1909 he concluded that socialism was "hostile to the intellectual, the religious, the domestic and moral life; it is a form of communism with no moral foundation, but essentially based on the immediate annihilation of personal ownership of capital, and, in the near future, the annihilation of the family, and ultimately the annihilation of civilization."[23]

The rise of radical political movements combined with the increasing frequency and level of violence of labor actions, most notably Haymarket in 1886, Homestead and Coeur d'Alenes in 1892, Pullman in 1894, and hundreds of others, confirmed conservatives' foreboding of impending revolution and anarchy. The nationally disruptive nature of these labor actions and the inability of the capitalist ruling class to resolve these conflicts without resorting to the state's means of violence convinced some conservatives that if the social, political, and economic order was to be preserved then economic and cultural reform was necessary.

It was this social context that grounded much of Adams' pessimism. In a letter to his brother, Henry, Brooks Adams hopelessness was apparent:

> [F]or the first time in human history there is not one ennobling instinct. There is not a barbarian anywhere sighing a chant of war and faith, there is not a soldier to sacrifice himself for an ideal. How can we hope to see a new world, a new civilization, or a new life? To my mind we are at the end; and the one thing I thank God for is that we have no children.[24]

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[21] Roosevelt, *An American Mind, p*p. 116-117.
[22] Quoted in Wiebe.
[23] Roosevelt, "Where We Cannot Work With Socialists," *The Writings of Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 309.
[24] Quoted in Aaron, p. 262.

Despite the bleak implications of his theory of history Adams grew hopeful that the rule of the capitalist elite could be mitigated by the resurgence of the martial spirit.[25] He spent the next two decades of his life trying to refute the Law.[26] For Adams, Theodore Roosevelt personified the fact that the martial man had not yet been made completely extinct by the imperatives and values of a modern laissez-faire capitalist society. Adams poured all of his hope and optimism for the regeneration of a martial virtuous elite in the person of Roosevelt. Adams urging him to lead "some great outburst of the emotional classes which should at least temporarily crush the Economic Man." [27] When Roosevelt assumed the presidency, Adams could not disguise his buoyant anticipation of Roosevelt's leadership:

> 'Thou hast it now: king, Cawdor, Glamis, all--' The world can give no more. You hold a place greater than Trajan's, for you are the embodiment of a power not only vaster than the power of the Empire, but vaster than men have ever known. You have too the last and rarest prize, for you have an opportunity. You will always stand as the President who began the contest for supremacy of America against the eastern continent.[28]

Adams and Roosevelt's criticisms of capitalism flowed from their disgust of the capitalist character type, the Economic Man. According to Roosevelt and Adams, the Economic Man was a product of historical evolutionary development. He was an innovator and engineer of prosperity and material plenty. Thus, both thinkers demarked an important place for the capitalist in their alternative to laissez-faire. But, capital was an "irresponsible sovereign," wrote Adams. The capitalist character was small-minded, short-sighted, timid, selfish, amoral, soft, effeminate, and decadent. For Adams,

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[25] Henry Adams sometimes chided his brother Brooks over his apparent optimism. See Donovan.
[26] William A. Williams,"Brooks Adams and American Expansion," *The New England Quarterly* (June,1952), pp. 217-232.
[27] Roosevelt to John Hay, June 17, 1899, *The Letters of Theodore Roosevelt* vol. II, ed. Elting E. Morison (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951). See also Adams, *Theory of Social Revolutions (*New York: MacMillan, 1913), pp. 3-6, 31-32.
[28] Quoted in Aaron, p. 270.

Benjamin Franklin was the best exponent of the capitalist mentality. Adams derided Franklin's commonplace virtues as suitable to "counter jumpers." "I know" wrote Adams, "that George Washington would never have indulged in such calculation nor yet would have been proud to become the preacher of such small ware if he had. I never said Franklin wasn't useful—so is the constable and so are your account books—but you don't see the constable by the side of your God nor make a bible of your ledger—thought many folks have no other.[29]

Roosevelt and Adams argued that government of a modern society characterized by concentration, centralization, and technological innovation required the leadership of skilled public administrators governing in the interest of the nation as a whole. They argued that the capitalist character was so narrowly specialized toward the art of money making that he was incapable of putting the national interest, the common weal, or any great noble endeavor ahead of his own monetary self-interest. This shortcoming made the capitalist unqualified to govern a modern state. In the *Theory of Social Revolutions* Adams argued that that the development of a capitalist environment "demanded excessive specialization in the direction of a genius adapted to money-making under highly complex industrial conditions."[30] Under such an environment, Adams argued, the characteristic which is most highly privileged is "money-making" an attribute to which "all else has been sacrificed, and the modern capitalist not only thinks in terms of money, but he thinks in terms of money more exclusively than the French aristocrat or lawyer ever thought in terms of caste."[31] While Roosevelt was not as critical about modern life

[29] Quoted in Aaron, p. 258.
[30] Adams, *Theory of Social Revolutions*, p. 208.
[31] Adams, *Theory of Revolutions*, p. 208-209.

as was Adams, he nevertheless agreed with some of Adams' foreboding.[32] In his "Strenuous Life" speech delivered in 1899, Roosevelt warned the Hamilton Club audience against becoming "content to rot by inches in ignoble ease within our borders, taking no interest in what goes on beyond them, sunk in a scrabbling commercialism.[33]

Thorstein Veblen in *The Theory of the Leisure Class* argued that the virtues and accomplishments valued most in capitalist society were those which generated wealth and which displayed one's success at doing so by conspicuous consumption. Roosevelt and Adams despised the new rich who were so preoccupied with moneymaking and leading decadent lives that they had no interest in political leadership. Since status was no longer determined by good breeding or statesmanship, but by the acquisition of wealth the old elite who had been less narrowly focused on economic success became socially and politically irrelevant. They were replaced by a new elite unconcerned with political life beyond their own self-interest in it. Roosevelt unabashedly showed his disdain for the new urban elite:

> In all the large cities of the North the wealthier or, as they prefer to style themselves the 'upper" classes, tend distinctly toward the bourgeois type; and an individual in the bourgeois state of development, while honest, industrious, and virtuous, is also not unapt to be a miracle of timid and short-sighted selfishness…the timid good form a most useless as well as a most despicable part of the community.[34]

In *Theory of Social Revolutions* Adams fumed:

> The modern capitalist looks upon life as a financial combat of a very specialized kind, regulated by a code which he understands and has indeed himself concocted, but which is recognized by no one else in the world…He may sell his services to whom he pleases at what price may suit him, and if by doing so he ruins men and cities, it is nothing to him. He is not responsible, for he is not a

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[32] For Adams' relationship with Roosevelt and his influence on him see Beringause, pp. 143-170; Aaron; Josephson, pp. 26-27, pp. 61-63, p. 98; Williams, "Brooks Adams and American Expansion."
[33] Roosevelt, "The Strenuous Life," *Theodore Roosevelt: An American Mind*, p. 185.
[34] Quoted in Mallan.

> trustee for the public. If he be restrained by legislation, that legislation is in his eye an oppression and an outrage, to be annulled or eluded by any means which will not lead to the penitentiary…Thus of necessity, he precipitates a conflict, instead of establishing an adjustment. He is, therefore, in essence, a revolutionist without being aware of it.[35]

It was this irresponsible ruling class of the capitalist new rich, who shirked from their social responsibilities, that Roosevelt called the "malefactors of great wealth." Roosevelt held special ire for corporations and their leadership who broke the law, corrupted political affairs, and made excessive profits by exploiting their workforce by low wages and miserable working conditions.[36] To Roosevelt it was clear that at least some of the responsibility for the threatened disunity and chaos resulting from labor unrest rested squarely at the feet of the irresponsible capitalist elite who did nothing but aggravate class antagonism by their greed and self-interest. Roosevelt's 1902 mediation of the Anthracite Strike is an instructive example.[37] The intransigence of the coal mine owners in their standoff with striking workers, which forced Roosevelt's intervention, further convinced him of the inability of the capitalist ruling class to protect its own interests, much less the general social and economic order. Recalling, years later, his role in the 1902 strike Roosevelt mused, "I was anxious to save the great coal operators and all of the class of big propertied men, of which they were members, from the dreadful punishment which their own folly would have brought on them if I had not acted."[38] It was their greed and narrow-mindedness that produced the miserable wages, working, and

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[35] Adams, *Theory of Social Revolutions*, pp. 209-210.
[36] Roosevelt, "Address at San Francisco," and "The Minimum Wage,"*The Writings of Theodore Roosevelt* , pp. 180-181, p. 289.
[37] For details of the strike and Roosevelt's role in its resolution see Dubofsky; Edmund Morris, *Theodore Rex* (New York: Random House, 2001), pp. 131-137, pp. 150-169.
[38] Quoted in Hofstadter, p. 288.

living conditions that lead to the volatile condition where labor unrest frequently turned violent and radical economic and political doctrines became appealing to the masses.

The virtues that Adams and Roosevelt counterpoised to those dominant under capitalism were virtues embodied by the aristocrat-warrior of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Their conception of the ruling class character type was male specific. Indeed, the frontier, which for Roosevelt, was the formative environment for the superior character type, was exclusively peopled by males.[39] To be sure women had a role in Roosevelt's vision but it was largely of motherhood and her duties to her family, nation, and race to bear and raise children.[40] But if the training ground for political leadership took place on Roosevelt's American frontier or San Juan Hill from which women were excluded, then their membership in the regenerative project were clearly subordinate to those of men.

The virtues that Adams and Roosevelt esteemed most were a masculine and virile character, physical strength, a fighting spirit, courage, valor, honor, hardihood, self-sacrifice, a life of striving consisting of "an indomitable will of power to do without shrinking the rough work that must always be done, and to preserve through the long days of slow progress or of seeming failure which always come before any final triumph."[41] These are not the characteristics of the Economic Man who Adams personified in the form of the banker, the gold bug, the plutocrat, and the Jew.[42] The character qualities esteemed highest by these thinkers were not those requisite for success in a capitalist economy. The character attributes prized by the capitalist type, such as

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[39] See Arnaldo Testi, "The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity," *The Journal of American History*, (March, 1995), pp. 1509-1533.
[40] Roosevelt, "Theodore Roosevelt on Motherhood and the Welfare of the State," *Population and Development Review* (March, 1987), pp. 141-147.
[41] Roosevelt, "Manhood and Statehood," *The Strenuous Life,* p. 257. Also "Letter to S. Stanwood Menken," *The Writings of Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 383.
[42] Adams was intensely anti-semitic.

calculation, self-interest, narrow specialization, and moneymaking were qualities associated with the head. For Adams and Roosevelt the most highly esteemed character virtues were most synonymous with the emotional, or the heart. Accordingly, for Roosevelt the heroic life of striving and the ultimate brilliant triumph is the product of an appreciation for and the free expression of the character qualities associated with the heart. In an address to a group of veterans in Burlington, Vermont in 1901 Roosevelt thundered,

> All great and extraordinary actions come from the heart. There are seasons in human affairs when qualities, fit enough to conduct the common business of life, are feeble and useless, when men must trust to emotion for that safety which reason at such times can never give. These are the feelings which led the ten thousand over the Carduchian mountains; these are the feelings by which a handful of Greeks broke in pieces the power of Persia; and in the fens of the Dutch and in the mountains of the Swiss these feelings defended happiness and revenged the oppression of man! God calls all the passions out in their keenness and vigor for the present safety of mankind, anger and revenge and the heroic mind, and a readiness to suffer—all the secret strength, all the invisible array of the feelings—all that nature has reserved for the great scenes of the world. When the usual hopes and the common aids of man are all gone, nothing remains under God but those passions which have often proved the best ministers of His purpose and the surest protectors of the world.[43]

To Adams and Roosevelt the historical figures of ancient and medieval Europe exemplified character types that the American nation, in fact, western civilization most urgently needed. They both argued that the decline of the heroic virtues and the martial and imaginative character types lead to the decline of the nation and western civilization. "If we ever grow to feel that we can afford to let the keen, fearless, virile qualities of heart and mind and body be lost, then we will prepare the way for inevitable and shameful disaster in the future," Roosevelt warned.[44]

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[43] Roosevelt, "Brotherhood and the Heroic Virtues," *The Strenuous Life*, p. 275-276.
[44] Roosevelt, "America's Part of the World's Work," *An American Mind*, p. 181.

To Adams and Roosevelt the soldier on the Civil War battlefield, the frontiersman conquest of the American West, or Abraham Lincoln standing boldly for unity in the face of secession and civil war personified the heroic spirit in the American context. The sort of striving for "great things" character type that made the American republic great had been replaced by a small-minded selfish individualism incapable of collective unity and realization of a national purpose. The once heroic republic, Roosevelt and Adams feared, was now menaced with decay from the narcissistic, petty, and timid character of the Economic Man and incessantly threatened to be torn asunder by the battles between capital and labor. As Roosevelt and Adams saw it, the nation and its citizenry were enveloped in self-interested individualism, effeminate decadence, chocking materialism, and devoid of a will to pursue anything greater than the accumulation of wealth and material comforts. Even in his later years Roosevelt continued to warn Americans that "prosperity at any price, peace at any price, safety first instead of duty first, the love of soft living, and the get-rich quick theory of life…are the things which will destroy America."[45]

Roosevelt and Adams sought the regeneration of the spirit and values of an Americanized "warrior-aristocracy" to guide the economic power of the capitalists to the interest and benefit of the nation. To both thinkers the the radical individualism and anti-statism of Sumner and Herbert Spencer were unappealing. Roosevelt drew on the older, more traditional, understanding of individualism which suggests that an individual could only reach his maximum potential through membership and serving the interests of a

[45] Roosevelt, "Letter to S. Stanwood Menken," *The Writings of Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 383.

larger community.[46] An emphasis on character, in particular on duty, especially to the nation, was part of his belief that through a purely self-interested individualism one cannot attain their fullest development as a person. Besides, as both Adams and Roosevelt stressed, the individualism of laissez-faire capitalism had been made antiquated by technological and economic change and the accompanying concentration and centralization in business, labor, and other elements of modern industrial life. According to Adams:

> The Anglo-Saxon has been the most individual of races, and it reached high fortune under conditions which fostered individuality to a supreme degree. Such conditions prevail when the world was vacant and steam began to make rapid movement possible; but all must perceive that, as masses, solidify, the qualities of the pioneer will cease to be those that command success.[47]

The Economic Man has failed to adapt a generalizing thinking and thus in incapable of guarding and guiding the evolutionary progress of the nation. Laissez-faire capitalism thus became an evolutionary liability that handicapped the society's progress in the Darwinian struggle for survival.

Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis that by the 1890s the once great and expansive America frontier had been tamed, settled, and therefore closed had a profound impact on Roosevelt. For Roosevelt the frontier had a tremendous impact on American economic, social, political, and cultural life. Not only did the frontier embody the American ideal of social mobility, the opportunity to start over again, it had also been an indispensable safety valve for averting class conflict.[48] For Roosevelt the close of the frontier meant that class conflict could no longer be dissipated. More importantly, however, the

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[46] David H. Burton, *Theodore Roosevelt: Confident Imperialist* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), pp. 142-143.
[47] Adams, *America's Economic Supremacy* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947 [1900]), p. 99.
[48] Even conservative critics of capitalism George Fitzhugh and Orestes Brownson recognized the seeds of revolutionary discord in the American North had been dissipated by the existence of the frontier.

conquest of the frontier by the white race, in particular, the Anglo-American race, was a mark of its superiority in the struggle for survival among races of people. The Anglo-American conquest of the west indicated to him their leading role in human progress. For Roosevelt, the close of the frontier confined men to the decadent egotism of the city that would doom the nation. It was this sense of stifled will that lead Roosevelt to seek out manly adventure on the ranches of South Dakota, safari and wild game hunting in Africa, and exploring the Amazon River, each about as far removed from the urban, calculating life of business civilization as one can imagine. These adventures were for his own personal virile regeneration. The question remained, though. With the close of the frontier, where would the nation, and in particular the males of the Anglo-American race find their regenerative adventure? For Roosevelt and Adams the answer lay in the history of the heroism of the Knights of the Templar, the Great Roman Armies, and Commodore Nelson of the British Navy. The answer to the atrophy and decay of the American nation lay in war and empire.

III. Empire

To Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt an American empire served several purposes. First, it served as a forum for the regeneration of a martial public-spirited character type among the ruling class. Second, it was the means by which America's inevitable decline, as suggested by the law of history might be delayed or averted. And finally, it offered a world-historical project with which America was saddled with to bring peace, order, liberty, self-government, in other words, civilization to the less developed peoples of the world. As Lears has argued, "The roots of the modern American empire were intertwined in economic interest and cultural crisis: the desire for foreign markets

drew strength from elite fears that America was becoming sterile, stagnant. The effects of imperialism, too, were at once cultural and economic."[49] Adams and Roosevelt's imperialism was intimately bound with their critique of laissez-faire capitalism and the modern life that it produced. Empire provided the forum, or the alternative universe, where capitalist calculation and self-interest was secondary to the heroic virtues, national glory and the destiny of western civilization.

Both Adams and Roosevelt operated under the assumptions of what today might be called the realist school of international relations. Both thinkers argued that nations were in constant struggle with one another over land, resources, labor, and markets. Imperialism was not a choice. It was a necessity in the interest of national survival. As Adams argued in *The Law of Civilization and Decay* America had to expand or face degeneration and decay. "There is nothing stationary in the universe. Not to advance is to go backward," he declared.[50] Adams was very much an economic determinist. In *America's Economic Supremacy* and later in *The New Empire*, he argued that international competition and the struggle for imperial supremacy was in fact about the struggle for economic supremacy. For Adams American imperialism in the Caribbean, the Philippines, and China was essential to America's survival because it opened markets where American goods could be sold.[51] Imperial expansion solved the problem of over-production and the crisis it produces in highly developed economies like the United States where business and industry are consolidated and centralized. Adams believed that

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[49] Jackson Lears, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 117.

[50] Adams, *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, p. 35 and Williams, "Brooks Adams and American Expansion."

[51] Similar arguments justifying American imperialism on economic grounds had been made by Henry Cabot Lodge, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and Albert Beveridge among others. See Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Barbarian Virtues: The United States Encounters Foreign Peoples at Home and Abroad, 1876-1917* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001).

it was the crises resulting from over-production that contributed to the bitter conflicts between capital and labor and the threat of revolution and anarchy. The key component addressing class antagonism was not only to regulate the corporations but an aggressive imperial foreign policy. An American empire was an outlet by which corporate capital could expand and sell its wares rather than compete to the death at home. Just as importantly, empire served as a forum to regenerate a virile and virtuous character type of the classical Republican sort. Imperial expansion then, was the key component to mitigating these threats and thus slowing America's inevitable decline to which his theory of history pointed.

According to Adams for over a thousand years the "social center of civilization" or in other words, the economic and imperial center, has progressively moved westward.[52] The Dutch and then the British were the last great economic and imperial powerhouses, who spread development and civilization to all of their imperial domains. The British, Adams argued, were in decline. Holding to the historic law of the westward expansion of civilization, Adams believed that it was America's turn to fill the vacuum and carry the torch of western civilization passed to it by the British. History had destined America to become the standard-bearer of western civilization, if and only if, it chose to rise to the challenge. Roosevelt agreed. Roosevelt pointed to the subjection of the Native American and the colonization of the Western United States as one of the greatest civilizing events the world had ever known. In *The Winning of the West*, Roosevelt justified the white settlement of the American frontier and their destruction of the Native Americans inhabiting the land in overtly racist terms. His conclusions regarding the justice of white conquest of the frontier remained unchanged throughout his

[52] Adams, *America's Economic Supremacy*, p. 72.

life and informed his aggressive imperialism in the Caribbean and the Philippines. "During the past three centuries," wrote Roosevelt, "the spread of English speaking peoples over the world's waste spaces has been not only the most striking feature in the world's history but also the event of all others most far-reaching in its effects and its importance."[53] For him the conquest of the western frontier, and the "inferior peoples" that inhabited it was fundamentally a project "in the interest of mankind and civilization."[54]

He viewed the American colonial subjugation of the Philippines in the same terms as he did the conquest of the American West. Anglo-Americans were not only justified in exploiting the markets of their imperial possessions but also historically obligated by the "white man's burden" to "improve" subjugated people. This improvement project, according to Roosevelt, involved making the colonized people "fit for self-government" by training them in the art of "obedience to law" which is the "first essential of civilization."[55] So long as the Filipinos failed to demonstrate otherwise Roosevelt endorsed American imperial paternalism there. It was the duty of the Anglo-American imperialists to be stewards of the Filipinos for the purpose of freeing them from "barbarism" and teaching them the republican virtues necessary for self-government[56] "Only the exceptional people have ever succeeded in the experiment of self-government," Roosevelt remarked, "because its needs, its interest, and its successful working imply the existence within the heart of the average citizen of certain high qualities. There must be

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[53] Quoted in David H. Burton"The Influence of the American West on the Imperialist Philosophy of Theodore Roosevelt," *Arizona and the West* (Spring, 1962), pp. 5-26.
[54] Roosevelt, "The Indian Wars, 1784-1787," *An American Mind*, p. 61-62.
[55] Roosevelt, "America's Part of the World's Work," *An American Mind*, p. 181, and "National Duties," *The Strenuous* Life, p. 293.
[56] Roosevelt, "National Duties," *The Strenuous Life*, p. 293.

control. There must be mastery, somewhere, and if there is no self-control and self-mastery, the control and mastery will ultimately be imposed from without."[57]

Influenced by Adams, Roosevelt was convinced that all nations, at some point in their existence become weak, stationary, and must die. They both believed that the United States had an opportunity to take its place in the pantheon of nations whose triumphs future generations will always remember:

> …the nation that has dared to be great, that has had the will and the power to change the destiny of the ages, in the end must die, yet no less surely the nation that has played the part of the weakling must also die; and whereas the nation that has done nothing leaves nothing behind it, the nation that has done a great work really continues, through in changed form, to live forevermore. The Roman has passed away exactly as all the nations of antiquity which did not expand when he expanded have passed away; but their very memory has vanished, while he himself is still a living force throughout the wide world in our entire civilization of today, and will so continue through countless generations, through untold ages.[58]

The Spanish-American War of 1898 afforded the United States the opportunity to travel the heroic road of the Roman and the British Empires. Adams and Roosevelt recognized the national and economic interests in acquiring Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines. This point should not be underestimated since both thinkers highlighted the importance of material and economic prosperity for imperial supremacy.

For Roosevelt the frontiersman, the wilderness hunter, the backwoodsman, and the soldier were the purveyors of civilization and the archetypes of leadership.[59] To Adams and Roosevelt, war, militarism, and imperialism offered the forum for the renewal of this character type out of which this new virtuous elite, who would administer that

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[57] Quoted in Jacobson, p. 226.
[58] Roosevelt, "National Duties," in *The Strenuous Life*, p. 286.
[59] Richard Slotkin, "Nostalgia and Progress: Theodore Roosevelt's Myth of the Frontier," *American Quarterly* (Winter, 1981), pp. 608-637. Gary Gerstle, "Theodore Roosevelt and the Divided Character of American Nationalism," *The Journal of American History* (December, 1999), pp. 1280-1307.

state on behalf of the national interest, was to be found. For Roosevelt and Adams war on behalf of the nation had this regenerative capability because it gave Americans the chance to belong to and participate in something greater than their own financial aggrandizement. According to Roosevelt, "military preparedness will teach young men that there are other ideals than money making."[60] It offered them the occasion to do something world-historic as contributing to the spread of civilization to the Caribbean, the Philippines, and China, but also to the resurgence of America's national glory and international supremacy. It gave the prospect to individuals to exhibit the valor, courage, strength of will, and daring in physical confrontation, which leads to respect and legitimate authority.

History, as Adams and Roosevelt understood it, taught that America in the late 19th century had the opportunity for greatness. It was a destiny upon which national survival and western civilization both depended, if only Americans could marshal the will to seize it. To that effect Adams and Roosevelt wanted to harness the inventive and productive capability of the modern capitalist industrial system and channel it toward the noble mission of civilizing the remaining dark corners of the world in the form of American imperialism and supremacy in the international arena. It was a policy that proved remarkably profitable for the captains of American capitalism.

IV. Conservatism and Reform

An American empire required some significant reforms on the home front, in order for it to succeed. Roosevelt and Adams recognized that America was a fundamentally different country at the turn of the 20th century than it had been one hundred years before when economic laissez-faire seemed more compatible with the

[60] Roosevelt, "Letter to S. Stanwood Menken,"*The Writings of Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 385.

nation's decentralized social, economic, and political institutions. However, the contemporary era of big business, industry, and international finance made the laissez-faire ideology of limited government antiquated and dangerous to order, stability, national survival, and imperial ambition. The consolidation and centralization that was everywhere evident in the world of business required an equal administrative capability on the part of the state to regulate business concerns in the interest of the nation. Therefore, from the conservative principles that placed the highest value on domestic stability and national strength, Roosevelt and Adams advocated reform.[61]

The problem of the trusts and the proper public policy course with regard to the concentration of business was perhaps the central economic question of Roosevelt's presidential and post-presidential years. Louis D. Brandeis, among other Progressives, argued that the best remedy against plutocracy, class conflict, and corporate power was a policy of economic decentralization. In the interests of republican self-government, Brandeis suggested, large corporations needed to be decentralized and broken up into smaller units where workers and communities could exert democratic influence over the economic decisions that affect their lives. Without decentralization and industrial democracy, Brandeis argued, workers were reduced to a state of dependency little better than slaves. They were devoid of the economic independence necessary for the development of the moral and civic character of citizens of a republic.[62] Brandeis' Jeffersonian republican political economy received a sympathetic audience from

[61] Roosevelt's support for reform have lead some scholars to underestimate the conservative principles behind the reforms and characterize him as a Progressive and corporate liberal. See William E. Leuchtenburg's introduction to Roosevelt's *The New Nationalism* and Sklar.
[62] Michael J Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 211-221.

Woodrow Wilson whose "New Freedom" platform incorporated the central ideas of the decentralist vision.[63]

Unlike Brandeis and Wilson who believed that economic concentration was incompatible with republican citizenship, Roosevelt did not believe that the problem with the trusts was their size. Instead, for Roosevelt the problem with the trusts was that they lacked public influence over their activities. As Michael Sandel has argued Roosevelt broke with the republican tradition by embracing consolidated political power in the form of the federal government in order to counter and control the consolidated power of big business.[64] Nevertheless, according to Sandel, Roosevelt falls within the republican tradition because he "sought to cultivate in citizens the qualities of character essential to self-government."[65] Roosevelt's republicanism was not of the Jeffersonian sort. An essential precondition for a Jeffersonian republican citizenship is economic independence embodied in the decentralist vision of Brandeis. This sort of republicanism implied a greater level of economic equality and a significant level of political initiative on the part of ordinary citizens that was lacking in Roosevelt's vision. Roosevelt's republicanism was of a different variant. It was concerned with typical republican issues such as the fear of corruption and luxury and the cultivation of civic virtue among citizens, but his conception of civic virtue was more narrowly defined and he placed the capability for political initiative with virtuous governing elites rather than the average citizen.

The crucial component of the warrior critique of capitalism was the capitalists' small-mindedness and lack of civic virtue. Roosevelt saw the capitalist, and in particular

[63] As President, however, Wilson soon turned away from decentralization model and came to terms with centralized power.
[64] Sandel, p. 211-221.
[65] Sandel, p. 218.

the capitalist elite, through the republican lens which located a tension between commerce and civic virtue. According to republican theory the stability and well-being of the republic and the liberty of its people is dependent upon a high level of civic virtue among its citizens. That is, citizens who are public spirited and willing to put the interests of the whole above their own private interests. A society which places primary emphasis on commerce, as America did, was a society that prioritized private interests ahead of the common good. Such a society would become decadent, soft, and corrupt.[66] It would be unable to protect itself from foreign threats and thus become prey for invading armies. More importantly, however, the polity would gradually rot from within as citizens neglect the public sphere in favor of tending to their private affairs. Their liberty sacrificed to a corrupt political class the republic would soon succumb to internal discord, decline, and despotism.

While Roosevelt often made these republican arguments his republicanism was not of an inclusive and participatory sort. For Roosevelt the ideal republican citizen is one "willing and able to take arms for the defense of the flag" and father "many healthy children."[67] The gender exclusion of this definition of republican citizenship notwithstanding, it is nevertheless a very limited way of defining the duties of citizens. In particular it lacks the core of republicanism which is a politically active public. While Roosevelt would tell people that republican citizenship required more than periodic voting, or would admonish those who have no time to "attend" to politics as "unfit to live in a free community," he dismissed popular protest as a form of political participation as the work of demagogues, socialists, "muckrakers", and other radicals. His faith in the

[66] Pocock, p. 183-218.
[67] Roosevelt, "The Duties of American Citizenship," *The Writings of Theodore Roosevelt*, p. 4-5.

wisdom of the public was further shaken when they did not lend him their support. An instructive example is his disillusionment with the public following Woodrow Wilson's election. Roosevelt declared, "I despise Wilson, but I despise still more our foolish, foolish people who, partly from ignorance and partly from sheer timidity and partly from lack of imagination and of sensitive national feeling, support him."[68] Such statements suggest that Roosevelt's faith in the political wisdom of the average citizen was tenuous at best and as a result the republican renewal that he envisioned was of an elite variety. Considering Roosevelt's ambivalence toward the common citizen, Roosevelt may have expected the public to defer to the officials of the federal government, like himself, who possessed a strong sense of civic virtue to safeguard the public interest. Instead of a new republican political economy then, Roosevelt embodied a state paternalism akin to the England of Disraeli and the Germany of Bismarck.

Roosevelt believed that public officials needed to act as stewards of the public interest by intervening in the economy to ensure fair competition and channel corporate interests toward the national interest. He knew leaving regulation to the individual states would be ineffective as many of the largest corporations were national in scope doing business throughout the U.S. For Roosevelt the centralization of business was an inevitable product of the evolution and development of the economy. In addition, a modern nation with imperial ambitions required the goods that could be efficiently produced using modern industrial techniques employed by large corporations. "Either we must modify our present obsolete laws regarding concentration and co-operation," declared Roosevelt, "so as to conform with the world movement, or else fall behind in the

[68] Quoted in H.W. Brands, *T.R.: The Last Romantic* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 773.

race for the world's markets."[69] Concentration was a "world-wide movement." To resist it or ignore was national suicide.

Nevertheless, Roosevelt did recognize the corrupting effects that large corporations and monopolies had on the body politic. But, instead of breaking up large business concerns, Roosevelt sought to control them "in order to protect the people" through the consolidated power of the federal government.[70] Departing from traditional republican political economy Roosevelt, together with Adams, and many influential Progressives, including Herbert Croly whose *The Promise of American Life* offered the theoretical justification for Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" saw consolidated political power in the national government as the ablest defender of the republican nation. The officials of the federal government were the guardians of the public interest holding corporations accountable to the national interest.

As a reformer Roosevelt sought to centralize power in the federal government as a counter to the power of big business and big labor. In his first Annual Message to Congress in 1901 Roosevelt declared:

> The tremendous and highly complex industrial development which went on with ever-accelerated rapidity during the latter half of the nineteenth century brings us face to face, at the beginning of the twentieth, with very serious social problems. The old laws, and the old customs which had almost the binding force of law, were once quite sufficient to regulate the accumulation and distribution of wealth. Since the industrial changes which have so enormously increased the productive power of mankind, they are no longer sufficient.[71]

He became a reformer out of the fear that if capitalism was not regulated and capitalist greed continued unabated the imperial panacea to America's moral and economic crises

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[69] Roosevelt, *Politics and People: The Ordeal of Self-Government in America*, ed. Leon Stein (New York: Arno Press, 1974), p. 384.
[70] Roosevelt, *Politics and People*, p. 384.
[71] Roosevelt, "First Annual Message to Congress," *An American Mind*, p. 127.

would be futile. Thus over the course of his presidency and after, he endorsed measures such as the regulation of railroad rates, legislation banning sweatshops, corporate transparency legislation, workman's compensation, child labor legislation, the eight hour workday, workplace safety regulations, the right of unions to organize, strike, and bargain collectively, free schools, housing regulation, inheritance tax, and the tax on incomes. Always open to the charge that these policy positions were nothing short of socialistic, Roosevelt and Adams never tired of reminding their conservative colleagues that reform was a means to conserve. In *The New Empire* (1902) Adams maintained that

> Every considerable political innovation must thus affect a portion of the population, for men always live to whom a change in what they have been trained to respect is tantamount to sacrilege. This temper of the mind is conservatism. It resists change instinctively and not intelligently, and it is this conservatism which largely causes those violent explosions of pent-up energy which we term revolutions.[72]

In a similar vein, in the final Annual Message to Congress of his presidency Roosevelt declared that, "a blind and ignorant resistance to every effort for the reform of abuses and for the readjustment of society to modern conditions represents not true conservatism but an incitement to the wildest radicalism; for wise radicalism and wise conservatism go hand in hand, one bent on progress, the other bent on seeing that no change is made unless in the right direction."[73] Betraying the conservative assumption behind his most progressive policy prescriptions Roosevelt continued to justify the necessity of reform as means to avert the explosion of revolutionary ferment, which he believed, was below the surface. In a 1910 speech in Denver before the Colorado Live Stock Association, Roosevelt maintained that, "true conservatism is that conservatism which is also the

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[72] Adams, *The New Empire* (New York: MacMillan, 1902), p. xiii.
[73] Roosevelt, "Eight Annual Message to Congress," *An American Mind*, p. 136.

embodiment of the wise spirit of progress. It is that conservatism which acts conservatively before that has happened which will inflame men to madness."[74]

Adams and Roosevelt, atypical even among conservatives of their own era, worried of the danger to domestic stability posed by an uncontrolled capitalism. Thus, their statist and imperialistic alternative to laissez-faire came out of their conservative commitment to avert revolution and to save modern capitalism from its worst enemy, its own unrestrained self.[75] Through political centralization and a policy of corporate regulation Roosevelt and Adams hoped to save the capitalist elite from their own folly by ameliorating some of the most galling misery and exploitation produced by laissez-faire capitalism and return stability, predictability, and efficiency to a volatile economy plagued by disastrous market vicissitudes. It was by this alternative that Adams and Roosevelt believed lay America's salvation.

IV. Conclusion

The enormous economic, social, cultural, and political transformations that occurred in the roughly five decades between the end of the Civil War and World War I produced the distinct conservative critique of capitalism of Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt. It was the first American conservative critique of laissez-faire capitalism without the benefit of a conservative alternative material reality. Therefore, Adams, Roosevelt, and other American warrior critics of business civilization, were forced to create a conservative alternative of empire upon which capitalism could be secured.

In the post-Civil War era, there was a pervasive sense in American culture which was explicit in Adams and Roosevelt that the American republic and western civilization

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[74]Roosevelt, "Conservation," *The New Nationalism*, p. 56.

[75] Richard Hofstadter wrote in *The American Political Tradition*, "It became his [TR] obsession to "save" the masters of capital from their own stupid obstinacy." 286.

were at a crossroads. There was the newly constructed, well-lit, well-maintained, well-marked and mapped out road of the era of the triumph of the Economic Man. Yet, it was a road that by the turn of the 20th century had already proved to be plagued with social turmoil and class antagonism, which Roosevelt and Adams worried, lead to domestic social upheaval, foreign conquest, and ultimate decay. And then there was the heroic road. Steep and meandering, laced with pitfalls each more difficult than the next. Once, in a more martial and imaginative age, it was a well-traveled road immortalized by the bravery of the Greeks at Marathon, the Great Army of the Roman Republic, the Union troops on the battlefields of the Civil War, and the statesmanship of George Washington, John Adams, and Abraham Lincoln. That once lively road was now left desolate by the triumph of a life of ease, materialism, and decadence. Adams, and with less pessimism, Roosevelt urged America to travel the heroic road. "For many conventionally wise Americans," writes Lears, "the martial ideal emerged as a popular antidote to over-civilization."[76]

Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt's indictment of laissez-faire capitalism marked a distinct chapter in the conservative intellectual tradition that has been critical of capitalism. They indicted capitalism for a number of reasons, some of which are consistent throughout the critical tradition, including its threat to stability and social order, the materialistic and self-interested virtues it cultivates, its destruction of a virtuous ruling class, and its failure to generate a responsible ruling class of its own. Adams and Roosevelt, though, did more than merely update old critiques. They made a distinct

[76] Lears, *No Place of Grace*, p. 100.

contribution to the American conservative discourse on capitalism by bringing the state in and adding the imperial dimension to their alternative to laissez-faire.

Unlike the defenders of slavery before them and many of the 20th century critics after, Adams and Roosevelt embraced the economic concentration and centralization of American business, industry, and finance. The warrior critics at the turn of the century recognized that America's stability, prosperity, and national strength were bound with the success of capitalism, but not of the laissez-faire variety. For the warrior-aristocrats, empire was necessary to save capitalism and as a forum for civic renewal. However, empire required a repudiation of laissez-faire. It required a regulated corporate capitalism and a government of public-spirited administrators governing on behalf of the national interest. Individualistic capitalism with its emphasis on self-interest, competition, specialization, and moneymaking failed to produce an elite capable of achieving these aims. Laissez-faire capitalism failed to produce the "rude and the crude" adventurer and the public-spirited administrator who would rescue America from its chocking materialism and self-interested, effeminate, decadent plutocratic elite and restore domestic stability, and renew a sense of national purpose to the republic.

# CHAPTER III

## The Agrarian Critique of Corporate Capitalism

> It is out of fashion in these days to look backward rather than forward; and about the only American given commonly to this disgraceful conduct is some unreconstructed Southerner, who persists in his regard for a certain terrain, a certain history, and a certain inherited way of living. He is punished as his crime deserves. He feels himself in the American scene as an anachronism, and knows he is felt by his neighbors as a reproach.
>
> John Crowe Ransom[1]

### I. Introduction

In the 1920s America found itself in a position it had never been in before. The yearning of Brooks Adams, Theodore Roosevelt and the warrior-aristocrats for American unity, will to power, and empire had come to partial fruition. Once the last stench of mustard gas lifted over the battlefields of World War I and dissipated into the European air the United States was left standing as the preeminent military and economic power in the world. But if Adams, Roosevelt, and their fellow warrior-aristocrats found solace in America's role in World War I their political project of restoring a virtuous ruling class of statesmen proved to be an utter failure. In the midst of the prosperity of the 1920s the wealthy capitalist, in particular the industrialists, financiers and bankers, continued to occupy the ether of ideological and social esteem. President Calvin Coolidge spoke in the spirit of the era canonizing the capitalist when he declared, "The man who builds a factory builds a temple. The man who works there worships there."[2] In a clear repudiation of the strenuous life idealized by Adams and Roosevelt and a far cry from their call for Americans to do something extraordinary and worthy of historical memory

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[1] John Crowe Ransom, "The South Defends Its Heritage," *The Superfluous Men: Conservative Critics of American Culture, 1900-1945*, ed. Robert M. Crunden (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), p. 172.
[2] Quoted in James A.Henretta, et al., *America's History: Since 1865* (New York: Worth Publishers, Inc., 1997), p. 745.

Warren G. Harding promised the American public, "not heroics but healing, not nostrums but normalcy."[3]

The decade long post-war prosperity had wide-ranging economic, political, social, and cultural effects. The number and scale of corporate mergers and consolidations was the most since the 1880s and 1890s. Corporate oligopolies, rather than monopolies, dominated entire industries from banking to steel making. By 1929, the 250 largest banks in the U.S. controlled nearly half of the nation's banking resources. In addition, the two hundred largest corporations controlled half of the nation's non-banking corporate wealth.[4] But not everyone was reaping the benefits of a prosperous decade. The severe but relatively brief recession of 1920 affected none worse than American farmers. As crop prices dropped, foreclosures mounted and rural people migrated in droves to urban areas in search of economic opportunity.[5] Nevertheless, in 1930, 30.5 million Americans still lived on farms and more than half of that number, 16.3 million lived in the South.[6] Aided by a business friendly Supreme Court and the three wholly pro-business presidents Harding, Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover American business and industry produced goods for the domestic consumer market that continued to grow with the advent of Fordism and the expansion of consumer credit.[7] American mass consumerism was largely bought on margin and on the installment plan which became widely used for the purchase of everything from Ford Model T's and refrigerators to securities on the New York Stock Exchange. Yet, the prosperity of the 1920s proved to be an illusion as the stock market

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[3] Quoted in Henretta, et al. *America's History*, op. cit., p. 740.
[4] Henretta, pp. 744-745.
[5] Between 1920 and 1930 the U.S. Farm population dropped by 1.5 million people. *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970, Part 1* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1975), p. 458.
[6] *Historical Statistics of the United States*, p. 458.
[7] Stanley Aronowitz, *How Class Works: Power and Social Movement* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p. 68.

crash of October 29, 1929 led to a run on the banks, widespread bankruptcies and foreclosures, and mass unemployment.

The Southern manifesto written by twelve southerners[8] titled *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* was first published in 1930. The book was not intended to be prophetic but the Depression made it out to be. The worst economic crisis in United States history gave the Southern Agrarians a relevancy and intellectual currency that they may otherwise not have had, had the prosperity of the 1920s continued into the thirties and beyond. While the book never sold very well and met with reviews ridiculing their nostalgia, utopianism, and glorification of Southern backwardness as somehow morally redeeming, the Southern Agrarians did generate substantial academic interest in agrarianism. More importantly, however, the Southern Agrarians offered the most radical indictment of capitalism offered by twentieth century conservatives. They also reframed the critique from one that was primarily concerned with elite degeneration to one that prioritized the common man and indicted capitalism for how it undermined the white, populist, agrarian republicanism symbolized by the rural South.

The Southern Agrarians critique of modern economic arrangements was multi-faceted. It included a "satanic-mills" indictment of industrialism as well as a critique of finance capitalism and corporate other-directedness. But it was not limited to these. The Southern Agrarians also offered a penetrating indictment of capitalism as an economic system driven by a need for constant revolution in production, expansion, overproduction, crisis and instability, and the production for an abstract market. Such an

[8] John Crowe Ransom, Donald Davidson, Frank Lawrence Owsley, John Gould Fletcher, Lyle H. Lanier, Allen Tate, Herman Clarence Nixon, Andrew Nelson Lytle, Robert Penn Warren, John Donald Wade, Henry Blue Kline, and Stark Young. *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977 [1930]).

economic system was incompatible with traditional society where there is a moral unity between "making a living" and the "way of life." This moral unity was based on the need for widely distributed private property. The Southern Agrarian vision of a yeoman farmer alternative included the wide distribution of private ownership of the means of production together with significant political restraints on the capitalist system.

The Southern Agrarian critique of capitalism found in *I'll Take my Stand* and *Who Owns America?* had many striking similarities as leftist critiques. Some scholars have suggested that the Southern Agrarians and the socialist and landless farmers that organized the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union (STFU), albeit from different positions, identified the same cause of America' problems, i.e. corporate or finance capitalism, as well as, the solution in the form of radical land reform.[9] For the Southern Agrarians corporate capitalism brutalized and exploited labor, created an alienated life of production and consumption, destroyed the right relations or sensibilities between humans, lead to the decay of the arts, the destruction of nature, a lack of appreciation for religion, and instability resulting from overproduction and the need to constantly revolutionize production. In *I'll Take My Stand* the Southern Agrarians stated aim was to overthrow this "evil dispensation" which they called the "American or prevailing way," or more simply "industrial," but which was in fact deeply critical of corporate capitalism and went far beyond a "satanic-mills" critique of industrialism. Allan Tate, one of the leading Southern Agrarians once wrote, "From my point of view...you [Malcolm Cowley] and the other Marxists are not revolutionary enough: you want to keep

[9] Jess Gilbert and Steve Brown, "Alternative Land Reform Proposals in the 1930s: The Nashville Agrarians and the Southern Tenant Farmers' Union," *Agricultural History* (October, 1981), pp. 351-369.

capitalism with the capitalism left out."[10] The Southern Agrarians were the last gasp of a radically conservative critique of capitalism offered in American political thought.11

The Southern Agrarian offered a populist, agrarian, and sectionalist critique of corporate capitalism and the plutocratic political order. Their thought drew on Jeffersonian agrarianism, the Populist critique of plutocracy, and antebellum Southern sectionalist thought. Their economic vision constituted of a radical reinterpretation of property rights and endorsed a radical redistribution of property on the model of a yeoman ideal that served as the economic basis for the restoration of a traditional political, social, and cultural conservatism. For the Southern Agrarians, the yeoman farmer who owned, worked, managed, and lived on the land was the repository of a conservative America that was threatened by plutocratic laissez-faire and the totalitarianism of the left and right. For the most part, the Southern Agrarians distrusted centralized political power in the federal government but did envision a significant role for state governments or regional governments in achieving their decentralized yeoman ideal.

*I'll Take My Stand* was a book that unabashedly rejected industrialism and corporate capitalism and the culture that it produced as forces destructive of the stable, traditional, organic, religious, republican community together with its unique manners, customs, folkways, and heritage that the South embodied. The Southern Agrarians

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[10] Quoted in Edward Shapiro, "The Southern Agrarians and the Tennessee Valley Authority," *American Quarterly*, (Winter, 1970), pp. 791-806.

[11] The radicalism of the New Right, which will be discussed later, acknowledged as the intellectual heirs of the Southern Agrarians pales in comparison in both their critique of capitalism and the alternative which they offered. See Eugene D. Genovese, *The Southern Tradition: The Achievement and Limitations of an American Conservatism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994); Paul V. Murphy, *The Rebuke of History: The Southern Agrarians and American Conservative Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

looked to an economy of subsistence agriculture of family farms which they believed were ubiquitous but endangered by the economic imperialism of Northeastern industrialists and financiers and their "New South" booster acolytes. An "agrarian way of life," posited the Southern Agrarians, offered community that was more orderly and humane than the alienating consumerism and materialism of industrialism and corporate capitalism. They explicitly pointed to the development of corporate industrial and finance capitalism as the forces which undermined the values, institutions and sensibilities of a conservative social and cultural order based on landed property, religion, Southern tradition and heritage, and local community. These social, cultural and political indictments of corporate capitalism led them to repudiate the corporate economic status quo and endorse radical economic change in an attempt to return America to its conservative and agrarian roots.

Despite the seeming egalitarianism of the Southern Agrarians populist yeoman alternative their vision, if fact, was severely limited by its provincialism, racism, and agrarianism. Their alternative spoke little to the exploited industrial workers who had been physically, mentally, culturally, economically, and morally degraded by corporate capitalism. Their vision was a regression for women who were not enamored with the prospect of returning to the back breaking work and a life of subservience under the despotism of the patriarchal family farm. Their alternative to the materialism, consumerism, dehumanization, and alienation of an industrial, corporate capitalism was the agrarian "way of life" which they believed was most closely approximated by the South. They admired the ways of the South as the embodiment of traditional religious community and old customs and folkways. They conceived of Southern culture as

uniquely different from the materialism of corporate capitalism, New Deal liberalism, and communism. But the Southern way of life which the Southern Agrarians so admired was more than this. It was also a society and culture of Jim Crow segregation and discrimination. It was a society of racial apartheid that disenfranchised, harassed, lynched and otherwise terrorized the African American population. The explicitly white, Southern, and racist orientation of the Southern Agrarian vision did not challenge but in fact meant to reinforce the system of racial apartheid in America.

The Southern Agrarians were not the only Right wing observers in the 1920-1930s who saw the degeneration of the American polity and culture soaked in material prosperity and decadent luxury. In their indictment of corporate capitalism and in their search for an alternative to it the Southern Agrarians were joined by other luminaries of the interwar Right including the New Humanists, Ralph Borsodi's Yankee agrarians, the Catholic rural movement associated with John A. Rawe. The Southern Agrarians collaborated closely with the English Distributionist movement Americanized by Herbert Agar. Six of the twelve Southern Agrarians from *I'll Take My Stand* contributed to *Who Owns America?* which was an attempt to translate agrarianism into practical public policy. But it was the Southern Agrarians populism, distrust of centralized power, and their defense of Southern tradition, culture, and values as the alternative to the rootless, bourgeois individualism of the North, rather than their radical critique and decentralist vision that proved to have the most lasting impact on the American conservative political tradition.

II. The Attack on Traditional Society

The Southern Agrarians indictment of corporate industrial and finance capitalism was the most radical, profound, and devastating of any other coming from the Right in the 20th century. Central to the Southern Agrarian critique of industrialism, finance capital, the corporate structure, and capitalism itself was that all of these forces decimated the yeoman farmer, who for the Southern Agrarians was the social basis of the conservative order in the South. The Southern Agrarians drew heavily on Jefferson glorification of the farmer as the repository of virtues such as self-reliance, moral integrity and the bedrock of a stable, republican society. In place of the South of the yeoman farmer who owned, worked, and lived on his own piece of land, established roots in the community, and was embedded in the traditions, culture, and heritage of the place where he lived the South was being proletariatized by the changing economic structure. Industrialization and the corporatization of agriculture, which essentially created factories in the fields shattered the relationship between the ownership and control of private property. Under corporate capitalism private property is owned, controlled, and worked by wholly different people. In many cases banks, real estate companies, insurance corporations, stockholders, and other absentee landlords owned productive property while the control of the property was left to corporate managers. According to Jess Gilbert and Steve Brown, in 1935 half of all American farmers were landless and one-third of the South's cotton land was owned by absentee landlords such as banks and insurance companies.[12] This relationship to private property, endemic of corporate capitalism, the Southern Agrarians argued had deep economic, political, social, and cultural ramifications that were destroying the distinct heritage of the South.

[12] Gilbert and Brown, p. 355.

The Southern Agrarians argued that a property system based on corporate industrial and financial capitalism was alienating and economically exploitative of the laborer and of the farmer. Using the technological advancements made by applied science corporate capitalism displaced the laborer and robbed the work of its enjoyment. It transformed labor as "one of the happy functions of human life" into an activity "evidently brutalizing."[13] "Labor is made hard, its tempo fierce, and employment is insecure," writes Ransom.[14] Work under a system of industrial capitalism is fundamentally inhumane and alienating. The Southern Agrarians were fond of contrasting the ideal notion of farm life and the farmer's relationship to his land with that of corporate industrial and finance capitalism.

> A man can contemplate and explore, respect and love an object as substantial as a farm or a native province. But he cannot contemplate nor explore, respect nor love a mere turnover, such as an assemblage of "natural resources," a pile of money, a volume of produce, a market, or a credit system. It is into precisely these intangibles that industrialism would translate the farmer's farm. It means the dehumanization of his life.[15]

The Southern Agrarians contrasted labor under industrial capitalism with the natural, leisurely, self-realizing work of the yeoman farmer. The Southern Agrarians argued that the work of the farmer was more enjoyable because it was not hurried and harried as is the monotonous high-tempo labor of the industrial employee.

In addition to the leisurely pace of farm work, the variety of labor done on an agrarian homestead allowed for the individual to develop a whole host of abilities upon which the family farm depended for its survival. As a result, more of the farmer's human faculties were allowed free development which made farm labor much more

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[13] Ransom, et al. "A Statement of Principles," *I'll Take My Stand*, p. xli.
[14] Ransom, et al. "A Statement of Principles," *I'll Take My Stand*, p. xl.
[15] Ransom, "The South Defends Its Heritage," *The Superfluous* Men, p. 179.

commensurate with the development of the total human personality. Furthermore, according to the Southern Agrarians, an additional benefit of the agrarian way of life beyond it being conducive for the expression of various faculties and abilities, was that it offered a natural organic work routine fixed by the changing seasons of nature rather than the monotonous, alienating, self-effacing drudgery of toil under industrial capitalism. Andrew Nelson Lytle described the variety and the steady routine offered by farm labor in the following idealized terms:

> Each morning the farmer wakes to some new action. There is the time for breaking the ground, the time for planting, the exciting moment when the crops begin to show themselves, palely green, upon the surface of the earth, the steady progress toward the ripe harvest, or it may be a barren harvest.[16]

Industrial work, argued the Southern Agrarians, subjugated the laborers to the tempo of the machines, the tyranny of the shop foreman, layers of corporate managers, and the artificial totalitarianism of the time clock.

The Southern Agrarian narrative of the yeoman homestead largely ignored women beyond romanticizing the grace and chastity of the ladies of the Old South and bemoaning the susceptibility of the modern woman to conspicuous consumption. The Southern Agrarian yeoman vision was a patriarchal one, which meant that their second class status vis-a-vis men would not have improved. In fact, the yeoman ideal may have looked even less appealing to women than employment in corporate capitalism. At the very least, employment in corporate capitalism provided a chance for females to work and make money outside of the home, allowing women some freedom from the despotism of their fathers or husbands, which they gained as a result of not being

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[16] Andrew Nelson Lytle, "The Small Farm Secures the State," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal: Essays After I'll Take My Stand*, eds. Emily S. Bingham and Thomas A. Underwood (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001), p. 154.

confined to the patriarchal home or farm for their employment. Despite the severe exploitation women suffered at the hands of corporate employers it is hard to imagine that women could have preferred the Southern Agrarians' patriarchal yeoman alternative.

The Southern Agrarians argued that corporate property relations give the corporation immense power over the individual worker who depended on the firm and the market for his survival. In Jeffersonian fashion the Southern Agrarians argued that the corporate system breeds dependence which annihilates the unity between "making a living" and the "way of life." With no economic or political power that comes from economic independence most people become little more that industrial slaves.[17] But that which makes this system even more exploitative of the worker is the consequences of the division between the owners and the managers of the corporate enterprise. According to the Southern Agrarians, corporate capitalism is characterized by the rule of absentee owners, including stockholders, banks or insurance firms. They are only concerned about the bottom line of whether the enterprise is profitable from year to year. Corporate managers are hired by the absentee owners to administer the daily operation of the enterprise, to keep the workers in line, and insure that the enterprise produces more profit every year. Under such a system the productive enterprise and the personal relations between owners and workers, with their numerous benefits, that was the hallmark of an America dominated by small business no longer exists. Those with the economic power are divorced from the management of the enterprise, the production process, and the workplace relations that exist there, and the community where the enterprise is located. Owners of corporate capital lose all sense of social responsibility. Every social relation is

[17] Ransom, "Reconstructed but Unregenerate," *I'll Take My Stand*, p. 23 and "The South Defends its Heritage" *Superfluous Men*, p. 181.

transformed into a commodity relation where isolated individuals exchange quantifiable values in an open market. Gone are the opportunities for benevolence and empathy which personal relationships make possible**.** Lyle H. Lanier captures the Southern Agrarians' indictment of the level of human alienation that corporate capitalism engenders:

> Systems of slavery or domination in some form constitute one of the outstanding facts of history. Our contemporary variety is perhaps as complete and vicious as any form of outright ownership, for there is no feeling of responsibility even for the physical welfare of individuals dependent for a living upon the caprice of modern industry.[18]

Thus, the Southern Agrarians restated one of the most powerful critiques of capitalism made by John C. Calhoun, George Fitzhugh, and the defenders of slavery. They argued that without a decentralized economy founded on personal relations a moral sense of obligation and benevolence, or in the Southern Agrarians' terms, the "right relations of man to man," is lost. For the defenders of slavery these "right relations" were embodied in the hierarchical social networks of the antebellum South. As these social networks eroded, thanks to the development and expansion of capitalism, the elite no longer felt a social obligation to be benevolent as a duty of their social and economic position. As a result the lower classes lost their respect for the elite and the institutions to which they once deferred and the traditions and the modes of behavior they had observed. The inevitable result was an increasingly tenuous social fabric that was continuously strained and torn by class conflict. The Southern Agrarians, while no defenders of slavery saw value in the idealized personal relations of the antebellum South. "For a society as a whole," wrote Tate, "the modern system is probably inferior to that of slavery; the classes are not so closely knit; and the employer feels responsible to no law but his own

[18] Lanier, "A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress," *I'll Take My Stand*, pp. 140-141.

desire."[19] Yet they knew that such a conservative elite as the antebellum slaveholder elite had been, no longer existed in the U.S. Nor did the Southern Agrarians wish to restore such an elite:

> If anything is clear, it is that we can never go back, and neither this essay nor any intelligent person that I know in the South desires a literal restoration of the old Southern life, even if that were possible; dead days are gone, and if by some chance they should return, we should find them intolerable. But out of any epoch in civilization there may arise things worthwhile, that are the flowers of it. To abandon these, when another epoch arrives, is only stupid, so long as there is still in them the breath and flux of life....It would be childish and dangerous for the South to be stampeded and betrayed out of its own character by the noise, force, and glittering narrowness of the industrialism and progress spreading everywhere, with varying degrees, from one region to another.[20]

The Southern Agrarians believed that the social basis of a conservative society must not necessarily flow from an elite class. Instead, suggested the Southern Agrarians, in the twentieth century it must do so from a populist, agrarian social structure. They believe that a society made up of yeoman farmers was an ideal basis of such a stable and conservative society.

In the Southern Agrarian ideal the yeoman farmer who tilled his small plot of land for the primary purpose of his family's subsistence rooted the farmer and his family in a place. He was intimately acquainted with the natural environment, the lay of the land, and the small town where he sought community and went to market. He grew acquainted with the traditions, customs, and heritage, all of which defined his identity and the identity of his ancestors. This rootedness gave him a sense of responsibility for the well-being of his family, his plot of land, and the community to which he belonged. The Southern Agrarians, argues Christopher M. Duncan in *Fugitive Theory*, were not some

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[19] Allen Tate, *Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall* (New York: Minton, Blach and Co., 1929), p. 43.
[20] Stark Young, "Not in Memoriam, But in Defense," *I'll Take My Stand*, p. 328.

foundationless sentimentalists but real communitarians. They defended a real historical community, the South, with real traditions, history, and social bonds from the tumult and anomie of corporate capitalism.

The Southern Agrarians were adamant about the relationship between the economic sphere of life and community. Specifically, they argued that real communities with their traditions and intimate social networks were only possible in a predominantly agrarian economic system of yeoman farmers:

> …real association exists, for the generality of people, only in the agrarian community and in the villages and towns which are its adjuncts. It depends upon a stable population, upon long acquaintances…the city necessarily means a diminution of these associations; the casual, fleeting, formal contacts with great numbers of people only enhance a sense of isolation…[21]

Corporate capitalism with its "paper wealth" failed to create such community and stability because it was so easily mobile, transferable, and revolutionary in the way it continually created and destroyed its means of production. Under such an economic system and its commensurate culture where everything is commodified and social relations are transformed into ephemeral exchange relations the sense of obligation, duty, and responsibility that come with property ownership disappears. The sensibilities, the sense of belonging and permanence that accompany being immersed in a particular place with its culture, traditions, religion, values, history, and timeless social relations erode and become antiquated. In the "Statement of Principles," the Southern Agrarians demonstrate their belief that corporate capitalism was incompatible with time-honored tradition and custom:

> The amenities of life also suffer under the curse of a strictly-business or industrial civilization. They consist in such practices as manners, conversation,

[21] Lanier, "A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress," *I'll Take My Stand*, p. 146.

> hospitality, sympathy, family life, romantic love—in the social exchanges which reveal and develop sensibility in human affairs. If religion and the arts are founded on right relations of man-to-nature, these are founded on right relations of man-to-man.[22]

The agrarian way of life and labor, due to the farmer's dependence on nature, in particular, the quality of the soil, the rain, the wind, the rising and setting sun, the heat and the cold, and the changing seasons, dictate to him the work that is to be done. It humbles the farmer in ways the industrial laborer surrounded by gigantic, technologically advanced, man-made tools, machinery, buildings, infrastructure, and organization could never be. The contingency of an unexpected drought or an extended cold spell, natural forces that humans cannot control, does not affect the daily productive life of the industrial laborer in the metropolis the way affects the rural farmer. The farmer's daily toil, in fact his survival, depends on the forces of nature. Through his daily labor he has a intimate relationship with the power, inconsistency, contingency, and unpredictability of natural forces. His own smallness and helplessness in the face of nature is recognizable to him everyday as he sets out for the day's toil surveying his crops swaying in the cool breeze as the thunder-clouds overhead draw nearer darkening the morning horizon. Through such an intimate and in many ways dependent relationship with the natural world and its forces, the Southern Agrarians argued, the farmer tends to be more superstitious and religious. As Lytle wrote in "The Small Farm Secures the State," the Southern Agrarians believed that religious belief had its basis in a particular mode of production and without the yeoman homestead religiosity was threatened and the American republic imperiled:

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[22] Ransom, , et al., "A Statement of Principles," *I'll Take My Stand*, p. xliii.

> …the genuine farmer (and it takes a proper society to make a genuine farmer) never loses his belief in God…When religion grows formless and weak, it is because man in his right role as the protagonist in the great conflict is forgotten or disbelieved. He becomes vainglorious and thinks he may conquer nature. This the good farmer knows to be nonsense. He is faced constantly and immediately with a mysterious and powerful presence, which he may use but which he may never reduce entirely to his will and desires. He knows of minor successes; he remembers defeats; but he is so involved in the tremendously complex ritual of the seasonal drama that he never thinks about idle or dangerous speculations.[23]

The Southern Agrarians saw as did the defenders of slavery, that there was an intimate connection between religiosity and property relations. The Southern Agrarians retained the ideas of the defenders of slavery that the source of moral behavior was found in religion and predominantly defined by the relations and interactions among people. Both groups of thinkers agreed that moral social conduct required that market relations of exchange value, calculation, and buying and selling are circumscribed, even within the arena of production, and do not invade the other spheres of social life. While George Fitzhugh and the defenders of slavery believed that the practice of moral behavior was made possible by the duties and obligations that accompanied a hierarchical social order, in particular one where one was either a slave or a master, the Southern Agrarians argued with Jefferson that "those who labor in the earth are the chosen people of God," and that moral practice had a more egalitarian, republican, and in particular, agrarian economic foundation.[24]

Despite the radical differences between the defenders of slavery and the Southern Agrarians' property schemes both groups of thinkers agreed that the economic base is the foundation of morality and that the capitalist economic system was opposed to a system of Christian or moral conduct. According to Donald Davidson, under a system of

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[23] Lytle, "The Small Farm Secures the State," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, p. 155.
[24] Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *The Portable Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), p. 217.

industrialism the actions of individuals are transformed from moral actions into economic transactions. The bigness, the economy of scale, and the fundamental divorce of the ownership from the control of property sap from the individual the personal or intimate consequences of his relations to others. Davidson argues that the development of the economic system into the modern industrial system transformed all actions into actions of distant consequences, where everything is produced for a market and dictated by the market. In this scenario individuals produce for an abstraction and in many ways they become abstractions themselves. Such a productive relation robs the individual of moral impulse, social will, and moral choice, argues Davidson. Everything is transformed into a money relation and "eventually men become callous even to near consequences."[25]

According to the Southern Agrarians the morality of traditional society requires a certain set of property relations that bind ownership and control in the same person. It is a property relation that according to Tate constitutes, "not only economic privilege but moral obligation, not only rights but duties, not only material welfare but moral standards."[26] Such a social and economic arrangement Tate and the Southern Agrarians called the "traditional society." Corporate finance capitalism divorced ownership of property from control which consequently transformed human agency from recognizing the moral consequences of an action to a mere amoral economic transaction. It divorced economic conduct or "making a living" from moral conduct or the "way of life."[27] Tate and the Southern Agrarians wanted to return to an "integrated life" where the demands of economic life and moral life were consistent and mutually reinforcing. Tate believed that

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[25] Donald Davidson, "Agrarianism and Politics," *Review of Politics* (March, 1939), pp. 114-125.
[26] Tate, "Liberalism and Tradition" *Critical Essays* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, [1941] 1968), p. 209.
[27] Tate, "Liberalism and Tradition," *Critical Essays*, p. 210.

a radical return to a morally integrated life required a radical revaluation and reorganization of property relations. As he understood it, "property is the concrete medium by which tradition is passed on."[28] It was evident to Tate and the Southern Agrarians that traditional moral behavior has its basis in the economic and property relations of a society.

> The higher myth of religion, the lower myth of history, even ordinary codes of conduct, cannot preserve themselves; indeed they do not exist apart from our experience. Since the most significant feature of our experience is the way we make our living, the economic basis of life is the soil out of which all the forms, good or bad, of our experience must come.[29]

The radical redistribution of agrarian property which the Southern Agrarians advocated was a return to the correct economic relations upon which a conservative morality and tradition could be renewed and passed on to future generations.

For the Southern Agrarians the "agrarian way of life" was the model society. It was distinguished by a life of leisure, manners, hospitality, religion, and community characterized by the ways of the Old South. The Southern Agrarian ideal was what Richard Weaver latter called a "social-bond individualism." Social-bond individualism was made operative in an agrarian economic arrangement which fashioned individuals humble before God and nature, and created a cultural environment commensurate with art, not as an escape or mere diversion, but as an expression of daily life. It was a social and economic system where each individual had a place in the family, community, and political order but also in the grander scheme of nature and the divine order. It was a humane life, and in the words of Donald Davidson "integrated life" where the economic, social, political, and cultural life were interdependent. For the Southern Agrarians this

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[28] Tate, "Liberalism and Tradition," *Critical Essays,* p. 209.
[29] Tate, "Liberalism and Tradition," *Critical Essays,* p. 230.

type of integrated life was only possible in a society in which the prevailing mode of production was agricultural, particularly one dominated by small family farms. For them the American South symbolized the closest approximation to this ideal of an agrarian integrated life. Thus they idealized southern traditionalism, romanticized its economic backwardness, ignored gender, defended racism and segregation, and the dehumanization of the non-white population, in particular African Americans, in order not to upset the organic development of the South.

The Southern Agrarian critique of capitalism then was not so much that it dispossessed and destroyed a traditional elite class which held the traditions, customs, and institutions of a conservative society together, so much as it was a critique that it dispossessed the inherently traditional and conservative yeoman class. In place of the conservative Southern elite of the antebellum period and the yeoman farmer the revolutionary plutocrat controlled the reigns of economic and political power. As corporate capitalism dispossessed the yeoman farmer and transformed the yeoman homestead into corporate property the social basis of a conservative republic was eroded. As Northern corporate capitalism destroyed the slave-owning ruling class of the Old South, the Southern Agrarians worried that it was now threatening the other social transmitter of tradition, morality and virtue, and the pillar of 20$^{th}$ century American conservatism, the yeoman farmer. For the Southern Agrarians as corporate capitalism destroyed the property relations that were the basis of these conservative classes it was inevitable that people would seek a way out through class conflict and radical alternatives from the left or from the right.

III. The Yeoman Ideal

The Southern Agrarians understood in ways that some conservatives at the time such as Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and their New Humanist colleagues, and many conservatives writing after the Southern Agrarians did not, that attempts to found the "right relations" between man and nature, man and God, and between man and man require a critical exploration of the mode of production that sustains human life. Thus, the Southern Agrarians urged conservative humanists, traditionalists, and defenders of Southern culture and prejudices not to ignore the economic base. "We cannot recover our native humanism by adopting some standard of taste that is critical enough to question the contemporary arts but not critical enough to question the social and economic life which is their ground," declared the Southern Agrarians.[30] The agrarian way of life of the yeoman South was the economic basis of these "right relations" just as much as it was a bulwark against the incursions of corporate capitalism, its plutocratic elite, and the socialist menace.[31] The Southern Agrarians' political economic program formulated after the publication of *I'll Take My Stand* constituted of a radical redistribution of property intended to lay the correct economic basis for a conservative society. The Southern Agrarian yeoman ideal, where property is widely distributed among the population and owned and controlled by the same person or persons, was their attempt at creating an alternative to the disintegrated and alienated life resulting from the morally, socially, culturally, and politically corrosive property relations of corporate capitalism.

The Southern Agrarians' radical repudiation of corporate capitalism was complemented by their radical political and economic program. The Southern Agrarian

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[30] Ransom, et al, "A Statement of Principles," *I'll Take My Stand*, p. xliv.
[31] Ransom, "The South is a Bulwark," in *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*.

conservatism rested on the regeneration of the yeoman farmer. The key then to the Southern Agrarian political and economic program was a radical reorganization and redistribution of property culminating in a social structure where the agrarian population dominated the political, economic, social, and cultural life.[32]

The Southern Agrarians political and economic program received its clearest expression in Owsley's "Pillars of Agrarianism," published after *I'll Take My Stand*. As conservatives and defenders of the South, the Southern Agrarians feared the proletariatization of the lower classes and the nascent communist menace intruding into Americans' daily lives that was exemplified for them by the legal defense of the Scottsboro boys in the early 1930s, by a group associated with the Communist Party.[33] Despite their fear of communism the Southern Agrarians' primary target was the corporate capitalist plutocracy who through the destruction of small private property was destroying the most solid defense against the communist threat.

The Southern Agrarian vision of a yeoman republic was an effort at smashing the rule of the plutocratic business elite and averting the concentration of political power in the federal government which they would inevitably lead to communism. The Southern Agrarians' yeoman republic was an attempt at reconstructing the economic foundation for a conservative political, social, and cultural life capable of protecting liberty, insuring self-government, and eradicating the economic hardships that many people were undergoing during the Great Depression. The fear of economic and political concentration as the precursor to communism was so central to the Southern Agrarians

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[32] Frank Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," in *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, p. 201.
[33] The Scottsboro boys were nine African-Americans accused of raping two white women in Paint Rock, Alabama. Eight of the nine men were tried and sentenced to death. The International Labor Defense, a group associated with the Communist Party handled the accused men's appeals.

that before titling their collaboration *I'll Take My Stand* they considered naming the collection of essays *Tracts Against Communism*. They decided against the latter title because it did not convey their explicit defense of the South. As Owsley stated in "The Foundations of Democracy," "the ownership and control of productive property sufficient for a livelihood gave a man and his family a sense of economic security; it made him independent; he was a real citizen, for he could cast his franchise without fear and could protect the basic principles of his government."[34] To make economic security, independence, and citizenship real for white Americans the Southern Agrarian alternative vision to corporate capitalism suggested a radical reorganization of property from industrial to agricultural, a radical redistribution of property from corporate to yeoman property, and a significant role for government to make this happen and insure its permanence.

Owsley and the other Southern Agrarians long argued that the South and its people were exploited and oppressed by northern finance and corporate capitalism. Banks and insurance firms who bought up small plots of agricultural land, combined them into large farms, and operated them as giant agribusinesses from their corporate headquarters in New York City were particularly distasteful to the Southern Agrarians. It was this reality of the corporate capitalist system that created the capitalist plutocratic elite and destroyed the economic foundation of a conservative republic.[35] In the "Pillars of Agrarianism," Owsley argued that these "twentieth century robber-barons," would have to be "reduced and civilized."[36] He called on government to break up big businesses and to buy the land of absentee landlords, including banks, insurance

[34] Owsley, "The Foundations of Democracy," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, pp. 223-224.
[35] Tate, "The Problem of the Unemployed: A Modest Proposal," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*.
[36] Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, p. 202.

companies, and landowners who have more land than they could put into productive use, and give each qualified person eighty acres along with "a substantial hewn log house and barn, fence him off twenty acres for a pasture, give him two mules and two milk cows, and advance him $300 for his living expenses for one year."[37] Only by such a radical land reform program, argued the Southern Agrarians might the alienating and irresponsible corporate property be transformed into a form of private property that binds ownership with control and regenerates a responsible ruling class of a yeoman republic. In addition to the re-appropriation of corporate property and the radical redistribution of it by the state, Owsley argued that in order to safeguard the yeoman form of property, government had to be entrusted with the responsibility to insure that land is conserved for future generations. Therefore, the Southern Agrarians advocated for significant restrictions on the use and transfer of property, in particular agricultural property. As Owsley suggests in the "Pillars of Agrarianism," the Southern Agrarians endorsed measures prohibiting the mortgaging of land, speculative sale of land, and the sale of land to real estate, insurance companies, or banks.[38] Furthermore, if the landowner failed to take proper care of his land, leaving the land "un-drained, un-terraced, single-cropped land, and lack of deforestation", with proper warning the landowner ought to be expropriated and the land be returned to the state to be given to another "worthy family."[39] As Owsley himself writes, this program implied a "modified form of feudal tenure where, in theory, the King or state has a paramount interest in the land."[40]

[37] Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, p. 205.
[38] Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, p. 206.
[39] Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, p. 206.
[40] Owsley, "The Pillars of Agrarianism," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, p. 206.

IV. Against Plutocracy

In addition to the critique that corporate capitalism exploited, alienated, and shattered the social and economic basis of a conservative polity, the Southern Agrarian indicted corporate capitalism as politically degenerating. Corporate capitalism, argued the Southern Agrarians, produced a plutocratic ruling class. The Southern Agrarian characterization of the degradation of American democracy into plutocracy was a clear revulsion against the Sumnerian notion that the capitalist was the purveyor of progress and civilization, which held political sway in the 1920s. The quote cited earlier from President Coolidge suggests that this indeed was the hegemonic thinking at the time. According to this line of thought, since the interests of capital and society are the same, then the interests of wealth ought to dominate the political world, and therefore all but the capitalist class ought to be absent from the political life of the nation.[41] The Southern Agrarians argued that the capitalist elite and their allies in government displayed few of the moral duties and humane obligations that the Southern Agrarians associated with the yeoman farmer. For the Southern Agrarians the economic man of big business, who dominated American economic and political life operated under social imperatives and ethical principles alien the yeoman farmer. As Ransom and the Southern Agrarians saw it, the moral and ethical obligations of a capitalist elite and those of a more responsible ruling class were worlds apart:

> The true economic man is the corporation, whose multitude of owners enjoy limited liability and leave the business to agents to run with maximum efficiency. Under big business and limited liability the spirit of *noblesse oblige* has disappeared from the working habits of the rulers of society. If it remains somewhere within consciousness, it ceases to apply at the place where it would

[41] Christopher M. Duncan, *Fugitive Theory: Political Theory, the Southern Agrarians, and America* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), pp. 134-135.

> do the most good, for in the economic world a technique has been devised which will prevent it from having any effect.[42]

Like the warrior-aristocrats at the turn of the century, the Southern Agrarians recoiled from the Sumnerian vision of a plutocratic polity. Like Adams and Roosevelt, the Southern Agrarians argued that the capitalist elite were irresponsible stewards of the public good who wanted nothing more but to enrich themselves. The Southern Agrarians sought to restore political virtue to a society enraptured by "possessive individualism," conspicuous consumption, and a belief in progress defined by the accumulation of wealth and the diffusion of consumer goods. Contrary to Adams and Roosevelt who sought political regeneration in war, empire, struggle, in other words, in the arena of the exceptional, the Southern Agrarians sought regeneration in the common, routine, everyday life of the yeoman farmer in the agrarian South.

In a corporate capitalist system where most people are divested of what Allen Tate called "effective ownership", which entails the personal responsibility of the given means of production[43], republican self-government is in jeopardy. The Southern Agrarians employed the argument of republican political economy or the republican understanding of property. At the core of republican political economy is the idea that economic independence is the basis of liberty, public virtue, and political power. In the spirit of Jeffersonian republicanism the Southern Agrarians argued that the distribution of political power followed that of the economic power. As the small farmer, the personification of Jeffersonian republicanism, was gradually driven to bankruptcy and dispossessed of his land by the one-crop system, the culture of consumerism, and Northeastern economic

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[42] Ransom, "What Does the South Want?," *The Southern Agrarians and the New Deal*, p. 249.
[43] Tate, "Notes on Liberty and Property," *Who Owns America? A New Declaration of Independence*, eds. Herbert Agar and Allen Tate (Wilmington DE: ISI Books, [1936] 1999), p. 113.

imperialism the republican vision was threatened with extinction. The dispossession of the yeoman farmer and the concentration of economic power in corporate enterprises resulted in the concentration of political power in the hands of a plutocratic corporate capitalist class who Tate described as "the 2000 corporate heads who rule America."[44] In the same collection of essays Lanier added that corporations are the "instruments of economic fascism threatening American democracy," and "inevitably leading to Communism or Fascism," both of which the Southern Agrarian program was seeking to avert.[45] The Southern Agrarian political program was an attempt to dispossess this corporate plutocratic elite and empower an economically independent yeoman class made politically responsible, virtuous, and conservative resulting from the productive relations of his material existence.

The Southern Agrarian vision was an attempt to restore to economic, political, social and cultural prominence a non-capitalist economic class. The yeoman ideal was a non-capitalist economic class because of the Southern Agrarian emphasis on the production for subsistence over production for an abstract capitalist market.[46] For the Southern Agrarians, the emphasis on production for the abstract market caused the American farmer to become dependent for his livelihood on the one crop system. The one-crop system led to overproduction and to the collapse of the price of agricultural goods and the bankruptcy of the farmer. In essence, the American farmer was subjected to the imperatives of the market whose machinations could not guarantee economic

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[44] Tate, "Notes on Liberty and Property," *Who Owns America?*, p. 122.
[45] Lanier, "Big Business in the Property State," *Who Owns America?*, pp. 29-31.
[46] My understanding of the concept, market comes from the description offered by renowned sociologist Georg Simmel as "the production for unknown purchasers who never appear in the actual field of vision of the producers themselves." Quoted in George Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," *Sociological Theory in the Classical Era*, eds. Laura Desfor Edles and Scott Appelrouth, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2005), p. 292.

security. The Southern Agrarian yeoman republic depended on the stable and economically independent class of farmers to which the market was antithetical. Thus the Southern Agrarians endorsed a departure from capitalist economic thinking that emphasized production for an abstract market and instead advocated production whose limits were set by the consumption needs of the family farm.

The Southern Agrarians' defense of the Southern way of life forced them to confront the issue of racism and segregation. Race permeated every institution and relation in the South and thus could not be ignored by thinkers who were self-consciously proponents of the South. The Southern Agrarians' views on race and segregation varied from a moderate defense of segregation to outright racism. Among the more moderate voices was Robert Penn Warren who called for equal protection of the law for blacks but that segregation was the best remedy for averting racial conflict between whites and blacks in the South. The racism of Tate, Davidson, and Owsley was much more overt. They portrayed African-Americas as racially inferior, little more than cannibals, and only fit to be ruled. As such social and political equality with whites was out of the question and would only lead to a race war and social disorder.[47] While most of the Southern Agrarians would eventually retreat from this position on race and segregation, Davidson and Owsley remained committed racists and segregationists well into the 1960s. Not only was Davidson a leading figure in the Tennessee White Citizens Council but was one that tied Southern identity to maintaining racial purity and segregation. The "race-question," as Davidson called racial apartheid in the South, was the defining feature of the South and the only issue the "southern people" were united. "The white South," wrote Davidson, "denies the Negro equal participation in white society, not only because

[47] See Murphy, pp. 106-109, pp. 199-201.

it is certain that social mingling would lead gradually to biological mingling, which it is determined to prevent, both for any given contemporary generation and for its posterity."[48] The Southern Agrarians were defending a real historical community, the South, of which racism, segregation, and racial terror was a defining characteristic. The Southern Agrarians then must be understood as defenders of a racist system that not only dehumanized and robbed an entire race of their liberty, property, and in many cases, life, which in turn undermines the Southern Agrarians' seemingly egalitarian, republican agrarian vision.

As the Southern Agrarians thought evolved and became more specific regarding economic and social policy clear fissures within the group emerged. In the 1932 and 1936 presidential elections the Southern Agrarians for the most part, supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt over the corporate laissez-faire of Hoover and Alfred M. Landon. Tate captured the agrarians' sentiment in a *New Republic* piece:

> I shall vote for Roosevelt," he wrote, "there are very few of the President's policies that I like, but he has been aware that a crisis exists, and there is at least a strong probability that he will take firmer and more coherent ground, in his second administration, against privilege and Big Business. Should Landon be elected he would certainly bring on a revolution of violence in his efforts to restore the good old days of finance-capitalism. If I were a Communist, I think I should vote for Landon.[49]

The tenuous support Roosevelt received from the Southern Agrarians was evident as their support soon wavered when it became clear that FDR's vision of reform did not include breaking up big business, decentralizing government, or restoring the family farm of the yeoman ideal. Where Roosevelt's policies had the result of decentralizing economic and political power the Southern Agrarians were supportive. Where the

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[48] Quoted in Murphy, pp. 106-107.
[49] Quoted in Edward S. Shapiro, "Decentralist Intellectuals and the New Deal," *The Journal of American History* (March, 1972), pp. 938-957.

intention and effect of the policies was to concentrate power, whether in business or in the federal government, the Southern Agrarians remained formidable critics.

The Southern Agrarians were vociferous opponents of Roosevelt's signature farm bill, the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933. The Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) addressed the crisis and poverty among America's rural population by raising prices of agricultural goods by restricting production. The AAA favored large farms over small farmers, tenant farmers, and sharecroppers. Initially a bitter critic of Roosevelt's rural programs Herman Clarence Nixon became an advocate for the New Deal to the extent the others never did. In 1935 he was chairperson of FDR's Southern Policy Commission which offered the administration recommendations on agricultural policy. He also supported farm cooperative, government ownership of natural resources and public utilities, socialized medicine, and the Bankhead-Jones Act which was intended to offer low interest loan for farm purchases.[50] The Southern Agrarians opposed the progressive tax reforms of the Wealth Tax Act. Yet, they did so not because they opposed a graduate tax structure but because the tax reform did not graduate taxes enough.[51] Some of the Southern Agrarians supported programs such as the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), rural electrification, and public works initiatives such as road and school construction. However, some Southern Agrarians saw these New Deal initiatives as usurpation of states' sovereignty and the continuation of the imperial subjugation of the South by the corporate Northeast. "Centralization of political power and government regulation of industrial processes—far from being tendencies toward any real socialism—offer even greater possibilities of economic domination, because of the comparative ease with which

[50] Murphy, p. 73.
[51] Shapiro, "Decentralist Intellectuals and the New Deal," pp. 938-957.

control of government agencies is secured by industrial interests," declared Lanier in a refrain typical of the Southern Agrarians.[52] Despite their differences over New Deal public policy the two ideas that united all of the Southern Agrarians until the ultimate break-up of the group in the latter part of the 1930s was their opposition to corporate industrial and finance capitalism together with their vision of a regenerated yeoman republican South.

The key to the Southern Agrarian alternative vision was a redefinition and reorganization of private property in the United States, which they believed would have positive political repercussions in the form of regenerating a conservative yeoman ruling class. Accompanying their radical economic vision the Southern Agrarians advocated for significant changes to the structure of government, in particular its system of federalism. The Southern Agrarians argued that the current system of federalism was a failure because it concentrated too much power in the federal government. In addition, they believed that the federal government was largely controlled by corporate capital and their plutocratic friends. Through the military occupation of the South following the Civil War and federal economic policy since then combined to turn the South into little more than a colonial territory of the dominant northeast. The Southern Agrarians argued that as the climes, geography, and demography of the South, the Northeast, the Midwest, and the Western United States differed so did their culture, society, economic interests, and their politics. For too long, argued that Southern Agrarians, has northeastern capital and their agents in the federal government exploited, robbed, and oppressed the other regions. For Davidson and Owsley, in particular, the Constitution was partially to blame. It created favorable conditions for capital and the plutocratic elite by usurping the sovereignty of

[52] Lanier, "A Critique of the Philosophy of Progress," *I'll Take My Stand*, p. 142.

the states in creating a powerful federal government and in fashioning a free trade zone in the U.S. As an alternative to the present federal structure the Southern Agrarians, in particular Davidson and to a lesser extent Owsley, advocated for regionalism. Southern Agrarian regionalism included the division of the country into administrative regions such as the South, the Northeast, the Midwest, etc. and empowering these regional governments with much of the domestic powers of the federal government. Powers that included economic development, taxation, as well as the power of nullification over issues of trade, tariffs, etc. Davidson argued that since each region is culturally, socially, economically, and politically different from the others, a regional system was commensurate with the maintenance of the diversity of each region, as well as with the democratic principle of self-government. The Southern Agrarians argued that over the course of American history the South made a number of attempts to return the American governing structure to its more democratic origins. Calhoun's theories of nullification and the concurrent majority, which embodied Jeffersonian political principles of limited government, states' rights, and self-government, argued Davidson and Owsley, were noble Southern stands against a corporate dominated Hamiltonian federal government.

Like Calhoun, Fitzhugh, and other defenders of slavery who also endorsed various political schemes intended to protect the system of chattel slavery, Davidson, Owsley, and the Southern Agrarians wanted to preserve the racist system of the pre-Civil Rights Movement South.[53] Their republican agrarianism and the political regionalism excluded blacks and in fact was aimed at solidifying the racial caste system in the South. Fundamental to the Southern Agrarian radical land reform was that the decentralization

[53] Davidson, "That This Nation May Endure—The Need For Political Regionalism," *Who Owns America?*, p. 173.

and redistribution of agricultural property was the basis of decentralized political power, as republican political economy suggests. Despite the apparent egalitarianism of the Southern Agrarian alternative Southern segregationists and racists such as Owsley and Davidson had no intention of empowering blacks either economically, politically, or treat them as social equals to whites.

## V. Conclusion

In the conservative tradition that has been critical of capitalism the Southern Agrarians mark the last radical indictment of the economic system. Their republican agrarianism rejected the elitism of the defenders of slavery and a repudiated the centralizing and imperialistic warrior-aristocratic model favored by Brooks Adams and Theodore Roosevelt. The Southern Agrarians were repulsed by the concentration and centralization of political and economic power preferred by Adams and Roosevelt in their attempt to build a national community. Likewise they rejected the rule of Sumnerian Horatio Algerism of the capitalist plutocratic elite and the collective authoritarianism of Fascism and Communism. And they were critical of liberal regulation of business, but did not reject the New Deal root and branch. The elements of the New Deal that they did reject were those the Southern Agrarians (by no means did they all agree) perceived to corporate property and monopoly capitalism.

Southern Agrarianism, while never a popular political movement, and only a short-lived intellectual movement, nevertheless, has had a significant influence on 20$^{th}$ century American conservative thought. The Southern Agrarian critique of capitalism like the antebellum defenders of slavery before them recognized that a social order characterized by religious faith, tradition, and humane values required a radical

restructuring of capitalism. The Southern Agrarians were the last gasp of a radically conservative critique of capitalism offered in American political thought.[54] Their emphasis on religion, critique of centralized political power, rootless individualism, consumerism, materialism and their defense of Southern tradition, heritage, values and culture have been a source of inspiration for traditionalist like Richard Weaver and Russell Kirk, neo-Agrarians like M.E. Bradford, and paleoconservatives Thomas Fleming and Samuel Francis. However, as Paul V. Murphy demonstrated in *The Rebuke of History* these latter conservatives distorted the Southern Agrarians views by reading out of their thought their radical critique of capitalism that was the basis of their social and cultural conservatism and their vision of the government's role in breaking up the corporate structure and redistributing land along the yeoman model. This re-interpretation transformed their thought, which at its basis constituted a radical economic program, into a form of social and moral traditionalism that separated social and cultural critique from economic critique and its political consequences. This re-interpretation made the Southern Agrarian ideas more palpable to the post-World War II conservative intellectual movement that had for the most part come to terms with corporate capitalism and disparaged any alternatives to it that emerged from both the political left and the right.

With the ascendance of conservatism with its rhetorical embrace of political democracy and its electoral strength located primarily in the South and the Midwest there has been a renewed interest in the Southern Agrarians. In *The Southern Tradition*, Eugene D. Genovese (1994) illustrated the radicalism of the southern conservative

[54] The radicalism of the New Right, which will be discussed later, acknowledged as the intellectual heirs of the Southern Agrarians pales in comparison in both their critique of capitalism and the alternative which they offered. See Genovese, *The Southern Tradition,* and Murphy.

tradition in which he placed the Southern Agrarians among the likes of Calhoun, Fitzhugh, and other antebellum defenders of slavery. A distinctively southern conservative tradition, argued Genovese, has historically been the source of conservative critiques of American capitalism. As this chapter illustrates, the southern conservative tradition of which the Southern Agrarians are a part, is only one current within the conservative tradition that has been critical of capitalism.

Perhaps more importantly though, Genovese points to the problem in the American conservative intellectual tradition which conservatives have been unable to resolve. The problem is the conservative defense of traditional values, sensibilities, and institutions without the commensurate economic relations upon which they are founded. Genovese chides contemporary conservatives for thinking that, "the [traditional] values could be defended and restored despite the triumph of bourgeois social relations and an attendant, self-revolutionizing economic system that has historically proven itself solvent of these very values."[55] The Southern Agrarians stood on the precipice of this problem. On the one hand, they were without the benefit of having a ready-made alternative to capitalism from which to launch their indictment of it, as their intellectual predecessors, the antebellum defenders of slavery once had. Therefore, the Southern Agrarians could not reject capitalism outright as some defenders of slavery had done. On the other hand, however, the Southern Agrarians were unwilling to meld their belief in traditional values, sensibilities, institution, and culture with the support of corporate capitalism, as many post-war conservatives had done. The Southern Agrarians believed that such an amalgamation would compromise the values and the way of life they sought to defend before the revolutionizing destructive power of corporate capitalism.

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[55] Genovese, *The Southern Tradition*, p. 8.

The Southern Agrarians in some ways are a bridge between the radicalism of 19th century conservatives such as Fitzhugh and Calhoun and contemporary conservative critics of capitalism. The Southern Agrarians retained the radical critique of capitalism offered by the defenders of slavery of the antebellum South, while offering an alternative vision of a decentralized conservative polity commensurate with an economic system based on free labor. For the Southern Agrarians the ideal ruling class was the white Jeffersonian yeoman farmer whose economic independence and intimate relationship with his small plot of land schooled him in republican citizenship, humbled him before God and nature, and gave him pride in living in a community with history, time-honored values, mores, and institutions.

The Southern Agrarians sought the regeneration of a yeoman tradition and culture, which they believed was more consistent with a humane and moral existence than modern corporate industrial and finance capitalism. They were defenders and promoters of Southern culture, art, tradition, and prejudice because they believed that the South embodied, more than any other region in the U.S., the economic, social, political, and cultural elements of America's yeoman past. In this spirit, then, they offered some poignant and profound criticism of corporate capitalism and its social, political, and cultural consequences. They argued that American corporate industrial and financial capitalism was alienating and exploitative of the laboring classes, it created a consumerist, instrumental, and amoral culture, it was opposed to the stability necessary for community, and it was antithetical to self-government as it destroyed the property relations conducive to the economic security and independence for the majority of citizens that is necessary for republican government. In place of a free polity in which

political sovereignty was held by a free and economically independent citizenry America's economic, social, cultural, and political institutions were ruled by a plutocratic corporate elite.

Despite the Southern Agrarians' prescient critique of corporate capitalism and their gusto for the Southern alternative their vision revealed itself to be highly provincial, exclusionary, and ultimately, premised on a social basis that was rapidly disappearing from the American political landscape. Their vision to install a yeoman ruling class was severely restricted by its anti-urbanism, racism, and sexism. Their vision of a humane, un-exploitative social system where individuals might live in economic security, community, and with real political sovereignty was limited to white rural males. The Southern Agrarians defended the racist system and the dehumanization of African Americans in the South. They offered very little beyond an opportunity to become yeoman farmers to the urban working class, and their proposed return to a patriarchal family farm was a step back for women. In essence, their vision of a yeoman political economy failed to gain much appeal for an increasingly urban, diverse, and progressively liberated society that America was rapidly becoming. As a consequence, their vision lacked a basis in social reality even in the rural South. By the 1930s the South was becoming increasingly industrial and urban and southern agriculture was largely made up of agribusinesses, large landowners, agricultural wage laborers, and sharecroppers.

Yet the Southern Agrarians are not irrelevant. No other 20$^{th}$ century conservative critics of capitalism have approached the radicalism of the Southern Agrarians' indictment of the corporate capitalist system. Many diverse conservatives since have continued the search for the regeneration of real historical community as the basis for a

genuine political, social, and cultural conservatism much as the Southern Agrarians had done in the early to mid-1930s. For the Southern Agrarians and many conservative thinkers, community was the antidote to the alienation, anomie, rootlessness, and non-religiosity of 20th century man. Yet, few 20th century conservative thinkers writing after the Southern Agrarians were willing to go so far in their criticism of corporate capitalism as the Southern Agrarians had done, much less endorse the radical economic transformation of corporate capitalism, which in their view, was necessary for the revival of conservative tradition and community.

# CHAPTER IV

## In Search of Community: The Post-World War II Conservative Critique of Capitalism

> "Man was born free" (said Rousseau, with his faith in natural goodness of man) "but is everywhere in chains." In chains, and so he ought to be, replies the thoughtful conservative, defending the good and wise and necessary chains of rooted tradition and historic continuity, upon which depend the civil liberties…Without the chaos-chaining, the Id-chaining heritage of rooted values, what is to keep man from becoming Eichmann or Nechayev—what is to save freedom from "freedom"?
>
> Peter Viereck[1]

### I. Introduction

The post-World War II period was a pivotal moment for American conservatism, and more important for this work, for the tradition in conservative thought that has been critical of capitalism. Prior to the war, conservatives offered various critiques of and alternatives to laissez-faire capitalism. The state played an important role in the alternatives offered by prewar critics such as the warrior-aristocrats and the Southern Agrarians. However, in the wake of fascist totalitarianism and the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union conservatives became more concerned by the growth of the state than laissez-faire capitalism. For many Americans communism was the "successor" and closely connected to Nazism.[2] And most postwar conservatives, believed there was "common cause" between New Deal liberalism and communism.[3] For Postwar intellectuals, liberal and conservative, the market had been subordinated to the liberal welfare state and the managerial revolution.[4] Liberals cheered the New Deal

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[1] Peter Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited: The New Conservatism—What Went Wrong?* (New York,: Collier Books, 1962 [1949]).
[2] Abbott Gleason, *Totalitariansim: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 74.
[3] Kevin Mattson, *Rebels All!: A Short History of the Conservative Mind in Postwar America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2008), p. 32.
[4] Nelson Lichtenstein, *American Capitalism: Social Thought and Political Economy in the 20th Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), p. 5.

out of a faith in the ability of the state to minimize market vicissitudes, prevent another Great Depression, and free individuals from the oppression of poverty. Conservatives, on the other hand, worried that the U.S. was on a "road to serfdom," to use Friedrich Hayek's famous title. They argued that it was liberals' belief in the innate goodness of humans, their rationalism, their faith in government planning and their rejection of tradition, custom, mystery, and traditional institutions that led to totalitarianism. The New Deal was a revolution animated by the ideas of the French Revolution, that conservatives argued, had a direct link to twentieth-century totalitarianisms that produced the Holocaust and the Soviet gulag.

The postwar conservative critique of capitalism is a narrative of the de-radicalization and marginalization of the indictment of capitalism in American conservative political thought. The divisive Cold War ideological conflict between capitalism and communism forced even conservative critics of capitalism to come to terms with capitalism in ways that their immediate predecessors, the Southern Agrarians, could not. The critical conservatism offered by the Southern Agrarians was appropriated by postwar conservatives Peter Viereck, Robert Nisbet, Russell Kirk, and others. But these postwar conservatives repudiated the Southern Agrarians' earlier radicalism. Postwar critics read exploitation and immiseration, a central indictment of the corporate capitalist system by the Southern Agrarians, out of the critique almost entirely. They reconciled capitalism with traditionalism—but without the redistribution and reorganization of property relations that the Southern Agrarians saw as a necessary precondition of that reconciliation. Postwar conservatives de-politicized capitalism and abandoned the Southern Agrarians' critique of plutocracy and the irresponsibility of the

capitalist ruling class. Instead, the postwar conservatives' most significant indictments centered on capitalism as a junior partner of the centralized democratic state: together, these forces were accelerating the destruction of traditional intermediate institutions.

The postwar conservative critique of capitalism grew less from any affinity for Gilded Age laissez-faire capitalism than from the belief that the wrong institutions were restraining the market. The postwar conservatives' most potent critique of capitalism focused on the tendency of capitalism, together with the democratic state, to weaken and destroy traditional institutions such as the family, church, neighborhood organization, and the local community. They argued that because capitalists focus on profitability spreadsheets, economic growth data, and other material indicators of a good society, capital underestimate and ignore the values and traditional institutions that shield humans from a tyrannical state, root individuals in larger political and economic institutions, and foster allegiance to them. These traditional institutions, conservatives stressed, transmit shared values that restrain our most selfish passions and make it possible for humans to live freely together.

For conservatives critics of capitalism, the market should have been subordinated to the traditional institutions rather than to the state. But not all conservatives viewed the growth of the New Deal as the destructive totalitarian force some conservatives and classical liberals feared it to be. Viereck was one of those conservatives who resisted his colleagues' apocalyptical prophecies and became an ardent defender of the conservatism of the New Deal.

Postwar traditionalist conservatives reconciled themselves to capitalism as the only game in town. They were impressed with capitalism's productive capability, its

history of raising living standards, and most important, the alternative it offered to communism. According to Viereck, among the most important conservative critics of capitalism in postwar America, capitalism was a "justified necessity." Capitalists were "morally entitled to derive material profits" from their "service to freedom," which he identified as the production of "higher living-standards at home and defense against aggressors abroad."[5] Likewise, for Kirk, "the free economy," by which he meant capitalism, "characterized by liberty of choice, private ownership of capital, and competition, is a bulwark of all freedom…and justice."[6]

Yet, despite their defense of capitalism, postwar conservatives did not want conservatism to be defined as an apology for unbounded accumulation of wealth at the expense of other values. While these conservatives abandoned the radical alternatives that their predecessors thought were necessary for a genuinely conservative polity, they did not want to the return to the laissez-faire capitalism of Herbert Spencer, William Graham Sumner, and other thinkers associated with the libertarianism. Viereck, Kirk, and Nisbet believed that laissez-faire capitalism contributed to the rise of mass man which then produced communist and fascist totalitarianism. They sought to distinguish their brand of conservatism from those who called for a return to the laissez-faire capitalism of the Gilded Age.[7]

Much of the postwar conservative critique of capitalism centered on distinguishing the Burkean conservatism of tradition, gradual change, prudence, experience, and religion from the defenses of laissez-faire capitalism of Spencer and Sumner that conservatism

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[5]Viereck,"Will America Prove Marx Right?," *The Antioch Review* (Autumn, 1952), pp. 329-337; Russell Kirk, "Is Capitalism Still Viable?," *Journal of Business Ethics* (November, 1982), pp. 277-280.
[6] Kirk, *The American Cause* (Chicago: Regnery, Co., 1957), p. 108.
[7] George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America: Since 1945* (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1996 [1976]), pp. 72-73.

had been associated.[8] "The apologetics of the William Graham Sumner school of capitalism," wrote Viereck, "are no old or deep-rooted part of the American tradition, being rather a product of the relatively recent, post-Civil War Gilded Age."[9] Kirk argued that traditional conservatives have been trying to disentangle themselves from "the impression [in America] that the new industrial and acquisitive interests are the conservative interests, that conservatism is simply a political argument in defense of large accumulations of private property, that expansion, centralization, and accumulation are the tenets of conservatism."[10] In a similar vein, Viereck implored like-minded thinkers to "take conservatism away from the wrong—the solely economics minded—conservatives."[11] But having been for so long identified as such, conservatism attracted few thinkers in the United States following the economic disasters of the 1920s and 1930s. Because of this "confusion," as Kirk called it, postwar traditionalist conservatives sought to take back conservatism from the likes of Spencer, Sumner, and their 20th century philosophical descendants and redefine it once again on traditionalist principles of Judeo-Christian values, organic unity, social order, experience, historical continuity, and rooted tradition.

Despite their distaste for laissez-faire capitalism, postwar conservative critics were more worried about the political centralization associated with the New Deal. Even Viereck, who supported the New Deal out of conservative principles, grew concerned about whether or not its reforms were veering toward socialism. In *Conservatism*

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[8] For instance see, Robert Green McCloskey, *Conservatism in the Age of Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951).
[9] Viereck, "Will America Prove Marx Right?," p. 333.
[10] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind: From Burke to Eliot* (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1978 [1953]), p. 199.
[11] Viereck, *Shame and Glory of Intellectuals: Babbitt Jr. vs. the Rediscovery of Values* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1953), p. 251.

*Revisited*, he captured traditionalist conservative sentiment in declaring that "conservatism fights on two fronts." It fights against "the atomistic disunity of unregulated capitalism and the bureaucratic mechanical unity of modern socialism."[12] Yet Viereck became outsider of a movement he was instrumental in founding as the Cold War marginalized the critique of capitalism on the right. With conservatives focused on the "creeping totalitarianism" of the liberal welfare state, his synthesis of conservatism and the New Deal, at least among the editors of the influential *National Review*, came to be seen as a sort of "counterfeit conservatism."[13]

Postwar critiques of capitalism were formulated as part of an effort to distinguish American conservatism from the totalitarianisms of the left and the right and from classical liberalism and twentieth-century liberalism. [14] For Viereck, Kirk and Nisbet totalitarianism arose from liberalism's assault on traditional institutions. The triumph of liberal individualism laid the groundwork for the growth of the centralized democratic state and the expansion of industrial capitalism. Together these forces eroded and destroyed the traditional institutions that provide a moral foundation and restrained individual self-interest which make social existence possible. The major concern for postwar conservatives was to restore these traditional institutions in order to restrain human's most selfish interests, satisfy individuals' need for community and material security, and safeguard individual freedom by dispersing power widely away from the centralized state.[15] The void left in the wake of the destruction of the various institutions

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[12] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 134.
[13]Frank Meyer, "Counterfeit at a Popular Price," *The Conservative Mainstream* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1969) pp. 67-70.
[14] For a detailed account of the fashioning of American conservatism as an intellectual movement see Nash.
[15] Robert A. Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt: Historical and Sociological Essays* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 132.

that made up civil society resulted in humans feel alienated, atomized, and alone. Precisely, the condition that conservatives worried, pointed to the tyrannical state and the transformation of individuals into totalitarian masses.

This intellectual project forced critical conservatives to rethink the role of the state in social and economic life leading to early conceptualizations of a conservative welfare state. This project took two different paths and revealed deep divisions. The dispute centered on the role of the state in restoring a non-totalitarian sense of community. The debate produced much vitriol among conservatives. It resulted in the excommunication of Viereck by Frank Meyer in the pages of *National Review* and marginalized the defense of the New Deal in the conservative discourse.[16] More important, the project yielded the framework for a conservative welfare state that is triumphant in the American conservatism today. It is a framework that repudiates the New Deal reforms and seeks to formulate a "new" conservatism of laissez-faire capitalism and empowered authoritative institutions.

II. Viereck's New Deal Conservatism

Peter Viereck was a Pulitzer Prize-winning poet, a professor of Russian history at Mount Holyoke College, and a political thinker whose book *Conservatism Revisited* "created the new conservatism as a self-conscious intellectual force."[17] Since the Great Depression, conservatism had been associated with the anti-industrial, sectionalist Southern Agrarians and the anti-New Deal business community that funded political organizations such as the Liberty League that Viereck wrote "give us only the negative

[16]See Meyer.
[17] Nash, p. 60.

liberty to starve and be unemployed."[18] Nash credited Viereck for "labeling" and popularizing," while Tom Reiss suggests Viereck "inspired" a nascent "new conservative" movement that sought to distinguish itself from the backward-looking Southern Agrarians and the economic libertarianism of the Liberty League.[19] Viereck's political writings focused on explaining the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and preventing it in the United States which he believed resulted from attacks on the established order by the radicalism of the left and right. His conservatism was based on the values of America's Judeo-Christian heritage and the idea of conservation through gradual reform associated with Edmund Burke. He argued that America's tradition dating back to the Founders was liberal and conservative. In the postwar era he called for a synthesis of moderate liberalism and moderate conservatism as a bulwark against totalitarianism. While liberals viewed Viereck as a spokesman for the new conservatism, by the mid-1950s he was scorned by many conservatives for his accommodation of liberalism and the New Deal. He soon became disillusioned with the conservatism of Russell Kirk, William F. Buckley, and Frank Meyer for their support of Joseph McCarthy and their failure to build on America's rooted traditions, which Viereck believed were, in part, liberal.

Viereck and other postwar conservative critics of capitalism were theoretical Burkeans. They believed that a conservative polity cannot be constructed by abstract theories or imported ideas, as liberals and radicals are wont to do, but must be grown organically and develop over time. The question then for American conservatives was

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[18] Viereck, "But I'm a Conservative!," *Atlantic* (April, 1940). http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1969/12/but-i-apos-m-a-conservative/4434/

[19] Nash, p. 60; Tom Reiss, "The First Conservative," New Yorker (October 24, 2005). http://newyorker.com/archive/2005/10/24/051024fa_fact1?printable=true

what was the task of conservatism in postwar America? Was it to conserve what exists? Namely, American liberalism. Or to repudiate American liberalism and reconstruct the foundations of a conservative polity? As the dispute between Viereck, on the one hand, and Kirk and Nisbet on the other demonstrates, even Burkean conservatives could not agree.

Surveying the American scene in the postwar era, Viereck surmised that there was much to conserve, including corporate capitalism and the liberal welfare state.[20] He saw corporate capitalism as a "justified necessity." Capitalists are "morally entitled to derive material profits" for their "service to freedom" that emanates from their role in producing "higher living-standards at home and defense against aggressors abroad."[21] But utility is not the only criteria by which an economic system, or anything else, ought to be judged. Viereck remained unconvinced of the "mystical, self-regulating perfection" of Adam Smith's invisible hand.[22] Reform of unfettered capitalism was both necessary and inevitable if social revolution was to be averted. "I have faith in American capitalism," wrote Viereck, "because I believe its profit system has been sufficiently modified by ethics—and because I believe it can continue to be revised peacefully, without need of socialism, when it does violate the demands of humanity."[23] Unlike other conservative critics, Viereck was not as frightened by the New Deal liberal welfare state. He appreciated, as few other conservatives have since the end of World War II, the destructive potential of laissez-faire capitalism and the inability of capitalists to guarantee social order and stability. He believed that when the reins of government are in the hands

[20] Viereck was not the only postwar conservative of the 1950 and 1960s to write favorably of the New Deal, most prominent among these is historian, Clinton Rossiter.
[21] Viereck, "Will America Prove Marx Right?," p. 336.
[22] Viereck, "Liberals and Conservatives, 1789-1951," *Antioch Review* (Winter, 1951), pp. 387-396.
[23] Viereck, *Shame and Glory*, p. 262.

of an aristocratic spirited elite the state can be entrusted to act responsibly to ameliorate the destructive effects of capitalism and to aid in creating the kind of community which laissez-faire has destroyed. Finally, he believed that conservatism is not a stubborn resistance to change. Instead, the proper task of a conservative is to conserve via gradual reform that which has living historical roots in the traditions and heritage of the United States. For Viereck, the New Deal was precisely this kind of conservative reform.

Viereck distinguished his conservatism from the "pseudo-conservatism" of the Manchester Liberals whose philosophy was "hostile to a decent compassion for child labor and slum conditions," and the populist agrarianism of the Southern Agrarians.[24] He recoiled from American capitalists who had an "almost corybantic devotion to economic production figures."[25] For Viereck capitalist materialism had too much in common with Marxism. He criticized conservatives like Frank Meyer whose unequivocal support for laissez-faire capitalism pointed to

> a return to that Sahara of inhuman aridity: the belief in Economic Man. It is a return to the incomplete liberties—merely top of the iceberg—of private economic liberty. It ignores the nine-tenths of human liberties beneath the top of the brain: the nine-tenths of imagination and art and religion.[26]

The problem with American capitalists and those who defended laissez-faire capitalism was that they "overlook[ed] those psychological, moral, and traditionalist shields of freedom against tyranny."[27] Capitalism needed cultural and traditional supports that were not primarily economic. Yet it is precisely these cultural values and institutional supports that industrial capitalism was destroying.

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[24] Viereck, "The Rootless 'Roots': Defects in the New Conservatism," *The Antioch Review* (Summer, 1955), pp. 217-229.
[25] Viereck, *Shame and Glory*, p. 192.
[26] Viereck, *Shame and Glory of Intellectuals,* p. 263.
[27] Viereck, *Shame and Glory of Intellectuals*, p.192.

Viereck detested laissez-faire but was equally impatient with the conservatism that ignored the Burkean tenet to "build on the concrete existing historical base." Viereck identified himself as an "evolutionary conservative" descendant from Burke, Coleridge, and Disraeli. For him, the Southern Agrarians' conservatism was little more than a "utopian dream." It was an abstract conservatism "of yearning, contrasting the cultivated human values of a lost aristocratic agrarianism with northern commercialism and liberal materialism, but may lack the living roots of genuine conservatism and have only lifeless ones, the lifeless ones are really a synthetic substitute for roots, contrived by romantic nostalgia."[28] The Southern Agrarians, argued Viereck, sought to recreate the traditions, values, and institutions of an era long ago eclipsed by the developments of the modern state and the industrial revolution. It was a conservatism which ignored the Burkean dictate to conserve and build on the roots that are "really there." It was the kind of conservatism that Viereck attributed to some of his contemporaries, including Kirk, whose conservatism Viereck called "rootless and abstract…unhistorical appeal to history, and tradition-less worship of tradition."[29]

Viereck's support for the New Deal did not flow from a commitment to egalitarianism. Instead, he viewed legislation that created the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), and Social Security, and, later, John F. Kennedy's New Frontier programs as remedies for the atomization that result from "excessive laissez-faire economics and greedy profiteering."[30] Viereck viewed the New Deal as conservative reforms that saved not

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[28] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 124.
[29] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 125.
[30] Viereck, *Conservatism: From John Adams to Churchill* (Princeton: D. Van Norstrand Company, Inc., 1956), p. 18.

only American political institutions but also capitalism itself from socialist class war.[31] It did so by giving a "real stake in the status quo" to American workers who formerly had been made miserable, frustrated, and potentially revolutionary by the joblessness, evictions, malnutrition, and suffering of the Great Depression.[32] The Fair Labor Standards Act established a federal minimal wage, guaranteed overtime pay, and prohibited many forms of child labor. The Wagner Act recognized unions and created the mechanisms for collective bargaining. These reforms channeled worker grievances to legitimate channels and minimized the violent confrontations that so often typified labor relations in the United States.

While Viereck warned against centralized government he believed that the state was not the only threat to a free and humane existence. Whereas Kirk and Nisbet pointed almost exclusively to the state as the primary threat to individual freedom, Viereck saw a more complex reality. He believed that threats to freedom manifest themselves in political and economic sources. According to Viereck, "without proper constitutional checks (meaning not only some abstract scrap of paper about liberal Rights of Man but the proper traditions to make those rights concrete) the worker will get crushed not only by the social indifference of King Log (his employer) but by the social progress of King Stork (his own government)."[33]

To check the power of the state and economic actors Viereck endorsed the strengthening of unions via government legislation as the model conservative social policy. Such legislation "encourage voluntary participation" and not "reckless spending and enlargement of the federal bureaucracy." It also fortified the function, community,

[31] Viereck, *Shame and Glory*, pp. 275-276.
[32] Viereck, *Shame and Glory*, p. 270.
[33] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 133.

and authority of an important intermediate institution, the labor union.[34] For Viereck unions were a conservative force in society because they diffused power, which is a necessary component of a pluralist society. More important, they "restored to [the] atomized proletariat an organic unity."[35] They offered to their members a belonging and solidarity and a sense of meaning and purpose transforms them from masses into individuals.[36] In a history plagued by the destruction of one intermediate institution after another, the trade union, suggested Viereck, is the only "true society" that industrialism had fostered.[37] An institution with authority and function, it "embodies the possibility of both freedom and the security essential to human dignity."[38] It is this sort of institution that conservatives like Viereck hailed as the greatest bulwark against the totalitarianisms of the left and right that result from the excessive individualism of laissez-faire capitalism. For Viereck, New Deal liberalism offered order and liberty and rescued America from the inhumane social organizations where either the individual is everything and the "whole" is nothing or the "whole" is everything and the individual is nothing.

Viereck supported the New Deal not only out of a commitment to humanism and pluralism. Arguably other conservatives shared these sentiments but remained staunch opponents of the New Deal and the New Frontier. Writing in the Burkean spirit, he defended the New Deal as prudent reforms that built on America's liberal "concrete existing historical base" of liberalism.[39] To the dismay of many of his contemporaries, Viereck argued that the American heritage rests upon a liberal and conservative synthesis.

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[34] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 137.
[35] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 135.
[36] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 137.
[37] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 135.
[38] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 135.
[39] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 126.

It is an amalgamation of Lockean liberalism and Burkean conservatism.[40] "American conservatism," writes Viereck, "in absence of feudal relics, must admit it has little to conserve except liberalism, which turns out to be relatively conservative liberalism."[41] Based on this insight and the Burkean belief in prudential reform, Viereck argued that the New Deal was a natural product of America's liberal heritage. Besides, by the 1950s it had become "conservative and rooted traditions here to stay."[42] He scolded fellow traditionalist conservatives for repudiating America's liberal heritage:

> …it is imprecise to call conservative those counter-revolutionary ideologues of the right who defy the conservative principles of continuity with the past by trying to wrench American life out of its liberal and New Deal past. Such a violent wrench, such a combination of utopianism and coercion, based on abstract a-priori blueprints rather than a concrete historical experience, is what caused the French Revolution to degenerate from wholesale reform into murderous despotism. That is why *Shame and Glory of the Intellectuals*, defined Old Guard Republicans and their intellectual apologists as "Jacobin endimanches,"…What I meant and mean is: the abstract doctrinaire leaders of Republicanism and of a capitalist Adam Smith a-priorism in the north—and analogously the more doctrinaire aristocratic southerners—are applying the same violent wrench, the same discontinuity with the past, the same combination of utopian blueprints with coercive conformity which characterized the French Revolution and which, in Burke's analysis, doomed it to inevitable disaster.[43]

Viereck was bewildered by contemporary conservatism for ignoring the teachings of Burke about the proper role of conservatism. For Viereck, contemporary conservatism "in the liberal state…is the destroyer rather than the conserver."[44]

A final important theme in Viereck's thinking about the relationship between capitalism and the state was his belief in the need for a class of aristocratic leaders who resist the demands of both the plutocrats and the egalitarian masses. "The aristocratic

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[40] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 123.
[41] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 142.
[42] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 142.
[43] Viereck, "The Rootless 'Roots'," p. 228.
[44] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 32.

spirit sustaining our democracy," writes Viereck, "is whatever conserves not real-estate values but real values, not gold standards but cultural standards."[45] This aristocratic spirit Viereck characterized as "dutiful public service, insistence on quality and standards, and the decorum and ethical inner check of noblesse oblige."[46] This aristocratic spirit was not something that was merely reserved for a chosen few, but a spirit that Viereck hoped could be transmitted to all, to make "all men aristocrats."[47] The way to do this Viereck thought was to "subordinate economics to cultural values and to subordinate external coercion to internal self-discipline," by strengthening the intermediate institutions where this spirit and the compassionate traditional Christian ethical values necessary for social reform are cultivated.

However, there is also a sense in Viereck that the state, when administered by the likes of Prince von Metternich, Benjamin Disraeli, Winston Churchill, and Frankilin Delano Roosevelt can cultivate these values as well. It can strengthen the Burkean "little platoons," such as the family, the local community, and intermediary associations which Viereck, Kirk, and Nisbet all agreed are of utmost social value. But Viereck's analysis also pointed to using the state to restrain capital, to have it to act humanely and to have capitalists meet their obligations to their workers and society at large. Although it was primary for Viereck that intermediate institutions be strengthened he clearly did not think that they would be enough to restrain the power of corporate capital and make it act more humanely and morally. Viereck recognized the logic and power of capital and believed that the restraints on it must come from moral instruction, the authority of traditional and intermediate association, and the selective use of the power of the state. The state has a

[45] Viereck, *Shame and Glory*, p. 252.
[46] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*, p. 38.
[47] Viereck, *Shame and Glory*, p. 221.

role to play in creating the context where the family, church, community, and trade union could thrive by providing a minimal social safety net.

By the mid-1950s Viereck became an outlier in the conservative movement. His conservative defense of Adlai Stevenson and the New Deal, vocal opposition to Joseph McCarthy, critiques of the rootless traditionalism of Kirk and of capitalist materialism no longer represented what Meyer called the "conservative mainstream." Meyer's conservative fusionism, which blended laissez-faire capitalism with traditionalism became triumphant in the conservative discourse. Despite the tension between libertarians and traditionalists, their aversion to Viereck's accommodation with the New Deal was enough to make him *persona non grata* in conservative circles. In the *National Review* article widely attributed to have excommunicated Viereck from American conservatism. Meyer wrote, "In an age in which grammar, rhetoric, and logic are no longer taught, the mass production of counterfeits is likely to continue apace. Viereck is not the first, nor will he be the last, to succeed in passing off his unexceptionably Liberal sentiments as conservatism."[48]

III. Kirk: De-Radicalizing Romantic Anti-Capitalism

Peter Viereck was not the only conservative in the postwar era to attempt to reconcile or assimilate capitalism with a renewed traditionalism. But where Viereck sought to do so within the context of corporate capitalism and the New Deal state, Russell Kirk repudiated both. Kirk studied at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland where he immersed himself in the thought of Burke. He founded the traditionalist journal *Modern Age*, served as Distinguished Fellow at the Heritage Foundation, supported Barry Goldwater for president in 1964, and sparred with Meyer over fusionism. Along with

[48]Meyer, p. 69.

Viereck, he attempted to distance the "real" conservatism of tradition and principle from laissez-faire capitalism. Kirk's *The Conservative Mind* is considered one of the most influential books of twentieth century conservatism. In the book, Kirk sought to establish a conservative Anglo-American intellectual tradition that fled from Burke, through John Adams, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Randolph, John C. Calhoun, Benjamin Disraeli, Brooks Adams, and Paul Elmer Moore, among others. As Kevin Mattson argues, Kirk's conservative tradition included a diverse group of thinkers and statesmen who were animated by a variety of principles and policy prescriptions. Kirk's tradition, writes Mattson, "included Federalists who championed national unity over decentralization and southerners who championed states rights and local government over national unity."[49] Indeed, Kirk even wrote favorably of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson.[50] The latter, long detested conservatives for beginning the process of government centralization that led to the New Deal.[51] Notably, excluded from *The Conservative Mind* were Herbert Spencer and William Graham Sumner long associated with laissez-faire.

Much like the Southern Agrarians Kirk detested big government, big labor, and big business, endorsed a decentralized economy and called for a greater "regard for the claims of rural life."[52] He rejected television as "electronic computers," he refused to drive and called cars "mechanical Jacobins, and was impressed by the anti-industrialism of the Southern Agrarians. Kirk was a bitter critic of industrialism, as the Southern Agrarians had been, yet his critique of capitalism was much more limited than the

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[49] Mattson, p. 46.
[50] See, Gerald J. Russello, *The Postmodern Imagination of Russell Kirk* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), p. 110.
[51] Nisbet, *The Present Age: Progress and Anarchy in Modern America* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988), pp. 42, 50.
[52] Kirk, *The American Cause*, p. 125.

Southern Agrarians or Viereck. Kirk disliked corporate capitalism and offered a middle class, shopkeeper, small farmer vision of capitalism. Although sympathetic to the Southern Agrarians' arguments for decentralization, Kirk ignored the Agrarians' critique of capitalist exploitation and their indictment of capitalist plutocracy. The primary target of Kirk's critique was the centralized democratic state and liberal political philosophy: these were the forces, he thought, responsible for undermining the institutions that held capitalist amorality and its excesses in check.

The core of Kirk's critique of capitalism was its emphasis on materialism. According to Kirk, it was short-sighted of capital to assume that it could maintain allegiance without the ideological supports of tradition and religion. Capitalism is not a religion, a moral philosophy, or a body of moral habits, Kirk argued. "Fidelity to the dogmas of capitalism," he wrote, "will not of itself make us all good, happy, and rich."[53] In *A Program for Conservatives*, Kirk argued that capitalism is supported not only by reason and economic arguments about utility and levels of consumption, but by "myths" of divine intent, tradition, and natural law. These myths, according to Kirk, provide the measure of social conduct that makes it possible for people to interact with one another in a peaceable and mutually beneficial way. Essentially, capitalism rests on these myths because they teach individuals to respect the ideas that are at the root of the economic system, property, private rights, and order.[54] These myths are taught and are embodied in the traditional institutions which rationalism, liberalism, the centralized state, and industrial capital have eroded and destroyed. As these myths and the institutions that nurture them are undermined by an increasingly centralized political state, so too is

[53]Kirk, "Is Capitalism Still Viable," p. 278.
[54] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives* (Chicago: Regnery, Co., 1962), p. 147.

capitalism.[55] "Once supernatural and traditional sanctions are dissolved," Kirk explained, "economic self-interest is ridiculously inadequate to hold an economic system together and even less adequate to preserve order."[56]

But it is not only the centralized state that is undermining the foundations of capitalism. Advocates of laissez-faire capitalism, like Ludwig von Mises, who focus solely on pure rationalism in their defense of the economic system and ignore the importance of community as a basic human need contribute to the heartless individualism that is undermining capitalism. Kirk argued that those who conceive of capitalism as an absolute good ignore "the genuine cause of dissatisfaction" when they fail to recognize "the ugliness, monotony, the ennui of modern industrial existence" and ignore the traditional ideological and institutional foundations upon which capitalism rests. The rationalist and utilitarian arguments of political economists cannot persuade the working class to accept the established order and their place in it. The working class is inherently conservative but their conservatism has been "weakened by dislocations and destruction of community by industrialism."[57] In *The Conservative Mind*, Kirk wrote,

> …this network of personal relationships and local decencies was brushed aside by steam, coal, the spinning jenny, the cotton gin, speedy transportation, and other item in the catalogue of progress…capitalism turned the world inside out…personal loyalties gave way to financial relationships…the wealthy man ceased to be magistrate and patron; he ceased to be neighbor to the poor man; he became a mass-man, very often, with no purpose in life but aggrandizement…[58]

Industrial capitalism transformed social relationships by setting them on the ground of utility. It also transformed labor from an activity of personal meaning and fulfillment into a monotonous exercise of social boredom. But capitalism need not take this form.

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[55] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p. 147.
[56] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p, 147.
[57] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p. 148.
[58] Kirk, *The Conservative Mind*, pp. 198-199.

"We can humanize the industrial system," he suggested, "against monotony (sacrificing efficiency, if necessary) to a variety of tasks and pride in workmanship, by standing guard against over-industrialization, by bringing back to the industrial laborer the reality of community and a taste of things beyond the pay-check."[59] Kirk believed that the best way to "humanize" capitalism and restore individual liberty was by promoting economic independence in a society where the "masters" are peasants, artisans, small traders, and small and medium-sized businessmen.[60] To do this Kirk suggested we look to a "third way" out of the "dilemma of capitalism and collectivism."[61] He endorsed Nisbet's idea of the laissez-faire of autonomous groups and Wilhelm Ropke's economic decentralizing scheme. Kirk wanted to order economic life away from the centralized and industrialized form it has taken and move toward a petit-bourgeois direction. To secure people from the vicissitudes of the market, Kirk proposed that people do not become wholly dependent on the market for their income and sustenance, but supplement their market activity with non-market productive activity. Citing Ropke, Kirk counseled that, "people get their sustenance from outside the immediate realm of financial disturbances so find lunch in the garden, supper in the lake, and earn his potato supply in the fall by helping his brother clear his land."[62] Among Viereck, Nisbet, and Kirk, the latter was the nearest intellectual heir of the Southern Agrarians. Much like the Southern Agrarians he romanticized the pre-industrial past of small self-sufficient family farms and shops. For Kirk, the artisans

[59] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p. 149.
[60] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p. 152.
[61] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p. 151.
[62] Quoted in Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p. 153.

and the small businessmen were where "traditional human nature still has its healthiest roots" and a decentralized economy the basis of a re-established community.[63]

IV. Nisbet: The Vanishing Capitalist Revolutionary

Robert Nisbet was a conservative sociologist heavily influenced by Burke, Tocqueville, and Emile Durkheim. In his professional life he taught at Berkeley and Columbia University. He was a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and a fellow at the Hoover Institution in Stanford. Like his friend Kirk, Nisbet was a bitter critic of the New Deal. Along with Kirk, Nisbet endorsed political and economic decentralization but thought Kirk's rejection of modern technology such as the automobile, as a force undermining the family was wrong.[64] His *The Quest for Community* was influential in the postwar conservative movement. Like many postwar conservatives his thought was animated by the rise of totalitarianism. For Nisbet, totalitarianism was not something irrational. He explained the triumph of totalitarianism in Europe as the "offspring of liberalism and the result of its failure."[65] For Nisbet, individuals need community. The liberal democratic state, under the pretext of freeing individuals from traditional fetters destroyed the intermediate institutions that stood between the individual and the state such as the "family, neighborhood, local community, and region foremost." Without the community offered by traditional institutions, argued Nisbet, individuals will seek it in the state, which is totalitarianism. For him, the surest bulwark against totalitarianism was what he called a conservative pluralism of intermediate institutions.

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[63] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p. 152.
[64] Nisbet, *Prejudices: A Philosophical Dictionary* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press,1982), p. 295-296.
[65] Nash, p. 47.

In *The Quest for Community*, Nisbet's most important book, he argues that the capitalist was not at the forefront of the revolutionary upheaval that smashed feudal institutions and, as Marx put it, "put an end to all feudal, patriarchal, idyllic relations…pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors'…drowned the most heavenly ecstasies of religious fervor, of chivalrous enthusiasm, of philistine sentimentalism, in the ice waters of egotistical calculation."[66] Instead, the capitalist is really a secondary figure in what he calls "the biggest change since the Neolithic Age."[67] Laissez-faire capitalism is the economic manifestation of the liberal individualism associated with Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and in particular, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.[68] While Hobbes and Locke, Nisbet argues, undermined the authority of and allegiance to feudal and traditional institutions, their version of liberalism did not triumph until the French Revolution, when the political doctrines of Rousseau helped turn the world upside down.[69] For many postwar conservatives, the rise of the mass man and fascist and communist totalitarianism were revolutions that had their origins in liberalism. For them, New Deal liberalism was on the same trajectory as Soviet communism.[70] It was Rousseau's political ideas especially his conception of human nature, the role of traditional institutions, and the general will that drove the French Revolution and pointed to totalitarianism. Rousseau and other intellectuals like him, argued conservatives, laid the theoretical groundwork and gave the impetus for

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[66] Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978 [1972[), p. 475.
[67] Nisbet, *Twilight of Authority* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 78.
[68] This is the case for Viereck, Kirk, and Nisbet. Other conservatives pointed elsewhere as the source of the erosion of metaphysical values and the institutions that embodied them. See Richard M. Weaver, *Ideas Have Consequences* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1948).
[69] Nisbet, *Conservatism*, p. 8.
[70] Of course not all conservatives believed this. Peter Viereck and Clinton Rossiter were notable exceptions.

successive revolutions against the established order which robbed the society of its most formidable defenses against the tyrannical state. Postwar conservatives saw in New Deal America the same ingredients to revolution and so they turned to the most formidable critic of Rousseau and the French Revolution, Edmund Burke.

For Rousseau, humans are by nature good and free. They are corrupted and oppressed once they enter into society. Once in society there develop various ranks, distinctions, and institutions among individuals, which deprive humans of their innate freedom and equality.[71] It is these various orders, ranks, distinctions, and institutions that fetter the freedom to which each human being is naturally entitled. Where Rousseau and liberal thinkers saw fetters and oppression, conservatives saw freedom, stability, and civilization. For conservatives, humans are not only naturally self-interested but sinful. Conservatism is the political secularization of the doctrine of original sin.[72] Conservatism recognizes the "flawed nature of man and the need for tradition and authority to restrain him," writes Nisbet.[73] The traditional institutions, like the family, the church, and the community are entities which have been grown over time and developed gradually with experience to restrain human impulses toward selfishness. According to conservatives, the erroneous premise of 17th and 18th century liberal social contract theorists regarding human nature and their equally mistaken assumptions devaluing the function and value of traditions and intermediate groups undermined the moral authority of these traditions and institutions which ultimately lead to their erosion.[74] Liberal individualism, by prioritizing the natural rights of the individual at the expense of the

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[71] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discourse on the Origin of Inequality," *The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1987), pp. 25-110.
[72] Viereck, *Conservatism Revisited*., p. 47.
[73] Nisbet, *Conservatism: Dream and Reality*, p. 35.
[74] Nisbet, *Tradition and Revolt*, pp. 137-138.

authority and function of the group produced great upheaval in political, social, and economic life. Most worrisome for conservatives, liberal individualism empowered the absolute state which previously had been checked by the intermediate institutions of civil society.

Released from the constraints formerly imposed on it the centralized state grew exponentially. In fact, for Nisbet the state was responsible for most of the demolition.[75] The liberal democratic state promised liberty, equality, fraternity, and the pursuit of happiness. These promises were quite appealing to the underprivileged in the face of disempowerment, frustration, and hierarchy. Thus, as politics became increasingly inclusive people turned to the power of the democratic state to address their claims for equality in other spheres of life, including the economy. Where radicals saw inequality of wealth as the product of theft, exploitation, and extraction of surplus value, conservatives saw the expression of natural inequalities of talent and character.

As the individual was freed from traditional institutions by the logic of liberal assumptions and by the destructive power of the state upon these institutions the capitalist economic system too, was transformed from one that had been restrained by obligations to the family, community and church into an economic system where the individual was left uprooted. This left human passion for the self-interested maximization of profit and the freedom to infinitely accumulate to rise to the top of the hierarchy of social values. No longer bound by the values, customs, and traditions of these organic social units capital grew bigger, more concentrated, more industrialized, and solely driven by the profit motive. But political liberalism was not the only force that eroded traditional institutions and empowered the state. Contrary to political economists, Nisbet argued

[75] See Nisbet, *Quest for Community*.

that economic liberalism contributed to both. As capitalist enterprises grew and property increasingly took the form of stocks and dividends rather than material property in farms, factories and buildings, big capital completed the rout of traditional institutions by accelerating the misery, instability, and anomie. The social consequences of this state of economic affairs was that as economic competition intensified, economic crisis deepened, and people seeking relief from the material insecurity and hardship which the economic system produced they were left with no other recourse but to turn to the state to ameliorate their suffering. According to Nisbet, "Far from proving a check upon the growth of the omni-competent State, the old laissez-faire actually accelerated this growth. Its indifference to every form of community and association left the State as the sole area of reform and security."[76] The threat to capitalism by the egalitarian demands of politicized democratic masses is the result of the destruction of traditional institutions by the tri-headed monster of liberal dogma, the centralized political state, and marginally, capitalism.

According to Nisbet as the power of the centralized state grew by destroying the feudal arrangements that were already weakened by liberal ideas the emerging bourgeoisie allied with the state against feudal fetters. As a junior partner of the state the bourgeoisie were granted legal concessions, subsidies, and aid, all of which allowed capital to industrialize, expand into new markets and territories, and grow bigger and more concentrated than ever before.

> We should not suppose that the laissez-faire individualism of the middle nineteenth century was the simple heritage of nature, the mere untrammeled emergence of drives and motivations with which man is naturally endowed. Laissez-faire…was *brought* into existence. It was brought into existence by the planned destruction of old customs, associations, villages, and other securities;

[76] Nisbet, *The Quest For Community* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973 [1953]), p. 278.

> by the force of the State throwing the weight of its fast-developing administrative system in favor of *new economic elements of the population* (my italics). And it was brought into existence, hardly less, by reigning systems of economic, political, and psychological thought, systems which neglected altogether the social and cultural unities and settled single-mindedly on the abstract individual as the proper unit of speculation and planning.[77]

The role of the state in the development of capitalism is very well established and no one can argue that capital could have achieved its rise and triumph without the help of the legal and coercive power of the state.[78] However, when Nisbet concludes that "there is much to be said for regarding capitalism as *simply* [my emphasis] the forced adjustment of economic life to the needs of the sovereign State," he seems unwilling to see the decisive role of capitalists in the shaping of the economic environment of a market society.[79] As a result postwar conservatives have underestimated the role of the capitalist in his own historical development, ignored a critique of plutocracy, and thus depoliticized capitalism.

Postwar conservatives oppose the individualist laissez-faire capitalism of Spencer and Sumner which lent intellectual justification for the ruthless exploitation of capital. But where Spencer and Sumner believed that in the competitive struggle of capitalism some grew stronger, larger, and more concentrated while others failed, went bankrupt, and died, Nisbet and Kirk do not seem to view economic concentration as a natural consequence of a competitive market but as the work of a centralized political state. For Nisbet and Kirk, capital plays a mostly passive role in this process, filling the void of hollowed out traditional and intermediate institutions deprived of authority and function.

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[77] Nisbet, *The Quest For Community*, p. 279.
[78] See Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party"; Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1944); Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).
[79] Nisbet, *The Quest For Community*, p. *ff*288.

Reading Nisbet one gets the sense that the capitalist was merely on the sidelines cheering on the centralized state as the state destroyed the traditional institutions that were assumed to be fetters to both the expansion of the state and to capital:

> What has so often been called the natural economic order of the nineteenth century turns out to be, when carefully examined, a special set of political controls and immunities existing on the foundations of institutions, most notably the family and local community, which had nothing whatsoever to do with the essence of capitalism. Freedom of contract, the fluidity of capital, the mobility of labor, and the whole factory system where able to thrive and to give the appearance of internal stability only because of the continued existence of institutional and cultural allegiances which were, in every sense, pre-capitalist. Despite the rationalist faith in natural economic harmonies, the real roots of economic stability lay in groups and associations that were not essentially economic at all.[80]

The biggest sin of capital, for conservatives like Kirk and Nisbet seems to be that it was too short-sighted and focused on profits and production figures to perceive that as the state was destroying the traditional institutions it was also undermining the necessary non-economic foundations of capitalism's own existence.

Not only does Nisbet deprive capitalism of its revolutionary characteristics, "can never be stationary" nature, as Schumpeter put it, but he also minimizes the role of the capitalist in pushing the state against the fetters of tradition. Whereas the critique of capitalist plutocracy was a central component in the thought of Fitzhugh, the warrior aristocrats, and the Southern Agrarians, for postwar conservatives the capitalist is depoliticized and almost totally read out of having any influence over political outcomes, including those concerning his own interests and aggrandizement.

## V. The Rudiments of a Conservative Welfare State

For conservatives the restoration of traditional institutions was an attempt to diffuse power away from the state and lodge it in multiple centers of authority. This

[80] Nisbet, *The Quest For Community*, p. 237.

distribution and decentralization of power suggested to them the guarantee of ordered liberty that is necessary for human social existence. "In the division of authority and the multiplication of its sources lie the most enduring conditions of freedom," wrote Nisbet.[81] To this end, Kirk and Nisbet wanted to repeal the New Deal and return social welfare to decentralized social and political units such as the family, the mutual aid society, the neighborhood, and the local community. Social Security, unemployment compensation and other federal legislative initiatives failed to build organic communities of meaning and belonging. Nisbet called his alternative to the liberal welfare state "the laissez-faire of autonomous groups," modeled on the various centers of power and authority that had existed in the Middle Ages.

But the restoration of function of traditional and intermediate institutions was not only meant to check the power of the state. It was also meant to rescue individuals from their individualism and egoism. Like their predecessors in the conservative tradition, Nisbet and Kirk believed that the traditional institutions ameliorated egoistic individualism by the values they inculcated and the bonds of kinship, locality, or religion they established, all of which prevented alienation and anomie. These institutions socialized individuals to value the interests of the community over their own accumulation of wealth. Restored traditional institutions thus served the dual purpose of checking the totalitarian potential of the democratic state by decentralizing its power and restraining the egotistic, self-interested, and destructive potential of laissez-faire capitalism. Where Viereck believed that the state could strengthen intermediate institutions via legislation like the Wagner Act and the Fair Labor Standards Acts, Kirk and Nisbet repudiated the New Deal in its entirety. Kirk and Nisbet are clear in their

[81] Nisbet, *The Quest For Community*, p. 270.

opposition to the New Deal and in their vision of a decentralized economy and empowered traditional associations. Kirk wrote that "community cannot be restored through any vaunting program of positive legislation."[82] However, neither thinker offers any concrete policy proposals on how their vision is to be achieved or what such a society would look like in a modern context. Nisbet idealized the days prior to World War I when there was an abundance of churches, voluntary associations, and mutual aid societies with "significant function and role in the larger society."[83] Yet, he ignored the massive suffering people endured, especially in times of economic crisis, when these associations were overburdened and unable to provide the support that people needed. Neither thinker believed that the authority of traditional institutions could be automatically restored when the state retreated from the provision of social welfare. In the *Quest for Community*, Nisbet wrote:

> …the role of [the] political government becomes clear in the democracies. Not to sterilize the normal authorities of associations, as does the total State through a pre-emption of function, deprivation of authority, and a monopolization of allegiance, but to reinforce these associations, to provide, administratively, a means whereby the normal competition of group differences is held within bounds and an environment of law within which no single authority, religious or economic, shall attain a repressive and monopolistic influence—this is the role of government in a democracy.[84]

The kind of social balance and pluralism Nisbet and Kirk had in mind requires an active government. Again in *Quest for Community*, Nisbet approvingly quotes Frank Tannenbaum on the role of government to insure "personal freedom and associative authority", "the road to social peace is the balance of the social institutions, and a wise statesman would *strengthen* [my emphasis] those institutions that seemed to be losing

[82] Kirk, *Program for Conservatives*, p. 160.
[83] Nisbet, *Twilight of Authority*, pp. 272, 276.
[84] Nisbet, *The Quest For Community*, p. 270.

ground, even if he were not addicted to them; for the only way to peace in this world of fallible human nature is to keep all human institutions strong, but none too strong; relatively weak, but not so weak as to despair of their survival."[85] While a the "strengthening of institutions that seem to be losing ground," need not point to support for the New Deal it does suggests more than merely a policy of eroding the liberal welfare state and letting intermediate associations fend for themselves. Particularly, since both Nisbet and Kirk have argued that these associations have been thoroughly decimated by liberal individualism, laissez-faire capitalism, and the centralized state. It suggests that government can maintain an environment of healthy competition between social groups via aid or regulation, of groups that no longer are the recipients of public allegiance. Nisbet's idea of the political project of American conservatism as strengthening intermediate and traditional institutions lays the theoretical foundations for what would become the conservative welfare state.

## VI. Conclusion

The conservative critiques of capitalism changed dramatically in the postwar era from what it had been for a century prior to the war. The prewar critique, that began with Calhoun and Fitzhugh, was given another dimension by Adams and Roosevelt, and culminated with the Southern Agrarians, varied greatly. But that which united and distinguished these earlier critiques from the postwar conservative critiques was the radicalism of its indictment of capitalism. Specifically, prewar conservatives attributed the misery and exploitation of workers and their families to unrestrained capitalism much more so than the state. They politicized the economy and the capitalist as a revolutionary agent active in the nation's social, political and economic transformation.

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[85] Nisbet, *The Quest For Community,* pp. 270-271.

The anti-communism that pervaded political discourse in postwar America reduced most political discourse on the right to a choice between laissez-faire capitalism and communist servitude. This choice pushed conservative critics of capitalism to depoliticize capitalism and the capitalist, to marginalize the capitalist as decisive actor in the process of social transformation, and to vilify the growth of the state as the political project of a liberal elite deluded by political doctrines dating back to Rousseau. The rudiments of the critical discourse remain—that laissez-faire capitalism undermines tradition and community—but are not as important in conservative thinking as they once were. Viereck's, Kirk's, and Nisbet's critiques of capitalism were not intended to subvert capitalism or to radically transform its operation as earlier critics had suggested. Their goal was to strengthen capitalism by disentangling it from laissez-faire liberalism and tying it symbiotically to the non-economic values and institutions that restrain it and lend it the cultural and ideological legitimacy that will save it from demise.

Postwar conservatives are the bridge between the robust critiques of capitalism offered prior to the Cold War and the restrained and exclusively cultural critiques that are still audible today on the right. This intellectual development indicates how far American conservatives have departed from earlier conservative thinkers and how thoroughly American conservatism has made its peace with capitalism. It is in the early decades of the Cold War that the litmus test for conservatives was not a principled anti-communism but an unwavering support of capitalism. A regulated capitalism that in one form or another, was endorsed by the warrior-aristocrats and the Southern Agrarians, became heretical among postwar conservatives, as illustrated by Viereck's expulsion from the movement. This continues to be the case today. In a recent article in *National Review*,

John J. Miller writes, "although Viereck was a strong critic of Communism…the fundamental weakness of his conservatism was [his] disdain of capitalism…he personally preferred a mixed economy to free markets."[86] Although a cultural critique of capitalism remains in the conservative discourse, American conservatism is fundamentally, more so now than ever before, about a defense of capitalism.

In various ways, postwar conservative critics Viereck, Nisbet, Kirk and others argued that unrestrained capitalism undermined and destroyed these traditional institutions that checked the power of the state and insured the survival of capitalism itself. From this point of mutual agreement there emerged significant differences over the best way to preserve the sanctity, authority, and function of these institutions. Their search for a viable conservative alternative to laissez-faire capitalism and liberal statism took two different paths, which reveal a fracture in the conservative critical tradition. One the one hand, conservatives like Viereck sought to conserve the revolution preventing reforms of the liberal welfare state institutionalized by the New Deal. They argued that the New Deal had become rooted, conservative, and part of the American tradition. Thus, conservatives like Viereck who esteem tradition, prudence, the experience of history, and gradual reform endorsed the New Deal and the restraints it placed on capitalism. They sought to restore an aristocratic spirit in American politics which they saw personified in FDR. It was these enlightened aristocratic statesmen who would steer the nation on a central reformist, but conservative course between the irresponsible rule of the capitalist plutocracy and the revolutionary agitation of the atomized masses.

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[86] John J. Miller, "Veering Off Course," *National Review* (October 25, 2005).

On the other hand, the thought of Kirk and Nisbet, which would become the dominant voice of traditionalist conservatism in America offered a different narrative and alternative. These thinkers worried most about the threat to traditional institutions and values from increasing political centralization. The primary threat to conservative values and institutions came from the centralized democratic state. They were often ambiguous, as Burke had been, about the threat to these values and institutions from capital itself. They acknowledged that threat, but it was nevertheless marginal to their thought. As a result, they sought to dismantle the liberal welfare state and transfer its functions and authority to the traditional institutions which both thinkers argued had been severely undermined by the state.

This alternative, however, did not preclude the role of the state. It just made it secondary to traditional institutions. Their vision sought to transform the state from an entity that regulated capital and provided a social safety net that made capitalism more humane into an entity that supported traditional institutions that, in theory, are charged with doing the same thing. Nisbet's and Kirk's narrative, which prioritized the critique of the state over the critique of capitalism, had much in common with laissez-faire conservatives. This stream of thought grew to dominate the conservative discourse from the traditionalist perspective as the liberal welfare state expanded under Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. With renewed focus, and important contribution from neoconservatives, the right took aim at the liberal state and transformed it into the conservative welfare state.

# CHAPTER V

## The Neoconservative Critiques of Capitalism: The Loss of the Protestant Ethic and the Search for American Empire

…the 'middling' nature of a bourgeois society falls short of corresponding adequately to the full range of man's spiritual nature, which makes more than middling demands upon the universe, and demands more than middling answers. And it is this weakness that generates continual dissatisfaction, especially among those for whom material problems are no longer so urgent…it is a religious vacuum—a lack of meaning in their own lives, and the absence of a sense of a larger purpose in their society—that terrifies them and provokes them to "alienation" and unappeasable indignation.

Irving Kristol[1]

### I. Introduction

With the exception of the warrior aristocrats, in particular Theodore Roosevelt, none of the conservative critics of capitalism surveyed in this work have had the kind of profound effect on public policy as the thinkers discussed in this chapter: the neoconservatives. Their influential presence in the media, Washington think tanks, corporate boards of directors, NGOs, IGOs, and in the United States government has been well established.[2] Over the past thirty years neoconservatives have been remarkably

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[1]Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers For Capitalism* (New York: Mentor Book, 1978), p. 174.

[2]Neoconservative media outlets include, *Commentary*, a formerly liberal magazine founded in 1945, but by the early 1970 under the direction of Norman Podhoretz moved sharply to the right. The *National Interest*, a neoconservative foreign policy journal established by Irving Kristol began publication in 1985. The *Weekly Standard* was launched in 1995 by William Kristol, son of Irving Kristol, which provided another important media for neoconservative ideas. But neoconservatives have not been limited to writing exclusively for their own media forums. They have written books, their work has appeared in scholarly and academic journals, and they have widely in the nation's newspapers and periodicals including the *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*, the *National Review*, the *New Republic*, *Foreign Affairs*, and many other important organs of print media. They have often appeared on the Sunday morning news programs and are regular contributors on cable news channels, in particular the conservative FOX News. Among the most influential neoconservative thinkers, social scientists, writers, and journalists in addition to those already mentioned are Seymour Martin Lipset, James Q. Wilson, David Frum, Nathan Glazer, Midge Decter, Michael Novak, Gertrude Himmelfarb, George Gilder, Peter Berger, David Brooks, Robert Kagan, Charles Krauthammer, Irwin M. Stelzer, among many others. Neoconservative political practitioners are also numerous. Many of who have held important positions in Congress as elected officials, in the executive branch of the federal government, and in international institutions such as the World Bank. Among the most well-known are Elliot Abrams, Kenneth Adelman, William J. Bennett, John R. Bolton, Douglas Feith, Stephen Hadley, Jeane Kirkpatrick, I. Lewis Libby, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Richard Perle, Paul Wolfowitz, James Woolsey, among others. See Gary J. Dorrien, *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Shadia B. Drury, *Leo Strauss and the American Right* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Anne Norton, *Leo Strauss and the Politics of American Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Jim Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans*

successful at translating conservative ideas like deregulation and the erosion of the welfare state into public policy. On the other hand, according to the neoconservatives themselves, their foreign policy ambitions have not paralleled their successes in domestic public policy. Indeed, according to the neoconservatives, America has only attempted to fulfill its global hegemonic destiny in fits and starts. Neoconservatives attribute this failure to America's cultural crisis marked by a deficiency in character that is the result of a culture of welfare state dependency, and as I argue here, capitalist egoism.

As Ronald Reagan, a hero to neoconservatives for his zeal for deregulation and aggressive anti-communism abroad, left office a sense of foreboding gripped the neoconservatives. Seymour Martin Lipset captured the neoconservative sentiment when he declared that "the concept of neoconservatism is irrelevant to further developments within American politics."[3] These words seemed prophetic in the 1990s. The 1990s was a decade of relative peace and prosperity characterized by an unabashed market triumphantalism at home and an international environment devoid of the epic struggles that marked much of the 20th century. The fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, argued the neoconservatives, offered the United States, the lone superpower, the political and historical moment to do something of world-historical and civilizational importance. Instead, the American public and their political leaders became obsessed with self-absorbed consumerism and the politically trivial. With frustration, the godfather of neoconservatism Irving Kristol grumbled, "What is the point of being the

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(New York: Viking, 2004);Stephen Halper and Jonathan Clarke, *American Alone: The Neo-Conservatives and the Global Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[3]Seymour Martin Lipset, "Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality," *Society* (July, 1988), pp. 29-37.

greatest, most powerful nation in the world and not having an imperial role? It's unheard of in human history."[4]

Yet, after a decade of frustration and feeling of missed opportunity, events would change the political landscape, making it more favorable to the neoconservative vision. The election of an avowedly conservative president in the person of George W. Bush in 2000 together with the events of September 11, 2001 created the opportunity for the resurgence of American global hegemony. The result was the transformation of neoconservatism from a body of ideas made historically irrelevant by the "end of history" into the dominant ideology of official U.S. foreign policy. The moment for America to transcend the materialism, parochialism, and triviality of liberal democratic politics and transform its politics into a grandiose moral mission had finally arrived. Neoconservatives could see in George W. Bush that their long delayed vision might finally be realized. As Bush told Congress shortly after September 11 "In our anger and in our grief we have found our mission and our moment."[5]

There have been many commentaries on the rise and triumph of neoconservatism in America. Much of the more recent literature on the neoconservatives has focused on their imperial foreign policy project. As insightful as this literature has been much of it has ignored how the neoconservatives' imperial project is a critique of the domestic American polity and how it aims to transform that polity.[6] Where the connection has been made between the neoconservatives' foreign policy and their domestic agenda it is

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[4]Irving Kristol interview. Corey Robin, "Endgame: Conservatives After the Cold War," *Boston Review* (February/March 2004); http://bostonreview.net/BR29.1/robin.html

[5]George W. Bush speech delivered to Congress on September 20, 200, quoted in Dorrien,"Benevolent Global Hegemony: William Kristol and the Politics of American Empire," *Logos* (Spring, 2004) http://www.logosjournal.com/issue_3.2/dorrien.htm

[6]There are exceptions, of course, see Greg Grandin, "Bring it all Back Home: The Politics of the New Imperialism" in *Empire's Workshop: Latin America, the United States, and the Rise of the New Imperialism* (New York: Metropolitan Books: 2006) and Corey Robin's "Endgame."

usually in the context of their neoliberal vision of increasing military expenditure to starve the welfare state of essential resources and making the world safe for the market penetration and profit of American capital.[7]

While the interpretation of neoconservatives' neoliberal objectives is valid there is a deeper more intimate relationship between the neoconservative imperial project and their view of the contemporary American polity. In particular, as I intend to argue here, the neoconservative imperial project, in part, grows out of a strong feeling of social degeneration resulting from, among other things, the culture of contemporary American capitalism. Contemporary neoconservatives' advocacy for an imperial America has its origins in the cultural critique of capitalism made in the 1970s by Daniel Bell *The Cultural Critique of Capitalism* and Irving Kristol in *Two Cheers for Capitalism*. [8] Much like Theodore Roosevelt and the warrior aristocrats at the turn of the 19th century, contemporary neoconservatives have looked to the prospect of empire as the antidote to public malaise and an emasculating egoism that contemporary capitalism has been instrumental in fostering. Neoconservatives hope that the American imperial project will rescue American society, politics, and culture from its decadence, depravity, and egoism by transforming the American consumer into a supportive citizen of what William Kristol, son of Irving Kristol, called the "benevolent global hegemony."[9] This thoroughgoing revolution in American political culture, neoconservatives argue, will also

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[7]David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford Univeristy Press, 2007 [2005]), pp. 82-83; Gordon Lafer, "Neoliberalism By Other Means: The 'War on Terror' at Home and Abroad," *New Political Science* (September, 2004); Irving Kristol actually says that a neoconservative goal is to erode the welfare state through tax cuts for economic growth and increased military spending. Irving Kristol, "The Two Welfare States," *Wall Street Journal* (February 3, 1997).

[8]It must be noted that Daniel Bell, unlike other thinkers surveyed in this chapter, has never accepted the neoconservative label. Instead, in the 1978 Forward to his *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* he maintained that he "is a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture." Nevertheless, he is widely considered to be an original neoconservative thinker.

[9]Gary Dorrien, "Benevolent Global Hegemony."

result in a decidedly conservative realignment of American electoral politics. And most important, anoint America as the standard-bearer of Western civilization.

The neoconservatives offer two distinct but related critiques of capitalism. The neoconservative critique of capitalism, never questioned profits, accumulation, and capitalist inequality, nor did it conceive of capitalism as an inherently exploitative economic system. From its inception the neoconservative critique of capitalism was a cultural one. The critiques themselves do not overlap chronologically, but share the basic theme that capitalism fails to inspire the public to come to the defense of what neoconservatives call "democratic capitalism" as a "way of life." The first critique was offered by Irving Kristol and Bell and centered on how capitalism undermined "bourgeois virtues" associated with the Protestant ethic and in the process failed to marshal an adequate intellectual and cultural defense of the economic system by left critics. As J. David Hoeveler, Jr. correctly argues, for first generation neoconservatives the central concern was the failure of capitalism to secure its cultural legitimacy in the world that it created.[10] For neoconservatives, "an effective defense of capitalism required a defense of the cultural assumptions on which a commercial civilization is based."[11] This cultural foundation had been lacking for decades and in the 1970s, neoconservatives worried, threatened the viability of the capitalist economic system. As originally articulated by Bell and Kristol their analysis of contemporary capitalism sought to rediscover the lost values that once made capitalism morally defensible and culturally legitimate. Their critique, as most but not all of the critiques surveyed in this work, defended capitalism by pointing out how it failed to foster allegiance and helped

[10]J. David Hoeveler, Jr., *Watch on the Right: Conservative Intellectuals in the Reagan Era* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 94.
[11]James Piereson, "Investing in Conservative Ideas," *Commentary* (May, 2005), p. 51.

undermine its own legitimacy. Their critique of capitalism centered on capitalism's amoralism and how corporate capitalism contributed to and aggravated a cultural nihilism to the peril of the economic and political system. They argued that capitalism needed to repudiate the culture that emphasized immediate gratification and egoism and return to the moral foundations of the Protestant ethic, which lent to capitalist accumulation and inequality a moral purpose and made it justifiable.

While contemporary neoconservatives continue to offer a cultural critique of capitalism it no longer centers on the questions of legitimacy and ethics that preoccupied the original neoconservative critics of the 1970s. By the 1980s neoconservatives seem to have been satisfied that business and government elites could muster a defense of the economic system and its institutions. As important, especially for Kristol, supply-side economics offered a model whereby the economy was to once again reward work, productivity, and saving, i.e. the bourgeois virtues, character traits that legitimated the economic system. And with Reagan in the White House it did not seem that left critics and welfare state liberals would have much political traction. Yet, it was in the 1990s once the euphoria over the fall of the Soviet Union had abated and America failed, in the eyes of the neoconservatives, to seize its destiny as benevolent global hegemon that some neoconservatives began to wonder whether the materialistic culture of capitalism contributed to America's unwillingness to remake the world. The bourgeois virtues, although necessary, were "prosaic" and failed to inspire courage, patriotism, and national sacrifice. And this is precisely the problem for contemporary neoconservatives. The two cultures of capitalism, the one being prosaic and the other decadent, fail to inspire the

public, as the neoconservatives see it, to come to the defense of the "American way of life" that is being threatened by Islamic fundamentalism.

II. Capitalism's Crisis of Legitimacy: Recovering the Protestant Ethic

The formation of neoconservatism, now two generations old, goes back to the acrimonious disputes between the social democratic and liberal left in the late 1960s. These intra-party conflicts centered on issues such as the student movement and the poor people's movement, the expanded welfare state of the Great Society, and the war in Vietnam. Leftists who opposed the tactics and demands of the student movement and the poor people's movement considered the Great Society programs a failure and supported the war in Vietnam as an essential arena for the anti-communist struggle. In 1973 Michael Harrington labeled "neoconservatives" former leftists and liberals who had errenously attributed the failure of the welfare state to the radicalism of the Great Society in its attempts to address social problems like poverty and racial/ethnic discrimination, in a heavy-handed government way. Among those Harrington singled out by name were Daniel Bell, Nathan Glazer, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan."[12] Some neoconservatives, like Irving Kristol, argued that it was not they who moved rightward and had discarded liberalism. Instead, American liberalism in the 1960s, steeped in identity politics and indiscriminately anti-establishment thinking, had abandoned the unifying philosophy of New Deal liberalism and veered sharply to the left.[13]

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[12]Michael Harrington. "The Welfare State and Its Neoconservative Critics," *Dissent* (Fall, 1973); pp. 435-454.; Stanley Aronowitz, "Considerations on the Origins of Neoconservatism: Looking Backward," *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America,* Michael J. Thompson, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2007).

[13]Irving Kristol, "American Conservatism: 1945-1995," *Public Interest* (Fall, 1995), pp. 80-91; Tod Lindberg, "Neoconservatism's Liberal Legacy," *Varieties of Conservatism in America*, Peter Berkowitz ed. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2004); Lipset, "Neoconservatism: Myth and Reality."

Writing in the 1960s and 1970s, neoconservatives were not avid free-market enthusiasts. In their formative years neoconservatives operated under the premise that the socialist alternative to capitalism had been discredited by the failures of the Soviet experiment, but that Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman's laissez-faire alternative was equally problematic. For Daniel Bell and Irving Kristol the main problem with capitalism and the reason that it suffers from a crisis of legitimacy is that it has become divorced from some desirable cultural and moral precepts, particularly those located in the Protestant ethic. Following Max Weber, Bell argues that capitalism had its origins in Protestant asceticism.[14] The Protestant ethic inculcated what Kristol had called "bourgeois virtues" such as thrift, self-reliance, industry, diligence, rectitude, sobriety, self-discipline, honest ambition, and a moderate degree of public spiritedness. The Protestant ethic was rooted in traditional structures of authority like the family, church, neighborhood, and ethnic group. These bourgeois virtues linked capitalist accumulation with an ethic that justified inequalities.[15] Those who worked hard, invested prudently, and had the personal fortitude to save rather than irresponsibly spend would, at the end of the day, not only be the most socioeconomically well-off but also receive God's highest grace of everlasting salvation. These virtues propelled individuals to pursue their economic self-interest within the confines of moral strictures. Again following Weber, Bell argues that the Protestant commitment to work, accumulation, and an occupation as a calling was not motivated primarily out of the desire to accumulate wealth but as a means to one's own salvation.[16] So long as capitalism was bound by these religious and ethical parameters individuals' profligacy and acquisitiveness was held in check and the

[14]Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Critique of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1996 [1976]).
[15]Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, pp. 128-130.
[16]Bell, 82.

inequalities that resulted from capitalist accumulation were largely accepted, by most of the populace, as deserved. But according to neoconservatives these virtues were no longer to be found among the highest socioeconomic categories. Writing in the epilogue of *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, Kristol declared, "no one seriously claims that these traditional virtues will open the corridors of corporate power to anyone, or that those who now occupy the executive suites are—or even aspire to be—models of bourgeois virtues."[17] By the 1970s, despite that capitalism and big business brought more material comforts and prosperity to more people than ever before, the popular perception of a successful corporate executive was one who was greedy, cutthroat, and solely concerned with profits to the detriment of all else. No wonder that left critics of capitalism and big business were so successful at undermining capitalism's legitimacy, Kristol believed. Who would want to defend a system like that, anyway?

The Protestant justification was never the only validation for capitalism and its inequalities. As Kristol argued in "Capitalism, Socialism, and Nihilism" the inequalities of capitalism were made defensible from a number of different perspectives. Others justified accumulation and profit maximization as values in and of themselves or as an evolutionary value in the spirit of Social Darwinism. These latter explanations for capitalism and inequality were shifts away from the religiously inspired Protestant ethos. According to Kristol these explanations have eclipsed the Protestant justification and created a crisis of legitimacy for capitalism:

> This definition [of distributive justice], propagated by Mandeville and Hume, is purely positive and secular rather than philosophical or religious. It says that, under capitalism, whatever is, is just—that all the inequalities of liberal-bourgeois society must be necessary, or else the free market would not have created them, and therefore they must be justified. This point of view makes no

[17]Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, p. 247.

> distinction between the speculator and the bourgeois-entrepreneur: Both are selfish creatures who, in the exercise of their private vices (greed, selfishness, avarice), end up creating public benefits.[18]

This re-conceptualization of capitalism and its inequalities unfolded gradually and had both material and philosophical causes. As capitalism developed and became more modern, concentrated, industrial and then post-industrial, the Protestant justification began to lose ground. The enormous concentration of wealth in the hands of the robber barons and New York banking and investment houses no longer reflected the personal traits of the God-fearing Protestant capitalist. Before long the religious and moral justification for capitalism came under attack by utilitarianism, Social Darwinism, and by the young intellectuals of the 1910s.[19] According to Bell, thinkers like Walter Lippmann, Van Wyck Brooks, John Reed, and Harold Sterns argued that American cultural values like the Protestant ethic and the romanticism of small town life no longer represented the turn of the century reality. America had become much more religiously, ethnically, and racially diverse. As the nation became more cosmopolitan and urban people were introduced to new ideas and they began to rebel against the restraints imposed on individual behavior by Protestant values. As a result, the moral justification for accumulation and the restraints on consumption that the Protestant ethic insured began to diminish.[20] The Temperance Movement was in part a reaction to perceived cultural degeneration and an attempt to restore Protestant asceticism.

But it was not only the intellectual attack on the Protestant ethic that undermined the religious foundation of capitalism. Capital seized on this cultural revaluation and

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[18]Irving Kristol, "Capitalism, Socialism, and Nihilism," *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 100.
[19]Bell, pp. 61-62.
[20]Bell, p. xx.

invented the means by which it could exploit and profit from this cultural shift. Both Bell and Kristol highlighted the invention of the installment plan and consumer credit as essential tools by which capital was made more profitable. However, in the process, these finance and credit instruments contributed to a culture that privileged instant gratification over the more moderating values of the bourgeois ethic.[21] According to Bell, "installment buying broke up the Protestant fear of debt."[22] The installment plan, argued Bell was "the most 'subversive' instrument that undercut the Protestant ethic."[23] In addition, to the installment plan capital further undermined its own cultural foundations by inventing a wildly efficient and profitable advertising industry that was so good at creating demand for immediate self-gratification that people were seduced by the consumerist ethic.[24] Ultimately, through the cultural and philosophical revaluation together with these changes in the way capital operated, "capitalism outgrew its bourgeois origins and became a system for the impersonal liberation and satisfaction of appetites—an engine for the creation of affluence."[25]

Gradually divorced from its moral foundations, both in theory and in practice, capitalism was praised solely for its hedonistic and materialistic benefits of conferring a higher standard of living than any alternative. Resting on such purely materialistic foundations capitalism became a system in which, in the words of Bell, "nothing is sacred."[26] According to Kristol, the economic defenders of capitalism have wrought the cultural crisis of capitalism. Capitalism helped produce a culturally bankrupt society of

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[21]Bell, pp. 21, 293. Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, p. 82.
[22]Bell, p. 66.
[23]Bell, p. 293.
[24]Hoeveler, p. 95. For the role of advertising in creating a consumer culture see, Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2001 [1976]).
[25]Irving Kristol, Irving, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, p. 82.
[26]Bell, p. 338.

consumers concerned solely for their own immediate gratification. "Yes," wrote Kristol, post-Protestant ethic capitalism "does provide more food, better housing, better health, to say nothing of all kinds of pleasant conveniences…But anyone who naively believes that, in sum, that they suffice to legitimize a socioeconomic system knows little of the human heart and soul. People can learn to despise such a system even while enjoying its benefits."[27] Kristol forcefully argued that the basic social-moral idea of capitalism that through the invisible hand of the free market private vices will be translated into benefits to the general welfare is a central problem for a liberal capitalist society. There is a failure of "imagination when it came to vice on the part of the secular libertarian tradition of capitalism."[28] A failure to which Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman and the libertarian conservatives have no satisfactory answer. Kristol agreed with Hayek and Friedman's attempts to moralize capitalism as the basis of individual freedom, individual self-realization, and political liberty. Yet, he believed that by privileging individual liberty over the formation of character, i.e. bourgeois virtues, libertarian thinkers failed to appreciate the cultural bulwarks of capitalism. Kristol wrote:

> The intense focus on economics and economic growth that is so natural to the heirs of Adam Smith has left them powerless against capitalism's cultural critics, as distinct from its economic critics. Adam Smith himself, though a creative genius in economic thought, was something of a philistine, believing that cultural attitudes and opinions, like religious ones, were matters of personal taste about which reasonable men would not and should not get particularly excited. For two centuries now, Western civilization has been haunted by this stupendous error of judgment, with the result that today, even as a market economy is accepted as superior to any other, at least in principle, the bourgeois society on which the market economy is based is being challenged with unprecedented boldness and success.[29]

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[27]Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, p. 82.
[28]Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism*, p. 103.
[29]Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism*, p. 128.

Capitalist freedom without moral restraints and a moral compass allowed capital to invest in and peddle anything and everything with the potential of realizing profit. The problem for neoconservatives was that this includes the ideas of its ideological adversaries. Capitalism's amoralism contributes to and profits from a dangerous cultural nihilism.[30] This includes ideas that openly seek to destroy it as well as the pornographic and the obscene, which further undermine the character of the citizens of a democratic society and threaten not only its social, cultural, and political institutions but also Western civilization itself.[31] Capital contributes to this moral crisis by profiting from and making pervasive a culture that disparages the very "bourgeois" virtues that are the moral and ethical foundations upon which the economic system originated and developed. The values that have been socially and economically useful for capitalism to progress and prosper have been made culturally to seem antiquated, boring, and stifling of individual personal expression. This revaluation of cultural values poses a problem for the viability of capitalism as, "the 'self' that is 'realized' under the condition of liberal capitalism is a self that despises liberal capitalism, and uses its liberty to subvert and abolish a free society."[32]

In the 1970s neoconservatives worried that capitalism's crisis of legitimacy had become dire. According to Kristol, "the spiritually impoverished civilization that we have constructed on what once seemed to be sturdy bourgeois foundations," is in desperate need" of a moral vision. "Liberal capitalism," he declared, "has been living off the inherited cultural capital of the bourgeois era and has benefited from a moral sanction

[30]Hoeveler, p. 104.
[31]Irving Kristol, *Neocon Reader*, pp. 169-180.
[32]Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism*, p. 103.

it no longer even claims. That legacy which stressed hard work, delayed gratification, and saving is now depleted, and the cultural environment has turned radically hostile."[33]

The question then, for Kristol and the neoconservatives was how to re-legitimate capitalism. The answer, for Kristol, was two-fold. The American corporation needed to undergo a drastic public relations makeover. And second, public policy need to be altered to incentivize the bourgeois virtues that legitimated capitalism. The American corporation, and in particular corporate elites, needed to alter the way they presented themselves and the corporation to the public. They needed to come up with new rationales for their authority and wealth.[34] According to Kristol, the defense of the corporation on grounds that it has been an vehicle of middle class prosperity by efficiently responding to the public's material desires was no longer compelling. Kristol urged corporate elites, both in his writings and in his corporate speaking engagements, to make themselves publicly visible and create a political constituency of stockholders by advertising their Horatio Alger origins and their firms' public service. For Kristol, the corporation was crucial to the future of liberal democracy because it diffused economic and political power that was necessary for individual liberty. For Kristol, then, the task of re-legitimating the corporation required corporate elites to rethink their political and cultural role. Liberal democracy depended on it.

Beyond the corporate public relations campaign that he advocated, the motor for renewed the bourgeois virtues was supply-side economics. Supply-side is basically a very old idea of economic growth that goes back to French economist Jean-Baptiste Say. Supply-side economics holds that supply creates its own demand and results in economic

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[33]Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, p. 83.
[34]Irving Kristol, *Two Cheers for Capitalism*, pp. 3-22.

growth. Discredited in the 1930s by the Great Depression and Keynesian economics, the theory gained credibility among conservatives and the business community in the 1970s after they learned of "Laffer's Curve" that was popularized by Jude Wanniski of the *Wall Street Journal*. Supply-side held that lower tax rates result in economic growth because business will reinvest the tax savings that will contribute to economic growth and ultimately increased tax revenues for the state despite lower tax rates. In other words, lower taxes on business will result in expanding private sector employment and greater revenues for the state. Supply-side was criticized by many economists. However, it gained a very influential following, including Ronald Reagan, who chose a number of supply-side economists, including Arthur Laffer, to serve on his Economic Advisory Policy Board.

For neoconservatives like Kristol, supply-side was more important for the revaluation of values that it offered than its potential economic benefits. Supply-side economics met Kristol's challenge to return to an ideological fusion between capitalism and the Protestant ethos of diligence, honesty, hard-work, etc. that were in danger of being lost forever in America's consumer capitalism.[35] Kristol was impressed by supply-side economics because he believed that it provided the correct set of incentives that would recover the character attributes of the bourgeois ethic. For Kristol, supply-side rewarded innovation and production that encourages industriousness and an entrepreneurial spirit. Rather than reward the shiftless and the lazy, as Kristol believed the Great Society had done by creating disincentives to work, supply side rewarded hard-work, prudent investing, and offered a model for cultural transformation.

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[35]Hoeveler, p. 101.

By the 1980s the neoconservatives' bourgeois ethic cultural critique of capitalism was spent.[36] Supply-side became the official tax policy of the Republican Party and was translated into policy by Reagan's massive tax cuts. Neoconservatives grew satisfied that capitalism finally had a mechanism to regenerate the character type that was at the foundation of the economic system and legitimated it. Certainly, the cultural recovery of the bourgeois ethic would not take place overnight, but supply-side was an enormous step in that direction.

## III. Toward a Conservative Welfare State

Neoconservatives rejected the liberal welfare state of the Great Society. As Harrington, had argued, the neoconservative critique of the Great Society rested on conservative premises regarding the limits of government in solving social problems. However, for neoconservatives, jettisoning the Great Society did not mean repudiating the idea of a welfare state. Instead, in their criticisms of the excesses and unintended consequences of the Great Society, neoconservatives formulated a vision of a conservative welfare state that has had great influence in American politics. This vision includes tax cuts, deregulation of business, and eroding the welfare state from one of entitlements to one that prioritizes self-reliance. Unlike, libertarians, who are opposed to any welfare state, neoconservatives aim to erect a conservative welfare state instead. To be sure, George W. Bush's compassionate conservatism, his prescription drug entitlement, and No Child Left Behind could not be attributed solely to neoconservatives.

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[36]Elizabeth Arens, "Review: The Anxiety of Prosperity," *Policy Review* (Dec. 2000/Jan. 2001); Lindberg, "Neoconservatism's Liberal Legacy," pp. 144-145. Daniel Bell, in his 1996 Afterword to *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* continued to argue that the decline of the Protestant ethic remains a central cultural problem for capitalism and the contradiction has only been aggravated since the mid-1970 when the book was first published.

However, these policies do represent the kind active role of government that has been a feature of neoconservatism from the beginning.

Many of the first generation neoconservatives had been former Trotskyites who became New Deal liberals, but as the New Deal transformed into the Great Society neoconservatives became the Great Society's most formidable critics. With all of its good intentions the Great Society welfare state, argued neoconservatives, was counterproductive and had many unintended consequences. Programs like Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Medicaid, food stamps, housing subsidies and other means tested programs undermined traditional institutions such as the two parent family by tying eligibility to poverty level income. Faced with the prospect of losing all public assistance if employed and earning just above the poverty line, public assistance created a disincentive to work. These programs and policies, argued neoconservatives, degraded character, was harmful to the family structure by encouraging out-of-wedlock births and female-headed households, and reinforced a culture of poverty that created disincentives for personal responsibility and instead encouraged dependency.

Despite their opposition to the Great Society the neoconservatives did not advocate for the immediate and total destruction of the welfare state. Although neoconservatives opposed the concentration of services in government and endorsed reforming the welfare state by eroding and eliminating most Great Society programs, they differed from their conservative colleagues. Neoconservatives believed that the welfare state grew out of a sense of insecurity felt by the public that struggled through economic depression. The welfare state, in particular the New Deal, was a response on the part of democratic people to protect themselves and mitigate the negative effects of

the capitalist economic cycle. For Irving Kristol policy measures like Social Security and unemployment compensation have historically been and continue to be political expedients by which "a liberal capitalist society inoculate[s] itself against a resurgence of anti-capitalist dissent."[37] In "A Conservative Welfare State," Irving Kristol wrote, "If the American people want to be generous to their elderly, even to the point of some extravagance, I think it is very nice of them…So, in my welfare state, we leave social security alone—except for being a bit more generous, perhaps."[38]

The polarity for first generation neoconservatives like Irving Kristol was not between the free market and the welfare state. Neoconservatives were repelled by both the egoistic individualism of free market capitalism and the perverse incentives of an overbearing and intrusive welfare state. Both contributed to dependency and self-indulgence that is degrading of character. Instead, the polarity, at least for Irving Kristol, is between two versions of the welfare state, the "older, masculine, paternalistic version of the welfare state" associated with Theodore Roosevelt's Fair Deal and Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal versus the "newer and firmly established feminine-maternal conception of the welfare state" associated with the Great Society.[39] Programs like Social Security and unemployment compensation are social safety nets for "productive" members of society. The limited welfare state of the New Deal made a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Widowed mothers and the disabled who were unable to work were considered the deserving poor and therefore entitled to public assistance. Likewise, seniors were entitled to assistance, as were the temporarily unemployed. Irving Kristol sought to recreate this older more limited version of the

[37]Irving Kristol, "The Death of the Socialist Idea," *Saturday Evening Post* (March 1979).
[38]Irving Kristol, "A Conservative Welfare State," *Neocon Reader,* p. 145.
[39]Irving Kristol, "The Two Welfare States," *Wall Street Journal* (October 19, 2000).

welfare state because it fostered self-reliance and a sense of "sympathy" rather than "compassion." According to Kristol, sympathy is a male quality. It is directed at people "who want to help themselves and need a helping hand."[40]

On the other hand, the Great Society, argued Kristol, was predicated on compassion, a feminine quality. It did not merely seek to help those who "needed a helping hand," as Kristol put it, but to aid everyone in need. Compassion, he argued, does not discriminate between deserving and undeserving and is potentially limitless because it esteems protection above all other values. This sentiment places demands on government to satisfy the public's infinite appeals for aid. Individuals then look to government to solve all of their problems rather than looking to help themselves. As Kristol saw it, the Great Society subsidized the lazy and irresponsible and decimated the two parent family by discouraging poor single mothers from marriage and poor able bodied men from finding employment. As demands on the welfare state increased the importance of traditional institutions like the family and the church, and their character-building influence declined. For neoconservatives the perverse incentives of the welfare state imperiled individual character and the nation's spiritual vigor. Public policy needed to be concerned with the way it incentivized rewards that influence the character of its citizens.

For neoconservatives, unlike other conservatives, big government is not the problem. Despite contemporary neoconservatives' preference for market solutions to social insurance, they do not reject the role of government in social welfare to the degree that other conservatives do. Instead the problem, for neoconservatives, is the character of government policy. The neoconservative lack of enthusiasm for total decentralization

[40]Irving Kristol, "The Two Welfare States."

and complete dismantling of the welfare state (although they support both endeavors within limits) have long been points of contention among neoconservatives and their traditionalist allies. Distinguishing neoconservatism from traditional conservatism Irving Kristol wrote, "we are impatient with the Hayekian notion that we are on 'the road to serfdom'. Neoconservatives do not feel that kind of alarm or anxiety about the growth of the State in the past century, seeing it as natural, indeed inevitable."[41]

According to neoconservatives, like Irving Kristol, the conservative opposition to even a minimum welfare state was a political miscalculation and failure to appreciate the essential conservatism of the New Deal. Kristol and other neoconservatives were astute enough political observers to know that conservative opposition to popular social policies without a corresponding positive agenda would not be politically successful. "It has long been my opinion," wrote Irving Kristol, "that the conservative hostility to social security, derived from a traditional conservative fiscal monomania, leads to political impotence and a bankrupt social policy."[42] But with the fall of communism, the American political landscape and the neoconservatives' orientation to the old welfare state has changed. Contemporary neoconservatives seek to erode the welfare state as the public provider of services like Social Security, education, and medical care. They believe that the market can provide these services with better quality, efficiency, and at lower costs. However, neoconservatives do not believe that the market will provide these services once the state has retreated. Instead, argue neoconservatives, the government should be proactive to foster the delivery of these services by the private sector. It can do this via tax cuts, tax credits, and public subsidies (such as vouchers) that effectively introduce greater market

[41]Irving Kristol, "The Neoconservative Persuasion" *Neocon Reader*, p. 35.
[42]Irving Kristol, "A Conservative Welfare State," *Neocon Reader*, p. 145.

mechanism to formerly public responsibilities like Social Security, education, and Medicare.[43] The neoconservative vision seeks to strike a balance between the virtues that are cultivated by the market and the political reality that the public expects at least a minimal social safety net from its government.[44] Neoconservatives continue to reject calls for a minimal state. Instead, they endorse, as Fred Barnes has written, "an activist government for conservative ends."[45]

However, economic and welfare policy could only do so much to alter the values of a society. For Irving Kristol, despite the renewal of the bourgeois ethic that a reformed welfare state and supply-side offered capitalism was incapable of cultivating virtues, in addition to commercial ones, that were necessary the survival of the polity. While the bourgeois virtues made capitalism defensible as an economic system they did not add up to a "complete moral code." Virtues that were missing included charity, physical courage, and patriotic self-sacrifice.[46] The regeneration of these required more than changes in economic policy and reform of the welfare state. It required a national political project. And Reagan's apocalyptic view of the Soviet Union as the "evil empire" provided just such an opportunity.

IV. Capitalist Culture vs. *Pax Americana*

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[43]For an insightful analysis of the introduction of market mechanisms in George W. Bush's Medicare prescription drug benefit see, Douglas Jaenicke and Alex Wadden, "President Bush and Social Policy: The Strange Case of the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit, *Political Science Quarterly* (Summer, 2006), pp. 217-240.

[44]William Kristol, "Small Isn't Beautiful," *New York Times* (December 8, 2008); David Brooks, "The Republican Collapse," *New York Times* (October 5, 2007), "Ceding the Center," *New York Times* (October 26, 2008); David Frum, *Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Ross Gregory Douthat and Reihan Salam, *Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

[45]Fred Barnes, "Big-Government Conservatism," *Weekly Standard* (August 18, 2003).

[46]Irving Kristol, "A New Look at Capitalism," *National Review* (April 17, 1981), pp. 414-415.

The view that capitalism was amoral, that it peddled the ideas of its ideological adversaries, and that it undermined the personal virtues that legitimated it was the primary thrust of the critique of the originators of American neoconservatism. The ideological struggle against Soviet communism and its perceived proxies in South and Central America together with the ascendance of supply-side economics made the conservative concern with the decline of bourgeois virtues both intellectually and practically antiquated. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the neoconservatives eagerly anticipated the rise of America as the next great empire in the tradition of Rome and Great Britain. However, they were soon disappointed. In the 1990s, an era when the U.S. was the lone superpower, governing officials dithered in the politically trivial and uninspiring, both internationally and at home. "America is a more dominant power in the world than Americans a century ago could ever have imagined," wrote David Brooks, "Yet we have almost none of the sense of global purpose that Americans had when they only dreamed of enjoying the stature we possess today. Domestically, we have a president and a Congress whose major common purpose is…balancing the budget."[47]

For neoconservatives there was no shortage of explanations for this dismal state, everything from Alexis de Tocqueville's observations regarding the egoism and mediocrity of egalitarianism, the anti-elitism of 1960s radicalism, permissive cultural liberalism, academic nihilism, the Vietnam syndrome, and isolationist right-wing populism were invoked. In addition to these, many neoconservatives pointed to the emasculating consequences of the culture of capitalism. In the mid-1990s

[47]David Brooks, "A Return to National Greatness: A Manifesto for a Lost Creed," *Weekly Standard* (March 3, 1997).

neoconservatives renewed the cultural critique of capitalism most aggressively offered by Theodore Roosevelt and the warrior-aristocrats at the turn of the 20th century.

The renewed cultural critique of capitalism offered by this second generation of neoconservatives reflected on a value system radically different from that which concerned the first generation in the 1970s. Whereas the original neoconservative critics of capitalism worried that the culture of capitalism was undermining the "prosaic values" associated with the Protestant ethic, contemporary neoconservative critics (some of whom, like Irving Kristol, offered both critiques) no longer consider these values casualties of capitalism. As Tod Lindberg maintains in "Neoconservatism's Liberal Legacy," "it became harder and harder to find evidence regarding the 'depleting of moral capital' of capitalism…the system's potential for self-perpetuation became more evident."[48] Instead, contemporary neoconservative indictments of capitalism emphasize its material decadence in creating a docile and spiritually weak public devoid of heroic virtues and the vision and political will to embark on a project "larger than ourselves," an endeavor of grand purpose.

For the neoconservatives the 1990s was an era when the dominant ethos encouraged a "preoccupation with one's own petty affairs."[49] It seemed to be an era of docility, materialism, frivolity, and parochialism. "We've spent much of the past few decades building little private paradises for ourselves," writes Brooks, "We've renovated our kitchens, refurbished our home entertainment systems, invested in patio furniture, Jacuzzis and gas grills. We withdrew from public life, often not even bothering to vote."[50]

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[48]Lindberg, p. 145.
[49]Francis Fukuyama, "Francis Fukuyama Says Tuesday's Attack Marks the End of 'American Exceptionalism'," *Financial Times* (September, 15, 2001).
[50]Brooks, "Facing Up to Our Fears," *Newsweek* (October, 22, 2001).

The triumph of the prosaic characteristic together with the self-indulgent material decadence that capitalist prosperity created were now the major obstacles that America needed to overcome to fulfill its imperial destiny. "Bourgeois society is "prosaic," Irving Kristol suggests "…not only in form but in essence. It is a society organized for the convenience and comfort of common men and common women, not for the production of heroic, memorable figures. It is a society interested in making the best of this world, not in any kind of transfiguration, whether through tragedy or piety."[51] This world of "convenience and comfort" where capitalism thrives and is most profitable requires peace and stability. While stability and predictability are not values that the market embodies as a system, as the fluctuation of the market indicate, individual capitalists do often prize predictability, calculability, stability, the rule of law, and peaceful relations as essential components of a good business environment. The pagan heroic virtues of self-sacrifice, martial strength, valor, and physical courage do not have a prominent cultural and practical place in a relatively prosperous, peaceful, capitalist world. "Heroism is famously problematic in democratic societies, where egalitarian impulses as well as the bourgeois fear of violent death drastically circumscribe the desire to, for example, pursue glorious victory on the battlefield and conquer the world."[52]

Neoconservatives long for the return of the barbaric virtues, the life of struggle, especially life and death struggle that capitalist society so denigrates. "If you are not willing to die for your country," writes Irving Kristol, "you will soon refuse to take it

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[51]Irving Kristol, *Reflections of a Neoconservative: Looking Back, Looking Ahead* (New York: Basic Books, 1983) 29.

[52]Lindberg, "Valor and Victimhood After September 11," *The Weekly Standard: A Reader 1995-2005* William Kristol, ed. (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2005), p. 267.

seriously, and insolent disrespect will replace reverence."[53] The original neoconservative critique of capitalism concerned itself with capital's loss of legitimacy due to the decline of the Protestant ethic. Capitalism's legitimacy is no longer the focus of contemporary neoconservatives. Instead, neoconservatives worry about the threat to liberal capitalist society from foreign threats and the culture of capitalism, that neoconservatives fear, has created a character to materialistically self-absorbed to defend the system. Neoconservatives do not want the virile virtues to supplant the prosaic virtues of the bourgeoisie. Instead, as Robin argues in "Endgame" neoconservatives are hopeful that these political virtues might become more prominent and supplement the economic virtues of capitalism thereby complementing capitalist prosperity and material well-being with a moral, historical, civilizational purpose.[54]

Following Reagan's retirement, the lack of political will for empire among the American political class and the citizenry, as interpreted by neoconservatives, is more than just a missed opportunity for America to play the role of a benign hegemon. It is more than a pass on the prospect of joining the ranks of Athens, Rome, and the British Empire as a world historical nation making "extraordinary contributions to the procession of civilization."[55] For them, it is also a question of renewing the domestic body politic, both politically and culturally, with a sense of common purpose. For neoconservatives the imperial vision is about forging a unity of purpose that is more than a mere agglomeration of private interests. "To create a world," in the words Robin, "that is about something more than money and markets."[56] Neoconservatives believe, as did the

[53]Irving Kristol, "The Lost Soul of the Welfare State," *Wall Street Journal* (February 3, 1997).
[54]Robin, "Endgame."
[55]Brooks, "A Return to National Greatness".
[56]Robin, "Endgame."

warrior-aristocrats a century ago, that the international goals of American hegemony and domestic renewal are interdependent. In "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," widely considered to be the neoconservative manifesto on foreign policy and the outline for much of the Bush Doctrine, William Kristol and Robert Kagan declare, "it is foolish to imagine that the United States can lead the world effectively while the overwhelming majority of the population neither understands nor is involved, in any real way, with its international mission."[57] But in a world without a cosmic enemy like the Soviet Union what might grasp the attention of a public distracted and preoccupied with self-gratification and material comfort. Kristol and Kagan believed that American empire and a renewal of the martial spirit to propel it forward required a formidable adversary and one needed to be found. Writing of the neoconservatives in first years after the fall of the Soviet Union, Daniel Patrick Moynihan stated, "they wished for a military posture approaching mobilization; they would create or invent whatever crises were required to bring this about."[58]

In addition to the interrelated ambitions of realizing America's potential as an imperial power and domestic civic renewal neoconservatives have another goal in mind: the realignment of American electoral politics to secure conservative dominance for decades to come.[59] For William Kristol and Robert Kagan the Republicans are "the genuine heirs to the Reagan tradition" from which the ideals of the benevolent American hegemon emanate. Reaganite conservatism was founded on supply-side economics,

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[57]William Kristol and Robert Kagan, "Toward a Neo-Reaganite Foreign Policy," *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 1996), 27.
[58]Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Pandaemonium: Ethnicity in International Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 36.
[59]Charles Noble suggests that William Kristol and second generation neoconservatives opposed the expansion of the welfare state out of political expediency. Charles Noble, "From Neoconservative to New Right: American Conservatives and the Welfare State," *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America,* Michael J. Thompson, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 109-124.

curtailing the welfare state, and a foreign policy laden with moral language and unapologetic of American hegemony. In his view of the Soviet Union as the "evil empire," Reagan rejected the *realpolitik* of Henry Kissinger, the isolationism of Patrick Buchanan, and the "soft" Wilsonian multilateralism of Bill Clinton. According to Kristol and Kagan, the neoconservative position, in the tradition of Reagan, must be to re-moralize foreign policy in accordance with the "universal, enduring, 'self-evident' truths of the Declaration of Independence."[60] Without all three Reaganite pillars, in particular the third, Kristol and Kagan suggest, "Conservatives will not be able to govern America over the long term…and conservatism will too easily degenerate into the pinched nationalism of Buchanan's "America First," where the appeal to narrow self-interest masks a deeper form of self-loathing."[61] Neoconservatives believe that even though some of the aims of the Reagan Revolution have been accomplished and institutionalized, if conservatives intend to remain in power and are committed to transforming the nation in the direction Reagan had pointed, conservatives had to change American political culture. American imperialism was precisely the vehicle for such a dramatic cultural transformation.

Just as Theodore Roosevelt mourned the closing of the American Frontier more than a century ago, the neoconservatives mourned the end of the Soviet Union. "With the end of the Cold War," wrote Irving Kristol, "what we really need is an obvious ideological and threatening enemy, one worthy of our mettle, one that can unite us in opposition. Isn't that what the most successful movie of the year, *Independence Day*, is

[60]William Kristol and Kagan, p. 31.
[61]William Kristol and Kagan, pp. 20, 31-32.

telling us? Where are our aliens when we most need them?"[62] They missed the Soviet Union because it evoked fear (whether real or imagined) among the American public. And this fear translated into a heightened sense of patriotism and a commitment to a collective purpose, i.e. the defeat of communism. Once the Soviet Union was gone, however, the new "monsters" on the block Somalia, Iraq, Serbia, and North Korea failed to inspire or justify any kind of grandiose ambition.

September 11 afforded the opportunity to recreate a world of Manichean struggle that neoconservatives have been eagerly seeking for over a decade. "Conservatives thrive on a world of mysterious evil and unfathomable hatred," argues Robin, "where good is always on the defensive and time is a precious commodity in the race against corruption and decline."[63] As conservative political leaders never tire of reminding the public, the post-9-11 world is filled with evil and nebulous enemies. In such a dangerous environment, the neoconservatives contended, the U.S. is justified in acting like the imperial power that it should be. It has a responsibility to protect itself and its interests and a grander humanitarian commitment to insure a world where people are free from the threat of terror. As Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld explained, in a world filled with "known knowns, the things we know we know…known unknowns, the things we know we do not know…and unknown unknowns, the ones we don't know we don't know,"[64] mystery, unpredictability, and adventure are once again returned to political life. This is a very different geopolitical environment than the one Americans experienced in the 1990s. It required a character and way of thinking that was not bourgeois. But in a global environment that breeds anxiety and fear the U.S. would not need to justify and explain

[62]Irving Kristol, "A Post-Wilsonian Foreign Policy," *AEI Online* (August 2, 1996).
[63]Robin, "Endgame."
[64]Hart Seely, "The Poetry of D.H. Rumsfeld," *Slate* (April 2, 2003) www.slate.com/id/2081042/

to its own public much less the international community when it "goes abroad looking for monsters to destroy."[65] America, neoconservatives argue, should be going out and aggressively looking for and destroying monsters. In this new, dark, frightful, and mysterious global environment these "monsters" or "evil-doers" must be lurking somewhere in every metropolitan subway system, plotting in every desert, training in every arid mountain range, receiving assistance from a host of unfriendly political regimes, and ready to strike without a moment's notice.

Indeed, this altered environment made neoconservatives hopeful and enthusiastic. Neoconservatives hoped that September 11 might result in a domestic cultural regeneration of the body politic and the long-frustrated realization of American global hegemony. As a result of September 11, writes Tod Lindberg, "After a long absence, Americans returned to the public square they had left for their private gardens, and to make sure everyone knew, they draped it in red, white, and blue."[66] The changed global environment once again made the world an unconquered, strange, and unsolved frontier. The neoconservatives persuaded the Bush Administration to seize the opportunity and wipe the slate clean of the norms, principles, philosophies, and regulations that have governed the international arena since the end of World War II. The Bush Doctrine's moralizing mission of spreading freedom and democracy and its privilege of preemptive war is a clear refutation of the post-WWII international consensus and a decisive embrace of the neoconservative imperial vision characterized by a moral unilateralism. Even under President Obama, and a Democratic Congress, many of who were critical of Bush's rationalizations for preemptive war and unilateralism, U.S. foreign policy, despite less

[65]Quote from William Kristol and Kagan, p. 31.
[66]Lindberg, "Valor and Victimhood After September 11," *The Weekly Standard Reader*, p. 258.

bellicose rhetoric and some tactical shifts in the war on terror, has changed little from that of the previous administration. President Obama's request for the largest defense budget ever, together with his Nobel Peace Prize speech where he declared, "Make no mistake: evil does exist in the world,"[67] suggests that American political elites, of both political parties, have accepted the neoconservative view of the world and America's place in it.

## V. Conclusion

In over a half-century of thought neoconservatives have offered two distinct, but related cultural critiques of capitalism. Although neoconservatives believe that the bourgeois ethic and its values are necessary and beneficial for political freedom and material prosperity, by itself, capitalism fails to mold a character type that can protect the society from opponents domestic and foreign. According to neoconservatives over the course of capitalism's development it gradually became divorced from its religious moorings that not only governed economic behavior but also it lent economic activity an aura of moral purpose. Once economic behavior was divorced from religious foundations capitalism became animated by an egoistic individualism that emphasized immediate gratification. By itself, capitalism failed to cultivate a set of virtues and foster a larger purpose that transcended egoistic individualism. In the 1970s neoconservatives worried that capitalism suffered from a crisis of political and cultural legitimacy. For these critics, capitalism was on the precipice and needed to be defended. It needed to be tied ideologically back to the bourgeois virtues that originally let it cultural and political legitimacy.

Neoconservatives are no longer anxious about the imminent demise of capitalism. Most neoconservatives believe that capitalism is no longer as culturally and politically

[67] Barak Obama, "Nobel Peace Prize Speech," *New York Times* (December 10, 2009).

vulnerable as they thought it once was. Neoconservatives do, however, continue to offer a cultural critique of capitalism. Previously, neoconservatives would indict capitalism for its amoralism and its role in subverting the values and ethic necessary for its own survival. While contemporary neoconservatives no longer believe that capitalism is undermining itself from the inside they did worry that its cultural decadence, hedonism, and egotism is making America too distracted and weak in the face of threats from abroad. The contemporary neoconservative critique focuses on the ways in which the culture of capitalism has subverted the grand, democratizing, liberating, and humanitarian mission of a benevolent American empire. Capitalism creates a culture of egotism and materialism that fashions an American polity without the interest, will, or stomach for such grand, heroic, and historic ambitions. It is because of this that neoconservatives are critical of the culture of capitalism and have compared contemporary America to Rome. But not to imperial Rome at its grandest and most powerful, but to the Rome too self-indulgent and decadent to recognize that it was being emasculated from within and disintegrating on the periphery.

September 11 illustrated that war and imperialism as the antidote to public malaise and self-indulgent consumerism has its limits. As Jackson Lears convincingly argues, the belief in regenerative war has a long, fascinating, but ultimately, disappointing history in the U.S.[68] Theodore Roosevelt learned this reality at the turn of the 20th century and in an effort to keep the nation (and himself) from sinking in decadent ease and effeminate weakness spent much of his life during and after his two terms as president searching for new places to conquer. As war comes to an end and empires no

[68]Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877-1920* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

longer expand, since they have no one left to conquer and colonize, the imperial power, particularly one like the United States, whose political culture is heavily influenced by individualism, materialism, and capitalism may soon discard the heroic and virile virtues in exchange for the more "prosaic," safe, and self-gratifying impulses valued in a corporate capitalist civilization. The neoconservatives hoped that a war on terror (for all the confusion that it implies), a war on an enemy that is just real yet mysterious enough to make people conscious and afraid of it, but elusive enough so that it can potentially go on forever might prevent this "degradation" of the public spirit that usually accompanies the peaceful conclusion of hostilities.

A decade into the 21st century the neoconservatives seemed to have accomplished what they set out to do. Capitalist elites have been able to marshal a defense of capitalism and the corporation convincing enough that the viability of capitalism and the need to further erode the liberal welfare state are axiomatic in the public mind. Likewise, while there has not been a radical transformation in American political culture away from decadent consumer capitalism, there has also not been a broad, politically and electorally influential current among the general public against the character of American foreign policy. American foreign policy in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Honduras, and elsewhere has been criticized by academics, journalists, former state officials, movement leaders, and others. Furthermore, hundreds of thousands of people across the nation have participated in public demonstrations against U.S. foreign policy. However, these activities have not yet had much impact on policy. Indeed, American political elites, despite neoconservatives' concern over the emasculating effects of capitalism, have found the political will for American empire, in all but in name.

# CHAPTER VI

## The Paleoconservative Critique of Global Capitalism

The global capitalist and the true conservative are Cain and Abel.

Patrick Buchanan[1]

## I. Introduction

The 1970s was a watershed decade for American conservatism. The perceived over-expansion of the liberal welfare state, the turmoil in America's cities and on university campuses, the relative success of the civil rights movement, and the launch of the women's liberation and the gay rights movements animated American conservatism since the 1960s.[2] America today is more conservative, perhaps markedly so, than it had been four decades earlier.[3] Conservative ideas have regained currency in the American political discourse and some of them gradually have been translated into public policy, particularly in the realm of economic and social welfare policy. Among the accomplishments of conservative policy makers has been the deregulation of business, the institution of a tax policy much more favorable to high-earners, the erosion of elements of the liberal welfare state such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and the institutionalization of conservative welfare state measures including vouchers, tax credits, and the expansion of the Faith-Based Initiatives Program. Despite these

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[1]Patrick Buchanan, *The Death of the West: How Dying Populations and Immigrant Invasions Imperil Our Country and Civilization* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002), p. 229.
[2]See Sara Diamond, *Roads to Dominion: Right-Wing Movements and Political Power in the United States* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995).
[3]According to the Center for American Progress' 2009 "State of American Political Ideology: A National Study of Values and Beliefs" survey 34 % of Americans identify themselves as "conservative", 29% as "moderate", 15% as "liberal", 16 % as "progressive", and 2 % as "libertarian." Although the study concludes that since the election of President Obama the public has become more progressive than it has been in years, conservative ideas continue to be deeply entrenched among large segments of the American public. www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/03/political_ideology.html

discursive and policy successes some on the American Right suggest conservatism in America has been defeated.[4] The paleoconservatives, the subjects of this chapter, are among those most repelled by the state of contemporary conservatism. They offer some of the most thoroughgoing criticisms of present-day American life from the Right. Their task, as paleoconservative-libertarian writer Justin Raimondo boldly declares, is to "take America back from the empire builders…international do-gooders…foreign lobbyist allies…career 'victims'… bureaucrats… special interests… politicians feeding at the public trough… and the corporate, professional, and managerial elites."[5] For Samuel Francis, a leading paleoconservative theorist, paleoconservatism in America today is "counter-revolutionary."

Paleoconservatism is part of a movement in conservatism called the New Right. The New Right strand of contemporary conservatism combines two distinct strands of thought: Christian Right thought and a nationalist populism called paleoconservatism.[6] There is much that unites these two strands of thought, including their belief that the U.S. is a Christian nation; opposition to legalized abortion, gay marriage, and other elements of the culture wars; and hostility to the liberal welfare state. Unlike the libertarians who argue that individual freedom is the highest value and thus seek to minimize the role of the state in economic life, the paleoconservatives do not privilege the rights and freedom of the individual nor do they prioritize the unfettered market over all other social goods and values. As Patrick Buchanan declares, "to worship the market is a form of idolatry

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[4]See Samuel Francis, *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993); Justin Raimondo, *Reclaiming the American Right* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2008 [1993]).
[5]Raimondo, p. 294.
[6]According to Josephe Scotchie, the label "paleoconservative" originated in the 1980s as a rejoinder to neoconservatism. *The Paleoconservatives: New Voices of the Old Right* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999), p. 1.

no less than worshiping the state."[7] While both the Christian Right and the paleoconservatives endorse deregulation of business, lower taxes, and privatization and decentralization of social welfare, neither group would go so far as the libertarians to eliminate government from economic and social life and construct a minimal "night-watchman" state.

Despite many shared beliefs, paleoconservatives and the Christian Right have differences both in degree and in substance. For instance, in foreign policy, paleoconservatives are isolationists and oppose the war in Iraq. Many on the Christian Right have welcomed American assertiveness as a vehicle to spread the Christian (predominantly Evangelical) mission to the rest of the world. Another point of difference between the two groups is that while both believe that America's Christian institutions, culture, and heritage are under attack, the paleoconservatives emphasize the dangers to national identity posed by multiculturalism and the multiracial character of recent U.S. immigrants. As Edward Ashbee correctly argues, paleoconservatism differs from the Christian Right in that the paleoconservatives focus on the regeneration of an American ethnic nationalism that goes beyond Christian identity.[8] Highlighting this distinction Francis writes:

> If they ever ended abortion, restored school prayer, outlawed sodomy and banned pornography, I suspect, most of its followers [the Religious Right] would simply declare victory and retire. But having accomplished all of that, the Christian right would have done nothing to strip the federal government of the power it has seized throughout this century…stop the cultural and racial dispossession of the historic American people, or resist the absorption of the American nation into a multicultural and multiracial globalist regime.[9]

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[7]Patrick J. Buchanan, *The Great Betrayal: How American Sovereignty and Social Justice are Being Sacrificed to the Gods of the Global Economy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), p. 288.
[8]Edward Ashbee, "Politics of Paleoconservatism," *Society* (March/April 2000), pp. 75-84.
[9]Ashbee, pp. 75-84.

A final difference between the Christian Right and the paleoconservatives concerns capitalism. There is no longer a critique of capitalism from the Christian Right. They have been satisfied by the Christianization of the market by the likes of George Gilder, Michael Novak, David Chilton, Ronald Nash, and others.[10] In their view, capitalism is an ethical system that bases its rewards (wealth) and punishments (poverty) on people's "free will" to work hard, save and prudently invest or be shiftless and hedonistic. The pursuit of profit is God's mechanism to make fallen man productive. What remains of a critique of capitalism on the New Right is of a nationalist populist vein of the paleoconservatives. The paleoconservatives prize a homogeneous nation made up of the English-speaking, white, Christian middle class that embody the "American" identity. The social, cultural, political, and economic status of this group has been diminished by both the liberal welfare state and global capitalism threatening the survival of the American nation.

Paleoconservatism is white nationalism.[11] Central to paleoconservatism is an ardent nationalism that is of decidedly white, European, Christian orientation. Paleoconservatives reject multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism as undermining national identity and sovereignty. For them, there is a life and death struggle between nations and their cultures. Most paleoconservatives are cultural supremacists who believe that in the

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[10] See George F. Gilder, *Wealth and Poverty* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Michael Novak, *Toward a Theology of the Corporation* (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1981), and *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (Washginton, DC: American Enterprise Institute, 1982); David Chilton, *Productive Christians in an Age of Guilt-Manipulators* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1981); Roland Nash, *Poverty and Wealth: The Christian Debate over Capitalism* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1986).

[11] Leonard Zeskind, *Blood and Politics: The History of the White Nationalist Movement from the Margins to the Mainstream* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2009); Matthew N. Lyons, "Fragmented Nationalism: Right-Wing Responses to September 11 in Historical Context," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (October, 2003), pp. 377-418; Chip Berlet, "The New Political Right in the United States: Reaction, Rollback, and Resentment," in *Confronting the New Conservatism: The Rise of the Right in America*, Michael Thompson, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2007), pp. 71-108.

U.S. different races and ethnic groups can and must adopt the dominant, white, culture. The paleoconservatives' aim is to achieve national solidarity, provided that all conform to the culture and values defined by the white "Middle American" middle class. Even still, paleoconservatives exhibit a nativism, anti-Semitism, and racism that goes beyond maintaining cultural identity. There is a strong current in paleoconservative thinking that ties American identity explicitly to the white race. Writing in this vein, Francis suggests that there is no reason to believe that American civilization "can be successfully transmitted to a different people."[12] Paleoconservative advocacy for strict immigration law, support for mass deportation of illegal immigrants, and for some like Francis, opposition to miscegenation points to a belief in biological racism.

Paleoconservatives do not reject that state, but believe that the state must be reoriented toward white nationalist objectives above all else. In the words of Patrick Buchanan, the culture war "is about power, it is about who determines the norms by which we live, and by which we define and govern ourselves." It is about "who decides what is right and wrong, moral and immoral, beautiful and ugly, healthy and sick…and whose beliefs shall form the basis of law."[13] The answer for paleoconservatives is that the United States is a white, Christian nation and it is the white, Christian middle Americans whose cultural, political, and economic values government out to represent. [14]

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[12] Quoted in Zeskind, pp. 368-369.
[13] Quoted in Zeskind, p. 283.
[14]Paleoconservative white nationalism has some affinities with fascism and Nazism. While there are differences between fascism and Nazism, especially the way they were manifest in the 20th century in Italy and Germany, respectively, paleoconservatism has similarities and differences with both, some of which will be illustrated below. Unlike fascism and Nazism, paleoconservatives do not worship the state nor does their movement exhibit the rigid hierarchy of obedience to one absolute leader like the *Fuhrer* in Germany or *Ill Duce* in Italy. Like fascism and Nazism, however, paleoconservatism has a tendency toward irrationalism and an emphasis on emotional appeals, rather than reason. For a brief description of fascism and Nazism see Lyman Tower Sargent, *Contemporary Political Ideologies: A Comparative Study* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1999), pp. 188-200; Terence Ball and Richard Dagger, *Political Ideologies and the*

The paleoconservative critique of capitalism focuses on capitalism's role in eroding America's national identity.

The paleoconservative critique of capitalism is the most radical emanating from the American Right today. Their critique of capitalism is based on a combination of nationalist and populist sentiments. Their critique focuses on the ways in which global capitalism threatens to obliterate America's Christian European heritage, embodied in the white middle class that is the social basis of the American identity. As a result of their diminished cultural supremacy the nation's sovereignty and independence is undermined. For the paleoconservatives, the managerial elite, who control the nation's largest corporations and political institutions are guided by profit-maximization and the doctrines of egalitarianism, internationalism, and multiculturalism are the primary purveyors of the assault on America's national and cultural identity. These ideas are antagonistic to a common culture, language, and heritage that make up the American national identity necessary to preserve the republic.

The paleoconservatives repudiate, what they call, global "managerial" capitalism[15] and seek to reorient the U.S. economy toward economic nationalism.[16] Their critique of global capitalism is not a refutation of capitalism as an economic system, per se. In fact, paleoconservatives hail capitalism as essential to individual freedom, political liberty, and the best medium for the distribution of goods and services. Capitalism is "part of the genius of the American people," as paleoconservative founder Clyde Wilson

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*Democratic Ideal* (New York: Longman, 1999), pp. 187-216. Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Knopf, 2004).

[15]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, p. 104.

[16]See Buchanan *The Great Betrayal* and Samuel Francis, "Message from MARs: The Social Politics of the New Right," *Conservatism in America Since 1930: A Reader* Gregory L. Schneider, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

suggests, but "to the New Right free enterprise is not an absolute…and the New Right does not intend to establish a religion of the dollar bill."[17] Instead, paleoconservatives' issue with capitalism, in its global "free trade" variant, is that it is unlinked from the interests of the nation and has become antagonistic and destructive of it. The result is an economic system that undermines the nation itself.

The paleoconservative label originated as a rejoinder to neoconservatism which gained influence among American conservative intellectuals and policymakers in the mid-1970s.[18] Paleoconservative thought was formed by a loose group of conservative thinkers, journalists, academics, and political practitioners who were disgusted by the moderation of the Republican leadership under Presidents Nixon and Ford.[19] Repelled by the Republican Party's acceptance of the liberal welfare state, the perceived takeover of American conservatism by a "neoconservative cabal," and transnational corporations, the paleoconservatives are committed to re-establishing the "authentic conservatism" that purports to honor limited government, states' rights, cultural conservatism, and the dominance of the Christian Euro-American tradition and heritage that was supreme in the U.S. in the century and a half prior to the New Deal. Paleoconservatives are extremely critical of George W. Bush, whose administration they believe has been high jacked by the neoconservatives. Indicative of paleoconservative criticism of the conservatism of George W. Bush, George Carey declares,

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[17]Clyde N. Wilson, "Citizens or Subjects?," *The New Right Papers*, Robert W. Whitaker, ed (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), p. 123.
[18]Scotchie, p. 1.
[19]According Paul Gottfried and Thomas Fleming's (1993) account of the rise of the New Right, Richard A. Viguerie, a founding member, dates the formation of the New Right movement to August 1974 and President Gerald Ford's nomination of liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller as vice-president. *The Conservative Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993). Its most prominent members at its inception were Paul Weyrich, Howard Phillips, Terry Dolan, and Richard A. Viguerie.

> When a Republican administration, widely portrayed as perhaps the most conservative in our history, practices fiscal irresponsibility, promotes policies that expand the size of government, advances the centralization of federal authority, and launches a "preventive" war—that is, act in a manner one might expect of liberal Democratic administrations—there is good reason to believe that something is terribly amiss, that somehow and at some point in time those principles and tenets which once formed the core of conservatism have been altered and abandoned.[20]

For paleoconservatives, what passes for contemporary conservatism is not conservative at all but an ideology that has been "assimilated by the regime of the Left."[21] In fact, for the paleoconservatives, modern America has become so fundamentally deformed that there is precious little to conserve. Mainstream American conservatism, argues Francis, has not only been culpable in the degeneration, but continues to operate under the illusion that it is conserving something worthwhile. Instead of conserving the ideas of the Left and their "regime," Francis urges the rest of the conservative movement to join the paleoconservatives in "counter-revolution."[22]

II. Capitalism vs. National Identity: The Critique

The theme that is most consistent in the writings of paleoconservatives is that America is rapidly losing the cultural values, traditions, and heritage that make up the distinctively "American" identity, which made the United States into a strong, independent, prosperous, self-directed sovereign nation. The paleoconservatives' best-known critics of global capitalism and exponents of ethnic nationalism have been Patrick Buchanan and Samuel Francis. The two men were friends for decades, have cited each other's works, and Francis was an enthusiastic supporter of electoral campaigns. Buchanan has served as senior adviser to Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Reagan. Buchanan

[20]George W. Carey, *Reclaiming the American Right*, p. xii.
[21]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, p. 231.
[22]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*; Francis, "Message from MARs."

has also campaigned for President of the United States three times. He sought the Republican nomination in 1992 and in 1996, and ran as the Reform Party candidate in 2000. His most impressive electoral showing was during the 1996 Republican primary campaign when he won in New Hampshire, Alaska, Missouri, and Louisiana but was ultimately defeated by Robert Dole.

Buchanan is well-known in the American political discourse as a Right-wing populist critical of the establishment elite, particularly in Washington D.C. and Wall Street. He is an isolationist in foreign policy, a protectionist on economic policy, an opponent of non-European immigration, and an advocate of what Berlet and Lyons have called "white racial nationalism."[23] Buchanan is not shy about his anti-Semitism and racism. He has been known to praise Hitler and write blatantly racist passages in his syndicated columns. According to Buchanan, "The central objection to the present flood of illegals [immigrants] is they are not English-speaking white people from Western Europe; they are Spanish-speaking brown and black people from Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean."[24]

Buchanan is a fairly influential opinion-maker and household name. He has been a prolific writer. He has published in conservative periodicals like the *American Conservative* and *Human Events*, but also *Rolling Stone* and the *Nation*. He has numerous books to his credit including his autobiography entitled *Right from the Beginning* (1988). He has also regularly appeared on shows such as *The McLaughlin Group*, *Crossfire*, and the cable network MSNBC.

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[23]Chip Berlet and Matthew N. Lyons, *Right-Wing Populism in America: Too Close for Comfort* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2000), p. 280.
[24]Quoted in Berlet and Lyons, p. 280.

The late Samuel Francis, not nearly as well known as Buchanan, was more of a theorist than a political practitioner. According to Zeskind, who has written numerous scholarly works on the New Right, Francis is the paleoconservatives' "philosopher-general."[25] His ideas have been extremely controversial, even in conservative circles. He has equated FDR with the likes of Hitler and Stalin.[26] He has called for the U.S. to withdraw from the United Nations, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and NAFTA. He has insisted that U.S. officials and public leaders "must reflect Christian beliefs and values." And he has opposed miscegenation and affirmative action as efforts to "destroy and denigrate the European-American heritage." [27] Nevertheless, his articles and essays have appeared in numerous conservative journals and newsletters including mainstream forums such as the *National Review* and *Modern Age*, in addition to lesser-known publications like *Chronicles, Citizens Informer, The Occidental Quarterly*, and *VDARE*.

In the late 1970s Francis served as a policy analyst at the Heritage Foundation, a conservative think-tank based in Washington D.C. While there he specialized in the study of terrorism, security issues, and foreign affairs. After leaving the Heritage Foundation, Francis served as legislative assistant for national affairs to North Carolina conservative senator John East. Following his tenure with East, Francis joined the *Washington Times,* a conservative daily and antidote to the "liberal" *Washington Post*, as an editorial writer and columnist where he wrote a twice-weekly nationally syndicated

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[25] Zeskind, p. 288.
[26]Francis, "Roosevelt's Big Government Legacy Nothing to Celebrate," *Human Events* vol. 51, Issues 20 (May 26, 1995).
[27]Francis, "Statement of Principles."
http://conservativetimes.org/Conservative_Resources/PaleoConservatism.htm

column. In 1995 he was fired from the *Times* after giving a racially charged speech at the *American Renaissance* conference where he stated,

> We as whites under assault need to…reassert our identity and our solidarity and we need to do so in explicitly racial terms, through the articulation of a racial consciousness as whites…The civilization that we as whites created in Europe and America could not have developed apart from the genetic endowments of the creating people.[28]

Upon his dismissal he remained productive. He continued to contribute a regular column to conservative magazines *Chronicles*, *Citizens Informer*, and *VDARE* and often secured speaking engagements to right-wing organizations such as the *American Renaissance* and the Council of Conservative Citizens. He has written two books on the thought of James Burnham, whose theory of the managerial revolution is a central theme of his Right-wing populism.[29] He also has edited and contributed to several collections on conservative thought including *Beautiful Losers: Essays on the Failure of American Conservatism* (1994), *Revolution From the Middle* (1997), *Shots Fired: Sam Francis on America's Culture War* (2006), *Race and the American Prospect: Essays on the Racial Realities of our Nation and our Time* (2006), and *Essential Writings on Race* (2007). His essays have appeared in numerous readers on conservative thought in America.[30]

According to paleoconservatives, several forces have contributed to America's degeneration; the managerial elite, the liberal welfare state, and global capitalism. The managerial elite, a concept Francis adopted from James Burnham's theory of the managerial revolution, developed in tandem with the growth and development of the

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[28]Quoted in Berlet and Lyons, p. 284.
[29]Francis' two books on James Burnham are *Power and History: The Political Thought of James Burnham* (1984) and *James Burnham: Thinkers of Our Time* (1999).
[30]Whitaker ed.; Scotchie; Schneider.

large, bureaucratic corporation and administrative state.[31] The corporate elite cooperated with the political elite in breaking down the older, traditional, local and familial restraints on their respective scopes of power.[32] Competition compelled capitalists to employ technology and organizational innovations to manufacture goods more cheaply, more quickly, of better quality, and in much greater quantities. To recover the costs of these investments, and more importantly, to maximize profit, capitalists demanded an expanding national, and eventually global, market for their goods and services. Traditional institutions and local communities, tastes, customs, and mores were barriers to market expansion and profit maximization. The political elite perceived these same local traditional institutions as impediments to individual freedom and the national administrative state.

According to paleoconservatives the political elite sought to remake the world in accordance with its egalitarian ideals. But it is not only the state, argues Francis, that is the purveyor of egalitarianism but the big corporations as well. In their narrow commitment to efficiency, profits, and market share big corporations are agents of a particular kind of egalitarianism. While corporate egalitarianism is not driven by lofty ideals of economic and political leveling, corporations are among the most destructive forces of local culture and institutions. According to Francis, corporations driven by profits and the need to expand create homogenized wants and tastes. They do this by inculcating an "egalitarian ethic of universal consumption," that buying on credit has made possible. Francis writes:

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[31]For a critique of the elite from ideological perspectives different than Burnham and Francis see, C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 [1956]); Christopher Lasch, *The Revolt of the Elites and the Betrayal of Democracy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1995).
[32]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, p. 98.

> It is thus basic to the interests of the large corporation to erode social and cultural diversity and promote egalitarian uniformity, as well as to cooperate with and support political egalitarianism, the costs of which in increased unionization, protection of the labor force, regulation, civil rights legislation, and economic environmentalism, are ruinous to the smaller competitors of the corporations but much less harmful to those larger economies that can absorb such costs and pass them on to consumers.[33]

But it is not only the corporate structure that is the antagonist of tradition and community. In "Capitalism the Enemy," an article criticizing the South Carolina House of Representatives vote to remove the Confederate battle flag from the state capitol building, Francis goes further than a populist critique of big business. He argues that inherent in capitalism is a cosmopolitan and egalitarian ethic that is hostile to local communities and traditional institutions. Francis writes:

> Capitalism, an economic system driven only, according to its own theory, by the accumulation of profit, is at least as much the enemy of tradition as the NAACP or communism…The hostility of capitalism toward tradition is clear enough in its reduction of all social issues to economic ones. Moreover, like communism, capitalism is based on an essential egalitarianism that refuses to distinguish between one consumer's dollar and another. The reductionism and egalitarianism inherent in capitalism explains its destructive impact on social institutions.[34]

It was not until the New Deal that the alliance between the corporate and the political elite was cemented through regulatory policy, which benefited large corporations, and social welfare policy that undermined the mutual assistance of traditional social organizations. This alliance of corporate and political elites has been strengthened over the years by the inherent dynamism of "managerial capitalism," states Francis. "The dynamic of managerial capitalism," Francis adds, "involves a continuing erosion of the social and cultural fabric through the mass consumption and hedonism,

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[33]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, p. 219. Francis' view that big business has been an agent or, at the very least, an accomplice to progressive public policy is suspect. See, Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement from the New Deal to Reagan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009).
[34]Francis, "Capitalism the Enemy," *Chronicles* (August 9, 2000).

social mobility, and dislocation that it promotes…"[35] In the face of such political and economic power the intermediate institutions and local communities that check centralized power, both in their political and economic forms, have all but disappeared.

According to Francis, the managerial elite has consolidated its control over American political, cultural, and economic institutions. As the national market has turned into a global market, the once national managerial elite has become a "transnational elite." Whereas the national managerial elite rode roughshod over local culture, tastes, traditions, and interests, the transnational elite in an age of global free trade capitalism is threatening to do the same to America's national culture, heritage, and interests.[36] America has become a nation of consumers and a multiplying assortment of ethnic and racial groups. It is dangerously close to becoming a collection of strangers without a shared cultural identity that might bind them together. Inevitably, argue Buchanan and Francis, such a divided nation will find itself in the midst of ethnic and racial conflict to the peril of social harmony and the culture and institutions that made America "exceptional" and a nation to be envied.[37]

America's strength, independence, and the opportunities that it afforded its citizens, argue paleoconservatives, was largely based on a shared cultural identity and heritage fashioned by the Founding Fathers. Despite the regional variation and economic differences that existed in the U.S. during the Founding Era, a relatively homogeneous, that is Christian and European descendant, independent middle class was the social

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[35]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, p. 104.
[36]Francis, "Francis on Free Trade," *VDare* (January 3, 2002), http://www.vdare.com/francis/free_trade.htm.
[37]In a November 2004 article entitled "Why Immigrants Kill" Francis several high profile acts of violence perpetrated by immigrants, including a multiple homicide in Wisconsin by a Hmong immigrant to suggest that immigrants "lacking roots in the society and civilization," (i.e. non-European immigrants) "feel little obligation to it," and therefore are more prone to violence than people native to the U.S. "Why Immigrants Kill," *VDare* (November, 29, 2004), http://www.vdare.com/francis/041129_kill.htm.

foundation of the American polity.[38] A shared religious faith, a common language, and an economy of small producers in tight-knit communities cultivated deep social bonds. The intimacy of interpersonal relationships and a common culture fostered a republican citizenry that had a healthy distrust of centralized power and prized personal independence and self-sufficiency. The intimacy of relationships necessarily developed as a result of religious, racial, ethnic, class similarities and the experiences that accompanied them in communities throughout America prior to industrialization and urbanization. These shared cultural and political orientations, operating in an economic environment of small producers, helped promote a blend of individualism, populist republicanism, and Protestantism that made up a distinct American identity.

But it was not only the racial, religious, and class homogeneity that transformed America from a young, vulnerable, ex-colony into a nation with a distinct identity, and ultimately into the world's preeminent power. Buchanan and Francis credit the enlightened leadership of the Founding generation and subsequent political elites Henry Clay, Abraham Lincoln, and Theodore Roosevelt who crafted a strong nation founded on a distinct national identity. They did so, in no small part, because of their commitment to a policy of economic nationalism as the basis for economic growth, development, and prosperity.[39] Buchanan highlights the ideas of Alexander Hamilton's in the "Report on Manufactures" and the protectionist policies that were put in place and continued for over a hundred years by successive administrations, as central to America's independence, security, and prosperity.[40] Hamilton's plan of tariffs on foreign goods and subsidies for

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[38]Francis, "Nationalism, Old and New," *The Paleoconservatives*, pp. 191-192.
[39]Buchanan, *The Great Betrayal*, pp. 93, 288. Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, p. 203.
[40]Buchanan. "Death of Manufacturing," *The American Conservative* (April 11, 2003), http://www.amconmag.com/article/2003/aug/11/00007/.

domestic manufacturers were necessary for U.S. manufacturers to grow and develop to compete with British and French industrial firms on the international market. But these measures were also necessary if the U.S. was to extricate itself economically from Britain and to have the capability to provide finished goods for its citizens and weapons of war for its defense. Buchanan argues that American elites up to Woodrow Wilson had not been seduced by the free-trade doctrines that influenced policy on the European continent throughout the nineteenth century. According to Buchanan's interpretation of the *Wealth of Nations*, even Adam Smith was reluctant to endorse global free-trade in light of national interest, stopping short of the utopian free-trade vision of David Ricardo, Frederic Bastiat, Richard Cobden, and Jean-Baptist Say.[41] Resisting these "foreign doctrines," the American economy rested on the twin pillars of the "American system," a domestic free trade zone and protectionism, which made the nation into an economic and military powerhouse. Yet, according to Buchanan's reading, it was not meant to be, as Wilson, who advocated liberal universalism, was convinced of the idea that promised peace through free trade, and thus incorporated global free trade into his Fourteen Points.

Throughout the 19th century America's political leaders resisted the global free trade doctrine in favor of protectionism. America's corporate leaders did so as well. They did so primarily because their economic interests still lay in the expanding domestic market and they feared competition for the American market once tariffs on foreign goods are lifted. Buchanan argues that the robber barons of the Gilded Age, captains of industry such as John D. Rockefeller, Cornelius Vanderbilt, and Henry Ford were, and self-consciously saw themselves as "American patriots."[42] Buchanan suggests that they

[41]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, pp. 174-176.
[42]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, pp. 93-94.

had been erroneously portrayed in historical accounts of the age. The robber barons, the greedy and exploitative "malefactors of great wealth," that as Theodore Roosevelt and Brooks Adams believed needed to be guided toward nationalist goals by a strong central state, were instead, committed to their nation and to their workers.[43] In the early 1900s Henry Ford famously paid his workers five dollars a day, which was a high wage for industrial laborers in those days and double the wage earned by the average autoworker. The wage increase made it possible for Ford's employees to buy the Model T's that they assembled. However, as the global free-trade doctrine infiltrated liberal and conservative intellectual circles and was implemented into public policy, the old bourgeoisie of the Gilded Age, those who owned and operated their businesses, gave way to a new breed of corporate elite.[44]

In contrast to the social conscience of the Gilded Age industrialists, Buchanan suggests that the corporate elite of global capitalism are guided by one value and one value only: profit. "If the bottom line commands the cashiering of loyal workers after years of service," writes Buchanan of the new corporate elite, "it will be done with the same ruthless efficiency with which obsolete equipment is junked."[45] National corporations have become transnational corporations and "patriotic" captains of industry have given way to a "rootless transnational elite who are without sentiment but the fittest alone survive" and who view "men and women not as family, friends, neighbors, fellow citizens, but 'customers' and 'factors of production'."[46] Corporations have become

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[43]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 93.
[44] Buchanan overlooks the fact that by the early 1900s many of the largest firms were not directed by their owners but well-paid corporate managers. An infamous example is Andrew Carnegie's absence (and support) during Henry C. Frick's brutal suppression of striking steelworkers at Homestead in 1892.
[45]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 55.
[46]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 97.

amoral institutions without loyalties to their workers, their communities, local traditions, or their nation.[47] Their only concern is to "maximize profits, executive compensation, and stock dividends."[48] The transnational corporation declares Buchanan, "is a natural antagonist of tradition. With its adaptability and amorality, it has no roots; it can operate in any system. With efficiency its ruling principle, it has no loyalty to workers and no allegiance to any nation. With share price and stock options its reasons for being, it will sacrifice everything and everyone on the altar of profit."[49]

According to Francis and Buchanan, where once America's corporate and political elite were suspicious of the doctrines of free trade, today they embrace it. They formulate policy and administer it in their own interest and in the interest of their allies, the underclass, who have been bought off by the liberal welfare state. Out of a narrow commitment to profits and expanding markets for goods, services, and labor, the new corporate elite endorse global free trade and mass immigration. The nation's political and cultural elites do the same out a commitment to egalitarianism, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism. The result of an economic policy of free trade in a global economy is that the sovereignty, independence, and security of the nation and its white middle class are sacrificed.[50] The national interest becomes defined by what is in the interest of the American consumer. And as Francis argues, often the interests and tastes of the consumer is manipulated and defined by the corporation itself.[51] A nation, argue paleoconservatives, is more than merely a collection of consumers, buying and selling

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[47]Francis, "Corporations Have No Souls: Or Loyalties Either," *VDare* (August 12, 2004), http://www.vdare.com/francis/corporations.htm.
[48]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 97.
[49]Buchanan, *The Death of the West*, p. 229.
[50]Buchanan, "Goodbye, Dollar—and Empire," *The American Conservative* (November 24, 2004), http://www.amconmag.com/article/2004/nov/22/00008/.
[51]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, pp. 208-221.

wares and services, soaking in imported consumerist luxuries. A nation, according to Buchanan, "is a people, separate and apart with its own destiny and history, language and faith, institutions and culture."[52] As such, it provides individuals with a sense of belonging to a larger collective. It offers a community with a higher sense of purpose than that of liberal capitalist self-indulgence. As Francis had argued, managerial capitalism decimated the peculiarities of local markets and communities in its pursuit of growing profits derived from a unified market. It follows that global managerial capitalism does the same but with more intensity and on a larger scale. The victims are not only small communities and regional cultures and tastes, but the culture, history, institutions, and the security of an entire nation.

"A nation's economic system," writes Buchanan, "should reinforce the bonds of national unity…a nation is organic, alive; it has a beating heart…The people or a nation are a moral community who must share values higher than economic interest, or their nation will not endure."[53] But in global capitalism there are no national loyalties. "The Global Economy," Buchanan continues, "is rooted in the myth of Economic Man…It elevates economics above all else."[54] As a result multinational corporations, institutions without national loyalty, trade with the nation's enemies, lay-off workers, outsource work to foreign countries, and campaign for an open immigration policy that puts a downward pressure on wages by increasing the labor supply.[55]

The erosion of America's manufacturing sector is symptomatic of the triumph of global capitalism and is especially devastating for national strength and independence. A

[52]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 51.
[53]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 287.
[54]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 287.
[55]See Buchanan's *Betrayal* and *The Death of the West.*

nation without the capability to manufacture goods, a scenario to which the United States is perilously close, will be unable to defend itself. "Manufacturing is the key to national power," argues Buchanan.[56] It is essential for a nation to be able to supply itself the "means of subsistence, habitation, clothing and defense," if it is to defend its liberty.[57] Buchanan suggests that a policy of free trade that has resulted in corporations fleeing American shores for cheaper labor markets abroad has imperiled America's security. Because of free trade, the United States has ceded its sovereignty, and in the process has become vulnerable and dependent on its trading partners. Today more than ever, the U.S. is preoccupied with the state of affairs of foreign countries because the U.S. has become almost completely dependent on others for its national defense and a decent living standard for its own people. For paleoconservatives, America's economic dependence on other countries is the result of global free trade. In an effort to insure that its economy does not suffer the U.S. is forced to intervene in countries abroad, as it did in the Gulf War or when it bailed out the Mexican economy in 1995. As Buchanan argues in *The Great Betrayal*, the U.S. is no longer in control of its economic destiny—it no longer controls its political destiny.

A further consequence of global capitalism, in addition to its threat to America's sovereignty and cultural identity, it also imperils the nation's republican traditions. For paleoconservatives, paramount to America's republican institutions is the white middle class that embody the American identity. Drawing on the long tradition of republicanism in the U.S., in particular the Anti-Federalists during the debates over ratification of the Constitution, the paleoconservatives argue that the republic requires a strong and

[56]Buchanan, "Death of Manufacturing."
[57]Buchanan, "Death of Manufacturing."

relatively homogeneous middle class as its social basis. Throughout American history, the middle class has been predominantly of European stock.[58] Through the growth of the welfare state and global capitalism, the managerial elite has wrecked havoc on the middle class. Especially onerous, argue the paleoconservatives, are tax and regulatory policies squeezing small businesses, social policies like affirmative action that empower ethnic and racial minorities at the expense of whites, an open borders policy, and disastrous free trade policy. In an economic system where capital and labor can move relatively freely from place to place, the economic status of the middle class is undermined. Capital is not only forced to look for inexpensive labor markets abroad but it is also interested in importing inexpensive labor from abroad. As immigrants from developing nations in the Caribbean, South America, and Asia, and Africa flood into the U.S., many are not assimilating to American dress, tastes, language, customs, traditions, and national identity. Instead, they are transplanting their ethnic and cultural customs to the U.S. and forcing white Americans to adapt to them. Outraged by this supposed expropriation of the white middle class, Francis declares, "Outsourcing and the whole jungle of globalization that goes with it can only accelerate that reaction (of middle and working class whites), as those who live on the receiving end of globalism experience the economic as well as the political, cultural, and racial dispossession it inflicts."[59]

For more than a century, the social base of American republicanism was the independent producer, whose livelihood neither depended on the corporation nor the state. This economic independence was the economic basis of self-government and civic

[58] Paleoconservatives offer cultural explanations for this and overlook the role of business and public policy in blocking blacks, Hispanics, Asians, Native Americans, and other non-whites from upward social mobility.
[59] Francis, "Outsourcing—The Economic Equivalent of Ethnic Cleansing," www.vdare.com

virtue. Dependence, whether on government for public assistance or on the wealthy or the corporation for employment, were both forms of corruption. For the Anti-Federalists and Thomas Jefferson, the yeoman farmer or the artisan embodied the republican citizen precisely because of his economic independence. Francis reconciled himself to the fact that a rejuvenation of the yeoman farmer or independent artisan was not possible under modern economic conditions. Nevertheless, Timothy J. Gaffaney suggests, that the independence required of full citizenship could be realized by wage-earners.[60] Particularly workers on an assembly line of a manufacturing plant. Employment in the nation's steel mills, auto factories, and other manufacturing firms offered millions of Americans a decent wage and a good middle class standard of living throughout the 20th century.[61] Without an economic foundation in well paid stable work, the white middle class shrinks and the republican project is put in jeopardy. As factories shut their doors and move to places like Mexico, Guatemala, China, India, and elsewhere, companies that remain in the U.S. are forced to make painful adjustments in order to stay competitive. They trim their own workforces or hire immigrants at low wages. Either way, Buchanan argues, the result is that American "wage earners work harder and longer just to stay in the same place" and are deprived of the essential economic independence required for full republican citizenship.[62]

Paleoconservatives are not the only thinkers and activists who see potential for republican renewal in wage-earning industrial workers. Some republicans and labor organizers believe that a republican renewal was possible in the context of a corporate

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[60]Timothy J. Gaffaney, "Citizens of the Market: The Un-Political Theory of the New Right," *Polity* (Winter 1999), pp. 179-202.
[61]Francis, "Nationalism, Old and New," in *The Paleoconservatives*.
[62]Buchanan, "Speech on Free Trade," Given to Council on Foreign Relations (November 18, 1998), http://www.chuckbaldwinlive.com/read.freetrade.html.

economy by rethinking the idea of republican economic independence. Inroads to establish greater workplace democracy through unionism or create producer/consumer cooperatives that transcend the wage system are progressive measures intended to do just that.[63] But for paleoconservaties the threat to the economic independence for republican citizenship does not come from the wide inequality in wealth or the lack of democracy in workplace and the relationship of dominance and dependence that are the result. Instead for paleoconservatives, economic independence means that the white middle class can seek employment in a domestic economy that is unencumbered by government regulations, unburdened by costly welfare provision, and protected from competition by foreign labor. For paleoconservatives, there is no natural antagonism between capital and labor or relations of domination and dependence in the domestic economy. Class antagonism is the result of the intensity of competition wrought by global free trade.[64] Paleoconservatives believe that the market, without government interference other than protectionism, would create the conditions for full employment and thus the economic independence that is necessary for republican citizenship.

## III. The Paleoconservative Nationalist Vision

As an alternative to global capitalism and the managerial elite, the paleoconservatives envision a policy of economic nationalism that carves out a significant role for the state in economic life. The paleoconservative task, writes Joseph Scotchie, is to "balance American nationalism against the requirements of a free market and a free society, to present a radical and positive alternative to the right-wing social

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[63] See, David Montgomery, *Citizen Worker: The Experience of Workers in the United States with Democracy and the Free Market During the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Michael J. Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent: America in Search of a Public Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

[64] Buchanan, "Speech on Free Trade."

democrats who have taken over the conservative movement and hijacked the Republican Party."[65] This balance might be realized, according to Buchanan, by an economic vision that combines "the patriotism of Theodore Roosevelt" with the decentralizing communitarian "humane economic vision of Wilhelm Rope."[66] This vision not only repudiates much of the welfare and regulatory state but the free market and "night-watchman" state as well.

The main goal is to strengthen the nation which the paleoconservatives identify with the white middle class, or Middle Americans. Perceiving themselves as the victims of global capitalism and an overbearing administrative state and conscious of their declining social status, the paleoconservatives argue, Middle Americans have begun to challenge the managerial elite by asserting the values of individualism, self-reliance, and a shared Christian, white European heritage. Unlike Theodore Roosevelt's efforts to foster nationalism from the top the paleoconservative vision is a bottom up mass movement focused on mobilizing ordinary "Middle American Radicals" (MAR).

As the MARs organize a mass movement of frustrated middle and working-class whites, argues Francis, their first target must be the nation's cultural institutions—the media and education—and its leaders. Drawing on work of the 20th century Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, Francis argues that political power does not require control of the means of production.[67] Instead, it lies in control over the means of cultural and ideological production. "Ideas do have consequences, but some ideas have more consequences than others," writes Francis, "and which consequences ensue from which ideas is settled not simply because the ideas serve human reason through their logical

[65]Quoted in Raimondo, p. 297.
[66]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 288.
[67]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, p. 220.

implications but also because some ideas serve human interests and emotions through their attachment to drives for political, economic, and social power, while other ideas do not."[68] As such, the first task of the "Middle American Radicals" counterrevolution is to take control over the cultural institutions and redirect Americans away from cosmopolitanism, multiculturalism, centralization, and free trade and toward American nationalism and its Christian and European components.

Once MARs assert control over the nation's means of cultural and ideological production their assault on the political and economic managerial elite will be made easier. The nation's political establishment is bound to fall next as Middle Americans, through the democratic process, gradually take control of the nation's political institutions. Contrary to libertarians, Francis believes that to maintain a distinct American identity, Middle Americas must not diminish the power of the state once they have gained control over it. Instead they will use it for their own benefit—just as the managerial elite does at present. Francis writes:

> …it is doubtful that the MAR coalition and its allies in the Sunbelt's entrepreneurial regions will continue to focus on this classical liberal principle [the free market]… The central focus of MAR-New Right political economy is likely to be economic growth, a value often confused with, sometimes encompassing, but not identical to the free market.[69]

Francis readily concedes that the MARs see "little value in their adherence to a strict laissez-faire ideology."[70] Indeed, paleoconservative political economy envisions an active and positive role for the state; it should spur economic growth on behalf of the anti-establishment, populist forces of Middle America. The goals of paleoconservative economic policy, according to Buchanan, might include full employment, wider and

[68]Francis, *Beautiful Losers*, p. 3.
[69]Francis, "Message from MARs," p. 310.
[70]Francis, "Message from MARs," p. 311.

deeper distribution of property and prosperity, rising standards of living and a living wage that enables one working parent to feed, clothe, house, educate a large family. It might also include a tax system that leaves Americans with the largest share of the fruits of their labor of any industrial democracy; diminished dependence on foreign trade, especially for necessities; the restoration of America's lost sovereignty; self-sufficiency in all areas of industry and technology vital to the national security; maximum freedom for citizens and private institutions consistent with a moral community and the common good.[71]

To accomplish these goals the paleoconservatives endorse the idea of economic nationalism, which repudiates the unfettered free market and much of the liberal welfare state, but also envisions a significant economic role for the state. As has already been shown, paleoconservatives do not opposed government intervention in the economy. Nor do they oppose the totality of the welfare state. As Francis declares, the paleoconservative "resentment of welfare, paternalism, and regulation is not based on a profound faith in the market but simply a sense of injustice that unfair welfare programs, taxes and regulation have bred."[72] As Francis argues, the paleoconservative political economy focuses on economic growth, which requires the dismantling of government bureaucracy, deregulation, and a decentralization and privatization of economic forces.[73] Paleoconservatives argue that 20th century economic regulations were welcomed by large corporations as a means to stifle competition and insure their dominance over the domestic market. They seek to re-establish a domestic free market without the burdensome rules, regulations, and taxes that hinder entrepreneurs and small businesses from competing with their larger corporate competitors. Likewise, the

[71]Buchanan, *Betrayal*, p. 289.
[72]Francis, "Message from MARs," p. 310.
[73]Francis, "Message from MARs," p. 315.

paleoconservatives suggest, decentralizing of corporate capitalism might even out the playing field so that small businesses can better compete for a share of the market. Paleoconservatives admit, however, that dismantling the entire welfare state might not be desirable. Elements that are beneficial to MAR interests such as "the economic privileges of the elderly and unionized labor (where it now exists)" and stronger regulation of Eastern banking and financial concerns would be maintained.[74]

After drastically reducing and restructuring the tax code and the liberal welfare and regulatory state in the interest of Middle America, the paleoconservatives would institute a political economy modeled on Hamilton's "Report on Manufactures." They would repudiate global free trade and withdraw from global and regional trade treaties and organizations. They would impose tariffs on goods imported from abroad and subsidize domestic producers. The subsidies, argues Francis, will be specifically targeted at industries in the South and West, regions with strong bases of Middle American support. By subsidizing enterprises such as aerospace, defense, energy, and agriculture, the paleoconservatives seek to transfer the center of America's economic vitality and prosperity from the East and the Frostbelt to Middle America and the Sunbelt.[75] These measures, argue paleoconservatives, will do much to persuade corporations from relocating to low wage markets abroad and thus keep middle class manufacturing jobs here in the United States.

The final key public policy measure endorsed by paleoconservatives and intended to restore the white middle class to economic and cultural primacy is a restrictive

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[74]Francis, "Message from MARs," p. 310. Kevin Phillips, one of the founders of the New Right, suggests regulation of Wall Street may not be such a bad idea. See "Why I am No Longer a Conservative," *The American Conservative* (October 7, 2002).
[75]Francis, "Message from MARs," p. 310.

immigration policy. The open immigration policies advocated by both the nation's elite have driven down wages and displaced the white Middle American labor force. These policies must be terminated. In *The Death of the West*, Buchanan argues that the 20th century immigrant "invasion" from Latin America, Asia, and Africa has "imperiled our country and civilization" by threatening our language, customs, republican traditions and our personal as well as national security. Buchanan, is especially concerned that the immigration and back and forth migration of Mexican migrant workers, which he says is akin to a Mexican "reconquista" of the U.S. Southwest.[76] Immigration must be restricted to 250,000 people per year. Immigration of extended families and amnesty for illegal aliens must be ended. All illegal aliens must be deported.[77] For paleoconservatives, the nation and its distinct American identity was built by whites from Europe who, despite their ethnic and cultural differences, came from relatively similar racial and religious traditions rooted in Christianity. They were quickly assimilated to America's culture, traditions, and political heritage. Newer immigrants, argue paleoconservatives, from non-European cultures could not assimilate. As their numbers grow America will change demographically and culturally to be less white and its cultural orientation, together with its political traditions, will degenerate. To turn back the rapid degeneration of the American identity already underway, paleoconservatives offer drastic alternatives to current public and economic policy.

IV. Conclusion

As this chapter has shown the paleoconservatives offer the most radical challenges to contemporary capitalism from the Right. It illustrates how far

[76]Buchanan, *Death of the West*, pp. 123-146.
[77]Buchanan, *The Death of the West*, p. 234.

conservatives have come in reconciling their various conservative concerns for tradition and culture, on the one hand, and capitalism on the other. Yet, it also shows the limits of conservatives' reconciliation and the tension that remains between them. Perhaps more than any other strand of contemporary conservative anti-capitalism the paleoconservatives seek the most drastic changes to the economic system. While they do not repudiate capitalism their rhetorical attacks on Wall Street and their more substantive calls for the U.S. to pull out of international economic institutions, discard its free trade agreements and enact a protectionist trade policy, seal America's borders from foreign labor and capital, and deport millions of people believed to be here illegally promise real counter-revolution. For paleoconservatives, global capitalism is bringing the American nation to the brink of extinction. There is no solution within the context of contemporary capitalism. The only solution to insure the survival of the American nation is to curtain the expansionary nature capitalism and harness it in the interest of the white, Christian nation-state. To do that and win the fight against "globalism," Buchanan suggests the Tea Party "may represent our last best hope."[78]

The paleoconservative alternative to global capitalism and the free market is a populist economic nationalism designed to restore the cultural supremacy of America's Western European inheritance. Paleoconservatives central indictment is that free trade capitalism is antagonistic to the nation. It is an assault on America's Christian-European cultural heritage, its national identity, and national sovereignty. Their nationalist critique of the disloyalty of the big corporation, together with their belief that the white middle

[78] Buchanan, "The Tea Party: America's Last Best Hope," *Free Republic* (December 24, 2009), http://www.freerepublic.com/focus/f-news/2415155/posts. For Buchanan's view that the Tea Party represents, what he calls white "ethno-nationalism" see, Buchanan, "The Tea Party Tribe," *American Conservative* (April 19, 2010), http://www.amconmag.com/blog/2010/04/19/the-tea-party-tribe/.

class is the repository of the authentic American identity, draws on populist resentment and racist, nativist, and nationalist thought with deep roots in American history.

While there is much overlap among paleoconservatives and the other strains of conservative thinking on issues of taxation, deregulation, privatization, erosion of the welfare state, military strength, and the importance of religion and patriotism in public life, economic nationalism has not been as integral to other conservatives, including the GOP, as it has been for paleoconservatives. For many paleoconservatives, contemporary conservatives have all variously reconciled themselves to the erosion of America's cultural foundations by free trade capitalism. Free trade and immigration are among the most important issues that highlight the gulf between the paleoconservatives and the GOP.[79] For decades now, paleoconservatives have unsuccessfully tried either to take over the Republican Party or to found a movement to displace it as the conservative electoral option. For the most part, paleoconservative have been relegated to the margins of mainstream conservatism. Yet, their fortunes may be changing as the Tea Party Movement, while still a very young movement, has exerted a fair amount of influence over Republican elected officials. Although not explicitly a paleoconservative movement, the Tea Party movement makes appeals to and is predominantly made up of the white middle class that Francis believed is the paleoconservative base. The Tea Party movement expresses many paleoconservative ideas, including the paranoia and racism that is exhibited by their sense that America is being "taken over" by outsiders and losing its white, Christian identity. Calls for President Obama to show his birth certificate or

[79] While many on the left also oppose free trade agreements such as NAFTA, the left opposition differs from the paleoconservatives' on a number points. The left does not oppose free trade on principle. The left opposition to free trade agreements is not rooted in racism, nativism, or a belief in American cultural supremacy but in the belief that free trade pacts, as currently negotiated are detrimental to workers (wherever they live and work) and their communities, the environment, and democracy.

the enthusiastic support for Arizona's 2010 draconian immigration law indicate that via the Tea Party paleoconservative concerns are no longer on the fringes of the conservative discourse or public policy. Cultural conservatives, in their various nationalist, agrarian, decentralist, and warrior manifestations have been critical of capitalism for more than a century, perhaps it is only now, in the form of the Tea Party, that conservative anti-capitalism has itself a mass movement.

# CONCLUSION

## Conservatism at the Crossroads

> The betrayal of the Confederate flag by the Republicans and by the capitalism which so hypnotizes the GOP says plainly that neither institution can be counted on to defend either Southern traditions or national and civilizational ones…the Republican infatuation with capitalism, and the disengagement of capitalism from every other social institution in pursuit of its own profits and in antagonism to any institution that presents an obstacle to profits, pitches the usefulness of these alliances into the garbage dump of history.
>
> Samuel Francis[1]

This work is a study of a strain of conservative thought that was once vibrant, bold, and thoughtful but has since been pushed to the fringes of the conservative discourse, its content having been reduced to a mere shadow of its former self. America has witnessed a conservative ascendancy and triumph over the last forty years. Barack Obama's 2008 election notwithstanding, the United States remains a conservative nation and the Democratic and Republican Parties today are more conservative (on welfare state and economic issues) than they were forty years ago. This is a study about the loss of a strand of thought within the conservative political discourse that has implications for the general American political discourse as well. The hollowness of the contemporary debate over capitalism and the welfare state not only between conservatives and liberals is a reflection of the decline of this strand of critical conservatism. Conservative and liberal thinkers and politicians may not be expected to challenge capitalist competition or the profit system. Indeed, they may be expected to defend the economic system. But as Theodore Roosevelt and Franklin D. Roosevelt had done, capitalism could be thoughtfully critiqued and imaginative alternatives found to the system of laissez-faire economics within the conservative and liberal political traditions. Still, as the late

[1]Samuel Francis, "Capitalism the Enemy," *Chronicles* (August 9, 2000).

historian Tony Judt has written both left and right seem to be "unable to conceive of alternatives" to laissez-faire capitalism.[2]

Following George Nash's study of postwar American conservatism, scholars have agreed that conservatism is a blend of economic libertarianism, traditionalism, and anti-communism. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, defining conservatives as anti-communists seems passé. Yet, the trope of a creeping socialism, especially since the election of Obama, is perhaps more prevalent among the right than at any point since the fall of the Iron Curtain. It is also widely believed that, with regard to capitalism, the outlook of American conservatives is decidedly libertarian. While there is certainly much truth to this claim given the right's penchant for deregulation, privatization, free markets, cutting public social service programs, anti-labor policies, and a belief in economic growth as the primary marker of the nation's economic health, it would be an error to assume that the libertarian voice has always defined conservative economic thinking. As this work has illustrated there has been and continues to be, although to a lesser extent than before, significant variety in conservative economic thinking such that some strains depart from economic liberalism. Such strains have at times been influential enough to be translated into conservative public policy. While the thinkers surveyed in this study are political theorists and not conservative economists, each of their political visions has had economic components that are at odds with economic libertarians. To be sure, only one of the thinkers in this work, George Fitzhugh, was willing to reject capitalism. For the other thinkers in this study, however, a defense of capitalism did not mean support for laissez-faire capitalism. Indeed, for all of them laissez-faire economics was an incompatible foundation for the conservative vision of a good society.

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[2] Tony Judt, "Ill Fares the Land," *New York Review of Books* (April 29, 2010).

The conservatives surveyed here believed that capitalism is profoundly anti-conservative and revolutionary; that it erodes valuable character attributes both of the individual and the nation; that it destroys the fabric of traditional social life causing communities to disintegrate. These conservatives all believe, in various ways, that capitalism undermines the family farm, the local community, the warrior spirit, or the national identity, without making up for this loss. They also believe that the state must play an active role in maintaining and strengthening the character, institutions, and traditions that are erode by capitalist egoism, materialism, and expansion.

Despite their critique of capitalism, American conservatives, especially after the abolition of slavery, did not reject capitalism. Despite laws and business practices that violated the principles of economic liberalism, elements of what Karen Orren called "belated feudalism," capitalism was the only economic alternative with deep roots in American political culture.[3] Over time conservative critics have reconciled conservative values with capitalism. Throughout this endeavor, conservatives have looked to the state as a counterbalance to the disintegrating effects of the market. Whether through an imperial project of the warrior aristocrats at the turn of the nineteenth century and the neoconservatives more recently or through the yeoman farmer ideal inspired land redistribution scheme of the Southern Agrarians, conservatives critics of capitalism have not been economically anti-statist.

The Cold War was a pivotal moment for this critical tradition. Prior to the Cold War, conservatives offered a much more thorough critique of capitalism that indicted the economic system for its exploitative production process, for producing miserable living

[3] Karen Orren, *Belated Feudalism: Labor, the Law, and Liberal Development in the United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

conditions for the laboring classes, and for turning the American republic into a plutocracy. Fitzhugh offered slavery as an alternative to capitalism, Theodore Roosevelt and Brooks Adams offered a regulatory and imperial state, and the Southern Agrarians offered a land use and redistribution scheme in accordance with a yeoman vision. In various ways, the visions of the pre-World War II conservatives, and Peter Viereck who defended the conservatism of the New Deal in the postwar era, challenged what they saw as an exploitative economic relationship between capital and labor and the political consequences that resulted. Prior to the Cold War, conservatives had been critics of both the state, as they continue to be, and of capitalism. In the postwar era, the fundamental conflict with communism reduced the debate over capitalism in the conservative discourse to one of capitalism versus Soviet totalitarianism. As a consequence, the state became the focus of conservative criticism. Capitalism, even among conservative critics of capitalism, was no longer the focal point of their social criticism as it had once been. Conservatives today have reconciled themselves to capitalism to a greater extent than they had prior to the Cold War.

Even though conservatives have reconciled themselves to capitalism as the only economic alternative there remains a core tension between a conservatism that esteems established traditions, values, and institutions and a capitalist economy that prioritizes profit and expansion. This tension within conservatism has led some conservatives to rethink the role of the state. Postwar conservative critics rejected the liberal welfare state along with the alternatives offered by previous conservatives, for instance Theodore Roosevelt's regulatory vision, the Southern Agrarians' land redistribution and decentralizing scheme, and Peter Viereck's conservative defense of the New Deal. While

conservatives agreed with many of von Mises, Hayek, Friedman, and other economic libertarians' arguments regarding capitalism and political liberty and shared their distrust of centralized social planning, conservative critics reject the economic libertarians' minimalist view of government. Instead, conservative critics of capitalism have attempted to find alternatives to both the liberal welfare state and laissez-faire capitalism. In the process, they have constructed and implemented a framework for a conservative welfare state that has eroded much of the regulatory regime of the liberal welfare state and introduced greater market mechanisms to various forms of public assistance without rejecting a substantial government role in social welfare.

As was suggested in the introduction, there is a debate in the conservative discourse regarding the nature of Bush's conservatism or whether his administration was conservative at all. Conservatives have lambasted many of the Bush administration's policies, including its foreign policy, expansion of executive power, and repudiation, not in words but in deeds, of a big, active government. As former House Majority Leader Dick Armey has written, Republicans suffered electoral losses in 2006 and 2008 because they were no longer the party of limited government. In Armey's view, mainstream GOP conservatives like Bush and John McCain have "suffered from philosophical confusion about free markets" of which in his view, compassionate conservatism, No Child Left Behind, and the Medicare drug benefit are but a few examples.[4] Yet, as Allan J. Lichtmann suggests, Bush was an "heir to a troubled tradition." He represented "the culmination of twentieth-century American conservative politics, buoyed by its strengths

[4] Dick Armey, "'Compassionate' Conservatism Was a Mistake," *Wall Street Journal* (November, 7 2008).

and burdened by its contradictions."[5] American conservatives have not been principled states' rights advocates, opponents of active government, foreign relations isolationists or imperialist. Nor have they been principled defenders of free market capitalism, as this study shows. While there may be no direct link between George W. Bush's compassionate conservatism and the critical tradition outlined in this work, compassionate conservatism did embody the tension between capitalism and conservatism that has been variously expressed in this tradition of thought. More so than Ronald Reagan, the darling of American conservatives, Bush embodied the tensions and contradictions that exist in American conservatism between economic libertarianism, social and cultural traditionalism, and the imperial vision of neoconservative anti-communism.

Compassionate conservatism is an alternative to both the liberal welfare state and the minimal night watchman state. For Newt Gingrich it was the "key to how to replace the welfare state."[6] According to Bush, compassionate conservatism offered a different approach to solving social problems than "either big Government or indifferent Government. Government cannot solve every problem, but it can encourage people and communities to help themselves and to help one another."[7] Compassionate conservatism shifts the burden of solving social problems away from the state to individuals and civil society.

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[5]Allan J. Lichtmann, *White Protestant Nation: The Rise of the American Conservative Movement* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), pp. 438-439.
[6] Quoted in Herb Kutchins, "Neither Alms Nor a Friend: The Tragedy of Compassionate Conservatism," *Social Justice* (Spring, 2001), pp. 14-34.
[7] George W. Bush, "Remarks on Compassionate Conservatism in San Jose, California" *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* (April 30, 2002), p. 717.

While the idea that social welfare ought to be the function of civil society rather than the state has a very long history in the conservative tradition, its influence among contemporary conservative political leaders such as Bush, Gingrich, John Ashcroft, and many others can be attributed to Marvin Olasky. Olasky served as a Bush advisor. Bush wrote the foreword and appendix to Olasky's *Compassionate Conservatism*. And the former president called Olasky "compassionate conservatism's leading thinker."[8] Olasky coined the term "compassionate conservatism" and has written numerous books and articles on the subject. Among the most important for conservatives is *The Tragedy of American Compassion*. *Tragedy* is a historical study of welfare in America in which the author makes the claim that the poor were better taken care of prior to the development of the welfare state in the 20th century when social welfare was largely the responsibility of families, churches, and voluntary associations. [9] Despite the questionable historical accuracy of Olasky's study, his depiction of private welfare provision from the colonial era to the 19th century serves as the model for conservatives' alternative to the liberal welfare state.

For conservatives, as Nigel Ashford has argued, the problems of poverty, unemployment, crime, and drug and alcohol abuse are largely cultural rather than economic. Therefore, compassionate conservatism seeks to strengthen the institutions and organizations of civil society. These institutions and organizations, conservatives believe, might transform society and cultural values. In the words of Bush, such organizations "inspire hope in a way that Government never can…and often, they inspire

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[8] A short biography of Marvin Olasky can be found on www.nndb.com.
[9] See Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Lanham, MD: Regnery Gateway, 1992); *Compassionate Conservatism: What It Is, What It Does, and How It Can Transform America* (New York: Free Press, 2000).

life-changing faith in a way that Government never should."[10] But the emphasis on culture and strengthening civil society does not imply that there is no role for the state in solving social problems. Indeed, even firm believers in compassionate conservatism such as Stephen Goldsmith, former mayor of Indianapolis and Bush advisor on faith-based issues, suggest that the market is not enough. While praising the virtues of the competitive economy in creating prosperity, Goldsmith concedes that the market has not benefited everyone. "The prosperity created by the marketplace has left many Americans behind."[11] There is a role for government in the compassionate conservative vision in assisting those in need through programs that strengthen traditional civil society institutions such as the family, the church, community groups, and charitable associations that might protect the victims of market competition. "Compassionate conservatives," Goldsmith argues, "acknowledge the role of government in helping those who need assistance; they do not believe that government itself needs to deliver those services. Small, local civic associations and religious organizations have the detailed knowledge and flexibility necessary to administer the proper combination of loving compassion and rigorous discipline appropriate for each citizen."[12] Compassionate conservatism, as its advocates conceptualize it, does not reject the idea of helping the poor. Instead it seeks to do it by outsourcing the administration of welfare from the federal government to civil society.

To be sure, compassionate conservatism has its critics, even among those considered solidly in the conservative camp. Least influential in the contemporary

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[10] Bush, p. 718.
[11] Stephen Goldsmith, "What Compassionate Conservatism Is—and Is Not," *Hoover Digest* (April 30, 2000).
[12] Goldsmith.

conservative discourse are traditionalist critics like Ethan Fishman. They argue that compassionate conservatism relies too much on a "dogmatic commitment to laissez-faire economics" and ignores the standards that natural law places on employers and merchants' conduct to treat workers well and "provide customers with a fair product at a fair price."[13] Fishman believes that compassionate conservatism places too much of an emphasis on the market to guide economic behavior and not enough on the universal moral standards that restrain egoistic self interest. Then there are individuals like Olasky, John DiIulio and David Kuo. In a 2007 article Olasky expressed his frustration with how compassionate conservatism had been "distorted," looked upon as a "political gambit" or "rhetorical device," and used for political expediency.[14] DiIulio and Kuo, both of who worked zealously in the Bush Administration to make the faith-based component of compassionate conservatism a pillar of federal social welfare policy but were also soon disappointed.[15] Despite Bush's rhetoric to "harness the armies of compassion," DiIulio and Kuo argue that Bush was more interested in prosecuting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and enacting tax cuts than in pressing Congress to come up with innovative ways to create and fund partnerships between the federal government and faith-based agencies. For others like Armey, the problem with compassionate conservatism was not that it lacked a sufficient commitment of political will. Instead, in Armey's view, compassionate conservatism was nothing more than big government that drives up

[13] Ethan Fishman, "Not Compassionate, Not Conservative: A Political Traditionalist Critiques our Pseudo-Conservative President," *American Scholar* (Winter, 2007), pp. 48-55.
[14] Marvin Olasky, "The Test of Time," *Texas Monthly* (March, 2007).
[15] See John DiIulio Jr., *Godly Republic: A Centrist Blueprint for America's Faith-Based Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); David Kuo, *Tempting Faith: An Inside Story of Political Seduction* (New York: Free Press, 2007).

deficits, raises taxes on entrepreneurs and hard working individuals, and repudiates the commitment to the idea of limited government that is central to individual liberty.

But there is more to contemporary conservatism, whether in its "compassionate" or its Tea Party manifestations than the contradictions and cross purposes of the strains of thought within this ideological construct. There is something profoundly un-conservative in the conservative tradition. As Corey Robin argues there is a strong current running through the conservative tradition from Burke and de Maistre to Palin and the Tea Party today that rejects moderation, prudence, gradual change, and the familiar and instead embraces its opposites.[16] There is a counterrevolutionary strain in conservative thinking that seeks to restore the inequalities and hierarchies of the "old regime" in the future. Indeed, many of the conservatives surveyed in this work, while using the language of restoration, pointed toward a new beginning. For instance, in the antebellum period Fitzhugh called for the expansion of slavery to include the white working class. In empire, Theodore Roosevelt sought to restore the vigor felt decades before in the conquest of the American west. The Southern Agrarians wanted to recreate the ways of the Old South but in a yeoman economic context. Through compassionate conservatism, Bush envisioned a conservative welfare state inspired by 19th century models of poor relief. And the paleoconservatives seek a society dominated by white ethnic groups that is combined with an economic nationalism inspired by an America before the New Deal and the civil rights revolutions. Each of these conservative visions entailed changes, not to the distribution of wealth, but to the role of the state in the status quo.

In 2010 there is a tug of war taking place among conservatives. While the battle rages for electoral supremacy within the Republican Party between the establishment

[16]Corey Robin, "Conservatives and Counterrevolution," *Raritan* (Summer, 2010).

GOP and the Tea Party insurgents, which may not last beyond one election cycle, the more profound and long-lasting battle is in the realm of ideas. In particular, the conservative vision of capitalism and the welfare state is at stake. One the one hand, there are libertarian-inclined conservatives who, despite eight years of tax-cutting and deregulation under President Bush, clamor for still more limited government in the economic domain. On the other hand, there is another cohort of conservatives who believe that small government is outdated and unlikely to be supported by the electorate. For the Republican Party to stay electorally competitive, argue David Frum, Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, David Brooks, among others, it must offer a new, positive agenda that does not reject an activist government.[17] From this point of view, Republicans need to embrace pragmatic governance that does not categorically reject regulation and the welfare state, but seeks to reform it to meet the needs of an economically and culturally insecure middle and working class.

American conservatives are debating laissez-faire capitalism in ways they have not for years. And while both the Frum and Douthat conservatives and the paleoconservatives embrace capitalism, remain critical of the welfare state, and challenge Obama's endeavors to expand it, few want to roll it back completely. Conservatives are not abandoning their affinity for the market nor are they embracing the liberal welfare state. Instead, they are trying to come up with ways to resolve the central tension inherent in modern conservatism—between dynamic capitalism and the content of values, institutions, traditions, and heritage to be conserved.

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[17] David Frum, *Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); Ross Douthat and Reihan Salam, *Grand New Party: How Republicans Can Win the Working Class and Save the American Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); David Brooks, "The Republican Collapse," *New York Times* (October 5, 2007), "Ceding the Center," *New York Times* (October 26, 2008).

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