

IS THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE CONSERVATIVE?

by George H. Nash

We gather today in a season of conservative discontent. Since the elections of 1986, a swift concatenation of events has overtaken the United States, paralyzing and threatening to derail the conservative ascendancy. The protracted Iran/Contra affair, the impending Reagan/Gorbachev "arms control" treaty, the incipient rebirth of detente, the dubious Central American peace initiative, the savage fury of the assault on Judge Robert Bork, the murky prospects for the coming Republican presidential nomination: all have sent a discernible chill through conservative ranks. No longer, it appears, does the political initiative belong to the American Right. Increasingly, it seems consigned to a spectator's role in the process of public policy formation.

The mounting malaise of which I speak goes deeper than the ebb and flow of political controversy. As the unifying and invigorating struggles of the early 1980s recede from consciousness, disturbing signs of sectarianism have begun to afflict the conservative movement. One thinks of last year's feisty "exchange of views" among prominent neo- and paleoconservatives at the Philadelphia Society's annual meeting. One thinks of the well-publicized differences among leading supply-side economists as well as various elements of the right-to-life movement. Even as the overall infrastructure grows, generating a neverending flow of conferences and policy studies, one wonders at times whether we are witnessing a laudable division of labor in the mold of Adam Smith or a subtle process of parallel fragmentation. Each ideological tendency in the movement now has its own network of scholars, foundations, "think tanks," and periodicals. But few conservative institutions, it seems, embrace and attempt to unite these sometimes fractious components of the Grand Alliance. No wonder that more than one commentator has openly suggested that conservatism's moment of glory has passed. No wonder that the editor of a journal familiar to us all is now at work on a book entitled *The Conservative Crack-Up*.

Achieving Results. The roots of this uneasiness go deeper still. During the first decades after World War II, the emerging intellectuals of the American Right were repeatedly obliged to establish their historical legitimacy--to demonstrate that the American heritage they presumed to defend was authentically conservative. During the 1970s and early 1980s, this preoccupation with the past gradually subsided. As conservatives came to influence public discourse, they found it less and less necessary to validate their claim to be indigenous. Whatever their roots or lineage, they were, undeniably, achieving results in the intellectual and political marketplace. Their very success was proof enough that they "belonged."

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Now, however, the wheel seems to be turning, as the battle over Bork makes clear. For what the judge's opponents are really asserting is that Bork and by implication the entire conservative intellectual movement are marginal, eccentric, and dangerous--not part of the "mainstream" at all. To the opponents of this nomination, the American political tradition evidently consists of only two legitimate forces: "progressive" liberalism, entrenched in the courts and elsewhere since 1933, and the "pragmatic," accommodating Center, willing to ratify liberalism's victories with the doctrine of *stare decisis*. Aware that he who controls the past controls the future, some American liberals now seem intent on constructing an image of the past that equates conservatism with racism and reaction. If they succeed, tomorrow will be theirs.

Core Values. For all these reasons, then, it seems appropriate today to reexamine the American experience and contemporary conservatism's relationship to it. More particularly, I wish to identify some of the core values of our past--values that American conservatism ought to stand for. Perhaps by stepping back from the current tumult and reflecting anew upon what America has meant, today's conservatives can regain both perspective and purpose.

From the days of the Puritans to the Age of Ronald Reagan, a sense of uniqueness and of destiny has infused the American character. On board the ship *Arbella* as it sailed for New England in 1630, John Winthrop admonished his Puritan brethren: "...we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us." A century and a half later, Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, a Frenchman who had settled in New York, pronounced in a classic little book a famous question: What then is the American, this new man?" And he prophesied: "Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labors and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world."

New Order. I wonder whether any of you have ever examined the design of our one dollar bill. On the back of it you will find a replication of the Great Seal of the United States. One side of the seal features a majestic bald eagle holding arrows and an olive branch in its talons. The reverse side of the seal, however, is less familiar--and, I think, more revealing. It shows a pyramid--an unfinished pyramid--with the date 1776 engraved in Roman numerals on its base. Below the pyramid is a motto: *Novus ordo seclorum*--"A New Order of the Ages."

Adopted by the Continental Congress in 1782, the Great Seal of the United States symbolized America's self-image as it embarked upon nationhood. America, the seal suggested, was not simply another nation-state; it represented something novel in history. Moreover, it portended the future--"a new order of the ages," a break with the past. The Old World, with its kings, oligarchies, and regimes of oppression, was to be left behind forever. Now, in a vast and nearly empty land, there would be constructed a republic--"conceived in liberty," as Lincoln later put, and dedicated to--to what? To a proposition, a creed, a set of truths held to be self-evident. America was to be a polity created by conscious design, an unprecedented experiment in self-government on a continental scale.

From its inception in 1776, the American republic has been identified with the hopes and future of mankind. The United States, to borrow a phrase from

Seymour Martin Lipset, was "the first new nation," and Americans and Europeans alike have probed the implications of this event. Said Alexis de Tocqueville in *Democracy in America* in the 1830s, "I confess that in America I saw more than America; I sought the image of democracy itself...." For Tocqueville, as for so many observers, America exemplified the contours of the future.

In other ways than the political, America has long been perceived as an untraditional society. To millions upon millions of immigrants through decade after decade of our history, America has been a land of opportunity, a refuge from the constricted, decadent, stratified, class-bound, traditional societies of Europe. Is it surprising that during our Civil War the British aristocracy was sympathetic to the "feudal" South, while the British working class favored the more "modern" North? And America has beckoned precisely because it appeared to be different from the Old World.

Values of Modernity. What has it promised? It has promised freedom: free land, upward mobility, equality of opportunity, a chance to start over. It has been a land of stupendous social energy, a land wherein has flourished, as in no other society before or since, the social type known as the self-made man. Benjamin Franklin is said to have remarked that America is country where we ask of a person not "Who is he?" but "What can he do?" Think about that; it is a profound observation. In our commitment to a society based on individual merit and equality of opportunity, we Americans have adopted two of the core values of modernity.

Still another way in which America has exhibited its modernity is in its dedication as a society to progress--or, to use a better word, to "improvement." Implanted deep in the American psyche is a conviction that social conditions around us do not have to be that way--that if evils exist we can eradicate them, that if, for example, corrupt politicians hold office we can throw the rascals out, that we are the masters of our fate and the captains of our souls. Passivity and fatalism are not a part of our national character. If we encounter obstacles that seem insuperable, well, our creed tells us, we can move on. This is one reason, I suspect, why California and more recently Alaska have held so much allure for the American imagination: they are states where, all else failing, we can go and start over. We are a restless people; half of us (think of it--half of us) change residences every five years. Has there ever been a society so mobile, as kinetic, as our own?

Constant Reforming. This relentless American impulse for "improvement"--of society and of oneself--has taken the most various forms. Think of the extraordinary edifice of higher education that Americans in two centuries have established: from small liberal colleges to behemoth universities. Think of the assumptions about human nature behind this commitment, and think also about its expansiveness: Americans increasingly seek education not just for a privileged elite but for ever broader segments of the population. A far higher percentage of Americans attend college, for example, than in any other country in the world. And consider this: has there ever been a society as incessantly productive of reform movements as our own? I refer not only to such preeminent crusades as those for emancipation of the slaves, universal suffrage, and regulation of the "trusts," but also of such causes as temperance, prison reform, aid to the Indians, the creation of

orphanages, abolition of child labor, even the health food movement. "What is man born for but to be a Reformer...?" wrote that enormously popular American philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson. We are, I repeat, a restless people, and many of us believe that even our inner selves can be re-formed. It is a remarkable, and remarkably modern, notion.

Let me offer another example. As a nation Americans have long been enamored of entrepreneurship, invention, and technology. From Eli Whitney to Thomas Edison, from Henry Ford to Charles Lindbergh, from the Wright brothers to the astronauts, from the automobile to the home computer and VCR: no other society, to my knowledge, has honored science--above all, applied science--as lavishly as has ours. I do not know how many inventions have been patented in the United States in the past two hundred years, but I would not be surprised if the total exceeded that of all other industrial nations combined.

The American Dream. This interest in technology, in gadgetry, in shaping and reshaping our environment reflects another aspect of the American temperament. We Americans like to think of ourselves as an optimistic, problem-solving people. During the election campaign of 1980, Ronald Reagan repeatedly denounced the drab, defeatist notion that America's challenges were insuperable, that our expectations must be lowered forever, that the "era of limits" had arrived. It was a theme that was persuasive with millions. In his inaugural address, Reagan declared:

The crisis we are facing today [requires] our willingness to believe in ourselves and to believe in our capacity to perform great deeds; to believe that together with God's help we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us.

And after all, why shouldn't we believe that? We are Americans.

Surely it is a significant datum that in our discourse we speak of something called the American Dream. No one ever talks about the British Dream, the Russian Dream, or the Japanese Dream. But the American Dream--that is something else. Instinctively, we comprehend what it means: it means opportunity--opportunity to achieve, to ascend the ladder, to transcend our origins, however humble. We sense that this is distinctively an American dream, that it is inextricably interwoven with our self-definition as a people. We sense further that ours is a land where dreams, often enough, find fulfillment, and that our society is unusual because of it.

This belief in American uniqueness and destiny, then--of America as a trailblazing society--has been deeply embedded in our historical consciousness. It is not the sole property of the Left. Consider this quotation:

It was not because it was proposed to establish a nation, but because it was proposed to establish a nation *on new principles*, that July 4, 1776 has come to be regarded as one of the greatest days in history [emphasis added].

Who said this? Tom Paine? William O. Douglas? No; it was Calvin Coolidge in 1926. Now consider these words:

By a classless America our forefathers meant far more than a sociological expression. There were to be no stratifications in life that handicapped the rise of any boy from the bottom to the top. The human particles should move freely in the social solution....This idea of a fluid classless society was unique in the world. It was the point at which our society structure departed from all others

Who wrote this paeon to a classless America? Hubert Humphrey? Eugene Debs? Jane Fonda? No: it was Herbert Hoover in 1940.

Or consider the following poem, written many years ago and delivered significantly enough, at the Republican national convention in 1980:

'Tis great to see the old world and
wander up and down
Among historic palaces and
the cities of renown
And admire crumbly castles,
and the statues of the kings,
But now I think I've had enough
of antiquated things,
So now it's home again and home again--
America for me.

My heart is turning home again and
there I long to be,
In the land of *youth* and *freedom*
beyond the ocean bars
Where the air is full of sunlight and
that flag is full of stars.

.....

I know that Europe's wonderful,
yet something seems to lack,
The *past* is too much with her,
the people looking *back*.
But the glory of the present
is to *set the future free*.
We love our land for what she is and
what she is to be.
So it's home again and home again--
America for me. [emphasis added]

America is different: it represents youth, freedom, energy, a better future: this is a vision that has been central to our national identity.

A few years ago, I participated in a conference of German and American conservatives held in Bad Godesberg, West Germany. The subject was the "Reagan Revolution" and its implications for the Atlantic alliance. I was fascinated, during

those four days, by the differences in outlook and temperament between the American delegation and its European hosts. The Americans tended to be ebullient and practical, filled with specific suggestions for getting things done. Do we want to advance the cause of conservatism? Then, the Americans would say, let us organize: set up conferences, establish "think tanks," found journals and newspapers, work at the grassroots. The Germans, in contrast, seemed much less "activist," more constrained by a sense of limitation, and elitist rather than populist in their approach to institutions and the mechanisms of social change.

History a Burden. Above all, I was struck by the differences in attitudes toward history among the conferees. For most Americans at the meeting, history seemed to begin with the Carter Administration, and when answering questions, Americans focused quickly on the present. When the Germans answered questions, their remarks might begin with learned references to the revolution of 1848 and work down gradually (sometimes very gradually) toward the present. For the Americans, the past was prologue; for the Germans, it was a weight. As one German intellectual said to me during the conference, "Our [German] history is a burden and a curse." I returned home with a deeper appreciation of the distinctiveness of the American experience.

Perhaps by now you discern the point I am making. If, as the social scientists tell us, the process of modernization entails social mobility, economic freedom, and the breakdown of class barriers; if it means equality of opportunity, increased popular participation in politics, and equal justice under the law; if it means a social order that is not static and hierarchial but dynamic and future-oriented; if it means technological innovation and a spirit of improvement; then America for two hundred years--at least in its own self-understanding--has been a modernizing, not a traditional society.

Modernizers vs. Traditionalists. There have been dissenters from these trends, to be sure, and sometimes the dissenters have been eloquent. In his bicentennial history of Illinois, Professor Richard Jensen has even reinterpreted American history as in substantial measure a conflict between "modernizers" and "traditionalists." Mark Twain, for instance, scorned the American penchant for uplift. "To do good is noble," Twain observed. "To instruct others in doing good is just as noble and much easier." Among twentieth century American critics of the modernizing ethos, one thinks above all of Albert Jay Nock, H. L. Mencken, and the Southern Agrarians who published *I'll Take My Stand* in 1930: "superfluous men," Robert Crunden has called them, brilliant men, but men whose dissent only underscored the prevailing orthodoxy of their time. Most Americans--at least most Americans who got things done in the society--saw themselves as creators of a modern, progressive civilization. The quintessential American, a British visitor shrewdly remarked in 1898, is "a highly electric Anglo-Saxon." Until well into the twentieth century, America was predominantly, in more than one sense of the term, a Yankee nation.

Now I am generalizing broadly, of course. And you will note that I am dealing with perceptions and ideals. But the "most potent force in society," Herbert Hoover once reminded us, "is its ideals." From the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth, the dominant American idea has been (to use a current term)

"democratic capitalism." And in the long perspective of Western history, democratic capitalism has been a virtual synonym for modernization.

Yet if America in many respects is a modern society (as I have used the term thus far), we must now examine an unsettling fact: that for more than half a century the identification of America with the future of mankind has been declining. No longer, it seems, is America perceived as the harbinger of the new order of the ages. Instead today, over much of the earth, the inspiring ideals of the American experiment--the ideals of political equality and participation, of entrepreneurial freedom and economic growth, of social fluidity and equality of opportunity--are scorned, despised, and mocked.

Why has the American system lost its idealistic appeal as a model for other new nations? Some, I suppose, would claim that this was inevitable: That America, the nation of youth, has finally become middle-aged. Some would argue that America's sense of uniqueness was always a function of geographical isolation and that as America's isolation has disappeared, it has lost its immunity from the Old World and its ills. No longer, they would say, is America exempt from the disillusionments of history. Still other observers would point to our racial problems, political corruption, unemployment, or environmental pollution and claim that the United States is no longer a success story, hence not a model for anybody.

"Political Pilgrims." These explanations have some plausibility, but they are not sufficient. For what has occurred in the past fifty or sixty years is not simply the discovery of an alleged gap between American ideals and American reality but a growing and massive rebellion against the ideals themselves. To an influential number of American and European intellectuals in this century, other societies have supplanted America as the repositories of progress and modernity. Just after World War I, the eminent muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens declared, "I have been over into the future--and it works." He was not referring to his own United States but to Russia. For him and so many others, Communist Russia had come to portend the beneficent next phase in the evolution of mankind.

Lincoln Steffens was but an early example of one of the most extraordinary phenomena of the twentieth century: the rise of what Paul Hollander has called "political pilgrims"--deeply alienated Western intellectuals, many of them quite famous, who have repudiated their own societies, traveled to horribly repressive totalitarian regimes, and found therein the dawns of utopia. Over the years, the particular earthly avatar of the new age has varied. In the 1920s and 1930s, it was Soviet Russia; later it was Cuba and Maoist China, Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh and Chile under Salvador Allende. But always it was somewhere else--never America. And always it was a totalitarian regime.

New Modernity. This profound inner defection of many of the West's most distinguished intellectuals from the American ethos of democratic capitalism is one of the most stunning and disturbing features of our time. It is a phenomenon, of course, that has many roots--far more than I can analyze here. But clearly it is linked to the rise, within the last century or so, of a new conception of modernity. Unlike the modernizing principles to which I have referred earlier, this "new modernity" (as I shall call it) has not been primarily political or economic in its

orientation. It has been, at bottom, literary, aesthetic, and, in a way, spiritual. The pioneers of this new consciousness are familiar enough to us all: names like Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Sartre; Ibsen, Gide, and Baudelaire; Pound, Picasso, and the early Albert Camus. Again, I must generalize and simplify, but few, I think, will deny that at the heart of this "new modernity" was a sense of relativism, negation, and despair. Where the "old modernity" asserted that certain truths were self-evident, the "new modernity" denied that universal truths exist. Where the "old modernity" was bourgeois, the "new modernity" was bohemian, contemptuous of bourgeois culture. Where the "old modernity" tended to be optimistic (after all, would not tomorrow be better than today?), the "new modernity" was not. Where the "old modernity" tended to be rationalistic, the "new modernity" explored the irrational and the absurd. Where the "old modernity" offered liberation from external constraints--from the barriers of class, race, national origin, and arbitrary government--the "new modernity" preached liberation from inner constraints--from traditional morality, from artistic convention, from rationality itself. Where the "old modernity" concentrated on getting ahead in the world and was relatively indifferent to questions of ultimate meaning, the "new modernity" was haunted by the conviction that life has no ultimate meaning, that God (as Nietzsche put it) is dead.

There is little doubt that this "new modernity"--or modernism, as some have labeled it--has penetrated very deeply into our civilization. How is it that this counterculture has become so pervasive? Writing more than fifteen years ago, Jeffrey Hart offered one answer. America in the past generation, he wrote, has witnessed a "cultural explosion":

paperbacks, Eliot reading his poems to fifty thousand students in a Midwestern football stadium, LP records, Mailer and Genet and de Sade appearing in mass circulation journals, the op-art and pop-art and porno phenomena.

All of these things, along with affluence, the GI Bill and the assumption, implicit in democratic theory and increasingly the premise of government action, that absolutely everyone must go to college, has now given rise to a vast student proletariat. Twenty-five years ago, about 10 percent of the college-age population attended college; today the percentage approaches 50 and it will continue to climb. Much of this proletariat absorbs the attitudes of the adversary culture....

Existential Ideas. Looking back on my own education, I can attest to the acuity of Professor Hart's remark. Attending college in the 1960s, I was exposed to books like Paul Goodman's *Growing Up Absurd* and Norman O. Brown's *Life Against Death*, to plays like *Waiting for Godot* and the *Marat/Sade*. Teaching at Harvard in the early 1970s, I had a student tell me one day that all values are without rational foundation, that one can only choose arbitrarily among them. This was pure existentialism, of course, but where had he acquired such ideas?

And as the "new modernity" has percolated down through our culture, the values of the "old modernity" have come increasingly to seem old-fashioned. Listen to the voices that dominate our public discourse (and I do not mean Mr. Reagan's). Listen carefully the next time someone uses the term "Protestant ethic" or "middle-class values" or "equality of opportunity" and see whether you do not detect a note

of irony or condescension. Surely it is significant that the political embodiment of these values in the United States at present is the Republican party, the conservative party. It is in the Republican party and among people called conservatives and neoconservatives that one still hears the rhetoric of upward mobility and achievement, of liberty and free market capitalism as the hope of all nations. The ideals of modernity--of the old modernity, that is--have become the property of the conservatives.

Something to Believe In. Now does this clash of "modernities" really matter? Does it matter that the ideology of modernism has become a vital orthodoxy among the secular intelligentsia? Does it matter that, as Midge Decter observed in a brilliant speech a few years ago, there is spreading through our society a conviction that "nothing is worth dying for"? Yes, it does matter, for two reasons. First, few men and women can live in a spiritual vacuum for long. If their society seems meaningless, they will in rage and frustration find or create meaning somewhere, even in violence, decadence, and revolution. Second, no society can survive without some sense of its own goodness. If many Americans no longer believe in our system, there are others in the world who believe in theirs--and are willing to enforce their beliefs at gunpoint.

Now is there a historical relationship between the "two modernities?" I have presented them as antagonists, but could there be some dialectical process by which the one inexorably gave birth to the other? Is there, in other words, an inevitable declension from democratic capitalism to socialist nihilism? There is a verse by Goldsmith that my New England ancestors used to recite:

Ill fares the land
To hastening ills a prey
Where wealth accumulates
And men decay.

More recently, Joseph Schumpeter, Daniel Bell, and others have suggested that capitalism creates the intellectual class that will ultimately destroy it--indeed, that capitalism generates its own fatal "cultural contradictions": that capitalism, with its ceaseless incitements to instant gratification of every taste, no matter how debased, eventually destroys the cultural matrix of decency, sobriety, and self-restraint upon which it--and republican self-government--depend.

Is this thesis true? Is the "new modernity" the necessary offspring of the old? In short, is the American way of life inherently and irremediably flawed?

Religious Roots. I do not believe that it is. But if I am correct, it is because of a fundamental constitutive element of the American ethos that I have not yet mentioned. Consider again the Great Seal of the United States. It contains, as I have said, the motto *Novus ordo seclorum* and the image of an unfinished pyramid. But hovering above the pyramid is a symbolic unblinking eye: the eye of God. And placed above that is another Latin motto, *Annuit Coeptis*, meaning "He has favored [our] undertaking." Americans, I said earlier, are a restless people, but as Tocqueville long ago recognized, we have not been restless in everything, particularly in the realm of our formative philosophic and moral beliefs.

And a powerful reason for this remarkable constancy amidst so much flux is that America, from the beginning, has evolved within a context of Christian religious belief.

I am not saying that the Founding Fathers sought to establish a Christian Commonwealth or that America's public institutions have been explicitly religious in character. I am saying that the impulses described earlier in this essay--the impulses that I have called the "old modernity"--have operated, at least until recently, within a predominantly and persistently religious culture. If the "new modernity" has not yet triumphed among us, it is because American culture has been molded and guided by the non-modern and profoundly civilizing force of our Judeo-Christian religious heritage. In short, if the American polity and economy are in some sense modern, American culture--at the level of ultimate beliefs about God and man--has been and perhaps remains primarily conservative.

The United States of America, then, is a modern nation. But it is not only a modern nation, and in this fact may lie the fate of the American experiment. Liberty, said Alexis de Tocqueville, "cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith." If America is to survive, its indisputably modern elements, it seems to me, must be conjoined with what Russell Kirk has called the "permanent things," spiritual things, and the institutions that sustain them. Without this fusion, the American experiment may fail--not because it is a regime of liberty but because liberty alone cannot instruct our own and our country's future, and for that guidance we must turn outside the marketplace and the polling booth. If the old modernity is not to succumb to the relativism and anti-religious nihilism of the new, it will have to draw on transcendent, pre-modern sources--on religious faith--to infuse our lives with meaning.

Edmund Burke said it well:

Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there must be without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things, that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters.

It is the duty of conservatives--even while accepting and celebrating the ideals of the "old" modernity--to forge the internal checks and balances that will channel those ideals toward the "permanent things" and thus give spiritual substance to the "opportunity society."

How, then, shall we conclude? Is the American experience conservative? The answer, I think, is simple: the American experience is what it is. So let me rephrase the question. Is the American experience worth conserving? My answer--and I trust yours--is: yes.

Blessings of Liberty. It is not, perhaps, commonplace for you to hear a conservative scholar celebrate the ideals of the "old modernity" and invoke it as a paradigm of value against its detractors. Still, if any of you are tempted to say that democratic capitalism is not worth purifying and preserving, or to conclude that the American experiment is too "modern" for your taste, I would ask you to indulge in

a little act of imagination. Imaged that when you leave this room you will be arrested and perhaps tortured for unlawful assembly; in large portions of the world at this very moment, this would be your fate. Imagine that you could not obtain employment because of a government whim; it has happened to Lech Walesa. Imagine that if you could not find a job, you would be expelled from the city where you are now living; this is the case in the Soviet Union every day. Imagine that if you tried to practice your religious faith, you were prohibited from going to college or pursuing any but the most menial career. It is happening in the USSR today.

The American heritage of which we are the heirs has bequeathed to us the "blessings of liberty." Freedom--to worship, to travel, to select and change careers. Freedom--to write, to publish, to attend meetings like this. Let us not lightly disparage these blessings. Free societies are a rarity in human history, and as the Vietnamese and Cuban boat people can tell you, they have their merits still.

American conservatives, then, unless they wish to live lives of reclusive despondency, must defend and civilize, not repudiate, the free society they have inherited. It will not, I believe, be easy; at times it will entail, in Whittaker Chambers's unforgettable metaphor, "a dance along a precipice." But in the world of spreading nihilism and tyranny, American conservatives must cherish their roots and perceive their true enemies with clarity. Against the disparagements and competing mythologies of the Left, they must affirm the vitality and validity of the American Dream.

