

It is a devastating indictment, and one not easily dismissed, given the thoroughness, scrupulousness, and even-handedness of Vaisse's analysis. Francis Fukuyama, himself a recovering neoconservative, provides a fitting encomium on the back of the book: "Sometimes we need a non-American to see American politics in a proper perspective." And one from "old Europe" at that.

—Paul Franco

### THE FRACTIOUS COALITION

George H. Nash: *Reappraising the Right: The Past and Future of American Conservatism*. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2009. Pp. xix, 446. \$27.95.)

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Conservatives and historians of conservatism should be grateful to George Nash whenever he shares his bountiful wisdom and knowledge with us, for he has studied and cogitated about the history of the American Right, and has had more useful things to say about it than perhaps anyone else. Nothing in this lengthy volume of reviews, speeches, essays, and short articles on the history of American conservatism, despite its at times slightly uneven quality, should change that view. Mr. Nash still has much to teach us.

If there are themes running through this book, they are, first, that even after the 2008 electoral victory of Barack Obama, conservatism in America is not dead. As Nash argues, throughout its history, the Right's opponents have written its obituary many times. They were always wrong before, and they are now. The rise of the so-called Tea Party movement and the rapid growth of conservative opposition to the Obama administration demonstrate this.

Nash's second theme is that the history of conservatism is important for reminding the Right of their heritage, which informs all Americans about the present. Nash does this well. He demonstrates, for example, how Whittaker Chambers's life, especially his deep religious faith and his fears that America was losing its belief in God, echoes the divide many conservatives see between the religious and the secular in American society today, manifested in the angry debates we still see concerning school prayer or abortion.

Nash explains the important role played by conservative intellectuals such as Richard Weaver or Russell Kirk, both in past years and still today. He notes how the different factions of conservatives, be they traditionalists, neoconservatives, or paleoconservatives, wield their ideas as weapons in their

occasional debates. He posits that the growth of new groups on the right, such as Rod Dreher and his brand of “crunchy cons,” with its focus on a rejection of materialism and consumerism, have roots in the writings of Kirk and Weaver. Again, the past informs the present.

Nash rightly devotes an entire section of his book to the history of the *National Review* magazine and its founder, William F. Buckley Jr. Buckley and *NR*, Nash contends, sought for many years to teach the Right an important lesson: that it must not only seek the ideal but also work within the bounds of reality. Only Buckley, through his wit, charm, personality, and leadership skills, could have held the conservative coalition together. But hold it together he did. Among other things, this allowed *NR* to welcome an increasing number of Jewish anticommunists into the conservative movement, Nash contends as he examines the rise of Norman Podhoretz, *Commentary*, and the neoconservative movement. Many historians have seen Jewish intellectuals and their circle of influence in New York as primarily the home of liberalism. Nash disagrees, and demonstrates that there were Jewish anticommunists even before the rise of neoconservatism and that, once Podhoretz, Irving Kristol, and the rest of the neocons arose in the late 1960s, Buckley and *NR* encouraged them to remain on the right through *NR*'s pragmatic, realistic editorial position. At the same time, neoconservatives in return moved rightward, advocating more free-market solutions and becoming more conservative on cultural issues.

George Nash has done extensive work on Herbert Hoover, and he contends there are lessons in Hoover's life for conservatives, too. Hoover has been an odd case. On the one hand, liberals have ostracized him from their ranks, despite his progressivism, due to the Great Depression and Hoover's unrelenting criticisms of Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal. At the same time, conservatives have often disowned him owing to that same progressivism. Nash argues, however, that conservatives should reappraise Mr. Hoover; they forget that in the 1940s and 1950s he contributed time, money, and encouragement to the nascent conservative movement (including to a young Buckley), that he indeed supplied trenchant critiques of the New Deal, and that even his progressive actions in government reflected a belief that government spending should remain limited. (One wonders, however, if Nash's lengthy article on the relationship between Hoover and Calvin Coolidge really adds anything important to reappraising conservatism as a whole.)

When all is said and done, whither conservatism? Nash argues that certainly conservatism's job is far from done, even in the wake of all the triumphs of the Reagan era. The federal government continues to grow apace. Beyond that, Nash contends that the members of the conservative movement and its watchers must remember that the Right remains a coalition, and a sometimes argumentative one. It contains libertarians, traditionalists (sometimes called paleoconservatives), neoconservatives, anticommunists, and members of the Religious Right. Each faction has different emphases. Each differs with

other factions on different points. Ronald Reagan's genius was that he was able to unite, more or less, all of these different groups. But with his passing and the end of the Cold War, keeping this coalition together will not be easy, as the obvious differences between conservatives recently concerning the war in Iraq or over government spending demonstrate. Yet as Nash argues, and I would agree, those who now believe that conservatism is sure to "crack up" and become either a permanent minority or disappear altogether perhaps speak too soon. Conservatism's demise has been predicted often over the past fifty to sixty years. Yet that demise hasn't come. Conservatism remains a "fractious coalition" (334). But don't bet against its survival.

—Kevin Smant

### ENTER THE GHOST

Richard M. Reinsch II: *Whittaker Chambers: The Spirit of a Counterrevolutionary*. (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2010. Pp. xi, 190. \$24.95.)

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Thou art a scholar. Speak to it, Horatio.

—*Hamlet*, 1.1

Jacques Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994) aims in part to identify traces of Marxist "spirit" that have survived the death of Communism. Whittaker Chambers could have helped him with the task. The argument of Reinsch's book hinges on the soundness, after all, of Chambers's early claim that in rejecting Communism he had chosen the "losing side." For Chambers and Reinsch the modern democratic state, product of the Enlightenment, has moved on a fatal continuum of "isms": rationalism, humanism, secularism, materialism, liberalism, socialism, Communism, so that we all at last live in the House-That-Marx-Built. To the author and his subject a mere retreat before the final stage was no victory. Reinsch calls for an "infusion" of Chambers's "spirit" into what he sees as the moribund body of conservative thought. To this end he draws upon the whole of Chambers's work from *Witness* (1952) to *Cold Friday* (1964), its unfinished, posthumously published sequel, with letters and diary entries. The corpus includes collected journalism, *Ghosts on the Roof* (1989); letters to William F. Buckley Jr., *Odyssey of a Friend* (1987); and correspondence with Ralph de Toledano, *Notes from the Underground* (1997).