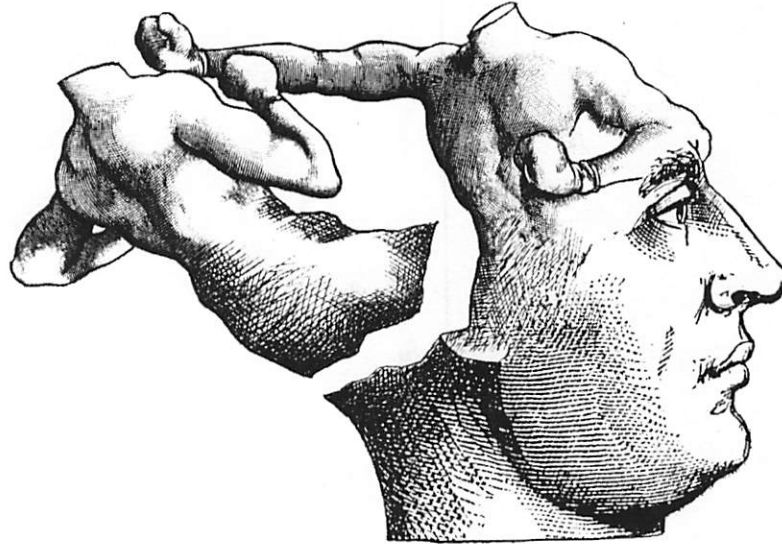


Winning the Culture War

The American Cause

by Samuel Francis



Igor Kopechinsky

The first thing we have to learn about fighting and winning a cultural war is that we are not fighting to “conserve” something; we are fighting to overthrow something. Obviously, we *do* want to conserve something—our culture, our way of life, the set of institutions and beliefs that distinguish us as Americans. But we must understand clearly and firmly that the dominant authorities in the United States—in the federal government and often in state and local government as well, in the two major political parties, the major foundations, the media, the schools, the universities, big business, and most of the system of organized culture, including the arts and entertainment—not only do nothing to conserve what most of us regard as our traditional way of life but actually seek its destruction or are indifferent to its survival. If our culture is going to be conserved, then, we need to dethrone the dominant authorities that threaten it.

Granted, we still have a democratic political system in which opposition and dissent remain in principle legal, but we all know the difficulty encountered by those who try to use their political and civil liberties to challenge the dominant authorities. Genuine dissent from the egalitarian, feminist, homophobic, multiculturalist, and socialist agendas is seldom permitted in establishment media and is often punished, intimidated, or terrorized.

Nevertheless, there remain sufficient loopholes in the apparatus of power to permit the organization of effective resistance by democratic and legal means, if we have the will and

the wit to use them. When I call for the overthrow of the dominant authorities that threaten our culture, then, I am not advocating illegal or undemocratic processes, but the war for the culture is nonetheless a radical or even a revolutionary conflict because it involves an almost total redistribution of power in American society—the displacement of the incumbent governing and cultural elites, the dismantlement of their apparatus of domination, the delegitimation of their political formulas and ideologies, and the radical decentralization of power and shift in control of cultural norms from the hands of the present elite to those of the Americans who remain loyal to their traditional cultural and national identity.

Understanding that the main strategic goal of cultural traditionalists is the overthrow of the dominant authorities in the United States leads us into a somewhat anomalous position. Ever since its formal appearance in the late 18th century, conservatism has generally been associated with the defense of existing authorities, and its ideas as well as its rhetoric and its basic psychology have historically been designed to conserve, not to challenge or overthrow. Hence, while we will find much in the conservative tradition to teach us about the nature of what we want to conserve and why we should want to conserve it, we will find little in conservative theory to instruct us in the strategy and tactics of challenging dominant authorities. Instead, we need to look to the left to understand how a politically subordinated and culturally dispossessed majority of Americans can recover its rightful position as the dominant and creative core of American society.

By far the most relevant figure on the left in the 20th century for this purpose is the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, whose idea of “cultural hegemony” has facilitated the cultural revolution that the enemies of American civilization have

Samuel Francis is a nationally syndicated columnist for the Washington Times. Mr. Francis delivered this paper at the May conference on “Winning the Culture War,” organized by Pat Buchanan’s American Cause Foundation.

pulled off in the last half century. I do not claim that Gramsci's ideas were consciously followed by those who seized cultural power in the United States—indeed, the beginnings of the cultural revolution of the left long predated Gramsci's influence—but it is true that the process by which that revolution occurred resembled the strategic and tactical ideas that Gramsci later articulated. Besides, most successful revolutionaries possess an instinctive understanding of these ideas and know how to apply them. If the cultural right in the United States is to take back its culture from those who have usurped it, it will find a study of Gramsci's ideas rewarding.

What distinguishes Gramsci's Marxism from that of most of his predecessors and contemporaries is that while most of them, following Lenin, emphasized the need to capture and control the state, Gramsci argued that this was not the appropriate tactic in Western Europe or the United States. In those societies, the capitalist class had succeeded in manufacturing what he called "ideological hegemony" by control of the cultural institutions of society—religion, education, the arts, the very processes of thought, taste, and emotion. While as a Marxist Gramsci believed this kind of hegemony was no less repressive than the economic and political repression Marx and Lenin had discussed, he also understood that the "masses" or working classes had essentially internalized the ideological formulas, myths, values, and norms that this ideological hegemony imposed, so that actual reliance on force by the ruling class was largely unnecessary.

The main implication of the cultural or ideological hegemony of the capitalists in Europe and America, in Gramsci's view, was that the strategy of revolution there had to be different from what it had been in Russia. While in Russia capturing the highly centralized czarist state was the key to a successful revolution, in the West the ruling class only partially depended on the state. "In the East," Gramsci wrote, "the state was everything, civil society was primordial and gelatinous; in the West, there was a proper relation between state and civil society, and when the state trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed. The state [in the West] was only an outer ditch, behind which there stood a powerful system of fortresses and earthworks."

In other words, overthrowing the state or capturing it would do the revolutionary little good, since the real power of the old ruling class rested on its cultural hegemony, and if the revolution were to succeed, it would have to challenge the cultural hegemony of the ruling class even more than it challenged its political hegemony. "A social group," he wrote, "can, and indeed must, already exercise [moral and intellectual] leadership' [i.e., cultural hegemony] even before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principal conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in its grasp, it must continue to 'lead' as well." It does no good for revolutionaries to control the coercive apparatus of the state if the masses they intend to rule still retain the internalized beliefs instilled in them by the ruling class, since the result would be the kind of total state repression that emerged in Russia under Lenin and Stalin. What the revolutionary must do, then, is to seize cultural power before seizing political power.

How this seizure of cultural power can be accomplished was the subject of a good deal of Gramsci's own political work as a communist organizer before his imprisonment and of

much of his writing while in prison. Essentially, he argued that instead of relying on the bureaucratized and elitist party structure that Lenin had built, revolutionaries must build what he called a "counter-hegemonic force," independent of the social and cultural institutions under the control of the ruling class. This parallel force would challenge the authority of the ruling class, its values and norms, while constructing its own authority in accordance with socialism.

What is important to understand about Gramsci's strategy of cultural hegemony, however, is, first, that it recognizes that political power is ultimately dependent on cultural power—that human beings obey because they share, perhaps unconsciously, many of the assumptions, values, and goals of those who are giving them orders—and, second, that in order to challenge the dominance of any established authority, it is necessary to construct a countervailing cultural establishment, a "counter-hegemony" (or, as the New Left called it, a "counterculture") that is independent of the dominant cultural apparatus and is able to generate its own system of beliefs. As indicated earlier, these concepts were not entirely new, and they had been applied, probably instinctively, by Progressivists, Marxists, liberals, and others on the left in the United States throughout the first part of the 20th century as the left gradually established its dominance in the mass media, the foundations, the universities, and the federal state. That dominance has intensified in recent years as veterans of the New Left, often directly influenced by Gramsci, have occupied strategic positions in such institutions and have used them to construct the cultural hegemony that we know as "political correctness." In the case of the American left, because it has so totally lacked any popular support at the grassroots level, it has been unable to build the kind of independent countercultural institutions that Gramsci wanted and has had to rely on the infiltration and permeation of established institutions, and especially on governmental power.

Moreover, the left has not been the only group to apply this strategy. It is interesting to note that Adolf Hitler seems to have conceived much the same idea in the aftermath of his failed 1923 Beer Hall Putsch. Speaking to a group of veterans of the putsch after he had come to power in November 1936, Hitler remarked, "We recognized that it is not enough to overthrow the old State, but that the new State must previously have been built up and be practically ready to one's hand. . . . In 1933 it was no longer a question of overthrowing a state by an act of violence; meanwhile the new State had been built up and all that there remained to do was to destroy the last remnants of the old State—and that took but a few hours." In the years between Hitler's failed putsch of 1924 and his coming to power in 1933, he and the Nazis built up an entire series of party institutions that paralleled and duplicated those of the existing state, including groups for women, youth, workers, students, artists, and intellectuals, as well as the party's propaganda organs and its paramilitary forces, so that by the time Hitler became chancellor in 1933, the national socialist state had already been "prefigured" (to use a term of Gramsci) in the party organization, and the actual seizure of state power merely enabled the party to substitute its own apparatus for that of the old state. The strategy that both Hitler and Gramsci were devising was essentially to construct what historian Crane Brinton in his classic *The Anatomy of Revolution* called an "illegal government." "The legal government," wrote Brinton, "finds opposed to it, not merely hostile individuals and parties . . . but

a rival government, better organized, better staffed, better obeyed. . . . At a given revolutionary crisis they step naturally and easily into the place of the defeated government.”

While Gramsci and Hitler sought to develop their cultural strategy for totalitarian ends, communist in the case of Gramsci and national socialist in the case of Hitler, the same strategy can be used for conservative purposes, and probably even more successfully in the United States since beneath the encrustation of the dominant cultural apparatus of the left in this country there still persists an enduring cultural core of traditional beliefs and institutions. Indeed, while the American right has generally ignored cultural forces, preferring to dwell on economic, foreign policy, and narrow political issues and to concentrate on policy bargaining within the government (usually on terms defined by their opponents), the European New Right explicitly invokes Gramsci as a source of its ideas and strategy. Thus Tomislav Sunic writes in his account of the European New Right: “The main reason that conservative movements and regimes have been unable to gain lasting political legitimacy lies in their inability of successfully infiltrating the cultural society and introducing another ‘counter-ideology’ to the masses. Should conservative movements genuinely desire to become politically consolidated, they must first and foremost elaborate their own cultural strategy, which will ultimately help them to dislodge socialist and liberal leverage on the political arena. One must first conquer the brains before conquering the state.”

The inadequacy of the political power of the right in America in the absence of cultural power is perfectly illustrated in the cases of the Nixon, Reagan, and Bush administrations. None of the Republican administrations possessed sufficient cultural resources and allies to enable whatever ideas and policy initiatives they expressed to endure, and much of their time and energy were consumed with explaining and often retreating from what they put forward in the face of the almost total opposition of the dominant cultural elite in the mass media and the higher circles of education. The Republicans had indeed won election to the “outer ditch” of government, but none of them ever came close to penetrating the “powerful system of fortresses and earthworks” of cultural hegemony on which the real power of the left rests. The Bush administration in particular came to rely on an essentially liberal discourse to justify its actions. As a result, the administration accomplished almost nothing in altering the framework of public discussion or in challenging the fundamental terms of debate in American political culture, so that today it is far more difficult to argue publicly against the legitimacy of homosexuality, against affirmative action, against the welfare state and its assumptions about man and government, or against a globalist foreign policy than it was before Bush, Quayle, Kemp, and William Bennett gave us the benefit of their wisdom. By replicating and repeating the rhetoric of the left, the American right merely confirms and legitimizes the cultural dominance—and therefore the political power—of the left.

Nor does there seem to be much prospect that the Republican Party as it is now constituted will offer any serious challenge to that cultural dominance, or that the tame neoconservative intelligentsia that serves as the GOP’s ideological vanguard will do so. Thus, neoconservative Michael Joyce, president of the \$420-million Bradley Foundation of Milwaukee, which the *National Journal* calls “the nation’s largest underwriter of conservative intellectual activity,” recently told the

Journal that “I’m . . . not ready to repeal the welfare state. I want to ameliorate the problems of the welfare state.” Similarly, in the spring of 1992, just after President Bush, under pressure from Pat Buchanan, fired NEA chairman John Frohn-mayer, there began to build for the first time a small consensus even among some liberals that the NEA might not be necessary after all. Who should jump out of the woodwork to tell us that “abolitionist sentiment, however understandable and defensible, will be ineffectual” but Mr. Joyce’s mentor, Irving Kristol, the ubiquitous godfather of the neoconservatives, and it was Kristol’s contribution to the *Kulturkampf* to suggest that all we really needed to do was just hand the NEA over to a neoconservative manager who could fork up the pasta to the right people, namely the neoconservatives. Mr. Kristol then sallied forward to tell us, in the *Wall Street Journal*, that “I regret to inform Pat Buchanan that those [i.e., the culture] wars are over, and the left has won. . . . the left today completely dominates the educational system, the entertainment industry, the universities, the media.” “One of these days the tide will turn,” he writes, but there is nothing anyone can do about it now. Well, no doubt some day the tide will turn, but when it does it will not be because Mr. Kristol was paddling in the right direction. If Antonio Gramsci had had comrades like Irving Kristol and Michael Joyce, Mussolini could have used his prisons for more serious threats to his power.

As far as I can see, there is virtually no reason to think that either the Republican Party leadership or the neoconservative intelligentsia or for that matter most of the mainstream conservative establishment either wants or is able to mount an effective challenge to the dominant cultural apparatus of the left in this country. They do not want to do so because they are perfectly happy holding petty offices, publishing reams of background papers, and giving each other immense financial donations within the left’s framework of cultural and political hegemony, and the most that they want to do is trim up that framework, reform it, take it over themselves, and, in Mr. Joyce’s term, “ameliorate” it. They are not able to mount an effective challenge because the establishment right has long isolated itself from the grassroots foundations of the real American culture and locked itself in its phone booth, where they employ their time and money making conference calls to each other, periodically emerging to raid the direct-mail icebox, and venturing all the way to Milwaukee to squeeze another large slice of the Bradley family’s fortune out of Mr. Joyce.

The people who are challenging the cultural hegemony of the left and are trying to construct a “counter-hegemonic force” are the American people themselves, through the efforts of leaders like Mary Cummins and her allies in the belly of the beast, New York City, and through similar efforts in Colorado, Oregon, California, and other states where the long silent and dormant core of American civilization is beginning to awaken. These efforts are not the products of strategies thought out in the Beltway, and as far as I know they owe nothing to the financial largesse of conservative foundations. They are largely local in orientation and thereby reflect the authentic grassroots nature of the real American culture. Independent of both the federal state and its cultural tentacles, they do not merely replicate the assumptions of the incumbent cultural regime; they express their own vision of culture, and in their activism they defy the kind of passivity that the dominant culture seeks to induce in Americans. If they are going to develop and

flourish in the future, they need to undertake three things.

First, they need to enlarge their numbers and avoid remaining in the political and cultural ghetto that so-called "movement conservatism" represents. This means that they cannot look to large conservative foundations or even to very many other conservatives for help, since the effect—if not the purpose—of those organizations is to make local groups dependent on their assistance and thereby confine them within the ghetto. Grassroots groups need to find ways they can expand beyond those already sympathetic to them and enlist the energies of other Americans who have not previously been involved or interested in cultural war, and to do this they need to look for new issues beyond their present range of concerns and interests. By doing so not only will they gain strength through new adherents but they will also be able to retain their financial and organizational independence and the integrity of their agendas.

Second, these groups need, to use a phrase of the left, to raise consciousness—not only to expand their numbers but also to educate other Americans in how the Middle American core is exploited by the dominant authorities, how traditional American culture is being subverted and destroyed, and what this destruction means to the country and its citizens. Long-standing issues of the populist right like abortion or relatively new ones like homosexuality, school curricula, and gun control cannot be seen or fought in isolation from issues that have not previously been issues at all, such as trade, immigration, and an America First foreign policy, and activists should use all these issues to inform previously inactive citizens and groups of how they

are all the victims of an alien domination and of what they can do to resist it.

Third, local efforts will eventually need to develop a national political consciousness and a national reach. While Gramsci was undoubtedly right that political power without cultural hegemony is pointless, it is these very grassroots groups that for the first time in living memory offer a firm cultural and popularly based foundation for enduring and effective political power on the right. Only if they can eventually be coordinated into a national movement that still retains its independence, its integrity, and its local and activist character can they become the effective base for a national political campaign or a presidential administration, and only if a national campaign or an administration possesses such a national cultural base can it or its supporters expect to accomplish what is necessary—to break the federal leviathan apart at its joints and dismantle its apparatus of cultural domination, its revolting and repressive culture, and its phony and disgusting cultural elite and to create a new national and cultural consciousness of what it means to be an American. The strategy by which this new American revolution can take place may well come from what was cooked up in the brain of a dying communist theoretician in a Fascist jail cell 60 years ago, but we can make use of it not to build the lies of socialism and the enslavement of communism but to conserve the freedom and dignity that American civilization has always represented and can represent again, if only we have the strength and the will and the common purpose to take back our country and our culture.



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