

for ill-conceived policies is neither honorable nor necessary. Therein lies the weakness of the soft power concept: it links this country's core virtues to fallible political choices to the detriment of the former. For Americans to die because we represent a worthy vision of a better society is tragic but a price worth paying. For Americans to die because Washington ideologues seek to remake parts of the world best left to their own devices is tragic waste. Soft power is supposed to be based on values, but it can be mobilized in conjunction with policies at odds with the entire course and tenor of American history. Indeed, the logic of soft power is entirely consistent with the neoconservative hubris of global transformation and American hegemony.

Nye defines "smart power" as combining hard military power with soft power. A better approach to true smart power for America as both Great Power and great nation lies in knowing when not to use our great power at all and, above all, how to use it with restraint and constitutional legitimacy in cases of clear American interest. Then, the force of our culture and values can and will shine clear. ■

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[*The Norman Podhoretz Reader: A Selection of His Writings From the 1950s Through the 1990s*, Thomas L. Jeffers, ed., The Free Press, 478 pages]

Idol With Clay Feet

By Samuel Francis

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to Thomas L. Jeffers's anthology of the best articles and essays of Norman Podhoretz, historian Paul Johnson writes that the former *Commentary* editor is "the archetype of the New York intellectual," a "polymath," "a great deal more than an editor," a "protean" intellect who is "a thinker and writer and polemicist, a geopolitician and student of religious ideas, an autobiographer of genius, a man who reacts sharply to the news as it pours from the press and the airwaves, who thinks deeply, angrily, and sincerely about it, and commits his thoughts into vivid and penetrating argument."

Yet Johnson's gushes can't match the gemlike sycophancy of the dust-jacket blurb offered by William F. Buckley Jr., who tells us, "Never (that I know) has a single lifetime borne such literary and philosophical fruit"—a statement that places Podhoretz somewhat higher than

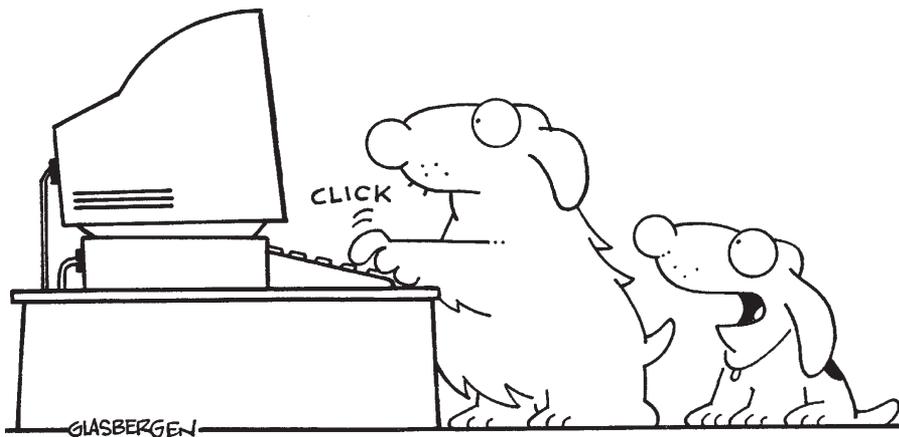
such dimmer bulbs as Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe. Jeffers chimes in with a rather more modest encomium that credits Podhoretz with "an intelligence as stunningly precocious, I think, as Mencken's or [Edmund] Wilson's had been two or three generations earlier," and he is astonished that in 1956 alone Podhoretz "wrote seven substantial pieces," followed by 13 in 1957, and nine in 1958—"which averages a piece every forty days or so." By this time the reader is fully expecting to find illustrations of Norman Podhoretz swimming the Yangtze River. In lieu of that, Johnson adds, "when you come to the end of a Podhoretz article and argument you feel you have got the real man, every time. There is no cant, nothing phony, no hidden agenda, nothing withheld, no tactical dodges, just the awkward or angular or disconcerting or simple truth, as he sees it. Here again, the comparison with Orwell springs to mind."

Orwell does in fact spring to mind, but not perhaps for quite the reasons Johnson suggests.

After wading through nearly 500 pages of what I found to be tedious prose on sometimes trivial subjects and people, I began to wonder if there wasn't something wrong with me. No doubt there is, but that still does not sway me from the conclusion there is not very much more to Norman Podhoretz than met my eye.

In his youth, Podhoretz was best known as a literary critic, and his reflections on such writers as Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, and Philip Roth, embedded with his personal stories about them, are all reprinted here, along with a brief and unremarkable essay on *Huckleberry Finn*. To most Americans, if not to Podhoretz and his fans, such writers and their professional careers, personal quarrels, political opinions, and sexual peccadilloes are as remote as the struggles between the Greens and the Blues in the chariot races of ancient Byzantium.

Podhoretz is best known today as one of the architects of what is known as "neoconservatism," the man who, through his editorship of *Commentary* from 1960



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to 1995, developed the magazine into the flagship journal of the neoconservative movement, which has now come to dominate the American Right. His evolution into a neocon is perhaps the chief point of interest in this collection.

The main criticism of neoconservatism by the Old Right is that it is virtually indistinguishable from the liberalism that prevailed in American government and cultural life from the New Deal until today. So far from being conservatism of any recognizable stripe, neoconservatism merely displaces (and in fact helped muzzle) the real Right and

other than the humanitarian impulses in which their authors wrapped themselves, and that something is anti-Semitism.

That might be a more compelling charge if he even tried to show that the liberal and Left critics of Israel had ever expressed any other anti-Semitic views, but he doesn't, and it is inherently unlikely that writers like Mary McGrory, Hodding Carter, Nicholas von Hoffman, or Anthony Lewis are anti-Semites at all. Yet for Podhoretz, they are such by definition because anti-Semitism consists almost exclusively of criticism of Israel. He acquits Alexander Solzhenitsyn of

interests. His embrace of the profoundly anti-conservative Wilsonianism therefore not only suggests his own agenda but also shows how his neoconservatism merely regurgitates the premises and values of 20th-century liberalism.

Indeed, despite the hearty welcome most conservatives offered him, Podhoretz is entirely frank about how neo-conservatives did not share the beliefs or agendas of the Old Right and deliberately sought to undermine them. "The neo-conservatives," he modestly informs us, "brought something new to conservatism besides their own persons." They were "caught up in the process of shaping a perspective of their own that differed in important respects from the older varieties of American conservatism," an admission that rather gives the lie to younger neoconservatives today who purport that they are the real conservatives and the paleoconservatives are unpatriotic leftists.

He acknowledges that in contrast to the old conservatives, "the neo-conservatives dissociated themselves from the wholesale opposition to the welfare state which had marked American conservatism since the days of the New Deal" and that while neoconservatives supported "setting certain limits" to the welfare state, those limits did not involve "issues of principle, such as the legitimate size and role of the central government in the American constitutional order" but were to be "determined by practical considerations."

By far the most brazen claim Podhoretz makes is that the Old Right never existed as a serious intellectual force. "It was the neo-conservatives who decided that the time had come to drag capitalism out of the closet," he assures us, citing two books of the late 1970s by Irving Kristol and Michael Novak. So much for Ludwig von Mises, Nobel Prize winners Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, Murray Rothbard, Henry Hazlitt, and Ayn Rand, among others, not one of whom was a neoconservative and all of whom "dragged capitalism out of the closet" decades before the neoconservatives had shed their pink diapers.

PODHORETZ IS ENTIRELY FRANK ABOUT HOW **NEOCONSERVATIVES DID NOT SHARE THE BELIEFS OF THE OLD RIGHT AND DELIBERATELY SOUGHT TO UNDERMINE THEM.**

perpetuates the liberal monopoly on political and cultural discourse. There is little in Podhoretz's account of his intellectual and political development to challenge that interpretation.

The selection from *Breaking Ranks*, Podhoretz's 1979 memoir of his political transition, is a case in point. Nowhere does he offer any deep or serious critique of liberalism or suggest that the anti-Americanism and blindness to Communism it has always harbored may be an inherent part of it, and nowhere does he offer an alternative worldview. In *Breaking Ranks* he was content to affirm, "the label I usually use when I am forced to use one at all is 'centrist' or 'centrist liberal.'" "Neoconservatism," as Podhoretz conceives it, is merely a more "moderate" or "pragmatic" version of liberalism.

A major subtext to his political metamorphosis, of course, was the view of Israel and Zionism the Left espoused, but that is only slightly apparent from the selections Jeffers offers. It pops up in Podhoretz's famous 1982 essay "J'Accuse," in which he examines liberal attacks on Israel after its invasion of Lebanon and finds them without factual merit. His inference is that the attacks must have been driven by something

anti-Semitism simply because he "has always defended Israel," while "in our own day, Israel has become the touchstone of attitudes toward the Jewish people, and anti-Zionism has become the main and most relevant form of anti-Semitism." There you have it: if you criticize Israeli policy, you hate Jews.

His defense of the Vietnam War on the grounds of Wilsonian moralism may also be suspected of containing much the same subtext. "For the truth was," he writes, "that the United States went into Vietnam for the sake not of its own direct interests in the ordinary sense but for the sake of an ideal. The intervention was a product of the Wilsonian side of the American character—the side that went to war in 1917 to 'make the world safe for democracy' and that found its contemporary incarnations in the liberal internationalism of the 1940s and the liberal anti-Communism of the 1950s." This explanation, it must be understood, is Podhoretz's defense of the war, not, as most conservatives would regard it, a critique.

Wilsonianism relies on abstract moral sentiment, and it is therefore highly useful in defending U.S. involvement in wars that are not really in our national interests and allies that are, if not indefensible in themselves, at least irrelevant to such

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It was also the neoconservatives, Podhoretz writes, who taught the older conservatives to embrace the civil-rights movement because only by appealing to Martin Luther King's "dream of a world in which all would be judged not by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" could they reject the racial discrimination of affirmative action. But the mainstream Right opposed affirmative action from its beginnings, and resistance to it has nothing to do with accepting the civil-rights movement, of which affirmative action is a direct outgrowth that King explicitly defended and advocated.

As for anti-Communism, here too Podhoretz claims the neoconservatives "enjoyed a great advantage over other conservatives in being thoroughly familiar with the sources of the enemy's arguments and attitudes," though in *Breaking Ranks* he acknowledges such ex-communists of the Old Right as James Burnham, Will Herberg, and Whittaker Chambers, to mention only a few who were somewhat familiar with Marxist ideology and tactics themselves. Nor is he correct that it was the neoconservatives "who led the attack" on the Nixon-Kissinger policy of détente. Both *National Review* and other Old Right journals in the 1970s were filled with rejections of détente and criticisms of Nixon and Kissinger. It is impossible to believe Podhoretz does not know all this.

He must also know that long before neoconservatism emerged in the 1960s, what is usually called the "conservative intellectual movement" had been flourishing for two decades. Not only the free-market theorists and anti-communists mentioned above but also political thinkers, cultural critics, and social theorists like Burnham, Robert Nisbet, Richard Weaver, Willmoore Kendall, Russell Kirk, Frank S. Meyer, and a number of European expatriates of the Right preceded neoconservatism by a generation. Not everything these writers wrote was correct, and what they believed was not always consistent, but taken as a whole they constituted a sig-

nificant contribution to American intellectual life and political thought and offered a far deeper and more searching critique of liberalism and its leftist progeny than anything Podhoretz or any other neoconservative has offered to this day. Podhoretz and his comrades not only sneer at the Old Right but are determined to rewrite history to erase any memory of it.

While Podhoretz claims in a 1995 essay that the "purpose" of the neoconservative movement "is to dismantle the structures created by the liberal revolution of the past fifty years" (i.e., back to 1945; he has no problem with the New Deal and its revolution in domestic and foreign policy), nowhere does he suggest the abolition of a single government agency, the reversal of a single Supreme Court ruling, or the repeal of a single piece of liberal legislation. What Podhoretz and neoconservatism seek has nothing to do with the conservation or restoration of the Old Republic or dismantling much of anything except the real Right itself. Its purpose is the preservation and continuing hegemony of the liberal regime and its ideology, because in the neoconservative perception only if that hegemony remains intact can Israeli and Jewish ethno-political interests be secure.

Sadly, after reading this anthology I am unable to identify any body of learning or serious thought that distinguishes the author and his ephemera. Success, the bitch goddess of his first book, *Making It*, and the money, power, and status that attend it, seem to occupy an immense amount of acreage in the Podhoretzian psyche and a disproportionate share of attention in what Mr. Buckley calls its "literary and philosophical fruit." There is no question that Norman Podhoretz "made it," but it's hard to believe the basket of fruit he leaves behind him will not quickly wither. ■

Samuel Francis is a nationally syndicated columnist based in Washington and writes a monthly column for Chronicles.

An Edsel, Not an Empire



The Edsel name became synonymous with failure back in 1957, when the Ford Motor Company launched a “new concept” of a car named after the

then chairman’s father, Edsel Ford. It bombed like no car has before or since. In 1999, Tina Brown, in cahoots with the disgusting Harvey Weinstein, launched *Talk* magazine with a million-buck grand-opening extravaganza on some island off Manhattan. *Talk* became an Edsel in no time, with Weinstein shutting it down after only one year. Both the Edsel and *Talk* used Madison Avenue hucksterisms to stir up excitement before the final product appeared. Both proved the old adage about fooling all the people all of the time to be correct. Mind you, Detroit has been lying to Americans since the first horseless buggy. Compared to European and Japanese cars, American ones are unsafe and expensive to run. It took a Lebanese-American to expose the lies with *Unsafe at Any Speed* almost 40 years ago, but still Detroit lies and covers up.

Which brings me to the Bush presidency: it looks like an Edsel—brilliant presentation followed by total failure. But it’s doing its best to cover up the mess. As Patrick Foy wrote in his newsletter, “Call it what you will, but Washington is hitting the wall in Iraq.” If only those Fifth Columnists who advised George W. Bush to go in head first would read history rather than policy papers.

Back in 1920, Colonial Secretary Winston Churchill, fresh from overseeing the debacle of Gallipoli, was hard at work implementing the Balfour Declaration and creating client states for England. We are now paying the price for Churchill’s criminal shortsightedness. The neocons may lack Churchill’s breeding, but they are just as arrogant, shortsighted, and cynical as old Winnie. (He at least had the excuse of his father’s

syphilis.) Here’s Margaret MacMillan in her opus, *Paris 1919*: “When the Cold War ended in 1989 and Soviet Marxism vanished into the dustbin of history, older forces, religion and nationalism, came out of their deep freeze. Bosnia and Rwanda have reminded us of how strong those forces can be. Today, some argue, resurgent Islam is the menace. In 1919, it was Russian Bolshevism.”

I guarantee you that resurgent Islam will also vanish into the dustbin of history as long as Uncle Sam minds his own business and stays out of the backyards of people who wear towels on their heads. If the Saudi kleptocrats wish to finance Islamofascists to preach death and destruction to infidels, let them—as long as they don’t do it in Michigan. As my friend (I am the godfather of one of his children), the brilliant historian Niall Ferguson, writes in *Colossus: The Rise and Fall of the American Empire*, Americans won’t admit to being an empire, as the U.S. only came into being by violently seceding from someone else’s empire. But, like it or not, we are becoming a sort of empire, if only because we exercise a hegemonic influence both culturally and economically the world over. This is fine, as long as we don’t muck around in the affairs of other countries.

Patrick Buchanan has said it time and again, we are a republic, not an empire, and we should behave as such. If only George W. Bush had read Lawrence of Arabia, rather than Wolfowitz of Mesopotamia, he would have known that Lawrence recruited many a man to fight against the Turks, all of whom eventually turned against the Brits once the hated Johnny Turk had been sent pack-

ing back to Istanbul. That history repeats itself is a cliché, but a hell of a good one.

Britain’s empire lasted a long time because nation-building back then required time and patience, something the American electorate will not put up with. The Brits sent generations of civil administrators overseas, generations who went native and stayed native. Ferguson reports that out of 43,683 undergraduate registrations at Yale in 2004, only one student majored in Near Eastern languages. How does one infiltrate an Islamist cell when one speaks only English and can’t live without McDonald’s for more than a week?

Not that these details ever bothered those who helped launch this disaster. Remember the Iron Chancellor’s famous remark that the Balkans were not worth the life of a single Pomeranian grenadier? Well, Iraq is not worth the life of a single American soldier, especially an American Marine.

Saddam was a threat to Iraq, not to Uncle Sam. Not even to Israel, as it turns out, but try to say this to the Israeli Lobby. As Frank Johnson wrote in the London *Spectator*, the neocons have been making mischief for more than a hundred years. He compares the present motley cabal of Wolfowitzes and Feiths to Lord Milner, the governor of the British Cape Colony in South Africa. Johnson writes, “Milner’s Iraq was the Boer republic of Transvaal.” He set out to convince the prime minister, Lord Salisbury, that the Boers were a threat to Britain, as ludicrous a claim as the WMD hoax a century later. It would be a cakewalk, or a slam-dunk, according to Milner. Over 22,000 British dead and three years later, Salisbury found out what neocon really means. Now it’s Bush’s turn. Unless he cleans house, his will be the Edsel presidency. ■