



THE VIEW

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A TIMELY GOOD-BYE FROM WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY, JR.

BY
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During this past winter the intellectual giant of American conservatism, William F. Buckley, Jr., passed away leaving many with a profound sense of loss. In my late teens I began subscribing to the National Review, the journal of conservative thought founded by Buckley after his graduation from Yale. My bookshelves are littered with almost all of his non-fiction books written to make the case for, and then to defend against all comers, the cause of American conservatism. At his death I found myself wishing that he had had the time and the presence of mind to pen one more book of his rich and intellectually challenging political thought.

Low and behold, as I was wandering in the "New Non-fiction" section of a bookstore my eyes came to rest on what indeed appeared to be a new book by none other than the late Mr. Buckley. On further examination I discovered the 2008 postmark for William F. Buckley's final work prior to departing this world. The book was entitled *Flying High: Remembering Barry Goldwater*.

Flying High is only about 200 pages long and as compared to many of his works that virtually require the presence of a high quality dictionary to decipher the meaning of his many multi-syllabic descriptors, this one is rather tame. We have all had those encounters with old friends from college or some other venue in a former life where we tell all of the same stories all over again. *Flying High* embodies one last telling of the bringing of conservative thought into full flower in the modern era in America. One may almost imagine Buckley beginning his familiar tale by saying "Remember the time we...".

Quite simply *Flying High* occupied the bulk of my time over the Memorial Day weekend, and in so doing it not only brought back many memories of the events upon which I cut my political teeth, but it also provided ample opportunity to compare and contrast the brand of conservatism based on intellectual superiority as practiced by Buckley and his colleagues with today's version based on the strategic use of wedge issues and petty "one upsmanship".

In *Flying High*, Buckley reminisces about the days not long after World War II when the dust began to settle and the communist threat came into focus. Buckley completed his studies at Yale and emerged to write his first book, *God and Man at Yale*, which sounded the alarm on the liberal elite that dominated the faculties of the nation's most prestigious universities. In November of 1955, Buckley and his growing band of conservative colleagues founded the *National Review*, which remains to this day the preeminent journal of conservative political and social thought. Buckley stated that the work of the *National Review* was "animated by a determination to frustrate communist enterprise on every front." The year 1960 saw a convergence of the political with the intellectual that placed the conservative movement on a trajectory on which the largely Republican right wing struggles to maintain today. It was in 1960 that the name Barry Goldwater emerged on the Presidential stage. While the head of the Republican ticket that year had already been claimed by Vice-President Richard Nixon, the conservative pure-in-heart had spotted the one who would be their champion by 1964. In that 1960 Presidential election year two other elements important to the efforts to build and sustain conservatism in the modern era came into being. Brent Bozell, brother-in-law of William F. Buckley ghost wrote the Barry Goldwater classic *Conscience of a Conservative*, which surprisingly sold nearly 4 million copies and the *National Review* contingent helped give birth to the Young Americans for Freedom at the Buckley home in Sharon, Connecticut.

The 1964 Presidential election saw Democrat Lyndon Johnson win in a landslide with 61% of the vote. Goldwater carried his home state of Arizona and the five contiguous southern states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. As bad as this defeat seemed, in reality it established the conservative movement as viable on the national stage. The conservative Republicans had been successful in eclipsing the domination of their party by moderates lead by New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and had produced a candidate in Goldwater who embodied more than any other of the day, a philosophy of limited power of the federal government and a strengthened role for state and local government and the power of the individual. Although the conservative movement suffered a body blow along



with the defeat of Goldwater, it did recover. The growing acceptability of conservative principles culminated in the election in 1980 of Ronald Reagan. Thus, Reagan's successful eight year Presidency is seen by conservative Republicans as the fruit born from the seeds planted in the Goldwater campaign.

On many occasions during this campaign season we have seen Republican candidates invoke the name of Reagan and his brand of conservatism. Unfortunately the conservatism of William F. Buckley that often seized and occupied the intellectual high ground has yielded to a destructive form of hand-to-hand combat. The legacies of the Buckley band of intellectuals are being ably carried forth by the likes of George Will, Patrick Buchanan, and Brent Bozell. We owe a debt of gratitude to William F. Buckley for telling us one more time how it all began.

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