

Great Men

Editorial

Time nominated Albert Einstein as the man of the century, with good reason, for he is the father of much of the technological marvels of this century. We could also nominate Henry Ford for mass production and Bill Gates for his development of the computer; but, in the behavior of men with each other, with or without technology, we have to look elsewhere for those who have been prominent in this century

Politicians come to mind. The political beasts of the century are well known: Stalin, Hitler, Chairman Mao, Mussolini. We are recovering from the wickedness they have caused. On the other side of the coin, Churchill and Roosevelt will receive much praise, and with good reason. Churchill recognized the wickedness of Hitler and Stalin, and gave the West an example of courage. We laud him. Roosevelt fought against Hitler with great competence, but he had trouble telling the truth and blamed Hoover for causing the depression, which was not true. Though he had a magnetic personality and promoted the song "Happy Days Are Here Again," he prolonged the depression with a tight money policy and got us out of depression only by going to war. He used the depression and the war to centralize the country. Roosevelt thought of Stalin as "Good Old Uncle Joe." Truman was not so gullible.

The great politicians of the century are three: Mikhail Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher, and Ronald Reagan.

Mikhail Gorbachev knew the Soviet Union was falling apart and introduced *Glasnost* and *Perestroika*, permitting free speech for the first time in decades. After he became President of the Soviet Union, the Soviet parliament met for the first time since 1918. When Soviet citizens wanted to leave the country, he let them go, and he allowed the Berlin Wall to fall. It was the greatest political act of the century.

When **Margaret Thatcher** became Prime Minister of Great Britain, she said, "I am not a consensus politician. I am a conviction politician." "You don't follow the crowd. You make up your own mind." Her father taught her that all individuals are responsible to their God, their family, their country, their community and even to themselves to work on behalf of others. Her moral courage and consistency to principle left its mark not only in Great Britain but also in the United States with welfare reform, tax relief, and balanced budget. She was a trumpeter of freedom when the world was still socialist.

Ronald Reagan revived American traditions: "Should we abandon the American Revolution and confess that a little intellectual elite in a far-distant capital can plan our lives for us better than we can plan them ourselves." "The answer to a government that's too big is to stop feeding growth." In 1982, when all the smart people were afraid of the Soviet Union and thought the Soviet Union was on the correct path, Reagan said, "Here is a political structure that no longer corresponds to its economic base." In the same speech to the House of Commons in 1982, he said,

What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term—the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history as it has left other tyrannies which stifle freedom and muzzle the self-expression of the people.

Mr. Reagan got the country out of depression and high interest rates by cutting taxes. The smart people said that he would bring economic collapse because the engines of growth in the United States were shut down and would stay shut down. The foreign ministers of the seven largest industrial nations treated him with contempt. He proved the smart people wrong. Two years after he began his program the same foreign ministers of the largest industrial nations said, “Tell us about the American miracle.”

Ronald Reagan’s greatest achievement was a resurrection of patriotism. We absorbed, once, he said, a love of America from our families, neighborhoods, schools, the movies, even television. An appreciation of this land and its institutions was in the air we breathed. For a moment, President Reagan made us lovers of the country of our birth or adoption. His message overwhelmed his opposition.

One does not need genius to recognize that fundamental movers of the world are writers. Politicians, journalists, commentators of any sort talk about authors. They may talk about this event or that, but the events they talk about result from what some writer wrote.

Karl Marx has been the dominant figure of the Twentieth Century with his analysis of society, and we have not recovered in spite of his theories having been proved nonsense. He believed in universal socialism, believing that capitalists and wage earners were eternal enemies, and that the capitalist class would be swallowed by the workers, bringing peace and prosperity to all.

Many of us remember *Doctor Zhivago* by **Boris Pasternak**, a beautiful story of a man and woman who tried to insulate their lives from the violence of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the chaos that followed. Pasternak was interested in social problems only as they influenced human lives, and he saw the Communist state as the great oppressor of freedom and beauty. A gentle man, after his novel won the Nobel Prize, he lived precariously because he glorified life rather than a political creed.

Like a beast in a pen, I’m cut off
From my friends, freedom, the sun.
But the hunters are gaining ground.
I’ve nowhere else to run.

Aleksandre Solzhenitsyn, a mathematician, was arrested in 1945 for writing a letter in which he criticized Stalin and then spent eight years in prisons and labor camps. In 1962 he wrote *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* where he described a typical day in the life of an inmate in a forced-labor camp. The book was a political sensation abroad and in the Soviet Union. But he felt again the power of

the state. When refused permission to publish, he distributed his short stories in self-published literature, an illegal activity. Continuing to write, in 1970 he published *The First Circle*, tracing the work of scientists who had to decide whether to cooperate with the authorities or be thrust back into brutal labor camps. His most famous work was *The Gulag Archipelago*, a record of the vast systems of prisons and labor camps over a forty-year period. He was arrested, charged with treason, and exiled from the Soviet Union. He declined to accept the Nobel Prize in 1970, but the day after his exile, February 12, 1974, he took possession of his Nobel Prize.

Solzhenitsyn rejected the Western emphasis on democracy and freedom and materialism, preferring a benevolent, authoritarian régime that drew on Russia's traditional Christian values. He has been of no influence since he returned to Russia, and he was of little influence while he lived in the United States; but he moved the world away from Communist dogmatism. Whether or not he will influence a rediscovery of values greater than materialism we do not know.

The Nobel Prize was granted to **Friedrich von Hayek** October 2, 1974. After an analysis of the problems of centralized planning he concluded that only by a far-reaching decentralization in a market system with competition and free price-fixing could we have a rational, social economic system. *The Road to Serfdom* was a popularized version of his detailed analysis, with practical applications, and its influence was immense both in serious academic circles and the popular press. A list of the famous people who learned from this book would fill pages.

Milton Friedman wrote that the role Adam Smith played in his century has been played in our time by Hayek. Personal discussions between Friedman and Hayek stimulated Friedman's interest in public policy and political philosophy.

Thomas Sowell wrote,

The twentieth Century looked for many decades as if it were going to be the century of collectivism. Anyone who would have predicted the reversal of this trend would have been considered mad just a dozen years ago. An alternative vision had to become viable before the reversal of the collectivist tide could begin. That vision came from many sources, but if one point could mark the beginning of the intellectual turning of the tide which made later political changes possible, it was the publication of *The Road to Serfdom*.

The major work of **Milton Friedman** (Nobel Laureate in 1976) was *The Monetary History of the United States*, which made more of an impression on me than his popular books. Professor Friedman argued that the Fed deepened the depression of the thirties and did much to prevent a recovery. The causes of the depression have been politicized but they were a failure of monetary policy. The Fed limited the volume of money when it should have increased that supply. The Fed was also responsible for the inflation of the seventies that caused the breakdown of many financial institutions, such as the savings and loans. These institutions loaned at low rates and long terms and could not handle inflation. The

Fed was created to do just that, and it failed. Professor Friedman believes that Fed is not performing its function and could be eliminated. He is a monetarist and believes the goal of monetary policy is stable growth rather than a juggling of interest rates. Interest rates should be allowed to fluctuate relative to the supply of money.

The popular fame of Milton Friedman rests on two beliefs. 1) The most important political goal must be the reduction of the role of government. In 1992, government spending was 42 percent of the national income. We could add to that spending in the private sector that is mandated by government, such as anti-pollution equipment in our cars, farm subsidies, wage and hour laws. We can assume that 50 percent of the national income is spent by the government. While there are some things only the government can do, government would be wise to do what it is good at: the protection of life and property. *In my view, said Milton Friedman, reducing the scope of government is our most important single objective.* 2) Education should be a choice among options rather than a government monopoly. This is so evident that a discussion seems superfluous, but the present educational monopoly is so deeply imbedded that the thought of alternative education is radical, something like Communism when, in fact, the monopolists are those imitating the Communist system. Government-run schools cost around \$6,857 per pupil. Private primary and secondary schools charge around \$2,500 per pupil. A voucher system would give better teaching at less cost and would free us from the threat of district-wide strikes by teachers.

Three other names deserve mention as effective in changing public opinion in the latter half of the twentieth century. None of them has Nobel Prizes, I suppose because their influence has been domestic more than international.

William F. Buckley launched the *National Review* in the early fifties, not long after the publication of *God and Man at Yale*, a critique of teaching at Yale. He was unknown at the time save for those who read the *Yale Daily News*, of which he had been an editor as an undergraduate. Buckley's book raised a great storm not only in Yale and among Yale alumni, but nationally, as it exposed the biased teaching of that pristine school of learning. Yale faculty protested vigorously and defended themselves from the charges of superficiality and bias Mr. Buckley presented, but the notoriety gained from the book permitted the successful publication of the *National Review*, which continues to this day. Mr. Buckley's journal was the only one of its kind: witty, learned, comprehensive in the discussion of current political and religious events, and with what became known as a conservative orientation. Until Mr. Buckley, popular journalism had been monotonously liberal, hewing to a liberal, socialist point of view. The *National Review* threw down the gauntlet. Not only was Mr. Buckley editor and publisher of the new journal; he wrote a syndicated column in daily newspapers and presided over the *Firing Line*, a television program that ran for thirty years. In demand as a speaker where his appearances to large audiences were the rule, his words dominated conservative thought for many years. Those who subscribed to his publication believed they needed nothing more than the *National Review* to resurrect the country from its illness and to discover the principles we needed for recovery.

William F. Buckley established the term “conservative” to describe the new orientation of the fifties, due to *The Conservative Mind* that was written by **Russell Kirk**. Many people did not care for the title “conservative” to describe the reinvigoration of learning, believing that the hypocrisy of the title “liberal” that represented welfarism and the growth of centralized government should be resented and refuted; but the new title won the day so that everyone opposed to the growth of the state had to be called “conservative.”

The assumption was that there was only one tradition in the United States, and that tradition was liberal. Russell Kirk replied to that assumption. His *Conservative Mind* was a massive description of traditions other than liberal. Beginning with Edmund Burke, he presented John Adams, Coleridge, Randolph, Cooper, John Quincy Adams, Disraeli, Maine, Lecky, Henry and Brooks Adams, Irving Babbitt, Paul Elmer More, and George Santayana, adding discussions of Law, Romanticism, Utilitarianism, Pragmatism, and Criticism. At the conclusion of the work, it was beyond question that other traditions existed than materialism, deceitful politics, the omnipotence of the state, and a decadent morality.

The Conservative Mind had an impact that we can hardly imagine, used as we are to popular books by those without a serious education, so that a young English instructor at Michigan State became overnight a national celebrity. Leading reviews appeared in the *Herald-Tribune*, *New Yorker* and *Saturday Review*. The whole issue of the July 4 issue of *Time* was devoted to the Kirk book and it was mentioned again in a news story. It was widely read and discussed in colleges and universities. After publication, Russell Kirk was a regular columnist for many years in the *National Review*, had a syndicated column in daily newspapers, was a popular speaker on college campuses, and wrote another thirty books.

The effort of Russell Kirk’s life was to promote what he called Permanent Things, the principles that abide through the ages and are preserved in our best traditions. He worked to preserve justice, freedom, moral order, and a decent culture. He touched our lives with graciousness.

My last great man of the latter part of this century is **Henry Regnery**, a quiet little man who is honored by the few who knew him well but deserves wider respect. When Mr. Regnery became a publisher in 1947, publishing in the United States was dominated by a few houses on the east coast. In Chicago, away from the great center of influence, Henry Regnery entered the fray. Hayek would have been published without Henry Regnery, and Milton Friedman too, but we would never have heard of William F. Buckley or Russell Kirk.

Mr. Regnery began publishing with three books, a study of Hitler by Max Picard, and two books on Allied occupation policy by Victor Gollancz. An early author was Freda Utley, an early Communist who learned the evil of that philosophy from bitter experience and whose *The China Story* made the best-seller list. [Her story is related in this issue by Allan Brownfeld in “Will the Twenty-first Century See a New Burst of Freedom.”] Then came *God and Man at Yale* and *The Conservative Mind* which were great successes. There were many other fine books: *Freedom and Federalism*, by Felix Morley, *The Ethics*

of *Rhetoric* by Richard Weaver, *The Sovereign States* by James Kilpatrick, *Congress and the American Tradition* by James Burnham, *The Conservative Affirmation* by Willmoore Kendall, *The Humane Economy* by Wilhelm Roepke. Mr. Regnery's publishing company continues to publish important conservative literature under his son.

A book has recently been published. It includes essays by Henry Regnery about his publishing ventures. The him as a reputable author as well as a bold publisher. And there are biographical details of his early life in Hinsdale, outside of Chicago. The book is a delight: *Perfect Sowing*, by Henry Regnery. ISI Books, Wilmington, DE 19807, 394 pp., hard cover, \$25.95. Ω

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