

punctuation book, *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*.

Saddam Hussein, in the end, did not—as Al-Marashi had feared—retaliate against his relatives remaining in Iraq, although his family has since fled the country

following a kidnapping attempt. Al-Marashi got his Ph.D. on schedule in 2004, and he is now an international policy fellow at Central European University's Center for Policy Studies. He is often asked why he didn't sue the British government.

He responds: "The ramifications of two governments making an argument to invade a sovereign nation based on evidence that was essentially taken from a journal article, in my opinion, makes the thought of money meaningless."

## POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

# Conservatism Marches On

**THE SOURCE:** "Is Conservatism Finished?" by Wilfred M. McClay, in *Commentary*, Jan. 2007.

THE REPUBLICAN LOSSES IN the 2006 midterm elections are just the latest news to have set many conservative pundits to sounding the death knell for their movement. The title of one of the many recent books in this vein labels the lead culprit: *Conservatives Betrayed: How George W. Bush and Other Big Government Republicans Hijacked the Conservative Cause*, by Richard Viguerie. According to Viguerie, Bush may have "talked like a conservative to win our votes, but never governed like a conservative." Bush's foreign- and domestic-policy stumbles, most notably the war in Iraq, have sabotaged "the idyllic spirit of unity at home and cooperation abroad that allegedly prevailed during the Cold War years under [Ronald] Reagan," writes Wilfred M. McClay, a history professor at the University of Tennessee, Chattanooga. But does all this mean that

the conservative movement is really finished?

McClay believes that the "modest" election victory for the Democrats, which yielded only a narrow majority in both houses of Congress, does not "justify the claim that *conservatism* lost." He points to the easy triumph of independent senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut "over his more liberal antiwar challenger" and the victories of "such relatively conservative Democrats as James Webb in Virginia and Robert Casey Jr. in Pennsylvania" as signs that no major ideological shift is underway. Indeed, McClay says, "the American electorate has . . . moved slowly but steadily in a conservative direction since 1968."

McClay also questions the validity of the conservatives' charges against Bush, each of which "rests on some a priori definition of what conservatism is and what it is not." Jeffrey Hart, for instance, author of *The Making of the American Conservative Mind* (2006), speaks of conservatism "as a realistic and non-ideological approach to gov-

ernance," and chides Bush for overstepping his authority. But McClay cites many instances when leaders took actions "that involved the transgression of a 'conservative' principle for the sake of broadly conservative ends," such as Abraham Lincoln's suspension of basic civil liberties during the Civil War. Nor is Bush's "insistence on the universal appeal of free institutions out of line" with conservatism of the past. His justifications for his Iraq policy echo Reagan, who once said, "It would be cultural condescension, or worse, to say that any people prefer dictatorship to democracy."

To some conservatives, Bush's evangelical Protestantism—"the source of his involvement of the federal government in promoting educational reform, his faith-based initiative, his African AIDS initiative"—"reeks equally of dogoodism and unlimited government." McClay points to the words of one of conservatism's founding voices, Russell Kirk, who said, "There exists a transcendent moral order, to which we ought to try to conform the ways of society." Even Reagan, McClay reminds his fellow conservatives, frequently quoted Scripture, and favored making inauguration day "a day of prayer."

It's "ridiculous," McClay adds, for conservatives to recall the Reagan

years as a time of comity. Viguerie himself charged in 1987 that Reagan had “changed sides” and was allied with liberals and the Soviets.

McClay believes that the current attention focused on conservatism’s “demise” is the best evidence that it is, “intellectually speaking, where the principal action remains.” The Democratic Party has so far found “clarity only in discrediting George W. Bush and regaining office.” But he cautions that “conservatism in American politics is less an ideology than a coalition.” As in any coalition, “not all of the pieces fit together coherently.” Conservatives would do well, McClay concludes, to “remember Ronald Reagan as a leader who not only embodied the distinctive characteristics of American conservatism but who finessed its antinomies and persevered against the contempt and condescension of his own era.” A more realistic view of the past, in other words, may help conservatives “regain their bearings and prevail.”

#### POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

## Why Political Science Doesn’t Matter

**THE SOURCE:** “Wilson’s Failure: Roots of Contention About the Meaning of a Science of Politics” by Peter N. Ubertaccio and Brian J. Cook, in *The American Political Science Review*, Nov. 2006.

AT LEAST 10 CANDIDATES ARE campaigning for president in the 2008 election, staffed up with pollsters, consultants, managers, and communications specialists. Where are the political scientists? For the

most part, they’re writing papers with titles such as “Enhancing the Validity and Cross-Cultural Comparability of Measurement in Survey Research.” Or “Bargaining in Legislatures Over Particularistic and Collective Goods.” In other words, they’re far from the real world of politics.

Modern political science is heavy on exotic statistical analysis and narrow specialization, short on practical insights into democratic governance. These are tendencies that Woodrow Wilson squared off against in 1903 when he founded the American Political Science Association, before he went on to become governor of New Jersey and president of the United States, and which others in the discipline continue to resist, with little success.

Wilson was wary of theory that was not grounded in experience, and believed that “a purely academic orientation, with its embrace of logic and reason, was inadequate as an approach” to the study of the political world, where passions and other forces reign, write Peter N. Ubertaccio and Brian J. Cook, political scientists at Stonehill College and Clark University, located, respectively, in Easton and Worcester, Massachusetts. “Shakespearean range and vision” are needed to understand politics, along with street-level experience of politics, Wilson declared. Modern government requires better leadership, and it should be the mission of political science to develop statesmen and help democracy solve its problems.

Yet political scientists were moving away from Wilson’s principles

almost as soon as he enunciated them. In part, this was a response to the centralization of political power in Washington that increased during Wilson’s own presidency and escalated dramatically under President Franklin D. Roosevelt. With one big power center, the fundamental dilemma of political scientists became acute: How could they counsel political leaders while retaining their scholarly detachment and their ability to speak truth to power? So they retreated from the path Wilson favored.

Today, there are now two main branches of political science. A warts-and-all group examines the behavior of public officials and government institutions down to the minutest detail—for example, why do members of Congress vote the way they do?—but has little to say about how their discoveries might guide either political leaders or citizens. Theory-minded political scientists work with the kind of a priori assumptions Wilson detested, busily constructing sophisticated statistical tests of their hypotheses—“with the results rarely contradicting the theory,” the authors remark. Such prescriptions as they offer carry little weight. Both groups have thrown out history, literature, and law as sources of political understanding in favor of the scientific model and methodologies borrowed from economics.

Yet there are dissidents in the discipline’s ranks, most prominently Theodore Lowi of Cornell University, a former president of the American Political Science Association. “Political science is a harder science than the so-called