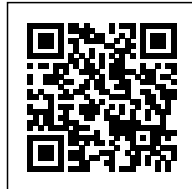


# WHITHER AMERICA?

*Posted on June 1, 2022 by Alexander Riley*



There are three types of books: those one ignores altogether (most of them), those one obtains and keeps forever, and those that are read and discarded once they have outlived their utility. Most topical politics/current affairs books are in the first class. At least 99% of those that escape that category are in the third, necessarily finding their way to the recycling bin within six months to a year. All astute readers of such books know that, however useful they might be in the brief window of their viable lifespans, those that merit rereading even a year after their publication are among the world's rare phenomena.

This past year marked the 20th and 10th anniversaries of two noteworthy exceptions to this general rule by perhaps America's most venerable paleoconservative voice. Even after all these years, Patrick Buchanan's *The [Death of the West](#)* and *[Suicide of a Superpower](#)* can still be profitably consulted as guidebooks for the major political and cultural crises of our times.

When *The Death of the West* hit the shelves in 2001, there were horrified shrieks from those perfectly content with the steady decline of traditional America. Some of the shrieks were emitted by those writing at journals then still considered by some to be sites of serious conservative thought. Take Jonah Goldberg's yelp of a review at *National Review* as exemplary of this type. For this writer, Buchanan's argument was "racist," "white supremacist," "bigoted." There was, of course, no evidence in *The Death of the West* to support these recreant charges. Buchanan was crystal clear that it is not immigration per se nor even immigration from the Third World and from cultures different from ours that poses the existential threat to America. It is a combination of several phenomena. Unprecedented quantities of new immigrants, legal and illegal, from distant cultures is the first. The lack of a rational plan for moderating their numbers over time as we had always previously done is the second. A third is the total abandonment by those who control American institutions to the project of assimilating those immigrants to traditional American cultural values.

Christianity is the major source of those values, Buchanan argued. De-Christianization, to which he devoted an entire chapter in this book and in *Suicide of a Superpower*, is the most devastating weapon in the elite war against American culture. It is being promoted in virtually every possible manner in contemporary America. Shared religion has unarguably been a major feature of American culture from the establishment of the first colonies here. Christianity has been far and away the dominant faith, in pure quantitative terms of number of adherents and in terms of the shaping of broader American values. Goldberg's review does not mention the topic, so absorbed is its author in hyperventilating about race. But many of a still more determinedly multiculturalist worldview not only acknowledge but actively cheer de-Christianization. I see this at the university where I work daily. In the ten years since

the publication of *Suicide*, the percentage of the population identifying as Christian has dropped more than 10 points. There is every reason to believe the trend will continue, thanks in no small part to the active work of our educational institutions and the increasingly secularist contours of public life as shaped by the courts.

Perhaps the feature that most separates *The Death of the West* from almost every other book of its kind is a brilliant chapter summarizing the history of the intellectual influence of post-Marx Marxian theory in the Western world. It is not that there are no other popular books that attempt to critically take on the influence of thinkers such as Georgy Lukacs, Antonio Gramsci, Theodor Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse. Indeed, it is something of a requirement in a certain genre of pop conservative book writing today to include at least a few pages of benighted gesticulation at the amorphous object "cultural Marxism." Such efforts generally are absent any concern whatever for having gotten the writers and ideas they are attacking right. They are shamefully confident in the knowledge that most of their readers would not be able to distinguish Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels from Roxanne Gay and Nikole Hannah-Jones or know why it is important to be able to tell them apart. Buchanan, on the other hand, has evidently read the Marxists and understood them. He has taken them seriously because what they proposed to do was serious business. His criticism of the role their thought has played in our recent revolutions is therefore devastating in the way that the blathering of the pop conservatives can never be.

Buchanan was well ahead of the curve in the right's glacially slow realization of the damage that was being done to the culture by the American cultural revolution of the mid-20th century. Evidence of the late conversions of writers who today write things like Buchanan has been writing for decades is not hard to find. Christopher Caldwell, then at the *Weekly Standard*, trashed *Death of the West* in a pollyannish *New York Times* review. Now, twenty years later, Caldwell has written a book that makes the same dire argument he criticized Buchanan for advancing.

In 2011, *Suicide of a Superpower* turned the civilization-focused lens of the earlier book more narrowly on the American nation. It eloquently described the precipitous decline in the birth rate of the part of the American population that had, up until only a few decades ago, made up no less than 80% of the country's citizens. The cancerous expansion of the collectivist and resentment-fueled diversity cult throughout America's institutions also received focused attention. The assault on freedom as a political value and the simultaneous slavish worship of notions of equality that deny reality and crush difference were expertly discussed. But here, as in *The Death of the West*, Buchanan did not content himself with a litany of the problems. He also proposed solutions. Saving America requires, minimally, several

concrete steps. We must begin to dismantle the American empire abroad. The state must be radically downsized. We will have to embrace economic patriotism and punish corporations that refuse it. A moratorium on immigration will be necessary. Finally, we must stop granting federal courts the authority to define our culture for us.

That last item is of special concern in light of the recent past. When the judicial system endeavors to tell us what marriage is or isn't, or what rights this or that group has by virtue of their membership in the group and what others are required to do in recognition of those rights, judges are transformed into dictators. This should move citizens to become rebels. No one has granted them this power. Their usurpation of the function of a democratic polity should be refused with the haughty disdain of a sovereign people.

Rereading the passage in *Suicide of a Superpower* wherein this topic is discussed now, I recalled the innumerable times during the four years of the Trump presidency when courts overturned his executive actions or otherwise limited their purview. Within just the first two years of his administration, federal courts ruled against Trump's executive actions and challenges to court responses to them more than 60 times. In that same period, courts struck down more than 90% of the administration's efforts to roll back federal regulations and other aspects of the administrative state. Amid that display of quasi-totalitarian power by unelected officials, a colleague commented to me that it was in his view a wonderful and democracy-preserving thing to have the neutral courts to keep political actors in check. I was laughing uncontrollably well before he had even finished the sentence.

In both books, Buchanan hammered hard on the two central causes of the suicidal American drift of the past fifty years. The first of these is the betrayal of the elite classes in America, which have turned firmly against traditional American culture, most profoundly and tellingly with respect to religious faith. The second is the unprecedented, radical demographic transformation of the country, through historically elevated levels of immigration and the lowering of native-born American birth rates as a result of new birth control technologies and the feminist revolution. Very few people were talking about these things in 2001, and no one in the mainstream media was. Yet for a full decade after the publication of *The Death of the West*, Buchanan still appeared frequently on television and wrote in high profile periodicals. It is nearly impossible to believe today, but he was a regular on CNN and MSNBC news panels and programs, including *Morning Joe*, *Hardball with Chris Matthews*, and *The Rachel Maddow Show*, up until less than a decade ago.

It is commonly believed that the publication of *Suicide of a Superpower* is the explanation for Buchanan's excommunication from mainstream public media. Yet the basic ideas of that book are already present in the earlier one. And in 2008 he had published another book, [\*Churchill, Hitler, and the Unnecessary War\*](#), which made yet another provocative argument that outraged all the right people. There were irrational charges of anti-Semitism and even sympathies with Nazism in the wake of that book's emergence, although all the major points Buchanan made regarding Hitler's true ambitions had been recognized by academic historians. Yet he stuck around on television for several more years.

What changed? Regarding Patrick Buchanan, nothing. But the attitude of American cultural elites toward political heterodoxy continued the process of hardening that had then already been underway for decades. And as their power grew, their ability to censor substantive criticism of the origins and agenda of their class grew concomitantly. This is yet another important take-home from a rereading of these books. Virtually everything in them is today impossible to say in a mainstream press book, or in a mainstream journal or newspaper, or on a network or major cable television program, or in any of the most popular social media. The cultural revolution that Buchanan described so accurately has proceeded with just the ferocious rapidity that he predicted.

In addition to the anniversaries of these two fine books, a decade observation of yet another Buchanan milestone is nearly upon us. It was in August 1992, thirty years ago this summer, that he gave his splendid speech on the opening night of the Republican convention. I found it on YouTube and listened to it again, for the first time in many years, while working on this essay. Every point he made in it is still a relevant element of authentic paleoconservative opposition to the progressive culture that rules America currently. The speech will today certainly still cause quivering and shaking in the ranks of those on the right who look to ConInc for inspiration. In it, he gives the lie to their pathetic miming of the left's favorite canards. For he concluded the Houston speech by emotionally evoking, in the wake of the Los Angeles riots of that April and May, the heroic denizens of LA's Koreatown who went to the rooftops of their shops and businesses to defend them. He also cheered the soldiers in the US armed forces of all races and ethnicities who block-by-block took back Los Angeles from those who tried to burn it down with the one power that rioters and revolutionaries cannot resist: "force, rooted in justice, backed by moral courage."

The basics of the political program advocated in *The Death of the West* and *Suicide of a Superpower* are already there in the 1992 speech. A renewed public presence for Christianity. An assertion of the rights of communities to protect themselves from the moral outrages of the American cultural revolution. An

argument for protection for the jobs for blue collar Americans who are seeing their livelihoods sold out by the corporations, the immigration advocates, and the radical environmentalist interests. A powerful critique of radical feminism and its vicious efforts to demolish the most basic principles of human social organization and solidarity. A defense of the heterosexual family as an institution. A rejection of the endless imperial wars to spread democracy to countries that either do not want or cannot sustain it.

There is still evidence of some of what Buchanan pointed to in these books as sources of hope for positive change. Surveys still reveal that nearly  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Americans believe race and ethnicity should not be considered in college admissions. More than 60% of blacks agree. But how you ask the question matters. Pollsters, who are part of the cultural elite class, are mightily motivated to ask it in ways that will get the answers they want. If you ask not whether race should be considered in admission, but rather "Is bringing more blacks and Hispanics on to campus a good thing or a bad thing?" something odd happens. It turns out that Americans are unwilling to call many things "bad" when it comes to race, even if that means seemingly embracing views inconsistent with their true thoughts. There is a new and formidable weapon of the enemies of traditional America. It is the carefully-executed dissimulation of the expert class that purports to tell us what we believe, and that through their mendacity and their power affects what we do believe in the long term. Expect the elite effort to manipulate American opinion in this way to continue and escalate.

On other scores, the situation has grown much more dire since *Suicide of a Superpower*. The freefall of American beliefs about what it takes to be American has been nothing less than stunning. In just the four years from 2016 to 2020, the numbers of those willing to say that being American has at least something to do with speaking English, sharing American customs, being a Christian, and having been born in the US decreased precipitously. Stunning, but also utterly predictable, as this is tightly related to the very demographic change Buchanan was noticing. More people than ever before who do not speak English and who do not share American customs or Christian faith are entering the country. As they take up residence and get consulted by pollsters, we can expect support for traditional beliefs about American identity to continue to plummet.

From time to time I allow myself the flight of fancy to imagine where America would be now if Patrick Buchanan rather than Bill Clinton had been our 42nd President and had served two terms. As a flight of fancy, it allows me to ignore the very real question of whether the country was already too far gone even three decades ago to have had the required perspicacity in a general election to select a second President Buchanan over Slick Willie. (For the record, I believe it certainly was). Such melancholy

thoughts about alternative histories are nearly all that is left to those who recognize how harrowingly accurate Buchanan has been on every major American political question he discussed in these two books. They are dual epitaphs for the great civilization into which Americans over 50 were born and which some of them may live to see finally take its last breath.

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*Alexander Riley is a Senior Fellow at the Alexander Hamilton Institute for the Study of Western Civilization. He [writes at Substack](#).*

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*[Featured image](#): "End of the Season," by William Merritt Chase; painted ca. 1885.*

