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AMERICAN CONSERVATIVE POLITICAL THOUGHT
from
EISENHOWER TO GOLDWATER

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As a political philosophy, conservatism has meant different things at different times throughout history. Yet, an American conservative tradition does exist. In tracing the American conservative political movement from its British beginnings in Edmund Burke to John Adams, father of American conservatism, through Hamilton, Calhoun, Lincoln, and the 19th century economic individualists to the conservatives of the 1960's, there emerges a recognizable body of thought and objectives from which the conservative position today has evolved. This body of thought and objectives has been a lasting force in guiding the improvement of the American civilization. It has shown the American people an orderly, lawful way of managing their affairs in a free society. At its best, conservatism has identified its principles with the goals of America on the philosophical foundations of freedom and justice for all.

The conservative position of the 1960's can be seen from an analysis of the political policies and principles of prominent figures who run for office under the banner of the Republican party, traditionally the party of conservatism. Three major segments of conservative thought emerge from this analysis: moderate conservatism, liberal conservatism, and Goldwaterism.

The moderate conservative of the 1960's is a man of compromise. He is as much aware of the dangers of relying

largely on the past for guidance in finding workable solutions to the complex problems of the second half of the twentieth century as he is of accepting new and original policies to solve these problems. He is strapped to a middle-of-the-road position where the pace of progress is very slow.

The liberal conservative of the 1960's is much more a man of action than his moderate counterpart. He is less skeptical of his abilities and weaknesses, more firm in his conviction that man is capable of finding social solutions to social problems without a loss of traditional values. He tries to chart a course by traditional American conservative principles, but he is ever ready to bring his principles in line with the changing needs and goals and character of the people.

Goldwaterism represents a return to 19th century rugged individualism. As a political philosophy, it ignores the complexities of twentieth century living, and as such, is irrelevant in reaching a conservative consensus for the 1960's.

The liberal conservative position promises to provide a basis by which a modern conservative consensus can be reached. It is rooted in traditional conservatism, yet does not deny innovation. Compromise has been a traditional method of operation in the conservative way of doing things. This is what is needed to draw together liberal conservatives and moderates in creating a modern conservative consensus, one which will continue conservatism's traditional role of safeguarding individual freedoms by pointing out that some

social reforms require a price in the loss of individual liberties which overrules the gains of the reforms.

The nation today is ripe for the moral and ethical values which are conservatism's greatest gift to American politics. However, unless conservatism in the 1960's is rooted in a philosophy which is oriented toward the solution of the major problems of our time, its relevancy will be lost. Conservatism's methods must be moderate, but its emphasis must be on progress. Liberal conservatism is the likely point of departure in reaching a conservative consensus around which an effective majority of the American people can be rallied. It is the new center of conservatism, the new middle ground of American politics which seeks for all men to achieve their individuality while fulfilling their social goals.