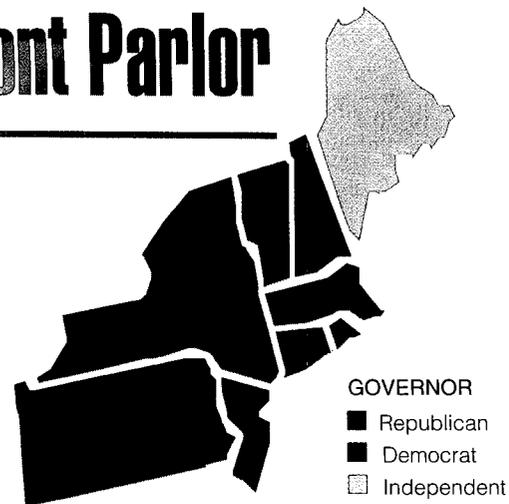


# Conservatives in Liberalism's Front Parlor

IS IT REAL? CAN IT LAST? WHAT DO THEY STAND FOR?



## New Jersey and the Death of Rockefeller Republicanism

Malcolm S. Forbes, Jr.

**C**onservatism—individual opportunity and responsibility, lower taxes and less government—is thriving in the once-hard soil of the Northeast. More than the rest of the country, this region enthusiastically embraced the expanded government and welfare statism that flourished in the 1960s. But the times, they are a-changing.

Just look at New Jersey, a moderate state politically, whose governor was raised as a “Rockefeller” Republican. In her 1993 gubernatorial campaign, Christine Whitman promised the most sweeping income-tax cuts of any state chief executive up to that time. The incumbent governor had doubled the state income tax and raised a slew of other levies as well. New Jersey went from economic leader to laggard. After routinely outperforming the national economy between 1950 and 1990, New Jersey was suddenly doing worse than neighboring states such as Pennsylvania and New York, themselves no great shakes economically. Whitman’s tax-cut pledge was greeted with skepticism from voters who had three times been jilted on the tax question: the sitting governor had originally promised no tax increases; Clinton had abandoned his middle-class tax cut and boosted federal exactions instead; and George Bush had made the words “read my lips” synonymous with tax betrayal.

Despite harsh criticism and ridicule from Democrats, some Republicans, and

almost the entire media, Whitman refused to back off. And in the end she won a narrow victory. Instead of the ritualistic “things are worse than we thought” scenario after her victory, she quickly reaffirmed her pledge. In her inaugural speech, she brushed aside the usual clichés about new horizons, new days, and new dawns, and asked the state legislature to pass the first part of her tax cut and make it retroactive to January 1. The Republican legislature complied. Her popularity soared and has remained high. Taxes were cut again this January, and if her proposed fiscal 1996 budget is enacted, taxes will be slashed even more dramatically.

The New Jersey economy is reviving. The state is once again out-performing Connecticut, New York, and Pennsylvania. In a few years, as the Whitman reforms are completed, New Jersey will resume its place as one of the premier economic performers of the nation. As the governor impishly noted in her recent state of the state address, one year ago Governor Cuomo was ridiculing her plan; now Cuomo’s evictor, Republican George Pataki, is using her plan as a guide for his own tax-cutting program.

Success breeds success. After consulting with Whitman and her economic advisors during his campaign, George Pataki pledged to cut New York’s income taxes 25 percent, citing New York’s southerly neighbor as proof that such a plan was feasible. Connecticut’s new governor, John Rowland, is going even further. In his campaign, he vowed to phase out Connecticut’s income levy altogether.

The New Jersey tax-cut model is exerting influence in quarters well beyond the

Northeast. After boosting taxes sharply during his first term, California Governor Pete Wilson is now proposing to reduce the state’s onerous income taxes.

Carrying through on these promises will be terribly important. The next steps will demonstrate that the proposals are more than campaign gimmicks, and that their sponsors are more than cynical flashes in the pan. It takes a determined leader to curb government and cut taxes. But strong principled executives can succeed—even in the liberal Northeast.

Governor Whitman is about to launch another round of headline-making tax reductions, and to keep the budget in balance she proposes to significantly reduce the number of state workers and squeeze popular state-aid programs for municipalities. What is important is the rhetoric she is employing to justify the changes. We are not, Governor Whitman and comrades are careful to explain, cutting government for the sake of cutting government. We are doing so in order to improve economic opportunities and individual freedoms for our citizens. Money saved in spending cuts doesn’t disappear; it goes back to taxpayers.

Our congressional leaders should do the same thing: emphasize that government-shrinking reforms are meant to enhance individual opportunity and help people realize the American Dream. That way conservatives in the Northeast and across the country can retake the high moral ground long occupied by statist liberals.

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## Cuomo Democrats Lose Their Blue Collars

George J. Marlin

While campaigning as a New York City mayoral candidate in the fall of 1993, I received an invitation from Mario Cuomo to come to his World Trade Center office to discuss the issues of the mayoral race. After chatting about our admiration for Holbein's portrait of St. Thomas More and gossiping about mutual friends in our home county of Queens, the governor and I sparred for over an hour on a host of fiscal, economic, and social issues confronting the City of New York.

I enjoyed this session of two fast-talking New Yorkers scoring debating points. We realized we had much in common. We were both products of the streets of the city; he is the son of a grocer and I am the son of a cop. And in our youths we were both instilled with a concept long championed by our church: subsidiarity—the belief that human life unfolds best when decisions are made at the local level, closest to concrete reality.

After touring New York City in the 1920s, British journalist G. K. Chesterton observed:

New York is a cosmopolitan city, but it is not a city of cosmopolitans. Most of the masses in New York have a nation whether or no it be the nation to which New York belongs.... They are exiles or they are citizens; there is no moment when they are cosmopolitans. But very often the exiles bring with them not only rooted traditions, but rooted truths.

As Mario Cuomo's career advanced, he carried those rooted traditions and truths taught in his parish and ethnic neighborhood. In his published diaries he described those beliefs as a "family kind of politics." Cuomo inquired, "for what indeed does our society need more than a respect for family, the sense of obligation to senior citizens, a shameless bold patriotism, a respect of work; a sense of law and order; a recognition of the overriding importance of education;

a gratitude for God's nature and a feeling of responsibility for it?"

Like so many of us who grew up in New York's old blue-collar neighborhoods of South Jamaica, Greenpoint, Bay Ridge, Williamsburg, and Ridgewood, Cuomo was parochial and protective of a turf that was often nothing more than a piece of cement. He defended the prevailing attitude: "This is my neighborhood, my block, my corner, my stoop." It had nothing to do with class warfare or racism; most of the people around the corner were classmates and of the same ethnic origin. We didn't hate these people, we just safeguarded what little we had—a piece of cement sidewalk.

In his races for lieutenant governor, mayor, and in his early campaigns for governor, Cuomo easily carried the ethnic precincts because these blue-collar/middle-class voters viewed him as "one of us." In 1994, however, these same voters turned against him, not because they were tired of incumbents but because Cuomo had lost touch with the truths of the old neighborhood.

In mid-December, delivering his last major speech as governor, Cuomo said that the middle class, which turned against the rich during the Great Depression, had now turned against the poor. And that's where he and so many Democratic Party ideologues have gone wrong. The folks in the neighborhoods aren't waging class warfare against the poor; they're revolting against a big government that, under the guise of "fairness," threatens to deprive them of their hard-won gains.

"Before the 1960s," political analyst Peter Brown has written, "fairness had meant that a person received what his sweat earned him. The family that emerged from Ellis Island to work six-day, 12-hour shifts in sweat shops deserved to move up. It had played by the rules. Just so, the less industrious did not deserve to do so well." Today those who still live by that code are frightened by a fairness that means not equality of opportunity, but equality of results. This fear has been labeled racist, but as Senator Joe Lieberman of Connecticut (a Democrat who was elected by going against the ideological tide of his party) points out,

"The average white voter is not racist. The average white voter is protective of what he has.... There is a sense of injustice here that is beautiful. It's more [the middle-class saying], 'You [Democrats] are making a fool of me. What am I, a chump? I'm breaking my back, my wife is too. And you're going to give my money to these people who don't even work and are pulling the wool over your eyes. What are you, fools?'"

Mario Cuomo lost the allegiance of these voters because he discarded the neighborhood vision of subsidiarity. And his successors in the Democratic Party will continue to lose until they stop deluding themselves and realize that class warfare and punishing the middle-class for success no longer works in American politics.

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## Voters Throw a Party—Out

John H. Fund

The last time Connecticut, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey all had Republican governors was in 1954. *I Love Lucy* was the most popular television show, and Tom Dewey was in Albany finishing up his third term. A lot has changed since that heyday of GOP rule in the Northeast, not least the kind of Republicans who've been elected in the region. Today's Republican governors are proud to call themselves the intellectual heirs of Robert Taft, Barry Goldwater, and Ronald Reagan. That was not always the case with Northeastern Republicans.

Forty years ago, Nelson Rockefeller hadn't been elected as New York's chief executive, but Republicans in the region were already "Rockefeller Republicans": ardent internationalists in foreign policy, liberal on civil rights, and aggressively in favor of new social programs and bigger government. Republican Clifford Case was elected U.S. Senator from New Jersey in 1954, and until his primary defeat by Jeff Bell a quarter-century later he voted