

# From Household to Nation

The Middle American Populism of Pat Buchanan

by Samuel Francis



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If there was any major difference between the presidential campaign of Pat Buchanan in 1995 and his first run at the Republican nomination in 1992, it was the relative calm with which his enemies greeted the announcement of his second candidacy and his rapid move last year to the forefront of the Republican field. Rabbi Avi Weiss and his goon platoons still found time and someone else's money to dog Buchanan's steps from New Hampshire to California, and occasionally some other hired thug, usually a failed neoconservative politician, would emerge from the political graveyard to moan about Buchanan's "fascism," his "nativism," or his "racism." But in general, even Buchanan's most left-wing critics found the man himself likable and many of his ideas compelling. Tom Carson of the *Village Voice* traveled with the Buchanan Brigades in Iowa last spring, and despite the agony of enduring a couple of weeks slumming in the Heartland, he could not help but be drawn to the popular insurgency the candidate was mounting. "I've been waiting my whole life for someone running for president to talk about the Fortune 500 as the enemy," Mr. Carson told Buchanan, "and when I finally get my wish, it turns out to be you."

Of course, there was criticism. In the early stages, its main thrust—from conservatives—was that Buchanan could not possibly win the nomination, let alone the election, and that his image as a fringe candidate, the notorious organizational weaknesses persisting from the 1992 campaign, and the lack of

adequate money this time would stop him from becoming any more than a divisive vote-taker from real winners like Phil Gramm. By the end of the year, the Texas Republican had largely faded from the discussion, though his bottomless pit of contributions kept him in the race. The more recent polls show Buchanan leading or matching Gramm in key early states like New Hampshire and Iowa, and by last summer Pat's fund-raising was outstripping that of the Texan's opulent money machine. It was beginning to look as though the boys who put their dollar on Mr. Gramm had backed the wrong pony.

But despite Buchanan's emergence as a major candidate, most serious observers believed he could not win the nomination, let alone the election, and that belief itself, widespread among conservatives preoccupied with getting rid of Bill Clinton, threatened to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. For those on the right who want only to oust the incumbent resident of the White House or impress their friends with invitations to the court soirees of the next Republican successor to the presidential purple, winning the election is all that matters, and Buchanan's supposed unelectability was enough to make them lose interest. But the courtiers and professional partisans miss the larger victory the Buchanan campaign is on the eve of winning. If Buchanan loses the nomination, it will be because his time has not yet come, but the social and political forces on which both his campaigns have been based will not disappear, and even if he does lose, he will have won a place in history as an architect of the victory those forces will eventually build.

The importance of the Buchanan campaign lies not in its capacity to win the nomination or the national election but in its

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