



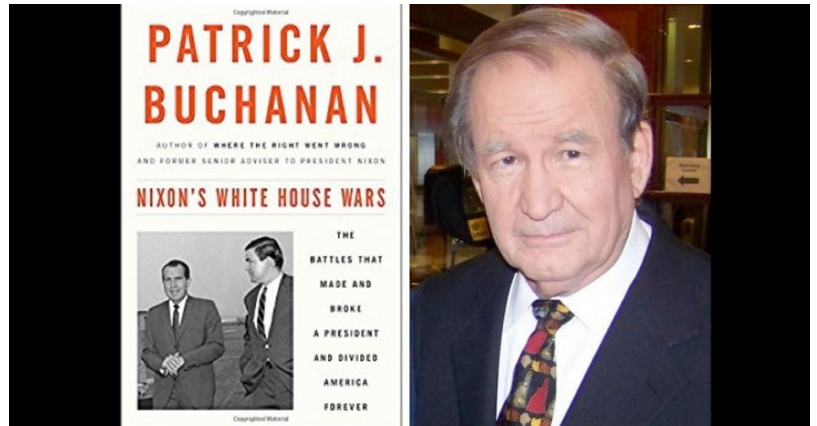
Written by [Steve Byas](#) on July 10, 2017

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Nixon's Populist Path

Nixon's White House Wars: The Battles That Made and Broke a President and Divided America Forever, by Patrick J. Buchanan, New York: Crown Forum, 2017, 436 pages, hardcover.

"The conservatives get the rhetoric, and we get the action," Senator Hugh Scott, the Republican minority leader, said in 1969. The liberal Republican was pleased that the presidential administration of Richard Nixon was giving the "action" to the liberals, despite the staunch conservative rhetoric emanating from the White House.



That "rhetoric" was mostly the work of Nixon's conservative senior advisor Pat Buchanan, who had been with Nixon since 1965, when the former vice president had begun his amazing political comeback (those years have been expertly documented in Buchanan's previous book *The Greatest Comeback*). In this delicious read, Buchanan reveals a different perspective on the Nixon presidency than we have heard before, from a man who was there. The major challenge with reviewing Buchanan's well-crafted book is that it contains so much meat that I can only feed the reader a small portion of it.

It was Pat Buchanan who created many of the words so strongly associated with Nixon's presidential years, such as the New Federalism, the Southern Strategy, the Silent Majority, and Strict Constructionist. Additionally, Buchanan's speeches written for Vice President Spiro Agnew, and delivered almost verbatim (such as calling the liberal press corps an "effete corps of impudent snobs"), made Agnew the odds-on favorite for the 1976 nomination, until his resignation in 1973 after it was revealed that he had taken bribes while governor of Maryland.

Buchanan retains an affection for Nixon, but he makes it clear that Nixon was "no Goldwater, no small-government, anti-New Deal libertarian conservative." Buchanan notes that Nixon often referred to conservatives as "they." When someone complained to Nixon aide John Ehrlichman about Nixon's support of the Family Assistance Plan as a "welfare program" that was "antithetical to Nixon's basic philosophy," Ehrlichman bluntly replied, "Don't you realize the President doesn't have a philosophy?"

Buchanan wrote that Nixon was often annoyed by the "constant right-wing bitching." But Nixon greatly respected that "right wing." Buchanan explained that Nixon believed it was the "Birchers and backers of Joe Shell in the California gubernatorial primary of 1962 [that] had wounded Nixon by denouncing him as an 'insider,' a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, setting him up for the kill by Pat Brown." Despite this, Nixon's "all out" effort for Barry Goldwater in 1964, when much of the Republican "establishment" abandoned him, had created a vast reservoir of good will among conservatives when Nixon made his amazing political comeback in 1968.

Photo of Pat Buchanan by [Bbsrock](#)

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Many Big Government programs — such as the Environmental Protection Agency — that still bedevil us today were created during Nixon’s presidency, with his blessing. (The EPA, in fact, was created by one of Nixon’s executive orders.) Yet the liberal establishment “disparaged and despised him for reasons I could not comprehend, given his centrist policies and even liberal policies,” Buchanan wrote.

The Left did not like Nixon’s conservative rhetoric, especially involving the federal courts. Nixon said, “I consider my four appointments to the Supreme Court to have been among the most constructive and far-reaching actions of my Presidency,” a statement with which Buchanan strongly differs — except for the appointment of William H. Rehnquist. “Of the seven votes for [*Roe v. Wade*], three — [Harry] Blackmun, [Warren] Burger, and Lewis Powell — were Nixon justices.” In fact, Buchanan has problems with the majority of the nominees of the past few Republican presidents.

“Since 1968, Republican presidents have had twelve Supreme Court nominees confirmed.... Democratic presidents have had four nominees confirmed,” Buchanan wrote. “All four nominees of Democratic presidents in the last fifty years proved to be reliably liberal. Three nominees of the Republican presidents — Blackmun, Stevens, and Souter — joined the liberal bloc, and two, Sandra Day O’Connor and Anthony Kennedy, became swing votes who blocked the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*.”

All in all, as Buchanan notes, Republican appointees had a dismal record, which includes *Lawrence v. Texas* (which started the ball rolling toward the national “legalization” of same-sex “marriage”). Yet a major part of the reason for the rejection of the Democrats in 1968 had been the infamously liberal “Warren Court,” led by then-Chief Justice Earl Warren. Buchanan recalled that while he was an editorialist for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* in the early 1960s, “there were so many billboards in Alton, Illinois, Phyllis Schlafly’s hometown, calling for his removal that when kids in sixth grade were asked on their final exams to name the chief justice, half the class gave Earl Warren’s first name as Impeach.”

But that same Supreme Court’s decision to give its backing to abortion on demand remade American politics, Buchanan believes. “*Roe* had ignited a backlash that caused traditionalist Catholics to sever ties to a Democratic Party that had begun to embrace feminism and abortion on demand. It caused evangelical Christian churches to become politically active. A Moral Majority that united pro-life Catholics, Christians, and traditionalists was formed.” The 22 percent of the Catholic vote Nixon had received in 1960 “soared to 55 percent against [George] McGovern.”

When Nixon took a majority of the Catholic vote against McGovern in 1972, on his way to a 49-state landslide and a popular vote margin of 18 million votes, some in the president’s political camp had almost messed it up, in Buchanan’s view, by trying to make the campaign about “isolationism,” tagging McGovern as an “isolationist” — the smear term of the globalist establishment against non-interventionists, despite the proud history of non-interventionism going back to George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson.

Buchanan told Nixon’s aide, Bob Haldeman, that such a strategy was a political loser: “I have a father who is a stronger Nixon supporter than Rose Woods, and he loves [Charles] Lindbergh, thinks Wilson was a posturing internationalist ass, and we had no business being in World War I or the League of Nations or the United Nations.”

In addition to the lurch to the Left, the Democratic Party had nominated a runningmate for McGovern, Senator Thomas Eagleton of Missouri, who was soon revealed to have been hospitalized, on multiple



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occasions, for mental problems — even having undergone electric shock treatments. McGovern initially said he supported Eagleton “one thousand percent,” but soon capitulated, and dropped him from the ticket. (As an historical footnote, Eagleton is the last pro-life Democrat to occupy either spot on the national ticket of the Democratic Party.)

Eagleton had known Buchanan from his time in Missouri, and a few weeks later, Buchanan received a call from him. He wanted to make sure that President Nixon saw a letter that his son had written in response to a note from Nixon. “President Nixon had written a private note to lift the boy’s spirits when his dad was going through his special hell.”

Buchanan notes that despite the tough image of Nixon, “it was not uncommon for President Nixon to write personal notes or invite into the Oval Office for private meetings political foes who were enduring personal torments, like the ones he himself had often endured in his career.”

Throughout the book, Buchanan is not shy in recalling multiple instances in which he disagreed with the more liberal members of the Nixon administration, even Nixon himself, but the closest he came to resigning in disgust came with the trip to Communist China in 1972. Noting the toasting that took place in Peking of a communist regime “with more blood on its hands than Stalin’s,” Buchanan said the thought crossed his mind, “Are we any different than that American party that traveled to Yalta, where FDR and Churchill ... capitulated to Stalin’s demands for all of Eastern Europe?”

After reading the communique negotiated by Henry Kissinger, in which America had “cut loose a loyal ally [Chiang Kai-shek’s non-communist China on Taiwan],” Buchanan said, “I was angry, disgusted, and ashamed.” He had to wonder: “Why should our sons fight and die resisting Asian communists in Vietnam when Nixon and Kissinger are toasting the most malodorous and murderous of Asian communists in Peking?”

In the end, Buchanan opted not to resign, concluding he could do more good for the cause remaining in the administration.

The book is especially enlightening in his coverage of two of the most contentious aspects of the Nixon White House years: Vietnam and Watergate.

Buchanan is particularly scathing in his denunciations of the Democrats who had favored the war when their presidents were in the White House, but suddenly became anti-war when a Republican, Nixon, occupied the post as commander-in-chief: “These same ‘thoughtful men’ had backed JFK and LBJ as they led us into Vietnam. But when Nixon inherited the war and became the nation’s leader, they had moved over into the peace camp to join their children and began to call Vietnam ‘Nixon’s war.’”

After reading this book, the reader will know a whole lot more about the Nixon years, and I highly recommend it.

Photo of Pat Buchanan by [Bbsrock](#)



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