

Backgrounder:

Patrick Joseph Buchanan

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PATRICK JOSEPH BUCHANAN: A BACKGROUNDER is a publication of the Nations Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee. It is part of National Affairs' focus on bigotry in the media and in the political process.

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PATRICK JOSEPH BUCHANAN

Paraphrasing Vince Lombardi's comment about football, Patrick Buchanan wrote that politics "is not a contact sport, it is a collision sport; dancing is a contact sport." Buchanan thrives on collisions, and given his track record, he and the Jewish world are likely to crash again.

Is he an anti-Semite? Certainly he is no David Duke or Louis Farrakhan, and those who know Buchanan profess that he has never used the language of gutter anti-Semites. Yet as will be clear below, he is no friend to the Jews, and has serious problems with "Jewish issues." But no one should call him an "anti-Semite" at this point. The test of anti-Semitism for many of Buchanan's media friends is the use of slurs; and so far Buchanan has only come close. If we use the word "anti-Semite" too loosely we water it down, and confuse the issue.

The most recent Buchanan episode started shortly after Iraq invaded Kuwait in August, 1990. Buchanan said that "only two groups . . . are beating the drums for war in the Middle East . . . the Israeli Defense Ministry and its amen corner in the United States." That occasioned Abe Rosenthal of the *New York Times* to write a column blasting Buchanan, saying, in part, "We are not dealing here with country-club anti-Semitism but with the blood libel that often grows out of it; Jews are not like us but are others, with alien loyalties for which they will sacrifice the lives of Americans." He blasted Buchanan's "venom against Jews," including his "demeaning of the Holocaust, the phony 'evidence' to question a crime of the gas chambers, the smarmy defense of war criminals and the attacks on American prosecutors who dared chase them down, the crack that Congress was 'Israeli occupied' territory, the code words about the 'de-Christianization' of America, the spreading of tensions between Catholic and Jew while Catholics in the Vatican are trying to lessen them."

Rather than apologize for any hurt his comment may have caused, Buchanan fired back in his next column, quoting the "late Arthur Koestler, a Jew, [who] wrote that 'one should either write ruthlessly what one believes to be the truth, or shut up.'" He explained that between 1967 and 1985 he had been "an uncritical apologist for Israel, a Begin man all the way." What changed him, he said, was "The manipulation of the

traitor Jonathan Pollard to systematically loot the secrets of the most generous friend Israel would ever have. The gratuitous brutality against Palestinian old men, women, teen-agers and children. The Good Friday land grab at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The shipment of cluster bombs to the Stalinist Mengistu regime in Ethiopia. The caustic, cutting cracks about my church and popes from both Israel and its amen corner in the United States."

In the same edition of the *New York Post* that printed Buchanan's reply column, the *Post's* editorial was devoted to one issue: Pat Buchanan. "Lest there be any doubt that Buchanan's reference to an 'amen corner' was a reference to Jews," the editorial said, "one need only look at his August 25 syndicated column. He speaks in that article of 'Israelis . . . goading us to attack' and lists American commentators who argue the pro-attack position. The names he selects are revealing: Abe Rosenthal, Richard Perle, Charles Krauthammer, Henry Kissinger. A series of identifiably Jewish names. . . . [I]n another column, [Buchanan argues] that war, if it comes, will see American kids 'humping up that bloody road to Baghdad' -- 'kids with names like McAlister, Murphy, Gonzales and Leroy Brown.' . . . The names in this list are chosen just as carefully, we believe, as the names on his list of warmongers. . . ."

As Norman Podhoretz wrote in the November, 1990 issue of *Commentary*: "Buchanan took the formidable polemical artillery he had always aimed at the Left and turned it on his erstwhile political allies. . . . He identified this group as the 'neo-conservatives,' a term he was clearly using as a euphemism for 'Jews.' . . . [Facts could not] put a dent in the impenetrable armor of Buchanan's now openly virulent hostility to Israel and his thus far more covert animus against Jews in general."

The *Post* editorial chided Buchanan for his other transgressions -- support for war criminals, and diminution of the Holocaust, and concluded that "when it comes to Jews as a group -- not Israel, not U.S.-Israeli relations, not individual Jews -- Buchanan betrays an all-too-familiar hostility."

WHO IS PAT BUCHANAN?

Patrick Joseph Buchanan is a 52 year old polemicist who enjoys a great deal of media exposure. He was a special assistant to President Richard Nixon, and the director of communications at the beginning of President Ronald Reagan's second term. Today he writes a syndicated column, and appears regularly on CNN and on the McLaughlin Group.

He was born November 2, 1938 in Washington D.C., the third of nine children. His father, William Baldwin Buchanan, was a certified public accountant who was an extreme conservative. "My father's sympathies had been with the isolationists, with Charles Lindbergh and the American First Committee," Buchanan wrote. Others among the "conservatives" whom his father admired were General Francisco Franco and Senator Joseph McCarthy.

Buchanan writes that "my views, my values, my beliefs were shaped by being a member of an Irish-Catholic conservative family of nine children . . . The church taught, and I think, correctly, that the great ideological enemy of Christianity and Catholicism was communism."

Jacob Weisberg, in the October 22, 1990 edition of *New Republic* writes: "Buchanan's politics has its roots in the 1930s isolationism of Father Charles E. Coughlin and Charles A. Lindbergh. The hallmarks of this tradition are a fierce and unselective anti-communism, an animosity toward Britain, and an eccentric obsession with the menace of 'Jewish internationalism'. . . . What the Buchanans admired about these men was their pugnacity and their loyalty to their causes."

It is worth noting that the most of the men admired in the Buchanan household of Chevy Chase, Maryland were not great friends of the Jewish people. For the Buchanans the messages that reaffirmed Catholicism or targeted communism seemingly blocked out all other messages.

In his autobiography *Right From The Beginning*, Buchanan wrote: "Either men are, or they are not, children of God, with immortal souls, destined for eternity and possessed of God-given rights no government can take away. If they are, communism is rooted in a lie; and every regime built upon that lie is inherently illegitimate. We were taught that [in the old Church]. and we believed that then, and we still do." Anti-communism and protecting the church seem to be two of Buchanan's most driving ideological passions.

He also wrote something telling:

"Once, in the fourth grade -- when I had done well in catechism and religion -- Sister Thomasina asked me to remain after school. Calling me up to her desk, she pulled out a pamphlet from a side drawer.

"Patrick," she said, "do you know who Paul Blanshard is?"

"I had only the vaguest notion of the writings of the premier Catholic-baiter of the era; and told her so.

"Well,' she said, 'Mr. Blanshard is constantly attacking Mother Church; he is a cunning, skillful enemy, and I want you to sit down and read this pamphlet by Mr. Blanshard, and write an answer to it.'

"I carried out my assignment.

"She knew -- and we were taught -- there were enemies of Catholicism out there; and the more intellectual of the sisters were constantly on the lookout for future Defenders of the Faith."

The power of Buchanan's upbringing rings clear in his autobiography, as does his need to attack those who might tarnish any aspect of it. He wrote:

"Among the nastier slanders of the modern era is that in the old Church we children were taught by the nuns and priests that Jews were 'Christ-killers.' Not until I was in politics did I ever even hear the phrase; and the notion that these pious women, whose heads bowed when the name of Christ was mentioned, would preach hatred or deploy so ugly a term is preposterous."

Some writers have called Buchanan a "fascist." The October 15, 1990, *New Republic* calls him, instead, an "anti-anti-fascist." I would add "anti-anti-old Church" and "anti-anti-Buchanan's America." His writings seem to have three central themes: The Church must be defended at all costs, on every issue great or small; communism must be attacked at all costs, on every issue great or small; and Buchanan's idea of what America is must be defended, at all costs, on every issue, great or small. Because communism and communists are the greatest evil, fascism and fascists must be defended to some degree, if only to make them seem less harmful than Marxism. Because the Church must be defended at all costs, all those who criticize the Church must be attacked, not worked with. And because what is best in Buchanan's America

are the values of the "old Church," he shows little sympathy for the agendas of ethnic and religious minorities, or for anyone who would question Buchanan's right to impose his America on the rest of us. America, he says, is a "Christian Nation."

Buchanan writes lovingly of the encouragement his father gave him to learn to fight ("Whenever we were arrested for fighting or came home bloodied, we were not punished . . . so long as we had fought fairly well."). He was suspended from high school for one year for fighting with police officers (he broke his hand in the confrontation). His instinct for "collisions," his drive to be a "defender of the faith," and the anti-Semitic models on which he has based his conservatism combine to produce a man with a severe Jewish problem. As his colleagues suggest, he may have no problem with Jews as individual human beings. But when he sees Jews in any issue, he tends, like Henry Ford and Father Coughlin and Charles Lindbergh, to combine them into a group that stands opposed to what Buchanan believes to be true and right.

NAZI WAR CRIMINALS: THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL INVESTIGATION

Buchanan has written and talked extensively about the Office of Special Investigation (OSI), and its effort to find, denaturalize and deport alleged Nazi war criminals. Because the OSI had to rely in part on documents collected in the archives of the Soviet Union, Buchanan questions the reliability of the evidence used to prosecute these alleged war criminals. Not stated, but necessarily implicit, is his distrust for the U.S. federal courts which must rule on any objection to any piece of evidence before it is admitted for consideration. Buchanan's "evidence" on behalf of the accused Nazis has been discredited, but it seems to bother him not. (According to the August, 1990 *Gentleman's Quarterly*, "Buchanan once proclaimed Demjanjuk's innocence by citing a book about Treblinka that described Ivan the Terrible's death in 1943. Only Buchanan conveniently forgot to mention that the book was a novel and that the author had told a court that he had invented the death.")

"John Demjanjuk may be the victim of an American Dreyfus case," Buchanan wrote. And, on the September 21, 1990 edition of the McLaughlin Group, Buchanan said, "Demjanjuk is not a Nazi. He can't even read. He's a poor, pathetic, old guy, bewildered, no money, no defense, who's going to die. He's going to be hanged. I'm trying to save his life."

Buchanan's compassion toward ex-Nazis, even if he believes what he says, seems one-sided. "Perhaps," he wrote, "the endless search for Nazi war criminals, these endless re-enactments on stage and screen of Hitler's concentration camps are good for the soul, . . . to what end, however, is all this wallowing in the atrocities of a dead regime when there is scarcely a peep of protest over the prison camps, the labor camps, the concentration camps operating now in China, Siberia, Cuba and Vietnam?"

Again, in Buchanan's view, the Nazis must be made a bit cleaner to make the communists dirtier. In addition to defending Demjanjuk, he has also supported alleged war criminals Arthur Rudolph and Karl Linnas.

ON HITLER

Buchanan even finds a few nice things to say about Hitler:

Though Hitler was indeed racist and anti-Semitic to the core, a man who without compunction could commit murder and genocide, he was also an individual of great courage, a soldier's soldier in the Great War, a political organizer of the first rank, a leader steeped in the history of Europe, who possessed oratorical powers that could awe even those who despised him. But Hitler's success was not based on his extraordinary gifts alone. His genius

was an intuitive sense of the mushiness, the character flaws, the weakness masquerading as morality that was in the hearts of the statesmen who stood in his path.

ON THE HOLOCAUST

Buchanan wrote, this year, challenging the claim that 850,000 Jews were gassed at Treblinka:

The problem is: diesel engines do not emit enough carbon monoxide to kill anybody. In 1988, 97 kids, trapped 400 feet underground in a Washington, D.C., tunnel while two locomotives spewed diesel exhaust into the car, emerged unharmed after 45 minutes. Demjanjuk's weapon of mass murder cannot kill.

Buchanan, one takes it, never got hold of a diesel car, parked it in his garage, rolled up the windows, connected a hose from the exhaust pipe to the interior, and experimented before printing his column.

"The problem is," wrote Mark Lasswell in *GQ*, "diesel engines don't need to emit enough carbon monoxide to kill anybody; they emit more than enough nitrogen and carbon dioxide to kill with great efficiency. 'The net effect is the same because of a lack of oxygen. It's a moot point,' says Jack Paskind, manager of the emissions-control technology-research department of the California Air Resources Board."

And, of course, as the *New Republic* points out, "Carbon monoxide emitted by diesel engines is sufficient to asphyxiate people when they are crammed by the hundreds into thirteen-foot chambers. According to the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, suffocation at Treblinka took as much as half an hour; Buchanan's comparison only proves that the children he describes had sufficient oxygen to survive whatever length of time they were trapped in the tunnel. Where did he get the anecdote? 'Someone sent it to me.'" (People were also gassed at Treblinka with Zyklon B.)

Buchanan's flirtation with Holocaust denial is a good example of his straddling the line between mainstream conservatism and the neo-Nazi crowd. He hates communists. He finds some attributes of Hitler respectable. He dislikes the Office of Special Investigation, and sees little purpose chasing down men whose crimes were committed forty years ago. His agenda on these issues is almost the same as the hard core who support David Duke. In fact, in a strange way, Buchanan and Duke are flip sides of each other: David Duke is an old-time National Socialist who truly liked Hitler and says the Holocaust was a "hoax" -- in private. Duke is trying to take his neo-Nazi views into the mainstream by soft-peddling his statements. Buchanan, on the other hand, comes from the "respectable" side, and his strong anti-Communism makes him a darling of the Holocaust-denial types, who quote his columns. (Buchanan wrote of the "so-called 'Holocaust Survivor Syndrome,'" and the "group fantasies of martyrdom and heroics.")

Allen Ryan, Jr., the former head of the OSI, says: "Buchanan is the spokesman for Nazi war criminals in the United States. His campaign on behalf of these people is so infused with distortions and misrepresentations of the facts that it's almost impossible to engage in any sort of response. He simply piles lies upon inaccuracy upon surmise upon personal attack."

Not only has Buchanan implicitly supported those who think the Holocaust is a hoax perpetrated to give Jews undo sympathy, he has also diminished the importance of the Holocaust when he has written on other topics.

For example, on euthanasia: "[I]f no higher law exists, upon what moral ground did we stand to condemn the German doctors whose 'crimes against humanity' consisted only of doing to the feeble-minded exactly what we are seeking to do." (Note the punctuation of "crimes against humanity" in the original.)

Buchanan lambasts people "caught up in remorse over crimes committed in Eastern Europe four decades ago." while today there is communism and abortion.

ISRAEL

As suggested above, Buchanan is no longer a friend of Israel:

That the United States would sit still for anything was brought home to the Israelis, long ago, on the third day of the Six-Day War, when Lyndon Johnson ordered a coverup of an Israeli rocket-and-machine-gun attack on the U.S. intelligence ship *Liberty* off the Sinai, an attack costing the lives of 37 brave American soldiers.

When it suits them, our Israeli allies launch air strike on Tunis, Baghdad or Beirut; they invade Lebanon; they even enlist U.S. traitors, like the Pollards, to loot the secrets of a nation that has manifested toward them an extraordinary indulgence.

Buchanan has called Congress "Israeli occupied territory."

CATHOLIC-JEWISH RELATIONS

Buchanan is an abrasive, again seeing his role as "defender of the faith." Buchanan attacks those Catholic leaders trying to promote good Catholic-Jewish relations. He wrote in 1988 about the Carmelite nuns at Auschwitz:

If U.S. Jewry takes the clucking appeasement of the Catholic cardinalate as indicative of our submission, it is mistaken. When Cardinal O'Connor of New York seeks to soothe the always irate Elie Wiesel by reassuring him, "there are many Catholics who are anti-Semitic . . . it's deep within them," when he declares this 'is not a fight between Catholics and Jews,' he speaks for himself. Be not afraid, Your Eminence; just step aside, there are bishops and priests ready to assume the role of defender of the faith,

BLACKS

According to the *Baltimore Jewish Times*, Buchanan has been "consistently hostile to American blacks, opposing all civil rights laws and spreading J. Edgar Hoover's charges about the loyalty of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He called King 'one of the most divisive men in contemporary history.'"

Not surprisingly, Buchanan blasted the Hate Crimes Statistics Act¹, despite the fact that the law had broad support, including that of police associations around the country. He wrote that "One motive in sifting out, from all the data, crimes against homosexuals, blacks, etc., is to bolster the big lie that the United States is Amerika, i.e., a nation where fascism and white racism are rampant The bill is a fraud . . . it advances a thesis . . . that the great menace to social peace in America comes increasingly from white males."

GAYS

Buchanan has called AIDS the way nature worked "an awful retribution" on homosexuals.

¹ The Hate Crimes Statistic Act, passed in 1990, requires the collection of information about crimes that are motivated by racial, religious, ethnic or homophobic bias.

"Homosexuality is not a civil right," he wrote. "Its rise almost always is accompanied, as in the Weimar Republic, with a decay of society and a collapse of its basic cinder block, the family."

Returning to the German comparison in a different column, he wrote: "Midst the moral crud of the Weimar Republic, the Nazi bullets must have had a certain appeal."

CONCLUSION

Buchanan has had a long career as a polemicist. In the Nixon White House, he wrote the daily news summaries (of the stories on the networks and in the newspapers) upon which Nixon relied. According to Stephen Ambrose, a Nixon biographer, the summaries were written "to goad Nixon, to appeal to Nixon's worst instincts. . . . It's just like watching Buchanan on *Crossfire* today; that very selective, very impressive, very antagonistic, very far-right, tunnel-vision approach"

Buchanan, who was, interestingly, turned down for a job at the *National Review* in 1962, has been an expert in collisions for nearly thirty years. (Lasswell writes in *GQ*: "When Vice-President Spiro Agnew helped turn 'journalism' into a dirty word with his press-bashing speeches, he was usually speaking Buchanan's lines.) He will continue to practice collision as politics. That portends trouble for the Jewish community -- it was Patrick Buchanan who, allegedly, urged President Reagan not to give in to "Jewish pressure" during the Bitburg affair.

Buchanan flirts with the edge between respectability and the right wing fringe. Many of his issues are the same as those championed by the neo-Nazi crowd. In fact, hate literature such as *New American View* frequently quotes him. ("True Conservative spokesman Patrick Buchanan . . . [has noted that] neither the future of Western civilization or [sic] that of American is at stake in the Persian Gulf crisis. He also observes that it was the imperialistic policies of Great Britain that led to the disastrous world wars with the Kaiser and Hitler. And he asks: 'What does Britain have to show today for its folly twice committed?'"

Ed Field's "The Truth At Last," (one of the most vicious anti-black and anti-Semitic rags around) regularly reprints Buchanan's columns, alongside articles promoting David Duke and ads for books like *The Auschwitz Myth* and the *Protocols Of The Elders Of Zion*.

Buchanan's message appeals to what the *New York Post* referred to as "flat-earth types." And, in fact, Buchanan's column ran for a few weeks this year in the *Spotlight*, the paper of the anti-Semitic Liberty Lobby, until, he says, a friend approached him and he had it pulled. Buchanan presumably wants to keep his respectability.

He is bright, articulate, and his views are provocative. They sell newspapers and tv advertising. Unless he does something totally self-destructive, he will remain a major media figure.

Although we can expect Buchanan to write on the issues that draw out his "Jewish problem," his "problem" can manifest itself unexpectedly. He brings Jews in gratuitously. For example, he questioned the *New York Time's* decision to print on page B3 the story of gay activists disrupting St. Patrick's Cathedral. He questioned whether the *Times* would have treated the story more prominently "had a synagogue been so desecrated."

Buchanan is a dogmatic "defender of the faith," and when he next collides with the Jewish community, we should remember this. Unless he says something *Mein Kampf*-ish, we should refrain from calling him an anti-Semite. That will only draw attention to him, and bring him defenders. Rather, I suggest we approach other people whom Buchanan's adherents see as equally qualified for the title of "defender of the faith" to write

a rebuttal. When it comes to Catholic-Jewish tensions, why not a leader in the church? And when it is an anti-communism-based issue (OSI, for example), why not a non-Jewish conservative?

When it is to our advantage to do so, we too can rebut, pointing out the coalitional work that AJC does, why it is so important and, implicitly, why that is so different from Buchanan's message: We work to avoid collisions.

It is also important to watch the growing split in the conservative movement between the "neo-cons" and the "isolationists" in the wake of American troops going to Saudi Arabia. Buchanan is emerging as a leader of the latter, who are inheritors of the old "America First" ideology. Especially if oil prices continue to go up, and the situation in the Middle East either deteriorates or becomes a stalemate, Buchanan's views may become more popular.

As if the news is not bad enough, he has presidential aspirations. He tried a candidacy in 1988, and pulled out only because he knew he couldn't win and thought he would hurt the conservative movement. He wrote how a friend advised "you'll never make it; you'll go down to defeat and probably take your friends Jack Kemp and Pat Robertson right along with you." Buchanan continued: "I hadn't joined up with Richard Nixon twenty-one years ago to advance the conservative cause, only to become the instrument of its permanent injury in my middle age."

If there is no other more electable articulate spokesperson for the right-wing "American Firsters" in 1992, Buchanan may run. In thinking ahead to what that will mean for the Jewish community, we should remember Buchanan's slogan for his ill-fated 1988 campaign, which he used as the first line in his autobiography: "Let the bloodbath begin!"