Creating Conservatism: Postwar Words that Made an American Movement

Michael J. Lee
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Books a movement make. Consider the state of conservatism in the United States following the Second World War. In the words of Lionel Trilling in 1950: “Liberalism is not only the dominant but even the sole intellectual tradition.” Other prominent commentators of the time dismissed conservatism as the province of cranks and fanatics, rabid anticommunists, and subscribers to the belief that religion deserves an important role in the political world.

But in the twenty or so years after 1945, adrift conservatives came together around a handful of books by Friedrich Hayek, Barry Goldwater, Richard Weaver, William F. Buckley, and the ex-communist spy Whittaker Chambers, amongst others. Foremost, the writers offered eloquent debate points for anyone leaning right to defend conservative political positions.

In Creating Conservatism, Michael Lee documents the decisive arguments and battles of the day, including how the books were wielded in the culture wars.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Winter 2015)

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