

NATIONAL REVIEW INSTITUTE

BURKE TO BUCKLEY PROGRAM

National Review Institute (NRI) was founded by William F. Buckley Jr. in 1991, 36 years after he founded *National Review* magazine. The Institute is a non-profit, 501(c)(3), journalistic think tank that preserves and promotes WFB's legacy and advances the principles of a free society through educational and outreach programs. Each year, NRI selects impressive mid-career professionals in key metropolitan areas—including Chicago, Dallas, Miami, New York City, and Philadelphia—to participate in its Burke to Buckley Program. In each city, 20 to 25 participants attend eight dinner seminars on the foundations of conservative thought. Participants complete 25- to 30-page reading assignments from foundational texts—from Burke to Buckley—and then discuss the reading with one of the conservative movement's leading thinkers.

SESSION

I

“WILLIAM F. BUCKLEY JR. & AMERICAN CONSERVATISM”

For almost sixty years, William F. Buckley Jr. was the voice of a conservatism that managed to be both sober and combative, committed to permanent verities, and dismissive of a corrupt liberal orthodoxy. He brought style and intellectual penetration to conservatism as it emerged as a coherent movement after World War II. *National Review*, founded by Buckley and a cohort of friends in 1955, was—and remains—the flagship journal of a thoughtful American conservatism. This first session is dedicated to the thought and journalism of WFB and his role in shaping modern American conservatism.

READINGS: Lee Edwards' *What is Conservatism?* and six WFB columns from the anthology *Athwart History*.

SESSION

II

“BURKE, PRUDENCE & THE SPIRIT OF CONSERVATISM”

The great eighteenth-century Anglo-Irish statesman and political philosopher Edmund Burke was in important respects the father of modern conservatism. A champion of the American cause and a panegyrist to English liberty, he saw the great evils at work in the French Revolution and in modern ideology more generally. An evocative writer and rhetorician, he defended reform, not revolution, and what can be called a “politics of prudence.” He was the enemy par excellence of abstraction in politics, of an appeal to abstract ideas that ignores circumstances, the wisdom of the ages, and settled tradition.

READINGS: Selections from Yuval Levin's *The Great Debate* and Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France*.

SESSION

III

“THE FOUNDERS’ CONSTITUTION”

The United States is that rare country whose nationhood is coextensive with her constitutional arrangements. The “philosophy” of the American Constitution is laid out with remarkable learning, penetration, and insight in the *Federalist Papers* (1787–1788), written by Madison, Hamilton, and Jay. Any thoughtful American conservatism will aim to “conserve” the constitutional heritage bequeathed by our constitutional Founders.

READINGS: *Federalist* #10, 51, and 84; Charles Kesler's Introduction to the Signet Classic edition of *The Federalist Papers*; and Richard Brookhiser's *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington*, his *James Madison*, and his *Alexander Hamilton, American*.

SESSION

IV

“ECONOMIC FREEDOM & POLITICAL FREEDOM”

“Economic arrangements play a dual role in the promotion of a free society. On the one hand, freedom in economic arrangements is itself a component of freedom broadly understood, so economic freedom is an end in itself. In the second place, economic freedom is also an indispensable means toward the achievement of political freedom” (Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*).

READINGS: Selections from Milton Friedman's *Capitalism and Freedom* and *The Essence of Hayek*.



SESSION

V

“CONSERVATISM, LIBERTARIANISM & FUSIONISM”

Contemporary conservatism has been marked by an enduring tension between a “conservative” defense of tradition and moral virtue (and of legitimate government authority) and a “libertarian” emphasis on the dangers of statism and the need for an expansive realm of personal freedom. Where some see an enhancement of human freedom, others see the erosion of the crucial moral and cultural prerequisites of a free society. These readings will also explore efforts to “fuse” traditionalism and libertarianism that were near and dear to *National Review* over the years. One reading deals with the decidedly “unconservative” thinking of Ayn Rand, whose thought remains influential in some libertarian circles.

READINGS: “Uneasy Cousins” by Robert Nisbet, “What Is Libertarianism?” by Murray Rothbard, “The Twisted Tree of Liberty” and “Libertarianism or Libertinism?” by Frank Meyer, “Ayn Rand: Engineer of Souls” by Anthony Daniels, “Why I am Not a Conservative” by Friedrich Hayek, and “Big Sister Is Watching You” by Whittaker Chambers.

SESSION

VI

“CONSERVATISM, DEMOCRACY & FOREIGN POLICY”

Americans have grown war-weary and tired of military engagements abroad. Yet America has vital interests in and an abiding commitment to the survival of Western civilization. The readings in this session explore the necessity for American foreign policy to combine spiritedness and moderation and to avoid the twin pitfalls of democratic crusadism and escape from our responsibilities in the world.

READINGS: Selections from John Fonte’s *Sovereignty or Submission*, and Henry Nau’s *Conservative Internationalism*, and “Principle and Prudence in Foreign Policy” Nathan Tarcov.

SESSION

VII

“MEDIATING STRUCTURES BETWEEN THE STATE & THE INDIVIDUAL”

The best conservative thought opposes radical individualism (which erodes the “mediating structures” between the state and the individual) in the name of those associations and groupings that give shape and form to human liberty. Alexis de Tocqueville famously praised Americans for their prodigious “art of association,” their remarkable capacity to form voluntary associations between the state and the individual. Contemporary conservative thinkers such as Robert Nisbet, Richard John Neuhaus, and Peter Berger have drawn on Tocqueville’s wisdom to show how “mediating structures” can renew community and “empower people,” and in the process act as a check on state power.

READINGS: Selections from *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* by Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus and “On the Use that Americans Make of Association in Civil Life” by Alexis de Tocqueville.

SESSION

VIII

“THE CONSERVATIVE SPIRIT & CIVIC GRATITUDE”

The American Dream is imperiled today by social breakdown and economic stagnation. The first reading for this session emphasizes fidelity to “ancient moorings” and resistance to encroaching statism; the second reminds us of our debts to the past and the need to cultivate a spirit of gratitude and civic obligation. Together, they capture the spirit of conservatism as William F. Buckley Jr. understood it.

READINGS: WFB’s “A Growing Spirit of Resistance” from *Let Us Talk of Many Things* and “The Patrimony and Civic Obligation” from *Gratitude*.

Seminar discussion leaders include an array of local nonprofit, academic, and public-policy leaders as well as respected intellectuals from around the country such as Lee Edwards, William Schambra, Christopher Wolfe, John Yoo, and many others. In addition, NRI fellows and *National Review* writers such as Richard Brookhiser, Charles C. W. Cooke, Kathryn Jean Lopez, and others have led sessions.

For more information about participating in the Burke to Buckley Program, please contact NRI Burke to Buckley Manager Lynn Gibson at lynn@nrinstitute.org or (212) 849-2806. To learn more about NRI’s other programs, visit www.nrinstitute.org.

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