
A MESSAGE TO OUR READERS

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hat could be more anachronistic—in the media culture and political climate of 2006—than the founding of a quarterly journal of ideas? In light of the venomous screeds, discourses on “framing” and political positioning, or any of the other obsessions progressives have adopted of late, who would think that there was an appetite for a meaningful discussion devoted to facts and the basic questions of progressive philosophy? It’s almost as if we were to announce the return of poodle skirts and pet rocks. But we believe that, to regenerate the strength of the progressive movement, big ideas are vitally important. And *Democracy* represents our bet—and the bet of our supporters—that they will matter.

National Review “stands athwart history, yelling Stop,” wrote William F. Buckley in its first issue. The conservative consensus forged, to a large extent, in those pages—along with the neoconservative ideas that came out of the *Public Interest*, *Commentary*, and the *National Interest*—was built on a foundation of serious thinking by serious people grappling with essential questions about how the world works and how it should work. They embarked on this process in order to challenge the dominance of New Deal progressivism. Four decades later, the consensus and the ideas developed in those journals have transformed America.

Yet we launch this endeavor at a time when American politics has grown profoundly unserious. As they have amassed more power for themselves than at any point in nearly a century, conservatives have grown tired in their thinking just as it has become clear that their ideas have failed. But instead of stepping into the breach with a coherent response, many progressives have adopted a compulsive fixation on electoral posturing and crafting the message of the day. Progressives too often have come to eschew bold ambition, preferring to take shelter in the safe harbor of “realism” and “competence.”

The times demand more. We are undergoing a profound transformation in our economy, the nature of global realities and national security threats, and the character of American democracy and society. This transformation has rendered obsolete the comfortable assumptions of the 1930s, the 1960s, the 1980s—and even the 1990s. As progressives have during previous times of similar flux, we must craft a response that moves beyond the mere criticism of the right wing or a rigid adherence to the past. We need a twenty-first-century progressivism that builds on our proud history, is true to our central values, and is relevant to our times.

Progressives have been at our best when we face the future bravely and optimistically, when we are both rigorous in looking at the world as it is and vigorous in introducing creative approaches to remake the world as we believe it should be. *Democracy* is not interested in reiterating the conventional wisdom nor in maintaining unity around outdated orthodoxies. We do not seek to publish policy papers or political plans; we'll leave the budget line items and electoral strategies to others.

Rather, *Democracy* will serve as a place where ideas can be developed and important debates can be spurred. We see our role as upsetting exhausted assumptions and pushing the boundaries of what is accepted by, and expected from, progressives. We believe that many of the old cleavages that divided progressives in the last century have been rendered irrelevant. If you agree, we hope you'll comment on the pieces you read here, offer new ideas and arguments, and enter the debate. Now is the time to fashion a new progressivism for the twenty-first century, and we welcome all who are willing to join in this conversation.

Conservative ideas have dominated our national discourse for most of a generation. No more. The world and this nation are changing too fast to allow for ideologues who will take us backward. But neither do they allow for those timid souls who are satisfied with, or cowed into, protecting an ever-smaller inheritance from being whittled away. Instead, we need to send a rejuvenated progressivism back on the march with a bold ambition to change America and the world for the better. At *Democracy*, we stand athwart history and yell, Forward!

—Kenneth Baer and Andrei Cherny