

VICTORY ★ REPORT

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"Politics is not a battle of the millions."  
~ Howard Phillips

## The legacies of Joe Sobran and Sam Francis

*Two writers whose ideas are vital to our ideals*

by Peter Gemma

Pundit Joe Sobran honed the definition of pithy better than anyone I've read. "The U.S. Constitution poses no serious threat to our form of government" is my favorite, but there are so many others which appeared in his newspaper columns and essays such as his observation that in America, "freedom is coming to mean little more than the right to ask permission."

That line should be in the preamble to the Constitution Party platform.

**"Witty and thoughtful."**

As a disclaimer, Joe Sobran was a good friend and I worked with him professionally. However, my opinions do not take away from the fact that Joe's writing style was often compared to P.G. Wodehouse and G.K. Chesterton. He had admirers such as Pat Buchanan, who called Joe "perhaps the finest columnist of our generation," and Ann Coulter who wrote, "Every once in a while I think I'm a reasonably competent writer. And then I read a Sobran column. He is the master." His former editor at *National Review*, William Buckley, praised him as "unquestionably the wittiest, most trenchant — and yet, lyrical — moralist to have appeared in my lifetime." Even the *New York Times* conceded in its obit that Joe "made his mark with witty, thoughtful essays on moral and social questions. He was an unapologetic paleo-conservative, opposed to military intervention abroad, big government at home, and moral permissiveness everywhere."

Joe Sobran earned such accolades by writing things like, "People who create things nowadays can expect to be prosecuted by highly moralistic people who are incapable of creating anything. There is no way to measure the chilling effect on innovation that results from the threats of taxation, regulation and prosecution against anything that succeeds. We'll never know how many ideas our government has aborted in the name protecting us."

One sign of a brilliant mind is that its owner can be an expert on more than one issue — perhaps on several disparate subjects. Joe's book, "Alias Shakespeare: Solving the Greatest Literary Mystery of All Time," proved him to be one of best-known scholars on Shakespeare's writings. He asserted that the Bard of Avon was actually the poet Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl of Oxford. The topic is a matter of fierce debate in which Joe authoritatively addressed in speeches, columns, and in a forum sponsored by *Harper's* magazine. And here's Joe's take, based on extensive research, on Abraham Lincoln:

A few books have told the dark story of Lincoln's suppression of liberty in the North, including the thousands of arbitrary arrests and hundreds of closings of newspapers; his war on the South required a war on the Bill of Rights in the North as well. All in the name of freedom, of course. Maybe it would have happened anyway but since Lincoln, the Constitution has meant not what it says, but whatever the U.S. Government decides it shall mean.

Finally, I offer this personal observation: in a bar, with his cigar, there was no better storyteller. Joe Sobran could quote Shakespeare (or perhaps it was Edward DeVere) at length and attach it to such punch lines as, "a bribe is an irregular transaction through which the citizen may get his money's worth of service from the government," or "War is just one more big government program." In my view, a good man is defined by wit, courage, and consistency in convictions. In America's culture war, we lost a good man and a fine soldier. He was taken off the front lines in 2010, but leaves us plenty of ammunition.

Another disclaimer: Sam Francis, Ph.D., was a mentor and a very good friend. I was asked by his family to publish a compendium of his essays and speeches, “Shots Fired: Sam Francis on America’s Culture War,” including material never before in print. The book carries a forward by Pat Buchanan in which he wrote: “Like his Confederate forebears, Sam rode to the sound of the guns.”

The philosophical core of Sam Francis, a political street fighter, is not hard to find. In the introduction to his book, “Beautiful Losers,” one of his unique contributions to modern conservative thought. Since World War II, he points out, “No matter how beautiful [conservatism’s] ideas and theories, no matter how compelling a chart of the currents of history’s river it drew, American conservatism was not enough to channel those currents into other courses.” The *New American* reviewed the book stating, “There is a strong tendency among American conservatives to so ideologize their outlook that they often find that they have cut the ground from beneath themselves ... Samuel Francis’ magnificent book is a powerful signal to conservative Americans that a fundamental change in our strategy and tactics is now a matter of life and death.” To me, the sum of their logic brings us the Constitution Party.

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conservative issues.”**

Sam advocated “a thunderous defense of moral and social traditionalism ... a domestic ethic that centers on the family, the neighborhood and local community, the church and the nation as the basic framework of values.” He condemned “immediate gratification, indulgence, and consumption” as the tinderbox of our nation’s culture war. Sam was a heavily armed combatant in this conflict.

Incorporating humor into his deep political commentary endeared him to his readers. Although some conservatives have claimed it as their own, Sam coined this sharp remark first:

There are two parties in Washington, the stupid party and the evil party. Every once in a while the stupid party and the evil party get together and do something that is both stupid and evil. In Washington, that is called bipartisanship.

Finally, Sam wisely observed, “virtually every cause to which conservatives have attached themselves for the past three generations has been lost, and the tide of political and cultural battle is not likely to turn anytime soon.” Since conservatives affixed their political fortunes solely to the Republicans, the casual observer might have considered Sam’s thesis flawed — especially on election night. But, Sam says, “a good student of *vrai politique* understood that a Republican majority in Congress was no more a help to traditional conservative issues than was the ‘moderate’ Democrat Bill Clinton.”

Like Joe Sobran, Sam Francis earned respect in his profession: he received the Distinguished Writing Award for Editorial Writing of the American Society of Newspaper Editors in 1989 and 1990.

Sam Francis passed away in 2005 and his legacy for the Constitution Party can be summed up by this commentary: “The problem today is not to conserve [the status quo], let alone to persuade Americans that it ought to be conserved. The problem today is how to persuade Americans that it ought to be — and can be — changed.”

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