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The power of James Burnham

by *Roger Kimball*

An essay on one of the greatest, and most underrated, political and social commentators of the twentieth century.

The common-place critic believes that truth lies in the middle, between the extremes of right and wrong.

□ William Hazlitt, □ On Common-Place Critics □

Americans have not yet learned the tragic lesson that the most powerful cannot be loved—hated, envied, feared, obeyed, respected, even honored perhaps, but not loved.

□ James Burnham, □ *Containment or Liberation?*

□

Who is James Burnham? How often have I fielded variants of that question while pondering this essay! My informal survey suggests that almost no one under the age of sixty has even heard of him (□ James who?). And for most people over that magic age, Burnham is but an attenuated presence, a half-remembered, even vaguely embarrassing fashion that has failed to return—fins on the back of a model that was discontinued long ago for lack of sales. □ Ah, yes, □ speak the glimmers of remembrance, □ author of *The Managerial Revolution* □ Burnham's first and most famous book, published in 1941 □ ardent Cold Warrior, helped organize the Congress for Cultural Freedom (remember that?), and □ wasn't he a supporter of Joseph McCarthy? □ The answer is No □ more on this below □ but even the hint of an adumbration of a suspicion of □ McCarthyite □ leanings is sufficient to expel one from the ranks of civilized recollection, as Burnham learned to his cost.

The most notable exception to the oblivion surrounding Burnham is among people associated with *National Review*, the conservative fortnightly that Burnham helped start in 1955 when he was fifty. For more than two decades, Burnham enlivened the magazine's pages with his spare but unsparing prose and editorial intelligence. He ranged widely, dilating on everything from foreign policy □ his specialty □ to (early on) the movies. William F. Buckley, Jr., the founding editor and perpetual *genius loci* of NR, called Burnham □ the number one intellectual influence on *National Review* since the day of its founding. □ In a just world, that would be patent enough for continued interest and recognition. But in this world, the combination of Burnham's ferocious intellectual independence and unclubbable heterodoxy long

ago consigned him to the unglamorous limbo that established opinion reserves for those who challenge its pieties too forcefully.

I wish that I could predict that *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World*,^[1] Daniel Kelly's meticulous biography of this sage political gadfly, would redress the injustice. But I suspect that Burnham is too idiosyncratic, too polemical, and too faithful to the dictates of intellectual integrity to enjoy anything like a general renaissance.

I hope I am wrong. I hope that Kelly's book boosts the Burnham stock and prompts publishers to resuscitate his books. (All of Burnham's ten or so books are listed as "Out of Print" or being of "Limited Availability," i.e., more limited than available.) Perhaps Kelly, a foreign service officer turned history professor, will follow his biography with a James Burnham Reader: it would be a public service. I should acknowledge that until reading *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World*, I, too, belonged to that unfortunate multitude which recognized "James Burnham" as but a name. I am deeply grateful to Kelly for dispelling my ignorance. For James Burnham (who died in 1987 after a decade's incapacity) was an astonishing writer. Subtle, passionate, and irritatingly well-read, he commanded a nimble style that was sometimes blunt but unfailingly eloquent. Burnham was above all a *rousing* writer. Immanuel Kant paid homage to David Hume for awakening him from his "dogmatic slumbers" about metaphysical questions. Burnham performed a similar service for the politically complacent. If he occasionally exaggerated the extent or imminence of the evils he described—Burnham was liberally endowed with what Henry James called "the imagination of disaster"—he was fearless in opposing and exposing the totalitarian temptation. Which is to say that he was fearless in opposing and exposing the most corrosive, most addictive, most murderous ideology of our time.

Today, Burnham is best known—to the extent that he is known at all—as an anti-Communist crusader. He was that. But he did not confine his criticism to Communism. On the contrary, he understood that the impulse to totalitarian surrender comes in many guises. The "managerial revolution" that he warned about was a revolution that aimed to repel freedom for the sake of bureaucratic efficiency and control. That revolution has not—not yet—succeeded in the monolithic fashion that Burnham envisioned. He did not, as his subtitle promised, so much tell us "What Is Happening in the World" as what might happen should certain tendencies be left unchecked. But who can gaze upon the ever-increasing routinization of life and regulation of individual liberty in our society without acknowledging the pertinence of Burnham's gloomy analysis?

Over his long career, Burnham changed his mind about many things. He went from being a sort of philosophical aesthete to having a serious infatuation with Trotskyism—a form of Marxism peculiarly seductive to intellectuals—emerging in the 1940s as a prominent spokesman for an astringent species of democratic realism. But throughout the evolution of his opinions Burnham remained unwavering in his commitment to freedom. This commitment had two sides: an infrequently exercised celebratory side, which he reserved for freedom's genuine triumphs, and an oppositional side, which he lavished with cordial hostility on those opinions, policies, sentiments, and personalities that worked to stymie freedom. This dual commitment made Burnham an equal-opportunity scourge. He was almost as hard

on what Tocqueville called democratic despotism—the tendency of democracies to barter freedom for equality—as he was on Communism. Burnham was a connoisseur of insidiousness, of the way benign—or seemingly benign—intentions can be enlisted to promulgate malevolent, illiberal policies. He descried this process as accurately in Western democracies as he did in Communist tyrannies, and he was tireless in his excoriation of what he called “that jellyfish brand of contemporary liberalism” pious, guilt-ridden, do-goody—which uses the curious dogma of “some truth on both sides” as its principal sales line.

Kelly observes that Burnham was “the living embodiment of what would later come to be known as political incorrectness.” Kelly is right. Consider, to take just one example, Burnham’s observation that most African nations were really “half-formed pseudo nations.” Now, as then, that is indisputably the case, but how many accredited intellectuals have the forthrightness to apprise Robert Mugabe of that inconsiderate fact? (Burnham was refreshing on many subjects, not least the United Nations and its disapproving resolutions about U.S. policy: “Why in the world,” he wondered, “should any sensible person give a damn what some spokesman for cannibalistic tribes or slave-holding nomads thinks about nuclear tests?”)

It would be easy to multiply such crisp interventions. Nevertheless, I hesitate to apply the label “politically incorrect” to so insightful and spirited a critic as James Burnham. In many quarters, calling someone “politically incorrect” has become a popular method of discounting his opinions without the inconvenience of allowing them a hearing. It is a clever, if cowardly, rhetorical trick. It allows you to ignore someone by the simple expedient of declaring his arguments to be beyond the pale, “extreme”—that is, unworthy of a place in the forum of public exchange. At bottom, the procedure is a form of political ostracism. The goal is to silence someone not by forbidding him to speak but by denying him an audience. This technique is especially effective with writers, like Burnham, who specialize in telling truths that most people would rather not hear.

James Burnham cut an odd figure in the world of intellectual polemics. He impressed his peers as both unusually pugnacious and curiously disengaged. His background had a lot to do with the mixture. The eldest of three sons, he was born in 1905 to a prosperous Chicago railway executive. His father, Claude, was a classic American success story. At fourteen, he was a poor English immigrant delivering newspapers at the head office of James J. Hill’s Great Northern Line. Two decades later he was a vice-president of the Burlington and Quincy Railroad (among other lines), traveling with his family in a private railway car. In later life, Burnham objected to the description of his father as a “minor railway magnate,” but the epithet does seem to cover the facts.

Even moderate wealth can be a segregating force, and it was one factor that set Burnham apart from many of his fellows. Religion was another. Burnham’s father (who died of pneumonia in his late forties in 1928) was Protestant but his mother, in Kelly’s phrase, was a “rigorous Catholic.” Burnham grew up Roman Catholic in a world still mildly suspicious of Papist influence. Society did not snub the Burnhams, exactly, but neither did it welcome them without reserve. And if Catholicism was grounds for distance, so was culture. The Burnhams were a cultivated family. Art, literature, and argument were staple goods in the Burnham household. Young James was musical, like his mother, and

delighted throughout life in playing the piano. He enjoyed an expensive education. When the Burnhams understood that their local parochial schools discouraged their charges from applying to Ivy League colleges, they decided to send James and his brother David to the Canterbury School, a tony Catholic institution in New Milford, Connecticut. Burnham performed well, brilliantly in English and math, and matriculated at Princeton in 1923. He majored in English, graduated at the top of his class, and went to Balliol to study English and medieval philosophy. Among his teachers were an unknown professor of Old English called J. R. R. Tolkien—I wonder if Burnham ever recorded his opinion of Hobbits? I doubt that it was flattering—and the suave Jesuit philosopher Martin D’Arcy. D’Arcy had a magnetic effect on non-believers such as Evelyn Waugh. But while Burnham gloried in theological argument, D’Arcy did nothing to salvage Burnham’s religious commitments, which he shed without noticeable struggle while at Balliol.

Being an ex-Catholic is not the same thing as being a non-Catholic, and an ex-Catholic with a taste for theological argumentation is a decidedly strange hybrid. Burnham did not return to the Church until the very end of his life, but his Catholic upbringing and intellectual training served to inflect his intelligence in distinctive ways. In 1929, he went to teach philosophy at New York University—a task he discharged for some two decades—and Burnham stood out not only because of his brilliance but also because of his tone, a combination of passion, polish, and polemic. One of Burnham’s students, Joseph Frank, the future biographer of Dostoevsky, remembered him as “very sophisticated, very serious, and very intense.”

Among Burnham’s early colleagues at NYU was the philosopher Philip E. Wheelwright, who had been one of his teachers at Princeton. The two had corresponded for some time about starting a new literary-philosophical magazine, and in January 1930 (one year after the debut of Lincoln Kirstein’s *Hound & Horn*) the first issue of *Symposium: A Critical Review* appeared. The first issue of the quarterly contained essays by John Dewey, Ramon Fernandez (the French literary critic who is probably best known today as a figure in Wallace Stevens’s poem “The Idea of Order at Key West”), and the philosopher Morris R. Cohen. Burnham contributed a long review of I. A. Richards’s *Practical Criticism*. It is a canny essay. Burnham judged Richards’s book to be “the most considerable and the most formidable study of poetry” which has appeared in America during the past year. But he also noted that he could “not help feeling” that Mr. Richards’s *Defense of Poetry* is more “inspired,” more “stirring,” and more *desperate* than any Sidney’s or Shelley’s.

To those of us who, however ardent may be our affection for poetry, do not look to it so entirely for the organization of our lives, Mr. Richards’ defense may seem most damaging to poetry itself; and poetry may appear through his efforts, as in the old twist of Pope’s, faint with

damned praise.

That is pretty good stuff.

Symposium had a run of three years. It was an impressive, if sometimes discursively academic, achievement. Burnham and Wheelwright snagged essays by Lionel Trilling (on D. H. Lawrence), Frederick Dupee (on Edmund Wilson's *Axel's Castle*), Allen Tate (on Emily Dickinson), and Sidney Hook (on Marxism). Ezra Pound wrote for *Symposium*, as did Herbert Read, J. Middleton Murry, Harold Rosenberg, and G. Wilson Knight. The first bit of Ortega y Gasset to appear in English—a portion of *The Dehumanization of Art*—appeared in *Symposium*, as did important essays on Eliot (a major influence on Burnham's thinking at the time), Valéry, and other modernist figures.

In general, the magazine lived up to its announced ambition — not to be the organ of any group or sect or cause, — which may be one reason that Burnham let it fold in 1933. In one of the last issues, Burnham contributed a long review of Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution*. He was deeply impressed — that — remarkable book, — the reading of which was — an exciting experience, — had strengthened his conviction that — a major transition [was] taking place — in the world. As for the lineaments of that transition — perhaps — revolution — would be the apter term — Burnham was more and more coming to see it in Marxist terms.

Whatever the internal logic that propelled Burnham toward Marxism in the 1930s, there were also two important external factors. One was the Depression. Burnham looked around and saw the institutions of American society in crisis. The liberal nostrums seemed useless at best, malevolent at worst. (Burnham loathed the paternalistic, big government policies of Roosevelt, describing the New Deal as — Fascism without shirts.) The second factor was the philosopher Sidney Hook, who was Burnham's entrée into the world of — pragmatic — Marxism, Marxism (or so Hook thought at the time) with a human face.

Burnham was an idiosyncratic Marxist. It's not that he lacked fervency. On the contrary, as Kelly reports, he fell — head-over-heels — for Marxism and — labored mightily for the Trotskyist cause. — Under Hook's guidance, he joined the American Workers Party and petitioned, agitated, organized, and above all wrote to further its aims. He helped edit and contributed innumerable broadsides to publications like *The New Militant*, *Socialist Appeal*, and *The New International*. His efforts did not go unnoticed. Before long he was in regular correspondence with — the Old Man, — with Trotsky himself, and although they never met Burnham became a trusted lieutenant in Trotsky's left-wing anti-Stalinist movement.

At the same time, Burnham always regarded the utopian strain of Marxism with a suspicion bordering on contempt. He had too low — too accurate — an opinion of human nature to be seduced by the promise of perfection. And while he did not repudiate violence, he was always alert to Marxism's — to any bureaucracy's — sweet tooth for totalitarian strategies. Burnham was also a social oddity among the comrades. In 1934, after getting married, he moved from Greenwich Village to Sutton Place, where he entertained in a style appropriate to that address. (For her part, his wife always seemed to regard her husband's adventures with Trotskyist radicalism with bemused distaste.) It is likely, as Kelly notes, that Burnham was — the only Trotskyist to own a tuxedo. — When he summered with his family in Biarritz, he

perused Marx and Engels during the day and played *chemin de fer* at night. His acquisition of a summer house in Kent, Connecticut, completed the contrast.

Of course, Burnham was hardly the only privileged beneficiary of capitalism to embrace Communism while holding fast to his bank account. But his intellectual independence made him an unreliable militant. Burnham happily immersed himself in Aquinas, Dante, and the Renaissance one moment, Marx and bulletins from comrade Trotsky the next. It was a giddy but unstable amalgam. Unwilling, as Kelly puts it, to sacrifice intellect to militancy, Burnham became an increasingly restless recruit. The break came in 1939 when the Soviets, fortified by the Hitler-Stalin Pact, attacked Poland. Trotsky justified the action as a step toward the abolition of private property (and how!), but Burnham saw it for what it was: a brutal land grab by a totalitarian power. He wrote as much and in short order found himself expelled from the Socialist Workers Party and the object of Trotsky's rage: overnight Burnham went from being a favored if sometimes wayward collaborator to being an "educated witch-doctor," "strutting petty-bourgeois pedant," and (*troup de grâce*) an "intellectual snob." Burnham's response was to gather his correspondence with Trotsky and dump it into the incinerator.

By the end of the 1930s, Burnham was a minor but respected public intellectual. In 1938, he began a long association with *Partisan Review*, the premier intellectual organ of the anti-Stalinist Left. But he did not become an intellectual celebrity until 1941, when *The Managerial Revolution: What Is Happening in the World* became a runaway bestseller—much to the surprise of its publisher and the chagrin of the several houses that had turned it down. Written at the moment when Hitler's army seemed poised to overrun Europe, the book is a grim exercise in dystopian prognostication. It is not, I think, one of Burnham's better books. As he himself later admitted, it is full of "remnants of Marxism," above all the depressing aroma of economic determinism and praise for the superiority of central planning. But *The Managerial Revolution* certainly is a bold, an impressive book. Its vision of the rise of an oligarchy of experts and alignment of world powers into three competing super-states made a deep impression on many readers, not least on George Orwell.

Orwell wrote about Burnham at least three times, reviewing *The Managerial Revolution* in 1944 and then in long essays about his work in 1946 and 1947. As Kelly notes, Orwell found *The Managerial Revolution* both "magnetic and repellent." Orwell criticized Burnham for "power worship," for being "fascinated by the spectacle of power" (and hence contenting himself with analyzing rather than condemning Hitler's early military successes). Burnham's essential intellectual failing, Orwell thought, was in "predicting a continuation of the thing that is happening." Nazi power is on the rise, *ergo* it will continue irresistibly; American capitalism is in crisis, *ergo* it will necessarily disintegrate—except that the rude, unkempt force of reality intervenes, transforming those *ergos* into "might have beens."

With hindsight, we can see that Orwell was right that Burnham underestimated "the advantages, military as well as social, enjoyed by a democratic country." His neat, schematic intelligence lulled him into believing that the (apparently) better organized nation was going to be the victorious nation. Burnham undervalued the advantages of the ad hoc, the unexpected reversal, the sudden inspiration. His "besetting sin," Orwell said, is to overstate his case: "He is too fond of apocalyptic visions, too ready

to believe that the muddled processes of history will happen suddenly and logically. (Orwell makes the arresting observation that, during the Second World War, the smarter Brits were often the more pessimistic: "their morale was lower because their imaginations were stronger.") At the same time, Orwell repeatedly underscored Burnham's "intellectual courage" and willingness to deal with "real issues." And it is clear that, whatever his criticisms, Orwell was deeply influenced by *The Managerial Revolution*. In 1984, he adopted wholesale Burnham's idea that the world was reorganizing itself into three rival totalitarian states. *The Managerial Revolution* itself appears in Orwell's novel under the title *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchic Collectivism*.

From 1939 to 1941, the Communists worked mightily to keep America "neutral." Good Trotskyist that he aspired to be, Burnham, too, was opposed to America's entry into the war. His opposition persisted after his break with Trotsky. But it did not survive Pearl Harbor. The Japanese attack on the Pacific fleet precipitated a political metanoia. Overnight, Burnham became a vociferous supporter of all-out war against the Axis powers.

This hardening, or clarifying, is evident in his next book—considered by many critics to be his best—*The Machiavellians: Defenders of Freedom*. Published in 1943, *The Machiavellians* is ostensibly an exposition of, and homage to, some modern followers of Machiavelli. Its larger purpose is to distinguish between the sentimental and the realistic in politics. Dante (in *De Monarchia*), Rousseau, and the architects of the French Revolution are prime examples of the former: they represent "politics as wish": noble, optimistic, ultimately futile (indeed, ultimately "reactionary and vicious" in Burnham's judgment).

Machiavelli and his heirs belong to the latter camp. They saw things as they were and faced up to unpleasant facts about human nature. Because they saw humanity as it was—in its imperfection, its treachery, its unceasing desire for power—they were the true friends of liberty. They did not exchange real freedoms for pleasant-sounding but empty idealities. They understood that all political freedom is imperfect freedom, won through struggle, preserved with difficulty, constantly subject to assault and diminution.

Burnham's political thought is often described as "hard-boiled." *The Machiavellians* is the cauldron in which the promised firmness is achieved. "All societies," he writes, "including societies called democratic, are ruled by a minority." Although the minority, the ruling "élite," naturally seeks to legitimize its power in the eyes of society, in the end "the primary object of every élite, or ruling class, is to maintain its own power and privilege," an aim that is sought largely on "force and fraud." Burnham had high hopes for "an objective science of politics"; at the same time he believed that "logical or rational analysis plays a relatively minor part in political and social change." The true friends of freedom budget heavily for the imperfection of humanity and acknowledge the relative impotence of reason in political affairs. Above all, they understand that the possession of power is inseparable from its intelligent exercise.

In terms of the evolution of Burnham's thought, *The Machiavellians* is perhaps most important not for its exposition of power politics but for its implicit recognition of the value of freedom, "that minimum

of moral dignity which alone can justify the strange accident of man's existence. As the 1940s and the Second World War unfolded, Burnham came more and more to understand that the preservation of freedom was primarily a salvage operation. And as the war hurried to its end, he looked on aghast as the West timidly made concession after concession to the Stalinist tyranny. In 1944, Burnham wrote a paper on postwar Soviet ambitions for the Office of Strategic Services. In 1947, an expanded version of this document appeared as *The Struggle for the World*. It is with this book, I believe, that Burnham comes into his own, for it is here that he first clearly articulates the opposition between the West as a precious heritage to be defended and Communism as a murderous tyranny to be defeated.

Was Burnham's opposition "oversimplified," as many critics charged? Doubtless it was. But it was also right in essentials and was, moreover, a salutary corrective to the naïve—and therefore deluded—advice of good-hearted liberals. Burnham understood with searing clarity two fundamental facts. First, that Communism was an expansionist ideology bent on world domination. And, second, that its triumph would entail the destruction of every liberty, intellectual as well as political, that we in the West held sacred and yet (perilously) took for granted—above all—the absolute value of the single human person. Communism, Burnham saw, was opportunism elevated to a position of absolute power. Unchecked, no human good, not even the commitment to truth, can withstand its assault. Anyone who has leafed through Marxist-inspired writings will remember attacks on "mechanical logic." But this, Burnham notes, is at bottom an attack on "the rules of objective inference and proof, the rules that permit us to test for truth and falsity." The alternative, what is called "dialectical logic," is simply a device that declares "whatever serves the interest of communist power is true."

In terms of foreign policy, the fight against Communism required neither appeasement—appeasement was merely a prelude to capitulation—nor containment—containment was merely appeasement on the installment plan. What was required was a concerted campaign to undermine, to roll back, the Communist juggernaut. In domestic terms, the fight against Communism had to begin with the recognition that Communists used and abused democratic freedoms in order to destroy them. Their aim was the subversion of democracy. Therefore, Burnham argued, their capacity to subvert must itself be subverted. In the end, he thought, this meant that Communism would have to be outlawed. In the near term, it required that serious restraints be placed upon Communist sympathizers and agents. Would this be a violation of their civil rights—the right to free speech, for example? Doubtless it would. But because "Communism, in democratic nations, makes use of free speech in order to abolish free speech," its own right of free speech had to be curtailed. (Burnham stressed later that great care would have to be taken to avoid lumping real Communists together with "socialists, liberals, honest progressives" and other "legitimate" critics and reformers.)

Burnham's point, as pertinent today as when he uttered it, is that free speech cannot be understood in isolation, but only in the context of that which makes it possible, that is, in the context of democratic government and the functioning social community that supports it. "The principles of an organized society," he argued,

cannot be interpreted in such a way as to make organized society impossible. Any individual right or freedom is properly extended only to those who accept the fundamental rules of democracy. How could any society survive which deliberately nursed its own avowed and irreconcilable assassin, and freely exposed its heart to his knife?

The publication of *The Struggle for the World* happened to coincide with President Truman's speech announcing what came to be known as the Truman Doctrine. This coincidence garnered a great deal of publicity—much of it negative—for the book. It also aroused the interest of the fledgling Central Intelligence Agency. Burnham, recommended by George F. Kennan, was invited to head the Political and Psychological Warfare division of the Office of Policy Coordination, a semi-autonomous covert branch of the agency. He took a leave from NYU to do research—the university explained—and moved to Washington.

Perhaps Burnham's greatest contribution while working for the CIA was to help found the Congress for Cultural Freedom. This organization, covertly funded by the CIA, was established to provide a liberal anti-Communist alternative to the Communist-controlled propaganda initiatives for "peace and friendship." The liberal element of the Congress cannot be overemphasized: this was an effort to win over the liberal intelligentsia to the cause of anti-Communism. Accordingly, in 1950 at the Congress's inaugural conference in Berlin, patrons and speakers included Bertrand Russell, John Dewey, Benedetto Croce, Karl Jaspers, Jacques Maritain, Herbert Read, A. J. Ayer, Ignazio Silone, Sidney Hook, and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Burnham was one of the few hard-liners. In his talk, Burnham tackled head on "neutralism"—what we have come to call "moral equivalence"—the "denunciation on equal terms of American and Soviet barbarism." Burnham admitted the demotic nature of American pop culture. But tawdriness was better than tyranny: Coca-Cola might be bad, he said, but "not quite in the same league with [the Soviet labor camp] Kolyma."

Burnham's tenure with the CIA (which, we tend to forget, was a deeply liberal institution) came to an end over the issue of "McCarthyism." Burnham was ambivalent about the Wisconsin Senator: he was not, he explained, a McCarthyite but an "anti-anti-McCarthyite." He understood that anti-McCarthyism was often "a screen and cover for the Communists and a major diversion of anti-Communist efforts." Reflecting on the phenomenon after McCarthy's death, Burnham noted that

McCarthy became the symbol through which the basic strata of citizens expressed their conviction that Communism and Communists cannot be part of our

national community, that they are beyond the boundaries: that, in short, the line must be drawn somewhere. This was really at issue in the whole McCarthy business, not how many card-carrying members were in the State Department □ The issue was philosophical, metaphysical: what kind of community are we? And the Liberals, including the anti-Communist Liberals, were correct in labeling McCarthy the Enemy, and in destroying him. From the Liberal standpoint □ secularist, egalitarian, relativist □ the line is not drawn. Relativism must be Absolute.

Burnham's stand on McCarthy precipitated his deportation to political Siberia. Overnight, this influential public commentator became *persona non grata*. Philip Rahv, his colleague at *Partisan Review*, put it well: □ The Liberals now dominate all the cultural channels in this country. If you break completely with this dominant atmosphere, you're a dead duck. James Burnham had committed suicide. □ The irony is that Burnham, so astute about the workings of power, should have become a casualty of this skirmish: one might have expected him to negotiate the battlefield more cannily. Burnham emerged as an important conservative voice in the late 1950s. But, as William Barrett noted in *The Truants* (1982), Burnham never again occupied □ the place that his own impressive gifts might have brought him if the intellectual climate in America, and particularly in its politics, had been different. □ More's the pity. Because, as Daniel Kelly's book vividly reminds us, James Burnham's insights and attitudes □ above all, perhaps, his allergy to political sentimentality □ are needed now more than ever.

Notes

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1. *James Burnham and the Struggle for the World: A Life*, by Daniel Kelly, foreword by Richard Brookhiser; ISI Books, 443 pages, \$29.95. [Go back to the text.](#)

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