The New Criterion

Features September 2002

# The power of James Burnham

*by Roger Kimball*

*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...

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This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 21 Number 1 , on page 4
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