



# Gang of Five: Leaders at the Center of the Conservative Crusade

*Nina J. Easton*

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## **Gang of Five: Leaders at the Center of the Conservative Crusade** Nina J. Easton

In "Gang of Five," bestselling author Nina J. Easton adds an important element to the history of American politics in the last thirty years. This is the story of the other, less well known segment of the baby-boom generation. These are young conservative activists who arrived on campus in the 1970s in rebellion against everything "sixties" and went on to overturn the political dynamics of the country in the 1980s and 1990s. They've been waging what Newt Gingrich called a "war without blood" for three decades. "Gang of Five" portrays the intertwining careers of five major figures: BILL KRISTOL, the Harvard-educated elitist and publisher of the "Weekly Standard," is the liberal establishment's worst nightmare -- a witty, erudite Rightist who was a leading force behind the demise of the Clinton health care plan, the historic reform of welfare, and the decision of House Republicans to impeach the president. RALPH REED, the hardball politico who helped turn an organization called the College Republicans into a kind of communist cell of the Right, in the 1990s tried to give the Religious Right a softer face as leader of the Christian Coalition but was thwarted by his thirst for power and the narrow fundamentalism of his activist followers. CLINT BOLICK, a leading force in the spread of school choice programs and the anti-affirmative action strategist who sank Lani Guinier's appointment, is the idealist who seeks to convince civil rights leaders that his legal work on behalf of disadvantaged minorities is sincere and that liberal programs hurt the people they are meant to help. GROVER NORQUIST, the "market Leninist" who divides the world into "good" and "evil," is at the hub of Hillary Clinton's "vast right-wing conspiracy" and is the architect of a no-new-taxes pledge signed by all major Republican candidates in the 1990s. DAVID MCINTOSH, the policy wonk who took the movement's war on Washington to Congress as leader of the House Republican freshmen during the Gingrich Revolution, pushed his party toward confrontation with the White House and is now running for governor in Indiana. In contrast to earlier generations of conservatives, these leaders and their allies tasted success, first with Ronald Reagan's twin victories in the 1980s and then, in the 1990s, with the Republican capture of Congress. They play to win and have had a hand in every major insurrection from the Right over the past two decades -- from abortion politics to government shutdowns to political muckracking. No politician can ignore their agenda or escape the new hardball rules they've written for national politics.

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