ALEX VASIC

Revising Ideologies

Perestroika in *Angels in America*

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HE EMERGENCE OF THE AIDS EPIDEMIC IN THE UNITED STATES OF America came at a critical juncture in both American and world history. Originally observed in five homosexual men in 1981 in Los Angeles, the disease would come to the forefront of medical, social, and political consciousness by the end of the decade. Overall, AIDS would end up claiming over one hundred thousand lives during the 1980s (“Current Trends”) while also exposing and instigating further prejudices against the predominantly homosexual-affected population. Politically, the emergence of the disease coincided with an era of peculiar contradictions. On a global scale, the 1980s brought on the ascendancy of Western liberal democracy through the democratization of the Kremlin under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, signaling the end of the Cold War and the ideological resolution of the fundamental conflict between communism and capitalism. However, on a local scale, this was accompanied by an era of social conservatism during the presidency of Ronald Reagan that would, in many ways, expose the cracks in American ideologies and provide a basis for significant criticism.

In his highly acclaimed play, *Angels in America* (and most notably in the second part, entitled *Perestroika*), Tony Kushner develops a unified commentary spanning the breadth of the historical, political, and ideological complications inherent in the AIDS epidemic. The second part of the play picks up where the first leaves off, resolving Prior Walter’s continued prophetic experience with the Angel of America, the rise and fall of Louis’ romance with Joe, and Roy Cohn’s mental and physical degradation and eventual death. Despite the considerable happenings that span the second part of the play, *Perestroika*’s opening scene, Prior’s first encounter with the Angel and the epilogue to the play provide the bulk of perspective necessary for an understanding of Kushner’s commentary on AIDS in America. Ultimately, these scenes reflect the tension inherent between the promise of Western democracy and its failure in the face of the AIDS epidemic; while conservative critics and Reaganites of the era hailed the Cold War’s end as ushering in a golden era of Western ideology (DuBose 9), Kushner points to the AIDS epidemic as evidence for a necessary revision. While much scholarly analysis of *Angels in America* suggests that Kushner ably deconstructs the notion of an era of prosperity under Reagan, this paper will focus on elucidating Kushner’s underlying criticism of ideological stagnancy that lies at the core of his commentary on Reaganism. In direct contrast to the hypothesis of a golden era of ideological stability, Kushner’s utopian vision consists of an ongoing ideological re-imagination and a theory of ideological flexibility in tune with an ever-changing world. Contrary to common critical thought, Kushner does not propose an alternative ideology to Reaganism, but rather urges the abandonment of set ideologies altogether.

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he end of the Cold War in many ways signified a fundamental shift in the balance of global ideologies. As conservative critic Francis Fukuyama points out, “The 20th century saw the developed world descend into a paroxysm of ideological violence.” Whereas the two World Wars preceding it had maintained an element of direct violent conflict, the Cold War was predominantly characterized by philosophical tensions: East versus West, capitalism versus communism, and democracy versus dictatorship. The lifting of the iron curtain in the late 1980s under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev with “Perestroika” (literally meaning “restructuring”) brought about extensive reforms. For many this signaled a decisive ideological shift, resolving the conflicts inherent in the Cold War decidedly in favor of liberalization along a Western model (Muñoz 7). In his widely circulated and debated paper “The End of History?” Fukuyama, a contributor to the Reagan administration, takes up this assertion, claiming that “the century that began full of self-confidence in the ultimate triumph of Western liberal democracy seems at its close to be returning full circle to . . . an unabashed victory of economic and political liberalism.”

Penned in 1989, Fukuyama’s paper coincides precisely with the period of time in which Kushner was drafting *Perestroika*, serving as an emblematic representation of conservative American ideologies under Reagan. Evidence of its influence on how Kushner tackles Reaganism in the face of the AIDS crisis is rife throughout *Perestroika*. In his essay, Fukuyama latches onto a traditionally Hegelian and Marxian concept that he refers to as the “End of History.” According to the Hegelian model, humanity evolves from primitive stages, geared towards attaining and subsequently maintaining a complete, rational society (Fukuyama). Fukuyama, however, takes it upon himself to assert that in light of the progression of events during the two centuries since Napoleon’s rise to power during the French Revolution, the “principles of liberty and equality” at the heart of Western political liberalism have emerged as the Hegelian pinnacle of social governance. He summarizes, “The triumph of the West, of the Western *idea*, is evident first of all in the total exhaustion of viable systematic alternatives to Western liberalism” (Fukuyama). After a century of World Wars and Cold War, Fukuyama claims that ideologies such as imperialism, fascism, and ultimately communism have fallen to the superiority of American liberal democracy. While Fukuyama’s attitude is representative of American sentiment in light of the end of the Cold War, Kushner sets himself in opposition to it. In fact, Kushner plays off the ideological themes tied to the end of the Cold War to induce a critical evaluation of the failure of American ideologies on a domestic level*.* Though Fukuyama is quick to dismiss opposing ideologies, this certainly does not necessarily prove liberalism’s superiority. In fact, throughout the length of his essay Fukuyama does little to analyze, let alone criticize, American social policy. It is at this point that Kushner steps in to demand a closer inspection of the ideology that Fukuyama touts.

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he first scene of *Perestroika* invokes Fukuyama’s theory in the context of the Cold War as a preface to the bulk of the plot in the second part of the play. The scene takes place in the Kremlin in January of 1986, roughly coinciding with the time period of Gorbachev’s reforms in the Communist Party. It opens with the introduction of Aleksii Antedilluvianovich, “The World’s Oldest Living Bolshevik,” whose speech reflects the era of reform he is living in:

The Great Question before us is: Are we doomed? The Great Question before us is: Will the Past release us? The Great Question before us is: Can we Change? In Time? And we all desire that Change will come. (Kushner 147)

These questions serve as a laundry list of challenges faced in the tremendous ideological shift that the end of the Cold War embodied and signify an engagement with Fukuyama’s hypothesis. There is recognition of the need for change. In the context of the social and political flaws of the one-party Soviet system, this is not in doubt. As Fukuyama points out, tempering communist regimes across the world – particularly those in Russia and China – with “a political culture that is more tolerant and pluralistic” stands as a testament to the failure of the Soviet model.

However, immediately after admitting this need for change, The World’s Oldest Living Bolshevik’s attitude shifts, as he is seized by a passionate fit, “And *Theory*? How are we to proceed without *Theory*?” (147). The lack of ‘Theory’, the lack of certainty inherent in completely deconstructing the ideological pillars on which his society once stood paralyze Prelapsarianov, “If the snake sheds his skin before a new skin is ready, naked he will be in the world, prey to the forces of chaos . . . Have you, my little serpents, a new skin?” (148), and subsequently “Then we dare not, we *cannot,* we MUST NOT move ahead!”(149). Prelapsarianov’s malaise in the face of social reform is critical, especially when the scene is considered in the greater context of the play. Throughout the play, this is the only scene that takes place in Russia, or engages with any Russian characters whatsoever. The title of the play reinforces the domain of Kushner’s thought: *Angels in America* is a play about America, not the dissolution of the USSR. The dissolution of the USSR becomes relevant only as a parallel for his consideration of American ideology. Appropriately enough, Prelapsarianov’s final plea for stasis overlaps with the arrival of the Angel of America, whose address to Prior resonates almost perfectly with Prelapsarianov’s sentiments. Through this comparison, Kushner projects the anxieties of his Russian caricature onto an American figure, initiating his challenge on Fukuyama’s canonization of Western ideals.

The Angel of America arrives in *Perestroika* with a level of grandeur and self-affirmation that is tremendously resonant with the American attitude embodied by Francis Fukuyama’s "End of History” theory. The Angel’s introduction is consistent with the self-absorbed tone of Fukuyama’s argument, as it asserts itself with four times the average dosage of personal pronouns, “I I I I / Am the Bird of America, the Bald Eagle” (170). The Angel also presents itself as a beacon of guidance, associating itself with the imagery of light and consequently enlightenment, listing among its attributes, “LUMEN PHOSPHOR FLUOR CANDLE” (170). The demands of the Angel complete the connection to Fukuyama’s theory, as they align with Fukuyama’s predicted historical outcome, as it states “The Great Work Begins” (170) and “On you and in your blood we have written:/STASIS/THE END”(170). Along the lines of Fukuyama’s text, the Angel boldly heralds in a new era of post-historic utopia characterized by social immobility. Within the realm of the play, Kushner frames this utopia as the “return of God,” whose flight was initially caused by social change and progress:

BELIZE: So human progress . . .

PRIOR: Migration. Science. Forward Motion.

BELIZE: . . . shakes up Heaven. (176)

This ‘return of God’ is ultimately analogous to the return of the primacy of a set of idealized norms, and to the halting of human progress.

However, upon further inspection the cracks in the Angel’s convictions start to appear. While its gestures and language are initially grandiose, the Angel is flustered within minutes of arriving on stage. Commanding that Prior dig up the “prophetic implements” only to find that he is unaware of their whereabouts, the Angel’s demeanor shifts: “Quiet. Prophet. A moment please, I . . . The disorganization is . . . ” (171). Likewise, when Prior proves to be uncooperative the Angel is at first confrontational and authoritative, dramatically demanding, “SUBMIT, SUBMIT TO THE WILL OF HEAVEN!” (171) before again backing off, “And Lo, the Prophet was led by his nightly dreams to the hiding place of the Sacred Implements, and. . . Revision in the text: The Angel did help him to unearth them, for he was weak of body though not of will” (172). The Angel’s language switches from verse to prose to accompany its frustration, and the use of only a single “I” betrays a seeming lack of confidence. Meanwhile, the fact that the Angel must “revise the text” to maintain the grand narrative that it is attempting to construct highlights the tremendous insincerity of the Angel’s triumphant proclamations. These breaks in the Angel’s aura demonstrate that not all in heaven is as well as it might seem; by association, these breaks suggest that Fukuyama’s touting of Western liberalism as ideological perfection is more superfluous than substantiated. In light of the social context of the United States in the post-Cold War era, Kushner’s challenge proves to be more than appropriate.

Kushner takes his criticism of Fukuyama’s theory a step further in ascribing to the Angel the very anxieties that Prelapsarianov experienced: “Surely you see towards what We are progressing/The fabric of the sky unravels/Angels hover, anxious fingers worry/The tattered edge . . . YOU MUST STOP MOVING”(178). In light of these lines, and the direct parallel they draw to Prelapsarianov’s calls for stasis, Kushner establishes a significant juxtaposition. Where the “unimaginably old and totally blind” Prelapsarianov cannot easily sacrifice his cherished ideals in the face of a changing global context, the Angel is simultaneously unwilling to tolerate the social change that has been shifting the bedrock of heaven. This parallel ascribes an inflexibility for change in Fukuyama’s theory analogous to that of the raving Prelapsarianov. This link is clarified by Kushner’s own thoughts in his essay “Notes About Political Theatre”: “The notion that everything flows from a single source . . . is undialectical . . . a pronouncement from the heart of the great historical project of capitalist myth-making: the transformation of that which is social, cultural, and political, and hence changeable, into nature, which is immutable and eternal” (21). Ultimately, Kushner suggests that Fukuyama’s theory is no more than the capitalist equivalent of idolizing a political ideal to the point of rendering it unquestionable. This is easily recognizable as problematic when introduced through the World’s Oldest Bolshevik’s unwillingness to move on without concrete theory. By shifting Prelapsarianov’s anxieties onto a representative American figure, Kushner suggests that American liberal theory should be no more unquestionable than the communist theory being deconstructed in the USSR through social reform. Again, Kushner’s own essay provides the best summary: “It’s a great thing that the Soviet bloc fell apart, it was long overdue; in part because it now frees us to examine socialism untrammeled by the need to defend its ongoing failure in Russia” (28).

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he Reagan administration announced itself with fanfare similar to that of Fukuyama’s proclamation of the “End of History” and the Angel’s delivery of its anti-progress mantra, though its promises would prove equally empty. The Reagan administration’s domestic policies were typified by two principal factors: a strong core of conservative family values, and similarly conservative economic policies. After four years in office, the Reagan administration presented its policies as tremendous successes in its 1984 re-election campaign. This is embodied in one of the campaign television advertisements, entitled “Morning in America.” The advertisement presents an idealized view of four years under conservative policies, suggesting, along the same lines as Fukuyama’s argument, a golden era of Western democracy. “It’s morning again in America,” the script reads.

The advertisement goes on to catalogue the financial successes against an idyllic backdrop. “This afternoon 6,500 young men and women will be married, and with inflation at less than half of what it was just four years ago, they can look forward with confidence to the future,” the narrating voice explains, as images of stereotypical white working class families, including a bride and groom, parade across the screen. These scenes and the sexual specificity of the script reinforce a traditional view of a heterosexual and racially homogenous marriage, while further glorifying them and associating them with the American ideal. “Why would we ever want to return to where we were less than four short years ago?” the advertisement questions. The tone of the piece is one of triumph over the struggles of the past, and further suggests that based on the successes of the Reagan administration thus far, its fundamental ideals should be upheld. However, upon further scrutiny of the underlying principles of Reagan’s campaign, particularly in the context of the AIDS epidemic, it becomes apparent that they were far from ideal.

Indeed, the very social and economic policies alluded to in “Morning in America” proved to be not only inactive in the face of the AIDS epidemic, but actually detrimental to its appropriate management. In *Perestroika*, Kushner highlights these failures to suggest that the model of post-Cold War Western liberalism is far from perfect. The Reagan administration’s televised advertisement unwittingly alludes to some of the social inequalities inherent in its policies through the association of economic prosperity during the era with images of stereotypical, white affluent families. A New York Times editorial published days after Reagan’s death in 2004 points out that many of his administration’s fiscal policies were balanced against the poor: “He [Reagan] and his first budget director, David A. Stockman, repeatedly tried to trim health, education and social welfare programs that had been expanding for decades, and they achieved much of what they proposed” (Toner & Pear).

Gay activist and academic Dennis Altman describes how this neglect played out in the evolution of the AIDS epidemic, pointing out that “The decade in which AIDS was recognized, conceptualized and named was a decade in which the Western world was undergoing the economic rationalizations of Reagan and Thatcher.” He suggests that these “economic rationalizations” were used to justify neglecting the gravity of the AIDS epidemic in order to trim spending. These rationalizations, coupled with the strong advocacy of Christian family values by the Reagan administration, led to a drastically insufficient response to the epidemic. In 1986, only 0.08% of the Department of Health and Human Services’ budget was allotted to the fight against AIDS, almost a half decade after its emergence (Brier 86-87).

Through a fictionalized version of Roy Cohn, a real-life Republican lawyer during the McCarthy era who died of AIDS, Kushner elucidates to great effect the failure of the American social system to adapt and to change in the face of the AIDS epidemic. Kushner vilifies both the Reagan administration’s financial neglect and its social prejudice through Cohn’s character. While Roy hoards an illicit stash of AZT, an antiretroviral drug, his nurse Belize remarks, “There are a hundred thousand people who need it . . . It’s not fair, is it?” Roy responds: “I am not moved by an unequal distribution of goods on this Earth” (189). With this line Kushner strikes at the heartlessness of Reagan’s so-called “economic rationalizations.” Beyond simple economics Kushner also uses Roy to exemplify the discrimination inherent in the Reagan administration’s disregard of the AIDS crisis: “Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a puissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who nobody knows and who know nobody. Who have zero clout” (51).

Overall, the Reagan government characterized itself by inflexible economic and religious principles. Its unwillingness to compromise these central values in the face of the AIDS crisis delayed the governmental response by almost a decade, as Reagan would not mention the disease in public until 1987 (Toner and Pear). Counter to Fukuyama’s argument and the overwhelming sense of American ideological triumph after the Cold War, the example of the Reagan government’s behavior in the AIDS crisis demonstrates that Western democracy was far from perfect. Just as Kushner’s Angel does not live up to its grandiose entrance, the Reagan administration fulfilled neither its own duties, nor the expectations laid down by Fukuyama. And just as Prelapsarianov’s anxieties hinder his capacity for change, so did the Reagan administration’s fear of abandoning familiar principles paralyze its response to the AIDS epidemic. Accepting economic and religious rationalizations as sacred and unquestionable during the 1980s led to the unnecessary and perhaps preventable deaths of tens of thousands. It is a stark reminder of the perils of heralding an end to ideological progress.

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onfronting the failures of the American government in the fight against AIDS, Kushner counters Fukuyama’s “End of History” theory, instead envisioning a re-imagining of American ideals analogous to the Soviet Perestroika. What this Perestroika entails is expressed in the epilogue to the play. Whereas the Angel and Prelapsarianov are both figures who look towards the future with tremendous anxiety, holding on to present ideals in the absence of newly formulated ones, Kushner’s Prophet, Prior, stands in contrast to this viewpoint. Towards the end of the play, Prior, spurred on by Hannah’s advice, goes on to challenge the Angel and to reject its theory of stasis. “An angel is just a belief,” Hannah tells Prior, “If it lets you down, reject it. Seek for something new” (237). Physically overcoming the Angel, Prior demands the blessing of more life: “Bless me anyway. I want more life. I can’t help myself. I do” (266). Prior thus overcomes the anxieties that paralyzed the Angel and Prelapsarianov. As Louis points out, “what you have to admire in Gorbachev, in the Russians, is that they’re making a leap into the unknown. You can’t wait around for a theory . . . It’s all too much to be encompassed by a single theory now” (278).

Through this example, Kushner suggests that the key to perfecting the Western political system lies not in the permanent canonization of a set of ideals, as Fukuyama might suggest, but rather in the continued effort to improve and reinvent those ideals. The stagnancy inherent in Fukuyama’s prophecy of Western liberalism and the Angel’s prophecy of stasis are fundamentally contradictory. Belize points out, “The world is faster than the mind” (Kushner 278). Hannah reiterates this quandary: “You can’t live in the world without an idea of the world, but it’s living that makes the ideas. You can’t wait for a theory, but you have to have a theory” (Kushner 278). These lines suggest that the minute a theory is established, it starts to degrade, requiring constant revision. Fukuyama’s theory, through the canonization of Western political ideals, strips those ideals of their capacity to adapt, making them insensitive to the world around them. Per Hannah’s rationale, this makes them fundamentally insufficient. Certainly, there remains no better example of the detrimental consequences of political stagnancy than the failure of the Reagan government during the emergence of AIDS.

Kushner’s hopes for American Perestroika in the aftermath of the Cold War are embodied in his work as an embrace of the fluidity of theory and its relationship to the world as opposed to its permanence and stasis. Louis proclaims this with characteristic enthusiasm, “Look! Perestroika! The Thaw! It’s the end of the Cold War! The whole world is changing!” (277). This hope for fluidity in place of stagnancy is best embodied as Prior contemplates the Fountain of Bethesda in New York, a central symbol in the epilogue. With this image Kushner invokes the fable of the Fountain of Bethesda in Jerusalem, which promises that upon the return of Christ to Earth - the “Capital M Millenium” (279) – the now-dry Fountain will flow once again. At face value, this narrative suggests the ascendancy of Christian ideals to a supreme status upon the arrival of a golden era of Heaven on Earth, much along the lines of Fukuyama’s claim for Western ascendancy at the End of History. However, by associating this golden era with the shift of the once blocked and dry Fountain to a state of constant flux, Kushner re-appropriates the narrative as a declaration of hope for change and open discourse.

On a less conceptual level, the fountain carries several tangible implications in the context of the AIDS epidemic. Given the fact that the National Institute of Health’s headquarters are located in Bethesda, Maryland, Kushner’s choice of image is not coincidental. Hannah promises to personally take Prior to bathe in the healing waters of the fountain when they begin to flow once more (Kushner 279), associating the aforementioned conceptual shift towards open ideologies with the possibility of an eventual cure for AIDS. In this sense, the “Fountain of Bethesda,” the NIH, might be let loose from its blocked-up, financially restricted state under the Reagan administration, and flow with full force once again:

The fountain’s not flowing now . . . But in the summer it’s a sight to see. I want to be around to see it. I plan to be . . . We won’t die secret deaths anymore . . . We will be citizens . . . The Great Work Begins. (Kushner 280)

With these lines, Prior closes the play emphatically, voicing his hopes for life after Perestroika.

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n abundance of critical commentary has been made in an effort to resolve political and ideological themes of *Angels in America* in the aftermath of the Cold War. Most agree that Kushner’s closing mantra of “more life” acts to invoke a re-evaluation of current ideologies, an assurance that outside of the realm of familiar theories, there lies an alternative “about and beyond the present state” (Scapp 93). Critic David Savran frames the same dynamic within the political context of *Angels*. Savran resolves this binary by concluding that Kushner preserves elements of Fukuyama’s concept of goal-oriented historical evolution, while tempering it with some necessary poststructuralist skepticism. Savran writes: “On the one hand *Angels in America* counters attacks from the pundits of the Right, wallowing in their post-Cold War triumphalism . . . On the other hand, *Angels* also challenges the orthodoxies of those poststructuralists on the Left by whom the Marxian concept of history is often dismissed as hopelessly idealist” (21). Consequently, *Angels in America* “is itself positioned as both the culmination of history, and as that which rewrites the past” (Savran 14). This, Savran claims, gives rise to “the *new* American religion: liberal pluralism” (27).

Though Savran is correct in pointing out that Kushner is willing to piece apart theories at both extremes of the ideological spectrum, his suggestion that Kushner presents liberal pluralism as the next ideological cannon is somewhat problematic. Admittedly, Kushner’s text is “carefully constructed so that communitarianism, rationalism, progress, etc., will be read as being preferable to their alternatives: individualism, indeterminacy, stasis” (Savran 22). However, Kushner does not present these principles as new ideals. Kushner makes it apparent in the symbol of the Fountain of Bethesda that his image of utopia is one of constant flux and revision. Liberal pluralism may be the next rational step; however, it by no means intends to be established as “the *new* American religion” (Savran 27), nor does it maintain itself as the culmination of history precisely because Kushner remains committed not to a historical outcome, but rather to the historical process.

In this sense, the process of democracy, the constant desire to re-examine and to strive for improvement best maintains liberal principles themselves. Ron Scapp latches onto the theme of process over outcome, pointing out that the future, as “the fantasy of democracy” (91), ultimately becomes the vehicle of democracy itself. At its heart, democracy is Perestroika. Despite identifying the ongoing democratic process as a core aspect of Kushner’s political hypothesis, Scapp’s desire to fit Kushner’s thesis into the great narrative of American democracy verges on the same brand of complacent American exceptionalism that Fukuyama voices in “The End of History?” Scapp glosses over the crux of Kushner’s political commentary; in Kushner’s eyes, the failure of the Reagan administration in handling the AIDS epidemic evidences a tangibly harmful standstill in the democratic process. Kushner’s criticism of the Reagan administration suggests the urgent need for a return to the democratic process. It is a call to action that characterizes Kushner’s play.

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verall, Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America* actively engages with the ideological, political, and social context of the 1980s, challenging governmental failures during the AIDS crisis. By drawing a parallel between the anxieties of the representative Soviet figure, Prelapsarianov, and those of the Angel of America, Kushner demonstrates that Fukuyama’s proclamation of a golden era of Western liberal democracy is empty. Kushner further demonstrates that this proclamation is informed more by self-affirmation and an aversion towards change than by the actual state of affairs in the United States during the 1980s. Kushner brings this theoretical discussion into the realm of the political by highlighting the detrimental effects of the Reagan administration’s social and economic discrimination in the response to the AIDS epidemic in America; Kushner uses these detrimental effects as proof of the flaws in Western Ideology. The epilogue, and in particular the image of the Fountain of Bethesda, suggests that in light of the AIDS crisis, we need to return to the fundamentally democratic process of constant ideological re-evaluation. In contrast to Fukuyama, Kushner heralds adaptation and flexibility, not stasis, as the harbingers of utopia. In the context of the AIDS crisis, he attaches the hope for open discourse and treatment to his utopian vision.

Far from being isolated to the world of literature, Kushner’s vision would soon materialize in the political realm. The full production of *Angels in America* debuted on November 1, 1992, on the eve of Bill Clinton’s election into office as President of the United States (Muñoz 2). Following twelve years of Republican governance under Ronald Reagan, and then under his former Vice President George H.W. Bush, this night marked the dawn of the tremendous ideological shift Kushner imagined – a veritable Perestroika in America. With the very first lines of his inaugural speech, Clinton made his vision for America clear:

My fellow citizens, today we celebrate the mystery of American renewal. This ceremony is held in the depth of winter, but by the words we speak and the faces we show the world, we force the spring, a spring reborn in the world's oldest democracy that brings forth the vision and courage to reinvent America.

Reprimanding the rigidity of his predecessors, Clinton’s election represented a return to the state of perpetual ideological reinvention envisioned by Prior in the epilogue to Perestroika. During Bill Clinton’s eight years in office, cash flow for AIDS research increased 67% at the NIH, representing the largest AIDS investment in the world; drug assistance programs showed a 787% increase in funding (Office of National AIDS Policy 1999); and overall mortality plummeted to record lows (“HIV Mortality” 2006). Though tremendous progress has been made, it is worth bearing in mind that unlike Fukuyama, Tony Kushner himself would likely be the first to point out that no battle is ever quite won. Now, and in the future, the desire for perpetual progress and improvement are critical in the fight against AIDS.

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