

VOLUME XVIII, NUMBER 1, WINTER 2018

# CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

*A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship*

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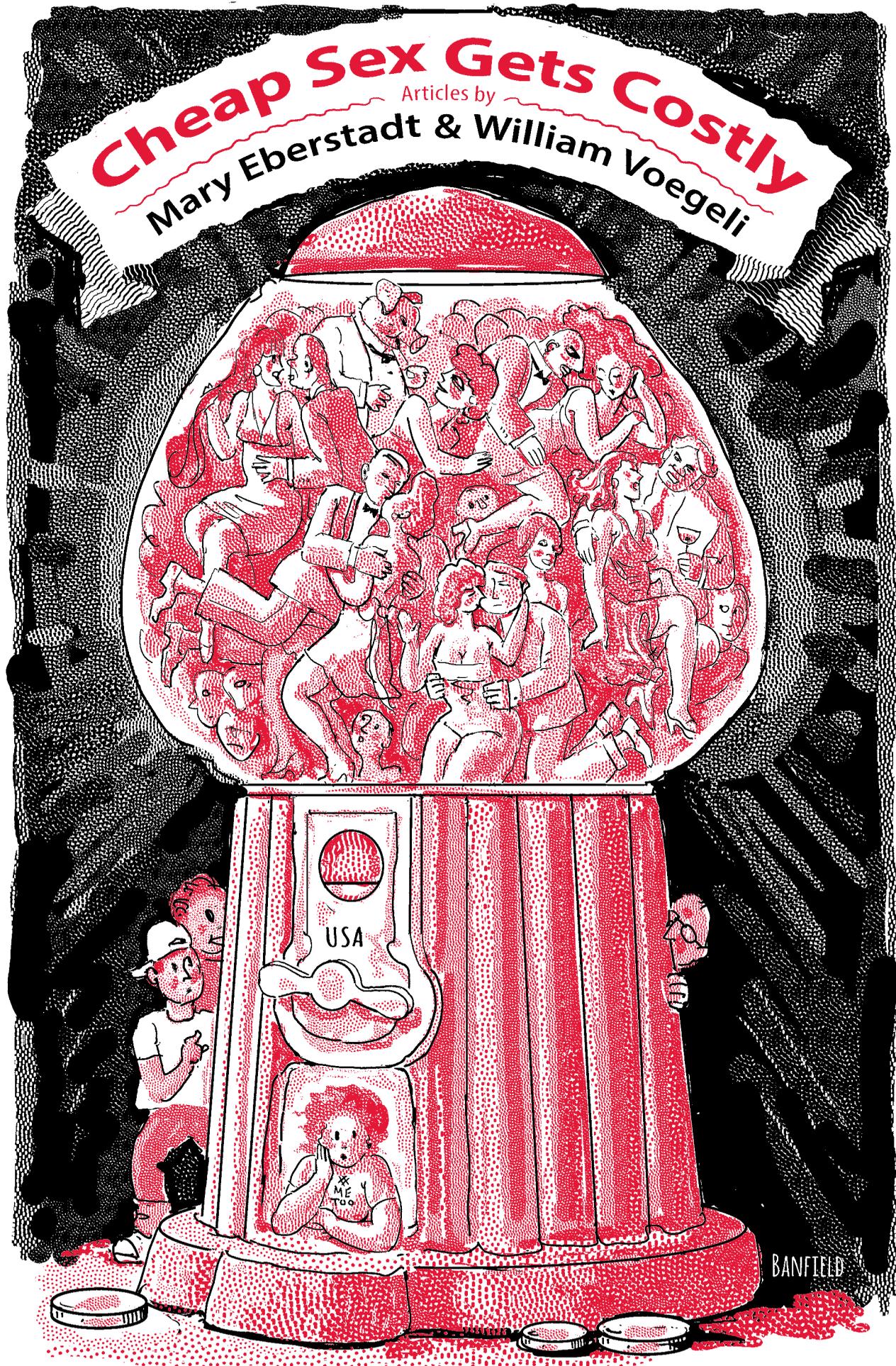
Hadley  
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Book Review by Joseph Tartakovsky

## WE COULD USE A MAN LIKE...

*Herbert Hoover in the White House: The Ordeal of the Presidency*, by Charles Rappleye.  
Simon & Schuster, 576 pages, \$32.50 (cloth), \$18 (paper)

*Herbert Hoover: A Life*, by Glen Jeansonne.  
Berkley, 464 pages, \$28

*Hoover: An Extraordinary Life in Extraordinary Times*, by Kenneth Whyte.  
Alfred A. Knopf, 752 pages, \$35



THREE NEW BIOGRAPHIES REASSESS, with quite different results, America's 31st chief executive. *Herbert Hoover in the White House: The Ordeal of the Presidency* by Charles Rappleye, a journalist turned historian, focuses on Hoover's handling of the Great Depression that devoured all but eight months of his 1929-33 presidential term. *Herbert Hoover: A Life* by Glen Jeansonne, an emeritus history professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, covers all of Hoover's 90 busy years. So does *Hoover: An Extraordinary Life in Extraordinary Times* by Kenneth Whyte, author of *The Uncrowned King* (2009), a biography of William Randolph Hearst, and

formerly editor-in-chief of Canada's *Maclean's* magazine and its *National Post*.

All three authors start from the same premise. Hoover, writes Jeansonne, has been reduced to the "economic Satan" who brought or failed to stop the Great Depression, condemned to sit, scowling, arms folded, beside Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan among the worst presidents. Rappleye, too, regrets that Hoover is recalled only "in defeat and in caricature—the clay-footed conservative who preached the old dogmas of laissez-faire while the false idols of capital came crashing down." But whereas Jeansonne idolizes Hoover as the "most versatile American

since Benjamin Franklin"—and a man, adds Whyte, whose "capacities and achievements are obvious and awe-inspiring"—Rappleye refuses to "resurrect Hoover as a forgotten hero ready for a new turn in the sun," for his was a "failed presidency, and not just because of fate."

"BERTIE," AS THE BLACKSMITH'S SON was known, was born in 1874, in a 350-person Iowa outpost called West Branch, making Hoover the first president born west of the Mississippi. As a boy he milked cows and planted corn in hand-dyed homespun. His Quaker mother, born in Brit-



ish Canada, limited the family library to the Bible, an encyclopedia, and anti-liquor novels. Orphaned at nine and sent west, Hoover took a chance in 1891 as a member of the inaugural class at Stanford University, later earning a geology degree, and then, chancier still, struck out to be a mining engineer in the Australian outback. In an industry basically consisting of big bets, Hoover had one of the highest “hit” rates of his time, including a famed half-million-dollar gold-mine investment that eventually produced \$55 million. In 1898 imperial China asked Hoover, fast becoming a living legend, to manage the coal mines within the Celestial Empire in return for a fifth of all profits. He lived in the walled-off foreign colony of Tianjin, enjoying 15 servants and nine-course meals; a Boxer Rebellion siege saw him improvising a volunteer fire brigade.

Hoover later became a millionaire globe-trotting mining consultant and investor, with 125,000 men on his payroll and offices in San Francisco, New York, Paris, St. Petersburg, Johannesburg, Melbourne, Rangoon, and London. A friend said that he “boarded an ocean liner as casually as you or I take a trolley-car to our daily jobs.” Jeansonne thinks Hoover could have become the Rockefeller of mining had he not instead chosen, in 1914, to enter public service—a decision motivated by

patriotism but also, as Whyte notes, the wartime collapse of commercial mining.

**D**URING WORLD WAR I, AS A PRIVATE citizen, he organized millions of tons of food relief to Belgians starving under German occupation and English blockade—until then the most audacious relief effort in history. Observers marveled at Hoover’s blend of humanitarianism and acumen in financing, rationing, transportation, and distribution; he managed a global network of docks, warehouses, and ships flying their own flag. Hoover moved so freely in enemy territory—with such good relations with the kaiser’s high command—that young Winston Churchill suspected him for a spy.

In 1917 President Woodrow Wilson brought the logistical mastermind into his administration to manage the national food reserves at a time when, under the wartime Smith-Lever Act, the federal government could in fact force Americans to eat their broccoli. The supremely efficient Hoover, after the war, not only sent back Congress its original \$150 million appropriation but \$60 million in profits.

When Warren Harding tapped Hoover, now 46, for his secretary of commerce in 1921, Senate Republicans distrusted the “ambitious

publicity hound with a Democratic résumé,” as Whyte puts it. He was saved by his reputation as a skilled, industrious, officious, and apolitical public servant. Calvin Coolidge kept the dynamo on, even if, as the joke went, the secretary of commerce thought himself undersecretary of all other departments. Hoover’s cabinet accomplishments in the ’20s included creating the Division of Simplified Practice, which made “recommendations” to help industry avoid the inefficiencies of, say, a dozen sizes of light sockets or bricks; the Aeronautics Division (the future FAA), which federalized airline safety and saw Hoover personally mapping out flight routes; and the Radio Division (the future FCC), to coordinate a new industry that saw 18,000 broadcasters drowning out each other on uncoordinated frequencies.

**I**N THE 1928 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, Hoover, popular and buoyed by national prosperity, crushed Al Smith, winning 40 states including Smith’s own New York and even five in the Old South. The technology-minded Hoover installed phones in the Oval Office, and made progressive gestures like declining a salary (though he still took in outside income from his business ventures) and graduating the income tax (over the objection of Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon).

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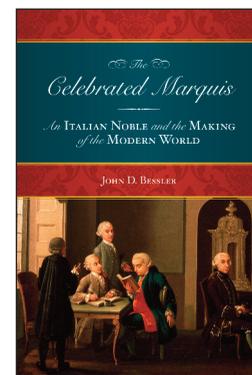
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Making of the Modern World**

John D. Bessler, University of Baltimore School of Law

Forthcoming January 2018,  
ISBN 978-1-61163-786-1

Called the “Italian Adam Smith” for his pioneering work as an economist in Milan, Cesare Beccari pushed for social and economic justice, monetary and legal reform, conservation of natural resources, and even inspired France’s adoption of the metric system. Bessler discusses the history of economics and shows how Beccaria’s ideas shaped the American Declaration of Independence, constitutions and laws around the globe, and the modern world in which we live.



**American Constitutional Law  
Selected Essays**

Henry Monaghan, Columbia Law School

Forthcoming January 2018, ISBN 978-1-5310-0780-5

By any standards, Henry Paul Monaghan is a giant figure in American constitutional law. A prolific scholar and renowned classroom teacher, his work is characterized by insight and by independence of thought. Scholars, practicing lawyers wrestling with issues in constitutional law, and and Supreme Court justices alike are students of Monaghan’s work.

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Jeansonne describes a clearly exceptional man but in panegyrical terms. Hoover was “tough and virtually fearless, with a warm heart, a generous soul,” he writes, describing Hoover as floating above politics. Not only did he, in Jeansonne’s telling, become the first man to reach the White House without white-hot political ambition, but once there, he was “honest to a fault, reluctant to pander or employ patronage in elections.” Jeansonne lays particular stress on Hoover’s “Quaker traits” as “handicaps,” such as in his “self-effacing style” and unwillingness to “play hardball.” Midway through Jeansonne’s book we are in the presence of unqualified adulation—his Hoover drawn so devoid of foible and weakness, and Hoover’s accomplishments so vast—that I concluded that either Hoover was not altogether human or this biography not altogether true. Jeansonne’s haste to catalogue his subject’s achievements leads the author into blunders like reporting that around 1918 Hoover ensured “free meals to 35 million Finnish children” when Finland’s population was about 3 million. Conversely, he lets Hoover off for the politically (if not also economically) disastrous Smoot-Hawley tariff—against which 1,000 economists signed an open protest letter—with the bland suggestion that it “did more harm than good.” (Readers seeking the anti-Jeansonne account, a relent-

lessly condemnatory portrait of Hoover, should try William E. Leuchtenburg’s slim 2009 bio, *Herbert Hoover*.)

For Rappleye, “Hoover was not the mild Quaker soul that his friends liked to portray.” Although “a kindly enough man in person and to his friends,” in office Hoover “was surly, easily frustrated, and sometimes vindictive.” Whyte, taking the middle ground, presents the most penetrating psychology of Hoover, finding in his “grim, silent ways” proof of a powerful determination born of a tough childhood, but also a “massive sense of vulnerability” that led him into a habit of semi-duplicious self-promotion. Rappleye and Whyte both describe Hoover’s apolitical stance as largely a pose to enhance his outsider, technocratic credentials and to gratify his desire to see himself as a non-politician summoned, in the old way, to reluctant service. This image was a boon but also a liability. “What I do fear,” Hoover said, in 1929, “is the result of the exaggerated idea...that I am a sort of superman, that no problem is beyond my capacity.”

**T**HE PROBLEM HE WOULD FACE SHOOK the world’s economic foundations. Historians still debate the causes of the Great Depression but Hoover insisted that it was a “hurricane” blown over from Europe’s

post-Versailles chaos. Jeansonne adopts this view; Whyte is noncommittal but suggests (in line with a growing trend) that we look hard at the Federal Reserve’s failure to maintain an adequate money supply. Rappleye fingers the Fed, too, but adds in other factors like the crash in residential construction. All three biographers agree, however, that the take-command Hoover, a one-man brain trust, acted with unprecedented vigor and sophistication.

The old engineer initiated more public works (e.g., the Golden Gate Bridge) than the past 30 years of administrations combined and asked all 48 state governors to maintain or expand public-works employment. He raised, alongside his cabinet, millions of dollars in charity for private organizations, much from his own pocket. He prevailed on Henry Ford and other industrialists to raise their workers’ pay; he brokered labor unions’ “patriotic withdrawal” of wage demands. In October 1931 he summoned 40 top banking and insurance executives to a secret meeting in Andrew Mellon’s flat to beseech them to raise \$500 million to steady failing banks. He suspended immigration by executive order, established the Reconstruction Finance Corporation to spend stunning amounts of stimulus equal to two thirds of the pre-crash federal budget, and expanded agricultural credit institutions.

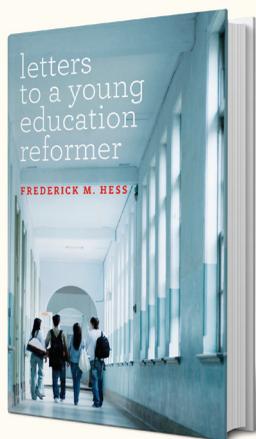
## New and Noteworthy Books from AEI Scholars

### Letters to a Young Education Reformer

Frederick M. Hess

April 25, 2017  
 Publisher: Harvard Education Press  
 ISBN: 978-1682530238

In *Letters to a Young Education Reformer*, Frederick M. Hess distills knowledge from 25 years of working in and around school reform. As the



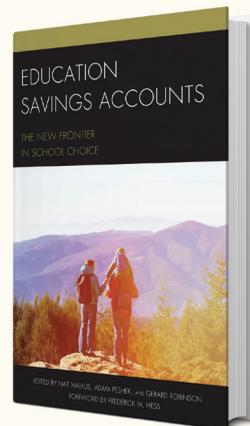
policy landscape continues to shift, this book offers valuable, timely insights to any young person passionate about transforming education—and to not-so-young reformers who are inclined to reflect on their successes and failures.

### Education Savings Accounts: The New Frontier in School Choice

Nat Malkus, Adam Peshek, and Gerard Robinson

April 26, 2017  
 Publisher: Rowman & Littlefield  
 ISBN: 978-1475830231

In a potentially profound development, Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) reimagine parent choice in ways that may upend many assumptions that have framed issues of school choice in the past. Yet, for all their potential import, ESAs are barely understood. This volume seeks to provide a comprehensive, fair-minded treatment of ESAs and will address the rationale for them, the challenges they pose, what it takes for them to work, and the political and legal dynamics at play.

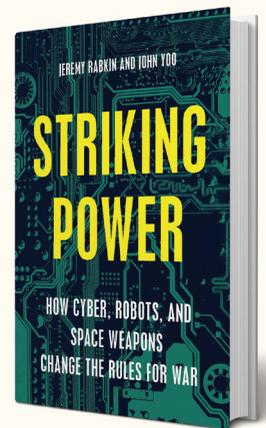


### Striking Power: How Cyber, Robots, and Space Weapons Change the Rules for War

Jeremy Rabkin and John Yoo

September 12, 2017  
 Publisher: Encounter Books  
 ISBN: 978-1594038877

The United States must respond to challenges to its national security by embracing new military technologies such as drones, autonomous robots, and cyber weapons. These weapons can provide more precise, less destructive means to coerce opponents to stop weapons of mass destruction, clamp down on terrorism, and end humanitarian disasters.



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Jeansonne and Whyte hold that no peacetime president ever intervened in economic affairs so daringly. But these efforts to arrest the descent stopped at a line that Hoover, for principled reasons, refused to cross.

**T**HE HOOVER “HALLMARK,” TO USE Rappleye’s word, was a commitment to what Hoover called “cooperative” or “voluntary” action, as distinguished from governmental coercion. The president said he wanted to buck up the people’s courage to “fight their own battles in their own communities,” without Washington, D.C. The celebrated relief-worker protested that he abhorred hunger and cold as much as any man but insisted that federal “direct relief”—the dreaded “dole”—would debauch America’s “infinitely valuable” spirit of “mutual self-help” and “self-sacrifice,” mainly the responsibility of individuals, private institutions, and state and local governments. But as the clamor for aid from D.C. grew more desperate, Hoover was prone to bloodless, statistics-heavy remarks in an attempt to tamp down hysteria. “I don’t believe an administration should be content with calm, factual statements,” a journalist ally of Hoover’s said, “when the obvious need of the hour is for somebody to say something with a heroic ring to it.” That was precisely what Hoover refused to do. “This is not a showman’s job,” he insisted.

Years later Hoover admitted that his “political mistake” was in uttering things like “The Depression is over” or “The hoboies are better fed than they ever were before,” for even if such statements were factually correct when made, they exposed him to discredit when conditions sank further. His other disadvantages as he headed to the 1932 presidential election included clumsy relations with the press and Congress, and one of modern history’s most gifted nemeses in New York Governor Franklin Roosevelt. Hoover swept into office by landslide and out by avalanche, losing all but six states. Before the election a wag cabled Hoover: “Vote for Roosevelt and make it unanimous.”

Hoover’s was a “historic fall,” as Rappleye writes, “from one of America’s most celebrated incoming presidents to its most reviled incumbent.” He may have claimed “elation” at being unburdened of responsibility, but friends saw humiliation and rage at being made the face of official callousness by Democratic campaigners for, astonishingly, the next five presidential elections, through the Eisenhower-Stevenson contest in 1952. Jeansonne sees a Hoover who finally shed his Quaker forbearance and started fighting, as friends always urged, making speech after fiery speech in the 1930s and

’40s, all aimed at proving to Americans that FDR’s wild carnival of spending, price controls, politicized relief, and swelling bureaucratic growth amounted to “collectivism” and “regimentation” along dangerous foreign lines. Whyte agrees that Hoover was motivated by an honest conviction that America now had “more to fear than to gain from further expansion of the federal government,” but also points to a desire for self-vindication. Rappleye, too, focuses on the “personal roots” of Hoover’s “pique”—a fixation with FDR and a psychological need by a man who, it was said, had never known failure to win in the realm of ideas what he had lost at the polls.

**T**HE IMPRESSION OF ANTI-FDR ANIMUS is hard to avoid when reading Hoover’s two 400-page volumes devoted to clearing himself of causing the Depression and proving FDR’s guilt in prolonging it: the *Memoirs of Herbert Hoover: The Great Depression, 1929–1941* (1952), and his posthumous *The Crusade Years, 1933–1955: Herbert Hoover’s Lost Memoir of the New Deal Era and Its Aftermath*, published in 2013 by editor George Nash, dean of Hoover scholars. Both these memoirs are searching condemnations of the New Deal and for that remain eminently valuable.

But they are also bitter, harsh, conspiratorial—and full of unending comparisons between FDR and Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin, analogies shocking not only in their earnestness but also in being reasserted long after World War II. Hoover, for instance, calls Roosevelt’s bank holiday in March 1933 the “American equivalent of the burning of the Reichstag,” a staged emergency to usurp power. Rappleye calls this sort of Hoover talk paranoid; even Jeansonne labels it “hyperbole.” Hoover’s fervent opposition carried over into foreign affairs. Until 1941 he publicly and strenuously opposed U.S. entry into World War II and, even after Pearl Harbor, continued quietly but firmly to believe that FDR deliberately provoked Japan into attacking us.

“I realize that former Presidents are a kind of menace,” Hoover wrote, as the only living ex-president between 1933 and 1953, “chiefly because people must at times listen to them talk on public questions.” Talk he did—his collected post-presidential speeches between 1933 and 1960, entitled *Addresses upon the American Road*, fill eight volumes. Less clear is the eagerness with which people listened. Hoover shouted louder as subsequent GOP candidates—Alf Landon, Wendell Willkie, and Thomas Dewey—kept their distance from a predecessor who had become untouchable. Hoover felt that each man had, disloy-

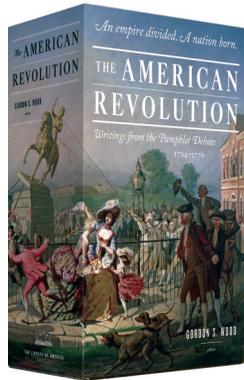
ally, made peace with the Roosevelt state. He would go on to doubt the conservative bonafides of Dwight Eisenhower, the first Republican to win the White House after Hoover, despite both men having gained their initial fame as nonpartisan master planners during wartime service to Democratic presidents.

Hoover never flagged in this role of sideline critic, offering, for instance, free, often grumpy military analysis to Truman, Eisenhower, and John F. Kennedy, usually through the lens he knew best: the First World War. Eventually he attained an honored, elder-statesman stature and with some success chaired “Hoover Commissions” under Truman and Eisenhower, aimed at reorganizing and trimming federal bureaucracy. His various “crusades” were patriotic and admirable, even if there was (to speak anachronistically) something of Richard Nixon or Jimmy Carter in his desperate quest to restore his national influence. Jack Garner, Roosevelt’s vice president for eight years, said that if Hoover “had become President in 1921 or 1937 he might have ranked with the great Presidents.” Hoover liked quoting the line; it was probably equally rankling and uplifting.

**W**HAT DOES HERBERT HOOVER STAND for today? Jeansonne tries to establish his enduring intellectual significance by declaring that Hoover, for the 31 years until his death in 1964, was the “purest spokesman of American conservatism.” Yet Jeansonne defines this conservatism in a way that even FDR could adopt: a “conviction in free-market capitalism, reasonably regulated” and in the “fundamental American values of political, religious, and intellectual freedom.” Hoover’s thought was more complex.

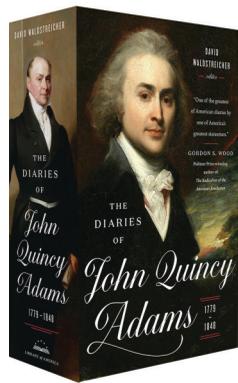
Of his 25 books, his mature philosophy takes shape in *The Challenge to Liberty* (1934), which though it leaves FDR unnamed begins with the anti-New Deal premise that “our American civilization is based upon the maximum of free will in an ordered Liberty.” Hoover fretted that Roosevelt’s interventions were creating a “group of loafers” and throttling capitalism’s energies. But for a man tagged by many as an uncompromising anti-statist, Hoover never abandoned his Bull Moose recognition of government’s growth and evolution by democratic choice. In *The Challenge to Liberty*, even with the New Deal underway, he declared that the general welfare “requires new commitments of government” and that although “haphazard, ill-considered experiment” was dangerous, so was “stubborn opposition to all corrective movement and change.” He praised, for example, the “human justice” of the “vast series of protections” against child labor, disease in cities, and corporate rapacity.

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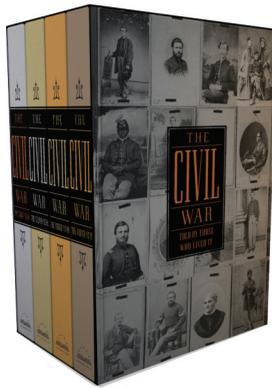
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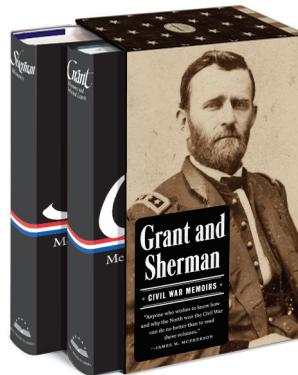
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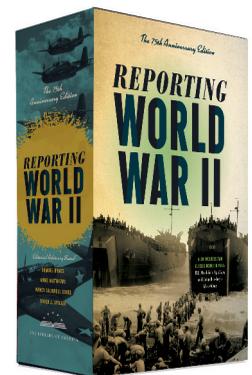
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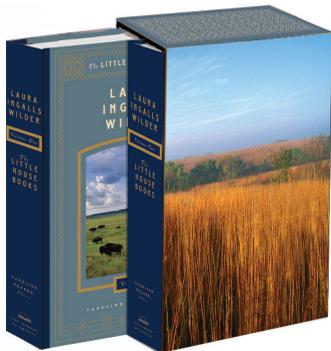
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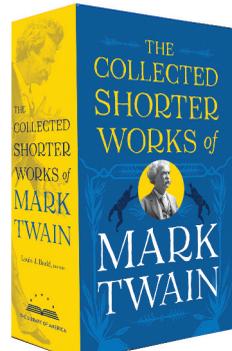
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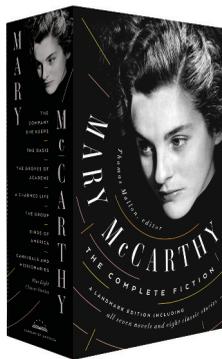
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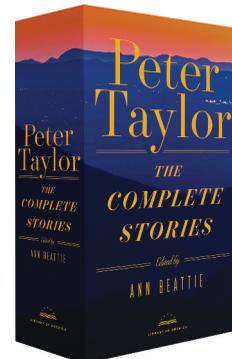
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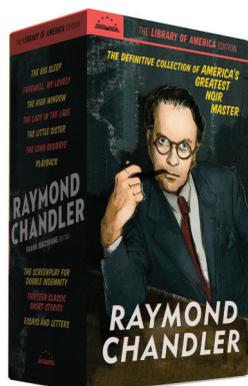
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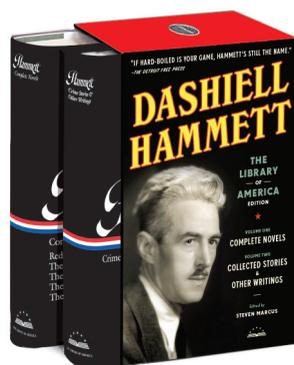
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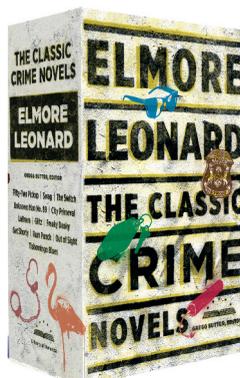
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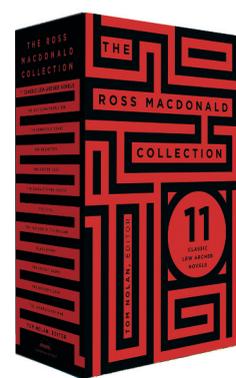
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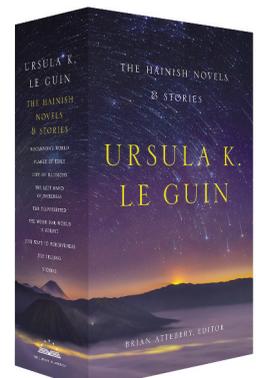
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Close reading of his New Deal memoirs is revealing both of his politics and the inner roots of his hatred of FDR. In a striking passage near the close of his 1952 volume, Hoover suddenly leaves off the comparisons between the New Deal and European totalitarianisms and instead writes that the New Deal “brought into being a number of long needed reforms and some constructive actions.” It almost causes whiplash. He then goes on practically to take credit—justifiably—for FDR’s banking reforms (which *he* had first urged), the Federal Communications Commission, the Federal Power Commission, and the Fair Labor Standards Act. More interesting yet, the two New Deal laws that Hoover found most hateful—which drove him to denounce “[g]oosestepping the people under this pinkish banner of Planned Economy”—the National Industrial Recovery Act and Agricultural Adjustment Act, were, by early 1936, both dead at the hands of the Supreme Court. In other words, Hoover continued to attack the soon-discarded New Deal of 1933-35 well into the 1950s, even as Truman enjoyed resurrecting old memories of the gnawing privations of the “Hoover Depression” in his 1948 campaign. (Whyte points out that Hoover presided over about three years of depression; FDR presided over *six* such years.) Perhaps a President

Hoover in 1932 would have resembled the Roosevelt of 1932, and a President Roosevelt in 1928 would have been confined to Hoover-like dimensions.

**H**OOVER HIMSELF EVOLVED AFTER 1930, especially where failed efforts at “voluntary” or “cooperative” action forced him into more radical, Rooseveltian approaches. For instance, Hoover in 1929 disclaimed any desire to “stretch the powers of the federal government by legislation to regulate the stock exchange” and so implored the New York Stock Exchange to regulate itself. But he saw this initiative undermined, to his surprise, by the very money-men he needed to avert new incursions of federal control. He came to praise Roosevelt’s Securities and Exchange Commission, created in 1934, as a “public necessity.”

Kenneth Whyte’s book, superb in every respect, demonstrates a mastery of American political traditions that furnishes him with the most interesting reflections on Hoover’s odyssey. Hoover, he writes, has “reasonable claims to paternity of the two main ideological currents of the American century: New Deal liberalism and the modern conservative movement born in opposition to it.” This truth is what has kept Hoover stuck in his

political netherworld: intolerably progressive for modern conservatives, unforgivably reactionary for modern liberals. But as Whyte continues: “That one man can in one lifetime be a leader to opposed schools raises the inconvenient fact that they have more in common than not.” That seems about right.

It is *this* Hoover, the iconoclastic moderate, the statesman-technician, the man of creative adaptation and justified new exertions of federal power, who offers lessons for a responsible, non-hysterical conservatism. How could the Right *not* learn from a man who knew every president from Theodore Roosevelt to Richard Nixon, and who served successfully under Wilson, Harding, Coolidge, Truman, and Eisenhower; and who spanned the tensions of rural and urban, traditional and modern, restraint and activism. Hoover was a transitional figure, a fascinating, extraordinary, and unfairly tarnished one, even if he represents a view of government that, like his reputation, will never be restored.

*Joseph Tartakovsky is a contributing editor of the Claremont Review of Books and the author of The Lives of the Constitution: Ten Exceptional Minds that Shaped America’s Supreme Law (Encounter Books), forthcoming in April 2018.*

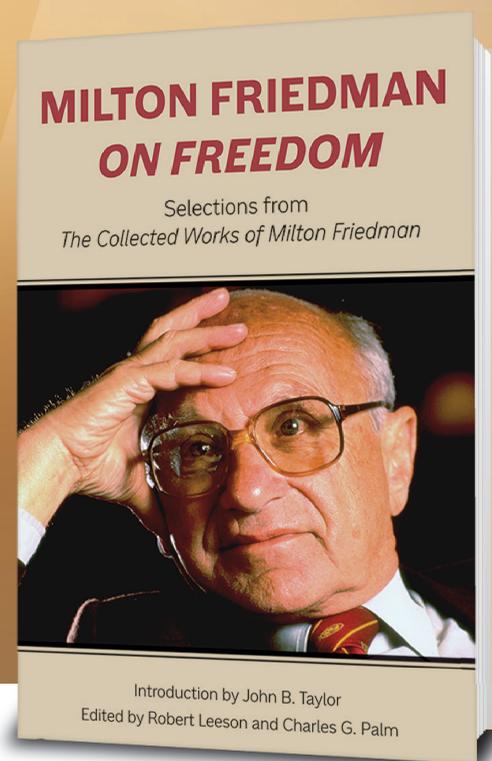
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