

VOLUME XIX, NUMBER 3, SUMMER 2019

CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship

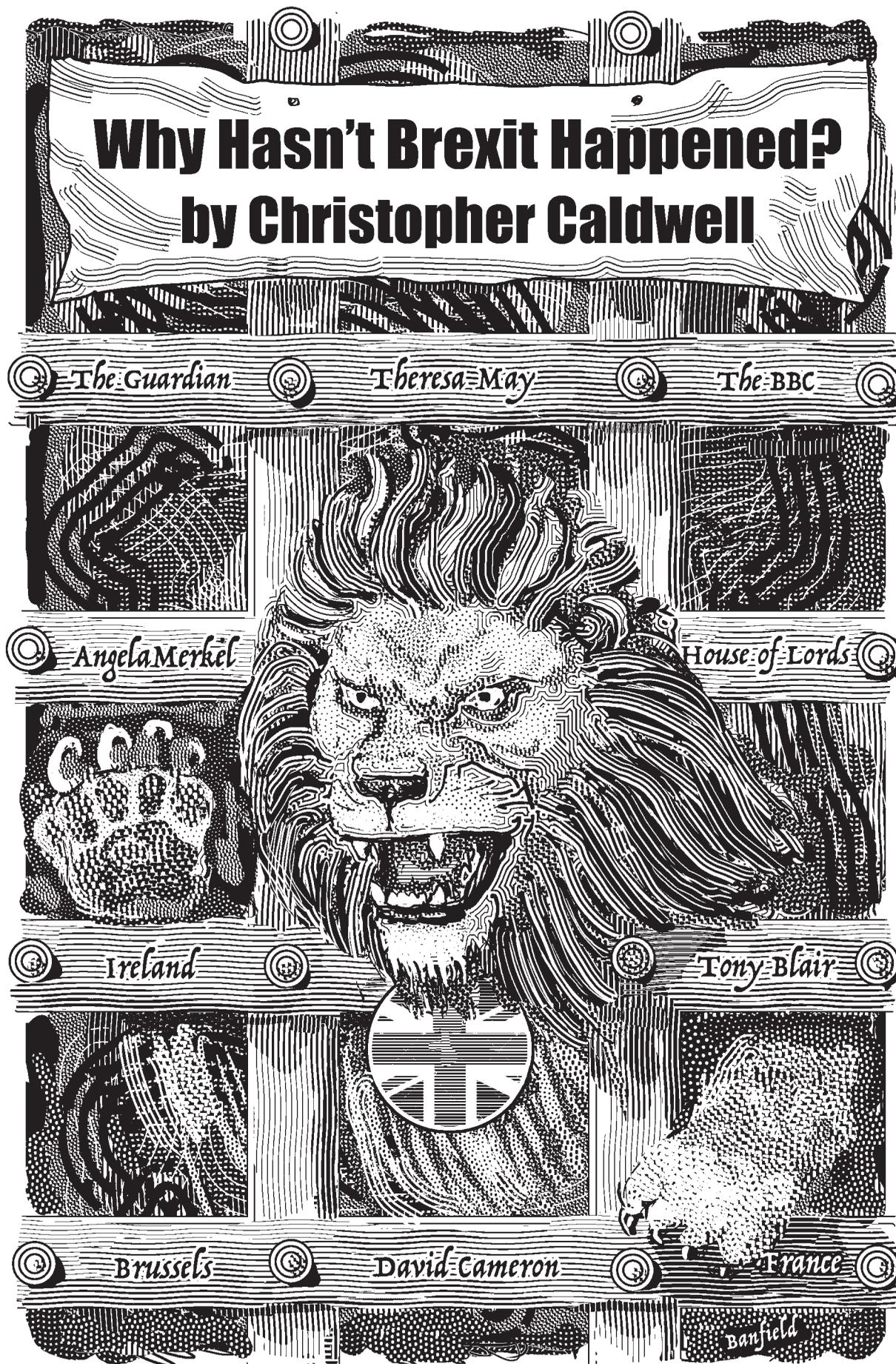
Angelo M.
Codevilla:
**Getting Real
About Russia**

Allen C.
Guelzo:
**U.S. History
After Zinn**

Robert R.
Reilly:
**Harry V.
Jaffa**

Carl W.
Herstein:
**Law & Man
at Yale**

Matthew
Continetti:
**All the News
That's Fit
to Slant**



William
Voegeli:
**The Woke Left
Against Israel**

John Daniel
Davidson:
**Ben Shapiro's
Western Civ**

Steven F.
Hayward:
**George F.
Will**

Victor Davis
Hanson:
**Tom Cotton's
Sacred Duty**

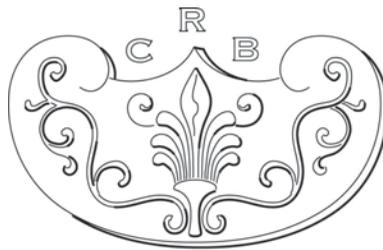
Michael
Anton:
**Bronze Age
Pervert**



A Publication of the Claremont Institute

PRICE: \$6.95

IN CANADA: \$8.95



Book Review by Victor Davis Hanson

WITH THE OLD BREED

Sacred Duty: A Soldier's Tour at Arlington National Cemetery, by Tom Cotton.
William Morrow, 320 pages, \$28.99

IN THE WORLD OF ANCIENT GREECE AND Rome, collective reverence for the war dead helped explain why hoplites and legionaries fought so fiercely.

The great themes of classical literature are often those of battlefield commemoration. Pericles' majestic Funeral Oration, the lyric poet Simonides' epitaph for the fallen at Thermopylae ("Go tell the Spartans..."), Horace's *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* ("It is sweet and proper to die for one's country"), the hundreds of elegant casualty lists carefully carved on stone, and the glimpses of funerals for the fallen on red-figure vases—all these remind us that without national commemoration and collective gratitude for the sacrifice of their youth, consensual societies of the past could not offer successful resistance against their more regimented or tribal enemies.

Senator Tom Cotton (R-AR) believes that proper commemoration still enhances civic responsibility. Accordingly, in *Sacred Duty: A Soldier's Tour at Arlington National Cemetery* he offers three narratives to emphasize how and why America has learned this ancient lesson of honoring the war dead. He relates a regimental motto of the 3rd United States Infantry Regiment, also known as The Old Guard: "soldiers never die until they are forgotten." *Sacred Duty*, focused for the most part on Arlington National Cemetery, is a multifaceted primer in why America so

dutifully commemorates her soldiers, and how such formal gratitude contributes to our civic sense of self and to élan among our fighting forces. Or as Cotton, himself an Army veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, puts it in more personal terms: "I...knew that, if I died, my battle buddies would bring me home and the Army would look after my family. That mutual pledge shaped our identity as soldiers and our willingness to fight—and, if necessary, to die—for our country."

THE CORE OF HIS BOOK IS A HISTORY OF The Old Guard, created in 1784 shortly after the American Revolution and now the Army's most ancient unit, with a decorated record of service that includes the War of 1812, the Mexican War, the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War. "[N]o other unit in our military," writes Cotton, "has such constant reminders of its heritage, of the traditions and standards its soldiers are expected to uphold." The Regiment's three battalions oversee a vast array of the nation's most solemn military rituals—well beyond their duties as the U.S. Army's official honor guard, in which capacity they have escorted the president at ceremonies and in formal parades since 1948. The Old Guard solemnly handles the transfers of our soldiers killed overseas, whose bodies arrive at Dover Air Force Base in Delaware. It escorts the caskets of the fallen at public funerals

and supervises the daily military burials at Arlington National Cemetery. And The Old Guard provides the sleepless sentinels who guard the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. "Their dedication to that mission transcends duty into love for three Unknown Soldiers who, in a phrase I heard often, 'didn't just give up their lives, they gave up their identities.'"

In all of these tasks Cotton gives an insider's exacting description of the exhaustive conduct, ritual, and dress codes that ensure such meticulous devotion—whether manifested in the Caisson Platoon, famous for its solemn riderless horses, or the Fife and Drum Corps, or the commander-in-chief's guard that drills as Revolutionary-era soldiers with cocked hats, wigs, and British Brown Bess muskets.

The regiment's uniform cloths are measured and cut not to the quarter inch but to 1/16-inch precision. Elaborate ancestral customs, along with exacting physical requirements, ensure that these various honorific platoons can perform 365 days a year and are as fresh and crisp in appearance and comportment when they end their daily watch as when they begin it.

It is not just that Old Guard soldiers must be able to stand mute and motionless for 75 minutes in all sorts of weather, or that they must master some 20 set marching movements. They also must be free of all prior convictions, civil and criminal, and avoid alcohol, drugs,

and debts. Readers at first may be amazed by the array of detail, which extends into the esoteric tricks of pressing cloths and removing uniform lint—"next, they remove 'fuzz,' or the wool's nap, with cigarette lighters and masking tape." But such minutiae (Windex is used to spruce up shoe shines) illustrate Cotton's point: in the quiet of the barracks, soldiers take it as a matter of ancient and personal honor to be perfectly groomed and attired even in ways imperceptible to the public. Cotton takes pride in the Pattonesque notion that a unit will fight the way it looks and drills.

AS HIS SUBTITLE IMPLIES, COTTON weaves his own personal history into this loving description of The Old Guard's rituals. His is a fascinating story of how a Harvard College and Harvard Law School graduate left a prestigious law firm, volunteered for combat duty in the U.S. Army, and at 27 was deployed in the 101st Airborne to fronts in post-9/11 Afghanistan and Iraq. As U.S. military casualties mounted and recruitment sometimes stalled, he was eventually asked to redeploy to The Old Guard at Arlington, where he finished out his four-year active service before joining the reserves.

That Cotton is 6 feet, 5 inches tall was a special inducement. The Old Guard prizes impressive stature—perhaps somewhat in the manner of Napoleon's renowned *Vieille Garde*, who were selected in part due to their minimum six-foot height, rendered even more imposing by their tall, black, bearskin hats.

Representative and now Senator Cotton experienced the loss of fellow soldiers firsthand, in combat and then as an Old Guard captain overseeing military funerals at Arlington. These experiences explain the book's third and subtlest theme. Cotton has been a life-long (he is 42 years old) conservative critic of American progressivism and the current postmodern trajectory of American popular culture. As an undergraduate he once worried about the cultural influence of the early internet. Later, as a soldier in 2006 Iraq, he wrote a widely circulated but unpublished letter to the *New York Times*, advocating the jailing of journalists who had leaked critical classified information on anti-terrorist efforts—information that he felt endangered troops in the field. After military service, he returned to farming his family's ranch until at 35 he won a seat in his conservative Arkansas congressional district.

Cotton, then, naturally worries if these ancient rituals can survive in a politically correct, globalized America. Will The Old Guard be reduced to an esoteric ancient cult, largely unknown to the vast nation it serves

and, when known, treated as a museum exhibit?

THE FORCES OF WOKE POPULAR CULTURE arrayed against the values of The Old Guard are certainly formidable. While I was reading Cotton's book, the week's tabloid news focused on U.S. women's soccer team sensation Megan Rapinoe, who declared that she would not participate in the National Anthem and had sworn not to visit the "f---ing White House." Nike announced that it would pull its July 4th-themed sneaker, emblazoned with a Betsy Ross Revolutionary-era flag, because their adman Colin Kaepernick had whined that the supposedly iconic symbol resonated with racism and an array of other -ologies and -isms. The courts had blocked a census inquiry asking whether the respondent was a U.S. citizen. And meanwhile, a Depression-era mural of George Washington was to be erased from a San Francisco school wall on the grounds that it supposedly promoted the racist visions of the Founding Fathers and their ilk.

Amid media-generated psychodramas such as these, the optimist Cotton still believes that the core of the country remains true to its founding. Accordingly, The Old Guard exists not because a fading minority take their patriotic responsibilities seriously and are pledged to honor the dead who helped save the country, but rather because the vast majority of Americans still expect from the U.S. Army and the government such diligence and solemnity in shared national rituals. The Old Guard exists at the nexus of two antithetical visions of America's founding: the modernist, pessimistic view that the United States was flawed in its origins and that its increasingly toxic traditions must be eradicated if it is ever going to reach its progressive potential—and the idea that America's sins are not unique but those of all humankind, which are best addressed and remedied within an exceptional United States that does not have to be perfect to be far better than the alternatives.

No wonder Senator Tom Cotton ends his inspiring, much-needed book with a story from Sergeant Major of the Army Dan Dailey, who talked to a foreign military leader visiting Arlington. The guest, after he had observed The Old Guard, sighed, "[N]ow I know why your soldiers fight so hard. You take better care of your dead than we do our living."

Victor Davis Hanson is a senior fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, and the author, most recently, of *The Second World Wars: How the First Global Conflict Was Fought and Won* (*Basic Books*).

AMERICAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

A Journal of Ideas, Institutions, and Culture

VOL 8 NO 2, SPRING 2019

The American Revolution and the New Moral History
C. Bradley Thompson

"Our End Was in Our Beginning": Judith Shklar and the American Founding
Giacomo Gambino

Natural Rights and American Constitutionalism: A Symposium in Honor of Michael Zuckert

Why Is America Important?

Madisonian "Paths of Innovation"

Federalist Republican

Parallel and Intersecting Journeys with Michael Zuckert

Lockean Liberalism and American Constitutionalism in the Twenty-First Century

Book Reviews

READ AT bit.ly/2tYs5LI



The Spirit of RELIGION & the Spirit of LIBERTY

The Tocqueville Thesis Revisited

EDITED BY MICHAEL ZUCKERT

LEARN MORE AT bit.ly/2n5Aaz8.

The CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS is a publication of the CLAREMONT INSTITUTE
FOR THE STUDY OF STATESMANSHIP AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

Subscribe to
the *Claremont Review of Books*

“The Claremont Review of Books applies the principles of Western civilization to an astute analysis of current affairs. This unique synthesis of theory and political reporting keeps those foundational principles alive, while providing deeper insight into the turbulence of our present era than any Beltway-obsessed publication can hope to achieve.”

—Heather Mac Donald

Subscribe to the *CRB* today and save 25% off the newsstand price. A one-year subscription is only \$19.95.

To begin receiving America's premier conservative book review, visit www.claremont.org/crb or call (909) 981-2200.

CLAREMONT
REVIEW OF BOOKS

1317 W. FOOTHILL
BLVD, SUITE 120,
UPLAND, CA
91786

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 504
UPLAND, CA