

VOLUME XVII, NUMBER 3, SUMMER 2017

CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship



Diversity and Its Discontents: Essay by William Voegeli

Joseph M. Bessette:

*More Prisoners,
Less Crime*

Mark Bauerlein:

Ernest Hemingway

Brian C. Anderson:

Jane Jacobs

Charles R. Kesler:

*Campus Protest,
Then & Now*

Harvey C. Mansfield:

Our Polarized Parties

Robert R. Reilly:

God Bless America?

Angelo M. Codevilla:

*At War with
Eliot Cohen*

Michael M. Uhlmann:

Progressive Eugenics

Mark Helprin:

Thomas Sowell

A Publication of the Claremont Institute

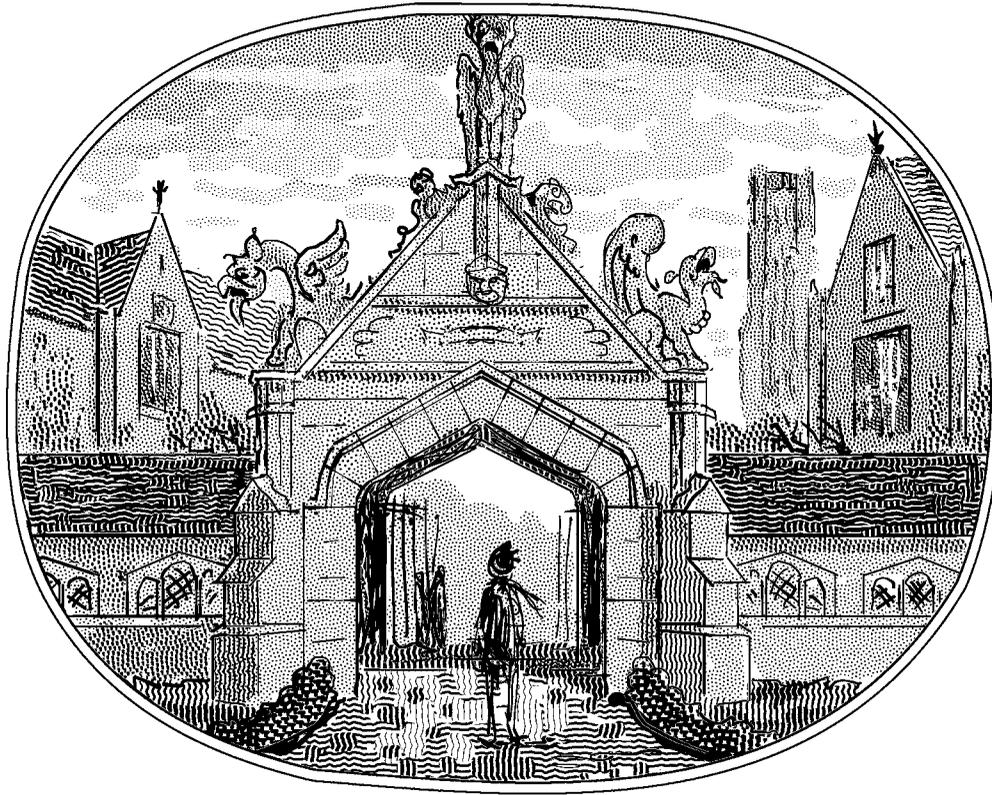
PRICE: \$6.95

IN CANADA: \$8.95



Essay by Joseph Epstein

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO DAYS



“Everyone was neurotic, weird, bizarre—it was paradise.”—Mike Nichols

THE FORTUITOUS—HAPPENING BY ACCIDENT or chance and not by design, never to be confused with the fortunate—plays a larger role in most people’s lives than they might think. Certainly it has in my own.

When I was in the army, stationed at Fort Hood, Texas, I learned that there were openings for typists at recruiting stations in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Shreveport, Louisiana. I applied, and one morning soon after was told that I had been selected for one of these jobs. I met with a Southern staff sergeant, a man I judged to be not long on patience, who said, “Take your choice, Shreveport or Little Rock.” I had a nanosecond to weigh my options. Shreveport: Louisiana, good food, Catholic, possibly interesting illicit goings-on; Little Rock: Governor Faubus in power, politically volatile, closer to Chicago. “Little Rock, Sergeant,” I said. Subsequently, in Little Rock, I met and married and had two children with my first wife. What, I have often wondered since, if I had said, “Shreveport, Sergeant?”

I had more time to think about going to the University of Chicago, but my thoughts about the place were scarcely more informed than my thoughts about Little Rock and Shreveport. Even though I lived in Chicago all my life, I had never seen the place, with its fake but nonetheless grand gray Gothic buildings. In Chicago one lived in one’s neighborhood as if in a village, and my village—West Rogers Park, in the far north of the city—was as far from the University of Chicago yet still in Chicago as it was possible to be. The University of Chicago was reputed to be radical, some said “pinko,” meaning vaguely Communist. This reputation derived, I learned much later, from the school’s president, Robert Hutchins, making it clear that he wasn’t going to be pushed around by Senator Joseph McCarthy and his crude anti-Communism. Hutchins had also eliminated the school’s Big Ten football team and installed a program, known jokingly as Hutchins’s Children’s Crusade, that allowed students as young as 15 to matriculate at the university. The word “nerdy” had not yet come into existence; people who went to Chicago were in those days thought “brainy.”

Genial Screw-Off

BRAINY WAS THE LAST THING I WOULD ever have been called. A thoroughly uninterested high school student—I graduated 169 in a class of 211—my high-school years were spent playing basketball and tennis, pursuing girls, and establishing myself as a good guy, which is to say, as a genial screw-off. In those days, the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, had, in effect, open enrollment, at least if you were a resident of the state. You could have three felonies and graduate last in your class and the school still had to take you—on probation, to be sure—but take you they did. So, without anything resembling study habits; having read no book of greater complexity than *The Amboy Dukes*; without a single intellectual interest; with no goal in mind but, hope against hope, to avoid flunking out; in 1955 I mounted the train at Chicago’s 12th Street station for Champaign-Urbana.

I had never heard the term “liberal arts” until I arrived at the University of Illinois. And then I heard of it as a way out of majoring in business, which most of the boys I



hung around with did, no doubt to establish their seriousness, both to their families and to themselves. I did know enough about myself to realize that the dreariness of accounting courses and the rest of it would have paralyzed me with boredom. (“Lloydie,” the successful immigrant father of a friend of mine is supposed to have said to his son, who evinced an interest in accounting, “don’t be a *schmuck*. You don’t study accounting. You hire an accountant.”)

My first-year courses at the University of Illinois included Biology, French, Rhetoric (really freshman composition), physical education, and ROTC, the latter two being requirements at a land grant college. Biology in those pre-DNA days meant little more than distinguishing among and memorizing the phyla. French meant memorizing, too—irregular verbs and the rest. I made it through Rhetoric by steering clear of anything tricky; and tricky at that time meant using a semicolon or dash or attempting a sentence longer than twelve words. I got mostly B’s.

B’s were good enough to get me into the University of Chicago. This was in part because my generation—those of us born late in the Depression—was a small population cohort, so small that the universities actually

wanted us. Then, too, Chicago, for reasons I’ve mentioned, was not a particularly popular place for undergraduates. When I was there I believe there were fewer than 2,000 undergraduates alongside more than 6,000 graduate and professional students.

Scruffy Bohemianism

I BEGAN THAT SUMMER (1956) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO taking what was called the Math Course. The course itself, I should say, was most impressive. The first two thirds were pure logic in which no numbers were mentioned (“if p, then not q equals?”). The last third was analytical geometry, and, based on what one learned in the first two thirds, seemed easy.

The College at the University of Chicago comprised 14 year-long core courses, in each of which one took a single comprehensive examination, known as “comps,” at the end of the year. (By the time I arrived at Chicago, one also had to declare a major outside the College.) Some kids were so well prepared and good at taking examinations that, during placement exams on entering the school, they “placed out,” or got credit for, fully two years’ worth of courses. No attendance was ever

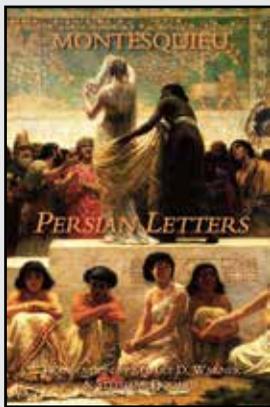
taken in any of the College courses. Essays might be assigned, but grades on them counted only to show students how they were doing. I recall no quizzes. Most mystifying of all, one’s teachers, like tutors at Oxford and Cambridge, did not grade students. Something called the College’s Examiner’s Office did. This simultaneously removed the whole matter of playing up—sucking up—to teachers, and it gave one’s grade a more objective feel.

At the University of Illinois I had been a member of a fraternity, Phi Epsilon Pi, the leading Jewish fraternity on campus. Fraternities and sororities in those days at most schools were strictly segregated by religion, an arrangement about which no one complained. The University of Chicago had nine fraternities and no sororities whatsoever. I moved into the Phi Psi house, not as a member but as a boarder, because an acquaintance of mine who was a member told me the fraternity had plenty of extra rooms, which it rented out for \$35 a month. (Tuition at the University of Chicago in those days was \$690 a year; at the University of Illinois it was \$90 a semester.)

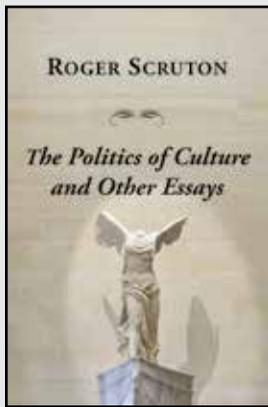
Phi Psi was a shambles, less a fraternity than a hot-sheet joint. People moved in and out. A fellow in medical school lived there with a beautiful biracial girlfriend with the

St. Augustine’s Press / Books for the Summer & early Fall

25% discount for all titles through September, 2017. View & Order online, www.staugustine.net; use code CLAREMONT.



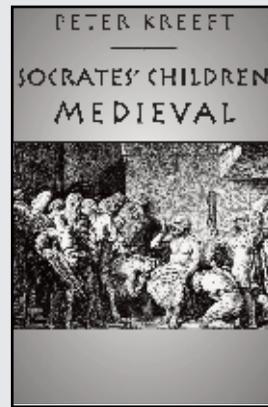
Montesquieu, *Persian Letters*, \$28, cloth



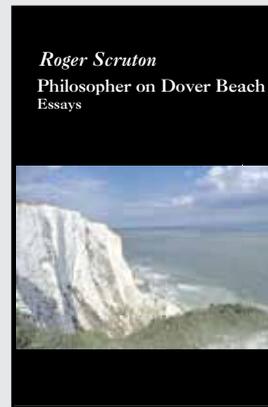
Scruton, *The Politics of Culture & Other Essays*, \$22, pbk



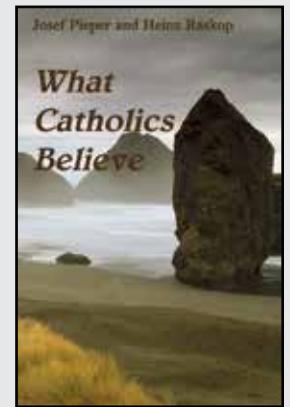
Kreeft, *Socrates' Children: Ancient*, \$24, pbk; *Medieval*,



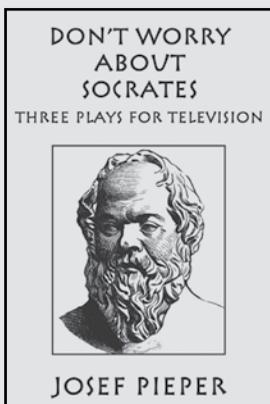
\$19 pbk; *Modern*, \$24, pbk, *Contemporary*, \$24, pbk



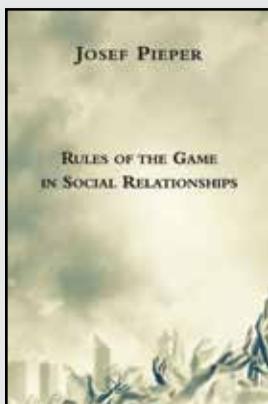
Scruton, *Philosopher on Dover Beach Essays*, \$28, pbk



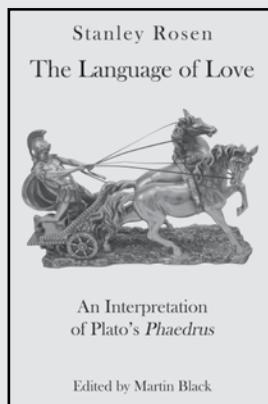
Pieper, *What Catholics Believe*, \$12, paper



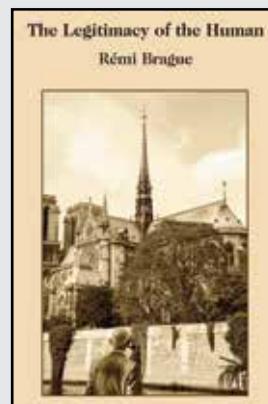
Pieper, *Don't Worry about Socrates*. \$25, cloth; \$15, pbk



Pieper, *Rules of the Game*. \$19, cloth; \$11, paper



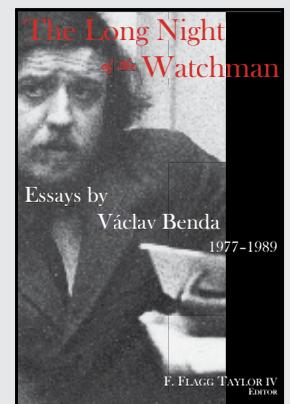
Rosen, *The Language of Love*, \$30, cloth



Brague, *The Legitimacy of the Human*. \$26 cloth



Steele, *Orwell Your Orwell*, \$35, cloth



Taylor, *The Long Night of the Watchman*, \$35, cloth



wonderful name of Arizona Williams, who audited the occasional course at the university and was said to dance at a black-and-tan club (where blacks and whites could mingle) on the edge of the Loop. Another graduate student, working on a Ph.D. in biochemistry, lived with his fiancée and a German Shepherd. A few fellows at Phi Psi were in their mid-twenties and had dropped out of school but didn't want to leave the university's Hyde Park neighborhood, an enclave, an island, of culture in philistine Chicago. Years later, I had a call from a man named Robert Lucas, a Nobel Prize-winner in Economics, asking me for a donation for our class gift. "What do you mean 'class?'" I said. "There were no 'classes' at the University of Chicago. You entered at 15 and left at 27, often without a degree."

A scruffy bohemianism obtained among University of Chicago students in those days. On campus an even moderately well-dressed person would have looked strikingly out of place. A militant unkemptness ruled, as if to divagate from the pursuit of truth and beauty for the mere niceties of respectable grooming would demonstrate one's peurility. The university, I used to say, had a single quota: among undergraduates only four attractive young women were allowed in at any time. A joke of the day had it that a panty raid on Foster Hall (the women's dormitory) yielded a field jacket and a pair of combat boots.

Modest Cultural Literacy

IN LATER LIFE I MET A NUMBER OF MY teachers at the University of Chicago—a few sent me manuscripts for *The American Scholar* when I was the editor there—and none recognized me as a former student. No reason they should have. My classroom strategy was to hide out. Not coming from a bookish home, I did my best to conceal my ignorance, which was substantial, and looked above all to avoid embarrassing myself. The possibilities for embarrassment were manifold. Had you not seen nor heard them before, how would you have pronounced the names Thucydides, Proust, Wagner? No doubt wrongly.

Most of my classmates seemed confident in their views, aggressive in their opinions. Many of them were New Yorkers, and, it later occurred to me, were probably reading the *Nation* and the *New Republic* from about the age of 13. Their parents and friends argued about Leon Trotsky, Mikhail Bakunin, Max Shachtman, the Moscow Trials, the Nazi-Soviet Pact. In my family politics wasn't a serious subject; all politicians were crooks until proven innocent, which, in Chicago, few were. Many of my fellow students had doubtless

been in psychotherapy. Many among my fellow students also had a fair amount of musical culture, whereas musical comedy was as high as musical culture reached in West Rogers Park.

By my second year at the University of Chicago, I had acquired a modest cultural literacy. I remember sitting in a modern poetry class taught by Elder Olson, and his mentioning Baudelaire. By then I knew that Charles Baudelaire was a French poet, 19th century, dark in subject matter, author of *Les Fleurs du Mal*—and that exhausted my knowledge of Baudelaire. Olson began to chant, "Hypocrite lecteur! —mon frere, mon semblable..." when he was joined in his chant by Martha Silverman, the girl sitting next to me. Which meant Miss Silverman not only knew Baudelaire's poetry, but had it by memory and in French. At that moment I felt the sharp stab of hopelessness, and wondered whether they might be taking job applications at a nearby Shell station.

Among students at the University of Chicago brilliance not solidity was the goal. George Steiner, Allan Bloom, Robert Silvers, and Su-

**Harvard was tougher
to get into, but Chicago
was tougher to get
out of.**

san Sontag might stand in as representative Chicago graduates: each brilliant, all crucially flawed. I never tried for brilliance myself, and wouldn't have come close to achieving it if I had. My body may have been in the classroom, but my mind frequently deserted it. I remember concentrating a fair amount of time on the perilously long ash of Elder Olson's cigarettes. Another teacher might remark on the way one's eye follows a certain sweep in a painting, though my eye never did. A teacher might set out eight reasons for the Renaissance, and I wondered what possessed him to buy that hopeless necktie. For grades I received chiefly C's with a light scattering of B's, and, best as memory serves, not a single A. I have since come to take a perhaps unseemly delight in great figures in literature and philosophy who were less than stellar students, some indeed dropouts: a roster that includes Blaise Pascal, Leo Tolstoy, Henry James, Paul Valéry, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others. Mike Nichols, from whom I take my epigraph, entered the University of Chicago in 1950 as a pre-med student, and dropped out in 1953 without a degree.

No Soft Spots

IDID BETTER OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM with the bookish offerings at the university. One of the best things about the College was that no textbooks were used. So one didn't read that "Freud said..." "Plato held..." "Marx stipulated..." "J.S. Mill believed..." Instead one read Freud, Plato, Marx, and Mill. Heady stuff, for a 19-year with only *A Stone for Danny Fisher*, *The Hoods*, and *Knock on Any Door* under his belt. I remember the deep aura of gloom I felt while reading Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* and the excitement of noting the dazzling connections made by Max Weber in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Everywhere through the undergraduate curriculum at Chicago in those days one ran into Aristotle and Plato: the *Poetics*, the *Rhetoric*, the *Ethics*, the *Politics*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium*, the *Crito*, the *Apology*. When it came time to declare a major, I decided on English, only to learn that the university's English Department in those years was heavily Aristotelian in its approach to literature.

Harvard, it was said, was tougher to get into than the University of Chicago, but Chicago was tougher to get out of. (Another saying had it that the University of Chicago was where fun went to die.) No soft spots anywhere for an undergraduate in those years. In the English Department, which might have been thought such a soft spot, undergraduate students, along with their regular course work, were examined at the end of their junior and senior years on two extracurricular reading lists that contained perhaps 75 items each. The items on the lists were precisely those that any young person should prefer, if at all possible, to avoid reading: Hobbes's *Leviathan*, Milton's *Paradise Regained*, Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*, Richardson's *Pamela*, Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government*. A better organized student than I might have read them over the regular academic quarters; I needed to forfeit my summer vacations to do so. In fact, I only finished my second, or senior, reading list while in the army, and took the examination on it on a pool table at Headquarters Company at Fort Hood, proctored by an ROTC second lieutenant from Alabama, the passing of which allowed me to graduate, A.B. *in absentia*, from the university in 1959.

What the University of Chicago taught, even to a student with little preparedness and a wandering mind, was a standard of seriousness. This standard continued long after my departure from the school. In my early thirties I became a close friend of Edward Shils—I would not have been prepared for him any



earlier—for decades one of the great figures at the university. I recall him saying, “You know, Joseph, I fear that my colleagues on the Committee on Social Thought labor under the misapprehension that Richard Rorty is an intelligent man.” (This at a time when every university in the country was seeking Rorty’s services.) On another occasion, Edward said, apropos Hannah Arendt, “No great *chachemess* [wise woman], our Hannah.” Toward the end of his career Edward brought Arnaldo Momigliano, the great historiographer of the ancient world, to teach at the University of Chicago. After the loss of a gifted graduate student to Princeton, Arnaldo, himself Jewish, noted: “A Jewish boy. The Ivy League beckons. He is gone.” Teachers such as Arnaldo, Christian Mackauer, Enrico Fermi, Louis Gottschalk, Leo Strauss—many of them Europeans—gave the University of Chicago a cosmopolitan tone and serious feeling unavailable anywhere else.

No trivial books were taught at the university during my time there. The only books by living writers I encountered were in a course on the modern novel by Morton Dauwen Zabel: *Howards End* by E.M. Forster, *Brighton Rock* by Graham Greene, and *A Handful of Dust* by Evelyn Waugh. This was of course long before multiculturalism, feminist studies, political correctness, and the rest kicked in, and so there was no need to teach, or for students to read, secondary writers in order to show they were on the side of the progressive political angels.

A Great Deal

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO IN those years favored, in Max Weber’s distinction, “soul-saving” over “skill-acquiring” education. If there were then un-

dergraduates majoring in economics, I never met them. The university I knew in those days seemed outside the orbit of capitalism itself (though it would go on to produce a dozen Nobel Prize-winners in economics). A graduate business school was housed in the main campus quadrangle, but in the era before the MBA became the golden key to open corporate doors, it seemed anomalous, beside the point. The knock on the University of Chicago Law School then was that it was “too theoretical,” which really meant too philosophical; if one’s aim was to get a job with a Chicago law firm, it was said one did better to go to Northwestern.

Job-getting wasn’t what the University of Chicago was about. Only careers in the arts, scientific research, politics practiced at the highest level, with, at second remove, the teaching of artists, scientists, and statesmen also being acceptable, were thought worthy of serious people. A conventional success ethos, such as George Santayana discovered early in the last century while visiting at Yale, was never in force at Chicago. To be lashed to money-making, even if it resulted in becoming immensely wealthy, made a person little more than one of Aristotle’s natural slaves, a peasant raking gravel in the sun. No surprise, then, that great economic success has not been notable among the school’s graduates. Not without reason has the University of Chicago, compared with other major universities, had a comparatively small endowment.

In the mid-1960s, while working at Encyclopaedia Britannica, I would occasionally meet Robert Hutchins, under whose youthful presidency (begun in 1929 when he was 30 years old), the radical institution that was the University of Chicago College had been set in motion, and found him an immensely handsome but weary and sad man. Hutchins

had earlier ardently wished to become a Supreme Court Justice, a job Franklin Delano Roosevelt dangled before him but cruelly withdrew. He had instead since 1959 been running the Ford-Foundation-Fund-for-the-Republic-sponsored think tank in Santa Barbara, California, called The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions—also known derisively as The Leisure of the Theory Class—which wasted its time on such hopeless projects as devising a constitution for a world government. At lunch one day at the Tavern Club in Chicago, Hutchins, knowing I had gone to the University of Chicago, asked me if I knew whether they had restored football there, a remark reflecting his sense of defeat and disappointment and suggesting that his one great accomplishment, founding the College with its Great Books-centered learning, had also come to nothing. I believe they have restored football, though on a modest basis; formerly the university was in the Big Ten.

I should have, but neglected, to assure him that, as far as I was concerned, it had come to a great deal, at least for me. Under the influence of Hutchins’s College at the University of Chicago, I set out on a life of high culture, which I may never have attained yet never regretted. Because of the values fostered at Chicago, I determined to become a writer with a confidence in the rightness of my decision that I was unlikely to find anywhere else. Looked upon now, I realize I owe the University of Chicago more than I can hope ever to repay.

Joseph Epstein is an essayist, short story writer, and a contributing editor for the Weekly Standard. His most recent books are Frozen in Time: Twenty Stories (Taylor Trade Publishing) and Wind Sprints: Shorter Essays (Axios Press).

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 is
full of splendid essays and reviews—
well written, based on deep scholarly
knowledge, raising issues of lasting
importance. I read it cover to cover.”*
—Michael Barone

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