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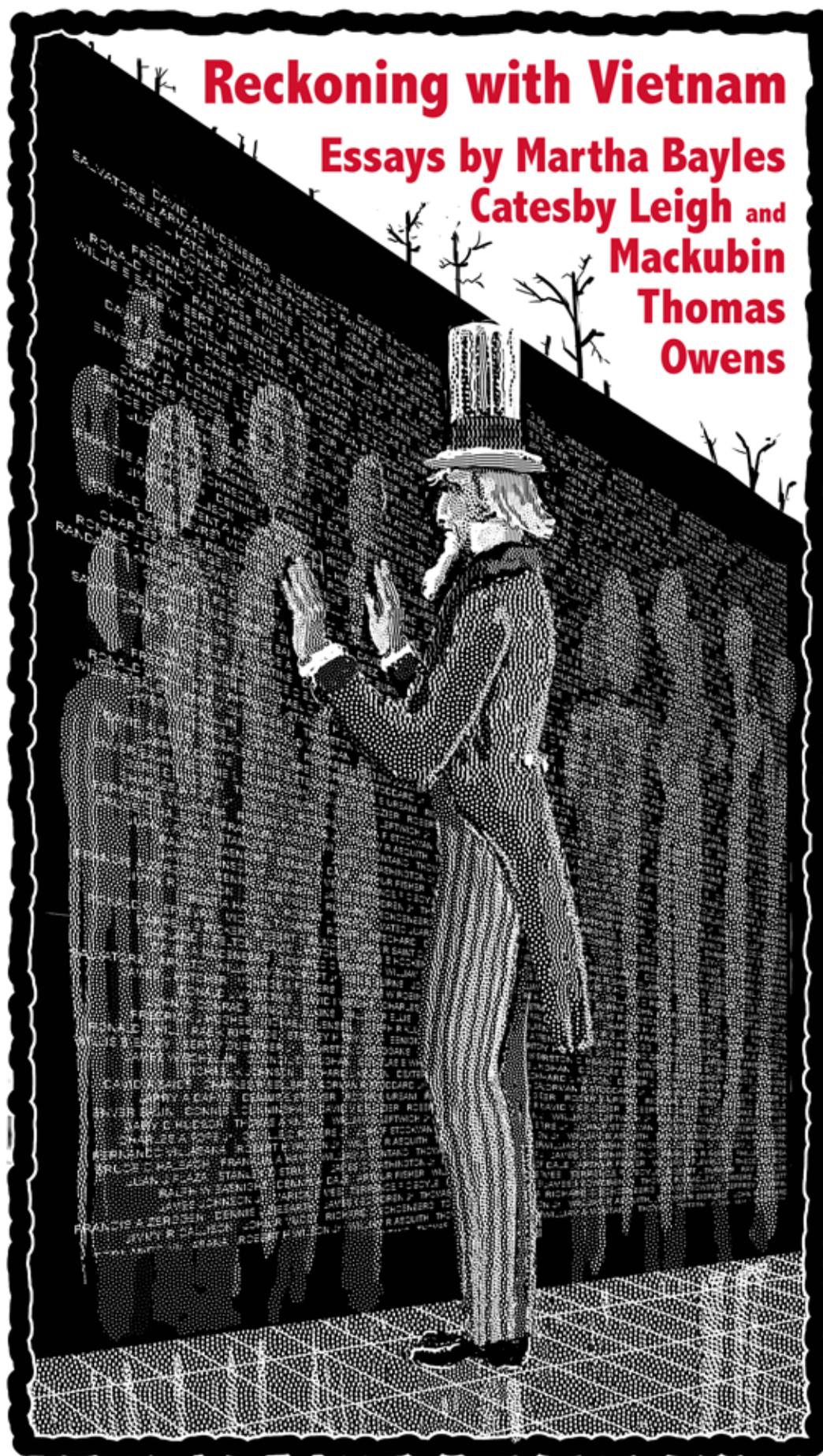
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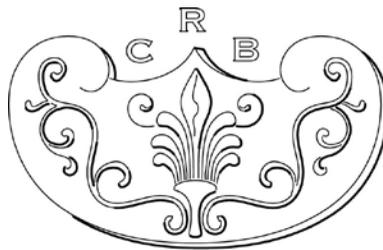
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Essay by Charles R. Kesler

## THINKING ABOUT TRUMP

TWO MONTHS BEFORE THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL election, the *Claremont Review of Books* published (in its digital pages) an essay that began: “2016 is the Flight 93 election: charge the cockpit or you die.” The author, Publius Decius Mus, a pseudonym for Michael Anton, who recently served as director of communications for the National Security Council, noted that “you may die anyway” because there were no guarantees except one: “if you don’t try, death is certain.”

He allowed that his metaphor might strike many readers as “histrionic.” It did; but it struck many more as galvanizing, especially when Rush Limbaugh devoted virtually an entire radio program to reading “The Flight 93 Election” excitedly to his listeners.

Not long after, a Never Trump friend took me aside to warn that the essay was “dangerous,” by which he meant irresponsible, “the kind of argument that could be used to justify...” He didn’t finish the thought, but I suppose he meant a calamity like a coup or the election of Donald J. Trump, assuming he could tell the difference. I pointed out the obvious, which is that the only non-metaphorical action the author urged Americans to consider was voting for the Republican presidential candidate. Nothing illegal about that, is there?

The broader point, of course, is that almost any spirited political appeal involves an ele-

ment of exaggeration for effect. After all, in a democracy free speech often aims to awaken the public to a danger to which it is presently blind or complacent. A free people understands this and *enjoys*, in both senses of the term, the exuberance of political argument, which is its birthright.

During the Cold War, with the danger of nuclear annihilation hanging heavy in the air, fellow-traveling leftists often deployed a surrender slogan, “better Red than dead,” to which American conservatives liked to retort, jauntily, “better dead than Red!” That qualified as an exaggeration, inasmuch as they were not looking forward to Mutual Assured Destruction, nor counseling, say, mass suicide in the event of a Soviet victory. More carefully stated, the slogan meant it was better to face the *possibility* of being dead than the *certainty* of being Red: it was a rallying cry to resist the Communists. And by means of a vigorous, anti-Communist foreign policy, it would be possible, God willing, to end up being neither dead nor Red, which was indeed how the Cold War played out not only for us but, more remarkably, for the Russians, too.

Is such freewheeling speech allowed anymore? That is a question for the Trump years, as we shall see. How amusing, in the meantime, that it is the president’s oppo-

nents who now seem to be eyeing the cockpit, nervously. And not merely in anticipation of a heated 2020 get-out-the-vote campaign. Some of them fantasize, rather openly, about congressional “interventions,” “Amendment 25” putsches, and other desperate steps that could be taken to remove the constitutionally elected president before he crashes Air Force One into the special counsel’s office.

They are letting off steam, mostly. But what’s remarkable is how little *light* they have shed on the object of their ire. After almost three years, American progressives and the conservative Never Trumpers are no closer to understanding the man and the political situation he’s helped to create than they ever were. If we wish to make some progress in understanding him and the state of the country, we need to start from a different point of view.

### Breaking Bad

TEDDY ROOSEVELT ONCE CONGRATULATED his countrymen for never having elected a bad man as president. More than a year into his presidency, the critics’ basic indictment of Donald Trump, delivered with several variations, is that he is a bad man, so bad as to be unfit for the presidential office. For most his badness bespeaks moral



vice, others cry up what might be called temperamental or psychological failings, while a few insist the disorder is intellectual. Among the Never Trump oddsmakers, the theory that he aspires consciously to be a tyrant seems to have faded, to be replaced by a more workaday worry over his “authoritarian personality,” which might be said to combine all three complaints.

The structure of the Never Trump argument is worth examining. Bad men make bad presidents; Trump is a bad man; therefore, Trump is, or will be, a bad president. For the syllogism to hold, both the major and the minor premises must be true. Let us stipulate, for the moment, that his critics are right in their commitment to the minor premise: Trump is a bad man. Does it follow that he must be a bad president?

There is certainly a lot of truth in the major premise. As the ancient Greeks used to say, “ruling shows the man.” That is, a man’s virtues and vices are clarified and magnified by his public actions and words, especially in the case of a president. “Character is destiny,” as the saying goes.

Yet two doubts or qualifications arise immediately. First, it is possible for a bad person to do good accidentally, as it were, either without intending to, or by intending quite deliberately to do so but for the sake of another, further end that is immoral or amoral. As Machiavelli argued (he wasn’t the first), the prince may be persuaded to serve the people for the sake of his own personal glory. That isn’t virtue as Christian or classical ethics would define it. But it can be productive of much public good, not as an intention but as a byproduct.

As it happens, the U.S. Constitution famously set up a series of institutional checks and balances to encourage ambitious men to vie against other ambitious men to serve the public good. The framers intended to enable men of good character to have the powers and duties they needed in office to put their virtues and talents to work, consciously pursuing justice and the common good; and at the same time, the framers intended to compel bad men to serve the public even if they would prefer not to. When working properly, the Constitution’s incentives would, by repetition, help to make such service habitual, and thus improve the character of some, at least, of the imperfect human beings who would get elected in this democratic republic.

Second, as these considerations suggest, a lot depends on what “bad men” actually means. Let’s begin from the beginning, as it were. From the point of view of original sin, we are all bad, that is, fallen—deprived of the

original justice and holiness God intended us to have. From this crooked wood of humanity—for there is no other—has come every so-called good, or even great, president. It shouldn’t be surprising, then, that many old-fashioned readers of the Bible, and evangelical Christians in particular, have made their peace with President Trump more easily than outside observers might have expected. Christians are commanded to hate the sin but love the sinner. That doesn’t mean they have to support Donald Trump. But his religious friends find it instructive that in the Bible God repeatedly found ways to use even very flawed human beings for His purposes—from King David, who procured her husband’s death so he could enjoy adultery with Bathsheba, to Saint Peter, who fearfully lied about his association with Jesus.

Though commanded to strive for godliness, Jews and Christians do not expect to reach it, at least not in this world. But presumably that is not quite the point being raised by “bad men make bad presidents.” All men, and all presidents, are not equally bad, nor bad in the same way. Many of Trump’s most well-meaning critics are thinking “bad” not in the sense of falling short of God’s glory but of falling short, through turpitude or vice (e.g., vanity, untruthfulness), of attainable human morality. Along these lines one of the less well-meaning critics, James Comey, the former FBI director, has said over and over, Trump is “morally unfit to be president.” These critics are scandalized that Trump is not scandalized by his own misdeeds, especially involving women.

It’s not uncommon, however, for bad men in this and similar senses to do good by the public. Gouverneur Morris, “the rake who wrote the Constitution,” as Richard Brookhiser calls him in his excellent biography, felt a kind of calling to sleep with other men’s wives. Martin Luther King, Jr., was a serial adulterer, as the tireless public servants in the FBI of his day knew well. These sins, which were habitual enough to be called vices, did not prevent—and detracted from, if at all, only slightly—the enormous public good they did.

Andrew Jackson killed a man in a duel, and would have killed more if he could. Ulysses S. Grant was a drunkard, at least for long stretches of his life. Grover Cleveland, an out-of-wedlock father through a dalliance that was Clintonian in its impetuosity, entered the presidency with chants of “Ma, Ma, where’s my pa?” ringing in his ears, only to be defended by his fellow Democrats who chanted, “Gone to the White House, ha, ha, ha!”

Exhorting Americans to live up to the Declaration of Independence’s principles as far as

they could, that is, as far as circumstances would allow, Abraham Lincoln liked to appeal to the verse, “Be ye perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.” But in accepting political allies among Know-Nothings and other unsavory elements, Lincoln resisted counsels of perfection and appealed to another verse, “by their fruits ye shall know them.” That is, the test of practical good should be: will bad or flawed men cooperate in delivering sound public policy (as measured by his, not by their, standards), regardless of their moral and intellectual failings?

The leap from bad men to bad presidents is not easy or automatic. Particulars matter. Bad character may be merely a distraction, or it may amount to a fatal flaw. If we are talking tyranny, or treason, or bestial depths of viciousness, or psychological or mental incapacity—these and similar species of badness clearly make for bad rulers and bad presidents. But the inability of moral virtue to rule the world is an old discovery, understood by none more profoundly than by the truly magnanimous statesmen like Lincoln who were keenly aware of the rarity of their greatness and goodness.

### Hard and Soft

**G**OOD CHARACTER REMAINS MORE desirable and honorable than bad character—even if bad character does not necessarily make for a bad president, nor good character for a good president. Based on his critics’ account of him, the question about Trump would seem to be, at least from the conservative point of view: how comes such a bad man to do so much good? That is, is it really the case, as the Never Trumpers’ minor premise asserts, that Trump is such a bad man? So bad that it was morally imperative to usher Hillary Clinton to the White House in his stead?

I’m reminded of Winston Churchill’s line about the socialist Stafford Cripps: “He has all the virtues I dislike and none of the vices I admire.” The Never Trumpers see no virtues in Trump, and admire none of his vices. The resulting portrait is a caricature, a rough, unrevealing one. No one would ever call him a moral paragon—not even the president himself. But the Trump universe theorized by the Never Trumpers is all dark matter; it doesn’t acknowledge the traits we see with our own eyes, including some admirable vices, but also his distinctive virtues, whether we choose to dislike them or not. The critics seem to prefer an explanation of Trump that is, as the cosmologists say, non-luminous.

Michael Barone’s *Hard America, Soft America: Competition vs. Coddling and the*

*Battle for the Nation's Future* (2004) is a short book with a useful distinction that begins to illuminate the phenomenon of Trump. It describes two countries, as it were. "Hard America" is shaped by the marketplace forces of competition and accountability. "Soft America" is the realm of public schools, self-esteem, and government social programs. The latter, according to Barone, produces incompetent and unambitious 18-year-olds, the former hard-charging and adaptable 30-year-olds. Somehow, uneasily, modern America includes both.

Donald Trump considers himself a kind of ambassador from hard America to soft America. Many (not all) of the asperities of his character are related to his career path. He calls himself "a builder," and America "a nation of builders." He knows his way around a construction site, and his virtues and vices skew to that hard, brazen, masculine world of getting things built quickly, durably, beautifully if possible, and in any case profitably. He wants to revive hard America's mines, factories, and building sites, in the face of what he knows is the growing power of its despisers in soft America.

Still, there are different districts in hard America. For example, Mitt Romney is a very successful businessman, too. But

Trump comes from a different neighborhood. They divide along recognizable lines that until 2016 did not seem that interesting, because most commentators simply assumed that Romney's neighborhood had forever displaced Trump's. They pose sharp contrasts within the world of hard America: construction versus consulting, blue-collar versus white-collar, "deals" versus mergers and acquisitions.

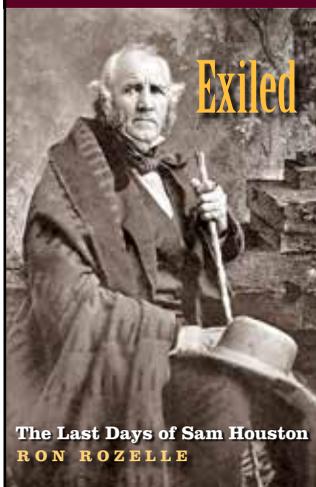
For most of his life, Trump ran a prosperous and famous family business. Though he's had clients, partners, and customers, he's never had to report regularly to a board of directors or to public shareholders or to regular capital markets, and it shows. He's used to being the boss, to following his intuition, to trying one thing and then another, to hiring and firing at will (and to hiring family members at will), to promoting himself and his companies shamelessly. Not every family entrepreneur is like this, but most could probably recognize a bit of themselves in Trump's exaggerated portrait. Whereas Trump is a wildcatter at heart, Rex Tillerson, his first secretary of state, the former CEO of Exxon, was Big Oil; it wasn't hard to predict they would clash.

As the quintessential Bain Capital private equity guy, Romney shunned big, old-line companies unless they were foundering.

Like Trump, he practiced a kind of creative destruction, but one that was planned, modeled, and financed as taught in the business schools (Romney is a joint Harvard J.D.-MBA). It was this spirit of cool expertise and willingness to sacrifice factories and jobs that helped to make so damaging Romney's leaked remark in 2012 about the "47%" who pay no income tax, whom he could never persuade "they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives." The only thing missing in his assessment was "deplorables."

Trump also knows his way around a television studio. The hard reality of being a builder and landlord is combined, in his case, with being a longstanding reality-TV star. If the preceding president cast himself in the role of "no-drama" Obama, the current one plays all-drama-all-the-time Trump. From the beginning his kind of real estate verged on show business. Branding and selling his name, which have constituted the largest part of his business for a while, represented for him another step in the direction of show business. Show business is a business, however, and Trump likes to interpret what might be considered the softer side of his career in the hardest possible terms. He emphasizes numbers—the ratings, the advertising dollars, the size of his crowds. He has survived in several

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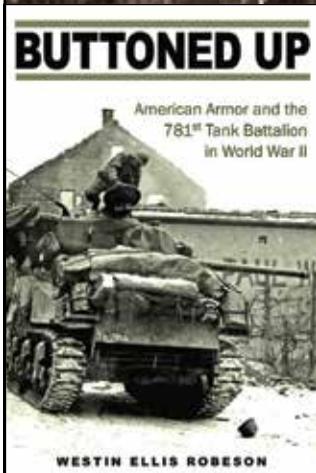
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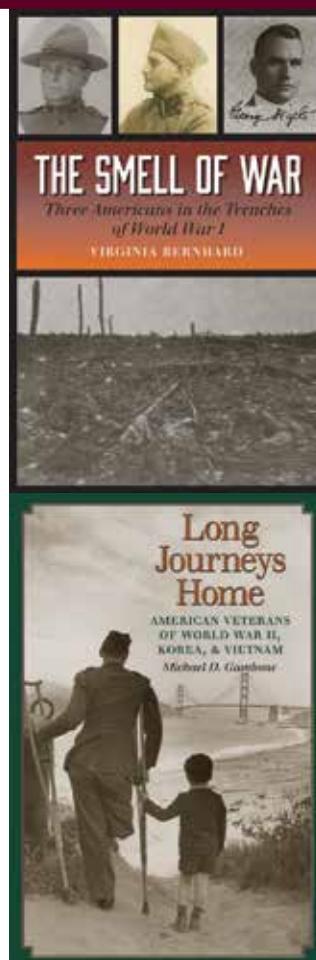
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Michael D. Gambone

*Long Journeys Home* explores the veteran experience in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. Author Michael D. Gambone examines and dissects the various myths that have grown up around each of these wars. Despite many differences, some obvious and some not, Gambone nonetheless finds a great deal of continuity, and ultimately concludes that Korean and Vietnam veterans have much more in common with the Greatest Generation than was previously understood.

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cutthroat industries, and intends to add politics to the list.

Whether in business or in politics, Trump disliked the airs and claims of “experts,” detached from and above the subjects of their experiments. He distrusted their glibness, too. He identified with working men and women, and promised (at least) to *add* jobs, to boost economic growth, to “win” for pipe-fitters and waitresses, too. He defended their Social Security but blasted the fraud of Obamacare, whereas Romney had scorned the 47%’s “entitlements” but gave Obamacare (based, you may recall, on Romneycare) a pass. Romney lacked perhaps what Kanye West would call “dragon energy.” When in a primary election he had done well among voters without a high school degree, Trump memorably declared, “I love the poorly educated.” You’d never hear Romney, nor any other mainstream Republican, say that!

Romney is certainly not a bad man, but he was portrayed in the 2012 presidential campaign as cruel to animals, a bully, a liar, a religious fanatic, a sexist (“binders full of women”), a warmonger, and many other evil things by the campaigning Left. These days the Left is always campaigning; as is the Right. Under those conditions, moral criticisms shade quickly into aesthetic-political ones, and vice versa. It is not entirely clear whether his liberal and conservative critics disapprove of Trump because he violates moral law or because he is *infra dig*. The ease with which the one yields to the other might suggest that his conservative opponents in particular should take pains to specify their objections and check their own prejudices. Their favorite medium for getting these off their chest—Twitter—suggests that painstakingness is not the point.

At any rate, Trump was neither the first nor the last GOP presidential candidate to be caricatured as a very bad, very rich man. The ease with which businessmen of whatever precinct may be caricatured as immoralists shows that soft America is perhaps not as soft as Barone thought. Soft America, centered on our schools, is hard enough to have come up with political correctness, now the cutting edge of American progressivism. And hard America, at least its Fortune 500 slice, has proved soft enough to become the chief disseminator of political correctness to middle America.

### In Search of Populism

**T**RUMP IS OFTEN CALLED A POPULIST, though it isn’t a word he uses very often or to describe himself. Yet many of his alleged moral and political disqualifications

are said to trace to his populism, whatever that means. In the age of big government or, more precisely, of administrative government, the word appears in country after country but always elusively. It responds to a need but never satisfies that need.

When the original American populists organized the People’s Party in time for the 1892 election, their rallying cry was the people versus “the interests,” meaning the railroads and large corporations that were squeezing farmers and small businessmen, and that allegedly dominated the two main political parties. So they started a new party calling for silver money and lots of it, nationalization of the railroads, a federal income tax, and other reforms including the initiative, referendum, and direct election of senators.

But in an age when the vast majority of federal laws are regulations passed by unelected bureaucrats, when state and federal courts freely strike down state initiatives they dislike, when the money supply is controlled by the

## Trump alone among the 2016 candidates took an unflinching, a *proud* stand against the multicultural dissolution and loathing of America.

unelected members of the Federal Reserve, when campaign finance laws make it difficult for new parties to form, and when there is already a federal program for almost every imaginable social problem—what is “populism” supposed to do?

The post-1960s bargain that Americans made with their government, not quite knowingly to be sure, was to exchange more and more aspects of popular control over government for a guarantee to the people of new, constantly updated rights, assigned by the government to economic, social, ethnic, racial, gender, and transgender groups. The exchange of power for rights has left us addicted to the rights but frustrated at the loss of power. The whole bargain seems increasingly hollow. And it could get worse if the next Democratic administration resumes President Obama’s efforts to use treaties and international organizations to upload more power to foreign courts and bureaucrats, even further removed from the American people.

As a result, there are fewer and fewer levers by which the governed can make its consent count, by which an indignant people can exert control over its own government. In the administrative state there is little room for populism because there is no room for an independent people. The “people” has been broken down into claimant groups, and every group has been organized, the better to mesh with the gears of the state. The only escape would be somehow to revive the older political system, which limited government enough so that the people could responsibly control the government, directly via elections and indirectly through the Constitution. The only populism that could make a difference, in other words, has at its heart a return to constitutionalism.

That’s a very daunting goal, not particularly clear in its ultimate demands. How to get there is just as daunting. In 2010 the Tea Party cheered the ends but remained baffled by the means, and then offered to let the Republican Party take over its thinking, which was a fatal mistake. The GOP never got beyond opposing Obamacare...without ever having thought, at least seriously, of a substitute.

Elections remain the people’s primary means to control the government, and it was through that door Trump entered our political life, at the head of a popular movement that gradually gathered to oppose the existing Republican establishment, the torpor of the conservative movement, and the politically correct, and increasingly anti-American, Left. Several times Trump has pointed out that the movement he led lacked a name, and lacks one still. This reflects probably the sheer confusion of the political moment, as the popular resistance to the consolidation and expansion of progressivism—to eight more years of Obama-style transformation—measured its lofty, desperate goals against the field of 17 contenders for the 2016 GOP presidential nomination. It reflects also, however, that Trump was not the origin of the discontent, however vital he was to its crystallization.

In the beginning it looked like a very impressive field, until Trump began to campaign against it. He announced his candidacy in June 2015, on the day after Jeb Bush did. Bush already had raised \$120 million, collected binders full of endorsements, muscled Romney out of the way, and stood near the top of every poll. Within a month Trump had overtaken him. Trump stayed at the top the rest of the way, with the exception of a few weeks of jockeying with Ben Carson.

The story of Trump’s rise was also the story of Jeb’s fall—of the whole Bush establishment’s fall. Republican voters came



gradually to realize that George W. Bush's presidency, despite some glorious moments, looked more and more like a failure. The administration's occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan had curdled into endless war and self-deluded democratization. Its domestic agenda of compassionate conservatism had proved underwhelming, leading to a bigger federal role in education, a new Medicare entitlement, and failed efforts to implement "comprehensive immigration reform," meaning more immigration, multiculturalism, and Democrats. At the end of his tenure the economy collapsed into the Great Recession, prepared in part by his administration's compassionate distribution of mortgages to uncreditworthy borrowers.

Trump awakened the Republican Party to how alienated it was from its own titular leaders and their agenda, which had been officially ratified by the Republican National Committee in its "postmortem" on Romney's loss in the 2012 election. The RNC recommended—demanded—more of the same, and especially a healthy dose of immigration "reform," for which Jeb, the former governor of Florida, was the perfect standard bearer. The only problem was that the party elites had completely misread the party base. They missed the huge popular (or was it populist?) wave that was

building, the wave that Trump would ride to the White House.

### Conservative Torpor

FROM GEORGE H.W. ON, BUSH FAMILY POLITICIANS had fancied themselves not only as post-Reagan Republicans, though their eagerness in that respect was revealing enough, but as supra-Reagan, a more public-spirited, morally grounded class of leadership. The story, probably apocryphal, has Nancy Reagan listening to H.W.'s acceptance speech, in which he vowed to seek a kinder, gentler America. Afterwards she asked Ronnie, "Kinder, gentler than *who*?" Exactly. The history of the GOP post-Reagan, through its presidential avatars Bush 41, Dole, Bush 43, McCain, and Romney, is a history of barely contained jealousy, disparagement, and imaginary transcendence of Reagan conservatism.

In terms of its public policy successes, the conservative movement peaked in the Reagan years, launching a generation-long rejuvenation of the economy and preparing the defeat of Soviet Communism. The Berlin Wall, and soon after the Soviet Union itself, fell during H.W.'s watch, though mostly as the result of his predecessor's policies. After that, conservatives relaxed their vigilance, confident they

were winning in a post-Soviet, post-socialist world. The GOP took the House of Representatives in 1994, for the first time in 40 years. Didn't Bill Clinton declare that "the era of big government is over?"

Conservatives sunk into a self-satisfied contentment, confident that what, in his brief heyday, Newt Gingrich called "the third wave" would conduct them safely and inevitably to shore. When the emerging Republican realignment did not emerge, many conservatives adjusted their timelines but did not despair. In the long run, they reflected, the alternation in power of conservatives and chastened liberals would produce an orderly progress toward moderate conservatism—or moderate liberalism, but in any event toward moderation. The price of this bargain did not seem high: the Left insisted on dictating the moral rules of the road, including the complete rulebook of racial and gender etiquette. Affirmative action, in particular, was here to stay in college admissions and business hiring. Republicans hardly objected: what were Human Relations departments for, after all?

It was business as usual for the GOP and, to a lesser but still significant extent, for the conservative movement throughout the Bush era, from H.W. to Jeb. That era ended when Trump descended the escalator at Trump

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### Lost in Translations *Roman Law Scholarship and Translation in Early Twentieth-Century America*

Timothy G. Kearley, University of Wyoming School of Law, Emeritus  
Forthcoming June 2018, ISBN 978-1-5310-0722-5

*Lost in Translations* focuses on five Roman law scholars (all but one of whom were trained as lawyers) who worked early in the twentieth century. Among them, they produced the first English translations of the Codex Theodosianus and Justinian's entire Corpus Juris Civilis, as well as other ancient Roman laws. In describing their heroic and often solitary labor, Kearley also addresses the history of American education.

### Communicators-in-Chief *Lessons in Persuasion from Five Eloquent American Presidents*

Julie Oseid, University of St. Thomas School of Law  
2017, 274 pp, ISBN 978-1-5310-0388-3, \$29.00, paper

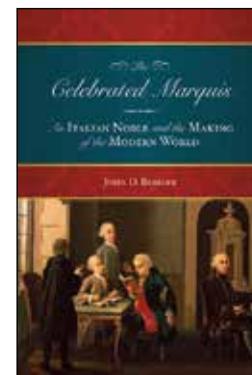
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### Send Them Back

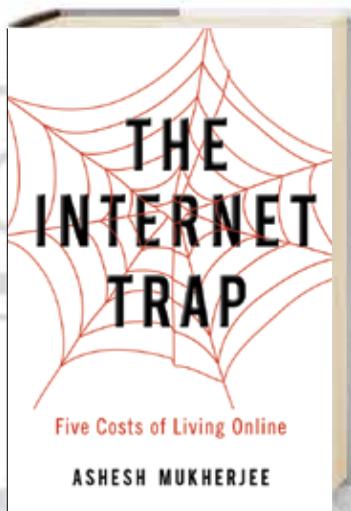
Irwin Stotzky, University of Miami School of Law

Forthcoming June 2018, ISBN 978-1-61163-849-3

*Send Them Back* highlights several of the cases that civil rights lawyers, working directly with Haitians and other activists, filed and litigated for Haitian refugees, and the legal, social, and political aspects of such litigation. The litigation fostered both structural legal changes — and a determined political opposition — to unfair and illegal immigration decisions.

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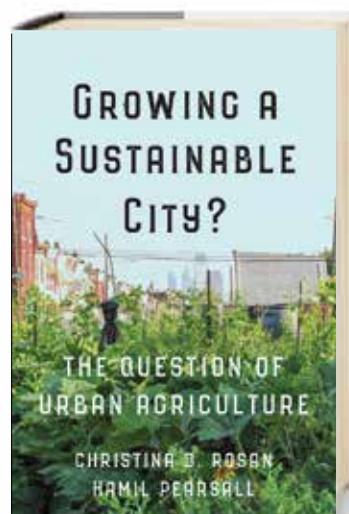


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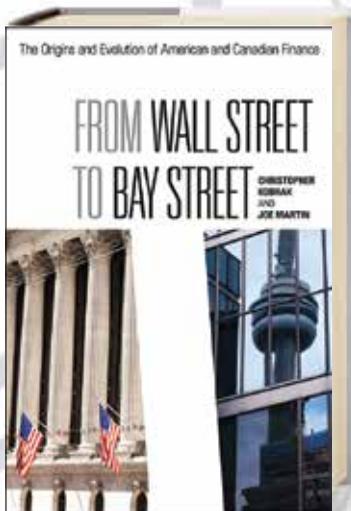


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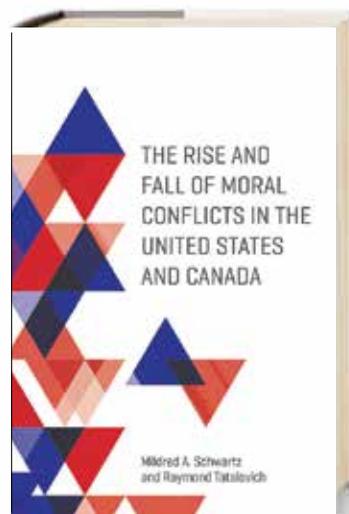


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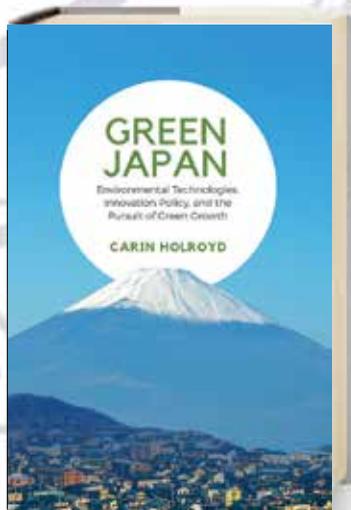
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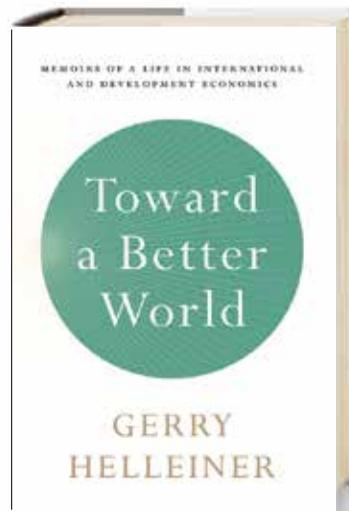


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by Carin Holroyd

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by Gerry Helleiner

In this memoir, Gerry Helleiner, Canada's leading development economist, recounts how his early experiences in Africa propelled him into a career devoted to teaching economic development and the reduction of global poverty.





Tower to announce his candidacy. It's far from clear that the Trump Administration will end well, but it's perfectly clear that the Bush era—one might almost say, the Bush-Clinton era—is over, for good or ill.

Perhaps only a genuine outsider could have smashed it. Although presidential candidates often present themselves as outsiders,

Trump is the real thing: a complete novice in politics. Lacking experience or a deep acquaintance with history, he is forced to improvise. Sometimes that scrambling has the character of the best kind of entrepreneurial innovation, sometimes it seems like the worst kind of reality-TV blather, when the unscripted imperative is to say or do *some-*

*thing*—the more dramatic the better—and see what happens next.

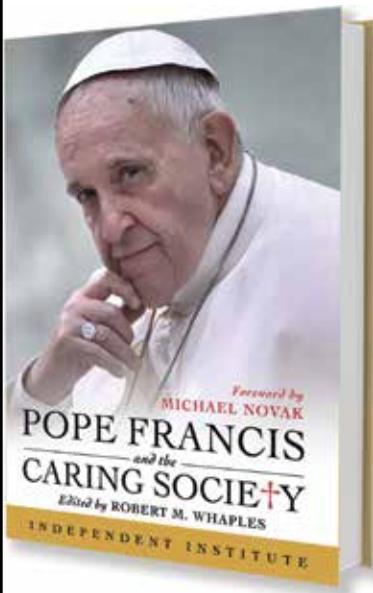
His campaign was a case in point. It wasn't an accident that his children filled so many key positions in the early going. That wasn't nepotism, it was desperation. Trump didn't know the experienced strategists, fundraisers, pollsters, and politicians that a normal presidential campaign requires to operate. Most of the outsiders who were attracted to him early were either complete unknowns or has-beens. (Everyone you'd ever heard of was working for one of the other 16 GOP contenders.) Steve Bannon was virtually unknown then, and certainly had no political experience. It's possible to be a "populist" while being unknown by the people, but it isn't exactly a recommendation. Through Bannon's activities at Breitbart the term "alt-right," also hitherto virtually unknown, began to circulate. This was a boon to the liberal press, who needed a MacGuffin to pursue for the rest of the campaign.

It was a mess, but competent people eventually were found, and amid the confusion Trump's indictment of the torpid party leaders continued to be heard, and welcomed. He had two conspicuous virtues that his Republican opponents, and Hillary Clinton too, lacked. One was a sense of humor. To address rallies for an hour at a time off the cuff and keep them laughing is very hard to do. His humor was not gentlemanly or self-deprecating like Reagan's; it was cutting, bold, outrageous, and usually at the expense of his opponents and the press. But Trump connected with his audience as Reagan did, because each spoke as a citizen to fellow citizens, without a trace of the policy expert's condescension, cosmopolitanism, or crocodile tears. The press never got Trump's humor.

His second virtue was a kind of courage in defense of one's own. This was a courage never tested in war or physical emergency, to be sure, but it was a large, and impressive, political fact. He was prepared to stand up for his family, his company, his campaign, his country, and for his country's jobs, workers, factories, and products. Courage never demands that one be perfect or morally pure, and he isn't, so this virtue fit his rhetorical needs and strength. America does not have to be perfect for him to defend her wholeheartedly against her enemies. He does not have to be perfect to seek or to assert the privilege of defending her. Warts and all. It's necessary only to love her.

Obama was constantly apologizing for America's past, present, and future sins. Hillary promised more of the same, only more gratefully. Trump regards this duty as, at best, a very small slice of the presidential portfolio; when vastly overdone, it becomes a moral nullity and a political con game.

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One effect of his courage in defense of our own was to neutralize the effects in the campaign of what used to be called “liberal guilt.” In truth, liberals long ago spread it to Republicans and conservatives. Part of the Bush dynasty’s high self-regard had to do with its presumed sensitivity on this question. Why Republicans should feel so guilty over historic Democratic policies like slavery and segregation is itself a good question, but the tactic has worked for decades to paralyze conservatives’ self-confidence and pride, and to induce them to take compensating positions on, say, immigration “reform” to prove their bona fides. Trump was the first GOP candidate and president in a long time to prove immune to this gambit. He appeared in public guilt-free.

In his confidence in America’s principles and in the ultimate justice of the people, and his refusal to indulge in racial and sexual guilt-mongering, Trump resembles those brave conservatives like Clarence Thomas, Shelby Steele, and Thomas Sowell, who have turned their face against the contemporary politics of liberal guilt, including its insistence on never-ending affirmative action. Like them he believes in equal opportunity, which means a chance for anyone, male or female, black or white, to prove up to the job. But that requires the same standards for everyone. Like these prominent black thinkers, he doesn’t mind that that makes him politically incorrect. In fact, he seems to enjoy it.

### Great Again

“MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN,” Trump’s slogan, presupposes of course that America once was great, and might be again. His courage in defense of her is thus not entirely blind to her faults and her glories. (You can love someone and still see the warts.) He assumes that her citizens ought to be proud of America, that

she is something noble or capable of being noble.

These notions, which used to be the common sense of American politics, are now highly controversial. They are politically incorrect, rejected as “offensive” on many college campuses and increasingly in American politics. Today’s freshmen, who are tomorrow’s voters, soon learn (if they hadn’t been taught already) to believe in the ubiquitous malevolence of “white supremacy” in American politics as earnestly as Protestants believe (or used to) in the depravity of human nature after Adam’s fall. Needless to say, it’s a very different thing to believe that human nature is inherently warped, and that white nature is. To disbelieve this racist canon is itself, in contemporary parlance, proof of racism.

Trump has his eye on the contemporary Left’s extremism, but this is not so much the statist Left that the libertarians oppose, nor the values-and-autonomy Left resisted by the religious Right, but the anti-American Left. This Left plunged its knife into our politics in the 1960s and has been twisting it ever since.

The Old Left had opposed American capitalism, the Progressives had condemned American plutocracy, but not until the ’50s and ’60s did a significant faction of the Left begin to blame the American masses, not the elite, for the country’s sins. The people became the problem. They were racist, materialist, imperialist, sexist, and sexually inhibited, according to the original catalogue of sins; later the phobias were discovered—homophobia, Islamophobia, transphobia, and so forth. Together these comprise pretty much the irredeemable sins Hillary had in mind when she condemned Trump’s voters as deplorable. His voters weren’t the whole country, but they were close enough. (And to be fair, she said she meant to denounce only about half his voters.)

Far from being Trump’s authoritarian fantasy, the Left’s growing alienation from

middle America, and hence from America, has been remarked and resisted in a series of major liberal books in recent decades: Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.’s *The Disuniting of America* (1991), Richard Rorty’s *Achieving Our Country* (1998), and Mark Lilla’s *The Once and Future Liberal* (2017). What these estimable volumes also have in common, alas, is ineffectiveness. They didn’t stop or even slow the Left’s self-alienation.

Increasingly, therefore, the effect of higher education is to turn our own children into aliens, and hostile ones at that. In truth, the difficulties of assimilating today’s immigrants are due mainly to us, not to them; they are reluctant mostly because they are learning from us that America is not a country worth assimilating to. Trump alone among the 2016 candidates took an unflinching, a *proud* stand against the multicultural dissolution and loathing of America. In that sense he was, as he occasionally indicated, a pro-immigration politician: great again, America would be a country worth immigrating to. “To make us love our country, our country ought to be lovely,” as Edmund Burke observed. To be citizens again, Americans of all sorts must re-discover their country’s loveliness.

That stand on behalf of America took not only courage but also a certain justice, which he expressed in very American terms. “When you open your heart to patriotism,” he said in his inaugural address, “there is no room for prejudice.” Donald Trump has gotten little credit for such virtues, but they are present amid the hurly-burly, the distractions, the mistakes, the tweets, the investigations, the exhaustion, and the shrewd public policy of the Trump Administration so far. His good qualities are the quietest part of his presidency.

*Charles R. Kesler is the editor of the Claremont Review of Books.*

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