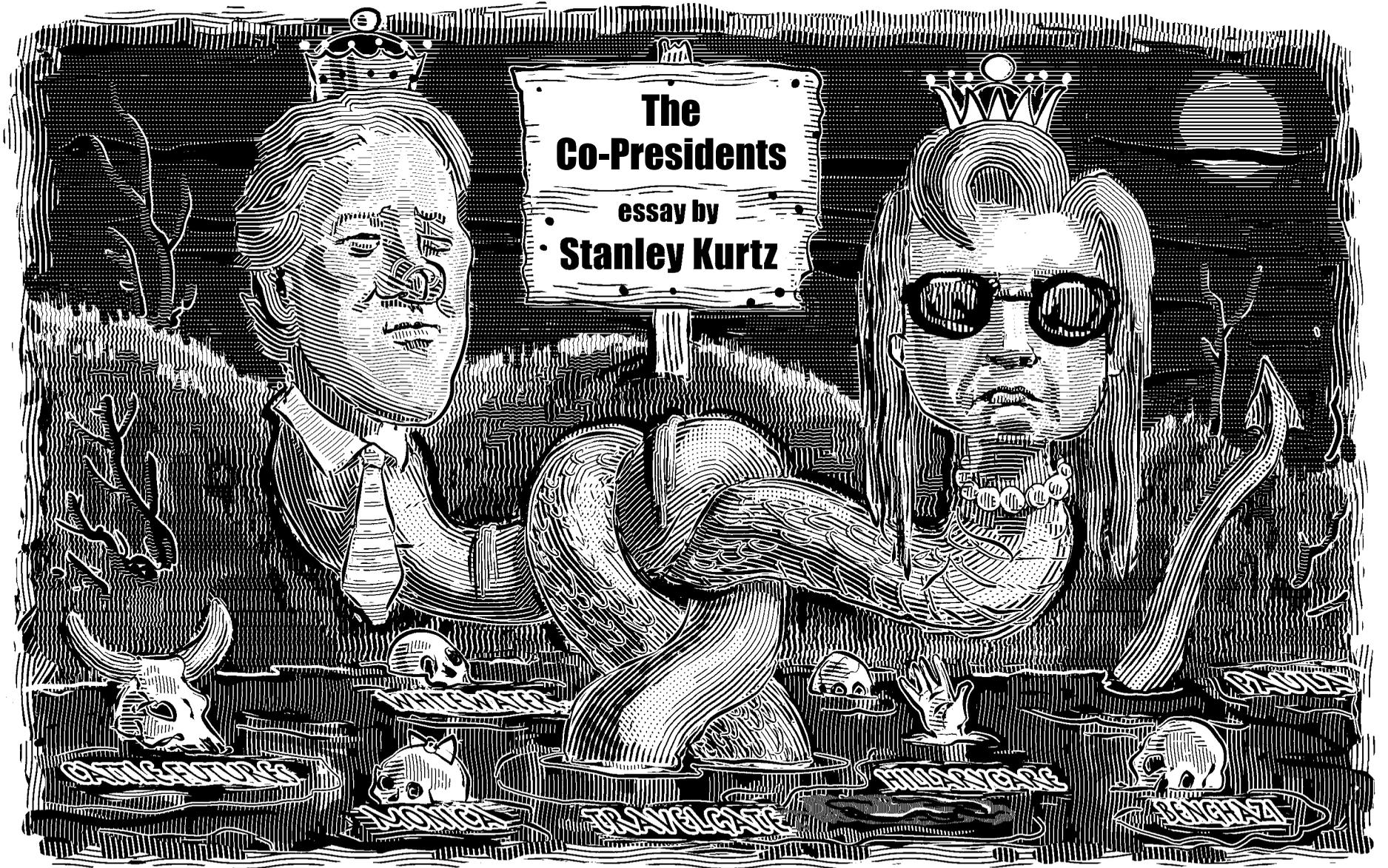


VOLUME XIV, NUMBER 3, SUMMER 2014

CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship



Algis Valiunas:
The Great War

John Yoo:
**Is the President
a King?**

Paul A. Cantor:
Jonathan Swift

Plus:

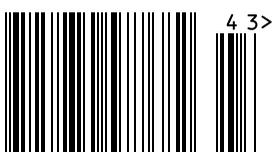
Steven F. Hayward:
**Barry Goldwater's
Extremism**

James W. Ceaser:
Three Funerals

William Voegeli:
The Resurgent Left

John O'Sullivan:
**The Good, the Bad, &
the Ugly American**

David P. Goldman:
Codevilla at War



A Publication of the Claremont Institute

PRICE: \$6.95

IN CANADA: \$7.95

PARTHIAN SHOT

by James W. Ceaser



Three Funerals

TWO STATE FUNERALS IN LESS THAN TWO YEARS IS A LOT FOR ANY nation to bear. The first, officiated by liberal commentators after the 2012 election, gave notice of the “death of conservatism,” (in *New York Times Book Review* editor Sam Tanenhaus’s phrase). The principal causes cited were an exhaustion of ideas and the reliance for political support on a dwindling base of older, married, and more religious white people. Late last year, it was the conservative commentators’ turn. Led by Charles Krauthammer, they announced without mourning the “collapse of liberalism,” a development declared almost self-evident from the failures of President Obama’s signature programs and his sinking poll numbers.

These two post-mortems, while different in their political implications, are not necessarily at odds. As the 2014 mid-term elections approach, the political situation resembles two dead men walking. Confidence in liberalism is foundering without any corresponding revival in support for conservatism.

Liberalism’s demise was unexpected. Healthy and vigorous until just recently, liberals were confident that their cherished arc of History was at last bending in their favor. They imagined that they would be dancing today on their opponents’ graves. Instead, they find themselves haunted by the prospect that the dry bones of their enemies might be reassembling. Liberals are at risk of incurring not just the usual electoral setback for the president’s party in a midterm election (which is traditionally more pronounced in an incumbent’s sixth year), but also a wound that touches the heart of the Progressive project. That project, crafted originally more than a century ago, had as its main goal the egalitarian promotion of social justice. It would be carried out in a political system exercising “social control”—a favorite and favorable term of the original Progressives—that was directed largely from the top and would follow the “best science.” It would be implemented by an efficient and effective public administration that would regulate or replace the irrationalities and injustices of the market. Progressivism offered a vision of government of the experts, by the experts, but for the people. Its democratic legitimacy would be assured through the leadership of high-minded orator presidents able both to persuade and inspire the public, thereby resolving the age-old dilemma of reconciling wisdom and consent.

Support for the Progressive goal of social justice, as distinct from the means for achieving it, remains strong today and stacks up as well as ever against the sometimes conflicting goals of economic growth, liberty, and fulfilling a national historical destiny. Trumpeting social justice, which has become the progressives’ full-time preoccupation, has enabled them until recently to avoid suffering a loss of political support, even as the actual conditions of social justice have deteriorated under their watch. Progressives have of course played the evasion-of-responsibility card, blaming the results on their predecessors’ egregious policies and their opponents’ ill will and stupidity. But even where responsibility is not explicitly denied, progressives have the escape route of arguing that their policies best protect those facing adversity. It would be perverse to suggest that liberals prefer failure to success, but the truth is that their cause is not hurt

by failure nearly as much as one might think—hence President Obama’s remarkable ability to prosper politically while lamenting the growing inequalities and the worsening plight of the poor and the unemployed.

WHERE LIBERALISM HAS CROSSED A THRESHOLD, HOWEVER, IS in its repeated incapacity to achieve, by its own favored means, its highest priorities. From the farce of “shovel ready” projects, to the disaster of the health care roll out, to the disgrace of mismanaging the socialized medical system for veterans, all but the most ideologically blinkered of liberals—which includes most in the media and academy—must have begun to experience doubts. If the smartest president ever, in consultation with the best experts ever, endowed with the most lavish resources ever cannot get programs to operate, then, Washington, we have a problem. Even among millennials, one of the progressives’ core constituencies, faith in the efficacy of government to manage complex affairs has plummeted. No wonder, then, that the idea of government administration no longer fires the imagination of today’s youth. Who among the talented next generation yearns to become a GS 15 in the Department of Health and Human Services?

Yet the greatest problem liberalism faces today does not result from doubts about government competence, but from a slowly dawning realization that liberals are increasingly disposed to sacrifice means to ends and impartiality to social justice. The result is repressive progressivism. Progressivism was born in a spirit of creating “good government,” which preached scrupulous fidelity to law, honesty, transparency, and separation of politicking from governing. This concern was cast aside as naïve by Franklin Roosevelt and ignored by Bill Clinton, from whom no one ever expected more. Current liberalism, however, was supposed to return to its progressive roots, and the public took Barack Obama at his word in his promise to do so. On every count, liberalism now disregards these procedures, whether in its routine presentation of erroneous or misleading facts, its outright lies, or its suppression of information. To see how certain agencies of government, beginning with the Department of Justice, treat whistleblowers, average citizens, or members of the media reminds one ever more of the behavior of authoritarian government.

For the most part, accusations of abuse and irregularity are met with denials, which almost no one believes. Far more disturbing, however, is that these excesses are now tacitly justified by the argument that such measures now operate in the service of a higher cause and are excused by the existence of an emergency. Emergency is not used here in the usual sense of a threat of an imminent attack or of an impending economic crisis. It refers instead to the dangerous character of the opposition and to the possibility that the opposition might win power. Whether such ideas are limited to those who lead us today or have seeped down to become part of liberalism’s core is difficult to say. Either way, the prospect is frightening. The death we should fear most is not that of an ideology but of free government itself.

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
the preminent intellectual journal
of conservative ideas and books. It
does for conservatism what the
New York Review of Books has done
for liberalism and leftism.”*

—Ron Radosh

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) 621-6825.

CLAREMONT
REVIEW OF BOOKS
937 W. FOOTHILL BLVD.
SUITE E
CLAREMONT, CA
91711

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