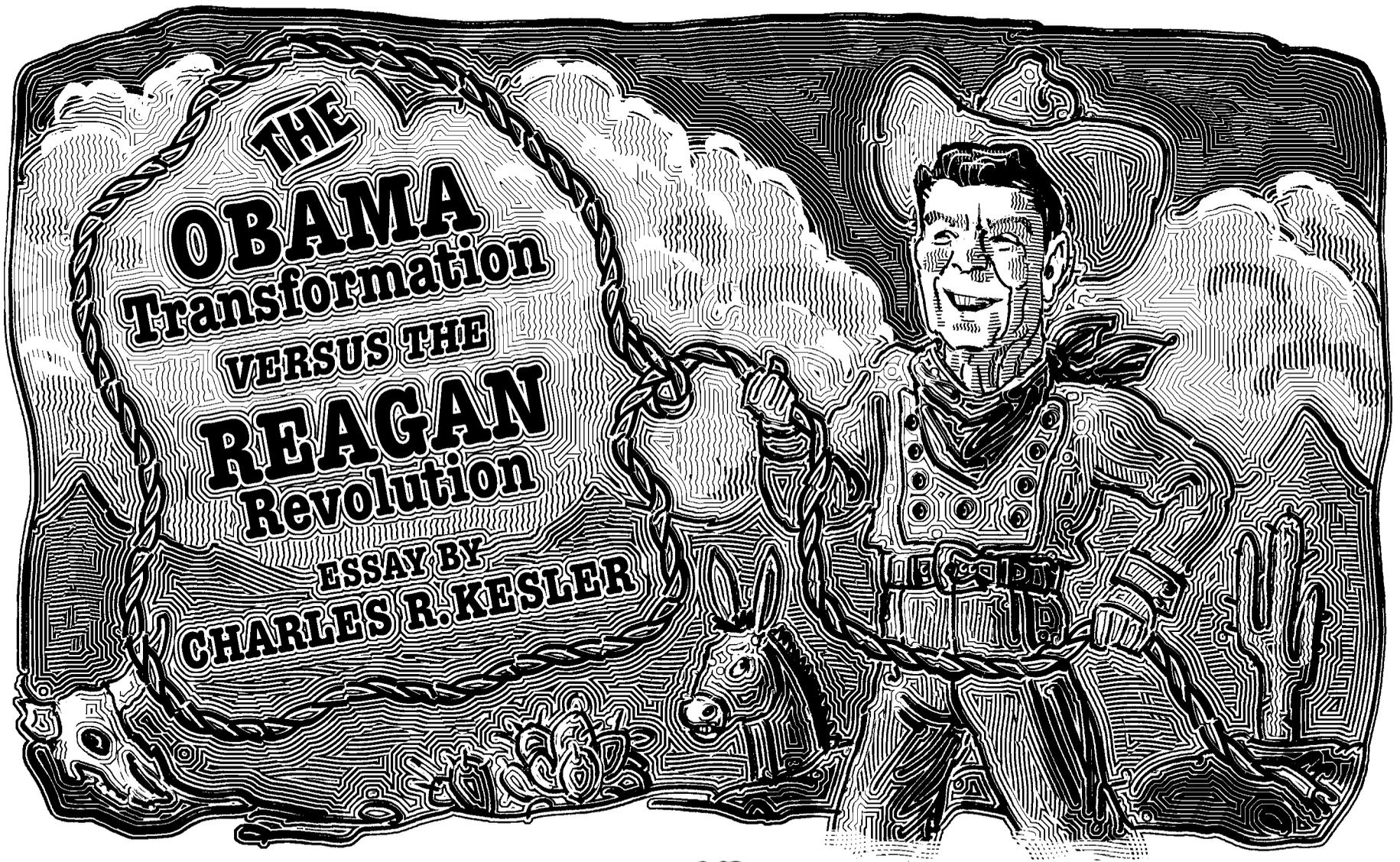


VOLUME XV, NUMBER 3, SUMMER 2015

CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship



AND

Christopher DeMuth:
**Our Corrupt
Government**

Brian T. Kennedy:
Choosing Defeat

Timothy Sandefur:
Star Trek Adrift

William Voegeli:
**The Church of What's
Happening Now**

Thomas D. Klingenstein
& Peter W. Wood:
**Free Speech
on Campus**

Charles Murray:
Our Kids

James Grant:
**Causes of the
Crash**

Joseph Epstein:
Young T.S. Eliot



A Publication of the Claremont Institute

PRICE: \$6.95

IN CANADA: \$8.95

YOU'RE FIRED!

by Charles R. Kesler

I NEVER THOUGHT REALITY TV WAS GOING TO WORK OUT WELL. IF a show couldn't afford a good script and good actors, why should anyone watch it? But millions did, and here we are, wondering what Donald Trump's campaign, more improvised than his television show, tells us about the state of American politics.

It's been good for humorists, that's for sure. Garry Trudeau's *Doonesbury*, a comic strip that hasn't been funny in two decades, flickered to life the other day. Asked why he thought he was qualified to be leader of the free world, the cartoon Trump replied: "Three words: Supermodel First Lady!" *The Onion* ran a faux editorial by Trump:

I've already alienated America's largest immigrant population... and publicly insulted a national hero's military service, all while not offering a single viable policy idea. But none of that matters at all.... Admit it: You people want to see just how far this goes, don't you?

We are along for the ride, partly to see the crack-up at the end but mostly to see the establishment gasp along the way. Trump is a populist but of a peculiar sort. William Jennings Bryan didn't go around calling himself "The William." The Donald talks (strictly in this order) about himself, the idiocy of the American political elite, and the good qualities of the American people, who come in a distant third. Even his anti-elitism is strangely personal. It's not a class hatred; it consists of a big, brash, rich (*verrry* rich) New Yorker calling out Jeb Bush, President Obama, and Megyn Kelly by name. It's an invitation to a rumble, not to a revolution. The rumble is all songs and no switchblades, of course, but that doesn't make it less fascinating.

Trump's populism exploits three frustrations with modern government or, more precisely, with the people who run it—that they're illegitimate, incompetent, and insufferable. The first lay behind Trump's dogged pursuit of President Obama's long-form birth certificate, trying to prove that he was born not in Hawaii but somewhere else, somewhere that would allegedly disqualify him from being president, or at least prove him a liar. Not only illusory, this gambit distracted from genuine worries about the illegitimacy of a government that concentrates more and more power in a distant elite, with less and less accountability to the public.

SINCE ANNOUNCING HIS PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY, TRUMP talks less like a birther and more like a turnaround artist. He excoriates the incompetence of Obama, Hillary Clinton, John Kerry, Jeb, George W. Bush, and other stupid, moronic, idiotic, and low-I.Q. holders of high office past and present. Losers! It isn't often that populism and demands for high job performance go hand in hand, and we should be grateful. Nativism is not his thing. His complaint is that the rulers of China, Mexico, Russia, ISIS, and Iran, among others, are smarter and bolder than our own. When he promises to build a wall along our southern border, he emphasizes it is to keep criminals, drug addicts, and perverts out, not the good Mexicans who want to work for him. In 1992 Ross Perot offered competence, too, but more as a set of technical skills: he knew how to look under the hood and "fix it." Trump knows how "to get things done." He is a deal-maker, a hard bargainer, a guy you are glad is on your side of the table—and a hard boss, too. How we long to hear him say to the elites of both parties: "You're fired!"

There are other things his supporters and onlookers like to hear him say. In fact, a huge (make that *yuuuuuge*) part of his appeal comes from his forthrightness in a P.C. age. He says things, never eloquently or without bluster, and in a surprisingly limited vocabulary, but nonetheless things that few others would have the audacity to say in private, much less in a presidential debate. To the insufferable smugness of the elites he offers the contrast of a populist breath of fresh air, and of something more valuable: a reminder of what America used to be like when it was a freer country, before political correctness did away with candor. When he denounces the best and brightest as dumb and dumber, that stings. And we cheer. All the more so because he refuses to apologize the way everyone hypocritically does these days, to get the P.C. police to call off the dogs.

If he really wants to be president, which isn't clear yet, he faces an obstacle that he may not have foreseen. Very few businessmen have made it to the U.S. presidency. Though Americans often admire successful business leaders, they often don't see them as having the right mix of talents and virtues for the nation's top job. Even reality TV has to face reality, eventually.

Claremont Review of Books, Volume XV, Number 3, Summer 2015. (Printed in the United States on August 14, 2015.)

Published quarterly by the Claremont Institute for the Study of Statesmanship and Political Philosophy, 1317 W. Foothill Blvd, Suite 120, Upland, CA 91786. Telephone: (909) 981-2200. Fax: (909) 981-1616. Postmaster send address changes to Claremont Review of Books Address Change, 1317 W. Foothill Blvd, Suite 120, Upland, CA 91786. Unsolicited manuscripts must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope; or may be sent via email to: crbeditor@claremont.org.

Send all letters to the editor to the above addresses.

Editor: Charles R. Kesler

Senior Editors:

Christopher Flannery, William Voegeli

Managing Editor: John B. Kienker

Production Editor: Patrick Collins

Assistant Editor: Lindsay Eberhardt

Contributing Editor: Joseph Tartakovsky

Art Director: Elliott Banfield

Publisher: Michael Pack

Publisher (2000–2001): Thomas B. Silver

Price: \$6.95 per copy; \$27.80 for a one-year subscription; \$55.60 for a two-year subscription; \$83.40 for a three-year subscription. Add \$17 for all foreign subscriptions, including those originating in Canada and Latin America. To subscribe, call (909) 981-2200, or contact subscriptions@claremont.org.

Visit us online at www.claremont.org/crb. Opinions expressed in signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the editors, the Claremont Institute, or its board of directors. Nothing in this journal is an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill or influence the election of any candidate. All contents Copyright © 2015 the Claremont Institute, except where otherwise noted.

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*

*“In an age when reflection and civility are out of style, the *Claremont Review of Books* has become one of the only places where important new books are treated seriously and in depth by reviewers who know what they're talking about.”*

—Charles Murray

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
937 W. FOOTHILL BLVD.
SUITE E
CLAREMONT, CA
91711

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