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REVIEW OF BOOKS

*A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship*



**Michael Anton:**  
**In Praise of Tucker Carlson**

**William Voegeli:**  
**Socialism for Dummies**

**Christopher Caldwell:**  
**Hungary vs. Liberalism**

**Larry P. Arnn:**  
**Andrew Roberts's Churchill**

**Joseph Epstein:**  
**The P.C. Menace**

**Martha Bayles:**  
**Cold War Movies**

**John Fonte:**  
**Reihan Salam's Melting Pot**

**Mark Helprin:**  
**Memo from Harvard Admissions**

**David Gelernter:**  
**Up from Darwinism**

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## Conservatism after Trump

William Voegeli's review-essay "Conservatism after Trump" (Winter 2018/19) is both wide-ranging and careful—an impressive and difficult combination! I was sincerely honored that he included my book *Trumpocracy* in his discussion.

I will here register a point of dissent—not from any of the essay's opinions, but on one factual claim. Voegeli writes that "the Never Trump effort has gotten much attention but little traction." Pre-November 2018, that seemed a plausible enough statement. Donald Trump rolled right over his rivals for the Republican presidency nomination and achieved almost perfect ascendancy over the Republican majorities in Congress. For a while Republicans who rejected Trump seemed to exist only in the media.

But the 2018 election revealed that—to the contrary—anti-Trump Republicans and Republican-leaning may constitute the most decisive swing voting bloc in American politics.

Consider the 7th district of Texas, containing Houston's wealthy River Oaks neighbor-

hood. It elected George H.W. Bush to Congress in 1966, stayed Republican through Watergate, Iran Contra, the Iraq War, and the 2008 financial crisis, only to go Democratic in 2018.

Look at the Atlanta suburbs, once the core of Sunbelt conservatism, now a solid mass of blue. In 1978, a brash young Newt Gingrich flipped the seat from segregationist Democrat to modern Republican. The seat stayed GOP for 40 years, only to be lost in the anti-Trump wave of 2018.

Ronald Reagan built his presidential library in the Simi Valley northwest of Los Angeles, a conservative stronghold in liberal California. Republicans have held the surrounding 25th California by comfortable margins for 30 years. As recently as 2016, the Republican incumbent won by a margin of 53-46. In 2018, that same Republican was toppled by a reverse margin of 43-56.

Tenth Virginia is home to most of the conservative Republican elite. Clarence Thomas lives there. So did Ken Starr and the late Robert Bork, and most of the Washington-based personalities you see on Fox News. Republicans held Virginia-10 for 60 of the past 66 years. It went blue in 2018.

Probably few of the former Republicans who deserted the party in 2018 would call themselves "Never Trump." But that's what they are: hundreds of thousands of people of conservative outlook who reject the Trump presidency and the Congress that enabled it. Obviously, they constitute only a fraction of the Republican coalition. But they are a fraction who make the difference between majority and minority status.

Voegeli complains that it is "procedurally unfair and politically obtuse" for this fraction to withhold its assent from Trump's presidency. After all, many current Trump supporters once swallowed doubts about John Mc-

Cain and Mitt Romney. Now the tables are reversed: shouldn't anti-Trump Republicans and conservatives swallow their qualms in their turn for the greater cause?

This is the logic of tribe, not the logic of republicanism. At bottom, the case for Trump is the same today as it was in the famous article published in this journal in 2016, "The Flight 93 Election": better a criminal than a liberal. At bottom, the case against Trump is that we owe our first loyalty to country, not party.

Voegeli's essay seems already to foresee the wreck of the Trump presidency. He rightly credits Trump with reading American politics more astutely than Jeb Bush or Paul Ryan. But the truths Trump perceived cannot be put to productive political use until the stain of Trump is wiped off them. That's the first job for conservatives after Trump—and until that work is done, it's hard to imagine how conservatives can soon regain political power or cultural authority.

**David Frum**  
Washington, D.C.

*William Voegeli replies:*

The Republicans have 42 fewer members in the House of Representatives than they did before the 2018 midterm elections. (The number of Republican senators, however, increased from 51 to 53.) As David Frum notes, some freshmen Democratic Representatives triumphed in districts where Republicans had been dominant for many years.

It does not follow that the GOP faces doom unless it repudiates President Trump. The Democrats lost 54 House seats (and control of the Senate) in 1994, two years before President Clinton was easily reelected. In 2010, the Democrats lost 63 House seats (and six in the Sen-

ate), two years before President Obama won reelection.

All three midterm elections were held during the incumbent president's first term. Clinton, Obama, and Trump's presidential victories all entailed changing the White House from one party to the other. Moreover, none of the three men had been considered plausible presidential candidate four years before their election. In this light, the 1994, 2010, and 2018 midterm elections each sent a not-so-fast message from the voters, who qualified the change they had made two years earlier.

The 1994 and 2010 midterms were referenda on Clinton and Obama, respectively, who fared poorly when the question was how their administrations compared to an abstract standard, but much better when the question was how they personally compared to the other party's nominee. This may prove to be the case for Trump and the Republicans in 2020, though much will depend on which candidate the Democrats nominate. As Frum has already warned, if the Democrats offer a fiercely progressive nominee and platform, they increase the likelihood that Trump will win a second presidential election by being many swing voters' less unattractive option.

David Frum's efforts to rescue the Republican Party, to argue that good governance and electoral success require completely different agendas and leaders, began long before Trump's famous escalator ride. Though he is an unusually erudite commentator and incisive writer, it must be said that Frum's advice has sometimes proven more forceful than thoughtful.

A decade ago, for example, he deplored the Tea Party as he now deplores Donald Trump. In 2009 Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter switched to the Democratic Party rather than face a primary challenge from Republican

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Pat Toomey, who was backed by the Club for Growth, a political action committee focused on limiting government. Frum called Specter's defection a "catastrophe," warning that "until and unless there is an honored place made in the Republican Party for people who think like Arlen Specter, we will remain a minority party." Frum also predicted that Toomey would "be crushed" in the 2010 general election. As it happens, Toomey was elected to the Senate in 2010 and reelected in 2016.

Nobody bats 1.000, of course, but there is merit in learning from, or being chastened by, one's mistakes. What has been disquieting for those of us who have admired Frum's writing over the years is the zeal with which he declares that Republicans can either track his own steadily evolving policy preferences or be consigned to political irrelevance. "I've seen little effort by David to explain his apparent philosophical transformation," Jonah Goldberg wrote in 2010. "Instead, one gets the sense that he read the polls and the long-term trends, and decided to defenestrate a lot of his old core convictions." This lament has, unfortunately, aged well.

## The Nationalism We Need

Christopher DeMuth's magnificent essay captures much of what underlies the West's political turmoil ("Trumpism, Nationalism, and Conservatism," Winter 2018/19). His endorsement of David Goodhart's "Anywheres" versus "Somewheres" dichotomy strikes me as especially correct, as is DeMuth's description of each group's characteristics and attitudes. I also have little to quarrel with regarding his specific policy proposals for American government.

DeMuth, however, underplays the moral dimension of the struggle between Somewheres and

Anywheres. He hints at it when he notes that Anywheres largely work in what they perceive to be meritocracies. For the Anywheres, DeMuth writes, "[m]eritocracy, not democracy, provides the justification for their power and the means of exercising power."

Meritocracy, then, is simply a new version of an old word: aristocracy. Aristocracy has come to mean rule by hereditary lords, but its Greek roots betray the underlying moral presupposition: "the rule by the best." And if one is better than others there is no reason to ask for the consent of one's inferiors. Indeed, there is every reason not to.

This is the underlying cause of our political discontent. One set of citizens has come to believe itself to be superior to another, and hence seeks to rule without their consent or in their interest. Not surprisingly, this is creating a modern Peasant's Revolt.

Belief in one's own moral superiority as a result of learning, experience, comfort, and distance from hard physical labor have always been the hallmarks of the aristocrat's claim to rule. Today's Anywheres, graduates of elite institutions or survivors in the rigorous competition of the academy, the marketplace, or the military, equate their backgrounds with innate differences. They think they are simply *better* than the rest of us, and as such our job is to follow along and keep quiet.

It is this sense of moral superiority that leads them to prefer closed systems of governance such as the rule of judges and bureaucrats. They alone can populate those precincts of power, and they alone can navigate them. The replacement of political debate with lobbying is another hallmark of aristocracy.

This aristocratic morality has peculiar expressions on the Right and the Left. Among the Right it leads to a doctrinaire libertarianism that denies the legitimacy of collective action through direct or representative government. Any such action is merely the attempt of an embittered group of

inferiors to unjustly steal power from the true *aristoi*, the owners and deployers of capital and their aides-de-camp. This view leads to *de facto* globalization and the *de facto* elimination of democracy.

It's not coincidental that the further one gets into libertarian thought, the closer you get to the idea of a libertarian judicial rule, a Council of the Hayekian Guardians, that enforces private contracts and does nothing more.

The Left's less individualistic take on aristocracy leads to socialism. The intellectual replaces the capitalist as the best of the best, and her supposedly disinterested and beneficent will should be unconstrained by regressive things like laws and legislative bodies. The unfolding crisis in Venezuela is an example of this principle in operation—and the dire straits to which it inevitably leads.

The revolt of the Somewheres is really a revolt against aristocratic morality. "We are people, too," they cry, and accordingly they believe their consent is needed for society to govern itself and for political leaders to govern them.

It has always been the case that the many find succor in the one to combat the few, and so oversized personalities like Trump and Italy's Matteo Salvini find themselves at the head of these movements. History also teaches us that these developments can lead to tyranny. The desire of the many for equality often causes them to centralize power in a dictator whose rule becomes as or more despotic than the aristocracy he replaces. But so far that has not happened; such majoritarian populist tyranny remains only a canard—a fantasy flung by the aristocratic Anywheres against their adversaries.

This moral dimension is critical to understanding our times, and to shaping them. If the nationalist conservatives and libertarians grasp this, they can rally the popular majority needed to establish the restoration of representative, democratic rule DeMuth envisions. Building and

nurturing such a majority will inevitably require compromise: more taxes, welfare, and trade protection than DeMuth might want, for example. But with such a majority, conservatives, and even libertarians, can truly renew and reapply the American creed.

Without such a renewal of the American ideal of justice—of human equality and dignity—we shall simply sink into some form of despotism. It could be aristocratic and relatively benign, as the Davoisie would have us believe. Or it could be more brutal and repressive, as fascistic or socialist populism is, always and everywhere. Republicanism can only thrive in the soil of moral equality, and if the soil is barren the plant will wither and die.

**Henry Olsen**

Ethics & Public Policy Center  
Washington, D.C.

There is much with which I agree in my former Reagan Administration colleague Christopher DeMuth's article "Trumpism, Nationalism, and Conservatism." His proposals to revive representative government; reform education to promote school choice, charter schools, and vocational education; and to move toward a tax-financed welfare state are thoughtful and reflect his years of experience in and out of government. His broader call for a new nationalism, however, especially one inspired by Donald Trump, seems willfully to ignore the dangers nationalism has posed in the past and the threats President Trump poses to democratic norms. Trump's nationalism does indeed bear resemblance, as DeMuth writes, to movements in Poland, Hungary, Italy, Germany, and France. Trump is Marine LePen without her tact and intellect. His campaign was not so much directed at global elites—the villains in DeMuth's formulation—as immigrants, especially Mexicans.

DeMuth adopts David Goodhart's formulation of a nation divided between "Anywheres"

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and “Somewheres,” with the latter rooted in place and affinity with those whom they know personally. It is an interesting taxonomy, but one wonders how Donald Trump’s “Somewhere”—Trump Tower in Manhattan and the Mar-a-Lago country club in Florida—put him in touch with the West Virginia coal miner or Iowa farmer. Perhaps most glaringly, DeMuth ignores the nexus between nationalism and race, which has characterized the movement everywhere.

DeMuth says he wishes “to bring issues of American identity and purpose to the forefront of political debate.” Again, I agree, but American identity cannot, or at least should not, be based on race, color, or even national origin, as incongruous as that may sound. Americans can be born anywhere, so long as they decide to make their lives here and adopt the nation as their own, learning the language, becoming citizens, adhering to the principles, values, mores, and civic duties of Americans. As Ronald Reagan famously said in his Farewell Address: “This I believe is one of the most important sources of America’s greatness. We lead the world because unique among nations, we draw our people, our strength, from every country and every corner of the world.... Thanks to each wave of new arrivals to this land of opportunity, we’re a nation forever young, forever bursting with energy and new ideas, and always on the cutting edge; always leading the world to the next frontier.”

Speaking at the border with Mexico in April, President Trump declared, “Can’t take you anymore. Can’t take you. Our country is full.” The contrast could not be more profound. To those who might object that Trump was speaking only of illegal immigrants, it is worth noting that *legal* immigration has declined during his two years in office as he has made it increasingly more difficult to obtain visas of all sorts and that he has endorsed legislation to cut in half the number of legal immigrants the country ad-

mits going forward. Trump is perfectly comfortable with a notion of nationalism based on blood as well as soil. He has no problem with immigrants from northern Europe, even falsely claiming on three recent occasions that his father was born in Germany. (His mother was indeed an immigrant from Scotland, but his father was born in New York, though his grandfather came from Germany.) The progeny of Germans apparently can become good Americans but not Mexicans (for example, Indiana-born Judge Curiel, whom Trump derided during the campaign for his supposed dual loyalty with Mexico) or even Puerto Ricans, citizens by birth but not entitled to his empathy or federal government help on a par with other victims of national disasters.

DeMuth has several suggestions for additional reading on the topic of nationalism. I’d like to make one as well, George Orwell’s “Notes on Nationalism.” Though the essay was written in the shadow of World War II and the Holocaust, much of its analysis is still relevant. “*Nationalism is not to be confused with patriotism*,” he writes (italics in the original), making clear patriotism isn’t the problem. “Every nationalist is haunted by the belief that the past can be altered. He spends part of his time in a fantasy world in which things happen as they should,” Orwell warns. “Indifference to objective truth is encouraged by the sealing-off of one part of the world from another, which makes it harder and harder to discover what is actually happening.... One has no way of verifying the facts, one is not even fully certain that they have happened, and one is always presented with totally different interpretations from different sources.” Orwell could have been writing of the White House press operation, or the propaganda machine on Fox News, or talk radio, or the words that come out of the president’s own mouth. Would that CRB spent as much time analyzing the threat posed by Donald Trump,

who has usurped Congress’s role, exploded the deficit, fractured civility, and promoted racialism as it does decrying global elites.

**Linda Chavez**

Becoming American Initiative  
Washington, D.C.

*Christopher DeMuth replies:*

I agree with Henry Olsen that there is an important moral dimension to the political divides described in more practical terms in my essay.

Claiming the moral high ground is a venerable technique of political rhetoric, aimed at connecting one’s immediate interest to the interests of others or to universal values of justice and fairness. Moral appeals sometimes stand on their own and endure as revealed truth—Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail” is a good example. More often—say, in paeans to the beneficence of farm subsidies or the Jones Act—they are efforts to impassion one’s allies and convert the undecided as a prelude to brass-tacks bargaining with one’s opponents.

But in today’s politics, claiming the moral high ground has evolved from a method of democratic debate to a means of suppressing debate. It aims to cast one’s opponents as politically illegitimate misfits, and oneself as deserving of special deference and authority. Anti-establishment nationalists and their Somewhere supporters are not immune from moral one-upmanship. It is, however, a specialty of established elites and progressive Anywheres intent on maintaining their prerogatives. Coupling moral self-assurance with material self-interest, they portray the transition from representative government to declarative government (to use the terminology of my essay) as salutary and irreproachable—settled science. A great advantage of the representative legislature is that moral high grounds are ephemeral. Appeals must be made in the immediate presence of differing and conflicting appeals, and

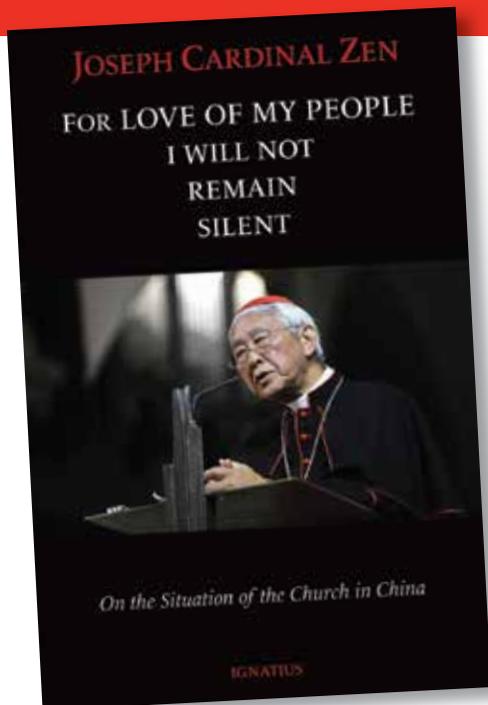
the pose of superior virtue must eventually give way to the necessity of compromise.

I agree with Olsen that libertarianism can go to anti-democratic extremes. But I think it is much less inclined to “aristocratic morality” than is socialism, because it is grounded in individual self-interest and the worthiness of accommodating differing interests and values. In my view, libertarianism is critical to the success of conservative nationalism—especially in regulatory policy—as a source of non-moralistic opposition to government favoritism toward special-interest groups. Legislatures naturally accede to persistent, exploitative interests. Libertarianism is the philosophy best suited to this frailty.

Linda Chavez’s letter recites several of President Trump’s statements and actions as evidence that he is a “blood” nationalist—anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican, a promoter of racialism; for good measure, she says that he is unintelligent and much wealthier than his constituents. She omits the president’s innumerable statements and actions lauding immigrants, Mexicans, and African Americans, and his incessant, obviously heartfelt bragging that black, Latino, and Asian unemployment rates have reached historic lows during his administration. Her skewed narrative is designed to discredit my essay by association (DeMuth “seems willfully to ignore” the dangers of Trumpian nationalism). On a recent CNN talk show, Chavez accused me and the “heretofore respectable” CRB of being crypto-white nationalists and proponents of the “nation as defined by blood and soil,” this in harmony with the panel’s messaging points on the ghoulish slaughter of 50 Muslim worshippers in New Zealand. She has privately apologized for this slander, and is more circumspect in her letter, yet has the temerity to complain of “the propaganda machine on Fox News.”

My own take on President Trump is that he is not a racist or

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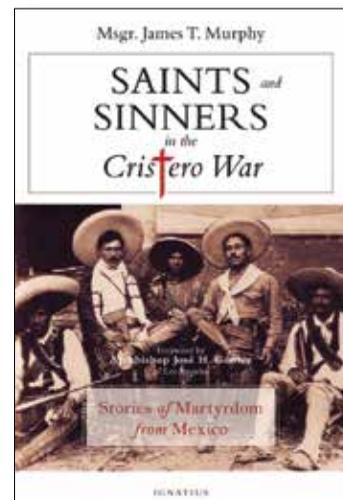
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white nationalist but something nearly the opposite—a New Yorker of the Queens persuasion, happily at home in multiethnic and other diversity, blunt spoken, heedless of political correctness, a wise guy. In sum a sort of latter-day Mort Sahl (“is there anyone here I haven’t offended?”). Now, a head of state who carries on as an improv entertainer and political provocateur is going to leave himself open to misrepresentation, and the spectacle is going to unsettle traditionalists like myself. But I must say that his pugnacity has effectively defanged the “white nationalist” line of moral high-grounding that has become a favorite of his adversaries. When Hillary Clinton seizes on a political trope, one can be sure that it has lost its power to wound or persuade.

Stripped of its moral positioning, Chavez’s letter comes down to saying that nationalism risks promoting racial and ethnic antagonisms. She’s right, but the problems are hardly unique to nationalism—they afflict internationalism and imperialism as well. They have, moreover, been earnestly considered by the best writers on nationalism, pro and con, including the contemporary scholars mentioned in my essay and also those, such as Lord Acton and Ernest Renan, who wrote in the 19th century when the modern nation-state was being forged, often in strife and bloodshed. I should have thought it obvious that a central purpose of my essay was to suggest institutional and policy steps for countering our divisive preoccupations with racial and ethnic identity, and for rekindling a sense of American unity that celebrates, incorporates, and transcends racial, ethnic, and other particular loyalties (a hat trick to be sure).

Chavez’s recommendation of George Orwell’s “Notes on Nationalism” is strikingly inapposite to the argument she is trying to make. Orwell was indeed writing in the shadow of World War II, when many Europeans blamed the horrors they had just experi-

enced on German and Japanese nationalism. I believe they were largely (not entirely) mistaken—Nazism was a satanic-messianic ideology with little relation to German heritage, and invaded other nations not for historical rectification but rather for conquest and subjugation en route to world domination. Yet Orwell’s position is closer to my view than to those then prevailing. He begins by explaining that he is using “nationalism” in an idiosyncratic way that will be unfamiliar to his readers. Nationalism, he says, is “power-hunger tempered by self-deception,” attached to a “power unit” that may or may not be a nation and may or may not actually exist. Read the essay (available online) and you will see that the closest modern approximations to his “nationalism” are “ideology” or “fanaticism.” His primary example of “nationalism” is the high-brow British Communist!—“Among the [British] intelligentsia, it hardly needs saying that the dominant form of nationalism is Communism.” Other targets are political Catholicism, Zionism, anti-Semitism, Trotskyism, and pacifism. The nationalism expounded in my essay, and by others of my ilk, is the opposite of most of these, and aims to draw political affections from the abstract and universalist back to one’s living natural home.

It is my firm policy always to be on Orwell’s side, as I properly understand that side. So I accept his point, emphasized by Chavez, that nationalism and patriotism are different things, but must give it my own interpretation. Patriotism is fine but is easy and subjective, and thereby a potential refuge for scoundrels. Nicolás Maduro and Xi Jinping are patriots on their own say-so; Emmanuel Macron says that patriotism requires the French to direct their political loyalties elsewhere, which is *ipse dixit* from a head of state intent on relinquishing his nation’s sovereignty. Nationalism is harder and impersonal—a matter of statecraft and politi-

cal order. The nationalist leader takes moral responsibility for the fate of his people, respects the sovereignty of other nations, and promotes an international order that encourages others to do likewise.

Read more discussion of Christopher DeMuth’s essay with F.H. Buckley, Yuval Levin, Richard Reinsch, and Philip Wallach, on the Claremont Institute’s publication *the American Mind* at <https://americanmind.org/features/post-trump-politics/>.

## American Exceptionalism

I want to thank Richard Samuelson for his thoughtful, though sometimes opaque, review of my book, *Friends Divided* (“Best of Enemies,” Winter 2018/19). He captures much of what I was trying to say about John Adams and Thomas Jefferson. But he, along with most other reviewers, doesn’t fully appreciate my admiration for Adams, the ultimate realist who understood human nature better than any American of his day. Perhaps this misperception has something to do with my calling Adams’s peculiar political theory irrelevant 50 years ago—something that no one seems to forget. I meant by irrelevance only his clinging to the English notion of mixed government (monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy) long after his fellow Americans had abandoned it. But 50 years ago, I also emphasized Adams’s realistic assessment of American society and culture, and that relevance is far more important than his anachronistic attachment to the ancient notion of mixed government.

Adams is an important founder, perhaps almost as important as Jefferson. He challenged Jefferson’s claim that the United States was “a chosen country” and “the world’s best hope” to lead the world toward republicanism, a claim that made Jefferson, the creator of the idea of

American exceptionalism, and not, as Samuelson has it, “modern exceptionalism,” whatever that means. By asserting that all men were born unequal and there was not much education could do about the resultant inequality of the society, Adams also came to challenge the Enlightenment belief embodied in the Declaration of Independence that all men were created equal—a challenge that in no way denies, pace Samuelson, “that human nature is a robust and important force in history.” I cannot accept Professor Samuelson’s claim that the central issue concerning Adams and Jefferson was “history and human nature, not equality.” Their differing views of equality were indeed the main issue separating the two men, and equality is still today “[t]he great God absolute! The centre and circumference of all democracy!” that Herman Melville said it was.

Adams’s idea that we Americans are just as sinful and vicious as other nations and possess no special providence and his belief in the inherent inequality of society do not make him un-American, but they do make him someone who challenges the myths by which we live. Which I guess is why Russell Kirk called Adams “the founder of true conservatism in America.”

**Gordon S. Wood**  
Brown University  
Providence, RI

*Richard Samuelson replies:*

I thank Gordon Wood for his thoughtful letter. Professor Wood raises two issues: what is American exceptionalism and what did Adams mean when he said that “there is no special providence” for America?

On the first score, the best short statement of American exceptionalism in the founding is probably Gouverneur Morris’s reaction to the French Revolution: “They want an American constitution...without reflecting that they have not American



citizens to support that constitution." Adams was in the same camp as Morris. Recall his comment in the "Preface" to the *Defence of the Constitutions*: "The people in America have now the best opportunity and the greatest trust in their hands, that Providence ever committed to so small a number, since the transgression of the first pair." He did not think the French, given their history and culture, had the same opportunity.

By contrast, Jefferson and James Madison were all in for the French Revolution. Recall the essay "On Universal Peace" that Madison published in 1792. "Had Rousseau lived to see the constitution of the United States and of France, his judgment might have escaped the censure to which his project has exposed it." Madison like Jefferson thought that the U.S. was not exceptional, but, on the contrary, that the American Revolution was part of a larger historical transformation across what would come to be called the "West," perhaps across the entire globe. They believed that in the modern age the problems of political life, long regarded by historians and statesmen as simply the way of the world, could be solved in this new age—"modern exceptionalism." This belief did not set America apart from Europe.

As I noted in my review, Joseph Stalin is often said to have coined the term "American exceptionalism," rejecting as a "heresy" the idea that the socialist revolution would not take place in the U.S.

The 18th-century version of that was to reject the idea that the French Revolution was a continuation of the American, and that both embraced radical egalitarian ideas. For Jefferson, that was Adams's "heresy."

What of America's "special providence" or lack thereof? "There is no Special Providence for Us. We are not a chosen People, that I know of," Adams wrote Benjamin Rush in 1812. Again that sentiment hardly set Americans apart. Recall Adams's 1797 comment to Henry Knox: "To a Frenchman the most important man in the world is himself, and the most important nation is France. He thinks that France ought to govern all nations, and that he ought to govern France." One definition of the term "Middle Kingdom" is that the Chinese empire is the center of the world.

If one reads further into Adams's letter to Rush, however, one finds that Adams's main focus is the importance of learning the lessons history teaches. Just before mentioning "no special Providence," Adams quoted Rush back to himself, "To borrow your own Words, 'Wealth, Family Influence, Talents, Industry, Ambition and Avarice; have oversett every Republick that has ever yet existed on this Globe.'" How did Adams know that? It is among those realities that history teaches when one reads it as Adams did, as philosophy teaching by example. And just after mentioning "no Special Providence," he wrote, "We must

and We Shall, go the Way of all the Earth. We ought to contend, to Swim, though against Wind and tide as long as We can." That is among the truths that history teaches us, or would teach us if we were inclined to listen.

Wood's approach to the study of history, I suggested in my review, obscures such truths. But one cannot understand Adams unless one is willing, at least for the sake of argument, to consider what history looks like from that classic perspective. Wood's assumptions about the nature of man and history, I was suggesting, put him closer to Jefferson than Adams. It is, after all, rather odd to call Adams "cynical" and "un-American" and at the same time say one is, in fact, a follower of Adams.

In the hundredth anniversary issue of the *American Historical Review*, Professor Wood has an essay with the subtitle, "How Henry Adams Got it Wrong." In his contribution to the first issue of the *American Historical Review*, Adams had suggested there is little reason to believe modern works of history—unlike works of say, biology—will be, in the decisive sense, superior to those of previous eras. In that case, Henry Adams was agreeing with his great-grandfather that history must be what it always has been, a humane study, which is to say that the job of the historian is to study human nature in context. Jefferson wrote in 1811 that "[h]istory, in general, only informs us what bad government is." John Adams, by contrast,

thought that history helps us understand what kind of creature man is and, therefore, it helps us to learn to distinguish good government from bad.

In sum, a close reading of Wood's extraordinary corpus of works in American history reveals that his account of the American republic is built upon premises about human nature and history which are, despite his protestations, more Jeffersonian than Adamsian.

## Deep in the Heart of Texas

After reading "Austin City Limits" (Winter 2018/19), and reversing a Texas sayin' from cut to complement: Kevin Williamson is "all cattle and no hat." I wish just once I could put a thousand words or so together in such a fine manner. Buy that man a pair of custom-made (in Ft. Worth), ostrich belly Lucchese boots; he is the real deal. You can tell all those coast huggers for us-un down here to "kiss our red Texas asses"; we're all headed to the ranch this weekend to wet a line. Right after we run by the bank to give Dorothy the deposit check for the Permian Basin royalty and office building rent checks (state tax free). They can take ol' Davey Crockett's advice and go to hell.

Richard Morgan  
Dallas, TX

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