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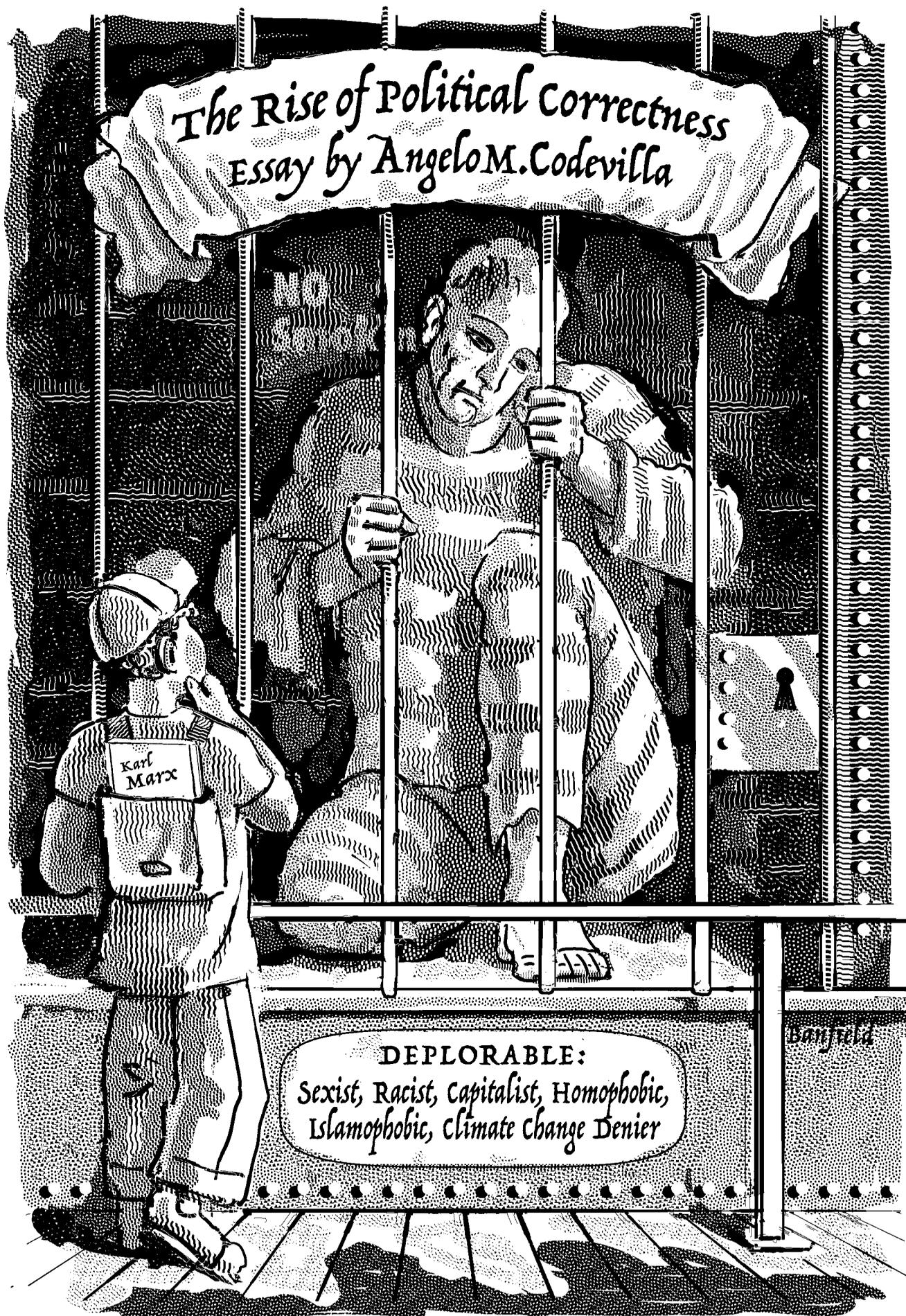
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## PARTHIAN SHOT

by Mark Helprin



### As Europe Devolves, America Centralizes

ONE OF THE CERTAINTIES OF EUROPEAN HISTORY IS THE AL-  
ternation of unification and dissolution. At the deepest level,  
this reflects the ever-fluent question of government purview,  
whether in geographical extent or granular penetration. Even without  
knowing it, those hostile to nationality are partisans of anarchy, em-  
pire, or simply nations on a more intimate scale. There never will be  
an ideal size or reach of government, but only continual adjustment as  
the result of necessity, accident, providence, or force.

The European Continent and for a time even the British Isles have  
been partially unified—by the Romans, Charlemagne, Spain, Aus-  
tria, Louis XIV, Napoleon, Hitler, and the European Union. Even if  
they didn't get very far, the Mongols, Muslims, and Turks gave it the  
college try. And then there was the papacy. The Romans were cham-  
pions of endurance, but Napoleon's stint was as short as he was, the  
empire of the Thousand-Year Reich didn't make it by 995½ years, and  
the Soviets got only halfway across.

As it evolved from the European Coal and Steel Community into  
the European Economic Community, and then the Schengenized  
"E.U. plus," bureaucracy's pacific conquest of Europe was different, its  
weapons the ballot box, rubber stamp, and pen. Furthermore, other  
than in one civil war, the U.S. had shown that 50 states could unite  
to great advantage.

Why is it, then, with Jean Monnet's body hardly cool, that Britain  
will leave the E.U., Scotland and Wales lust to devolve, Belgium and  
Italy each strain to break in two, Spain in three, Yugoslavia has shat-  
tered, Hungary may either quit or be expelled, Greece is like one's  
child who ends up a heroin addict in jail, extremist political move-  
ments are partying like it's 1936, and Marine Le Pen wants France  
out? Not even fully consummated, the European Union shows sign  
after sign of impending divorce.

One need not be hostile to the idea of this union to know the es-  
sential flaw in its conception, namely the statist assumption that bu-  
reaucratic conceit will prevail over geography, history, tradition, and  
individual attachments, preferences, and loyalties. Greek profligacy  
and German prudence cannot sleep in the same bed. Good luck to the  
Frenchman who tells an Englishman how much sugar to put in his tea.  
Rivers, alpine ranges, marshes, and seas have carved into the landscape  
physical barriers that for millennia have shaped the economics, histories,  
and cultures of these disparate nations. Unlike the United States—at  
its founding English in culture and language, with a pressure-relieving  
wilderness to the west—Europe as it united was a densely populated,  
grudge-filled continent with scores of major languages and their dia-  
lects. Its peoples had been governed in a hundred different ways, fought  
countless wars, and inherited dozens of philosophical traditions.

This concoction has always settled into a natural angle of repose only  
to be periodically disturbed by grand designs. But here is the problem

with such grand designs. If government is a machine applied to every-  
thing, then everything becomes a machine—"If you're not part of the  
solution, you're part of the problem." This is where the Left's dream of  
addressing human needs via a universal mechanism always fails, for it  
takes no account of the soul, the existence of which it denies as it fights  
a losing war against the untidiness of human nature.

KNOWLEDGE OF THIS AND MORE WAS PRESENT AT THE CRE-  
ation of the E.E.C., but the enormity of the two world wars  
elevated hope over experience. Nor is the union dead. But,  
still, the strength and depth of Europe's long established cultures  
with their naturally diverging outlooks and interests cannot and  
should not be subsumed in a universal governance ill-equipped to  
understand, let alone guide them. To continue subjecting them to a  
coterie of second-stringers in Brussels and Strasbourg is an exercise  
in imperial sado-masochism.

What can the United States learn from this? Progressive opposition  
to the embedded separation of powers in tripartite government and the  
structure of the electoral college, the Senate, and the states themselves,  
has as its best ally the homogenization of America by mass media, com-  
mercial standardization, and headlong administrative expansion. That  
to forge a ruling coalition progressives are engaged in fractionalizing  
the population into as many aggrieved groups as possible does not con-  
tradict their urge to centralize. For unlike the states, the elements of  
such a coalition have no enumerated or constitutional powers, and are  
raised or dismissed at will in the winds of propaganda.

Paradoxically, in the days when an American commonly identified  
as a Virginian, a New Yorker, a Californian, etc., the national interest  
was paramount. Now, when the national interest is lost in a sea of iden-  
tity politics and contrition, attachment to one's state (*pace* Texas) has  
almost vanished. As are all constitutional manifestations of the separa-  
tion of powers, the states are becoming less and less a brake upon the  
dangerous ideal of democratic centralism, and as a result we may end  
up in a sadder condition than even a disintegrating Europe.

Our federalism is always in flux due to changing conditions that  
favor different levels of governance. Never was it intended to be en-  
tirely static, but with its oscillations dampened by a deliberate bal-  
ance of powers, stresses upon it have been successfully contained.  
Now—with federal encroachment upon every province of life, overt  
ideological hostility to American nationhood, and the Balkanization  
of the population into as many manipulable identities as will (until  
no longer needed) serve the progressive agenda—the balance of levels  
of governance, and our felicitous constitutional structure will be so  
subject to stress and attack that, ironically, the wonderful example  
partisans of a united Europe sought to imitate may evolve into the  
kind of bureaucratic tyranny Europe now finds difficult to endure.

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