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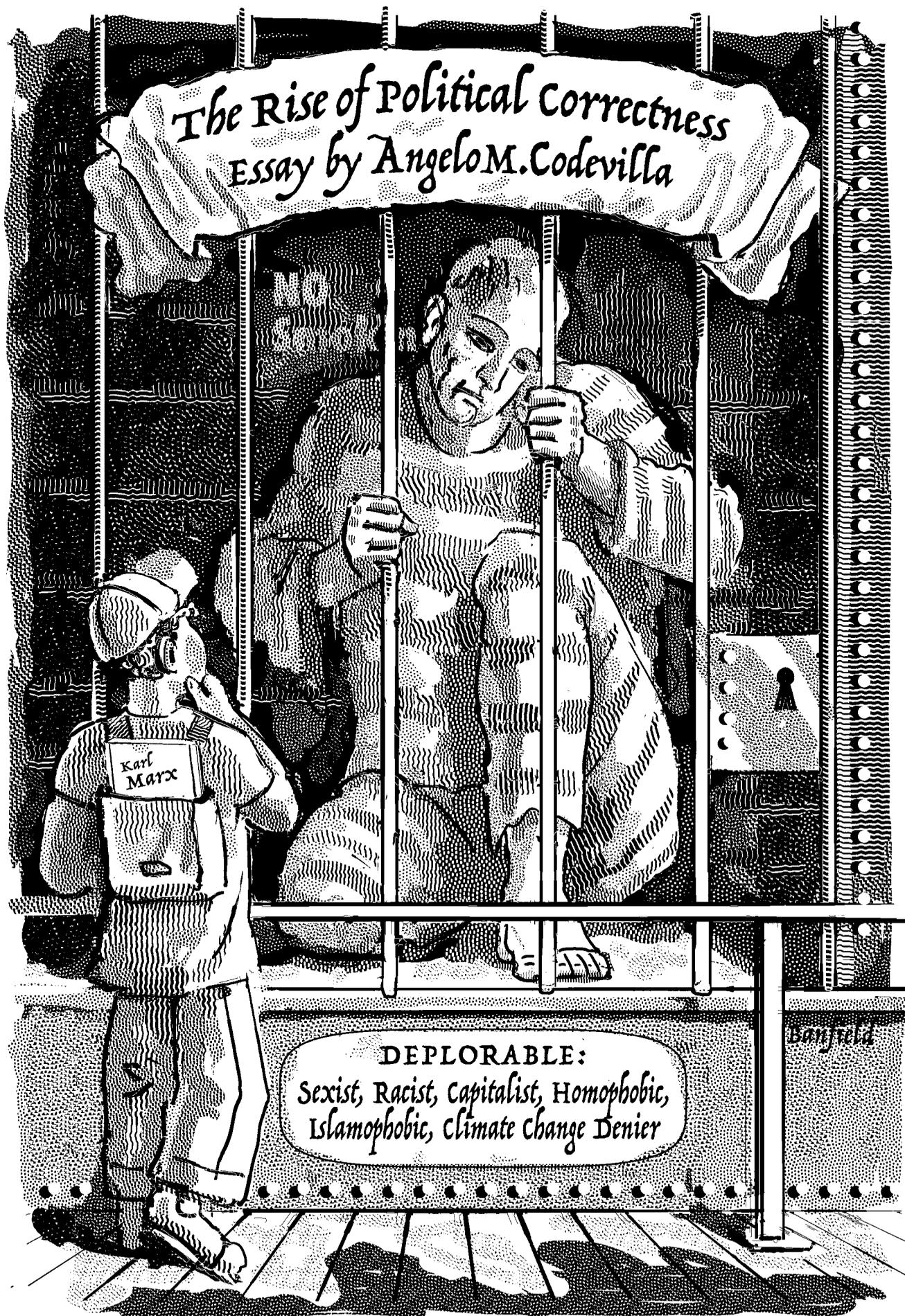
Jeremy
Rabkin:
**Randy Barnett's
Republican
Constitution**

William
Voegeli:
**The Left's
Dilemma**

Algis
Valiunas:
**Edward
Gibbon**

John M.
Ellis:
**The Essential
Goethe**

Bradley C.S.
Watson:
**Conservatives
on Campus**



David
Azerrad:
**Yuval Levin's
Fractured
Republic**

Christopher
Caldwell:
**Immigration's
Hidden Costs**

Bruce Cole:
**Robert
Hughes**

Brian
Domitrovic
♦
Deepak
Lal
♦
George L.
Priest:

**In Defense
of
Markets**



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Book Review by John J. Pitney, Jr.

AMERICA'S RELENTLESS SUITOR

The Nixon Effect: How Richard Nixon's Presidency Fundamentally Changed American Politics, by Douglas E. Schoen.
Encounter Books, 392 pages, \$25.99



ACCORDING TO SOME BIOGRAPHIES, young Richard Nixon was doggedly persistent in courting his future wife, Pat. He did not give up when she said she didn't want to see him. He did not give up when he showed up at her home and she told him to leave. He did not give up even when she said she wanted to go out with other guys—indeed, he drove her to her dates. Eventually, she married him.

Nixon went on to become America's relentless suitor. Nothing ever kept him from our national doorstep: not his 1960 loss to John F. Kennedy; not his defeat in the 1962 California's governor's race, which led to his "last press conference"; not his resignation after Watergate. In the 22 years since his death, his name has lingered in political conversation, usually as a warning or a slur. During the 2016 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump have each been likened to Richard Nixon, and not in a nice way.

IN *THE NIXON EFFECT*, DOUGLAS E. SCHOEN goes beyond the bogeyman clichés to explain why the 37th president was deeply consequential in ways both good and bad. Notwithstanding some glitches (details below), the book is well-researched and thoughtful, a worthy addition to the ever-expanding shelf of Nixonania.

Schoen writes that Nixon was a "pro-big government, pro-public spending, and pro-safety net president." This Republican and nominal conservative "may have turned out to be our most 'statist' president of the postwar period." Although these observations may puzzle people who neither lived through the Nixon years nor studied his imprint on public policy, Schoen lays out the evidence very clearly. Nixon launched two regulatory behemoths, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). His proposal for a guaranteed annual income fell short in Con-

gress but it did spawn the Supplemental Security Income program (SSI). And his failed health-insurance plan served as an inspiration for Bill Clinton and Barack Obama.

Though the White House taping system recorded him making racist comments that would shame David Duke, he kept the promise of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1957). Schoen notes: "Richard Nixon desegregated more schools than all other presidents combined." His administration advanced the cause of affirmative action with the Philadelphia Plan, involving "goals and timetables" for minority hiring in the construction trades. He signed Title IX, a statute that banned sex discrimination in federally funded education programs and still has a deep impact on colleges and universities.

Although Schoen, a Democratic consultant, generally gives high marks to Nixon's liberal domestic policies, he also knows that some of these policies did serious harm to the country. Even though price increases were

running at a far-from-Weimar level of 5-6%, Nixon imposed wage and price controls in 1971. This move was popular at first, the book observes, “though it came at a heavy long-term cost.” This appraisal echoes Nixon’s own. In a rare admission of error, the president wrote in his memoirs that the controls added to the economic woes of the later 1970s: “The piper must always be paid, and there was an unquestionably high price for tampering with the orthodox economic mechanisms.”

IF THE NIXON EFFECT WERE A WORK OF INTELLECTUAL HISTORY, it might have gone into greater depth about the origins of Nixon’s approach to policy. Progressivism shaped him to a greater extent than most observers realize. His father supported the Progressive Party candidacies of Theodore Roosevelt in 1912 and Robert LaFollette in 1924, and his most influential professor at Whittier College was progressive historian Paul Smith. Nixon often spoke of his admiration for Woodrow Wilson, quoted him liberally, and hung his portrait in the Cabinet Room. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, who worked in the Nixon White House and who understood the world of ideas, wrote that a touch of Wilsonian progressivism was evident in Nixon’s legislative and administrative programs.

To conservatives, and especially many CRB readers, that influence would seem less a touch than a taint. Nixon’s reputation as a conservative stemmed from his early anti-Communism and his pursuit of Soviet spy Alger Hiss. But on national security as much as on domestic issues, his presidential actions were scarcely those of a hard-line right-winger. He ended the military draft, gradually withdrew from Vietnam, cut an arms-control deal with the USSR and, most famously, orchestrated the diplomatic opening to mainland China.

Nixon did try to keep conservatives on his side. Among other things, he enlisted speechwriters Pat Buchanan and Bill Gavin to add some conservative seasoning to his rhetoric. But for some on the Right, wage and price controls and the China gambit were too much to take. As Schoen puts it, “Moving leftward domestically, economically, and internationally, he first frustrated, then alienated, and finally galvanized American conservatives to action.” Some rallied behind Ohio Congressman John Ashbrook’s underfunded and ultimately quixotic challenge to Nixon in the 1972 primaries. Though not obvious at the time, the Ashbrook pushback was a step toward much stronger conservative campaigns to come—including those of Ronald Reagan.

Just as Nixon was inadvertently nudging Republicans to the right, he was tempting Democrats to the left. When he co-opted their positions, he presented them with an unhappy choice: either side with a man they disliked and distrusted, or differentiate themselves by taking stands that were even more liberal. On issues such as health-care and welfare reform, they chose door number two. As a result, they bobbed the chance to enlarge the welfare state further. According to Schoen, Ted Kennedy’s greatest regret as a lawmaker was spurning Nixon’s health-care proposal, which could have become something like Obamacare nearly 40 years sooner.

“WHAT MADE NIXON SO DIVISIVE domestically,” Schoen argues, “was that while his *governance* was mostly centrist, and sometimes flat-out liberal, his *politics* were much more confrontational.” As his chief of staff, Alexander Haig, might have said, let me caveat that contention. No doubt Nixon did much to earn the title of “Tricky Dick” that his 1950 Senate foe Helen Gahagan Douglas bestowed upon him. But he often got as good as he gave. Conrad Black reminded us in his biography *Richard M. Nixon* (2007) that Douglas herself accused him of “nice, unadulterated fascism.” Evoking the

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Confounding Father

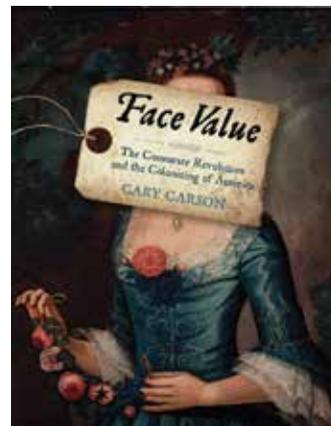
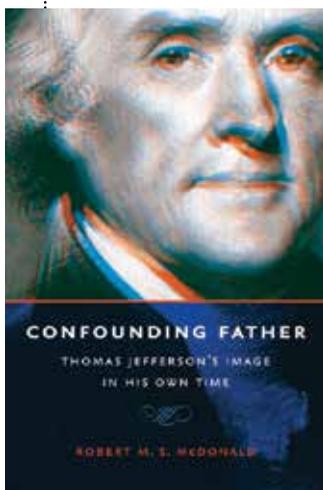
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“*Confounding Father* is an ambitious, impressively researched, and well-written study that shows how public perceptions of Jefferson were inextricably bound up with the young nation’s core values and controversies. A must-read for anyone seeking to understand the sweeping impact of Jefferson’s image on early national America and beyond.”

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image of Hitler's Brownshirts and Mussolini's Blackshirts, she spoke of the "backwash of Republican young men in dark shirts."

That quibble aside, Schoen offers real insight into the similarities between Nixon and another divisive centrist: Bill Clinton, who, although he made his first race as an anti-Watergate congressional candidate and his wife helped write the House Judiciary Committee report on impeachment, ended up relying on Nixon as a role model. "The concept of triangulation," writes Schoen, "is what links Nixon and Clinton most closely at the political level: their positioning of themselves between the ideological and political poles." Nixon approached welfare reform from the left and fell short, whereas Clinton approached it from the right and succeeded. At the same time, "Slick Willie" enraged his enemies as much as "Tricky Dick" had, and with harsh consequences.

Schoen suggests that our incumbent president could also have learned from Nixon's determination, strategic vision, and immersion in foreign affairs. He faults President Obama for a variety of shortcomings ranging "from his lack of conviction about American primacy in the world, to his preference for words over action, to his preference for domestic policy over international relations."

THE NIXON EFFECT IS A FINE BOOK, BUT due diligence requires noting some inaccuracies. Schoen identifies Arthur Fletcher, a champion of racial hiring preferences, as secretary of Labor; actually he was assistant secretary, an important difference. He suggests that Nixon and his 1968 election team wooed Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond into the GOP. In fact, Thurmond switched during the Goldwater campaign in 1964. Schoen cor-

rectly notes that spending on human resources exceeded spending on national defense between 1970 to 1975, and then adds: "It's never happened again." It most certainly has. In fiscal year 1975, human resource spending accounted for 52% of the budget, double the 26% share for defense. Forty years later, the figures are 73.4% for human resources, and just 16% for defense.

Another minor error connects to an amusing side note. Schoen refers to Representative John Brademas of Indiana as a Republican. In fact, he was a liberal Democrat who lost to Republican John Hiler in 1980. In the

Nixon often spoke of his admiration for Woodrow Wilson, quoted him liberally, and hung his portrait in the Cabinet Room.

1986 midterm, Hiler won reelection by just 66 votes. Four years later, Nixon appeared at a closed-door House GOP meeting, and displayed his granular knowledge of electoral politics. Hiler started to ask a question, and Nixon interjected, "Landslide Hiler!"

Most surprising for a book that takes a fair-minded view of the 37th president, it repeats a pernicious urban legend about his 1968 campaign. At a couple of points, Schoen insists that Nixon claimed to have a "secret plan" to end the Vietnam War. Although Nixon was vague about his Vietnam policy, he never spoke of any secret plan. Speech-

writer Ray Price wrote in 2002 that the myth originated with a wire story that inaccurately paraphrased the Republican hopeful's stump speech. "We on the Nixon staff immediately pointed out, to all who would listen, that he had not claimed a 'plan.'"

AS HIS BOOK WENT TO PRESS LATE LAST year, Schoen added a brief afterword about the then-upcoming presidential race, imagining what Nixon might say:

Trump is something else. He is the living expression of the silent majority, circa 2016. You don't think there's anger and frustration out there? Just look at the crowds the man draws.

Schoen is right. Like Nixon in '68, Trump responded to growing concerns about "law and order." His then-campaign chief, Paul Manafort, told a media breakfast that Nixon's acceptance speech was Trump's template: "The Nixon 1968 speech—if you go back and read that speech—is pretty much on line with a lot of the issues that are going on today. And it was an instructive speech."

For contemporary politicians across the spectrum, there is much to learn from Nixon's virtues and vices. He knew his stuff, minded his words (at least in public), and was cool and deliberative in international affairs. He could also be amoral, paranoid, and vengeful, qualities that ended his presidency. "Always remember," he said in his 1974 farewell to the White House staff, "others may hate you, but those who hate you don't win unless you hate them, and then you destroy yourself."

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