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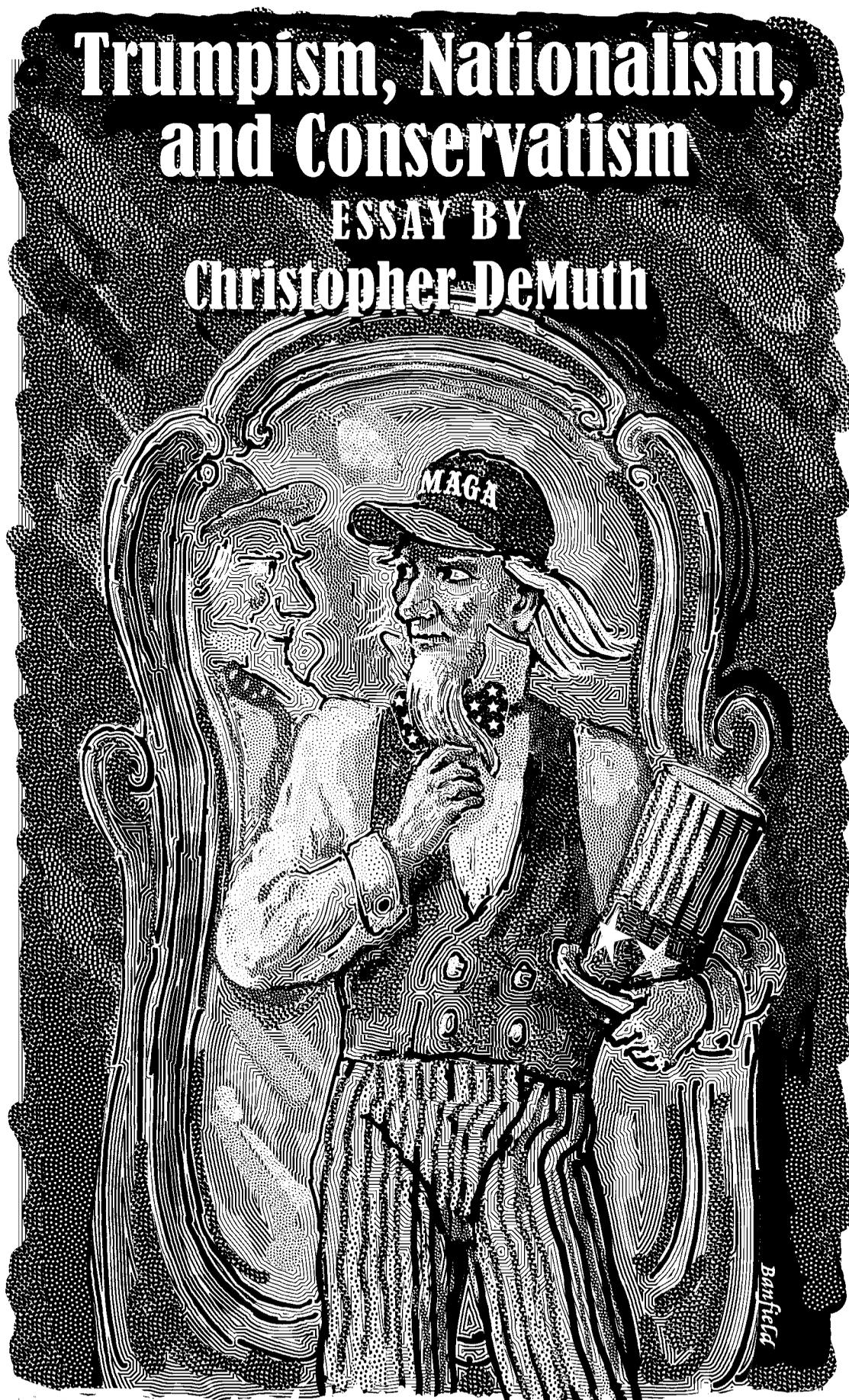
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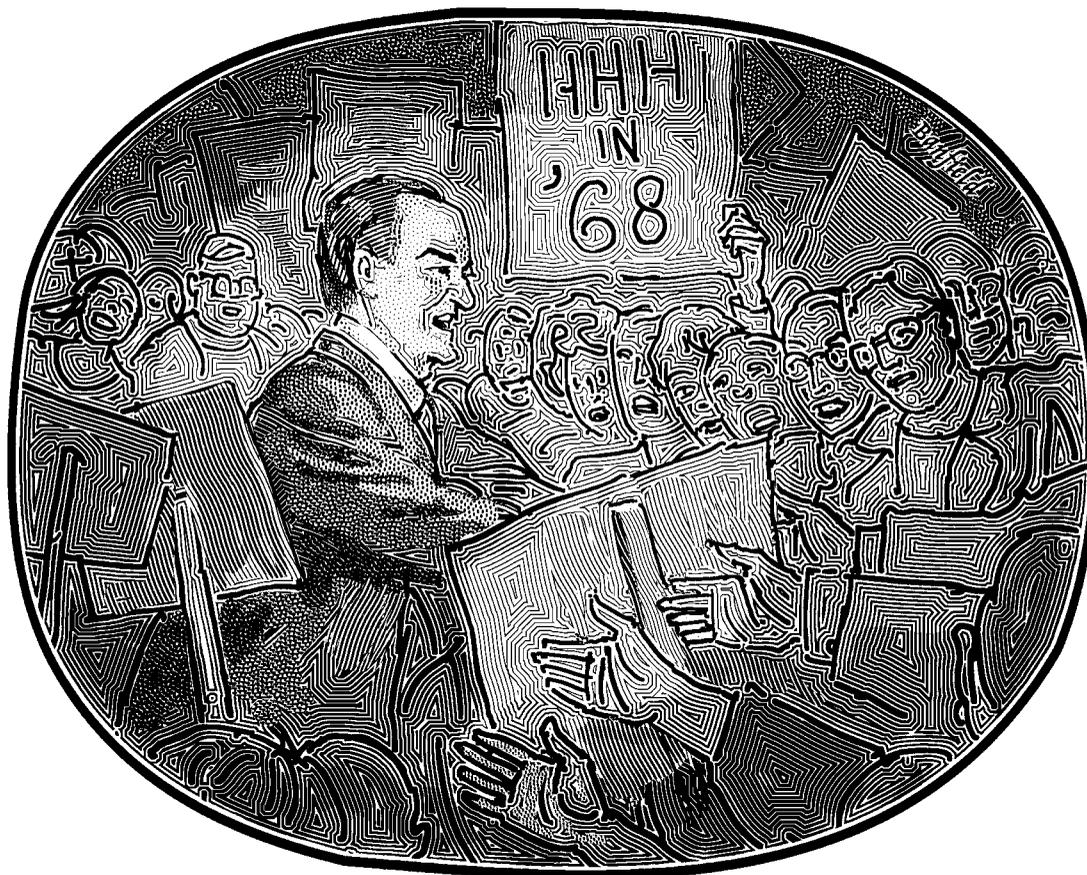
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Book Review by Michael Barone

THE LAST NEW DEALER

Hubert Humphrey: The Conscience of the Country, by Arnold A. Offner.
Yale University Press, 512 pages, \$35



SOMETIME IN THE EARLY 1970S I PERSUADED editors at the *Washington Post* to run a column I had written entitled “Why Not Abolish the Vice Presidency.” In it, I argued that vice presidents had seldom contributed much to governance and that the office tended to diminish the serious politicians who had held it. Succession to the presidency could be arranged in other ways. Within days, a letter arrived on official stationery from former vice president Hubert Humphrey, once again a senator, protesting that the office was a worthy and necessary one. Alas, I didn’t save the letter. But it was obviously dictated in a hurry, with no attempt made at orderly argumentation, and signed with a flourish. Even after his dreadful four years as vice president, Humphrey wrote with cheerful ebullience.

Surprisingly, there has not been much in the way of a serious biography of this man, a major player in national politics from the 1940s to the 1970s. Now comes Arnold Offner, emeritus history professor at Lafayette College,

to fill the gap. Offner doesn’t try to conceal his enthusiastic support for his subject. When he disagrees with Humphrey, he does so only to endorse conventional liberal wisdom (e.g., that a South Vietnamese government coalition with the Viet Cong would have produced a desirable denouement in Vietnam). His workmanlike prose, however, does a good job of informing readers of the politics of the time, and his narrative proceeds in chronological order: one cannot assume that readers today, even readers of political biographies, have much knowledge of what are now 40- to 70-year-old political events. This particular reader would have preferred a more poetic evocation of the times, places, and peculiar personalities—but few political scientists have the gifts of the late Richard Ben Cramer.

HUBERT HUMPHREY PLAYED A CRITICAL role in both the rise and decline of mid-20th-century American liberalism. It bears mention that few members of

Congress during the 1930s were committed New Deal liberals. Only a handful of Democrats (including Senators Robert Wagner of New York, Edward Costigan of Colorado, and Burton Wheeler of Montana) and a few Progressive Republicans (Robert La Follette of Wisconsin) believed in economic redistributionist legislation; most Congressional Democrats were either big-city hacks or Southern segregationists. Humphrey fit into neither category. He grew up in South Dakota, the son of a pharmacist who had briefly served in the state legislature and who had sacrificed a shot at the governorship in order to finance Hubert’s education at the University of Minnesota. Humphrey then received a master’s degree from Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, where he saw segregation in action and met future colleague Russell Long.

Returning to Minnesota, Humphrey got a New Deal patronage job. When Pearl Harbor was attacked he was already 30 and a father. He ran for mayor in then Republican-leaning

Minneapolis and lost badly in 1943, then won in 1945 and 1947. In those years he midwived the merger of the left-wing Farmer-Labor Party (DFL) with the state's third-place and less liberal Democrats. In 1948 he was the new Democratic-Farmer-Labor candidate for U.S. Senate—and, suddenly, a nationally prominent liberal.

ON TWO IMPORTANT ISSUES IN THE late 1940s—civil rights and foreign policy—Humphrey helped lead the Democratic Party to liberal positions which were far from inevitable extensions of the party's history. On civil rights, Republicans had always been more supportive of equal rights for blacks than had Democrats. Even in the New Deal years the Democrats who were most pro-civil rights—Eleanor Roosevelt, Henry Wallace, Harold Ickes—were all former Republicans. Humphrey, with roots in almost all-white South Dakota and Minnesota, was appalled by the segregation and racism he saw in Louisiana and always favored equal rights. His fiery speech for the minority civil rights platform plank at the 1948 Democratic National Convention, and its passage by the convention, converted what had been a segregationist party within living memory into a civil rights party.

On foreign policy, Minnesota was an isolationist state before World War II, and many Farmer-Laborites, including appointed senator and one-term governor Elmer Benson, supported the anti-anti-Communist Henry Wallace. Humphrey opposed isolationism before World War II and supported the Truman Administration's anti-Communist Cold War policy afterward. Nationally he was one of the founders, along with Eleanor Roosevelt and United Automobile Workers president Walter Reuther, of the anti-Communist Americans for Democratic Action. In Minnesota he led the successful drive (with help from future Governor Orville Freeman, Minneapolis Mayor Arthur Naftalin, lawyer Max Kampelman, and 20-year-old college student Walter Mondale) to oust Benson's comrades from control of the newly merged DFL. 1948 was his *annus mirabilis*: Humphrey's stirring convention speech committed the Democratic Party to civil rights; as DFL nominee he beat incumbent Republican Senator Joseph Ball by 60% to 40%; and as a 37-year-old senator he could escort his father to a White House meeting with President Harry Truman after his surprising and decisive victory. Broad sunlit uplands seemed to stretch before Humphrey and his fellow liberals in every direction.

INSTEAD THEY FACED FRUSTRATION. Truman's Fair Deal legislation went nowhere in a heavily Democratic Congress, and the Korean War throttled domestic reform. Humphrey's political instincts were unsure, and he was humiliated when he assailed the elderly Virginia Senator Harry Byrd in a series of speeches to Byrd's own special committee for its failure to cut federal spending. Lyndon Johnson—who was elected to the Senate in the same year, but with 11 years of prior experience in the House—took the naïve Humphrey under his wing in what Offner characterizes as a father-son relationship, though LBJ was only three years his senior. Humphrey did have one legislative success, Public Law 480, which allowed warehouses with huge surpluses of farm products resulting from New Deal programs to send them abroad. The political reason for its passage was to slow the inevitable migration from increasingly mechanized farms in the South and Midwest (including Minnesota). Humphrey always maintained a sentimental regard for the family farmer.

Offner slides quickly over Humphrey's hapless 1960 presidential campaign, which, like all of Humphrey's campaigns, seems to have been underfunded and bereft of strategic guidance. The author doesn't address the tan-

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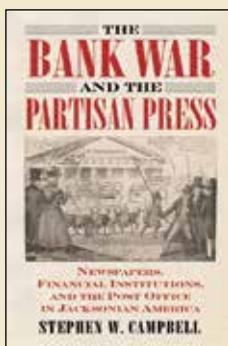
The Bank War and the Partisan Press Newspapers, Financial Institutions, and the Post Office in Jacksonian America

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—Sean Patrick Adams, professor of history,
University of Florida

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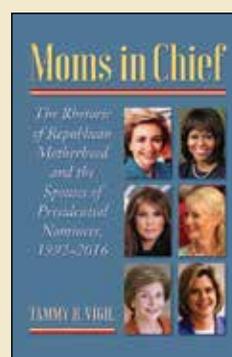


Moms in Chief The Rhetoric of Republican Motherhood and the Spouses of Presidential Nominees, 1992–2016

Tammy R. Vigil

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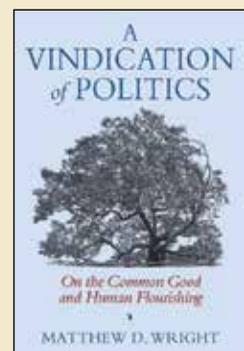


A Vindication of Politics On the Common Good and Human Flourishing

Matthew D. Wright

"You will be hearing again from Matthew Wright. This brilliant book takes up some of the thorniest issues in political theory: The relation between the individual and common flourishing, and whether political association is good in itself or just a means to other ends. The approach is fresh, and I will long be pondering its insights."—J. Budziszewski, University of Texas at Austin, author of *Commentary on Thomas Aquinas's Treatise on Law*

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talizing questions of whether Lyndon Johnson was encouraging him to run in order to stop the Kennedys, and he only skitters over the enormity of the Kennedy operation. One Joseph P. Kennedy agent inquired how much it would cost to get one West Virginia county boss's support and was told "thirty-five"; the sheriff in question was surprised when he opened the attaché case to find it contained not 35 hundred but 35 thousand dollars.

OFFNER SHOWS MORE INSIGHT WHEN he writes that "Humphrey was highly dependent emotionally on Johnson's goodwill." As vice president he had an institutional reason not to disagree publicly with Johnson, especially so soon after a traumatic presidential assassination. But Humphrey acquiesced in Johnson's control over his travel schedule, over even anodyne public statements, over his total exclusion from contact with military and civilian national security officials. Even as a presidential nominee himself, and unlike other 20th-century vice presidents running for the top office (Richard Nixon in 1960, George Bush in 1988, Al Gore in 2000) he trembled with fear at presenting his own policies, until finally offering alternatives on Vietnam five weeks before the general election.

This biography doesn't tell us what if anything Humphrey thought of Johnson's selection of the visually impressive but intellectually clueless William Westmoreland as commander in Vietnam, or why Johnson kept him in place so long. Perhaps that's because he had no thoughts on that subject at all. The American presidential selection system tends to produce commanders-in-chief with limited knowledge of military issues and no contact with the military officers from whom they must select commanders. Humphrey, who had been within a heartbeat of the office for four years, seems to have been especially underprepared in this regard. His instinctive anti-Communism was a good start, but on Vietnam he tended to vacillate, arguing sometimes that bombing halts would somehow satisfy Communist enemies, sometimes snapping back peevishly at those denigrating America. Unlike Nixon, whom we are told re-

peatedly he loathed, he could not figure out how to move toward military victory while reducing American troop levels.

ON DOMESTIC POLICY, HUMPHREY fans intuitively feel, he would have done better. Certainly he had been right about civil rights, and his management of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was skillful—although Offner does not mention his vow to eat the Act if its employment sections were used (as they soon were, by the Nixon Administration) as a justification for racial quotas and preferences. And a case can be made that Humphrey-style liberalism served postwar America well—but also that it stopped doing so in the years just after he was elected vice president in 1964. It had already produced for the vast majority of Americans the "welfare state which assured a decent standard of living and human dignity to every citizen," that Humphrey was arguing required increased federal funding of education, housing, and health care. For the two postwar decades the nation's economic competitors had been put out of commission by the war, and so America managed to grow and generate jobs up and down the skill scale, despite the burden of New Deal laws that imposed labor union restrictions on management, and regulations designed to freeze existing arrangements in place rather than encourage competition and innovation. Such arrangements reached their maximum peak of celebration in the 1964 Johnson-Humphrey campaign, which boasted of its support from both big business and big labor, Walter Reuther and Henry Ford II, by big-city bosses and civil rights leaders, Richard J. Daley and Martin Luther King, Jr. Consensus!

But with postwar recovery, America had stronger competitors and a new generation of adults with more demanding expectations. Humphrey's impulse on policy can be boiled down to the title of William Voegeli's book *Never Enough* (2010). If corporate-labor cartels seemed to work, let's have more of them. If real wages and salaries had increased despite government supervision and control, let's have more of that, too. Incomes may have risen and

poverty declined, but let's also create an anti-poverty program, and let's rely on those in poverty to tell us how to get out of it. If blacks rioted in large cities, even those with liberal mayors, then more money must be sent to city governments, their entrenched bureaucracies, and community organizations dominated by self-chosen malcontents.

A BETTER AND MORE TRULY LIBERAL response was on offer in those years from Ralph Nader, who in between calling for legislation to require safety features in automobiles also was busy sponsoring studies and books urging deregulation of trucking, freight rail, airline fares, and communications. Nader's proposals received serious consideration during the Ford Administration and were widely adopted by the Carter and Reagan administrations. But this wave of reform, which squeezed enormous amounts of cost out of transportation and communication, to the benefit of everyone with modest and low incomes, passed Humphrey by. His attentions were elsewhere, on the Humphrey-Hawkins Act, which purported to require the Federal Reserve to consider full employment as well as low inflation as policy goals—something that the Fed usually did anyway. Humphrey-Hawkins was something of a parting gift from a Democratic Congress and president to a party leader of good cheer and great energy who was gamely persevering while visibly dying of cancer in his mid-sixties. That came in early 1978, and so Humphrey was spared the knowledge that the man who would dominate American politics and public policy for most of the next decade would be a man born in another small Midwestern town in the same year, a fellow traveler in postwar liberal anti-Communist politics who cheered on Harry Truman's victory in 1948, whose ideas had taken a different turn in the intervening 30 years: the former movie actor Ronald Reagan.

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