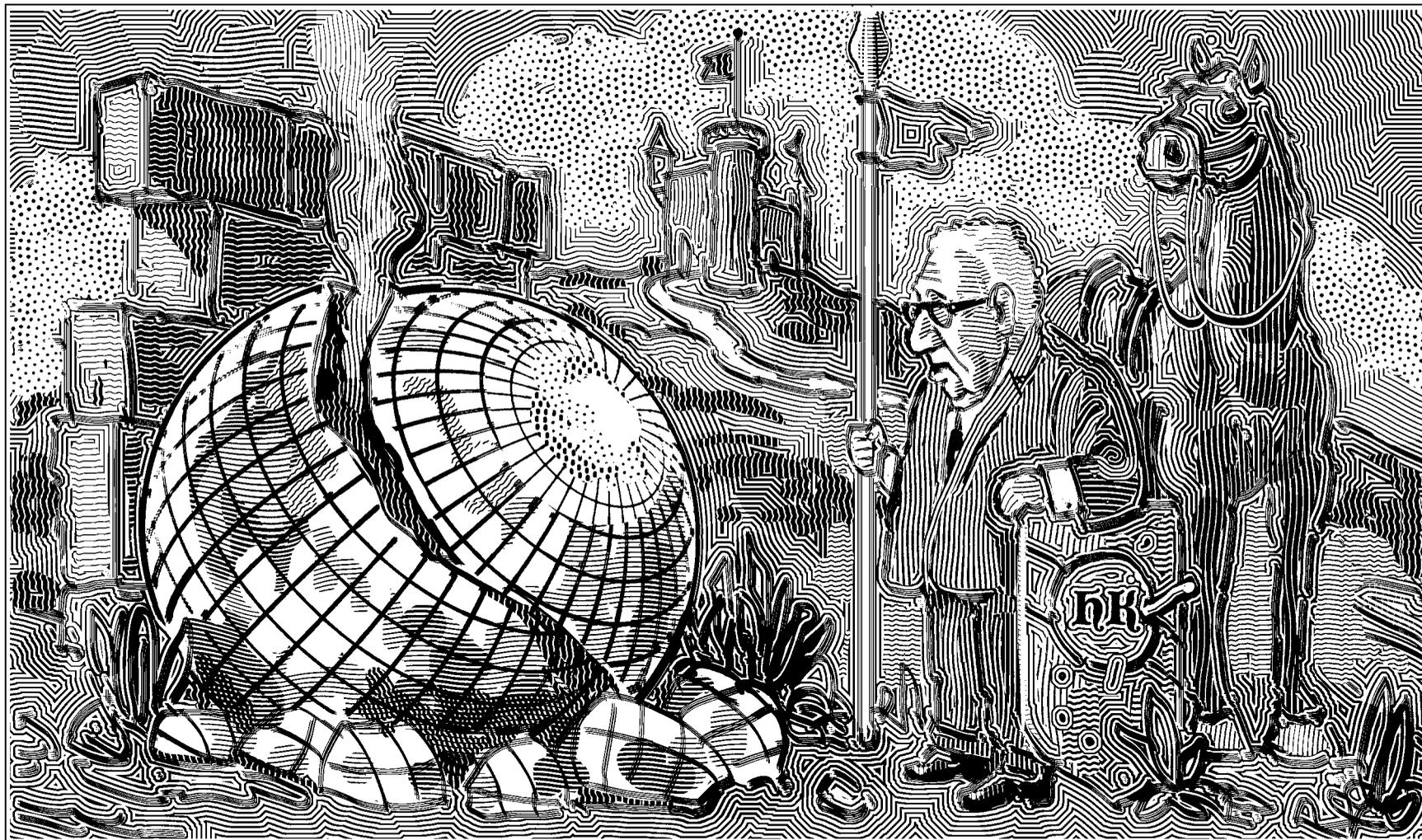


VOLUME XV, NUMBER 2, SPRING 2015

# CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

*A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship*



## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO KISSINGER

by Angelo M. Codevilla

*Plus:*

Michael Anton:  
**Tom Wolfe's  
Women**

Mackubin T. Owens:  
**Robert E. Lee**

Lee Edwards:  
**LBJ vs. Reagan**

William Voegeli:  
**Political Correctness**

Lucas E. Morel:  
**Brookhiser's Lincoln**

Edward Feser:  
**Science & the Soul**

Christopher Caldwell:  
**Getting Over Vietnam**

Allen C. Guelzo:  
**Is Capitalism  
Slavery?**

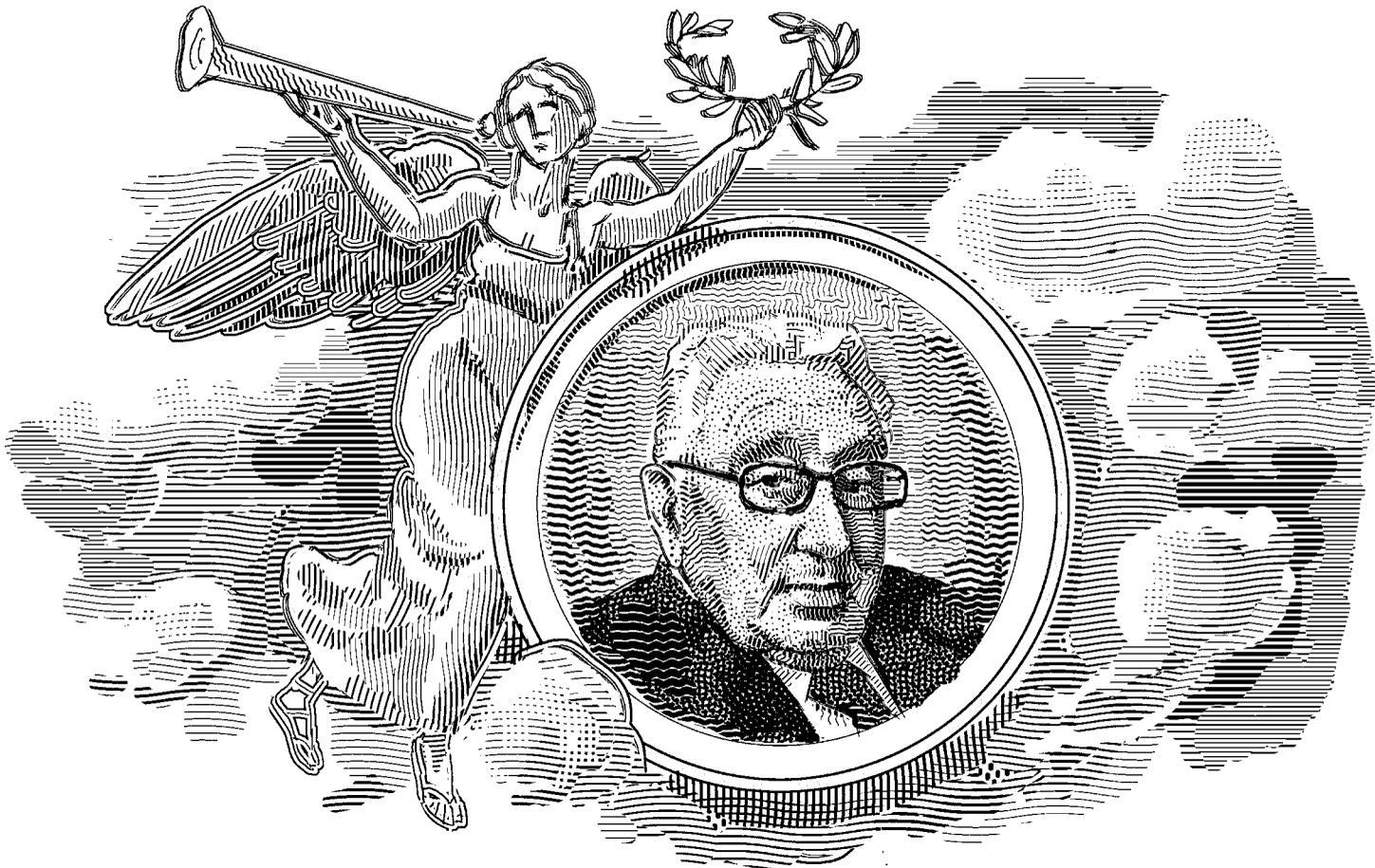
Larry P. Arnn:  
**Martin Gilbert**



A Publication of the Claremont Institute

PRICE: \$6.95  
IN CANADA: \$7.95

## THE COURAGE OF HIS CONTRADICTIONS



ESTABLISHMENT VOICES JOINED TOGETHER in acclamation. In the *Boston Globe*, Nicholas Burns (Condoleezza Rice's right-hand man at the State Department, now at Harvard's Kennedy School) praised Henry Kissinger's new tome for its "words of wisdom" about "the international order he rightly believes is a necessary precondition for global stability, prosperity, and peace." In the *New Criterion*, Conrad Black called it "a brilliantly conceived and executed book even by Henry Kissinger's very high standards." Michiko Kakutani, the *New York Times's* principal book reviewer for more than 30 years, said: "At its best, his writing functions like a powerful zoom lens, opening out to give us a panoramic appreciation of larger historical trends and patterns, then zeroing in on small details and anecdotes that vividly illustrate his theories." In the *Wall Street Journal*, James Traub added that *World Order* undermines "the romantic pieties of left and right that have shaped so much of American foreign policy over the past century."

Kissinger's 17th book does, in fact, make plain the views on war, peace, and America's global role that he has expressed, often ambiguously, in countless articles and speeches going back more than 60 years. In particular, *World Order* clarifies the theme that runs through all of these writings: a single-minded determination to make "international order" the criterion for interpreting and evaluating statesmen's words and deeds. Since Kissinger's views evolved in tandem with our ruling class's, this book also helps us understand the *formamentis*, the priorities that have driven U.S. foreign policy for over a half-century.

*World Order* reflects badly on Kissinger and on the establishment that celebrates him. The promiscuous use of impersonal pronouns and the passive voice, for one thing, makes it impossible to ascribe particular ideas and deeds to identifiable historical actors. On most pages the reader will encounter ungainly and mystifying metaphors, sentences that begin in one direction but end oppositely, and outrageous claims advanced without supporting evidence.

### Source of Disorder

THE TEXT'S VIOLATION OF ELEMENTARY rules of style and diction is not carelessness; it is essential to the case it is trying to make. The history of international affairs the world over, Kissinger believes, has less to do with peoples pursuing their own ambitions, interests, or predilections than with creating one version or another of "order." Above all, American foreign policy's principal task is to take the lead in crafting such an order. Making that case using accountable language—the active voice, pronouns that assign rather than obscure responsibility, as well as proper quotes and footnotes—would be impossible.

*World Order*, then, inadvertently explicates the source of our ruling class's disorder: a clerisy has escaped the duties and limits inherent in the role of one nation's public servants, entrusted to advance its citizens' security and happiness, in order to carry out imagined global obligations with assumed capabilities. This failure to discharge true duties for the sake of false ones is why America



lost the Vietnam war; discarded its defenses against air and missile attack; sought to keep together a Soviet Union that was coming apart; wasted its superior forces in conflicts without end; cowers as terrorists surround it; and backpedals in the Pacific. Nowadays, we speak of America's renunciation of power as if it were a recent phenomenon. But, *grosso modo*, it has been the story of U.S. foreign policy for over half a century, and was a glimmer in the eyes of ruling-class intellectuals long before then.

Let us begin with Kissinger's key precepts.

- "World order describes the concept held by a region or civilization about the nature of just arrangements and the distribution of power thought to be applicable to the entire world."

- "The idea of world order was applied to the geographic extent known to the statesmen of the time...each region viewed its own order as unique."

- "Our age is insistent, at times almost desperately, in pursuit of a concept of world order. Chaos threatens side by side with unprecedented interdependence."

- World order will require respect for "the multifariousness of the human condition and the ingrained human quest for freedom. Order in this sense must be cultivated; it cannot be imposed."

- "The mystery to be overcome is one all people share—how divergent historic experiences and values can be shaped into a common order."

This all makes sense...if you accept that "regions" can hold "concepts" and "view" orders. Or that some regional or global mind opines about world justice; that orders "base themselves," and ages "grasp" in pursuit of concepts; that human beings really prefer freedom for themselves to power over others; that relationships between nations "grow" rather than reflect shifting patterns of power; that "mysteries" can be "overcome"; that an author may freely ascribe his own perspective and priorities to epochs and statesmen from the past. In short, *World Order* presumes Kissinger was present as the inner longings and logic of nations, ages, and civilizations rose and unfolded—some-what as in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*.

But the *Phenomenology* eschews discussion of any facts and people against which the reader might compare its lucubrations. Kissinger's references to ideas, events, and protagonists—however vague and magisterial—pose a challenge. Given that *World Order* proceeds by *obiter dicta* rather than

evidence, readers can only accept or reject that Kissinger knows what an "age," or for that matter an individual, intends. The pronouncements offer no argument to follow, no chain of reasoning to accept or reject.

### European Past

THE PROBLEM IS CLEAREST IN THE FIRST two chapters, which discuss European history. (The exposition there differs strikingly from the boilerplate discussions of non-Western history in the four subsequent chapters.) Kissinger's opening distills his point: in Europe, as distinguished from the non-Western world, "[d]istinct competing dynasties and nationalities were perceived not as a form of 'chaos' to be expunged but, in the idealized view of Europe's statesmen—sometimes conscious, sometimes not—as an intricate mechanism tending toward a balance that preserved each people's interests, integrity, and autonomy." He doesn't tell us who had these perceptions of competing dynasties, or how *he* is conscious now of views not consciously held by people centuries ago.

What analysis he does offer betrays his limited acquaintance with basic facts. De-

*World Order*, by Henry Kissinger.  
Penguin Press, 420 pages, \$36

spite Kissinger's professorial image, his career as an academic entrepreneur always precluded in-depth scholarship. Consultancies, conferences, and politics took up his student days, a pattern that never really ended. For example, no one familiar with Augustine or medieval politics could write of "kingdoms with separate militaries and independent policies [that] maneuvered for advantage in a manner that bore no apparent relationship to Augustine's *City of God*." In fact Augustine, writing as the Roman Empire was collapsing into competing powers, was not longing for one new Caesar. Rather, he reminded Christians of Christ's distinction between duties to God and those to whatever Caesars might exist. Similarly shaky intellectual history is on display when Kissinger writes that Hegel's *Philosophy of History* "inspired Marx's doctrine." No—Marx got his Hegel through Ludwig Feuerbach's gloss on the *Phenomenology*, though "inspired" is fuzzy enough to cover many such errors.

Kissinger's heedless eagerness to bend every fact to fit the world order thesis also explains his description of Charlemagne's empire as a product of "[a]spirations to unity" and "post-Roman

ideas of world order." A more plausible, tangible cause was Charlemagne's ancestors' military victories, especially ones at Poitiers and Tours, and then his own over the Longobards in Italy. The Frankish epic, the *Chanson de Roland*, is about Christian chivalric valor, not world order. Though illiterate, Charlemagne had *The City of God* read to him in Latin, and set about separating secular from ecclesiastical power accordingly. Moreover, *pace* Kissinger, stopping the Muslim host at the gates of Vienna in 1683 was not the work of "Prince Eugene of Savoy," but rather of 20,000 horsemen charging behind Polish king Jan Sobieski. Nor did Richelieu "invent...the idea that the state was an abstract and permanent entity existing in its own right." Jean Bodin had done that in 1576, in *Les Six Livres de la République*.

Even where his grasp of the historical facts is more assured, such as when discussing the 1648 Treaties of Westphalia and the 1815 Congress of Vienna, Kissinger tells us more about his own mindset than about Europe's past. Among his most egregious practices is to offer mutually exclusive propositions as if all were true. The three agreements that make up Westphalia happened, he writes, because delegates "had come with eminently practical instructions based on strategic interests." So much blood had been spilled that "peace would be built, if at all, through balancing rivalries." "[N]one signed the documents under the illusion that it was doing anything but advancing its own interests and prestige," and "[a] distinction must be made between the balance of power as a fact and the balance of power as a system."

At the same time, however, Kissinger uses the passive voice to tell us that the Westphalian participants were really engaged in pursuits bigger than themselves: "The inherent equality of sovereign states...was instituted." "[N]ewly arrived powers...were granted." The "balance of power made its appearance as a system; that is to say, bringing it about was accepted as one of the key purposes of foreign policy; disturbing it would evoke a coalition on behalf of equilibrium." And "[t]he theoretically logical and predictable intermeshing of state interests was intended to overcome the disorder unfolding in every corner of the continent."

Such slippery formulations make it impossible to know whether the author maintains that the balance of power results from opposed objectives or from common intentions. Challenges to the equilibrium's existence "evoked" its maintenance, which could mean many things, or nothing. Was the legal equality of states *de facto*, or did somebody "institute" and "grant" it? If the latter, whose?



Did equilibrium between powers result from countervailing forces, or from collective purpose? If so, whose? Was the intermeshing of state interests merely “logical,” or was it “intended to overcome disorder”? If so, by whom?

Kissinger’s ensuing hymn to Britain as “the balancer of the equilibrium” is equally self-refuting. Great Britain “fought in European wars but with shifting alliances—not in pursuit of specific, purely national goals, but by identifying the national interest with the preservation of the balance of power.” But he cannot help noting large shifts and deep tensions in Britain’s understanding of its national interest. Benjamin Disraeli’s view of the national interest’s imperatives was, for example, diametrically opposed to William Pitt the Elder’s understanding. Moreover, decisions about its national interest turned Britain from keeping to breaking the balance of power. In 1914 “Britain, by its ambiguity obscuring the degree of its growing commitment to the allied side...made France and Russia adamant; its aloof posture confused some German leaders.” In other words, Britain pushed both sides into a war that wounded it mortally.

The many tergiversations, however, never obscure Kissinger’s central point: the balance of power is a good that nations have sought

and should seek over and above particular interests. Content-neutral balances of power have done so much good for mankind that, during the 18th century, “wars were...fought for limited territorial objectives” because “the system would not tolerate hegemonic aspirations.” He does not mention that this moderate system’s supporters hardly paused as they dismembered Poland and erased it from the map. But he does say that although—and yet, also because—so many wise, secular, and moderate men of the age (d’Alembert, Montesquieu, Kant) were saying so many wise, secular, and moderate things, France somehow erupted in a secular-religious crusade, i.e., the French Revolution, that destroyed the system. Kissinger, at least, has the courage of his contradictions.

And so it was that statesmen “assembled at Vienna to discuss how to design a peaceful order.” But that is *not* what these statesmen said they were doing there in 1814-15, which is why Kissinger doesn’t quote from their letters and diaries. Rather, he writes, “The order established at the Congress of Vienna was the closest that Europe has come to universal governance since the collapse of Charlemagne’s empire.” But the Congress of Vienna *established* nothing. It *ratified* what the governments that defeated Napoleon had secured militarily. Kissinger writes, “It produced a consen-

sus...that the preservation of the system was more important than any single dispute.” Vienna, in fact, ratified a consensus: preserving the peace *was* more important to each party to the agreement than pursuing any discrete dispute that existed in 1815. But that “system” endured only 40 years until clashing objectives regarding Crimea started wars among the major powers, which ended 16 years later after the Franco-Prussian war. By that war’s conclusion, 1815’s borders had been largely undone and Europe was sliding into the catastrophe of 1914. Kissinger does not explain how his paradigmatic “world restored” lasted only about as long as any other post-war settlement.

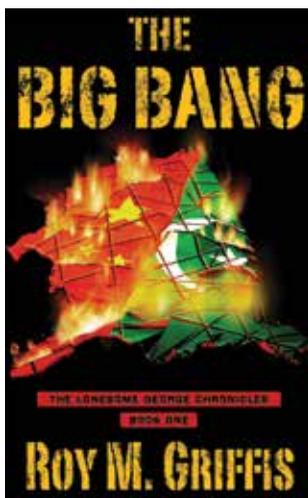
The closest he comes to accounting for world disorder is to note that a system can, like Vienna’s, lose “legitimacy.” The concept of “legitimacy”—the belief that existing arrangements are not just tolerable but worth defending for their own sake—turns out to be a puffed-up, tautological way of saying that certain arrangements secure favor because people favor them. In fact, during the century after Vienna (as in previous centuries) people valued many things more than the international order’s stability. Indeed, a book that purports to explain war and peace should focus on how and why people think about political ends as they do. But this book’s focus, “world order,” works against the

**FICTION THAT ENTERTAINS...  
AND MAKES YOU THINK!**



[LibertyIslandMag.com](http://LibertyIslandMag.com)

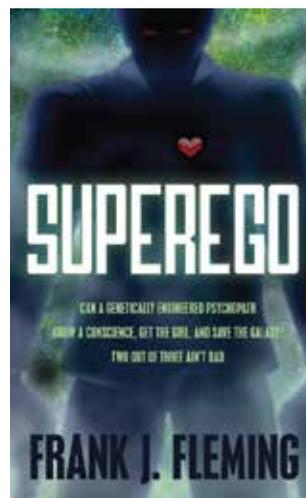
**Liberty Island** is the home of the new conservative counter-culture. And we publish the very best in sci-fi, alt-history, mystery, and more. If you love great fiction, Liberty Island is your destination.



**THE BIG BANG**  
*THE LONESOME GEORGE CHRONICLES, BOOK ONE*  
**BY ROY M. GRIFFIS**

“A wild romp through a post-apocalyptic America unimaginably awful but also highly contemporary. Buckle your seat belts — and prepare to resist!”

—Rich Lowry,  
Editor of National Review



**SUPEREGO**  
**BY FRANK J. FLEMING**

Can a genetically engineered psychopath grow a conscience, get the girl, and save the galaxy?

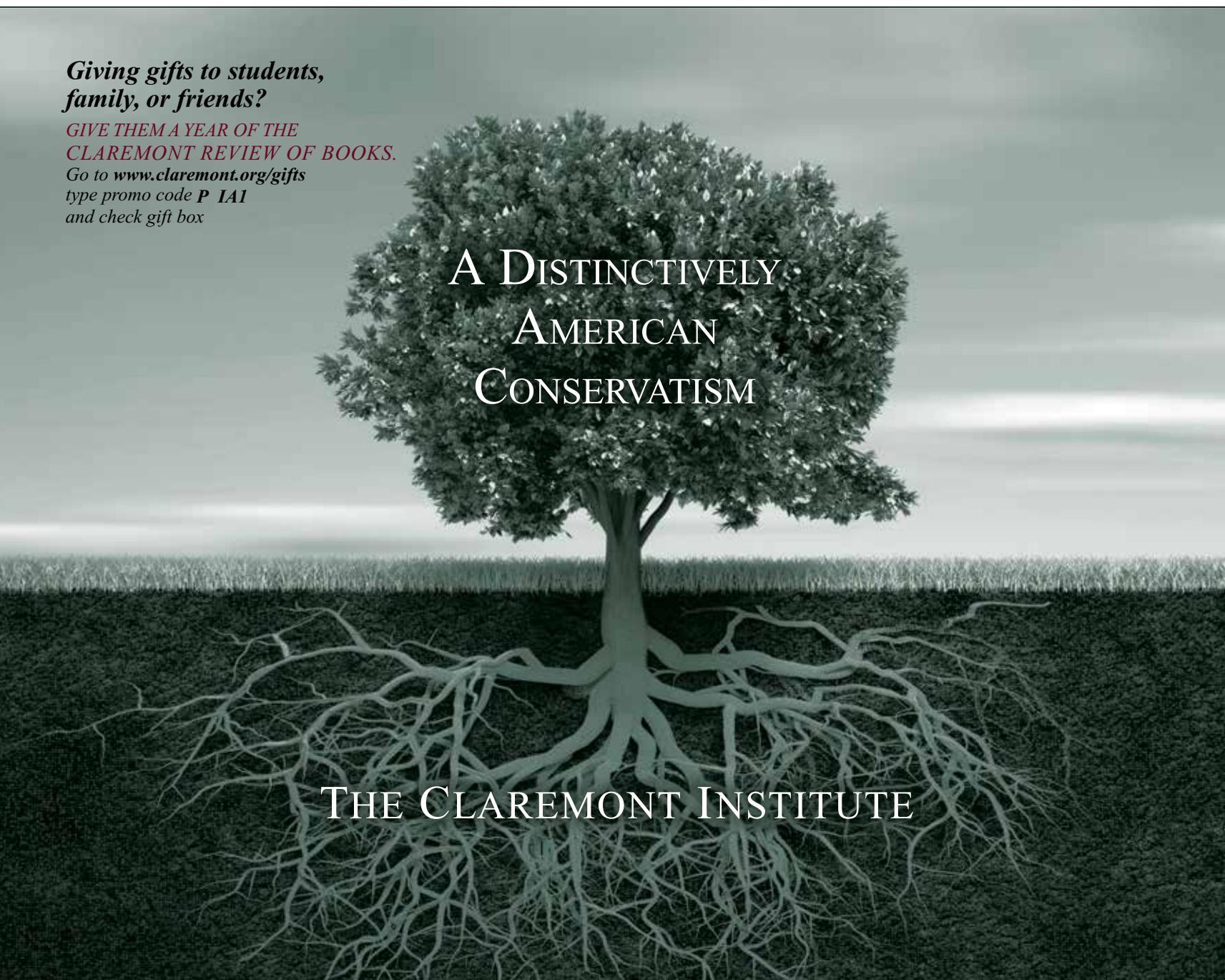
Two out of three ain't bad.

Available in paperback and ebook at Amazon.com, iTunes, BN.com, and other online retailers.

***Giving gifts to students,  
family, or friends?***

***GIVE THEM A YEAR OF THE  
CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS.***

*Go to [www.claremont.org/gifts](http://www.claremont.org/gifts)  
type promo code **P IAI**  
and check gift box*



**A DISTINCTIVELY  
AMERICAN  
CONSERVATISM**

**THE CLAREMONT INSTITUTE**

The founding ideas of equal natural rights, natural law, and limited constitutional government are seeds from which the American republic grew. Over the past century, Progressivism has undermined those principles and imperiled our republic. We must recover America's intellectual heritage before we can succeed in restoring American self-government. The Claremont Institute educates the next generation of young conservatives in how the founders' principles help to solve today's problems. We then assist these rising thinkers and statesmen in their careers in state and national politics, in the courts, academia, the media, and conservative think tanks. These conservative leaders are our hope for a healthier America.

**Support The Claremont Institute**  
**[Claremont.org/donate](http://Claremont.org/donate)**

**THE CLAREMONT INSTITUTE**

*Recovering the American Idea*





obvious explanation: human beings constantly revise their relations with one another inside regimes as well as between them. The result of these often-clashing objectives is that any existing international arrangement has many self-interested opponents, few self-interested defenders—and no disinterested friends.

Kissinger is not unaware of the problem: “No truly global ‘world order’ has ever existed,” he admits. The closest approximation—which was established by the treaties of Westphalia, reaffirmed by the Congress of Vienna, and imposed on the world by Western colonizers—died in the 20th century’s world wars. Thereafter, the United States effectively established and upheld a “cooperative order of states observing common rules and norms, embracing liberal economic systems, forswearing territorial conquest, respecting national sovereignty, and adopting participatory and democratic systems of governance.” But this was not “Westphalia.”

Though the U.S. retained the Westphalian system’s forms, Kissinger acknowledges, the *Pax Americana* lacked what had enabled the Westphalian balance of power to last. Western Europe, which had originated the Westphalian forms, was losing the will and divesting itself of the capacity to uphold them. Meanwhile, other parts of mankind were asserting their own interests, either out of indifference or opposition to the existing “world order.” Today “the frequent [American] exhortations for countries to ‘do their fair share,’ play by ‘twenty-first-century rules,’ or be ‘responsible stakeholders’ in a common system, reflect the fact that there is no shared definition of the system.... Thus, while ‘the international community’ is invoked perhaps more insistently now than in any other era, it presents no clear or agreed set of goals.” In short, many in the world resent America’s “international community.” There is no world order because nobody really wants one—except for some Americans.

Ignoring the logical question—if world order is such a chimera, why pursue it?—Kissinger moves from misconstruing history to his book’s main purpose: a plea to Americans to “act for all mankind” by constituting (or reconstituting) world order out of world chaos. But why should Americans do that, and what kind of world order might they conjure? The answers are not compelling.

#### American Interests

**K**ISSINGER IMMEDIATELY MAKES CLEAR the limits of his familiarity with American history. “America’s foreign policy has reflected the conviction that its domestic principles were self-evidently universal

and their application at all times salutary; that the real challenge of American engagement abroad was not foreign policy in the traditional sense but a project of spreading values that it believed all other peoples aspired to replicate.” This abstract statement might not be entirely true even if attributed to Woodrow Wilson at his most righteous and least realistic moment. Though the Declaration of Independence’s authors did believe that its principles were self-evidently true, they stopped well short of holding that their “domestic principles” (a term that confuses those truths with the particular constitutional arrangements chosen by the Americans) were universal and immediately applicable and “at all times salutary.” That was for other peoples to decide for themselves. The Declaration does declare, in Lincoln’s gloss, “an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times”—a standard by which all men and all governments may be judged. But it is about what one people, the Americans, and only the Americans, plan to do about that truth. Until the 20th century, no American

### Kissinger’s diplomacy produced pretend agreements that aggravated conflicts and helped lead his country to its only defeat in war.

statesman imagined that the Declaration had arrogated to Americans the right to deprive other peoples of their independence—much less to presume that all peoples were ready, willing, and able to follow our example.

Kissinger’s tendentious historical interpretations tell us that America’s earliest settlers had left the Old World upon concluding that the peace of Westphalia negated the “ideal of a continent unified by a single divine governance.” So for them, “America provided a place to do so on distant shores...dreams of unity and governance enabling a redeemed purpose...the way to transform the lands of which they had taken leave.” This account conflates John Winthrop’s 1630 evocation of Deuteronomy (taken up most recently by Ronald Reagan’s invocation of America as a “shining city on a hill”), which exhorted Americans to exemplary behavior regarding their own affairs, with America’s supposedly congenital tendency to meddle abroad.

Kissinger’s interpretation of our early foreign policy leaves out George Washington and *The Federalist’s* sober description of the rela-

tionship between the founders’ defining purpose and their diplomacy. For Americans to enjoy lives more free, just, and prosperous than those attainable in any other nation, America should “observe good faith and justice towards all nations; cultivate peace and harmony with all.” Since these founders presumed other nations to be unalterably “other,” they preached and practiced traditional arm’s-length diplomacy focused on the national interest. For them, foreign policy was the shield behind which the Republic would grow to greatness.

John Quincy Adams embodied and defined that diplomacy. Kissinger dismisses Adams as a simpleton “verging on exasperation at other countries’ determination to pursue more complicated and devious courses.” In reality, Adams, who served as secretary of state and president of the United States, was as successful as he was sophisticated. He negotiated the end of the War of 1812, navigated America through the challenges of the Holy Alliance, and extended America’s borders to the Pacific. His first diplomatic appointment came at age 14, after which he served as ambassador to Russia, Prussia, and Britain. He was at home in French, German, Dutch, Russian, Latin, and Greek; conversant in Spanish and Italian; and he never ceased studying foreign cultures in the original languages. By contrast, Kissinger has mostly forgotten his native German. His “creatively ambiguous” diplomacy produced pretend agreements that aggravated conflicts and helped lead his country to its only defeat in war; he was the only American ever to sign a surrender (though called a peace).

Kissinger also purveys a Theodore Roosevelt created in his own image and likeness. But his attempt to set T.R. apart from the founders by pointing to his excellent education and acquaintance with “traditional principles of strategy” and “prominent ‘Old World’ elites” can impress only those who don’t know the full story. James Madison and Alexander Hamilton—never mind John Quincy Adams—were better educated than T.R. In fact, T.R. considered their grasp of strategic principles superior to his own. Adams had grown up in European capitals and been on intimate terms with every statesman of his time, including walks along the Neva alone with the czar. Abraham Lincoln, a brilliant autodidact, played European politics like a violin during the Civil War, and carried on a correspondence with the czar so friendly and effectual that he addressed his letters to “my great and good friend.”

Kissinger writes that there was something new about T.R.’s simultaneous affection for America’s special character and his conviction that “to fulfill its calling, the United States would need to enter a world in which power,

*Giving gifts to students, family, or friends?*

*GIVE THEM A YEAR OF THE  
CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS.*

*Go to [www.claremont.org/gifts](http://www.claremont.org/gifts)  
type promo code **PA2**  
and check  
gift box*

**When courts stray from the Constitution,  
we're on their case.**

*The Claremont Institute's Center for Constitutional Jurisprudence* is an academy for the restoration of constitutionalism. We educate students from top law schools in the principles of natural right and natural law that are the foundation of the U.S. Constitution. As law clerks and scholars, our students will, in turn, inform the judges and justices with whom they work. We help shape the current and the next generation of legal interpretation. We are the corrective to the legal establishment's contempt for the Constitution. In addition to teaching future lawyers and judges, we fight the good fight directly by participating in high-profile cases in the highest courts.

**Support The Claremont Institute**  
**[Claremont.org/donate](http://Claremont.org/donate)**

**THE CLAREMONT INSTITUTE**

*Recovering the American Idea*



---

and not only principle, shared in governing the course of events.” T.R. did inveigh against Americans who believed that good intentions would suffice in international affairs. But he was distinguishing himself not from his predecessors but from his “idealistic” contemporaries like Wilson.

Then comes Kissinger’s main point: “[T.R.] saw the United States...both an Atlantic and a Pacific power—as in a unique position to ‘grasp the points of vantage which will enable us to have our say in deciding the destiny of the oceans of the East and the West.’ Shielding the Western Hemisphere from outside powers....” So far, Kissinger is telling the reader neither more nor less than what T.R. thought. But then, without a break in the sentence, Kissinger continues with his own prescription, which would have scandalized T.R.: “*and intervening to preserve an equilibrium of forces in every other strategic region, America would emerge as the decisive guardian of the global balance and, through this, international peace*” (emphasis added).

This is, indeed, Kissinger’s central objective, laid out in voluminous writings over six decades that also encompassed eight years of policy making at the highest level. America is to be the guardian of orderly world peace—a role pursued with latent force, minimally employed, and a maximum of non-ideological, mutual adjustment of interests. He believes that America’s own good would result from its success in managing the international environment.

But that was never Theodore Roosevelt’s objective. He agreed with Quincy Adams on America’s strategic hierarchy: our paramount interest is our own independence. Accordingly, our interest in the lands that border the Republic and nearby islands is that enemies not possess them. As for the oceans—“the common possession of mankind”—our interest is making sure we can traverse them peacefully and that our enemies cannot. Our interest in the lands beyond the oceans is to have no trouble with them. Kissinger writes that T.R. looked on his mediation of the Russo-Japanese treaty of 1905 as “the *beginning*” of America’s management of “the Asia-Pacific equilibrium” (emphasis in the original). That is pure invention. If any such thought ever crossed T.R.’s mind, the anti-American riots that ensued in Tokyo dispelled it. For Kissinger to tie onto T.R.’s words a tail that literally twists them in the opposite direction is careless at best, and at worst dishonest.

The same goes for his characterization of T.R.’s corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. No, its purpose was not a “security umbrella for the Western Hemisphere.” It was exclu-

sively to prevent European interference in the Americas for our own security’s sake. In its focus on U.S.-Europe relations rather than Latin America, the “Roosevelt Corollary” differed not at all from Grover Cleveland’s 1895 readiness to fight Britain over its interference with Venezuela.

Kissinger notes correctly that T.R. inveighed against “grand pronouncements,” and that this advocate of power sought to give no offense: “Speak softly and carry a big stick.” But that prescription for U.S. foreign policy is no different from John Jay’s in *The Federalist*. Nor does T.R.’s constant emphasis on the need to match ends and means depart from the American people’s timeless common sense, and the policy of nearly all their 18th- and 19th-century statesmen.

But Kissinger’s judgment that, after T.R.’s passing, “American foreign policy returned to the vision of the shining city on a hill” is so contrary to reality—the foreign policy of Woodrow Wilson and of his many imitators has been unlike any preached or practiced anywhere, at any time—as to be explicable only by Kissinger’s own willfulness. He writes: “Woodrow Wilson turned the vision America had asserted largely for itself into an operational program applicable to the entire world.” This is a distortion. The desire of Wilson and subsequent Wilsonians to deal with the rest of mankind as if that vision of the good life were common, in Wilson’s words, to “forward looking men and women everywhere,” was and remains distasteful to the American people at large. Far from being “the vision that America had asserted largely for itself,” it was what set Wilsonians apart from their country’s history and sensibility.

Moreover, people like Wilson were the very first Americans to imagine that they could or should use government force to improve others without their consent. Ultimately, Wilsonians yearned to use American power on behalf of what Kissinger calls, correctly, “a definitive and global implementation” of their vision. He quotes Wilson to convey, correctly, his boundless millennialism: the Great War would be “the culminating and final war for human liberty.” Achieving humanity’s end-state would require the “destruction of every arbitrary power anywhere...or, if it cannot be presently destroyed, at the least its reduction to virtual impotence.” He has no doubt that Wilson, because he thought this way, prevented an early, moderate, balance-of-power settlement of the Great War that would not have left Germany irreconcilable, or too powerful. He faults Wilson’s followers for their fateful combination of international commitments and the reduction of the arma-

ments necessary to fulfill those commitments. He finds the concept of “collective security” “belied by the experience of history.” In sum, writes Kissinger, Wilson’s career “would appear more the stuff of Shakespearean tragedy than of foreign policy textbooks.”

And yet he writes that Wilson “had touched an essential chord in the American soul.” “[H]e rallied the tradition of American exceptionalism behind a vision that outlasted [his]...shortcomings.” Whenever America has faced challenges, “it has returned in one way or another to Woodrow Wilson’s vision of a world order that secures peace through democracy, open diplomacy, and the cultivation of shared rules and standards.” Nevertheless, Kissinger notes that this “elevated foreign policy doctrine” is “*unmoored from a sense of history or geopolitics*” (emphasis added). Later, when discussing John F. Kennedy, Kissinger also observes that Wilsonian foreign policy—essentially the foreign policy of the past hundred years—“based the moral universalism of the leaders on the American people’s dedication to freedom and democracy.” Note: the people want one thing, which the leaders reinterpret and use to pursue the different thing they want. This is a massive critique.

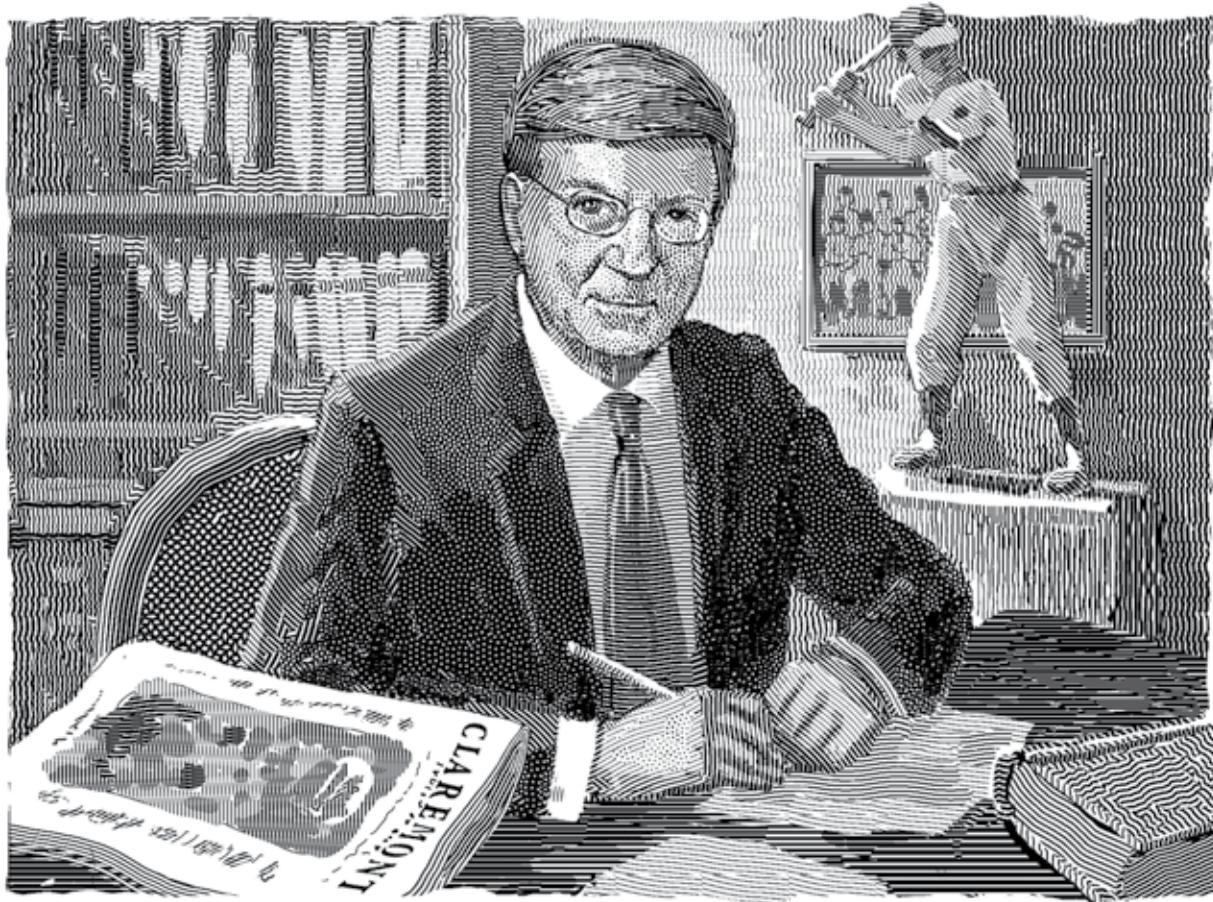
It is not clear whether Kissinger realizes how massive. He is happy that U.S. elites are dedicated to the world order he celebrates. But, in his own words, this dedication is not just “unmoored” from international reality but also based on these very elites’ willful confusion of their own “moral universalism” with ordinary Americans’ love of their own freedom—a love their leaders deprecate. He does not ask about, never mind demonstrate, the sustainability of any policy that undertakes such a demanding task on such a precarious foundation.

### Minding Others’ Business

**I**NDEED, IN A CHAPTER ON “TECHNOLOGY, Equilibrium, and Human Consciousness,” as well as in his conclusion, Kissinger describes the crafting of world order, out of the 21st century’s increasing disorder, as a task so difficult as to be quixotic.

He believes that the spread of nuclear and other sophisticated weaponry, coupled with advanced societies’ inherent vulnerabilities, will effectively level the military balance between peoples who live on vastly different socio-economic, cultural, and political planes. As a result, the world’s units will be functionally interchangeable in strategic terms, even though there will be enduring, perhaps growing differences among the various peoples. Hence, countries that are strategically commensurable but inhabit “increasingly contra-

# The Must-Read for the Most Well-Read



*“When I was asked, a few years ago,  
to list my most important reading matter,  
I put CRB at the top of my list. Every issue  
validates my judgment.”*

– **George F. Will**, *Pulitzer Prize-winning author, columnist, commentator.*  
Claremont Review of Books reader since 2004.

***Giving gifts to students,  
family, or friends?***

*GIVE THEM A YEAR OF THE  
CLAREMONT REVIEW OF BOOKS.*

*Go to [www.claremont.org/gifts](http://www.claremont.org/gifts)  
type promo code **PA3**  
and check gift box*

**CLAREMONT**  
REVIEW OF BOOKS  
[Claremont.org/subscribe](http://Claremont.org/subscribe)

THE CLAREMONT INSTITUTE

*Recovering the American Idea*





dictory realities” will need some neutral order among themselves, as did the parties that made peace at Westphalia. Kissinger sees something like Mutual Assured Destruction (or mutual assured capacity to do serious damage) as the factor common to all that will push all to seek some kind of grand bargain.

He is by no means confident that these “contradictory realities” are capable of conceding to one another the right to exist, never mind to grant “legitimacy” to any arrangements they might make among themselves. He is also agnostic as to whether the biggest of these “realities”—he mentions China and the U.S.—can accommodate changes in power relationships between themselves in ways that “avoid a repetition of previous tragedies.”

In sum, according to Kissinger, “the structure of the twenty-first-century world order has been revealed as lacking in four important dimensions.” First, nation-states are ever less relevant. Second, pressures for protectionism imperil the world’s prosperity. Third, the multiplicity of international “joint declarations” does not reflect any underlying “common conviction.” Fourth and most importantly for him, the United States is not doing enough to foster world order. The problem with this ham sandwich, in short, is that there is no ham, no bread, and nobody to put them together.

Complicating statesmen’s problems is that, as technology continues to spread information, as well as the capacity of human beings to connect with one another, “a surfeit of information may paradoxically...push wisdom even further away than it was before.” As ordinary people’s capacity to influence foreign policy increases, the chances of world order drop: “The temptation to cater to the demands of the digitally reflected multitude may override the judgment required to chart a complex course in harmony with long-term purposes.”

So, “[i]s it possible to translate divergent cultures into a common system?” He answers: “the unity of things lies beneath the surface; it depends upon a balanced reaction between opposites.” “[D]ecisions to meet these challenges must be taken by statesmen before it is possible to know what the outcome may be.” There is no doubt that Kissinger’s oracular opacity is counseling statesmen to push for world order, nor that the statesmen to whom the book is addressed are American.

Hence here, as in his other writings, Kissinger promotes a U.S. foreign policy the principle of which is minding the world’s business, a principle he shares with America’s ruling class but knows to be unpalatable to ordinary Americans, whom he often chas-

tises as unsophisticated “isolationists.” For the past hundred years the bipartisan ruling-class consensus has favored a wide variety of political commitments, defining the national interest in terms that encompass the internal affairs of other nations while abjuring the use of force to redeem those commitments. Most Americans, however, have remained attached to an older view of foreign policy: few commitments, tied tightly to our own narrowly defined interest, and defended by maximum force when required.

#### Retrospective

**A** DVANCING THE RULING CLASS’S FOREIGN policy project by subtly undermining the people’s inveterate foreign policy has been a principal feature of Henry Kissinger’s work. When Richard Nixon made him his National Security Adviser in 1969, *Time* magazine’s cover story said, “A superficial reading of some of his works makes him

People like  
Woodrow Wilson were  
the first Americans to  
imagine that they should  
use force to improve  
others without  
their consent.

seem like a hawk. But intelligent doves regard him as Nixon’s most astute appointment.”

In “The United States: Ambivalent Superpower,” the present book’s Chapter 8, we get a retrospective view of Kissinger’s arguments and actions for six decades, an approach that has diminished America through deception and self-deception. “America’s Cold War undertaking,” we read, “began as a defense of countries that shared the American view of world order.” Perhaps that was so for a half dozen high-placed thinkers. As far as the American people were concerned, the Soviet Union was to be fought because it was our godless enemy. Then Kissinger mischaracterizes the sides in the struggle over early Cold War policy:

Is American foreign policy a story...in which final victories are possible? Or is it a process of managing and tempering ever-recurring challenges? ...By framing the issue of America’s world role as a

test of moral perfection, [America] castigated itself—sometimes to profound effect—for falling short.

He thus implies that conservatives in the 1940s and ’50s, such as Robert Taft and Douglas MacArthur, favored “rolling back” Communist conquests, making them advocates of a millennialist “final victory.” By contrast, liberals (from Henry Wallace to Adlai Stevenson) favored one degree or another of accommodation with Stalin which, according to Kissinger, meant that they were practitioners of traditional foreign policy. That is exactly, doubly wrong. It was liberals, Wilsonians all, who believed their objective in foreign policy—world co-dominion with Stalin—was ushering in the blessed Last Days. Franklin Roosevelt’s secretary of state, Cordell Hull, looked forward to a resolution of World War II so transformative that “there will no longer be need for spheres of influence, for alliances, for balance of power, or any other of the special arrangements by which, in the unhappy past, the nations strove to safeguard their security or to promote their interests.” Conservatives were all about Washingtonian foreign policy: minding America’s peace and winning America’s wars today and tomorrow. As for castigating America’s supposed moral imperfection, that was something that happened in the 1960s, exclusively among the ruling class’s left wing, which Kissinger was scrambling to join.

No one can read Kissinger, however, without noting elements of insight. Occasional vignettes would lead careful readers to disdain political figures venerated by most, including by Kissinger. At Tehran in 1943 Franklin Roosevelt accepted Stalin’s offer to move the American legation from the U.S. embassy to the Soviet compound, where every room had been bugged. To take another example, Harry Truman and Secretary of State Dean Acheson refused to confront the Soviets’ 1948 blockade of Berlin even though Stalin had ordered his forces not to resist if the Americans had mobilized along the entire front.

This “Ambivalent Superpower” chapter sums up the intellectual-political journey that culminated in Kissinger’s stewardship of the Vietnam war and his signature work, détente. In *A World Restored* (1957), he had supposed the existence of a common will or intention to assemble a system whose integrity the participants valued above their own particular interests. False as this is to reality, it has stood Kissinger in good stead with Wilsonians, always eager to see Vienna 1815 as an important precursor to Versailles 1919, San Francisco 1945, and their latest scheme for world governance. Kissinger’s second



book, *Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy*, published in 1957 by the Council on Foreign Relations, was the establishment's principal attack on the Eisenhower Administration's policy of responding to Soviet aggression "by means and at places of our choosing." In it, Kissinger accused that policy of promising "instant and massive thermo-nuclear retaliation." In its stead, he proposed meeting Soviet aggression locally, with small nukes if need be, backed not by the prospect of using big ones, but by what Kissinger imagined to be a common fear, amounting to a common will to avoid the "unthinkable."

To this end, Kissinger applied the concepts of "game theory" developed by Thomas Schelling, which depicted America and the USSR as locked in a matrix of choices by their equal desire to maximize gains and minimize losses, and hence axiomatically sharing an interest in moderation. By 1961, in *The Necessity for Choice*, Kissinger had taken the logic of shared interest to the next step. "Though the need for forces capable of fighting limited nuclear war remains," he called for excluding them from limited war "except as a last resort." Pushing the specter of nuclear weapons ever further into the background was essential to "show the way to a new international order." Leftists criticized him for supporting, even

in this partial way, the idea of making war on America's behalf. Kissinger responded that "limited war is...preferable not to peace, but to surrender or all out war." Limiting war to the kind that "a great nation can afford to lose" is "to be sure a subtle task," possible only if the government is "prepared to negotiate and to settle for less than our traditional notion of complete victory."

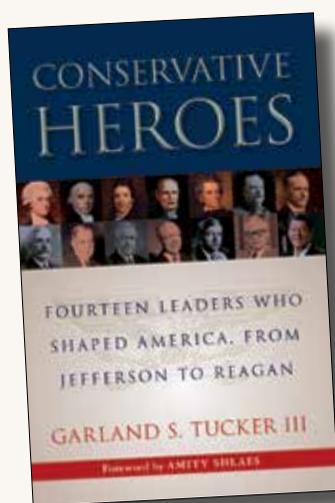
Upon reading such stuff coming out of America's foreign policy establishment, our European allies started scrambling for alternatives to relying on the United States. In *The Troubled Partnership* (1965), Kissinger counseled calm. The alliance's ultimate purpose was to "take us beyond the divisions of nation states." The point of it all, then, was to sacrifice particular interests to the greater good of a generally shared interest in international order. That book's publication hastened Europe's loss of trust in the U.S., Europe's subsequent socio-political transformation, and America's correspondingly diminished capacity to pursue its objectives.

As National Security Adviser and in President Nixon's name, Kissinger published a 43,000-word "state of the world" message in 1970, unremarkable for its substance but very remarkable for the novelty of its focus: "While we proceed to guard our national in-

terests, let us also safeguard human interests. And the elimination of war and arms is clearly in the interest of both." (This repeated, almost verbatim, President Kennedy's 1963 speech in support of the nuclear test ban treaty, though Kissinger did not draw attention to that.) Thus did Kissinger place eliminating war—an instrument of statecraft throughout history—on a par with the objectives of statecraft.

Kissinger and Nixon turned a different instrument, the balance of power, into an objective America should pursue for its own sake. Nixon told *Time* magazine in 1972, "I think it will be a safer world and a better world if we have a strong, healthy United States, Europe, Soviet Union, China, Japan, each balancing the other, not playing one against the other, an even balance." Nixon did not explain the difference between balancing, and playing off against one another.

Kissinger did. It was "an informal commitment by each to pursue its interests with restraint." Characteristically he also distanced himself from the obvious incongruity, noting that "two of the countries listed as part of a concert of powers were in fact adversaries." So how did he think that this hoped-for "informal commitment" might become reality? The United States would have to make it so by being the balancer while also being part of the



## CONSERVATIVE HEROES PROFILES IN CONSERVATIVE COURAGE

*The story of American conservatism in fourteen lives*

"A wonderful book for many reasons, not the least of which is its focus on long-forgotten conservatives like Grover Cleveland, Josiah Bailey, and, my favorite, Robert Taft." —**FRED BARNES**

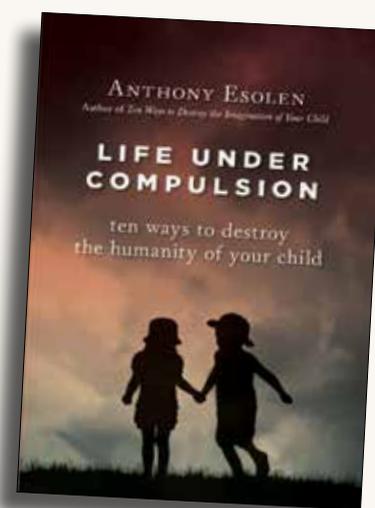
"Tucker's profiles remind us that America's history is too subtle to force into the framework of modern progressivism. . . . Many readers resent the narrowness standard histories offer. They will welcome *Conservative Heroes*, which so thoughtfully draws out the full picture." —**AMITY SHLAES**

## LIFE UNDER COMPULSION AN INDISPENSABLE GUIDE FOR ANY PARENT

*The eagerly awaited follow-up to Ten Ways to Destroy the Imagination of Your Child*

"Esolen signals with this book his presence in the top rank of authors of cultural criticism." —**THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR**

"Esolen shows how under the spell of that conjuring word *freedom* we wrap children in cords of bondage. . . . A profound book." —**J. BUDZISZEWSKI**



ORDER TODAY AT [ISIBOOKS.ORG](http://ISIBOOKS.ORG) 

---

balance. It could do this by such subtleties as renouncing the use of “a capability [that the adversary]...knows one possesses and that will not be altered by the renunciation.” This was one instance of the “creative ambiguity” Kissinger extolled elsewhere.

### Kissinger's Legacy

**B**ETWEEN 1969 AND 1977, WITH KISSINGER at the wheel, America test-drove these concepts. The resulting policies, “Vietnamization” and détente, crashed and burned. Sending troops to fight in Vietnam had been the Kennedy Administration’s expression of the preference for confronting Soviet expansion indirectly through “limited war,” the approach theorized by Kissinger, Walt Rostow, and others. Doing so eschewed using America’s overwhelming technological and economic advantages, in favor of relying on American flesh and blood—“boots on the ground,” as we’ve come to say. As summarized by Jonathan Schell in *The Time of Illusion* (1976), “the plan was to pay for nuclear peace with limited war.” Kissinger writes, “The dilemmas of Vietnam were very much the consequence of academic theories regarding graduated escalation that had sustained the Cold War.” Yes, but these were *his* theories. “Bombing campaigns alternating with ‘pauses’ to test Hanoi’s readiness for negotiation tended to produce stalemate—bringing to bear enough power to incur denunciation and resistance, but not enough to secure the adversary’s readiness.” But Kissinger had been this tactic’s first advocate.

Then, having attributed the strategy’s failure to achieve any of the war’s purposes to nameless “disaffection,” he adds, “the Establishment view settled on a program to ‘end the war’ by means of a unilateral withdrawal in exchange only for the return of prisoners.” But by this time *he* was the establishment’s lodestar. Moreover, Hanoi returned only 591 prisoners, holding back some 300 and demanding a ransom similar to what France had paid to get the rest of its POWs back in 1954. This was no secret. On February 2, 1973, the *New York Times* headlined: “Laos POW List Shows 9 from U.S.: Document Disappointing to Washington as 311 Were Believed Missing.” Because paying ransom would have unmasked claims of “peace with honor,” Kissinger then took the lead in scrubbing concern for the remaining American POWs from the government and the press. The “settlement” he once claimed as his master stroke is, in reality, a stain that can never be erased.

This debacle resulted from nothing less than his cleverish attempt to stop the chal-

lenge that the Soviet Union was posing on the world’s periphery by giving in to some of its central demands—while, in the periphery, waging a “limited war” and advertising willingness to settle for less than half a loaf. He expected the Soviets to respond to the American surrender on central demands by moderating peripheral challenges. Lyndon Johnson already had offered Ho Chi Minh billions of dollars for a “Mekong Valley Authority” in exchange for letting America leave Vietnam “with honor,” and been rebuffed. Kissinger and Nixon were offering the Soviet Union itself much more: namely, strategic equality, the chance to partner with America to run the world, and subsidized food and untold billions of dollars.

According to Schell’s account of the 1972 summit in Moscow, “as President Nixon proclaimed that ‘America’s flag flies over the ancient fortress,’ while Americans were dying in Southeast Asia in an attempt to counter the Kremlin’s influence, the fighting in Vietnam came to look like something without precedent in military history: a war in which the generals on the opposing sides combined into a joint command.” But the Soviets never did join the joint command. As Nixon and Kissinger toasted in the Kremlin, the flow of Soviet armaments to Ho Chi Minh increased.

In exchange for all of détente’s advantages, the Soviets gave America only what Kissinger was reduced to begging for: “a decent interval” before overrunning South Vietnam. He cashed his Nobel peace prize share in December 1973, and the last American helicopter escaped from the U.S. embassy with desperate Vietnamese hanging from its skids as Soviet tanks crashed through the gates in April 1974. (North Vietnam’s Le Duc Tho, refusing to join the pretense that he had agreed to any kind of peace, refused his share.) Nor did the Soviets moderate any of their other clients’ anti-American activities. In 1973, as Syria and Egypt, equipped with Soviet armaments, nearly overran Israel, a reporter asked Kissinger if this was not the sort of immoderate behavior that détente was supposed to have stopped. Kissinger replied, “When I see an example of such a thing, I will tell you.”

*World Order* makes no attempt to defend what Kissinger touted to the Senate in 1972: his supposed success in banishing the development of counterforce missiles and anti-missile weapons, thus dispelling the specter of nuclear war by institutionalizing Mutual Assured Destruction forever. This effort combined his general confusion about national security with his specific ignorance about missile weapons. Before he left office it was already clear that the Soviets had simply

allowed him to believe his own press releases while they built the wherewithal to fight, survive, and win a nuclear war.

His defense of détente in this book is indirect and perfunctory:

In the face of strong domestic opposition, [President Gerald Ford]...supervised the conclusion of the European Security Conference. Among its many provisions were clauses that enshrined human rights as one of the European Security principles. These terms were used by heroic individuals such as Lech Walesa in Poland and Václav Havel in Czechoslovakia to bring democracy to their countries and start the downfall of Communism.

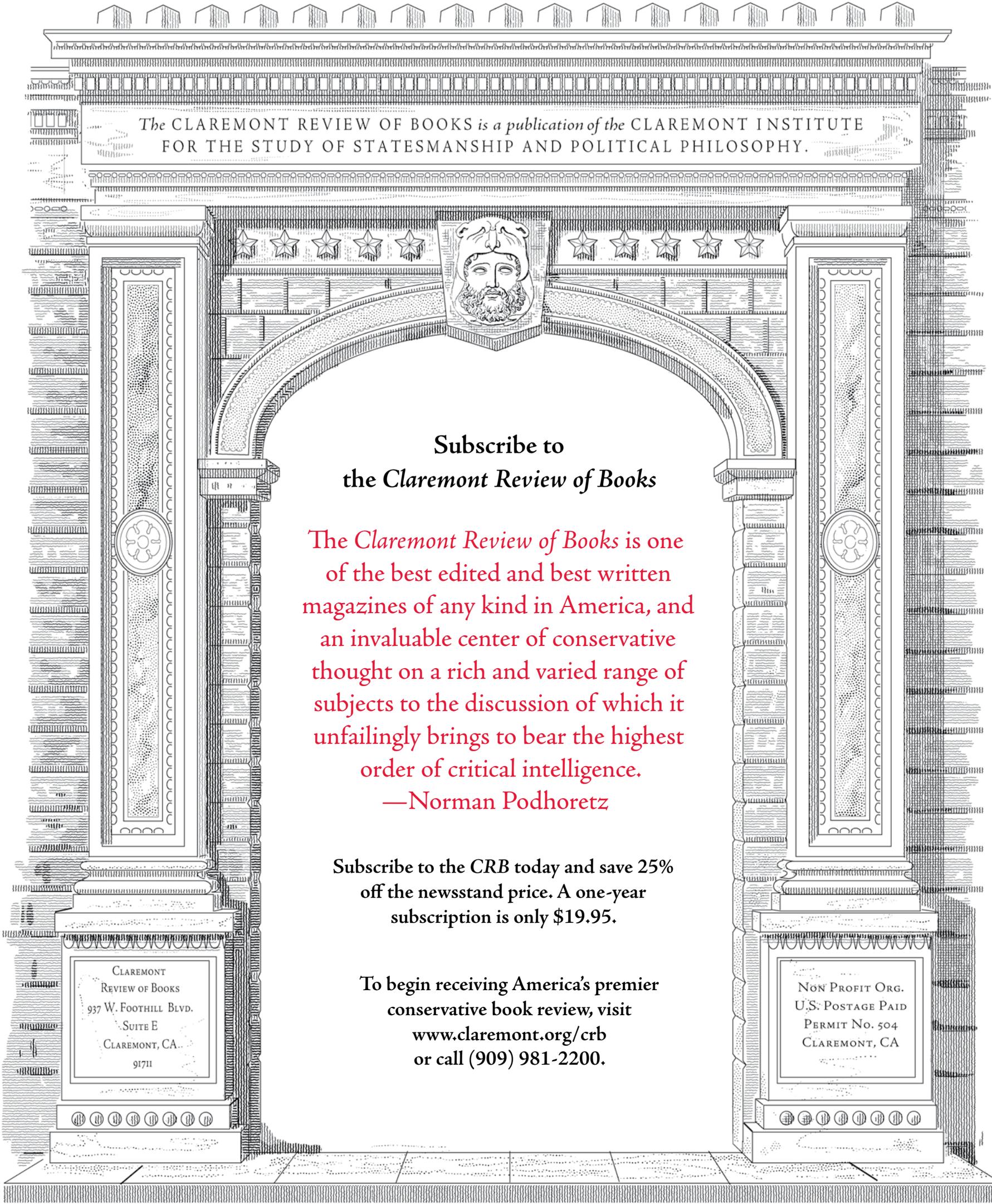
In fact, Kissinger’s policy had been to “normalize” relations with the Soviet empire, legitimating and facilitating Moscow’s hold on it. Popular recognition of this fact was so strong, widespread, and scornful that it helped lead to Ford’s defeat in the 1976 election and Kissinger’s exit from office.

By then Kissinger had become a focus of criticism by the presidential campaigns of both parties, of Jimmy Carter, who was elected in 1976, and of Ronald Reagan, who was almost elected in ’76 and won four years later in a landslide. *No one has ever been so idolized by America’s bipartisan ruling class and so rejected, in effect, by the American people as Henry Kissinger.*

His exit from office, of course, did not end his influence on U.S. foreign policy. Though Reagan shunned him, his aide Brent Scowcroft served as George H.W. Bush’s National Security Adviser. In that capacity, Scowcroft led U.S. efforts to keep the Soviet Union from falling and commissioned his assistant, Condoleezza Rice, to draft Bush’s “Chicken Kiev” speech, which warned Ukraine not to leave Mikhail Gorbachev’s Soviet Union. She then served George W. Bush as secretary of state. Kissinger aide Lawrence Eagleburger was very briefly President George H.W. Bush’s secretary of state, and served under Presidents Nixon, Carter, and Reagan.

Henry Kissinger’s practical advice and example, such as practicing “creative ambiguity,” are exactly how serious people do *not* conduct private and public affairs. We can only hope that those who praise him, such as most of those who have reviewed *World Order*, have not understood him.

*Angelo M. Codevilla is a senior fellow of the Claremont Institute and professor emeritus of International Relations at Boston University.*



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*

*The Claremont Review of Books is one of the best edited and best written magazines of any kind in America, and an invaluable center of conservative thought on a rich and varied range of subjects to the discussion of which it unfailingly brings to bear the highest order of critical intelligence.*

—Norman Podhoretz

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](http://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