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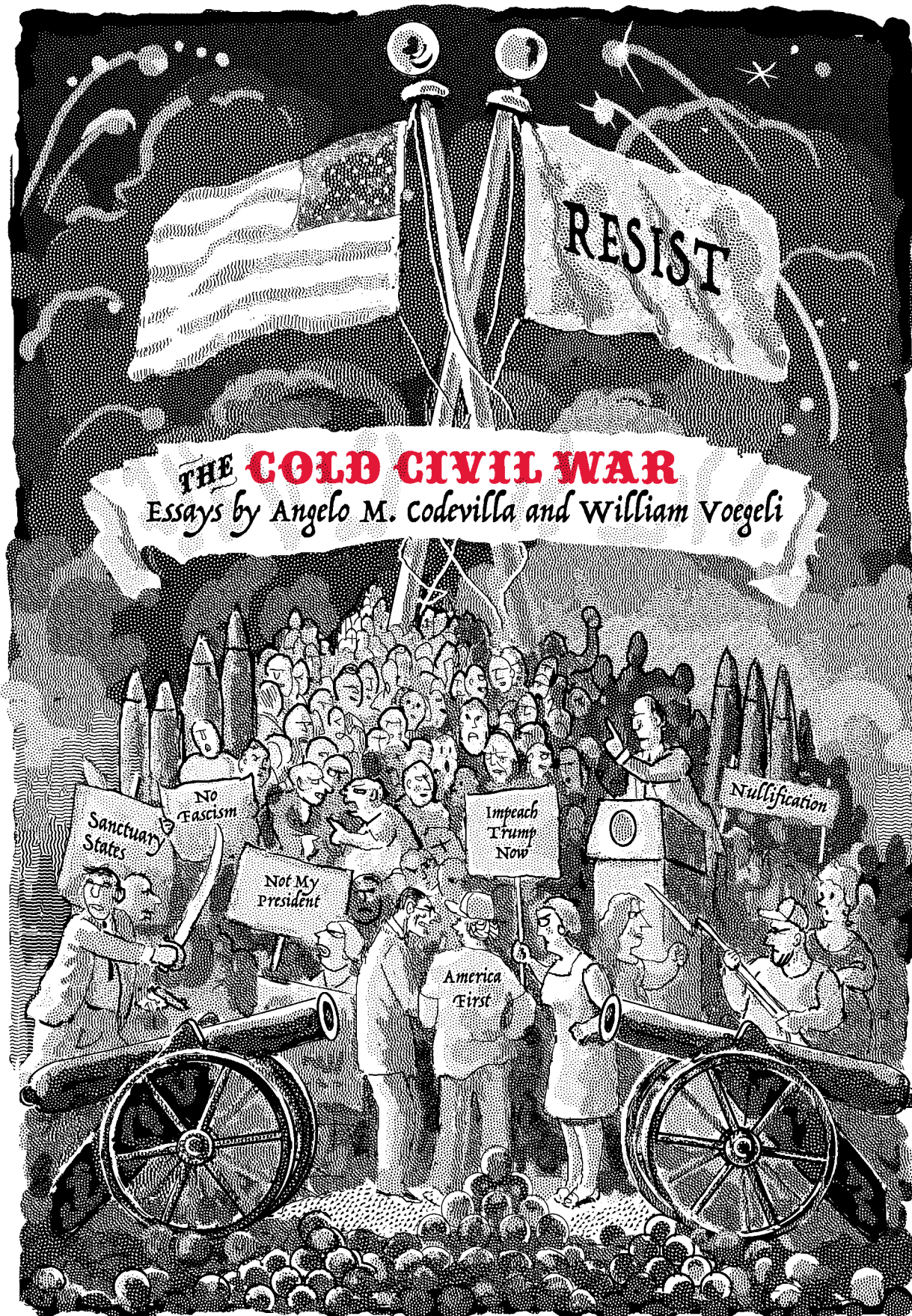
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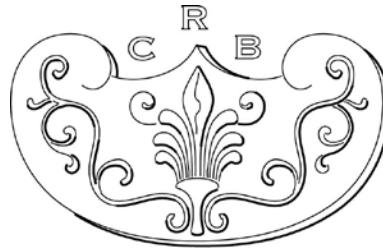
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Essay by William Voegeli

THE NEW ABNORMAL

“ARE YOU NOW, OR HAVE YOU EVER been, a supporter of Donald J. Trump?” It would be ominous if witnesses in congressional hearings had to endure this type of McCarthyite interrogation. But what do you call it when sports-writers demand that a professional athlete answer the same question?

New England Patriots quarterback Tom Brady, for example, found it necessary to prepare for the 2017 Super Bowl the way a defendant prepares for cross-examination. “Tom Brady has some explaining to do on Donald Trump,” a *USA Today* sports column warned before the championship game.

How did Brady incur this obligation? First, he and Trump are known associates. The football star was a judge in the 2002 Miss USA Pageant, an event then part of the Trump business empire. He subsequently played golf with the celebrity businessman at several of Trump’s courses. Second, in September 2015 a “Make America Great Again” cap was seen hanging in Brady’s locker. Third, Trump has praised Brady effusively and Brady has reciprocated, albeit with notable caution once Trump began his presidential campaign. “Donald is a good friend of mine,” Brady said in a December 2015 radio interview. “I have known him for a long time. I support all my friends. That is what I have to say.”

Fourth, and most critically, Brady tried to avoid discussing politics at all in the days be-

fore this year’s Super Bowl, played two weeks after Trump’s inauguration. “If people want to take sides, you know, they can obviously do that,” he told one reporter a week before the game. “And I have a right to stay out of it, too.... I don’t want to bring any distractions to our team.”

But several commenters were having none of it. The court of public opinion, they made clear, honors neither the right to privacy nor the right against self-incrimination. Not in the Age of Trump. *Sports Illustrated*, its patience at an end, complained, “Brady has had every opportunity to clarify his friendship with Trump and has mostly declined.” In “refusing to publicly disavow Trump’s actions, Brady is giving tacit endorsement to both Trump and the chaos he has created,” *USA Today* pronounced. Brady’s silence about Trump, a *Boston Globe* columnist wrote, “amounts to tacit approval for the new president to go about his horrific business of dividing the nation and icing multicultural progress.”

In being called to account, Brady was not singled out, not even on his own team. Patriots owner Robert Kraft is also one of the new president’s friends, and has expressed gratitude that Trump phoned him regularly after Kraft’s wife, Myra, died in 2011. He too was scolded, most notably in a *Tablet* magazine open letter, which accused Kraft of betraying his Jewish heritage by not repudiating Trump. The letter’s author helpfully provided a state-

ment of renunciation for Kraft to deliver in public. “I cannot stand by and allow [Trump] to make the kind of reckless moves that have already done so much damage to the country I love, and to its great democracy,” Kraft was instructed to say. “As a Jew, I disagree with his positions on immigration. As a man, and as Myra’s widower, I abhor his disrespect of women.”

Another New England sports hero could advise Brady and Kraft to take such threats seriously. Curt Schilling, the pitching star of the 2004 World Series champion Boston Red Sox, was suspended and ultimately fired as a baseball announcer by ESPN, after his social media posts on political issues—including jihad and public restrooms for transgendered people—sparked controversy. Clearly, it’s not too soon for ESPN analyst Sage Steele to start thinking about a new career. Being a biracial woman in a biracial marriage did little to protect her from harsh attacks after she criticized athletes who refuse to stand during the national anthem as a way of supporting Black Lives Matter, and later complained about the protestors who blocked airports after the first Trump “travel ban” went into effect. One blogger admonished, “You would be the token person they book on CNN to tell black people we need to fix us before we try fixing the police departments who use black people for target practice.” ESPN has already taken steps to reduce her role in its broadcasts.

Who Decided?

AS IN SPORTS, SO IN SPORTING EQUIPMENT. L.L. Bean is being boycotted by the “Grab Your Wallet,” campaign, which discovered that one of the 50 Bean family members involved in the company had donated to a pro-Trump political action committee. And as in business, so in show business. Actress Nicole Kidman found it necessary to apologize for her anodyne post-election statement that “we as a country need to support whoever is president.” After he asked Trump the kind of superficial questions guests have faced for 62 years on NBC’s *Tonight Show*, critics denounced host Jimmy Fallon for aiding and abetting Trump’s election. “Now,” *Slate* warned, “even if celebrities [want] to opt out of the current moment, they can’t.... Doing nothing is doing something. Silence either signifies ‘I’m for Trump’ or ‘I’m for myself.’”

“You either have to be part of the solution, or you’re going to be part of the problem,” Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver wrote, giving the 1960s one of its enduring slogans. “There is no more neutrality in the world.” Soon after the 2016 election result was in, Donald Trump’s opponents designated themselves, melodramatically, “the Resistance.” The treatment of Brady, Kraft, Steele, and others makes clear that Cleaver has now been updated: either you’re part of the Resistance, or you’re part of the evil the Resistance is resisting. In the Age of Trump, public figures can neither declare themselves neutral nor simply decline to have, or share, their personal views. Fallon’s critics made clear that to do anything less than revile Trump, in any public setting, is to “normalize” him, thereby imperiling all that is good and decent in our land. The Old Normal, where everything Trump represents and intends was understood to be odious and catastrophic, must never devolve into a New Normal that legitimates Trump and Trumpism.

To declare that abstaining is impossible now—that the world’s axis shifted the moment Donald Trump secured his 270th electoral vote—would be more credible if the Resistance’s new rules of engagement weren’t so similar to the Left’s longstanding order of battle. A major theme of Trump’s campaign was opposition to political correctness. That stance appealed to many, who feared that a campus affliction was becoming a national one, foretelling a future where Anytown, USA, might as well be Berkeley, California. When quarterbacks and actresses are sternly admonished that you’re for Trump unless you make it unmistakably clear that you’re

against him, the central Trumpist axiom about the danger of political correctness is affirmed, not refuted.

In a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* essay, literary scholar William Deresiewicz pointed out that the term “political correctness” originated on the Left as an “ironic invocation of Stalinism.” The problem is that “we’ve lost the irony but kept the Stalinism.” As a result, “There is always something new... that you aren’t supposed to say. And worst of all, you often don’t find out about it until after you have said it.” Tom Brady and Nicole Kidman could attest, if they were so reckless as to speak out, that people far removed from academia can now be pilloried for committing transgressions that were not transgressions at the time they were committed.

The key to understanding academic political correctness, Deresiewicz believes, is that “[s]elective private colleges have become religious schools.” The faith’s central tenets are secularism, environmentalism, and, above all, “the holy trinity of race, gender, and sexuality.” And where there’s dogma, there’s heresy, “those beliefs that undermine the orthodox consensus.” The point of higher education, as a result, is *not* to raise and ponder questions. It is, rather, to internalize the strictures—nebulous and constantly changing but always severe—about which questions never to ask.

Shortly after the Deresiewicz article appeared, one of those stories came along to demonstrate simultaneously that: 1) political correctness is, increasingly, a social rather than a purely academic phenomenon; and 2) any suspicions that the problem of political correctness might be exaggerated dissolve when confronted by evidence that the situation is even worse than we had been led to believe. The 2017 Biennial exhibition at New York’s Whitney Museum of American Art has seen protests over one painting, *Open Casket*, which depicts the bludgeoned face of Emmett Till, a black teenager murdered in Mississippi in 1955. An open letter signed by many artists demanded that the painting “be destroyed and not entered into any market or museum.” Its painter is white, of course, and her insistence that the work was one of empathy and solidarity placated none of her critics. According to the letter, *Open Casket*’s existence proves that “even the disfigured corpse of a child was not sufficient to move the white gaze from its habitual cold calculation.”

Two supporters of the open letter, writing in the *New Republic*, said that it should not be understood as intolerant or censorious but, rather, as “a call for silence inside a church.”

The Taliban had its Ministry for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice. Our modern religious colleges, museums, sports channels, awards shows, and, in the fullness of time, bowling alleys, have *their* arbiters, too, of the sacred and profane. The open letter to the Whitney declares: “white free speech and white creative freedom have been founded on the constraint of others, and are not natural rights. The painting must go.”

Deresiewicz’s essay alludes to the outcome of the 2016 contest as an “electoral catastrophe.” He describes himself as an atheist and social democrat who believes systemic racism and sexism to be grave problems, which places him outside any known subset of Donald Trump’s electoral coalition. Nevertheless, his sharpest words against political correctness would draw loud cheers at a Make America Great Again rally: “Whenever I hear that you aren’t supposed to say something, I want to know, where did this *supposed* descend from? Who decided, and who gave them the right to decide?”

Freedom to Riot

ONCE IT BECAME CLEAR ON THE morning of November 9, 2016, that Trump had won his unthinkable victory, the anchor of “The Young Turks” web broadcast declared, “We’re going to fight back. The era of politeness, for progressives, is over.” In 2009, during the era of politeness, libertarian social scientist Charles Murray spoke on the campus of Middlebury College in Vermont, completed his remarks without interruption, and then left campus without incident. In March 2017, at the dawn of the era of Resistance, Murray was shouted down and chased from campus when he attempted to give a speech at Middlebury. The professor who accompanied him from the lecture hall to the getaway car was sent to the hospital by the most Resistant activists.

The student protesters had many defenders within and beyond Middlebury. One professor, Linus Owens, insisted that the students were merely “talking back” to Charles Murray, and that “the nonviolent demonstrators were defending speech just as much as the people now rushing to condemn them.” Murray’s free speech rights did not extend to a right that others remain silent, or a guarantee that it will be possible for him to be heard. This was the position of a Yale political science lecturer, who said that the protesters who made it impossible for Murray to deliver his lecture may have been rude, obnoxious, and scary, but were exercising the same right to free speech as the guest lecturer. He

added, "Given Murray's monstrous politics, I stand with the students."

Other clever equivalencies helped absolve Middlebury protestors of undermining liberal democracy. Let's not forget, Owens wrote, "the real violence of bringing a known and active racist and anti-poor people 'intellectual' into our community," whose arguments constitute "material attacks" on minority students' presence at Middlebury, "not to mention their very reasons for being." A recent Middlebury graduate wrote of the "inherent violence" of hosting and legitimizing Murray, calling the speech "institutional violence," a "real form of violence with real consequences," and "a direct act of violence" committed against the students. Using terms like "real violence" to denote the expression of controversial opinions makes it possible to excuse or endorse good, old-fashioned violent violence. If words are deeds then countervailing deeds are just words, a form of self-expression. The Middlebury students who turned Murray's lecture into a melee were simply "speaking out and standing up for not only their safety but their humanity," according to the supportive alumnus.

Incidents like the one at Middlebury also reliably bring forth reminders that the First Amendment guarantees only that *government*

shall not abridge the freedom of speech. It has nothing to do with some people inhibiting others' speech, nor does it require that any particular venue, including an institution of higher education, accommodate any particular speaker. "No one silenced [Murray]," wrote Owens. That is, he retains the ability to convey his ideas through several media, but the Middlebury students justifiably insisted that their campus need not and should not be one of them.

Those who argued that the students who prevented Murray's Middlebury lecture were the real victims, not villains, emphasized that the event took place in the new political environment created by Donald Trump's presidency. The platitude that free and open debate is the fairest, safest way to advance wise and decent notions (while refuting and defeating baseless or pernicious ones), they argue, was rendered untenable by the 2016 campaign and its outcome. "The purveyors of logic, of facts dutifully checked and delivered to the public, lost big league in November," in the view of *Slate's* Osita Nwanevu. "Is the space in the discourse that liberalism has granted to bigots emboldened by the Trump era a real problem or not?"

Owens believes it's frighteningly real. With "open white supremacists in charge of the country," it has become clear that the mis-

take was to refrain from disrupting Charles Murray's speech at Middlebury in 2009, not to prevent him from giving a lecture there in 2017. The "acceptable range" for political debate, he says, "is between the non-racists and the anti-racists." Thus, the "racists don't have a place here." The result of such thinking is that those who get to determine the boundaries of the debate's acceptable range, to admit the non-racists and bar the racists, end up wielding great political influence. Professor Owens doesn't clarify which standards they'll employ when making their determinations, or who will hold them accountable if they abuse their power.

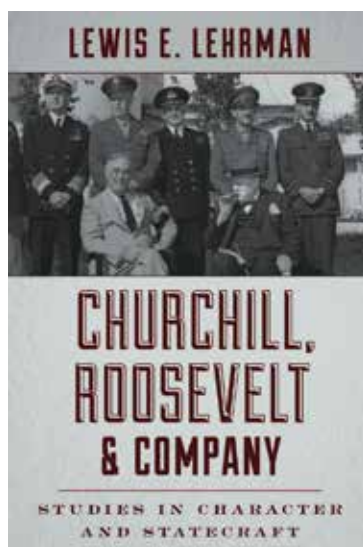
Loss of Civility

THE NOTION THAT CHARLES MURRAY and the Middlebury protestors shouting him down were both exercising their First Amendment rights to speak without government interference has political implications beyond the campus. A healthy liberal, democratic polity has laws regulating such fundamental requirements as free speech and civic participation, but they're also exercised in quotidian political life by following informal though powerful norms. It's like the distinction between playing a

The Wall Street Journal Featured Review

by Arthur Herman, Pulitzer Prize nominee for *Gandhi and Churchill*

"Lewis Lehrman's *Churchill, Roosevelt & Company* offers a detailed look at the special relationship, especially during World War II, when Anglo-American cooperation achieved its most impressive results and faced its most formidable challenges. The book is packed with fascinating detail and illuminates not only the past but the challenges of the present day. The subtitle is *Studies in Character and Statecraft*: Mr. Lehrman makes it clear that, in geopolitics, the two go together."



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game according to the written rules, and displaying good sportsmanship. The latter prohibits some acts that the rules don't forbid, such as "showing up" an opponent, and requires some that the rulebook doesn't mention. Greg Schiano, briefly a professional football coach, damaged his reputation by ordering his defensive team to blitz the opponent's "victory formation," where offensive players protecting an insurmountable lead kneel down without trying to advance the ball as time expires to end the game. Doing so violated nothing in the rulebook, so the defense never incurred a penalty. Yet, "[a]t all levels of football, when the offense goes into victory formation, defenders who are good sports simply watch the snap and then shake hands," wrote football columnist Gregg Easterbrook. "Having your players charge the line on the final snap after you've lost is the sort of thing ordered by coaches who are, deep down inside, persons of low character."

Civility, however, is not sustained and elaborated for its own sake, but for the sake of preserving and improving a community, whether an academic one of 2,500 college students or a national one of 325 million people. In 21st-century America, narrowly but deeply and bitterly divided, the cohesion or even the long-term existence of a national community that makes the phrase "fellow Americans" meaningful has become increasingly doubtful. Our politically correct colleges are religious institutions of a sort, and our efforts at self-governance resemble religious warfare. Believers in transformation, recently led by a president who made that promise repeatedly, contend with believers in restoration, who elected a successor promising to make America great *again*. There are ever fewer propositions these two secular creeds both affirm, ever weaker commitments to norms or a national future that both sides share.

There is, indeed, steadily decreasing contact with or comprehension of the opposite faith's adherents. In 1992, 39% of voters cast ballots in "landslide counties," ones where the winner received more than 60% of the votes for one of the two major-party presidential nominees. In 2016, 61% of voters lived in such counties. Only 4% of voters in 1992 lived in "extreme landslide counties," where the victor received more than 75% of the two-party popular vote. In 2016, 21% did so. We are voting with our feet, against heterogeneity, before we vote with our votes. Civility, like other habits, atrophies from disuse. If more and more Americans have fewer and fewer occasions to discuss politics with people they disagree with fundamental-

ly, the increasingly rare conversations that do take place become increasingly intemperate and pointless.

Going Nuclear

ESCALATION ENSUES. IN 2016, REPUBLICAN Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell's refusal to hold hearings for Judge Merrick Garland, nominated to the Supreme Court by President Obama, established a new operational principle: a term-limited president whose party doesn't control the Senate shouldn't get to fill a Supreme Court seat that becomes vacant during his final year in the White House. This tactic was probably meant, and was certainly received, as a provocation. Democrats were infuriated, though future sets of circumstances rendering the "McConnell rule" operative are likely to be infrequent.

In any case, their claim that Republicans "stole" the seat that became vacant after Justice Antonin Scalia's death makes sense only to those who believe the seat *belonged*

Either you're part
of the Resistance,
or you're part of
the evil the Resistance
is resisting.

to Garland, Obama, or the Senate's Democratic minority. Where governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, however, the stronger argument is that the Court seat belonged to the people. Since elections are the central mechanism for deriving popular consent in a democracy, the course for Democrats was to make the Supreme Court seat, and the Senate Republicans' treatment of President Obama's nominee, a central issue throughout the 2016 campaign.

But they barely tried. Garland was mentioned even less frequently at last year's Democratic convention than Jimmy Carter. (One plausible reason is that Hillary Clinton wanted the option to nominate a younger, more liberal justice after her inevitable victory in November.) And in not pressing the case that Obama and Garland deserved better, Democrats lost not only the White House and Senate, but the right to claim that McConnell's treatment of Garland violated some indispensable political norm. If voters had cared about whether the Garland nomination

went forward or not, they could have made that view unmistakably clear with their ballots. When that dog didn't bark on Election Day, the McConnell rule was established by virtue of having been neither challenged nor defeated.

In 2017, Democratic Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer, by filibustering President Trump's Supreme Court nomination of Neil Gorsuch, attempted to establish a much broader principle than McConnell's: no president, at *any* point in his presidency, can fill a Supreme Court vacancy unless his party holds 60 seats in the Senate. Where the McConnell rule would prevent filling Supreme Court seats only in extraordinary circumstances, the Schumer rule would prevent filling a vacancy *except* in extraordinary circumstances. Upholding that principle would steadily depopulate the Court.

Democrats insisted, further, that the "nuclear option," abolishing filibusters of Supreme Court nominees, would delegitimize the Court. Before Gorsuch joined the Court because Republicans lowered the threshold needed for confirmation to a simple majority, Oregon Democratic Senator Jeff Merkley warned, "Every 5-4 decision will be one we will look at and say that it is not really legitimate, because that Supreme Court Justice wasn't really legitimate." The inevitable next step in this line of argument—illegitimate Justices' illegitimate decisions have no moral force, and should be ignored or violated by those who reject them—means replacing the rule of law with the rule of force. A republic where laws are binding only on those people who agree with them is one where the experiment in self-government is breaking down. As the anti-Trump protestors like to say, "This is what Resistance looks like." Unfortunately, George Wallace standing in front of schoolhouse doors, attempting to prevent federal marshals from enforcing a court order mandating racial desegregation, is also what resistance looks like. It's just not what democracy looks like.

Worst of Humanity

THE RESISTANCE, CHANTING "NOT MY president" since Election Day, justifies its words and actions by citing Trump's transgressions and defects. His sins easily become his supporters'. When *New York Times* columnist Nicholas Kristof urges his liberal readers to avoid harsh generalizations about Trump voters, they respond by telling him how committed they are to those negative judgments. They "hate" and "despise" all Trump supporters, the "worst of human-

ity,” every last “stupid and selfish” one a racist. For every demonstration, campus riot, and awards-show sermon that is visited upon the republic *because* Trump won, another 10,000 members of the Resisted attain greater clarity about *why* Trump won. Even Americans with misgivings about Trump and his policies can agree with the European scholar who recently wrote, “There is a deeply anti-democratic undercurrent to much of the criticism of the new president, borne aloft by an assumption that democracy is too important to be left to the voters.”

More so than in warfare generally, religious wars are animated by the determination to vindicate righteousness and punish blasphemy. There is a heightened emphasis on assigning blame to the combatant who “started it,” a heightened determination to stand down only after retaliating against the most recent attack—which means neither side ever stands down. Conciliation is scorned as a form of capitulation. It’s hard to see how all this ends, and really hard to see how it ends well. Everyone loves the poetry at the conclusion of Abraham Lincoln’s First Inaugural: how “we are not enemies, but friends” who will be held together by “the mystic chords of memory” and “better angels of our nature.” It’s less consoling to

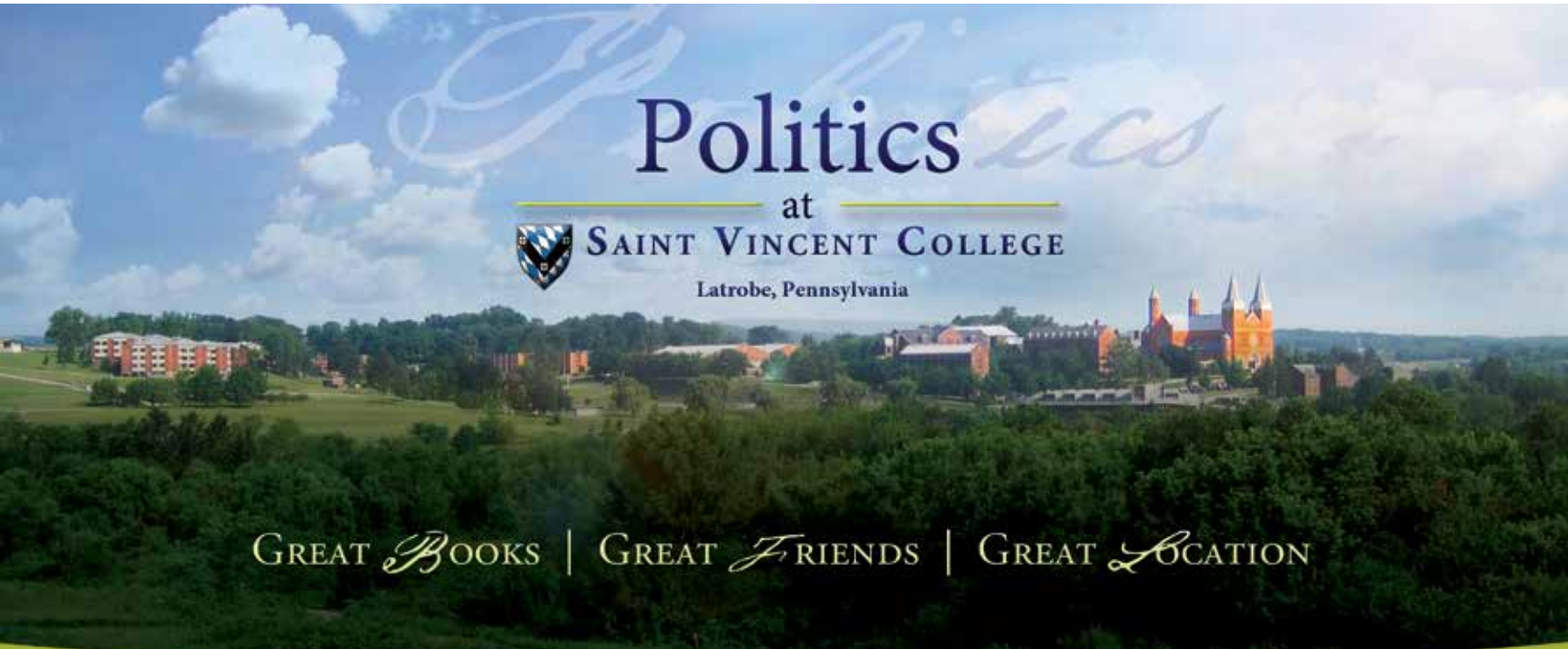
remember that Lincoln’s address was a rhetorical triumph but political failure. None of the seven Southern states that seceded from the Union between Lincoln’s election and inauguration reversed course after his speech, and four additional states joined the Confederacy in the following weeks.

The first and current Republican presidents are, safe to say, dissimilar in certain respects. Their electoral victories, however, caused each man’s most vehement opponents to conclude that such an outcome rendered doubtful the worth of preserving American unity and respecting democratic processes. Southerners embraced the logic, though not the slogan, of “Not My President” when Lincoln’s election showed that the North had the votes and, increasingly, the inclination to settle the slavery question on terms other than the South’s maximum demands. Last summer, after violent anti-Trump protests, journalist Emmett Rensin was fired from Vox.com for tweeting that it was “never a shame to storm the barricades set up around a fascist,” and, “Advice: If Trump comes to your town, start a riot.” After Trump’s inauguration, *Foreign Policy* offered Rensin the opportunity to expound on political violence in 3,500 words rather than 140 characters. The elaboration does little to reassure. Rensin notes, in passing, that he

doesn’t consider Trump a fascist, though without clarifying whether he no longer believes this or never really did. It seems not to matter, because some people, especially “the poor and oppressed,” *do* think Trump fascist, and for them his election means that “the official channels of political redress have broken down, that the system is not working and therefore extreme measures must be taken.” Rather than attempt to disabuse them of their assessment of the situation, or dissuade them from their response to it, Rensin prefers to empathize with their plight and respect their political judgment. After all, he notes, you don’t thwart a fascist by calling your congressman.

Lincoln began his presidency by imploring all his countrymen to “think calmly and well.” That’s good advice in general but is, unfortunately, advice most likely to be delivered in situations where it’s least likely to be heeded. We’ll learn things about the people we are and the times we live in over the next four years. Whether we’ll like what we learn is a different question.

William Voegeli is a senior editor of the Claremont Review of Books, and the author, most recently, of The Pity Party: A Mean-Spirited Diatribe Against Liberal Compassion (Broadside Books).



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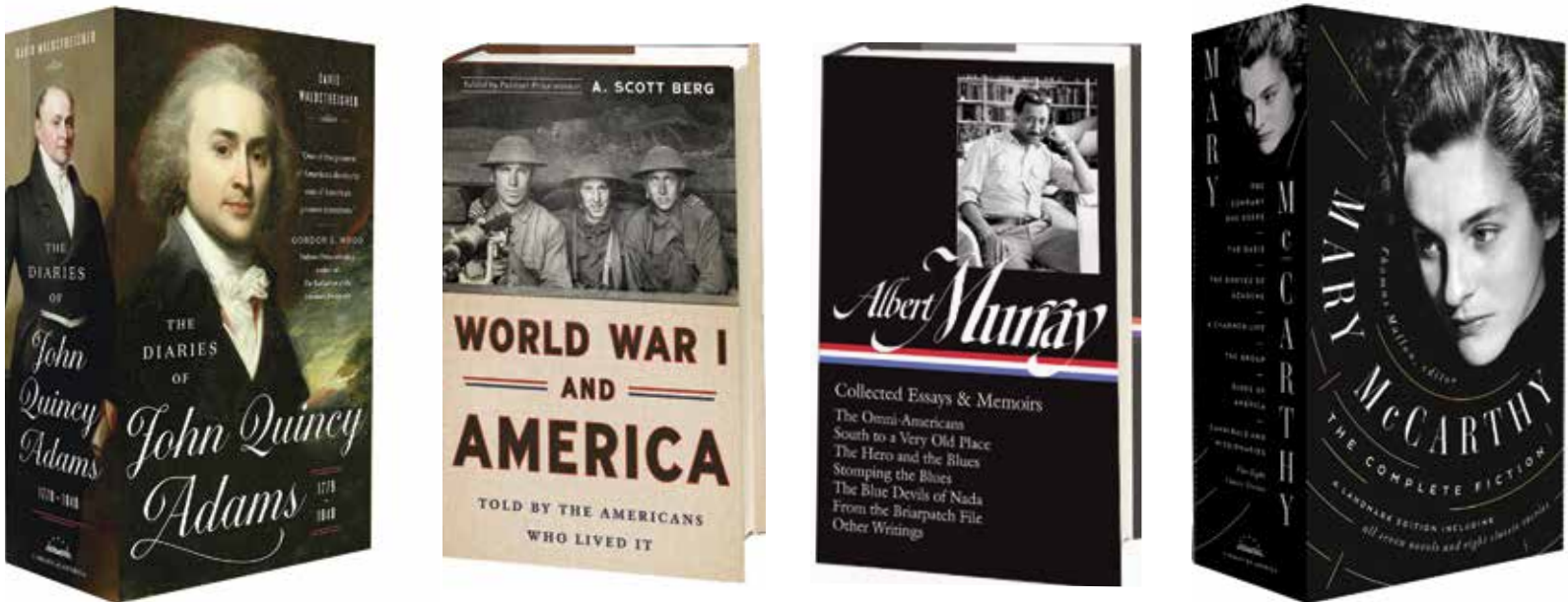
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