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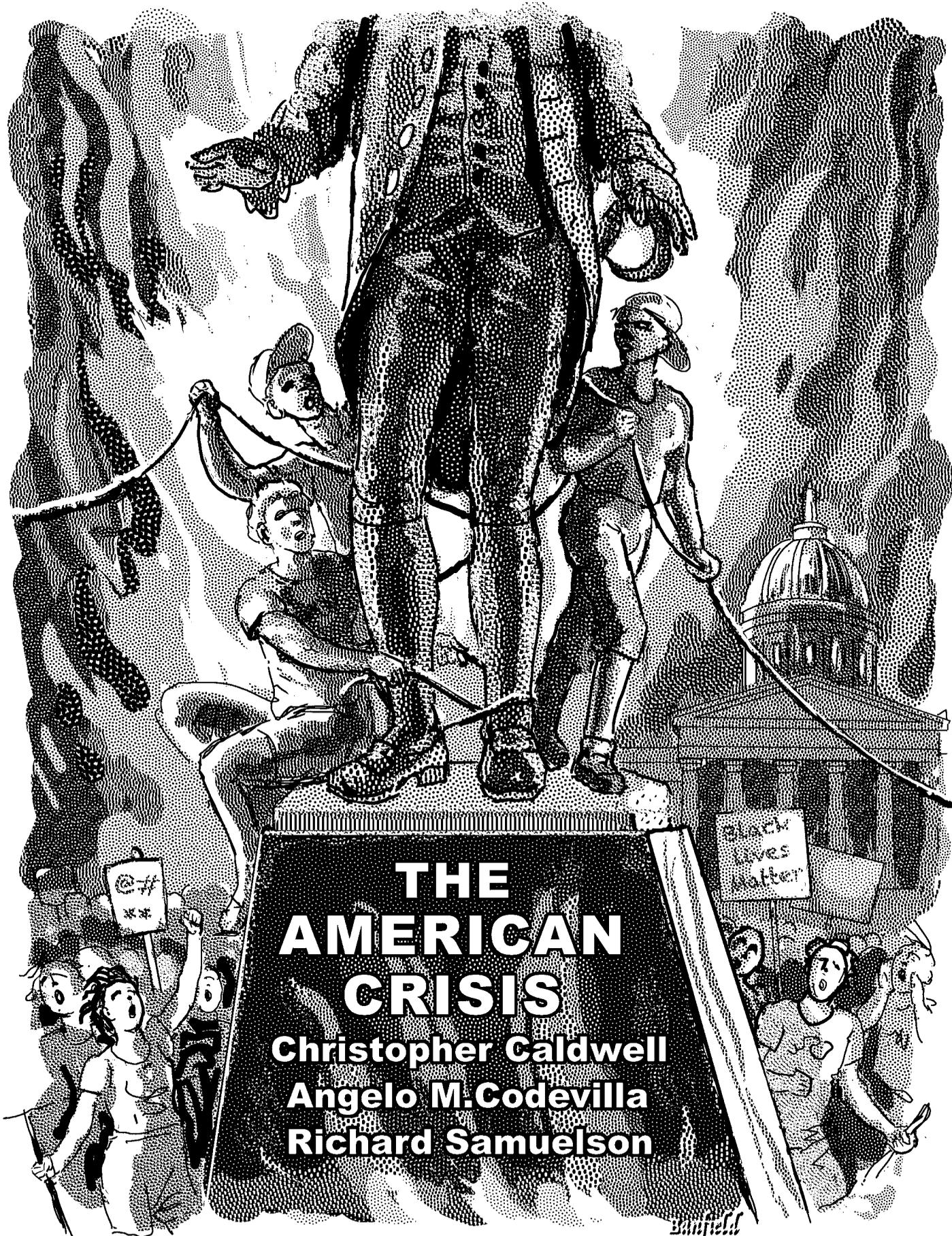
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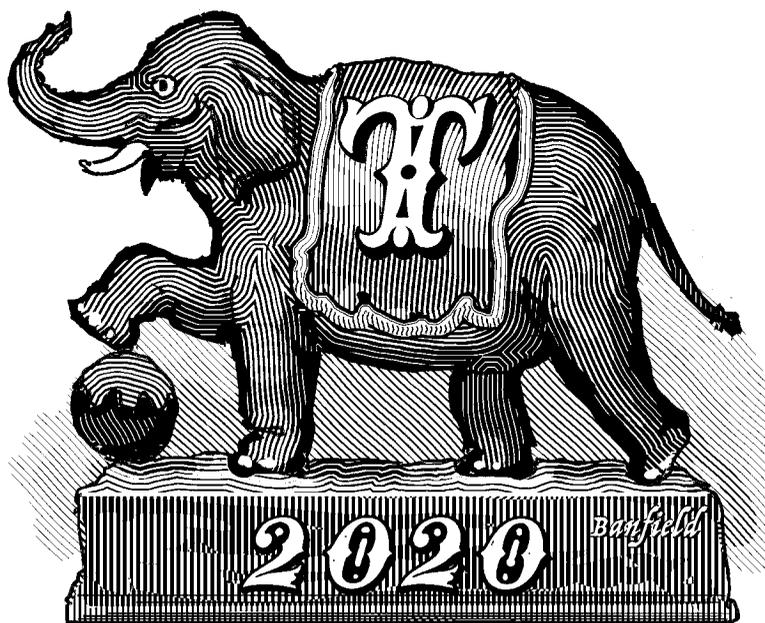
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Essay by Michael Anton

THE CASE FOR TRUMP



AMERICANS WHO WANT TO REMAIN citizens of a united country that at least makes some desultory attempt to protect them and further their interests have no choice but to stay the course. As the saying goes, the only way out is through.

I know that some readers will lament that the Trump Administration has been a disappointment. “Where’s our wall?” I’d like to have seen more progress by now, too. “Why wasn’t he tougher during the riots and their aftermath?” I don’t know.

But it does seem clear that a few of the things we thought all along are actually true. The presidency is hard enough to manage with decades of experience in politics and a series of elective offices under your belt. It’s that much harder when a president assumes the office not merely from the outside, but politically speaking, from out of nowhere.

It’s harder still without a party. Yes, President Trump enjoys the overwhelming loyalty of Republican voters—but his hold on Republican donors, and especially officials, is much more tenuous. He ran against them and won—and most of them will never forgive him. They play nice to his face and undermine him behind his back. That’s before we even get to the ones in open rebellion. No president—Democrat or Republican—has ever come to power facing organized efforts by his own party’s middle management to tally lists of people declaring on the record that

under no circumstances will they work for the incoming administration. It’s been hard, to say the least, to staff up when a good chunk of the party is dead-set against their leader, and nearly all the rest spent their careers furthering policies diametrically opposed to those he ran—and won—on.

And that’s just President Trump’s ostensible own side. Then factor in all his open enemies from the other party, and virtually every other power center in our society, plus the steadfast opposition of the so-called “deep state”—i.e., the very federal bureaucrats whom he was elected to oversee and direct. Viewed from this angle, one may fairly wonder how it’s been possible for him to accomplish anything at all.

More fundamentally: where do you think the country would be without him? Even if you’re disappointed with less than 200 miles of wall, remember that leading Democrats not only insist that every single new inch is a moral atrocity, they want to *tear down sections that already exist*.

Think the trade agenda is progressing too slowly? Well, President Trump already renegotiated two of our worst trade deals. How many new, bad ones do you think a Hillary administration would have signed by now? Trump not tough enough on China for you? A little too much talk about his “good friend” Xi Jinping? I sympathize. But he’s still done more than all the last four presidents combined.

More than that, he’s reversed the China policy of the last four presidents combined. Have you heard how Joe Biden kowtows to China?

And I know that some will insist that, so long as a single American soldier, sailor, airman, or marine is deployed anywhere in the Middle East, then Trump has failed—or worse, betrayed them. But in fact, the president has mostly succeeded at the tasks he promised for that region: defeating ISIS, revitalizing our alliances while requiring more from our allies, and prudently disengaging from existing conflicts while not starting any new ones.

All of these trends, changes, policies, and initiatives, and many others—however incomplete—would be reversed in the event of a Trump loss. The ruling class would hail the president’s defeat as a historic repudiation of his (allegedly) “racist and xenophobic” vision, etc., as a vindication of every charge and complaint they’ve made against him and his supporters since Day 1. Their goal would be to erase the last four years and the 2016 election as if they never happened. If think-tank conservatives want above all to get into a DeLorean and go back to 1985, the ruling class wants to cram America into a Prius and force us back to 2015. And then resume the trajectory the country had been on back then, i.e., the road to woke managerial tyranny.

Whenever I’m asked—mostly by leftist concern trolls who want to write “Former Trump Official Bashes President”—if I have



any criticisms of President Trump, my answer is always the same: there's little wrong with President Trump that more Trump couldn't solve. More populism. More nationalism. More patriotism. More law and order. More full-throated advocacy for the neglected American people, for the working class, for the Rust Belt and rural America, for religious believers and law-abiding gun owners. More defense of free speech against tech and corporate censorship and suppression, more support for his voters when they or their interests are viciously attacked. In short, more adherence to the 2016 agenda.

The only way to get more Trump is, literally, to get more Trump. Which means the president being reelected and implementing his core agenda in a second term. But that alone will not be enough. Saving America as a unified, self-governing republic is a long-term—possibly generational—project.

American Unity

IN 1991, FORMER KENNEDY WHITE HOUSE aide and longtime college professor, scholar, and public intellectual Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., published a slim volume entitled *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*. Precisely because of his impeccable liberal credentials, Schlesinger's brief against multiculturalism, anti-Americanism and anti-Westernism hit the intellectual world like a thunderbolt. Those being (very) different times, his book was—outside the fever swamps of the universities, and even by some within them—widely praised by Left and Right alike.

Today it would be denounced as a right-wing screed. Schlesinger criticized multiculturalists as “very often ethnocentric separatists who see little in the Western heritage other than Western crimes,” whose “mood is one of divesting Americans of their sinful European inheritance and seeking redemptive infusions from non-Western cultures.” We can't go on this like this and remain a “we,” he warned, and urged Americans to (re)unite around our shared language, heritage, history and interests.

About a decade later, three-term Democratic Colorado Governor Richard Lamm gave a short speech, a third person-account of which became one of the earliest known documents to “go viral” online. In the speech, Lamm laid out what he called—tongue firmly in cheek—his “secret plan to destroy America.” All of his eight points focused on deliberately fostering disunity: encouraging multiculturalism, multilingualism, dual citizenship, “diversity,” the politics of victimization and resentment, and so on.

Every dire trend Schlesinger and Lamm warned about was already happening when they gave their warnings. Each is exponentially truer today. The country was still united enough in 1991, and in 1998 when Schlesinger augmented and republished his book, even in 2006 when Lamm spoke, the two of them at least got favorable hearings. Of course, no one left or right heeded or acted on any part of what they had to say. Instead, all the trends were not merely allowed to continue but deliberately intensified.

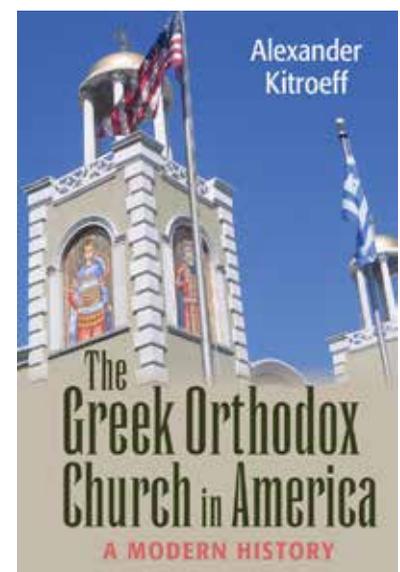
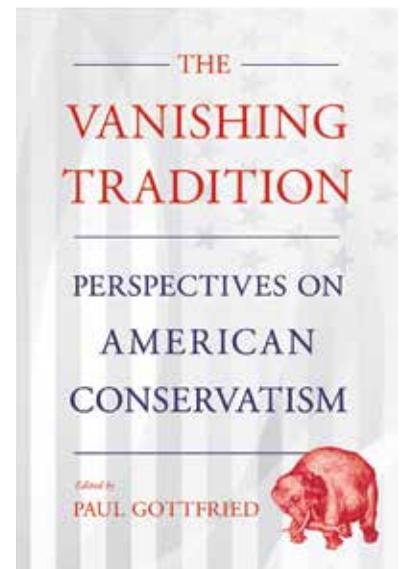
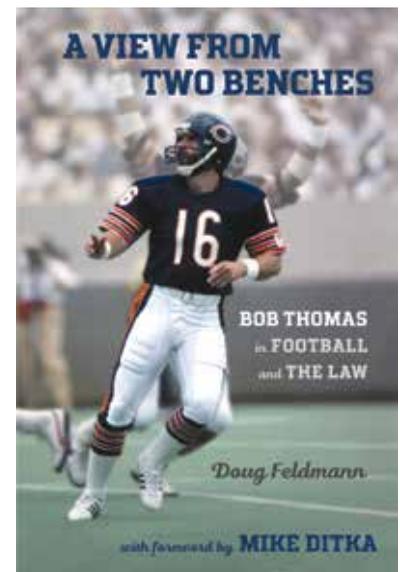
And now here we are: in so many ways, more divided than we were in 1860—in so many ways, not even a “we” anymore. Restoring American unity in this climate sounds almost comically impossible. How to restore unity after five decades and counting of Cold Civil War—the rancor of which only seems to intensify month to month?

I have some ideas, which I will get to. But first, let's understand what is meant by “unity.” It does not mean a unanimous vote in the Electoral College, such as George Washington won twice. It doesn't mean return to the bipartisan consensus of World War II and the first decades of the postwar, Cold War era. It doesn't even mean anything like the 1972 or 1984 49-state landslide—which can almost certainly never be repeated.

“Unity” in the American political context—really, for any republic, and one may say for republicanism simply—means a shared set of basic goals and assumptions. It doesn't mean everyone has to agree on everything or even like everyone. Indeed, a unified republic may nonetheless be quite divided in certain respects. Historically the most common division in any republic has been economic, with religion and culture providing the underlying bedrock of unity. Divisions between patricians and plebeians over sharing spoils and offices continually wracked Republican Rome, but the city also remained fundamentally unified, as Rome, with both classes speaking the same language, worshipping the same gods, adhering to the same morality, and committed to Roman greatness and glory.

To say the least, there does not appear to be any shared interest or bond of unity underneath contemporary America's bitter Red-Blue divide. One side loves America, the other hates it—or can tolerate it only for what it might someday become, were the Left's entire program to be enacted without exception. One faction, or most of it, is religious in the traditional sense; the other invented the god of wokeness, which it worships with Dionysian abandon. One side speaks only English, the other boasts of the literally hundreds of

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languages now heard in America's Blue precincts. One side insists that the ultimate moral imperative is to punish the other—who in turn understand that morality requires fairness and equal justice under law.

What would partisans of either side cite as something they share in common with the other? The land itself? But they each go to great lengths not to live anywhere near one another. "The economy?" It's been reengineered to benefit one side at the expense of the other. As for the culture—that reliable unifying bond throughout most of history—to ask is to laugh, and cry, at the same time.

The merest shred of cultural unity would seem so far out of reach as to be scarcely worth trying for, at least for the foreseeable future. I don't believe the country can continue indefinitely without any semblance of a common culture, but focusing right now on a near- and medium-term impossibility would be folly. Which leaves us with economics.

Even that's going to be hard enough. How to do you reconcile—much less unify—a fundamentally rural, small-town and small-city manufacturing-agricultural economy with an urban and affluent-suburban finance-information-managerial economy? Especially when the profits of the latter so depend on strip-mining the resources—outsourcing the industries and replacing the labor—of the former?

The seemingly paradoxical answer is that one side needs to gain and keep—electorally!—the upper hand for a while: specifically, the side that has been getting the short end of the stick for the last generation at least. Its leaders will of course, and of necessity, use their power to benefit their side—their base—but they must also use it to right the ship, to rebalance and benefit the whole.

Reform or Replace

WE SEE IMMEDIATELY, HOWEVER, that no party representing the interests of the rural, small-town and small-city manufacturing-agricultural population currently exists. The Democrats long ago abandoned "the common man" in favor of their high-low coalition. The Republicans would seem to be the country party—certainly, they get a lot of their votes from such people—but in practice GOP office-holders and donors are just as, if not more, likely to side with the interests of the ruling class and "global capital" over those of their own ostensible base.

What's needed, then, is a Trumpist political party focused squarely on "old economy"—rural, manufacturing, and blue-collar interests. Which means, in most if not all cases, a

party actively opposed to the program of the ruling class. If the Republican Party can become that, all to the good. If it can't, it should go out of business.

Trump's 2016 vision and program remain the right ones—the only ones with any hope of restoring what measure of American unity can be salvaged and of keeping the republic going as a republic. For it to be carried out, the president must be followed by a succession—an army—of Trumpists. His base—and America itself—will need a new cadre of populist-nationalist leaders at the federal (of course) but also state and local levels. The party—whether Republican or a successor—needs such people both as a farm team or bench from which to recruit future elected and appointed high office-holders, and also to force D.C. to respect states and local communities as serious political power centers in their own rights, to make Washington think twice about being too heavy-handed. "Trumpism" needs a strong state and local political class ready and willing to fight for its core

More nationalism.
More patriotism.
More law and order.
More advocacy for the
neglected American people.
More defense of free speech.

supporters and their interests, and to resist ruling-class authoritarianism.

Let's also be clear that saving the Republican Party will require, in no small measure, moving it to the left economically. Note well: *moving* it leftward, not making it a leftwing party. A Trumpist party—whether Republican or something else—will still be the party of property rights and of basic economic freedom, and will be the party opposed to "reparations" and other forms of unjust redistribution and expropriation. But it will be a party much friendlier to the interests of workers: the party of tight labor markets and rising wages, of reasonable worker safety and environmental regulations, of far-sighted government spending on infrastructure, and, above all, of industrial and trade policies that favor and encourage domestic manufacturing. Republican free-trade, low-tax, no-regulation dogma stopped serving the interests of at least half of the Republican voting base decades ago. The wing of the party that still sings from that hymnal today is nothing but a controlled-

opposition adjunct of the ruling class. Its dogma will have to be smashed.

A major area of continuity between the old and new Republican Party, however, will be the so-called "social" or "cultural" issues. The party must speak forthrightly for people distrustful, even fearful, of social engineering. The Left's rout in the "culture wars" has made Republicans so gun-shy that they can't even seize obvious opportunities, such as standing up for female high school athletes who suddenly find themselves losing all their track meets to biological boys.

Much—probably most—of the ground lost in the culture war can never be regained (at least not as long as the current "sect" lasts). There's no going back to 1985, much less 1955. Somewhat paradoxically, though, the Left's many cultural victories make the Right's task easier today. All the low-hanging fruit has been plucked: every social cause that ordinary Americans can be convinced is a matter of simple fairness has been achieved. What's left are radical causes that sound to middle America not merely lunatic but dangerous. Fifty-year-old men asserting a fundamental "right" to change in front of 11-year-old girls in YWCA locker rooms is not the moral equivalent of ending Jim Crow—and despite the Left's caterwauling, few Americans see it that way. What they lack are politicians with the spine to stand up to this nonsense.

In other words, to succeed the Republican Party needs to become more like the old Democratic Party—more worker-friendly, more concerned with wage and wealth inequality—but also the opposite of today's Democratic Party: openly nationalistic on economics and trade, stalwartly traditional on morality and culture. If the Republicans can so transform themselves, they have a chance. If they cannot, then the party will have to be destroyed and replaced—or else left to wither in the ruling class's ante-room, its dwindling adherents the last to realize their own irrelevance.

The Republicans are not exactly the "white party"—the spiritual and financial core of the Democratic Party is white—but they are the party that draws the overwhelming majority of its support from white voters. Were the Republican Party to die and be replaced by another—the same way the Republicans themselves replaced the Whigs in the 19th century—the new party would also be overwhelmingly white, and so would face the same demographic challenge. Which is that, for a Republican—or post-Republican, or Republican/post-Republican-plus-Democratic-defector—coalition to emerge, it will have to include a substantial proportion of nonwhite voters. That's just math. As



our Blue overlords never tire of reminding us, “demographic change” means, or soon will mean, that assembling a national majority is impossible without a “diverse” coalition.

Politically, Republicans would have to walk a very fine line: maximize their white support—especially in the Rust Belt and among those on the lower half of the income/education ladder—while actively campaigning for blue-collar, working- and lower middle-class black and Hispanic votes, especially among men, without jeopardizing their base.

Another electoral quandary is how, simultaneously, to appeal to Asian voters. On paper, they should be the real “natural conservatives”: religious, family-oriented, meritocratic, successful, wealthy, supportive of law and order. And yet they are integral to the “high” part of the Democratic high-low collation. To update for our time Milton Himmelfarb’s quip about the Jews (who earn like Episcopalians and vote like Puerto Ricans), Asian Americans earn like Ashkenazis and vote like Somalis.

That it’s possible to win, simultaneously, the votes of technocratic and managerial-class Asians and working-class blacks and Hispanics is demonstrated by the fact that Democrats routinely manage it. Could Republicans? Maybe—with the right message (more on this below).

But cutting deep into the Democrats’ margin with their base voters would likely be enough to secure Republicans a majority for a generation or two—if they could manage to do so without losing their own. The Democrats know this. And it terrifies them.

Which is why the ruling class and its minions will use their complete control of the Megaphone—the entire media and educational system propaganda machine through which our rulers broadcast their message—to make winning such votes very, very difficult. There is practically no end to the Left’s motivations for calling anyone to their right “racist.” But this fear is perhaps the biggest. Hence if and when the Republicans ever mount such an effort the calumny machine will kick into overdrive. The inherently paradoxical propaganda script is already written: the fact that you don’t win votes of color proves that you’re racist and bad; the only way to redeem yourselves is to court voters of color; but any voter of color who votes for you is a race traitor.

Heads they shoot us, tails they hang us. Hysterical Megaphone propaganda 24/7 will be hard to overcome. But Republicans will not only have to try—they’ll have to *succeed*.

Some will no doubt object that the Republican “brand” is too sullied in the minds of such voters for this to ever work. Certainly

the Megaphone’s volume and shrillness have reached unprecedented levels under Trump. But that could be because Trump—a media-age celebrity if ever there was one—is so obviously *not* a “racist” but instead a respecter of fame, wealth, and power regardless of race and, moreover, exactly the kind of blingy, emotive, trash-talking “big man” whom working-class men of all races are apt to admire. Trump is the Republicans’ first real threat to attract minority voters since the New Deal, so the demonization had to be intensified in proportion to the threat. Before the 2020 Cultural Revolution raised vilification levels to an intensity hitherto unknown in American politics, Trump’s approval rating with minorities (again, especially men) was, even with all the hate thrown his way, higher than that of any Republican in at least a generation. Granted, those relatively high approvals hadn’t—yet—translated into votes. But the mere prospect that they might is a mortal threat to the Democratic coalition.

A New Message

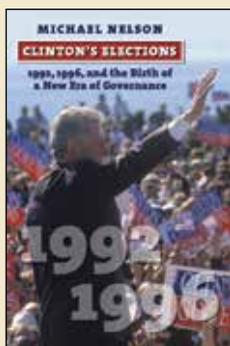
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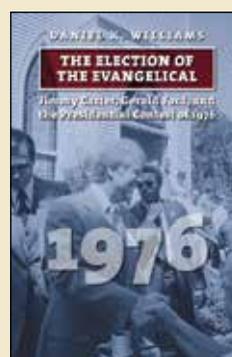
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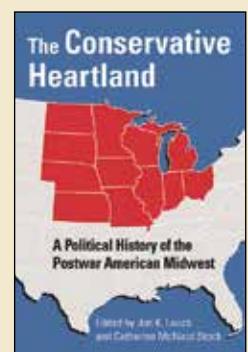
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form with pledges never to stop fighting in the Middle East—not only no longer inspires the party’s base, it positively repulses many of them. It has no chance whatsoever of winning over any part of the Democratic coalition.

What might? A winning message must combine the promise of concrete benefits with a sincere appeal to voters’ sense of dignity, individuality, and self-worth, and also to feelings of common cause, common citizenship, and patriotism. Something along the lines of:

- ✦ We’re the party of good jobs and higher wages—for *you*. Yes, we’re for economic freedom and (mostly) free markets, but not as ends in themselves, rather because theory and practice alike show that these are the best ways to produce prosperity for all. We’re well aware that the pseudo-prosperity of the last few decades has not been shared but has been gobbled up by those at the top, that you and your families have been left behind and even left out.
- ✦ The animating spirit of our party is to change that, to pursue policies that encourage domestic manufacturing, create jobs, and raise wages. And not just any jobs—not just paper-pushing and burger-flipping jobs—but jobs making real, tangible things that real people want and need. Jobs that—to be blunt—Americans, and especially American men, want to do. That means a shift from a purely information-service-consumer economy to a more balanced economy that respects and honors manufacturing. It means moving away from relying almost completely on imports in favor of making things at home—and a return to selling some of what we make overseas. It means no more dumb trade giveaways or tax and regulatory policies that favor bankers and techies while shafting everyone else. It means protecting American industries and jobs when and where beneficial to American workers.
- ✦ We’re also the party committed to ensuring that your hard-earned wage gains won’t be wiped out by rising health care costs. We’re not going to do that by forcing a government takeover of the system, which would make everything worse for everyone but the superrich, who could always afford to buy the best care (assuming high-quality care could survive a complete government takeover). We’re instead going to use government power to make the private market more affordable for routine doctor visits and ordinary care, and create a public backstop to ensure that, in cases of injury or disease, no person or family need worry about how to pay their medical bills.
- ✦ We’re the party of real “meritocracy,” not the phony kind the ruling class dangles to trick you into thinking our system is fair to you and yours. We’re the party that will neither create nor tolerate any impediments whatsoever in the way of your or your children’s rise. Help will be provided where it’s needed, but fairly, impartially. We will never pit race against race, group against group, citizen against citizen.
- ✦ We’re the party of military strength and foreign policy restraint—the party that will protect our country’s interests while minding our own business. America’s days as the world’s arbiter-intervener of first resort must and will end. As a commercial republic whose prosperity depends in part on buying and selling overseas, America must be able to project strength abroad. But we will do so only where and when we must, to protect our interests, which we will define strictly and narrowly.
- ✦ We’re the party of the common man and woman, the ordinary Joe and Jane, the average American—the party of family, faith, and our shared, cherished American way of life. We’re the party that will defend our common ideas of decency, morality, and citizenship. We’re the party that stands in favor of you living and worshipping the way you always have, the way your sacred scripture says and your ancestors taught you. We stand against silly, destructive fads cooked up on university campuses and in big cities to alter and degrade your way of life—and to insult and belittle you in the process.
- ✦ We’re for “progress,” but the real kind: progress in shared wealth and new technologies that benefit all, not just a small elite; progress in building up the dignity and honor of you and your families; progress in the strength and greatness of our shared country; progress toward a future in which America’s central institutions and power centers care about you and fight for you.

I know that’s much too long for a political “message” in the age of soundbites. I leave to the consultants, pollsters, and focus-group jockeys the task of carving a workable set of one-liners out of the above material. I am however confident that a message based on these themes is the only one that stands a chance at building a majority coalition of middle-class and working-class voters capable of beating the hard Left at the ballot box.

Michael Anton is a lecturer and research fellow at Hillsdale College. A former national security official in the Trump Administration, he is also a senior fellow of the Claremont Institute. Under the pseudonym Publius Decius Mus, he wrote “The Flight 93 Election” in 2016. This essay is adapted from his forthcoming book, The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return (Regnery Publishing).

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