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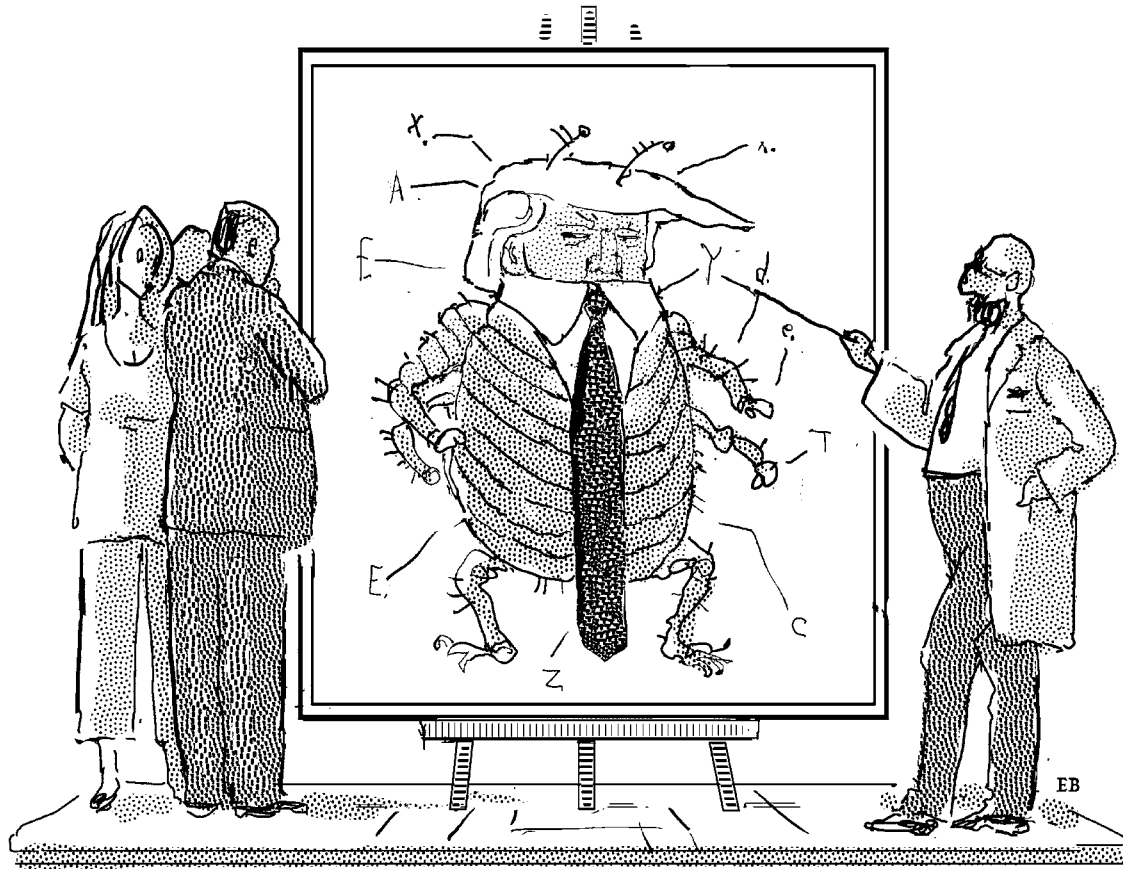
IN CANADA: \$9.50

Book Review by Douglas A. Jeffrey

ARE WE GOING TO FIST CITY?

Trumpocalypse: Restoring American Democracy, by David Frum.
HarperCollins, 272 pages, \$28.99

Un-American: The Fake Patriotism of Donald J. Trump, by John J. Pitney, Jr.
Rowman & Littlefield, 248 pages, \$21.95



TOO MUCH OF JOURNALIST DAVID FRUM'S *Trumpocalypse* and most of political scientist John Pitney's *Un-American* could be reassembled into a day-by-day catalog, spanning five years, of anti-Trump talking points aired on CNN. To this extent the books are dull as ditchwater.

It is easy to make light of the lengths to which the authors go to press their case. Frum's analysis of Trump's base, for instance, includes the category of "people who would not conventionally be thought of as white." (To support Trump, Frum explains, "you just have to agree that white is best.") His examples include Dinesh D'Souza, Candace Owens, and—perhaps Frum is simply an underperformer on cognitive tests where you identify which item in a list doesn't belong—Santino Legan, the shooter who killed three and wounded 17 at last year's Gilroy Garlic Festival.

Pitney is if anything *less* circumspect than Frum. While Frum at least qualifies, with the word "reportedly," the claim that Trump ordered fleeing border crossers shot in the legs—the claim, after all, was *reported* in the *New York Times*, citing anonymous sources—Pitney presents it as a simple fact. It is safe to say there is no fake news about Trump where Pitney is concerned. Indeed, he argues that Trump got the idea of decrying fake news from 1970s mob boss Joe Colombo, who denied the existence of the mafia. Pitney's proof? As a reader of tabloids, "Trump surely took note of Colombo's public relations strategy." QED.

Sure to profit from Pitney's book are any readers yet to notice the president's tendency to exaggerate. Pitney reveals, for example, that the website of Trump's Virginia winery says it sits on 1,300 acres, whereas a *Washington Post* fact-check shows the actual acreage to be

1,200. He also debunks Trump's claim to have the "world's greatest memory," citing a 2013 legal deposition in which Trump repeatedly says he can't recall things. The only time Pitney takes Trump at his word is when Trump opines, while touring Mount Vernon, that "[i]f [Washington] was smart" he would have put his name on the house, because "[y]ou've got to put your name on stuff or no one ever remembers you." Deaf to the humor—unlike Trump, both these books are relentlessly humorless—this is offered as proof that Trump lacks a "moral sense."

Russia looms large in these books, as one might expect. Frum laments that Robert Mueller didn't "allow himself" to "get to the bottom" of Trump-Russian collusion, which would have meant turning over every stone in Trump's past until he found what Vladimir Putin is using for blackmail. Asserting that small-town America is no longer patri-

otic, he cites a Yahoo! poll (who does that?) suggesting that small-town Americans aren't as obsessed with Russia as he is. Pitney, meanwhile, refers to the first meeting between Trump and Putin, at a 2017 summit in Germany, as their "first-ever *acknowledged* meeting"—withholding the payoff, I guess, till his next book.

FRUM AND PITNEY ARE INCREDULOUS that Trump would doubt anything the U.S. intelligence community says—e.g., the January 2017 assessment by then-Director of National Intelligence (and current member of the Resistance) James Clapper that Putin and the Russians clearly preferred Trump over Hillary Clinton. Yet at the same time they credulously believe *Putin's* intelligence community: Pitney quotes as gospel a Russian agent saying that when Trump won, "[W]e uncorked a tiny bottle of champagne.... We uttered almost in unison: 'We made America great.'" Although one often suspects Trump's enemies in the academy and the media of dissembling in the name of a higher cause, here we clearly seem to be in useful idiot territory.

Simply making light of these books, however, doesn't do them justice. When Pitney quotes Achilles, of all people, against Trump—"I hate that man like the very Gates of Death who says one thing but hides another in his heart"—the word "hate" does not seem out of place. The spirit of these books is exceedingly ugly. Here is Frum: "Most of [Trump's] predecessors were comforted in the president's lonely office by the love of a wife and family...enjoyed the cheerful company of old and trusted friends...were supported by a faith in God" and

by a deep emotional connection to the American nation. Some, at the very least, enjoyed the wordless companionship of a cat, a dog, or a horse. Trump relied on none of those things. He loved nobody, and nobody loved him.

And again:

Trump loves nobody and has no sense of tomorrow. Like an animal, he lives only in the present. Yet even an animal will avoid fouling the place in which it lives and sleeps. Trump cannot even meet that test.

Pitney never quite reaches this level of rhetorical overkill in his own voice, but he quotes fellow political scientist and former State Department counselor Eliot Cohen describ-

ing how the "germs that produced secession, lynching, and Indian massacres," after a period of dormancy, have erupted again "in the presence of Trump...like plague buboes—bitter, potent, and vile."

IN NO COUNTRY NOT ON THE VERGE OF civil war do "leading" people like Frum and Pitney write like this of their fellow citizens. Trump was elected, after all. And while the two authors have lots of ideas for disenfranchising Trump voters—Frum's list includes eliminating the Electoral College, granting D.C. statehood, doing away with presidential primaries, and prohibiting voter I.D. requirements—there are still those pesky *people*. "The forces that brought [Trump] to power," Frum writes, "will not magically vanish." The country "will have to find a way either to reconcile them to democracy—or to protect democracy from them."

What Frum means by democracy becomes clear in a section of his book on the "deep state"—a phrase he traces from Kemalist Turkey to Steve Bannon, although it was popularized prior to Trump's election by liberal journalist Mike Lofgren. In *The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government* (2016), Lofgren defines the deep state as "a hybrid association of key elements of government and parts of top-level finance and industry that is effectively able to govern the United States with only limited reference to the consent of the governed as normally expressed through elections." Frum turns this definition on its head, depicting the elected president himself as illegitimate—Trump, he writes, is "his own deep state"—and those thwarting him from carrying out the policies he campaigned on as the "regular government" acting lawfully.

"Trump's national security team," Frum notes approvingly, "persistently treated *him* as a national security threat.... They marginalized him, ignored him, or willfully misinterpreted his instructions." Posing to himself the question of why Trump was not "entitled to conduct foreign policy," he responds by quoting Gouverneur Morris on the danger of a president being "bribed by a greater interest to betray his trust." And how does one "tell when a president is acting selfishly, rather than for the public purpose?" "One sure sign," Frum writes, "is when the president tries to bypass the executive branch that exists to serve him." This is a Catch-22 worthy of the British sitcom *Yes Minister*: an elected leader trying to bypass the bureaucrats thwarting him is proof he needs thwarting.

AS ADDED PROTECTION FOR THIS FORM of democracy, Frum endorses cancel culture. He recounts how Stephen Ross, an investor in Equinox and SoulCycle, hosted a Trump fundraiser, after which both he and the two companies were forced by the usual threats to issue the usual confessions and denunciations. Connected to this, Frum introduces the idea of two cultures, one "alienated and resentful" and the other "dynamic." He writes: "I looked up the distance between the nearest Trump rally in 2019 and the nearest Equinox gym. The closest I could find was 148 miles: the distance from Grand Rapids, Michigan, to the posh Detroit suburb of Bloomfield Hills." This physical distance pales, though, in comparison to the cultural or class separation.

Dynamic America, as Frum describes it, is "where new products are designed, patents filed, songs composed, science advanced"—in other words, places like New York City, Hollywood, Silicon Valley, and the universities. These are the "high output" areas—at least if you identify big tech, big finance, and academics who live off tax dollars with output. And if you dismiss small business owners, construction workers, farmers, truckers, electricians—in short, the people who make the country work—as schlubs. Trump voters, Frum writes, are "repulsive to dynamic America." And he is confident that non-Trump America—"the stronger part of the country economically and culturally"—"can impose its will on Trump America" if push comes to shove. He hopes it doesn't come to that, he says—well, except for the "criminal" Trump, who "deserves the penalties of law," and Trump's political and media supporters, who will forever "deserve the scorn of honest patriots"—but his tone suggests otherwise.

Racism gives Russia a run for its money as a recurring theme in these books. "In 2005," Pitney writes, in the first of a series of contrasts he draws between Trump and America's founders, "Trump told *The New York Times*: 'When they came up with the wonderful statement, all men are created equal, never has there been a more false statement.'" Sounds damning, but if you follow the footnote to the source, it is a short entertainment article in which Trump is promoting the fourth season of *The Apprentice*. Specifically, he is discussing a contestant whose beauty might give her an unfair advantage, which is where "created equal" comes in. "It sounds brilliant," Trump says, "But some people are geniuses. Some are beautiful." The founders, of course, acknowledged that brains and beauty are unevenly distributed—just not God-given rights. And there are countless Trump speeches, perhaps

most memorably at Mount Rushmore, in which he echoes the founders on equal rights.

PITNEY HIMSELF, IRONICALLY, IS AT SEA when it comes to equality: it “means that nobody can judge better than you whether you are happy,” he writes—a relativist idea as foreign to the founders’ way of thinking as the idea that each person is the best judge of whether he is male or female. Nothing Pitney quotes Trump as saying would be nearly as abhorrent to the founders.

Frum bases his most serious charge of racism against Trump on one of the president’s best speeches—his 2017 address in Warsaw. Here is the part Frum quotes:

We write symphonies. We pursue innovation. We celebrate our ancient heroes, embrace our timeless traditions and customs, and always seek to explore and discover brand-new frontiers. We reward brilliance. We strive for excellence, and cherish inspiring works of art that honor God. We treasure the rule of law and protect the right to free speech and free expression.... What we’ve inherited from our ancestors has never existed to this extent before. And if we fail to preserve it, it will never, ever exist again.

Frum condemns this as an appeal not to “human rights and liberty,” but to “white ethnic identity.” Trump uses the word “we” in an exclusively white way, Frum argues, citing Trump’s reference to “the most particularly European of all cultural forms: symphony writing.” The speech thus “defines freedom not as an ideal sought by all, but as the patrimony available to descendants of certain ancestors.”

But here is the part Frum omits using ellipses:

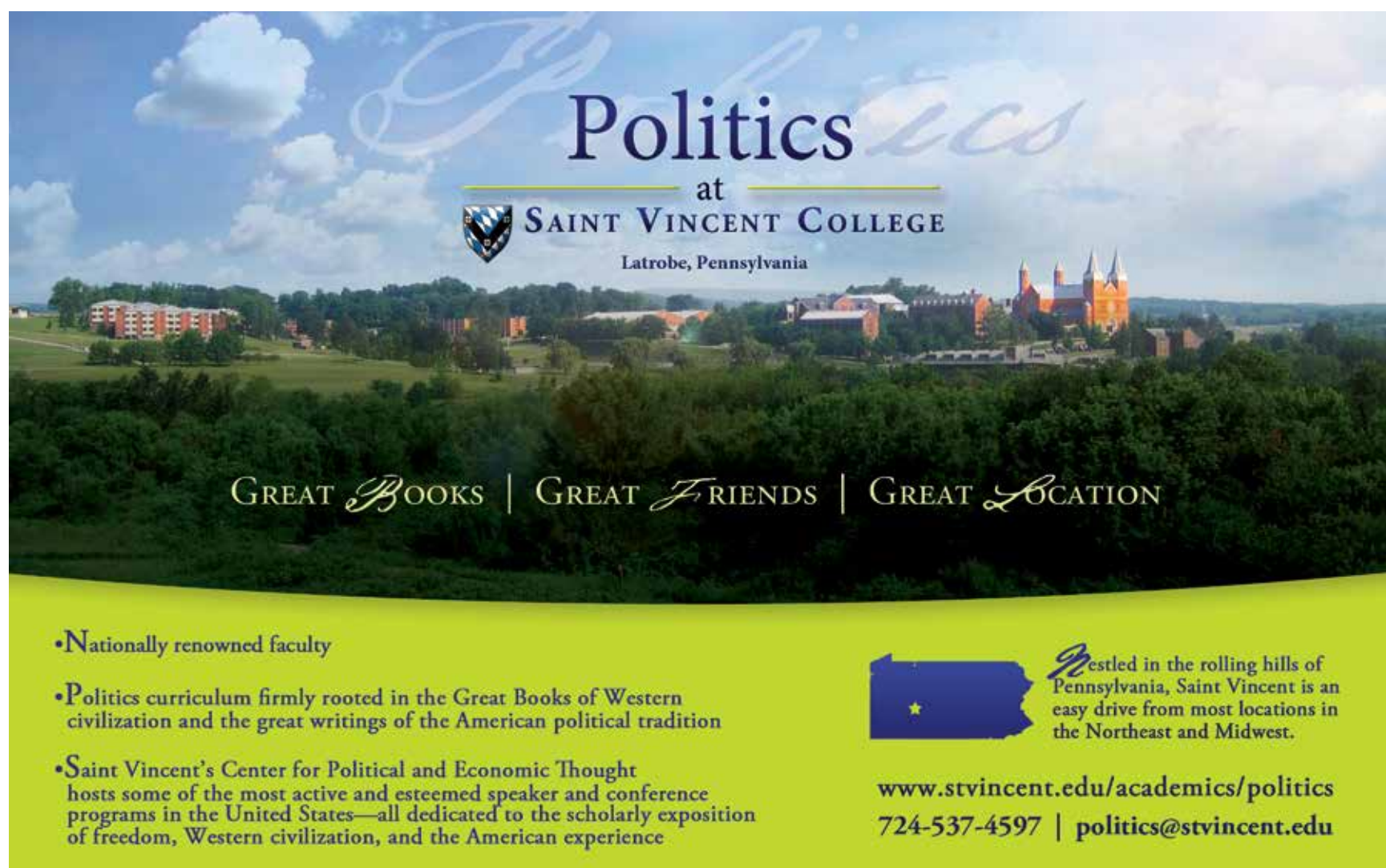
We empower women as pillars of our society and of our success. We put faith and family, not government and bureaucracy, at the center of our lives. And we debate everything. We challenge everything. We seek to know everything so that we can better know ourselves. And above all, we value the dignity of every human life, protect the rights of every person, and share the hope of every soul to live in freedom. That is who we are. Those are the priceless ties that bind us together as nations, as allies, and as a civilization.

So Frum dissembles: the speech explicitly appeals to human rights and liberty.

But more important, he confuses the idea of Western civilization (symphonies not excluded) with the idea of “whiteness”—the very same confusion (though Frum expresses it in the politically correct way) that befuddled Iowa Congressman Steve King early last year and got him unanimously censured by the U.S. House of Representatives. The same confusion, one might add, that rendered America’s educated class unable to condemn lawless violence during the riots this summer.

Writing the introduction to his book as this year’s pandemic was breaking, Frum was a pioneer in the art of politicizing a virus. Predicting that “many in [non-Trump America] would blame those in [Trump America] for the miseries ahead,” he asked: “How do you listen to people if you blame their votes for killing your mother before her time?” That question, of course, answers itself: you don’t. And when talk, the medium of politics, no longer works, where does that leave us? Intentionally or not, these ugly books put to the test any hope that the divide in our country can be resolved peacefully.

Douglas A. Jeffrey is vice president for external affairs at Hillsdale College and a senior fellow of the Claremont Institute.



The advertisement features a scenic background image of Saint Vincent College's campus, showing red brick buildings and green lawns under a blue sky with clouds. The word "Politics" is written in a large, elegant serif font, with "at" in a smaller font below it. Below "at" is the Saint Vincent College crest, followed by "SAINT VINCENT COLLEGE" in a bold, serif font, and "Latrobe, Pennsylvania" in a smaller font below that. A horizontal line separates the header from the main text. The main text reads "GREAT BOOKS | GREAT FRIENDS | GREAT LOCATION" in a large, elegant serif font. Below this, there are three bullet points: "•Nationally renowned faculty", "•Politics curriculum firmly rooted in the Great Books of Western civilization and the great writings of the American political tradition", and "•Saint Vincent's Center for Political and Economic Thought hosts some of the most active and esteemed speaker and conference programs in the United States—all dedicated to the scholarly exposition of freedom, Western civilization, and the American experience". To the right of the bullet points is a small map of Pennsylvania with a star indicating the college's location. Below the map is the text "Nestled in the rolling hills of Pennsylvania, Saint Vincent is an easy drive from most locations in the Northeast and Midwest." At the bottom right, the website "www.stvincent.edu/academics/politics" and the phone number "724-537-4597" are listed, along with the email address "politics@stvincent.edu".

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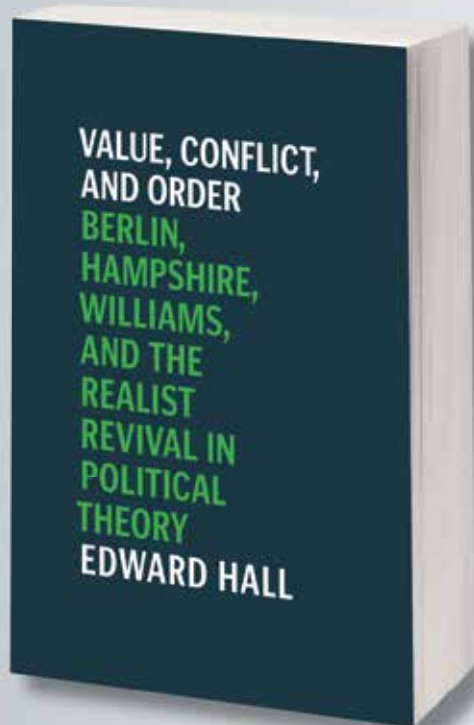
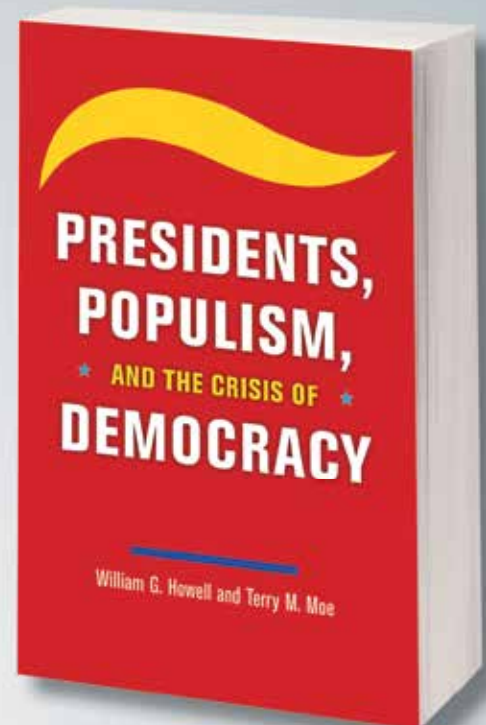
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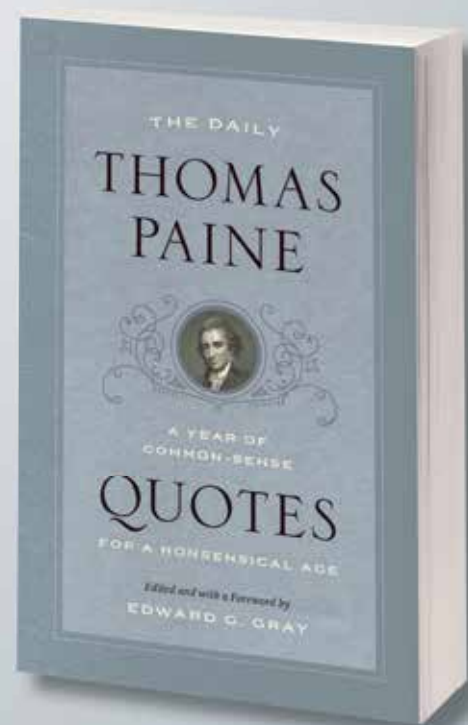
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