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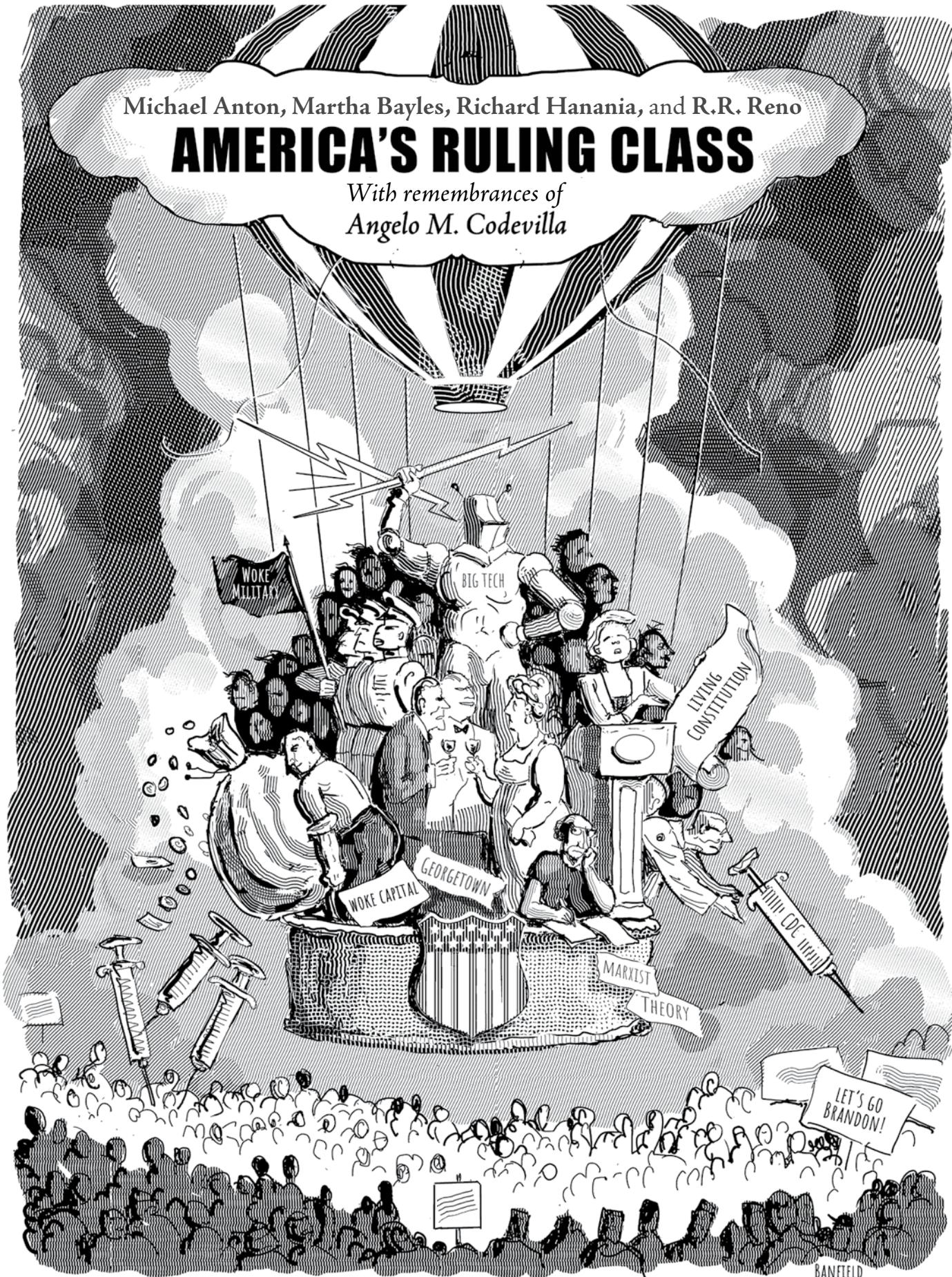
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Defending Afghanistan

Contrary to Charles Kesler's analysis ("Who Lost Afghanistan?" Summer 2021), the United States's campaign in Afghanistan should not be regarded as a lost war and therefore a failure. The American-led effort to prevent Islamic terrorists from using the country as a launchpad for attacks against the homeland should be remembered as another episode in the ongoing saga of our international confrontation with tyranny, even if certain elements of the war confirm the average American's opposition to nation-building and indefinite military commitments. A campaign that underwent multiple honest reviews by foreign policy experts, military commanders, and regional scholars cannot accurately be characterized as one lacking a coherent military strategy. In the face of entrenched insurgent warfare, the U.S. military made good-faith attempts to reform its training and tactics throughout three different presidential administrations in order to secure Afghan civilians, build confidence in a U.S.-aligned Afghan government, and deny a safe haven to terrorist cells—a mission I believe the American public consistently

supported for 20 years and supports today.

In the era of intense political polarization, Americans like me have taken solace in the valor of the men and women who served in Afghanistan, and who frequently came home maimed by improvised explosives or traumatized by their experiences. Their sacrifice has been one of the few forces that has been able to unify us as a country. And their voluntary commitment ought to give our country renewed confidence in its ability to avenge aggression and fight for liberty in future battles. The heroism of the veterans of the war in Afghanistan propelled me to join my university's ROTC program and serve in the army as an infantry platoon leader.

America's fight against terror is a fight that can never be fully won, and so we must set aside our desire for a victory parade as the U.S. concludes its mission in Afghanistan. In the future both political parties must resist the temptation to build new nations in America's image, but the United States should remain committed to making war on Islamic radicalism with drones in the air, special operation teams at the ready, and limited support for governments that will help America root out extremism wherever it lurks. The current challenge is how to develop a balanced foreign policy that prevents jihadists from hijacking politically weak countries while at the same time recalibrating the American military for a potential asymmetric, hybrid, or conventional armed conflict with China, Russia, or Iran. This is what I hope keeps Joe Biden awake at night.

Stephen Greenway
Marietta, GA

Texas Blues

Having lived in Texas and in California for about the same

amount of time, I concur with Michael Anton's conclusion and choose Texas hands down ("Right Flight," Summer 2021). I don't necessarily believe, however, that the outcome is preordained in Texas's favor, and as evidence of that I offer the idiocy of the Texas House Democrats bolting for D.C. in July when they couldn't get what they wanted in an up-or-down legislative vote. I wonder what Lyndon Johnson and Sam Rayburn would make of their successors. And Texas Democrats have gained strength in the past few years, picking up 12 new state House seats in 2018. The unpleasant reality is that the California mentality is gaining a foothold in Texas, and not the other way around (which is why Gavin Newsom still has a job). California is the way it is because Californians are the way they are. There's no guarantee Texans will continue to be the way they have been.

Howard Hirsch Henderson
Harbor, NY

Has the Crime Wave Crested?

In his essay "Criminal Negligence," William Voegeli wisely hedges on the key point of whether crime will continue to rise (Summer 2021). There already are signs that it will not. For example, the NYPD Compstat report in late August indicated that crime is lower in 2021 than it was during the same period in 2020. Although it is true that no one knows for sure what will happen with crime rates, as I showed in *The Rise and Fall of Violent Crime in America*, the crime tsunami from the late 1960s to the mid-'90s and the subsequent decline were only partly—though significantly—about the criminal justice system. Other factors includ-

ed the migration and immigration to big cities of groups with high-crime cultures, the massive increase and subsequent decline in young males at their most crime-prone years, and, in the late 1980s, the violence stimulated by crack cocaine. Because these phenomena no longer hold, the continued growth in crime rates seems unlikely. Much will depend, as I think Voegeli would agree, on whether Republicans and moderate Democrats can fend off progressive proposals to weaken the criminal justice system.

Barry Latzer
City University of New York
New York, NY

William Voegeli replies:

Since my article was published and Professor Latzer's letter was written, there have been several developments. The FBI released its Uniform Crime Report data for 2020, showing that there were 29.4% more murders in the United States in 2020 than in 2019. That is, 4,901 more people were murdered in 2020 than the 16,669 murdered in 2019. The broader category of violent crime saw a 5.6% increase from 2019 to 2020, according to the FBI.

Since the FBI's 2020 report was not issued until September 2021, it won't be until the latter half of 2022 before we can confidently answer the question of whether the 2020 spike will subside or continue. The news showing that crime in New York's five boroughs was 5.4% lower in August 2021 than it had been in August 2020 is encouraging. The news from the nation's second- and third-largest cities is more ominous. The Los Angeles Police Department reports that there were 285 murders in the city from January 1, 2021, through September 21, 2021, a 26% increase over the number of murders during the same period

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in 2020. The Chicago Police Department reported a 3% increase in murders over the first eight months of 2021, compared to 2020.

I agree with Prof. Latzer that the crucial variable determining whether crime continues to increase will be the degree of political resistance to progressive proposals for weakening the criminal justice system. The evidence on this front is also discouraging. Both Los Angeles County and Cook County, which contains the city of Chicago, have elected new chief prosecutors who made the promise of a more lenient criminal justice system the key to their campaigns. George Gascón, the L.A. County district attorney elected in 2020, is serving his first term, while the Cook County chief prosecutor, Kim Foxx, was elected in 2016 and reelected in 2020, receiving 54.2% of the vote in the general election. Ms. Foxx's office recently declined to file any charges in a gang shootout that left one man dead and two wounded, on the grounds that the exchange of gunfire was "mutual combat." Even Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot, neither a Republican nor a moderate Democrat, said that the city could be sent "into chaos" by this kind of prosecutorial discretion.

Another prosecutor in favor of greater leniency, Philadelphia District Attorney Larry Krasner, was elected in 2017 and won renomination in the 2021 Democratic primary against a challenger who blamed Krasner for Philadelphia's increasing crime. The electoral success of such prosecutors argues that, despite the rise in crime, there are some big cities and metropolitan areas where "criminal justice reform"—the code word for leniency—is more popular than a resort to more aggressive policing and prosecuting. If that remains the case then either: 1) crime will subside on its own for reasons unrelated to government actions; 2) crime will stay as it is or increase, and a majority of voters in these cities will continue to

prefer living with more crime to doing vigorous things to prevent it; 3) rising crime will eventually cause some voters to change their minds about criminal justice, and the policies associated with Gascón, Foxx, and Krasner will become politically untenable; or 4) crime-intolerant residents who find themselves outnumbered on Election Day will vote with their feet rather than their ballots, relocating residences and businesses to locations where crime is lower and the determination to keep it that way more robust. Note that the second and fourth alternatives are not mutually exclusive but mutually reinforcing. An exodus of crime-intolerant voters from a city or county will make the remaining crime-tolerant majority even larger.

Russia's Chinese Fortune

Mark Helprin identifies the distressing points of malaise and decay in American society—its "self-hatred and national suicide," as he puts it—and aptly notes that these destructive factors have affected virtually all aspects of American life, including the military, manufacturing, education, etc. ("Two Blind Mice," Summer 2021). This makes it particularly ironic that he should then suggest that Russia throw in with this nation in decline rather than join in *entente* with the rapidly and ineluctably rising power of China. He further suggests that Vladimir Putin is as vision-impaired as the misbegotten Joe Biden in this regard and that China is, essentially, not a trusted comrade for the hapless Russia. (As an aside, one must appreciate what can only be the sly humor of his retelling the Frog and Scorpion tale immediately following the reference to French President Emmanuel Macron.)

Perhaps the flaw in Helprin's thinking is that he uses the now-antiquated prism of Cold War strategies in viewing the Russia-

China coalition. The largest commercial deals in the history of world economics (i.e., the China-Russia East natural gas pipeline, China's "Belt and Road" initiative) are now increasingly denominated in ruble and yuan instead of the previously hegemonic U.S. dollar. Helprin's admonition that China will "eat" Siberia is as hoary as the level of Russian technology. Even more important is the growing symbiotic relationship between an asset-rich Russia (of 146 million souls) and an asset-barren China (of 1.4 billion souls).

Both Russia and China have as national objectives something other than the failed notion of global hegemony that has been the U.S. foreign policy desideratum for the past century. As dollar hegemony fails, we badger Russia and China with ludicrous military forays (with that old U.S. proxy NATO) all over the area comprising Russia's contiguous neighbors and engage in feckless but equally annoying saber-rattling over Taiwan and other Asian-Pacific assets. These two rising powers have other ideas: national self-interest, security, and general economic prosperity. Far from lacking vision, Putin sees clearly the writing on the wall and it says "the Rise of the East."

Robert M. Hunt
Kenwood CA

Mark Helprin replies:

The judgment that it is "hoary" to believe that China will eat Siberia is not supported but rather contradicted by citing, immediately thereafter, "the growing symbiotic relationship between an asset-rich Russia (of 146 million souls) and an asset-barren China (of 1.4 billion souls)." When the imbalance between China and Russia swells sufficiently to prompt China's rulers, they will—in the manner of most hegemon throughout history—decide to stop paying for what they regard as property stolen from them.

At which point the rulers of Russia will be able only to wish them *bon appétit* and then kick themselves for allying with a soon-to-be-dominant, contiguous state rather than grouping with lesser and/or declining nations to create a balance. The wisdom of doing so is illustrated theoretically in International Relations 101: historically, for example, in the long-term British policy vis-à-vis continental Europe; particularly in Churchill's *Marlborough*; and effortlessly in the parable about riding the tiger.

Then, consider the assertion that China has as a national objective "something other than the failed notion of global hegemony that has been the U.S. foreign policy desideratum for the past century," but, rather, "national self-interest, security, and general economic prosperity." We know this, *because China says so*. And it is proven beyond a doubt by China's tenderness toward non-Han (read "foreign" nationality) Chinese, and by the fact that, backed by—variously—military threat, maneuvers, and invasion, China actively claims not only the entire South China Sea, but territories and resources of India, Tibet, Indonesia, Malaya, the Philippines, Vietnam, Taiwan, and Japan. With no connection to the Arctic, it proclaims itself an Arctic nation. It does not abide by the demilitarization of either the Antarctic or space. Knowing that it is far too big, populous, and strong to be invaded, it is nevertheless engaged in a military buildup of far greater velocity and scope than that of either Germany or Japan in the interwar years.

Speaking of which, many a statesman and letter-writer at the time apologized for the real and imagined sins of British and American imperialism, comfortable in their belief that the Axis powers wanted only to be prosperous and secure. And speaking of which, Stalin initially allied with Hitler. In its many vivid parallels, the unfortunate proof of that pudding tends to confirm the above.

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