

VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 1, WINTER 2021/2022

CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship

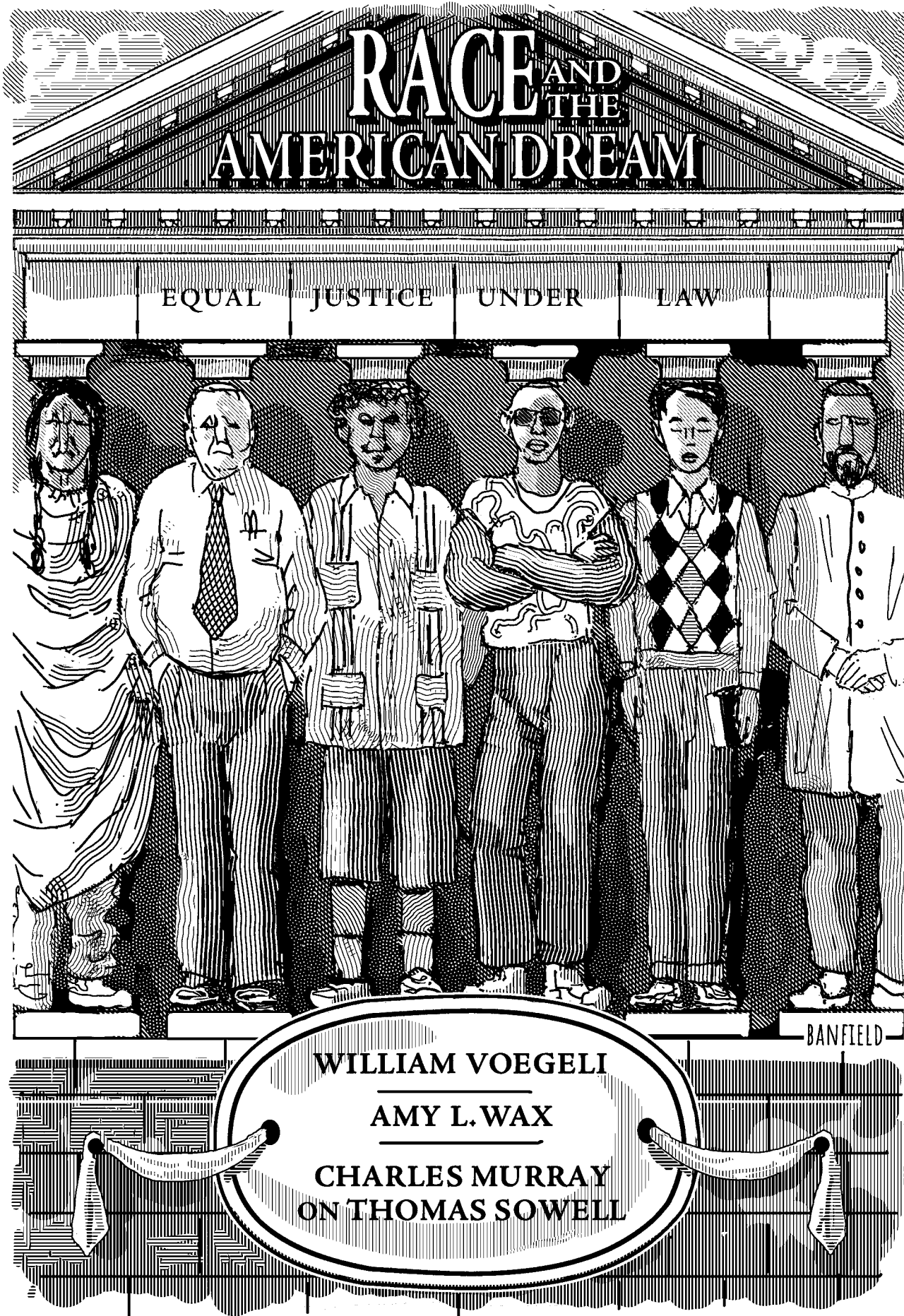
Nate
Hochman:
**What Academic
Freedom
Is For**

Sohrab
Ahmari:
**Tucker
Carlson**

Gordon S.
Wood:
**Andrew
Roberts's
George III**

Christopher
Flannery:
**Lincoln's
1619 Project**

Helen
Andrews:
**A Good
Imperialist**



James
Piereson:
**VDH's
Dying
Citizen**

Christopher
Caldwell:
**Poland
Against
Progressivism**

Nathan
Pinkoski:
**Who Started
the Spanish
Civil War?**

Peter A.
Coclanis
+
Barnaby
Crowcroft:
Woke History

Kyle
Smith:
**The Godfather
at 50**

A Publication of the Claremont Institute

PRICE: \$6.95

IN CANADA: \$9.50



7 25274 57768 2

PARTHIAN SHOT

by Mark Helprin



Scholasticism vs. Survival

PROFESSIONAL MILITARY JOURNALS ARE LADEN WITH ATTEMPTS at conceptual formulae for victory even though such things do not exist. By the same token, survivors of the world's most prestigious universities cannot fail to recall the ceaseless efforts to view the mercurial workings of the international system—something with more possibilities than chess—through the lenses of various, often mutually exclusive “schools”: realism, liberal internationalism, Marxism, pragmatism, neoconservatism, etc.

At the very least, one should be familiar with the tenets of these schools, as their acolytes have real influence and create real effects. And, as in all things, in war and diplomacy there are notable and recurring patterns. But those for whom reality is subservient to intellectual modeling are blinded to the continually adaptive relations between states and the ever-changing conditions of war, making them like the biologist who, knowing everything about penguins, walks like one. A foreign or defense policy that doesn't readily and eclectically accept and reject elements of the various schools will, perforce, fail.

Soldiers and statesmen are given their start in the university, but without subsequent inquiry and thought untethered from inculcated doctrine, formal schooling is not merely insufficient but crippling, like the scholasticism Henry Adams had in mind when he wrote, “Nearly all the highest intelligence known to history had drowned itself in the reflection of its own thought.”

To cite a glaring example from the 1950s through the Reagan defense buildup, Tufts economist Franklyn Holzman's calculations of Soviet spending led the academy and the Left (but I repeat myself) to downgrade estimates of the USSR's military capability. With intricate numerical manipulations, he concluded that Soviet military power was an illusion. But hidden (apparently even from him) within the complexity of his methodology was the assumption that input exactly equals output, to hell with intervening factors. Input might have been an acceptable measure had one to guess at the output, but Soviet military assets were well known. Whereas the rate of change in expenditures was valuable predictively, their absolute value was of little use. It didn't matter if a warship cost a billion rubles or one kopek. What mattered was the warship, and we could see it.

In academic writings and op-eds, Holzman's seemingly authoritative assessment of Soviet capabilities, proffered to discredit our own expenditures, devolved into the now-familiar commonplace that American defense spending is—needlessly—*more than that of the next X countries combined*. Along with the fundamental flaw of judging output by input, this kind of comparison is favored among the current administration's many university-oriented *responsables*. But it overlooks the nature of our commitments, the fading contributions of our allies, geography, America's size and that of its economy, conscription or its absence, purchasing power parity, exchange-rate distortions, the military trajectories of potential adversaries individually or in combination, and the masking effects among them of off-budget outlays and occult expenditures.

TOO ACADEMICIZED AN APPROACH IS THE PRODUCT OF CULTURE and luxury. Prior to the rise of the university and in countries such as China, Russia, and Iran where education is an organ of government, influential treatises have come in the main from literate practitioners such as Caesar, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, Hamilton, Madison, and Mahan, as well as from amateurs of exceptional brilliance, now as rare in our bureaucracies as a mouse at a convention of cats. Unlike today, theory arose from practice, not vice versa.

And only nations with little existential worry have the luxury of debating how much to promote their principles abroad, to embark upon the liberation of oppressed peoples, or exquisitely to calibrate the limits of intervention; and to what extent their foreign and military doctrines consider the status of women and homosexuals, the preservation of species, and the state of the climate. All these are ripe agar for limitless growth in speculative theory and academicized influence.

Rather, our North Stars for the study and practice of statecraft and war should be Lincoln, Churchill, and Israel (the country). For them, methods, means, and morality were and have been successfully ordered and converted into operational plans by a single principle or necessity: survival. For those under fire or awaiting the hangman, the dross of life is swept away quite easily.

For example, China's navy, on the upswing, is now larger than ours, on the rusty downswing. As the arsenal of autocracy, China can surge production in its 100 major shipyards, but our six major shipyards cannot compete. In this century as in the last, whoever controls the Pacific will dominate the world. With stunning and unimpeachable simplicity, survival says, *build up the goddamned navy*. And yet, prattling on endlessly about one thing or another, we don't.

Despite the Zimmermann Telegram during World War I, Japanese invasion mapping of the Mexican coast prior to World War II, and the continuing nuclear standoff since (now tripartite and growing), we haven't faced a threat to our sovereign existence since the Civil War. If, as present trends suggest, Russia and Islamism continue to neutralize Europe, and China, growing apace, Finlandizes our Asian allies, seizes control of the Pacific, and dominates Africa and South America, in the not-so-distant future, we will. Although the possibility of physical invasion cannot be dismissed, long before it, by maneuver and constriction, hostile forces might achieve checkmate resulting in elements within this country rising to oblige them. Ask the Norwegians and the French. This is how the world has worked since the beginning, and always will.

No longer flush with victory and power in the American Century, we must now learn to think more modestly and defensively. According consideration of survival its rightful and obvious place would spur us to spend on defense in surplus, as war and deterrence require; to put steel into America's diplomatic spine; and to stop fussing over theoretical frameworks in favor of choosing our course and conduct in the clear light of what must be done to assure our continuing existence as the sovereign, constitutional state we have come to take for granted.

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 the proof that conservatism is a
living and civilising force in American
intellectual life, and a powerful
challenge to the dominance
of the academic left."*

—Roger Scruton

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
or call (909) 981-2200.

CLAREMONT
REVIEW OF BOOKS

1317 W. FOOTHILL
BLVD, SUITE 120,
UPLAND, CA
91786

NON PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 504
UPLAND, CA