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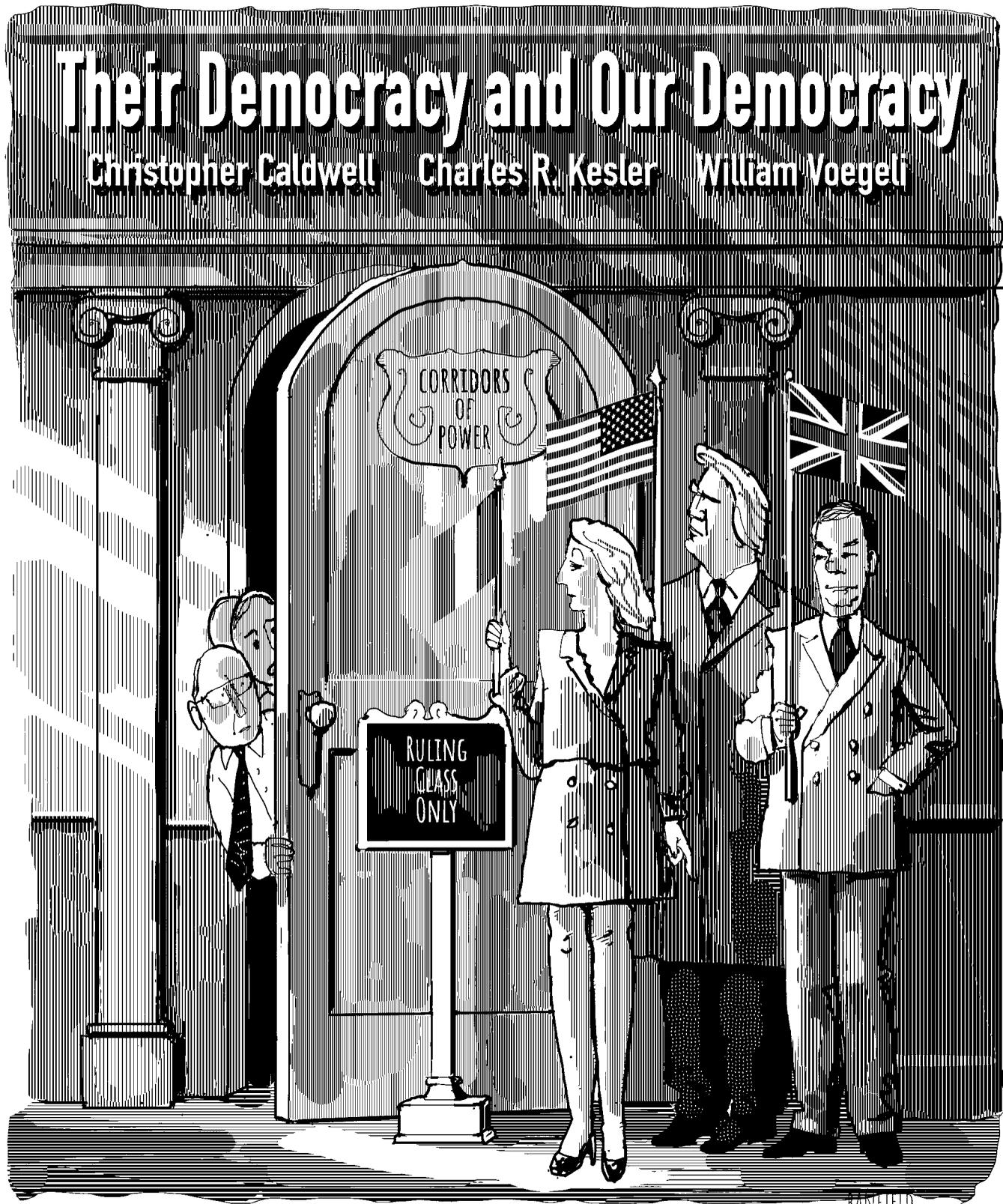
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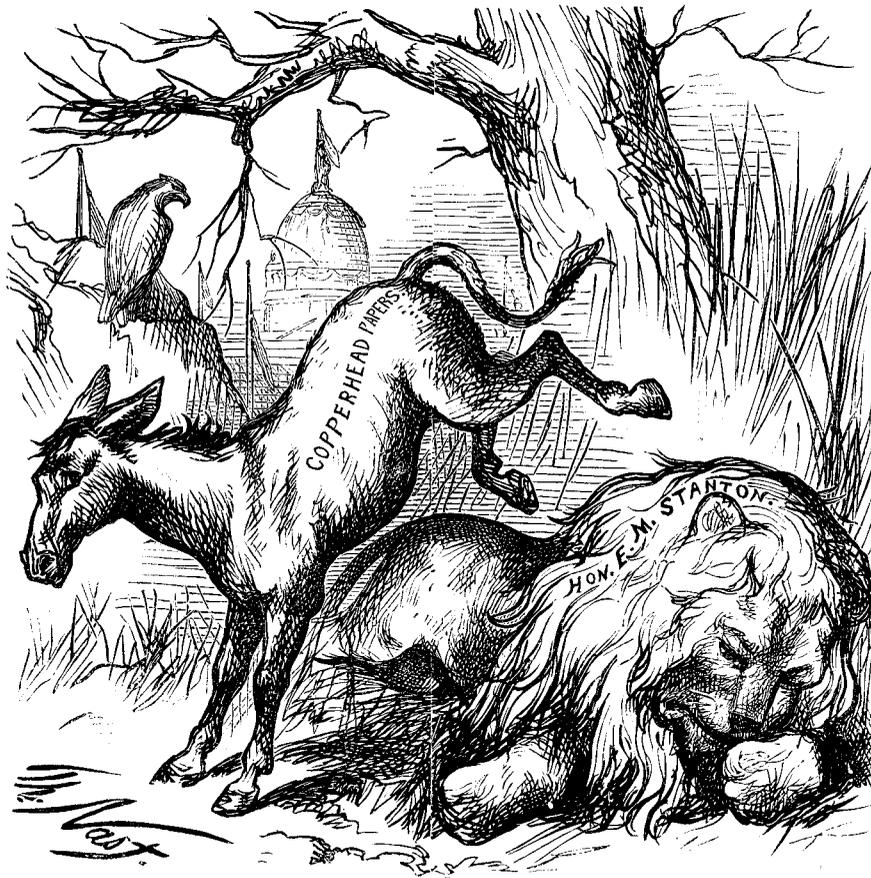
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Book Review by Michael Barone

## SHIFTING POLITICAL PARTIES

*The Hollow Parties: The Many Pasts and Disordered Present of American Party Politics*, by Daniel Schlozman and Sam Rosenfeld.  
Princeton University Press, 448 pages, \$35

*The Year That Broke Politics: Collusion and Chaos in the Presidential Election of 1968*, by Luke A. Nichter.  
Yale University Press, 396 pages, \$37.50 (cloth), \$24 (paper)



“A LIVE JACKASS KICKING A DEAD LION.”\*

“PARTY IS A BODY OF MEN UNITED, FOR promoting by their joint endeavors, the national interest, upon some particular principle upon which they are all agreed.” So wrote Edmund Burke in 1770, in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Recent Discontents*, his argument against his parliamentary colleagues’ treatment of Britain’s North American colonies. But the rebellious colonists seem not to have looked to Burke for advice. He was then a Rockingham Whig, the ex-

\* An instance of the donkey as it evolved to become a cartoon symbol of the Democratic Party. The cartoonist, Thomas Nast, who was a staunch Republican, based his design (1870) on the Aesop fable, “The Ass and the Lion.” In the drawing, the lion represents Edwin Stanton, Abraham Lincoln’s Secretary of War. The donkey represents the Democratic press, which published obituaries critical of Stanton. —E.B.

PLICIT successor to the governing party led by Robert Walpole and the Duke of Newcastle, which was in power almost uninterruptedly from 1715 to the succession of George III in 1760. The American revolutionaries and founders took their guidance from that party’s critics, the anonymous *Cato’s Letters* and Lord Bolingbroke’s *The Idea of a Patriot King*, and, with the conspicuous exception of Alexander Hamilton, they roundly condemned the Walpole-Newcastle system as corrupt and oppressive. They insisted again and again that they hated parties.

And yet they almost immediately arrayed themselves in what they must have recognized as political parties, as American officeholders and office seekers have ever since. The American Revolution can be seen as a contest between rival parties with opposing views of “some particular principle.” Perhaps one-third of the

colonists, and probably majorities in New York and New Jersey, the site of most of the Continental Army’s battles, were Tories (an English party name) loyal to the Crown. In 1787 and 1788 Federalists and Anti-Federalists argued over whether to ratify the Constitution, and it was a close-run thing which side would prevail in the conventions in Virginia and, with the help of the 85 *Federalist* papers, New York.

IN THE 1790S, NOT ONLY MEMBERS OF CONGRESS but also George Washington’s cabinet were divided over issues of undoubted importance. Treasury Secretary Hamilton’s bills to fund the national debt and establish a national bank were opposed in the cabinet by Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and in Congress by Hamilton’s writing partner on *The Federalist*, James Madison. The world war that broke out between revolutionary France



and commercial Britain in February 1793 and lasted, with only brief pauses, until June 1815 split politicians and voters into the Federalist and Republican parties. Jefferson hoped that his Republicans would prevail and the Federalists would disappear. That eventually happened, but not until passage of the 12th Amendment, which silently recognized that parties would nominate joint president and vice president tickets. In time the parties seemed to coalesce, as the electorally victorious Jeffersonian Republicans adopted Federalist policies, with President Jefferson sending the Federalist-created Navy against the Barbary pirates in the Mediterranean and President Madison supporting a second national bank after arguing for 20 years that the first one was unconstitutional.

Federalists ran their last candidate for president in 1816 and James Monroe, the third Virginia Republican president in a row, was re-elected without opposition in 1820. But the second party system grew up in the wake of the four-candidate 1824 election, in which no candidate received a majority of electoral votes and John Quincy Adams, the second-place finisher in electoral votes, was chosen in the House. Andrew Jackson, feeling cheated, vowed revenge, spent four years amassing supporters, and beat Adams solidly in 1828. In 1832 his leading supporter, the Albany Regency machine politician Martin Van Buren, imitating the New York-based Anti-Masonic Party, set up the first Democratic National Convention, which nominated Jackson for president and Van Buren for V.P. This was the first in an unbroken series of quadrennial Democratic national conventions, of which the 49th took place in Chicago in August 2024.

**T**HUS WAS ESTABLISHED WHAT IS NOW the oldest political party in the world. The third oldest is the Republican Party, created in 1854, whose first national convention was held in 1856 and whose 43rd was held in Milwaukee in July 2024. These two parties and the two-party system have endured partly for structural reasons: the Electoral College and single-seat Senate elections, both mandated in the Constitution, and the single-member House elections, which Congress could change. They have also endured, as I argued in my 2019 book, *How America's Political Parties Change (And How They Don't)*, because of their enduring basic character, with the Republicans built around a core of demographically "typical" Americans who are never by themselves a majority, and the Democrats a coalition of "atypical" demographic groups who, when held together, can

be a majority. But their positions on issues have changed over time, as has the degree of popular involvement in their workings. That last item is the central focus of *The Hollow Parties: The Many Pasts and Disordered Present of American Party Politics*, by the political scientists Daniel Schlozman and Sam Rosenfeld of Johns Hopkins and Colgate, respectively. As their title suggests, they lament a decline of citizen involvement in the two ancient parties, and they identify as a key turning point the reforms in the presidential delegate selection process initiated in 1968. That year, which the late political scientist Nelson Polsby called the worst election year in American history, is the subject of Chapman University historian Luke Nichter's *The Year That Broke Politics: Collusion and Chaos in the Presidential Election of 1968*.

**O**NE OF THE HIGH POINTS OF *THE Hollow Parties* is the authors' description of the enthusiastic support for Jackson's Democrats in 1828 and

### Why bother toiling in local party organizations when they provided no patronage jobs and no influence in choosing presidential nominees?

1832. Unprecedented numbers participated in parades and rallies, cheering speakers and chasing off scoffers, saluting first-time voters (see Jon Grinspan's 2016 book, *The Virgin Vote: How Young Americans Made Democracy Social, Politics Personal, and Voting Popular in the Nineteenth Century*), and singing partisan anthems. This was not so much based upon agreement on what Burke called "some particular principle," as on something like the loyalty exhibited by fans of particular sports teams. Jackson, the victor of the Battle of New Orleans, in the 1820s took no distinctive stands on what would become the trademark issues of his Democratic Party—opposition to high tariffs and to the Second Bank of the United States. The masses who rallied to the Democrats' opponents, the Whigs, in 1840—when turnout hit 80% of those eligible—seemed less interested in tariff schedules and banking minutiae than in countering the Jacksonians' jibe that their candidate, the victorious William Henry Harrison, was devoted to sipping hard cider

in his log cabin. Perhaps their enthusiasm owed something to their realization that, thanks to universal suffrage for white men, they were participating in self-government in a way that was unique in the world.

**T**HE STANDOUT EXAMPLE OF A PARTY animated by a "particular principle" is what Schlozman and Rosenfeld call "the transformative Republican project of the 1850s and 1860s," which "brought together patronage politics, industrial might, and revolutionary radicalism." Unlike the Democrats and the Whigs, the Republicans were a regional party, passing out their ballots, with just a few exceptions, only in non-slave states. The party sprang up suddenly, in the single calendar year of 1854, in response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act which allowed slavery in the territories. Its 1856 nominee, John C. Frémont, failed to win a majority of the electoral college though he carried the electoral votes of the non-slave states (114 free-state electoral votes for Frémont, 62 for Democrat James Buchanan); its 1860 nominee Abraham Lincoln flipped Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania and, with 54% of the free state popular vote, won 180 electoral votes—a solid national majority—even though he won only 2% of the popular vote in slave states. The authors hail the Republicans' "grand achievement" of using "mass democracy as the instrument of human freedom," but the Republicans' majorities were tenuous. Freeing the slaves actually increased the South's share of House seats (since each former slave was now to be counted as one person, rather than three-fifths of one person, toward state representation and hence the Electoral College)—a gain to the Republicans' opponents unless blacks' right to vote could be secured. Alas, by 1874 Northern voters turned against military enforcement of civil rights as Southern whites used violence and terror to disenfranchise blacks. The list of postbellum Republican presidents is misleading; Republican nominees won less than 50% of the popular vote in every election from 1876 to 1892 and Democrats won majorities in the House of Representatives in eight of ten elections between 1874 and 1892. The "stalwart" Republicans who were supportive of civil rights and were "insistent on regularity [that is, supporting your party candidates despite allegations of corruption, incompetence, etc.] to defeat a rising Democracy in their states" were the most frequent target of corruption charges from Mugwump Republicans and Southern Democrats, and the historians who for generations followed their lead.



THESE REPUBLICANS WERE ONLY FOLLOWING the Jacksonian Democrats' rules: Martin Van Buren's insistence on always supporting the party, William Marcy's assurance that to the victor go the spoils. Enthusiasm for parties akin to 20th-century sports fans' enthusiasm for their team, plus a desire for public sector jobs: these were the things that made the 19th-century parties very much un-hollow and that produced the highest voter turnout rates in our history. Civil service legislation to some extent removed patronage jobs, the replacement of party-printed ballots by government-printed "secret" ones (on which the voter's identity is kept anonymous) weakened party poll watchers, and the Ivy League-educated presidents of the first two decades of the 20th century (Harvard's Theodore Roosevelt, Yale's William Howard Taft, Princeton's Woodrow Wilson) each happened to come to office owing little to party bosses. Hence the hollowing out of the parties.

Both of America's parties, as I noted in my book, suffered huge defeats by the voters in the first third of the 20th century. The Republicans' rout in 1932, due to the Great Depression and Herbert Hoover's failure to end it, has been widely covered by historians, but the Democrats' rout in 1920, due to economic dislocation, labor strife, and radical uprisings, not to mention the policies and

then the incapacitation (due to strokes) of Woodrow Wilson, although greater by some metrics, has been mostly ignored. What's significant, in my view, is that both parties proved resilient enough to recover and become competitive within a few election cycles. Like most historians and political scientists, Schlozman and Rosenfeld have little interest in the Democratic collapse of 1920 or the Republicans' response to their collapse in 1932. They seem to assume that the Democratic Party had a national majority for decades afterward, although Franklin Roosevelt's victories in 1940 and 1944 and, in my view, Harry Truman's in 1948 were due largely to war and foreign policy.

MENTIONED ON ONLY TWO PAGES, both times tangentially, is E.E. Schattschneider, perhaps the leading political scientist of the mid-20th century and the prime instigator of arguments for ideologically coherent parties, the subject of Rosenfeld's insightful and original 2017 book, *The Polarizers: Postwar Architects of Our Partisan Era*. It was a pet idea of Franklin Roosevelt, whose 1944 remark to Harry Hopkins the authors quote: "We ought to have two real parties—one liberal and the other conservative." Schattschneider made the same argument and inspired an American Political Science Association committee to press it further,

undoubtedly sharing Roosevelt's assumption that the liberal party would win most of the time. You see Schattschneiderism also in the writings of liberal congressman Richard Bolling, who urged Speaker Sam Rayburn in the 1950s to force Southern and non-Southern conservative Democrats to vote for the whole liberal agenda. (As Richard and Lynne Cheney note in their 1983 book, *Kings of the Hill*, Rayburn, a lonely bachelor with no hobbies, had no intention of risking his post that way.) But there was no automatic mechanism that could force Southern Democrats to vote for liberal policies that were unpopular in their states and districts.

Still, the Schattschneiderists had a point. Party preferences in mid-century America were lagging indicators, based often on long-ago events and historic experiences that continued to reverberate more than current party platforms. Civil War loyalists were visible on the political map, in the states carried by Strom Thurmond in 1948 and George Wallace in 1968; in mountain redoubts in West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama that voted against secession in 1861; in non-metropolitan counties westward from New England through upstate New York and northeast Ohio to northern Illinois, the core constituency of Frémont in 1856 and Lincoln in 1860. Protestant hostility to Irish Catholic immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s was glar-

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ingly apparent in the results of the 1960 presidential race, as were the Baptist and Presbyterian 19th-century fears of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. More recent events like the union victories in 1937-38 sitdown strikes made steel and auto factory towns Democratic bastions, while postwar prosperity opened affluent Southern cities to voting Republican.

Meanwhile, party urban machines were decaying. Wartime and postwar prosperity reduced the demand for patronage jobs, white ethnics were leaving central cities for suburbs, and New Deal welfare and Social Security programs reduced the need for turkeys at Thanksgiving. Schlozman and Rosenfeld note the renomination of New York Mayor Robert Wagner over the opposition of the borough bosses in 1961 (I remember being there, in the days of the 15-cent subway fare and 25-cent pizza slices, reading the tabloid headlines on the primary). They cite canonical works on the subject, like James Q. Wilson's book on Manhattan "reform" Democrats, *The Amateur Democrat* (1966), and Edwin O'Connor's novel about the demise of a thinly disguised five-time Boston mayor James Michael Curley, *The Last Hurrah* (1956). (I remember a woman in Boston explaining, "I just go down the ballot and vote for all the good Irish names.") Voter turnout, stagnant in the 1940s, rose sharply in 1952 and peaked in 1960, then fell far below 19th-century levels.

"THERE ARE THREE GROUPS OF importance in a Democratic convention," wrote Democratic elder James Rowe, one-time New Deal aide and longtime Lyndon Johnson confidant, to Vice President Hubert Humphrey in 1965: "They are the bosses, the liberals, and the Southerners." But by 1968 things had changed, as Nichter explains in *The Year That Broke Politics*. The liberals who had seen Humphrey as a champion for 20 years now opposed him for not breaking with Johnson and calling for a bombing halt in Vietnam. The Southern governors, torn between black protesters and Republican challengers, feared being linked with any national nominee. The bosses were pretty much out of business, with Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley the notable exception that proved the rule. These three groups could still produce many national convention delegates, but they had little capacity to do what party leaders from Van Buren to FDR's machine bosses had done: deliver votes in the general election. The parties were hollowed out.

With painstaking archival research and interviews of the diminishing number of 1968 eminences still available, Nichter presents an unfamiliar view of 1968. Johnson was still

thinking about running again up through the convention roll call in late August, he writes. A kind of non-aggression pact was made by LBJ and Richard Nixon, reinforced by confidential meetings with evangelist Billy Graham, who considered these two cynical politicians genuinely religious. Nichter takes pains to show, contrary to what many Democrats and journalists have believed for half a century, that Nixon hinted he would go slow on integration in the South, and that he used intermediary Anna Chennault to persuade the South Vietnamese to frustrate Johnson's peace negotiating efforts. As president, Nixon actually presided over massive desegregation of schools and workplaces, Nichter points out. And the South Vietnamese needed no prompting, he argues, to mistrust the Johnson Administration—whose chief Vietnam negotiator Averell Harriman and Defense Secretary Clark Clifford were eager to sell them out—and to take their chances with his successor.

WHAT WE DON'T FIND IN *THE YEAR That Broke Politics* is any mention of the single event that year that led directly, in Schlozman and Rosenfeld's view, to the hollowing out of the parties in the decade that followed. As it happens, I was an eyewitness to it and perhaps a more knowing one than network commentators. Sitting in the gallery at the Democratic National Convention, I watched the roll call on a proposal advanced by Eugene McCarthy supporters Anne Wexler, then a Connecticut housewife and later a shrewd Washington lobbyist, and Geoffrey Cowan, whom I'd known on the college newspaper and who currently holds an Annenberg chair at the University of Southern California, to establish a commission to reform the Democratic Party's nominating process. Lyndon Johnson, purportedly through an operative under the podium named John Criswell, had exercised ironclad control in roll call after roll call. But on this measure, as the states reported their votes, I could see divergences from the usual patterns. The Michigan delegation, under the controlling influence of Walter Reuther's United Auto Workers, cast a surprisingly large number of votes for the reform commission. So did the New York delegation: evidently the work of James Q. Wilson's "amateur Democrats" who supported Hubert Humphrey but opposed the Manhattan, Bronx, and Brooklyn bosses whose power had been diminished by Mayor Wagner's primary victory in 1961 and the election of his liberal Republican successor John Lindsay in 1965.

The result, Schlozman and Rosenfeld write, was "the transformation of party pro-

cedures, in reflection of a party vision itself shaped profoundly by the antiwar movement." The ensuing reform commissions, headed first by Senator George McGovern, who received some votes for president in 1968 from Robert Kennedy supporters, and then by Congressman Donald Fraser, interviewed by Nichter before his death in 2019 at age 95, went on to require election-year delegate selection processes, encouraged presidential primaries rather than party caucuses, and imposed something like sex and race quotas on party delegations. Mayor Daley, the dominant public face of the 1968 convention, was ousted together with other directly elected delegates at the 1972 convention in favor of an Illinois delegation headed by the Lakefront reform Alderman William Singer and the 30-year-old Jesse Jackson.

OVER THE ENSUING HALF-CENTURY, participation in political parties has diminished. Why bother toiling in local party organizations when they provided no patronage jobs and no influence in choosing presidential nominees? Presidents and, temporarily, presidential nominees set parties' policy priorities, and political consultants played key roles in statewide contests for governor and senator. In the process, the hold of history on voter behavior has been weakening. Sectarian Catholic and Protestant preoccupation ended after the 1960 election. The Civil War and the sitdown strikes faded in memories, although for two decades George Wallace and Jimmy Carter provided templates for Democratic congressional, state, and local pols to appeal to Southern voters who, on economic and foreign policy issues, became mostly Republican presidential voters. In 1956, 1964, 1972, and 1984, voters with living memories of depression and world war continued to deliver landslide re-elections to presidents of both parties who seemed to produce prosperity and peace. But by the 1990s those cohorts had mostly disappeared, and since 1984 no president has won more than 53% of the popular vote.

But even as the parties have hollowed out, in the last quarter-century the Schattschneiderists' prayers have been answered, and voter turnout has been rising toward 19th-century levels. By 1990 political scientists were theorizing that Republicans had a lock on the presidency and Democrats on Congress, just as the leading-edge baby boomers Bill Clinton and Newt Gingrich were about to prove them wrong. The result has been closer and more bitter partisan competition. From 1952 to 1988 Republicans won seven of ten presidential elections, with an average popular



vote plurality of 10%. And from 1954 to 1992 Democrats won majorities of House elections, from 1958 to 1992 with at least 243 seats, well above the 218 needed for a majority. But starting in 1992 Democrats have won five out of eight presidential elections, but with a popular vote plurality averaging just 4% of the popular vote. And starting in 1994, Republicans have won House majorities in eleven out of 15 elections, but have won more than 243 seats only once, in 2014. Over that stretch, starting in the 1990s and accelerating in 2016, Democrats have gained strength among affluent and college-educated white voters in the nation's 50-some million-plus metropolitan areas, while Republicans have gained strength among non-college graduates, most of them white but in the Donald Trump era including many Hispanics and at least some blacks.

**T**ODAY, HALF A CENTURY AFTER E.E. Schattschneider's death, we have a Schattschneiderite party system, with one clearly liberal party and one clearly conservative party, even as their issue focus has changed. In the 1990s Bill Clinton never thought of backing same-sex marriage or transgender rights and Newt Gingrich didn't fight for higher tariffs or a wall on the Mexican border. The result is the polarization aptly described by Rosenfeld and lamented by high-minded editorial writers. Over the last dozen years, only handfuls of senators and congressmen have been elected in states and districts carried by the other party's presidential candidate. In this polarized politics it is easy to predict which party's nominee will carry all but a half-dozen states, but it has gotten much harder to predict who will win 270 electoral votes.

Schlozman and Rosenfeld would like to see more Americans involved in political parties, to fill up what were even in 1968 hollow

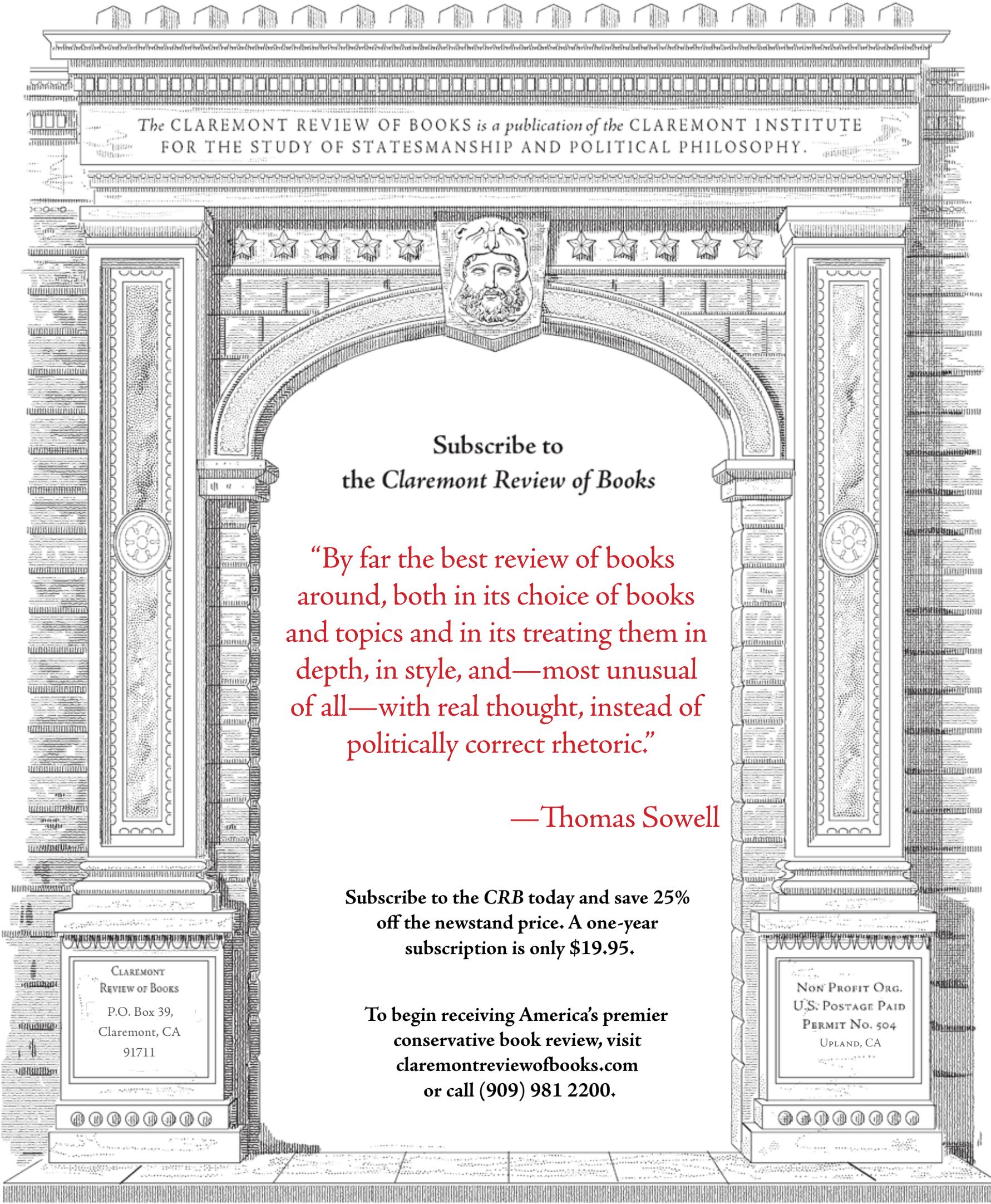
political husks with robust Tocquevillian involvement. But their proposals to accomplish this seem no more practical than reviving the frontier rallies of Andrew Jackson (whose name has been banished from what used to be Jefferson-Jackson dinners) or the Whigs' log cabin and hard cider festivals of 1840. They call for party caucuses rather than primaries to choose presidential convention delegates and for public financing of campaigns—two things unlikely to happen. They praise the Nevada Democratic Party-building of Senator Harry Reid and the Culinary Union, which doesn't seem easily replicable. Nevada is the only state with 70% of voters in one county where the one dominant industry, gaming, is peculiar and unusually unionized—and recent polling shows Donald Trump ahead in heavily non-college and Hispanic Nevada. They call on Democrats to concentrate on economic redistribution even while recognizing the party increasingly depends on, and is guided by, affluent white college graduates. Instead, Biden Democrats push for forgiveness of college debt and restoration of full deductibility of state and city income taxes, policies whose immediate economic benefits go overwhelmingly to affluent high earners.

**T**HEY HAVE EVEN LESS REALISTIC SUGGESTIONS for the Republican Party. They make much of its connections to the John Birch Society, which the party repudiated, as the Democratic Party repudiated its Popular Front connections with the Communist Party, some 60 and 70 years ago. They criticize Republicans for "exploitation of grievance and status resentments" as if the same could not be said of New Deal Democrats' denunciations of malefactors of great wealth. They want a Republican Party currently fixated by the man it's nominated a

third time to concentrate on local elections, and they condemn the party as "authoritarian" and "drift[ing] toward the pro-capital strand's suppression of popular politics and rapprochement with populist-strand extremists." Yet on the same page they look benignly, without scare adjectives, on Democrats' proposals to "end lifetime tenure for Supreme Court justices, pack federal courts, scrap the Electoral College, and admit new states into the union." A few pages later, they suggest that only Republicans have benefited from partisan redistricting (have they ever looked at the Illinois district lines?) and that the Republican Party needs to suffer "*repeated and substantial electoral losses*" (italics in the original).

One lesson of these two books is that it is easier to see the past than the present with clear eyes from a distance. Luke Nichter, looking back on Nelson Polsby's *annus horribilis*, now half a century in the past, sees further than the journalists and chroniclers of the time, who saw it through the lens of the New Deal historians and with an increasingly inexplicable animus against Richard Nixon. Daniel Schlozman and Sam Rosenfeld see clearly the development of America's two great political parties, free of liberal historians' enchantment with Andrew Jackson and the scorn of Southern Democrats and Mugwump Republicans for Reconstruction—but, alas, they stumble into meme-ridden partisanship when they focus close-up on the eras of Gingrich and Trump.

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