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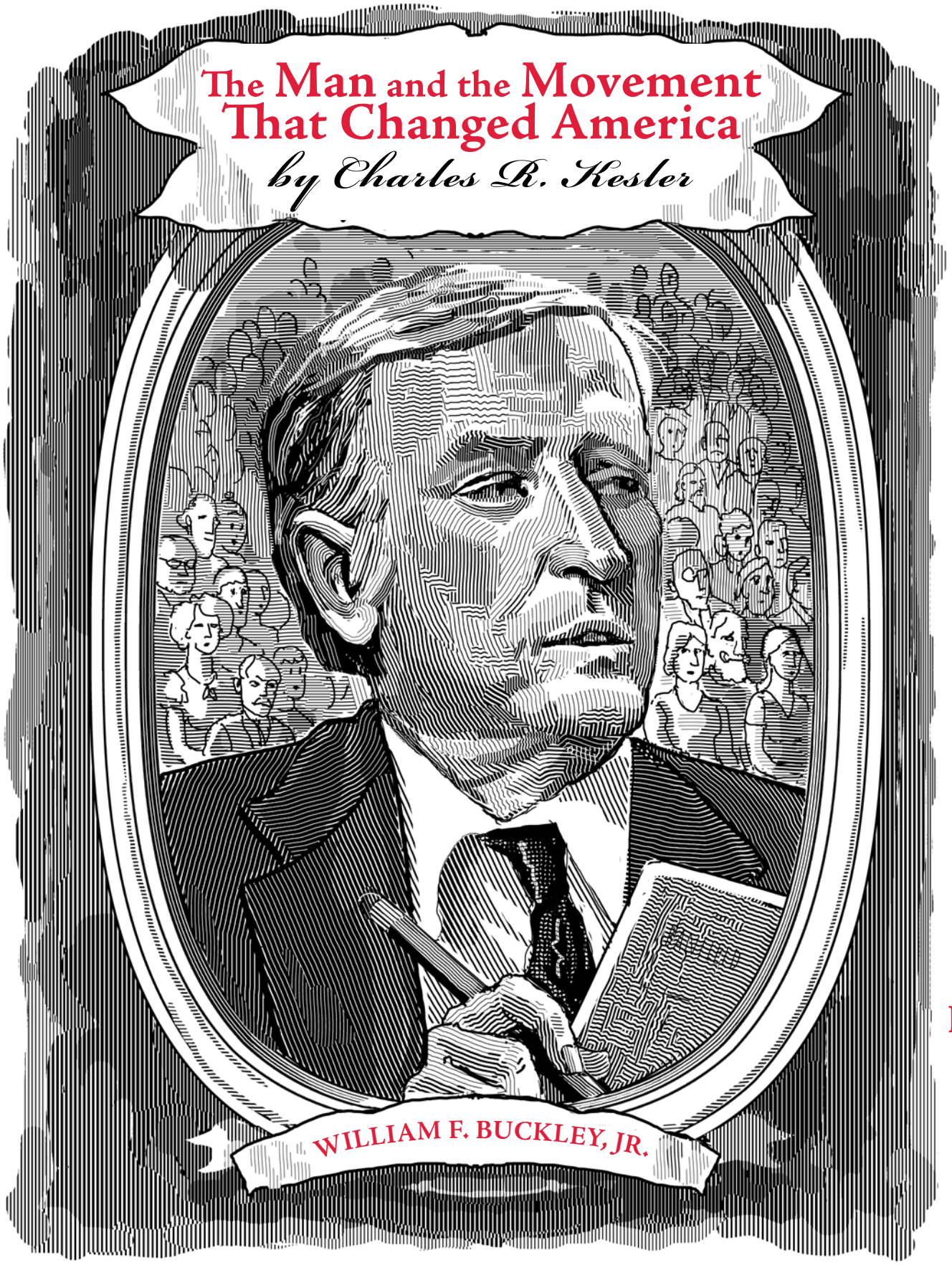

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Book Review by Victor Davis Hanson

Unsung Hero

The Fate of the Generals: MacArthur, Wainwright, and the Epic Battle for the Philippines, by Jonathan Horn.
Scribner, 448 pages, $30.99

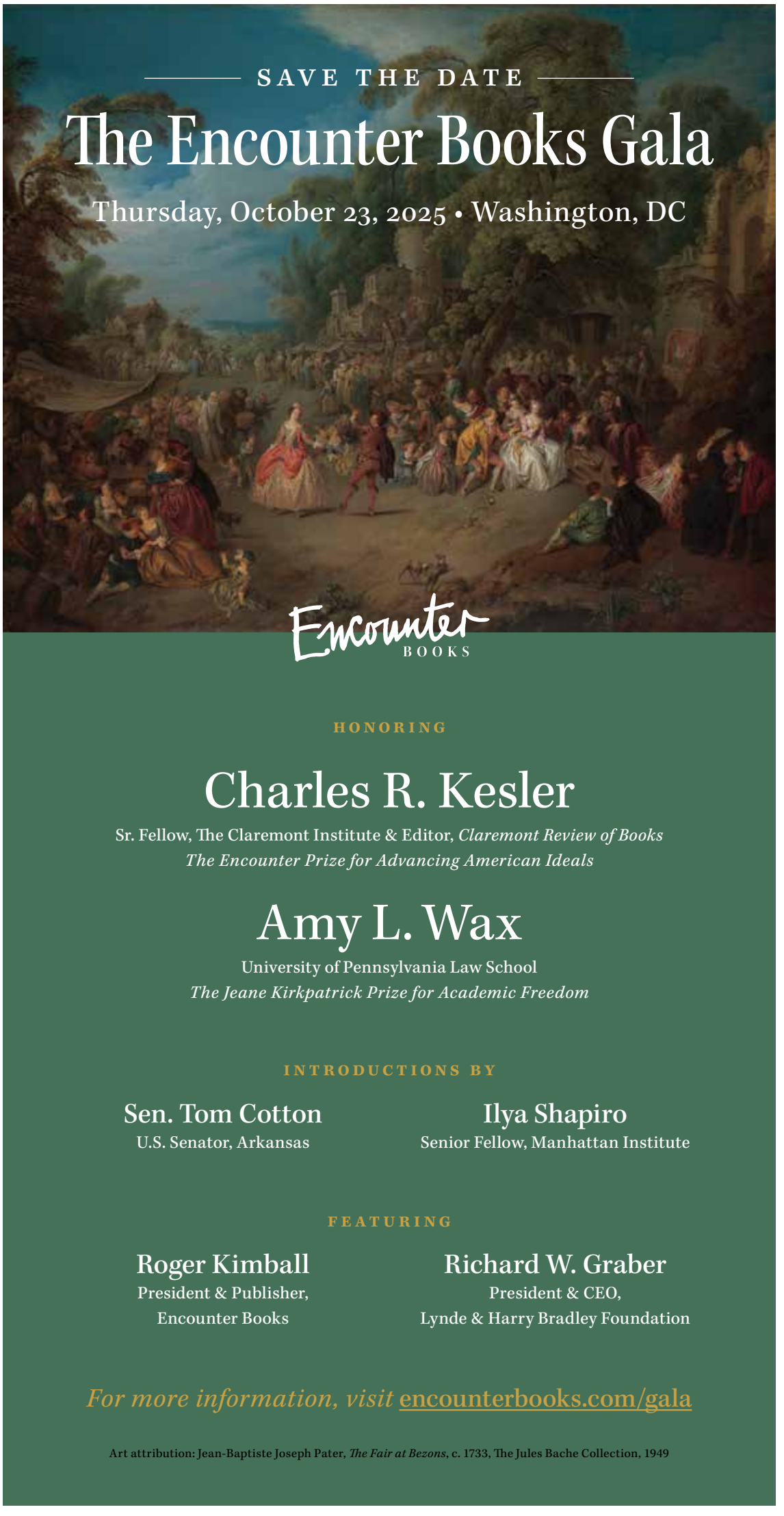
General Douglas MacArthur greets General Jonathan Wainwright in Yokohama's Grand Hotel. This is their first meeting since they parted in the Philippines in 1942.

As world war ii raged in europe, Douglas MacArthur, perhaps the best known and most decorated American general of his era, was called out of retirement at age 61 to command all United States Army Forces in the Far East. He was eager to return to Army headquarters in the Philippines, where he had earlier in retirement overseen the creation of the islands' defenses. By the time he was recalled to active duty in July 1941, most American strategists assumed that Manila and the surrounding American bases on Luzon would be the first targets of any preemptive Japanese strike—and that MacArthur would see to it that Japan was deterred.

Yet, there was always something baffling about MacArthur's illustrious Pacific tenure and daring escape to Australia before the Philippines fell on April 9, 1942. Although he was unable to receive enough guns, ammunition, food, and medicine to properly equip an effective resistance, especially given that he had only six months to prepare, on paper his combined American and Filipino forces were still impressive—numerically greater than the Japanese amphibious forces that eventually landed and took the islands.

MacArthur and his subordinate generals, Lieutenant General Jonathan M. Wainwright and Major General Edward P. King, commanded 31,095 troops, including some 16,643 Americans. In addition, there were another 6,000 American Army Air Force, Marines, and naval personnel scattered through the islands, and perhaps 100,000 or more Filipino auxiliary troops, as over against the 129,435 Japanese troops that invaded the islands. The Americans were determined not to follow the recent example of the British capitulation of Singapore on February 15, 1942, in which Lieutenant-General Arthur Ernest Percival had surrendered 85,000 British Commonwealth troops to a Japanese invading force half that size.

MacArthur had under his command the largest contingent of fighters and bombers based outside the United States. Air Force Major General Lewis H. Brereton had at his disposal 35 new B-17 Flying Fortress bombers, along with 12 B-18s. In theory, the American heavy bombers were better than anything comparable in the Japanese air forces. Often outclassed by the Mitsubishi A6M "Zero," Brereton's 91 new P-40 Warhawks had obtained at least near parity with the Japanese when used effectively, as they were with the veteran Flying Tigers of Claire Chennault's American Volunteer Group based in Burma. Nor were the naval forces commanded by Admiral Thomas



Hart, one of the Navy's more veteran officers, necessarily outclassed. Hart directed a heavy cruiser, a light cruiser, 13 destroyers, and, most importantly, 23 fairly new submarines, which he had long experience in commanding.

Nevertheless, after the Japanese struck Manila on December 8, 1941, several hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor, within days almost the entire American air fleet had been either destroyed on the ground or caught at a disadvantage in the air. The submarines were never fully utilized. MacArthur, who was also unable to unify properly the army, air, and naval commands, or coordinate his own ground forces in Bataan and Corregidor, took no blame for any of the tragic lapses.

Personally brave, MacArthur for over three subsequent months rarely left the fortified tunnels and bunkers on the island fortress of Corregidor, made impossible demands on his generals, was ordered to flee before the inevitable capitulation, and then never really forgave Wainwright for surrendering to the Japanese and allowing almost all American and Filipino forces to be captured.

There are dozens of biographies of MacArthur, and many accounts of the Philippines' tragic fall to the Japanese. But there have been few treatments of MacArthur's second-in-command Wainwright, who went on to spend three years in a number of Japanese prisoner-of-war camps. In *The Fate of the Generals: MacArthur, Wainwright, and the Epic Battle for the Philippines*, Jonathan Horn, a former White House speechwriter for George W. Bush who has previously written a book on George Washington and another on Robert E. Lee, offers month-by-month parallel biographies of two quite different generals covering their early years, their overlapping commands in the Philippines, and the critical decision each made—MacArthur's escape to Australia and Wainwright's choice to stay with his men—that changed their lives and, perhaps in some way, the course of the Pacific War itself.

Numerous times MacArthur had courted death on the front lines throughout his military career. But in the Philippines he was often belittled as "Dugout Doug" for his reluctance to visit the beleaguered at Bataan and help energize his doomed forces. Horn allows that an often-courageous MacArthur felt that his own irreplaceable genius was central to victory and thus had to be protected at all costs. Dwight Eisenhower later complained that MacArthur had been granted the Medal of Honor "for sitting in a hole" in Corregidor. Wainwright, on the other hand, as Horn notes, thought "it is important…to

sit on sandbags in the line of fire," deliberately exposing himself at Bataan.

Ultimately, Wainwright believed comprehensive surrender to the Japanese was the only way to spare his combined remaining force of 11,000 Americans and Filipinos from eventually being starved out or executed. MacArthur deeply resented Wainwright's surrender, in part because it called attention to MacArthur's own role in the loss of the islands. Some of his decisions made surrender almost inevitable for Wainwright, and it was sadly ironic that the general who escaped to freedom from the Philippines so often opportunistically second-guessed the general who chose to stay.

MacArthur could be the most loyal and magnanimous of commanders, and often the most petty, spiteful, and jealous—even, or especially, to his friends. He opposed any talk of honoring the imprisoned Wainwright in absentia even as reports filtered back that he was sick and failing under brutal treatment from his captors. Although MacArthur had earlier politicked shamelessly to get his first Medal of Honor when he was wounded in World War I, he now repeated his insider lobbying to deny granting Wainwright the same. Later, MacArthur reversed himself and loudly applauded Wainwright's receiving the Medal of Honor, but only because his subordinate was now a national hero.

Although Horn's ostensible theme is that each man according to his station proved inspiring and invaluable, the author's sympathies are clearly with the underappreciated Wainwright, who willingly became the highest-ranking U.S. officer to be imprisoned by the Japanese. Horn has examined much of Wainwright's previously ignored diaries and personal correspondence which for the first time provide a vivid picture of the conditions he endured and his own confusion about his relationship with MacArthur. Wainwright spent his incarceration periodically transferred throughout the Japanese prison archipelago, amid torment, near starvation, and physical cruelty. Shut off from most news in his confinement, he worried nonstop that back home he was already considered cowardly for surrendering, especially given the widely reported desire from MacArthur in distant Australia that Wainwright fight to the bitter end.

No matter. At war's end, the debilitated Wainwright would live to see the Philippines liberated and the two tough Japanese generals—the conqueror Masaharu Homma, whom he despised ("that double bastard Homma"), and Tomoyuki Yamashita, who later lost the Philippines to MacArthur—found guilty of war crimes and executed. The public greeted the emaciated Wainwright as an authentic American hero.

By contrast, the far better-known MacArthur soon became embroiled in a series of political and military controversies, beginning with the Korean War. His command in Korea was indicative of a long pattern in which he often proved overconfident, was caught by surprise, and suffered catastrophic setbacks. The best example is the disastrous 1950 American winter retreat when hundreds of thousands of Communist Chinese crossed the Yalu River into Korea, despite MacArthur's assurance to the Pentagon that his long, attenuated supply lines were unlikely to be attacked.

That said, MacArthur's powers of recovery were just as dramatic. His Operation Cartwheel campaign in 1943-44 had ensured the recapture of the Philippines. Later, the September 1950 Inchon Landing in North Korea—opposed by most of MacArthur's Pentagon superiors—saved the nearly lost American deployment and turned the war around.

Horn includes valuable vignettes of feisty President Harry Truman's natural empathy for the plain-speaking, modest, hard-drinking Wainwright. His middle-class roots and habitual self-deprecation appealed to the like-minded Truman, who not only fired MacArthur from supreme command of the Korean War, but, as Horn makes clear, made no secret that he utterly loathed the five-star general.

Like MacArthur's later dutiful subordinate in Korea, the brilliant Matthew Ridgway, Lieutenant General Wainwright proved loyal to the end. He either never knew or simply dismissed reports that MacArthur had often scapegoated him and blocked deserved avenues of his commemoration. Wainwright nominated the general for president at the 1948 Republican National Convention.

But Wainwright never fully recovered from his captivity, made worse by battling alcohol and an array of ailments. He died at age 70 in 1953. MacArthur didn't attend the funeral—which infuriated Truman, who as he aged grew even more scornful of MacArthur. "The former president remained convinced," Horn writes, "that his predecessor in office should have ordered Wainwright out of the Philippines and left MacArthur behind."

In the end, what are we to make of these two generals, whose lives intertwined in the tragic months of the doomed Philippines? Although MacArthur certainly possessed military genius—especially in his strategic foresight about how the Japanese Empire could best be dismantled, defeated, humiliated, and reborn as a consensual democracy under his own consulship—the more ordinary Wainwright emerges as the better man, if perhaps the less capable general. Horn soberly implies that just as Wainwright probably could not have led the vast array of U.S. forces in the Pacific to victory, MacArthur could not have withstood the indignity of surrendering to the Japanese, enduring three years of imprisonment, and ceding his command to others. As Horn presents them, each was heroic in his own way, but neither could have been so if his respective role had been reversed.

Even so, *The Fate of the Generals* was written not so much to contrast the two generals' command abilities—their overlapping tenures in the Philippines were brief—but to commemorate an unsung American hero who has never properly received his due. Jonathan Horn is too good a historian, however, to obsess over MacArthur's bothersome character flaws, vanities, and egotism. And so, he leaves us with a paradox of human nature: that the supremely talented but flawed human being whom we may not admire, we may well *need*—and treat better than we do his moral superior.

Victor Davis Hanson is the Martin and Illie Anderson Senior Fellow of Classics and Military History at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, and the author, most recently, of The End of Everything: How Wars Descend into Annihilation *(Basic Books).*

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