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Will There Always Be an England?

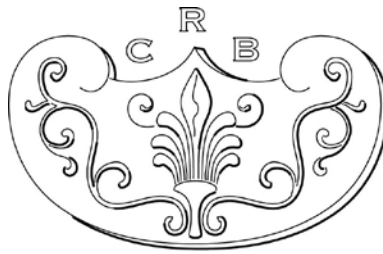
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Essay by Christopher Caldwell

LAND'S END

Mass migration has radicalized the United Kingdom.

“REMEMBER,” NIGEL FARAGE SAID IN late July in his office near Parliament, “I am the *moderate...reasonable...democratic...experienced...grown-up* face of the fightback. If I lose, just you wait.”

For nearly 30 years, Farage (rhymes with “barrage”) has been the most influential British voice of what he calls the fightback, and his detractors call populism. At the turn of this century, as a member of the UK Independence Party (UKIP), he fought to “save the pound” at a time when London elites hoped to abandon England’s ancient currency for the European Union’s Euro. The pound survived, and in 2010 the Euro crashed. Almost alone among top politicians back then, Farage called for Britain to leave the E.U. outright. By 2016, a majority of his countrymen agreed. They broke their European ties in the so-called Brexit referendum, even if three years of parliamentary and judicial chicanery delayed Britain’s exit till 2020. (See “Why Hasn’t Brexit Happened?” Summer 2019.) Winsome, bibulous, half-prophet and half-clown, he has a habit of being vindicated.

Farage has been warning for a decade that immigration—rather than economic growth

or global warming or animal rights—is the issue that will determine whether Brexit succeeds and Britain survives. The signs are not good. To its population of 69 million the United Kingdom has been adding almost a million migrants each year, overwhelmingly from outside of Europe. Tens of thousands of them are smuggled onto the country’s south coast in motorized “small boats,” which authorities have proved unable or unwilling to stop. Skippers used to hit the beaches at high speed, sending unknown young men running up streets and scattering across fields. Lately, they have entered port in a more orderly way. There’s no reason not to. Migrants render themselves undeportable by applying for political asylum, confident of being swiftly released into British society whether their application is approved or not. Thirteen boats arrived in Dover alone on one afternoon in late July, just as Donald Trump was landing in Scotland to open a golf course. The *Times* of London bannered across its front page: “Trump Flies in to Warn: Migration is Killing You.”

Even the large part of the British population that deplores Trump tends to agree. A

frequent visitor to Mar-a-Lago during the president’s four years in the wilderness, Farage has become a national darling. His Reform UK, Britain’s newest political party, won seats for him and four others in last year’s elections, taking 14% of the vote. It has grown swiftly and steadily since, now commanding the allegiance of 31% of the electorate. That is way ahead of the country’s fragmented Conservative Party, which stands at 17%, having lost more than two-thirds of its parliamentary seats after Boris Johnson, having won Brexit, opened the floodgates to immigration. Reform is also way ahead of Labour, which in last year’s election, due to the mismatch of the British two-party electoral system with a four-party field, won an invincible parliamentary majority (412 of 650 seats) with just a third of the vote (33.7%). That huge majority has radicalized Labour at a time of growing conservatism, making Prime Minister Keir Starmer’s government less popular with every passing month. It now has the backing of just 22% of the country. According to Matthew Goodwin, a sociologist formerly at the University of Kent who has abandoned academia to join Farage’s movement, Reform commands a ma-



jority of those who voted for Brexit in 2016 and a third of those who voted for the Conservatives last year. It is the top party among the working classes and the top party among men. And this despite a dire shortage of top-level talent at the level below Farage, not to mention Farage's own clumsiness in managing his party's growing right wing.

Though the strength of Reform is not surprising, the upshot is shocking. On current trends, British voters could very soon destroy Britain's venerable Conservatives (by some reckonings the oldest political party in the world), along with its two-party system and part of its social contract—the part that, since the Cold War, has been built on porous borders and imported notions of human rights. That so many in Britain have grown comfortable with the prospect of systemic demolition may reflect the influence of Trumpism. Or it may be a harbinger of something even more disruptive.

English Protest

THIS JULY PROTESTERS GATHERED FOR several days in front of the Bell Hotel in the Essex town of Epping and shouted, "We want our country back!" Over the past five years, the government has commandeered hundreds of big hotels and converted them into housing for asylum seekers, which is more often than not a euphemism for "illegal immigrants." Most of them are young men. English people aren't happy with the arrangement. Neither are the migrants themselves. Far from home, bored, subsidized by the government, and barred in most cases from working, they have a tendency to misbehave. In Epping, one of the Bell's residents had been arrested for the sexual assault of a 14-year-old girl.

It might seem an isolated incident, but the public's patience is at an end. Last summer, ethnic English people rioted in the city of Southport at the news that a young man of migrant background had crept into a Taylor Swift-themed dance party being held for little girls and stabbed a dozen of them, killing Alice da Silva Aguiar (age 9), Bebe King (6), and Elsie Dot Stancombe (7). He was an English-born son of Rwandans, as it turned out. Protests spread nationwide. Ever since, the country has been on edge at any misdeed involving migrants, children, sex, or violence, as well as at efforts to sweep them under the rug.

The Starmer government has, from the outset, shown no sympathy for the protests. "I won't shy away from calling it what it is," the prime minister said after the Southport riots: "Far-right thuggery." Starmer managed last

year's crisis through so-called COBRA meetings, cabinet-level gatherings usually reserved for national security emergencies, and used anti-terrorism law to inflict draconian penalties on protesters. One of them, a Birmingham mother named Lucy Connolly, became a cause célèbre. She was sentenced to two years and seven months of prison for tweeting on the day of the attacks:

Mass deportation now, set fire to all the f-cking hotels full of the bastards for all I care, while you're at it take the treacherous government and politicians with them. I feel physically sick knowing what these families will now have to endure. If that makes me racist so be it.

It is angry speech, certainly, but newspapers and social media were quick to note that many offenders had been punished more leniently for outright violence than Connolly was for blowing off steam. One comparison went viral: Against Connolly's two-plus years for mistweetment, someone named Mohamed Abbkr had merely been sent to a hospital for spraying two old men with gasoline and lighting them on fire. The post was somewhat misleading, as media fact-checkers rushed to point out: Abbkr was found guilty of attempted murder. But to many English people, it was evidence that Starmer and his government did not consider England *their* country anymore. Starmer is a thoroughly English product of suburban Sussex and of the late baby boom. But he's also an international human rights lawyer, and has been ill-equipped to address an uprising carried out in the language of nationalism, a language he speaks only haltingly. When Connolly was ordered released in late August after serving more than a year of her sentence, Starmer was of two minds. He pronounced himself "strongly in favor of free speech" but "equally against incitement to violence."

In January of this year, Elon Musk condemned Starmer and Jess Phillips, his secretary charged with preventing violence against women, for having blocked an investigation into the crimes of so-called "grooming gangs" in the city of Oldham. It is a problem that has arisen in dozens of cities since the start of this century. Grooming gangs—which, outside of government reports, are now more often called "rape gangs"—generally consisted of Muslim men, who coerced teenage girls into sex, in many cases trafficking them to friends. Some of the men were taxi drivers, others drug dealers. Their victims were vulnerable (some underage or in foster care, others homeless or addicted) and almost all

were white. Hundreds of convictions have been slowly won over the decades, but fresh cases keep emerging, and the problem has proved almost impossible to debate in public. It is now evident that "exploitation was not investigated because of nervousness about race," to quote a landmark study done in Telford in 2022 that found a thousand girls had been abused or raped there. That was the year Musk bought Twitter, and by then the subject had been virtually "deplatformed."

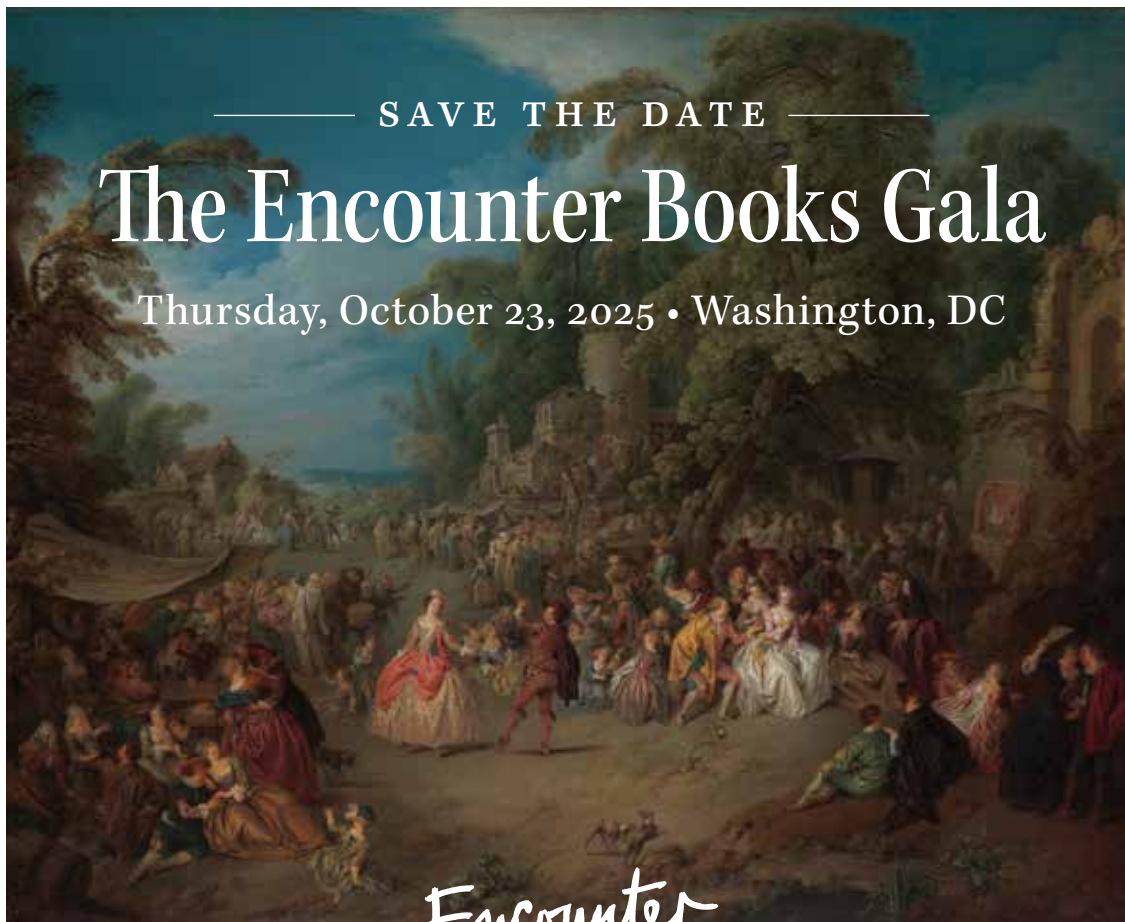
Musk changed that, but reticence persists. Starmer accused Musk of spreading "lies and misinformation" about the gangs. That is the usual view in government circles. Neil O'Brien, a Tory M.P. with a big online following among the party's younger and more intellectual right-wingers, has called the U.K. bureaucracy a "data desert," noting that ethnic statistics, so fastidiously reported when it comes to allocating benefits, are increasingly hidden when it comes to crime. O'Brien reported in his Substack that in 2010 the ethnicity of the perpetrator was reported in 93% of shoplifting cases nationwide. Today it's just 70%.

Speech Codes

IN JULY, THE GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCED that it would—against strong public sentiment to the contrary—lower the voting age to 16 before the next national elections. Labour strategists believe that extending the vote to an age cohort that is more progressive and less ethnically English will help close the lead that Reform has built up over Labour on immigration issues. This may be a mistake. Not only Reform but also dissident leftists around the former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn appear to be running just as strong among 16- to 18-year-olds. A less-noticed provision in the same legislation would bring tough new sentences for offenses involving "hostility towards politicians."

Even before the Southport riots and demonstrations, people were talking about "two-tier policing"—one standard of law enforcement for ethnic minorities, another (more severe) standard for whites. But in Southport's wake, large parts of the public told pollsters that they saw the entire British system of law enforcement as outright biased in favor of ethnic minorities: 31% thought the Starmer government was more tolerant of Muslim lawbreakers than of others, versus 7% who thought it was less tolerant; only 6% thought it was more tolerant of right-wingers, versus 44% who said less tolerant. After Southport, such sentiments became irrepressible.

A visitor to England twelve months after the 2024 unrest is struck by two things. First,



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that strenuous attempts are being made to police speech across the country. Second, that they are failing. The taboos have been overwhelmed by swarms of violators. Anything involving race, migration, money, and secrecy is hotly debated online. In July it emerged that the government had hidden a scandal involving all of those things. In 2022, some bumbler in the British Ministry of Defence briefly exposed online a list of Afghans who had aided the British war effort in Afghanistan since 9/11. It was not clear whether anyone had noticed, but Britain's helpers might be imperiled. The government reckoned better safe than sorry. A decision was made to bring more than 20,000 Afghans to England at a cost of more than £6 billion (\$8 billion). The operation was carried out in extreme secrecy, so as not to upset public opinion—Afghan crime rates in England are especially high. In August, the *Daily Mail* revealed that two Afghan immigrants in Warwickshire had been charged with the abduction, “strangulation,” and rape of a 12-year-old girl, and that police had pressured local councilmen not to reveal the ethnicity of the subjects for fear of “inflaming community tensions.”

The opposition has not been stopped or daunted, merely reshaped into something that is more online and more anonymous. A whole new vocabulary has emerged to describe British politics: Not just “two-tier,” but “Boriswave,” “Deliveroo economy,” and “Yookay.”

The Boriswave is the name online commentators have given to the unprecedented migration levels of the last half-decade. After having arduously won Brexit for the British electorate—which had voted for it largely to control borders and stop immigration—Prime Minister Boris Johnson was confronted with the COVID epidemic. (He himself caught COVID early on and nearly died of it.) Whatever else it may have done, COVID stopped migration altogether. Deluded by Office for Budget Responsibility statistical models that scored migrants as a straightforward increase to the country's wealth, Johnson and his advisors came to the conclusion that the shortfall in immigration was *in and of itself* an economic emergency. His cabinet relaxed its regulations on immigrants and things went calamitously wrong. In little more than three years, between 2021 and 2024, Britain admitted 4.5 million immigrants—close to 7% of the country's population today. Eighty-one percent of them were non-E.U. nationals, and they were arriving at a time when more native Britons were leaving the country than returning. (There are now, for example, a quarter of a million Britons living in Dubai alone.)



The result is a dramatic deterioration in the country's demographic stability. More than 40% of babies born in England last year have at least one foreign-born parent. And since Brexit, those parents have increasingly come from outside Europe. Matthew Goodwin of Reform released a list of the top ten countries from which foreign-born mothers hail: India, Pakistan, Nigeria, Romania, Bangladesh, Poland, Ghana, Afghanistan, Albania, and Iraq. White British people will be a minority in the U.K. by the year 2063.

The expression "Deliveroo economy" refers to the social need that the newest migrants, whether asylum seekers or not, most visibly fill. They work shuttling food to upper-middle-class urbanites for the British equivalents of DoorDash and Uber Eats. Replacing technology with household help is not a route to higher productivity. It seems more like a route out of the First World and into the Third.

Wholesale demographic change has brought a change, too, in the political disposition of the natives. A substantial part simply cannot accept as legitimate that 7% of the population of a democracy could simply have been transplanted into it overnight, without any semblance of democratic deliberation. The younger U.K. generation is especially agitated by these developments. People born since the end of the Cold War have never been under any illusion that they might somehow retreat from or buy their way out of the unpleasantnesses of multiculturalism and globalization. Imagine what life looks like for an English person born in 1990. He woke up to politics in 2005. His first political experience was the U.S.-led bloodbath in Iraq, in which Britain played an ignominious supporting role, followed by a series of scandals that implicated the government of Tony Blair in various wartime lies. Such a voter would have entered university just as the financial markets crashed—bringing a decline in Britain's standing and income that has turned out to be permanent. For this hypothetical 35-year-old, Britain has *always* been an indebted, disorderly, multicultural country in which the natives are invoked only when their customs are being deplored as prejudices. The baby boom leaders who presided over an uncompensated dismantling of these customs now struggle to find euphemisms for what they've done.

The U.K. has become "Yookay." That is what the country is called in the extraordinary X feed "Yookay Aesthetics," curated by the pseudonymous Drukpa Kunley (the name is that of a 16th-century Tibetan Buddhist monk, poet, and sexologist *avant la lettre*), who posts photos, video shorts, and articles that

generally have the effect of making one vaguely sad: like an immigrant barmaid who doesn't know how to pour a pint of beer, or a podcast clip of two immigrants discussing how much they hate non-Muslims, under the heading "Integration Update." Alongside a picture of a pretty and tidy Japanese girl in an enviably orderly Japan, captioned "Stuck in the past," one finds the text "RIDDLE ME THIS: If Japan is so great, where are its Pakistani Vape Shops?" The tone is always deadpan in this way: spitting back propaganda about the economic and cultural blessings of "diversity" in a way that makes it look not well-meaning and progressive but cynical and destructive.

Looking for the Real Thing

THERE ARE TWO EXTRAORDINARY ANONYMOUS magazines on Substack that give a good idea of how young people understand Britain today. The *Pimlico Journal* is more focused on policy that might alter the course of

Conservatives make the retrospective assessment that Britain was not altogether a free country when it was saddled with the immigration policies that have broken it.

Britain's decline. *J'accuse* tends more to polemic. Together they are like a combination of Enoch Powell and Bronze Age Pervert. Although *J'accuse* is the edgier and more radical of the two, both are inclined to view the politics that brought Britain to this pass as undemocratic and illegitimate. Donald Trump, while not especially admired by either journal, is of interest to both as an example—particularly insofar as he has managed the beginnings of a program of mass deportation by sending 600 flights to 16 countries in his first half-year in office.

One of the writers at *J'accuse*, the presumably pseudonymous Rhodes Napier, considers a ramped-up version of Trump-inspired "multilateral resettlement" a necessary element of fixing Britain. "Both Third World immigrants and countries," he writes, "are bad faith actors which have abused the sentimentality of Westerners for the past 70 years." Another *J'accuse* writer, George Ruska, has a dark idea of how the Starmer government worked with immigrant gangs to suppress native-English protests in the

wake of the Southport killings: "The police," he writes, "were only able to eventually outnumber protestors because they de facto allied with the kind of mobs which had been previously besieging their stations in Manchester." He is also interested in Israel, but not in the usual way European youth are these days: he would like to see ethnic Britons protect themselves by emulating the *shomrim* self-defense groups that have been started by Orthodox Jews in communities where they are menaced. Napier favors ethnic consciousness-raising of the sort Israel has done since the Holocaust. He also wants to legalize guns.

A large part of British conservative youth is tribalizing in an ethnic way. That is not working to the advantage of a Conservative Party that must regenerate itself after its worst-ever election defeat. Since November the party has been headed by Kemi Badenoch, a computer engineer born of Nigerian parents in England in 1980 but educated mostly in Nigeria before returning to Sussex to attend university in the 1990s. She has very good business and budgetary sense and might have made a superb successor to Margaret Thatcher. In her first big economic speech she took aim at Britain's major social problem besides immigration: an epidemic of malingering. A quarter of working-age people are now classified as disabled in some way, and people in their early twenties are more likely than people in their early forties not to be working due to "ill health." Badenoch sees society divided between 28 million "makers" and 28 million "takers." This holds out the prospect of uniting the party's Thatcherite inheritance with some of its new concerns about migrant freeloading, and Badenoch has the support of Charles Moore, Francis Maude, Michael Gove, and other party elders. But as young people come to talk about remigration and self-defense, they are looking for something harder, and Badenoch's immigrant story, though it might have been the key to her appeal a decade ago, is today as much a liability as an asset.

Younger Tories seem to be more excited by Robert Jenrick, who lost a close-fought leadership contest against Badenoch a year ago. Jenrick, in Parliament since 2014, has begun to talk about mass deportation. He has made a series of TikTok-friendly videos in which he confronts ethnic youths turnstile-jumping and committing petty crime in London's Tube. A group of rebellious Tories are more or less aligned with him—Nick Timothy, the most conservative of ex-prime minister Theresa May's advisors in the years after the passage of Brexit; Neil O'Brien, the gadfly troubled by Britain's unwillingness to face hard ethnic



truths; and Katie Lam, the young M.P. who in April gave a shocking speech about grooming gangs in the House of Commons in which she stressed their racial element and accused the government of refusing to launch investigations that had been ordered by Parliament. “The girls we are talking about, Mister Speaker,” Lam began:

are predominantly white. The men who preyed on them were predominantly Muslim, generally either from Pakistan or of Pakistani heritage. One of the victims from Dewsbury was told by her rapist, “We’re here to f-ck all the white girls and f-ck the government.” Will the minister accept that, in many cases, these cases were racially and religiously aggravated?

People knowledgeable about the 120-strong Tory caucus in Parliament say that by late summer Badenoch probably commanded the loyalty of only a quarter of them, while Jenrick may have the sympathies of a third. Still, Jenrick has a couple of problems. The part of the Conservative electorate that he is courting is the part that has the fewest compunctions about defecting to Farage. Attractive to the party base though his positions may be, they are relatively new on him, and may be lightly worn. A Cambridge grad, he was at home with the moderate, Europhile, aristocratic party of David Cameron for as long as the going was good. Jenrick has now positioned himself “to the right” of Farage, come up with a more internally consistent program, and given signs that he is a more attentive manager—but Ron DeSantis did the same thing in 2024. Voters seem to pre-

fer the Real Thing to the More Coherent Thing. Farage doesn’t seem to worry about Jenrick, whom he refers to as “Robert Generic,” while mocking his “Damascene conversion to Farageism.”

Goodbye to All That

ALMOST ALL OF BRITAIN’S CONSERVATIVE leaders are converts of a sort. Something like an annulment is underway, a retrospective assessment that Britain was not altogether a free country when it was saddled with the immigration policies that have broken it. What five years ago would have been called “caring” or “good government” is increasingly being cast as incompetence:

- When Keir Starmer scrambled to increase his country’s defense budget to 5% in the wake of Donald Trump’s challenge to Europe’s leaders, his detractors accused him of defending against threats like the Ukraine war, which had no possibility of reaching Britain’s shores, rather than threats like the “small boats,” which already had.
- When Energy secretary Ed Miliband suggested building 41 windmills, each of them 70 stories high, in the middle of the scenic Pennine Hills, the romantic backdrop of Emily Brontë’s *Wuthering Heights*, columnist Simon Jenkins was dumbstruck: “That a foreign conglomerate can honestly expect to be subsidized by the British taxpayer to wreck the Pennine Hills suggests a cabinet with no idea what merits protection and what does not.”
- When Trevor Phillips, the old Blair-era ethnic-policy guru, asserted that “the key

aim of policy should not be zero immigration but orderly flow,” he was clearly stuck in the world of a generation ago, when opposition to immigration meant complaining about litter in ethnic neighborhoods—not today’s countrywide sense that that older generation looked on lazily while the land of its forefathers was permitted to die.

Whomever Britain chooses to lead it away from its era of multiculturalism, something big is going to change. In the United States, most deep reforms must travel a narrow road of constitutionality and survive the scrutiny of the Supreme Court. Britain has a different constitution. The democratic prerogatives of the British Parliament are almost absolute. It is true that, at the turn of the century, Blair enshrined the European Convention of Human Rights in British law and empowered a Supreme Court to vet parliamentary decisions. For now, such institutions and treaties impede any program of large-scale deportation. On the other hand, Britain’s proudly (or notoriously) sovereign parliament could abolish these Blairite guardrails in an afternoon. All three conservative leaders—Farage, Badenoch, and Jenrick—have, in one way or another, declared themselves open to the idea. Even relative to Brexit, or to what Donald Trump has done thus far in the United States, this would be an earthquake. It would take at least until the next election, but on present trends it cannot be ruled out. Maybe that will turn out to be what Brexit was for.

Christopher Caldwell is a contributing editor of the Claremont Review of Books.

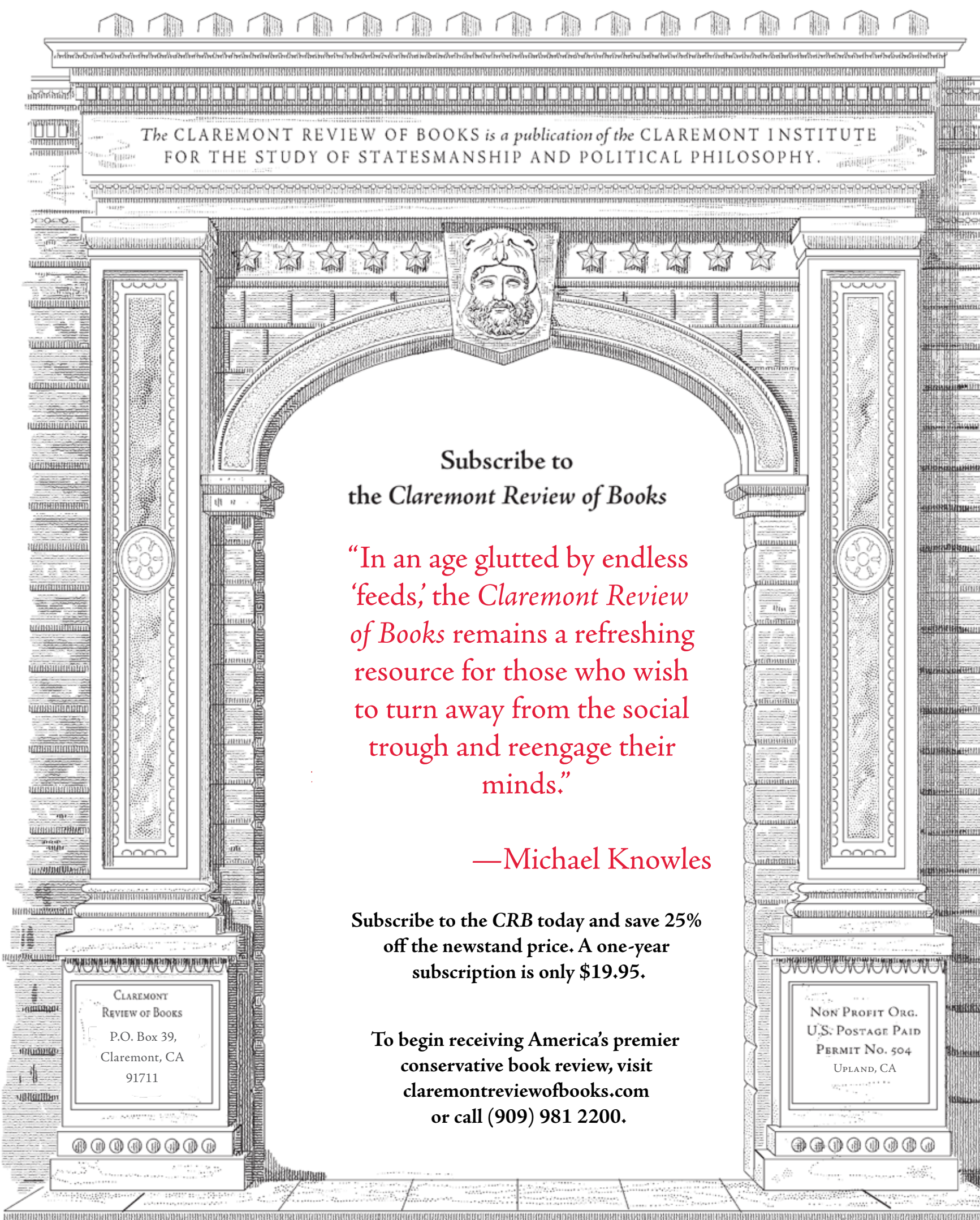
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