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SUMMER 2020

Edited by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.



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THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR  
Summer 2020

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### EDITORIAL OFFICE

The American Spectator

122 S. Royal Street

Alexandria, VA 22314

703-807-2011

editor@spectator.org

www.spectator.org

The American Spectator, LLC is a subsidiary of The American Spectator Foundation.

**OFFICE MANAGER:** Cathy Cook

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# It's Not Good

by Wlady Pleszczynski

This was going to be a reopening issue. Not an end-of-the-world issue. But then right before press time, three months of shutdown (and counting, in too many different places) took on a different coloring. Increasingly during that quarter one had had the sense that this was the way the world ends — with a whimper. A nation that allows itself to soften hastens its own demise. Turns out we had set ourselves up for something a lot more devastating.

By April, out of some sort of panic or entrenched fear, the country had simply stopped functioning. Rather than try to gain some perspective on what had happened and what we were doing to ourselves, certain parts of the country, mainly those under left-wing misrule, devoted all their energies to keeping things shut down, the better to grow their power. It all seemed to come down to wearing masks, indoors, outdoors, in the shower, and probably in the privacy of one's bedroom as well.

Interestingly, no government agency bothered to check on whether the masks in question worked or even comported with federal standards. But once something becomes a fashion and status symbol, nothing else matters. Just ask Joe Biden — if he's ever remembered for anything it'll be the black mask that covered more than half his face on Memorial Day. In the open air. Whose idea was it to muzzle him like that?

Social distancing continues, but in unexpected ways. Rioters, looters, and many, many peaceful protesters totally untroubled about providing cover for such upstanding aggrieved young people have set the new tone. In these circumstances six feet of separation gave way to six (or fewer) inches. And everyone who had brayed for endless shutdown thought the new intimacy was great, the better to shut down everything they abhor about the country they loathe.

Consequently, it's now imaginable to see their agenda actually succeeding: property undefended, businesses torched, jails emptied, police forces dismantled, elections fixed or simply declared invalid if the results fail to comport to the one acceptable outcome. You think the Electoral College will survive? Or July 4? Or Christmas Day? Free speech, or what's left of it? Oh, and yes, make way for reparations. The latest round sum bandied about: \$14 trillion. Let's be fair. It'll probably turn out that that's just the first round.

There's a new way of conducting business in the land. A lot of it could be seen in action along not even a half block of 16th Street north of Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C. There was historic St. John's Episcopal Church, at the corner of H Street. By some miracle a fire set in its basement did

not engulf the rest of the church. The local media gave it no meaningful coverage, at least not until President Trump showed up the next day to draw attention to it. For his troubles, he was denounced by the local Episcopal bishop. Charity appears to be in short supply.

Moving past the church one comes across the imposing headquarters of the AFL–CIO. Whoever passed by it the night they tried to burn the church down also defaced Big Labor's home by spraying a great many obscenities on its doors and windows. Is that any way to treat a Democrat stronghold?

For me at least things now got personal. Many of the same obscenities could also be found sprayed all over the badly defaced monument to Revolutionary War hero Tadeusz Kosciuszko in Lafayette Park. No good deed goes unrewarded. In the U.S. Kosciuszko freed his slaves, just as in what was left of Poland he freed all serfs. Presumably his statue was standing in the wrong place at the wrong time. Or the looters mistook him for a dead American white male.

Things got really personal in my hometown. A protest march brought three thousand mourners to the Santa Barbara Courthouse's sunken gardens. Organizers weren't in a gracious mood. When the city's liberal mayor tried to address the gathering, she was shut down by one of the event's organizers. "You should have been on TV condemning police brutality and racism," she was told. When the mayor tried to speak anyway, the organizer this time told her, "When a black woman is speaking, silence." Our brave new world is going to take some getting used to. ✨



*Wlady Pleszczynski is executive editor of The American Spectator.*



## My Money Is on the President

*History will repeat itself.*

by **R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.**

**Y**ou will remember the election of 2016 as you think about the election of 2020. Twenty sixteen was the election in which *The American Spectator* led all publications in predicting the outcome. We predicted a victory by Donald J. Trump. That was astounding to other members of the commentariat, so astounding that only two members of that august body were moved to mention it: Seth Lipsky of the *New York Sun* and Ben Smith of BuzzFeed. Well, that is not completely accurate. The estimable Grover Norquist noted our prediction too, and he added that “If it had not been for Bob Tyrrell and *The American Spectator*, Hillary Clinton would have been president of the United States.” A chilling thought, but it is probably true.

We started making our singular predictions early. Jeff Lord offered his in 2013. I offered mine about the time Donald came down the escalator in June 2015. Both of us continued reiterating our predictions right up to election night. So, you might forgive me for expressing amazement over the commentariat’s amazement at Hillary’s loss. Hillary was bound to lose. She is no Bill. Yes, she had the upper echelons of the FBI willing to break the law for her. She also had the upper echelons of the CIA and the DNI himself on her side. Then too it is now apparent that Antifa was with her, at least the intellectual wing of Antifa.

But the geniuses of the commentariat forget a few revelations that repose in Hillary’s biography. She was hated in Arkansas, and she got Bill bounced from office when he sought his first reelection. In her White House years, she was the least popular first lady since the statisticians began keeping such records. She was unpopular as a senator from New York. She even had trouble winning the Democratic nomination from crazy Bernie. Moreover, she ran the most inept campaign since Harold Stassen. I would not be surprised if Bill voted against her. Show me the proof that he cast his vote for the woman who bashed more lamps and books on his head than were bashed one the heads of any other prior president. I am told by my spies that the Secret Service did not dare interrupt her assaults.

What is our prediction this time around? The last time I based my prediction only on two variables, the conservative vote and the independent vote. Frankly, I did not take the polls, most of which were predicting Hillary, very seriously. It was apparent to me early on that they could not be accurate.

Late last year, the Democrats gave us the Russian collusion farce and soon after that the impeachment farce. I thought both were gifts to the president. The Democrats handled both so badly Donald could only benefit from them, especially impeachment.

After all, the economy was doing great things. As 2020 began, inflation was low.



R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr. is founder and editor-in-chief of *The American Spectator*.

The economy was expanding. Employment was so healthy that even Latino and Black unemployment were at record lows. In fact, we were claiming that President Trump had introduced a new model for welfare. It was Trumpian workfare. Give a poor person a job, with its attendant security, dignity, and upward mobility, and welfare would be a thing of the past. Up against the gaffable Joe Biden or Crazy Bernie, the president was unbeatable.

Then the coronavirus struck. It came from China, and it knocked the stuffings out of the economy. Yet by the middle of May there was reason to believe the economy would be on the mend shortly. The coronavirus had slowed and seemed to be passing. Recovery showed signs of gaining strength. The economy's vital signals seemed strong enough for the country to bounce back. For instance, the stock markets already were bouncing back.

Then came the riots and the cries of police brutality, and once again the economy was embattled. Stores that were opening up after the shutdown were, of a sudden, shut down again. From December to June — a little over a six-month period — America went through more crises than

I have experienced in any one decade of my life, possibly two. By June the president was being hammered on all sides, except, of course, from his base.

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In late December,  
I thought the  
president was going  
to win. Now even  
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---

On June 1, he gave a fine Rose Garden performance, and then, braving the rioters, he walked from the White House through Lafayette Park to visit St. John's Episcopal Church across from the White House, which had recently been torched. Those who know their history recognized that he had torn a page from the playbook of Bob Kennedy. I was put in mind of 1968 when in the bloody and riotous aftermath of

Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination Bob Kennedy walked through the smoldering streets of Washington, D.C. He was esteemed heroic, and he was heroic. Would Donald Trump be now? No, he was dismissed as a vain man who would endanger his guards and the peaceful protesters throwing water bottles at him for a photo op. The president cannot win, except on election day.

In late December, I thought the president was going to win. Now even against Joe Biden it will be close, but he will win again. I put my money on the conservatives. There are more of them out there today than there were in December. I put my money on the independent vote. The independents get very serious when pocketbook and public order issues are at stake. It is better to have a president who brought us to prosperity a few months ago than Sleepy Joe. And on public order Joe sounds like what we once called an "appeaser."

Finally, I think there will be others out there who have seen the cities smoldering and are going to do something unusual — vote. Some of them are Black and Latino. It is going to be a tight race, but I shall put my money on the president. 🐦



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## PUBLISHER'S NOTE



# Get Up, America

*Is it the beginning of the end, or will we begin again?*

by **Melissa Mackenzie**

America is three years, 137 days, four hours, fifty-seven minutes, and forty-six seconds into a perpetual leftist tantrum as of this writing. The day that Donald J. Trump was inaugurated, Soros-funded shock troops shattered storefronts and looted. Even before being elected, Trump and his campaign were being surveilled by the FBI. From mainstream media dimwits like CNN's Jim Acosta to the skinny, black-clad Portland Antifa clowns, to rage-screaming lesbian college professors, to the rampaging and looting mobs burning out Democrat-led cities across the nation, the distemper has not ceased.

The country should be celebrating its emergence from the lockdown that was imposed to battle the Chinese virus. Instead, the youth march and loot. Even with this, the economy is rebounding, much to Paul Krugman's frustration. Unemployment was supposed to be 19 percent today. Instead 2.5 million people gained jobs. The stock market soars.

Meanwhile, Joe Biden forgets the name of the man killed by a Minnesota police officer. "George ... George ..." (It's Floyd, Joe, George Floyd.) Democrats watch Joe mumble and worry.

Things are not going as planned. Donald Trump was to be impeached, thrown out of office, and in prison by now. That hasn't happened. Nothing has worked — not the constant journalistic calumny, not fictional Russian collusion, not Biden-buddy whistleblowers, not a worldwide pandemic and the economic collapse it caused. Not even Trump's own tweets have derailed the president.

Instead, Trump's support has held steady. Thus, the Left ups the ante. They're willing to burn to the ground cities that they control and call it justice. But whom are they harming? Like a child wrecking his favorite toy because he's not getting his way, the Left has been reduced to consuming itself in critical race theory, communist envy, and destruction.

Does an empire know when it's dying? When sliding into grotesque indulgence, such as wealthy Manhattanites cruising Fifth Avenue in their Rolls Royces and tricked-out Cadillac SUVs to loot the Gucci and Ferragamo stores, do Americans realize they're witnessing depravity that ends in a return to medieval serfdom? The revolution may start with luxury brands, but it won't end with them.

The West will fade should the delusion continue. Entropy is the natural state, after all. Civilization must be built and maintained. It's astonishing how quickly it can crumble. To save it, a reformation of the church, educational and intellectual academies, art, and governance must start now.



*Melissa Mackenzie is publisher of The American Spectator.*





Marvel Studios: *Avengers Endgame*

Americans observe the devilry. They're buying guns and ammo. The pandemic has taught them that they have to defend their own. It's doubtful that taking guns away will be entertained any time soon.

Those who followed the rules and stayed home, risking their businesses to save the lives of their fellow citizens, are now seeing their businesses looted and burned. They didn't go to church for fear of infection. Now they're seeing big-state nannies like Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio pose cheek to cheek for protest pictures.

One hundred thousand Americans died *alone* with COVID-19. Families were not allowed to have funerals to mourn. Instead, they were shamed by the media and so-called epidemiologists and medical experts, at first to not wear a mask and then to wear a mask. "Stay home, stay safe," they preached. So Americans did.

Then the riots and marches poured thousands of Americans into the streets. The epidemiologists decided that black lives didn't matter that much. Some things are more important than risking death. Working to support one's family or worshipping God or caring for an elderly relative are not some of those things. Got it.

It's not just the public health elites who have undermined their authority. *New York Times* social justice writers made a mockery of free speech decrying an op-ed by a United States senator, Tom Cotton, because they disagreed with what he wrote. They wanted his editorial canceled. And the quavering leadership buckled. But then it was revealed that editors at the *Times* requested his op-ed. Oh, the humanity! Should the editorial be yanked or stay or have a note? The illiberal college professors indoctrinating their empty-headed students have turned a generation of journalists into vapid activists. Rather than fire the close-minded bigoted censorial nannies, a business that relies on free speech to exist kowtowed to them.

The fit-throwers want to see their fellow citizens prostrate and humiliated for the crime of rejecting their divisive worldview.

Do Americans see what's at stake? Or have two generations of ahistorical psychobabble and Malthusian Marxist garbage infected the whole population with a mind-blinding virus that will more effectively destroy the West than any pandemic?

America is not a dystopian novel quite yet. There are bright spots. SpaceX and NASA launched American astronauts from American soil to the International Space Station for the first time in nine years. No more relying on the Russians. The rocket then returned to a platform in the ocean to be reused. The possibilities are endless: colonize the moon? Why not? Manned trips to Mars? Yes, please!

Space isn't the only place hosting technological marvels. No one makes much of it, but because of genetic sequencing of viruses, scientists can trace, observe, and map a new killer virus in near real time. It's unprecedented. Individual labs across the fruited plains met the moment (once the CDC was out of the picture) and responded to the need to understand the virus and develop tests to diagnose it within weeks. Scientific advances make the future look exciting, indeed.

So there is hope. A comeback is possible, and, if Donald Trump is to be believed, it is happening already. Poor Paul Krugman.

*The American Spectator's* scribes write about the American comeback in the midst of these challenges. Read about uniquely American creations like road trips, fast food, superhero movies, and rap music. Read about a great American: Rush Limbaugh. Learn about the Chinese habit of suppressing religious practice. Ponder the country home revival. Find freedom in Alcatraz. This is a fun issue. We could all use some levity.

Americans, as Mark Hemingway notes in his article, have a naturally rebellious nature. They're scrappy. Like Steve Rogers, aka Captain America, says while getting back to his feet after being battered by bullies, "I could do this all day." Americans just don't quit. They keep getting back up.

America has been knocked down by forces without and within. Let's hope she gets back up, and, as Dov Fischer writes, she has it in her to Make America Great Yet Again. 🇺🇸

The country should be celebrating its emergence from the lockdown that was imposed to battle the Chinese virus. Instead, the youth march and loot.



# Those Wicked Sons of Heaven

*Cultural destruction and religious intolerance in communist China.*

by Matthew Omolesky

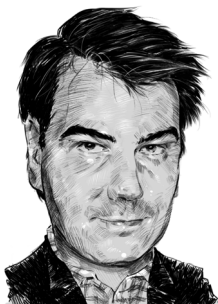
In a dimly lit corner of Baltimore’s Walters Art Museum, amidst an impressive array of Buddhist art bequeathed to the institution by the tobacco heiress Doris Duke, there is one sculpture that stands out above all the rest: a Ming-era dry-lacquer sculpture of the *bodhisattva* Guanyin, the Goddess of Mercy, the Barque of Salvation, and the Perceiver of the World’s Lamentations. In the Mahayana tradition, it was Guanyin who composed the beloved Sutra on the Heart of the Transcendent and Victorious Perfection of Wisdom, and it is believed that this selfsame goddess takes hold of those who have perished, folds them into the heart of a lotus, and gently conveys them to the Pure Lands. Thus does Guanyin serve as a “guide for souls,” and as an object of veneration for those in need of compassion and providential care throughout the Buddhist world.

Perched comfortably on her plinth, the Walters Guanyin projects an outward expression of inward confidence and tranquility. Everything about the sculpture is serene and fluid, in keeping with the *bodhisattva*’s traditional associations with all things lunar, liquid, impermanent, and in flux. Even the technique used in its creation plays with the notion of transience. The unknown fifteenth-century sculptor responsible for this masterpiece began by fashioning a clay figure, which he then coated with strips of cloth soaked in lacquer, a process akin to papier-mâché. The lacquer was left to harden, whereupon the surface was carefully painted and decorated with gold leaf. Finally, after the clay interior was broken up and removed, the innards were smeared with a pigment containing cinnabar, a deadly toxin that here serves a preservative function. In this way perishable linen, tree resin, and dyestuffs were transmuted into the enduring memorial that awaits sharp-eyed visitors to the Walters.

Looking at this representation of Guanyin, with its noble aspect, fine features, and melancholy patina laid down by time and wear, I am reminded of the lines in Gabriele D’Annunzio’s *Notturmo* that describe

*le note rotte del nero  
e vermiglio canto avvenire  
la melodia dell’eternità  
l’inno profondo, sempre più profondo  
della doglia infinita*

*the broken notes of black  
and vermilion, song of the future  
the melody of eternity  
the deep and ever deeper hymn  
of infinite sorrow*



Matthew Omolesky is a human rights lawyer, a researcher in the field of cultural heritage preservation, and a Fellow of the Royal Anthropological Institute.

Guanyin, attuned as she is to the sounds of the world’s lamentations, would no doubt recognize this refrain, though her own compositions are thought to be rather sweeter. The

Precious Scroll of Fragrant Mountain tells of Guanyin's visit to Naraka, the hell-realm of the dead, where she played joyous music and conjured fields of flowers into bloom. It was said that her mere presence in hell transformed it into a veritable paradise, and for the sympathetic viewer of the Walters *Bodhisattva* Guanyin, Accession No. 25.256, this seems altogether plausible.

Though undoubtedly an artistic triumph, there remains something amiss about this sculpture, at least in its present context. Guanyin really should not be atop so stark a plinth, shoved into the corner of an unadorned and cramped gallery, staring down at a patch of nylon carpeting. In situ, she would have been seated on a rocky throne representing the shores of the island of Mount Putuo, with her gaze directed towards a moonlit pool, as candles flickered in her eyes and wisps of incense smoke danced about her figure. Here she is left unattended by her usual companions, the acolytes Longnü, Shancai, and the Filial Parrot. Her traditional willow branch and her jar brimming with pure water are likewise nowhere to be found. No longer does she serve as a focus of reverence, or as a vigilant guardian of a temple complex and of the Buddhist faith as a whole. Instead she is the trophy of a billionaire heiress, living on merely as an object of curiosity and aesthetic interest. But at least she is fundamentally safe and sound, in the caring hands of the museum's conservators. The same cannot be said of a great many of the other statues of the Goddess of Mercy, which remained in China, where cultural cleansing and militant atheism have taken a terrific toll on the tangible and intangible manifestations of Buddhism and other faiths besides.

One of the best-known representations of Guanyin can be found near the old Qing mountain resort of Jehol. There, inside the Puning Si, the "Temple of Universal Peace," is an imposing version of the bodhisattva in the guise of "the one with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes." Weighing in at more than a hundred tons and rising to a height of seventy-three feet, it is considered the tallest wooden statue in the world, and has little in common stylistically with the diaphanous Guanyin on display in Baltimore. Visitors are drawn to the Puning Si by the thousands to visit this staggering work of art, which positively exudes majesty, warmth, and repose, but there is a much darker side to this locale, one seldom dwelt upon by tourists. The temple, as it happens, was built in 1755 to commemorate the Qianlong Emperor's victory over the nomadic empire of the Zunghars. Puning Si's Guanyin therefore functions as monumental Manchu propaganda, with Qianlong likening himself to the Goddess of Mercy, the all-seeing and far-reaching source of universal tranquility, as demonstrated by his successful conquest of Xinjiang.

One can get a much better sense of historical perspective by crossing the Wulie River and hiking up the hill to the Anyuan Miao, the "Temple of Pacifying Distant Lands," a destination rather less popular with tourists than the Puning Si. Intrepid visitants will find, as Anne Chayet has described it, a "complex system of enclosures" with "walls consisting of wood panels richly decorated with paintings, and a classical tianjing [well of heaven] coffered ceiling." Anyuan Miao is admittedly a somewhat dilapidated place, at least in comparison with the rest of the Eight Outer Temples of Jehol, but a couple of details warrant our attention. The first is the looming presence inside the temple of a large statue of Vajrabhairava, the lord of death, embracing his consort. It is an image quite at odds with that of Guanyin back at Puning Si, and intentionally so. When luxuriating in the empire's repose, Qianlong could be as sweet as Guanyin, but when pacifying distant tribes he could be as wrathful as death itself. The second detail worthy of our consideration is the fact that the structure itself is not based on an original design;

rather, it is an ersatz replica of the great temple of the Zunghars that once graced the city of Kulja, in what is now called Xinjiang.

It was the great Zunghar warlord Galdan Tsering who founded the Kulja Temple, an architectural marvel wherein, according to the Qing official Fuheng's *Imperial Commissioned Illustrated Geography of the Western Regions*,

*the rooms were of white felt, the walls were of wood; later tiles of gold covered the beams and rafters.... They were so tall that they caressed the skies, gold streamers dazzled the sun, the beams and rafters were immense and the Buddhas were solemn and imposing. Monks were assembled to live in [the temple]... in the evening they beat the drums and in the morning they sounded the conch shells and the chanting of the Buddhist prayers was exquisite.*

The military governor Song Yun later observed that "at new year and midsummer the worshippers gathered from far and near, often they brought precious jewels to donate and bestowed gold and silver to adorn the temples" of Zungharia. The city of Kulja, named after a Mongol word for mountain goat (*guldja*), thereby earned its alternate appellation, Ili-balik, or "resplendent city." That resplendence came to a definitive end in 1756, when Qing forces again swept into the Ili valley and set the Kulja Temple ablaze. The age-blackened rafters collapsed, the white felt burned away, the gold tiles melted, and the wooden statues of *bodhisattvas* inside were reduced to ash.

The Kulja Temple was far from the only casualty of Qianlong's remorseless "war of annihilation" (*yongjue genchu*) and "extermination" (*jiao*) against the Zunghars. The human toll was grievous. Wei Yuan, in his account of the Qing invasion, Shengwuji, estimated that of the six hundred thousand Zunghars alive in 1755, "40 percent died of smallpox, 20 percent fled to the Russians or Kazakhs, and 30 percent were killed by the Great Army. [The remaining] women and children were given as [servants] to others."



*Bodhisattva* Guanyin, The Walters Art Museum, Accession No. 25.256

It was recorded that “for several thousand li there was not one single Zungharian tent,” and that “all remote mountains and water margins, wherever one could hunt or fish a living thing, were scoured out, leaving no traces,” so that “there was not a trace of a living thing, whether grass, bird, or animal.” A “righteous extermination” (*zhengyiao*) had established Chinese suzerainty over a land that was renamed Xinjiang, the “new dominion.” It hardly seems coincidental that one Chinese term recurs time and again throughout the Qing archival material pertaining to the western conquests: *ping*, which may mean to “make peace” (*heping*), but may also signify flattening out or creating a plain (*pingyuan*). This was a social, political, and cultural demolition job on an imperial scale, in which, as the Qianlong Emperor insisted, “all must be entirely swept away [*qiongjiu saochu*].”

What was left of the Zunghars after their extermination at the hands of the Manchu remains as illusory as a steppe mirage. In Qing records we find mention of “nearly 100,000 men drawing bows, and herds filling the valleys,” herds large enough to accommodate regular dispatches of ten thousand head of horse and camel destined for China, either in tribute or in exchange for luxury goods like tea, silk, rhubarb, and earthenware. In Russian accounts like that of the explorer Ivan Unkovsky, we encounter a very different and less purely nomadic view of the Zunghar realm, where “farmers were widespread,” where “special attention was paid to dividing the land into fields,” and where “wheat, barley, millet, pumpkins, melons, grapes, apricots, and apples” were bountiful. The region was rich in iron, copper, silver, aluminum, and sulphur, and the Zunghars were able to produce a ready supply of firearms, both hand-held and camel-mounted. In this they were aided by the Swede Johan Gustaf Renat, a prisoner of the Russians who in turn fell into the nomads’ hands, and who spent the years from 1716 to 1733 teaching his captors the art of cannon-casting and the printing press. All this we know from the scattered accounts of outsiders, but lost today are the lyric and epic poems of the Zunghars, the maxims and proverbs, the legal “mountain writings” carved in red on craggy eminences for all to see and heed. Lost are the *uruds* tasked with forging weapons and utensils, the *kötöchinars* who erected yurts for the khan, and the *altachins* charged with the production of golden sculptures of the Buddha. And lost is the Kulja Temple, a victim of the Qianlong Emperor’s campaign of physical and cultural genocide against Zungharia.

Such modern terms are not wholly out of place here. In 1984, the eminent Chinese historian of the Qing, Dai Yi, admitted that the “Zunghar people suffered a severe disaster. We must expose and criticize the Qing government for adopting such cruel methods,” regardless of whether or not they were adopted in the supposed interests of the “progress of history.” Western historians have been willing to go much further. *The Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity* included the extirpation of the Zunghars in its list of historical ethnocides, Peter Perdue dubbed the conquest a “final solution,” and Charles Bawden has similarly referred to the “genocide” in which the Qing “indulged.” Mark Levene, for his part, has called the Qing campaign “arguably the eighteenth century genocide par excellence,” but further noted that the “Dzungar extermination might deserve to be treated as seminal,” but “because it has no place — or indeed value — within a Western frame

of reference, even arguably a genocide-focused one, its marginalization, or more accurately mental obliteration down a giant memory hole, is likely to be perpetuated into the foreseeable future.”

There is really only one vestige of tangible Zunghar heritage that has escaped that memory hole, and it is the reproduction of the Kulja Temple at Anyuan Miao. Whether the structure was meant as a “religious conservatory for the pious Mongol vassals of the emperor” who had been resettled near Jehol, as Anne Chayet has suggested, or whether it was a “trap set by Manchu imperial

hunters to capture and subject the Tibetan church,” as Philippe Forêt has countered, it is surely one of the most peculiar religious sites in the world. The Qing recreation of the Kulja Temple, destroyed by the Qing themselves in a genocidal war against the nomads who built the original structure, constitutes a meticulous act of cultural heritage preservation undertaken in the midst of a relentless program of ethnic extermination. It would almost be akin to a synagogue carefully reconstructed by Albert Speer, or a Incan stone *intibuatana*

lovingly maintained in Hapsburg Toledo.

We cannot be sure if the construction of the Anyuan Miao was intended to be an act of penance or an addition to some kind of cultural zoological garden, just as we cannot be sure whether the black tiles of the temple’s gambrel roof, which represent water, are

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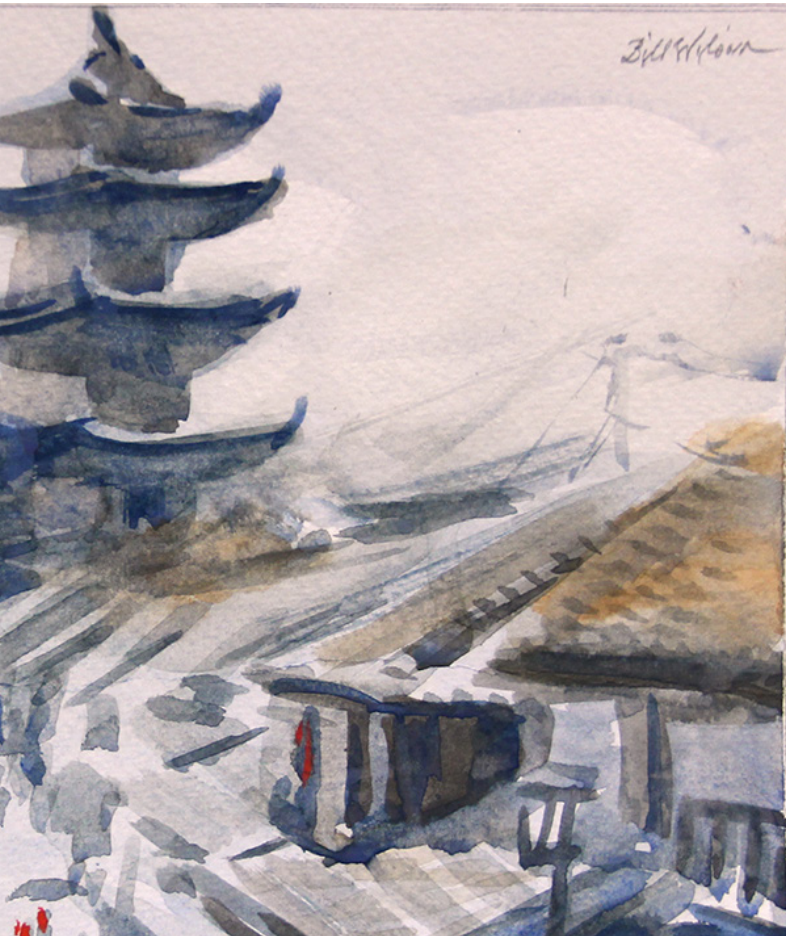
The fate of the Kulja Temple and the Zunghars who worshiped there should not be considered a matter of merely historical or antiquarian interest, for a direct line can be traced from the events of Xinjiang in the eighteenth century to those of our own era.

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a delicate reference to the fate of the previous incarnation of the structure in Xinjiang, or are simply faithful to the original and thus an instance of cruel historical irony. We have reason to question Qianlong's good faith, given that the Jinchuan hill peoples of western Sichuan were likewise targeted for extermination during an outburst of Manchu violence that took place between 1771 and 1776, leading to more genocide, enslavement, and the eradication of the traditional Bon faith in favor of Yellow Sect Buddhism. The Zunghars were far from alone in their fate. What we can be sure of is that, spiritually at least, the Anyuan Miao seems much farther away from the Puning Si than the two miles or so that separate them.

The fate of the Kulja Temple and the Zunghars who worshiped there should not be considered a matter of merely historical or antiquarian interest, for a direct line can be traced from the events of Xinjiang in the eighteenth century to those of our own era. Today, in East Turkestan, hundreds of thousands of Uyghurs have been subjected to a "righteous extermination" not unlike that experienced by the Zunghars, marked by mass incarceration, organ harvesting, the demolition of mosques and graveyards, prohibition of ancestral tongues, and more, leading the China Tribunal, in a final report published in the summer of 2019, to find "unmatched wickedness even compared — on a death for death basis — with the killings by mass crimes committed in the last century." And whereas the Qianlong Emperor was deeply concerned with the numinous, and was torn between his split spiritual personalities — Guanyin with her willow branch and goblet versus Vajrabhairava with his curved sword and blood-filled skull-cup — the present-day Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has no such curb on its brutality. Totally in thrall to what G. K. Chesterton called the "universal negative" of scientific atheism, the party has embarked on a campaign of iconoclasm utterly appalling to human sensibility, one which would have caused the cheeks of even the most brutal Manchu conqueror to blanch with horror.



A story has come down to us from the early days of the Han dynasty, one which tells of a man found to have taken a handful of earth from an imperial tumulus mound. The police apprehended the brazen individual and promptly put him to death, but when the emperor heard of the incident, he reacted with fury at the lightness of the punishment that had been meted out. We can only presume that the vandal had been summarily beheaded or strangled instead of being boiled alive, quartered, pulled apart by chariots, or slow-sliced into bloody ribbons, which presumably would have been more appropriate penalties for such a *pu-tao*, or "impious crime." One gets the distinct sense that the preservation of China's imperial cultural heritage was a matter of considerable importance, particularly in a society wholly devoted to ancestral worship.

"Culture itself is conservative," wrote the great Chinese scholar and diplomat Hu Shih (1891–1962), and he posited that "there is always a limit to violent change in the various spheres of culture, namely, that it can never completely wipe out the conservative nature of an indigenous culture." Hu was writing in the mid-1930s, and he could not have foreseen the simple but decidedly sinister solution that Mao Zedong and his fellow communist revolutionaries would devise to address the essential conservatism of Chinese society: the wholesale spoliation, root and branch, of five thousand years of Chinese culture, thought, religion, and tradition. In this way would Hu's optimistic theory of cultural resilience be sorely put to the test.

The merciless Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was aimed at scouring away the ancient patina formed by the "Four Olds" — habits, ideas, customs, and culture — the better to "completely break up with conventional ideas." This would pave the way for what Mao promised would be "a future of incomparable brightness and splendor," a veritable *ta-i'ung*, the long sought-after era of "great harmony." Maurice Meisner described it rather more aptly as a "strange negative utopianism." Whereas the Chinese had once ritually swept their ancestors' tombs, they now set about sweeping their ancestors' tombs away. The old Summer Palace was slashed at by Red Guards, the Garden of Abundant Nourishment was torn up, murals were defaced, and ancient structures were torn down all over the country. In Beijing alone, 4,922 of 6,843 registered cultural relics were obliterated. The situation devolved to the point where, as Hung Wu later lamented, "the common mind could hardly understand the reason for this massive destruction: the land freed from these ancient buildings seemed incommensurate with the energy and manpower wasted in the project." But the energy was not, from the Maoist perspective, being wasted in the slightest. The widespread ruination was intended to leave nothing against which the new communist dystopia, which wound up costing as many as eighty million lives, could be measured.

Thoroughly suffused with the perverse spirit of Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Marx's "religion of humanity," the communist authorities similarly threw themselves into a "great leap forward in religious affairs," with the ultimate goal of "eliminating religion" altogether. So-called scientific atheism quickly gave way to its militant offshoot. Over the course of the 1950s and 1960s, some 90 percent of Chinese temples and churches were "donated" to the communist brigades, while at sites like Daluo Mountain Buddhist monks and nuns were forced to destroy statues of the Buddha and abandon their vows. As Fenggang Yang summarized it, "Folk religious practices, considered feudalist superstitions, were vigorously suppressed; cultic or heterodox sects, regarded as reactionary organisations, were resolutely banned; foreign missionaries, considered part of Western imperialism, were expelled.... The criticism of theism quickly became in practice the theoretical declaration for ... eliminating religion in society." Those who openly identified as believers were ridiculed, curiously

enough, as “ox-monsters” and “snake-demons,” while the forces of counter-revolution were referred to as “ghosts, demons, and monsters.” Rhetoric like this suggests the stubborn persistence of certain folk beliefs, as does the common practice of dancing, swearing oaths, and confessing to ideological sins in the presence of effigies of Chairman Mao, who was reverentially referred to as *hong taiyang*, the “Red Sun.”

The oral testimony of the townsfolk of Ku Village in Guangdong Province, as recorded by the anthropologist Hok Bun Ku, offers a riveting account of the ensuing struggle between the devoted adherents to Buddhism and their secular persecutors. During the Maoist campaign of “doing away with superstitions and blind faith,” the Red Guard “came to our village,” recounted a woman by the name of Qiying, “to destroy the Guanyin temple.” The soldiers “destroyed the painted clay Guanyin sculpture and temple wall with sledgehammers,” and upon completing their task “sang revolutionary songs and left.” Qiying continued,

*I was really scared and hastened home because I had a small clay statue of Guanyin in my house. I tried to find a safe place to hide it. In the end, I hid it beneath my bed. In the important festivals, we still worshipped Guanyin, of course we carried it out secretly. Every time I had to close all the windows and the door. My mother-in-law would guard the gate (bamen). If the situation proved unfavorable, she would knock on the door and I would quickly stop worship and hide everything under the bed. Every time we could only offer food, but not incense, candles, and paper money because the smoke would attract attention.*

In such a fashion did Buddhism, along with Taoism, Christianity, and folk religious practices, survive until the Deng era, when, as Hok Bun Ku put it, “the discrediting of the party and many of its institutions” allowed for “a rapid resurgence of local cults.”

By the 1990s, a veritable *wenhua re*, a “culture fever,” had taken hold, perhaps as a form of transference after the crushing of the 1989 democracy movement. In the early years of the twenty-first century, a religious revival of sorts was in the offing, as Ian Johnson described in his recent book *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*. A 2005 survey found that there were around three hundred million Chinese people identifying as religious (in a population of over 1.3 billion). But a Pew Research Survey suggests that number may be low, as it found 245 million Buddhists alone, and there is data indicating that some 173 million more engage in Taoist practices, alongside fifty-four million Christians, twenty million or so Muslims, seventy million Falun Gong practitioners (at least at the movement’s height), and so on. More abstractly, a 2007 survey showed that 77 percent of Chinese respondents believed in moral causality, 44 percent believed that “life and death depends on the will of heaven,” and 25 percent had actually “experienced the intervention of a Buddha (*fo*) in their lives in the past twelve months.”

All of this prompted an equal and opposite reaction, in the form of a backlash on the part of the ruling Communist Party, which for its own part has banned its ninety million members from belonging to religious communities of any kind. The State Administration of Religious Affairs has worked to make religious licensing difficult if not impossible. Laws passed in late December 2019 have targeted unregistered Christian churches, in a bid to force Catholic congregations to join the heavily regulated Chinese





Catholic Patriotic Association, and for Protestant churches to be absorbed by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Religious practices and sites are being systematically “sinicized,” and thereby subordinated to the party and its socialist program, at least when they are not being effaced entirely. The aforementioned case of the Uyghurs is only the most notorious of such examples. Hui Muslims have likewise faced persecution, with their Dongsheng Mosque being “sinicized,” schools being shuttered, and Arabic texts purged. A Catholic pilgrimage site, the Shrine of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows, was demolished in October 2019 on the grounds that “it had too many crosses and statues,” while the Gate of Heaven on the Seven Sorrows Mountain was torn down on the spurious basis that it was “dangerous” to use.

Surely the most absurd instance of “sinicization” must be the CCP’s decision in spring 2019 to decapitate the statue of the First Guanyin of Shandong and replace it with the head of Confucius. The result, as aesthetically ludicrous as it was spiritually tragic, had all the dignity of a Funko Pop figurine. Bitter Winter, an online magazine that covers religious persecution in China, heavily publicized the “bizarre-looking ‘sinicization’ folly.” As a consequence, though the “village committee was very reluctant to dismantle the ‘Confucius statue,’ which was built at the cost of 2.4 million RMB (about \$360,000),” after two weeks of tragicomedy the hybrid statue was fully dismantled. Gone now is the First Guanyin of Shandong, never again to grace the Holy Water Pond Folk Culture Park in Pingdu City. Pulled down around the same time was the Chairman Mao Buddha Temple in Ruzhou City, a converted structure that similarly came in for shaming at the hands of Bitter Winter for its absolutely preposterous depiction of Mao in the guise of a Buddha, alongside such stirring inscriptions as “Lord Mao is the new Jade Emperor, who controls the heavens, the earth, and the human world,” and “Taoism and Buddhism will be attributed to the teachings of Mao Zedong.” At least the CCP is occasionally capable of embarrassment.

President Xi Jinping, in his infamous 2013 defense of the legacy of Chairman Mao, insisted that “because leaders made mistakes,

one cannot use these mistakes to completely negate their legacies, wipe out historical successes, and descend into the quagmire of historical nihilism.” Yet I can think of no better example of historical nihilism than the “sinicization folly” that descended upon cities of Pingdu and Ruzhou last year, nor any better confirmation of Marx’s adage concerning history’s tendency to repeat itself, first in a tragic mode, then as a crude farce.

**T**he Maronite monk Saint Charbel Makhlouf tells us that “the ignorant man clings to the dust until he becomes dust; the wise and prudent man clings to heaven until he reaches heaven. The place where you hang on, you will belong to it.” So too did he observe that “people have become arrogant, living amidst asphalt and cement; their minds have become asphalt and their hearts cement.” Starting with Mao, the authorities in mainland China have gone beyond even this, not content to cling to the dust in the fashion of all those besotted with scientific atheism, but seeking at every turn to pulverize into dust the thousands of years’ worth of heritage around them, replacing so much of their diverse, glorious bequest with lackluster asphalt, cement, gimcrack kitsch, and misery.

We in the West can certainly recognize these dynamics at work. Attorney General William Barr, in his October 11, 2019, speech at the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture at the University of Notre Dame, described “the force, fervor and comprehensiveness of the assault on religion we are experiencing today,” one in which “secularists, and their allies among the ‘progressives,’ have marshaled all the force of mass communications, popular culture, the entertainment industry and academia in an unremitting assault on religion and traditional values.” Barr declared, “This is not decay; it is organized destruction.” Thus far the canaries in this particular sociopolitical coal mine have been institutions, individuals, and sites like the Little Sisters of the Poor, Jack Phillips (of Masterpiece Cakeshop), and the Bladensburg Peace Cross. But wider measures, including those directed against foster parents and nonprofits that fail to toe the secularist line, are inevitable. In Great Britain, we

already see tribunals ruling that biblical views are “incompatible with human dignity and conflict with the fundamental rights of others,” while in France the mere presence of posters stating that “*la société progressera à condition de respecter la vie* [society will progress only if life is respected]” was enough to bring down wrathful injunctions from the Mayor of Paris, Anne Hidalgo. All of this lends considerable credence to Barr’s recent rhetoric regarding the “organized, militant secular effort to drive religion out of our lives” and “out of the marketplace of ideas.”

Such occidental examples are comparatively tentative in relation to the assaults perpetrated during the Cultural Revolution and the ongoing efforts at “sinicization,” but they differ in degree and not in kind. In China we see the apotheosis — and not infrequently the *reductio ad absurdum* — of militant secularism, which demands that faith be sterilized, mutilated, and rendered entirely subordinate to Chinese scientific socialism, lest it pose offer too credible an alternative to the bleak vision of the totalistic state. The “religion of society,” as Roberto Calasso has termed it, has adopted an integralism of its own, and it jealously guards its newly fabricated rites and idols.

The story that began with the eradication of the Zunghars and the Jinchuan, and continued through the orgy of destruction that Mao’s “great leap forward in religious affairs” through to the warmed-over revolutionism and nihilistic iconoclasm of the present-day CCP, would seem to leave little cause for hope. But just as we can be sure that “there is a day to come,” as Henry Edward Cardinal Manning maintained, “which will reverse the confident judgments of men,” so too can we can take heart in Hu Shih’s confident assertion that there is no level of violence that can wholly eradicate the conservative nature of Chinese culture. What is more, we ought to bear in mind the words of one of China’s most sensitive outside observers, the French ethnographer and poet Victor Segalen, who in his collection of prose poems, *Peintures* (1916), argued that

*The others, those ruinous ones, those destructive ones, the Ultimates of each dynastic fall, those wicked Sons of Heaven who go, “belts loosened, by revolting paths” ... you will agree that they are no less*

*worthy to be seen, since they are no less necessary! The First Ones are lauded, called Founders, Renovators, Lan-Givers, Mandatees of the high and pure Lord-Heaven.... But how then can one renovate, how to restore order without first of all installing disorder? How can justice be admired and stimulate fine deeds for its sake, unless from time to time Injustice reigns dancing on the world? How can the Mandate be obtained, unless contrary precursors, devoted beyond death, even as far as posthumous contempt, prepare the obverse of the task.*

We who live in what Buddhists call this *mofa*, this “Degenerate Age,” in what Dietrich von Hildebrand rightly called “this age of relativism and dehumanization and depersonalization,” can take a great deal of solace in this line of thinking.

But if comfort is what we are looking for, one of the best places to look for it may be back at 1 West Mount Vernon Place in Baltimore, where the *bodhisattva* Guanyin remains atop her humble plinth. As the Perceiver of the World’s Lamentations, she has, in the Buddhist tradition, been subjected to all the enormities and indignities of which mankind is so eminently capable. Her effigies, as we have seen, have paid quite the price for this, in Kulja, in the Daluo Mountains, in Beijing, in Guangdong, in Shandong, in far too many other places to mention. But there remains, for all that, a wry smile on her face — not quite a smirk, but an expression of the utmost confidence in the seaworthiness of the Barque of Salvation amidst the countless tempests of our degenerate, dehumanized age. In the visage of Guanyin we can find confirmation that injustice will not reign dancing on the world in perpetuity, and that the song of the future will not be one of unremitting sorrow. What a fitting monument this sculpture is to the potential of Chinese and indeed to human civilization. There is absolutely no comparison between it and the buffoonish Guanyin–Confucius pantomime mashup that disgraced the Holy Water Pond Folk Culture Park in Pingdu City for those two embarrassing weeks last year. We ought to ask ourselves: How much richer does the former make us? How much poorer the latter? And how long must we continue to stumble down the “revolting path” that descends from one down to the other? ❧







# Rush Limbaugh, Exceptional American

*How the beloved talk-show host remade radio.*

by Scot Bertram



What can you say about Rush Limbaugh that he already hasn't said about himself? The Big Voice on the Right. America's Anchorman. The Doctor of Democracy. A living legend. The harmless, lovable little fuzzi-ball operating with talent on loan from God.

His ideological opponents use slightly different language. The *Daily Beast* has called Limbaugh a "racist radio pioneer." A 2012 CNN essay compared him to Josef Goebbels and asked the FCC to punish radio stations airing his program. Before his Senate days, Al Franken wrote a book titled *Rush Limbaugh Is a Big Fat Idiot*. President Bill Clinton almost certainly was targeting Limbaugh when he laid part of the blame for the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing on "voices on the airwaves" who spread hate and leave the impression that "violence is acceptable."

Through it all, for more than three decades, Limbaugh has been synonymous with talk radio. "The Rush Limbaugh Show," broadcast weekdays from noon to 3 p.m. ET, remains the most-listened-to radio program in America. According to the show's syndicator, Premiere Networks, the program airs on more than 650 stations nationwide, reaching more than twenty-five million listeners on a weekly basis.

That kind of success and longevity in any industry would be impressive, but in the fickle world of broadcasting it merits special notice. To fully appreciate Limbaugh's rise, it helps to understand the playing field he entered back in 1988.

One year prior, in 1987, the Reagan administration and the FCC acted to roll back a nearly forty-year-old regulation on the holders of broadcast licenses called the Fairness Doctrine. The statute demanded that radio stations present both sides of controversial issues of the day. A corollary to the Fairness Doctrine required broadcasters to notify any public figure of a "personal attack" and allow him an opportunity to respond over the airwaves.

You likely can understand how these regulations chilled the development of any program that might have an overt partisan tinge. Sure, Larry King could conduct interviews on his national program and Bruce Williams could answer questions on financial matters from listeners, but politics was essentially a no-go zone.

Once the Fairness Doctrine was lifted, new programming possibilities emerged. And into this arena stepped the right man at the right time.

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*Scot Bertram spent fifteen years working in the talk radio industry. He currently serves as a lecturer in journalism and general manager of the student-run radio station at Hillsdale College.*



**R**ush Hudson Limbaugh III grew up on the banks of the Mississippi River, in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. Despite his family's history of producing a string of well-respected lawyers and judges, Limbaugh long had radio on his mind. He worked at his first station at the age of sixteen and honed his on-air style in stops in Pittsburgh, Kansas City, and Sacramento before making the jump to New York and national syndication in 1988.

Back then, radio's biggest star was a seventy-year-old broadcaster named Paul Harvey. His morning and midday "News and Comment" show aired on hundreds of stations across the country, reaching millions of listeners. The broadcasts weren't explicitly ideological, but it wasn't hard to divine his point of view on any number of stories. Harvey's signature style featured his sonorous voice and a healthy use of the dramatic pause (a little dead air never hurt anybody, as Limbaugh often says).

A profile on Harvey aired on the short-lived CBS TV newsmagazine *West 57th* in 1988, the same year Limbaugh went national. To watch it again today is to be reintroduced to many of the market inefficiencies of which Limbaugh would take advantage.

"To anyone who says the news media is slanted to the East and canted to the left, [Harvey] is the Midwest answer to that," a friend of Harvey opines in the report. Limbaugh, the Missouri native, takes unbridled joy in puncturing the illusion of an unbiased media. He assails what he describes

as the "drive-by media" for parachuting into a story, stirring up emotions to a fever pitch with half-truths and lies, then dropping any coverage when the real facts emerge.

The CBS reporter on the *West 57th* story, Bob Sirott, lauds Harvey's "flag-waving, good-news attitude and his unusual mix of the important and the trivial." A week listening to Limbaugh's show would feature any number of stories illustrating the ideal of American exceptionalism, but it also could include detours into talk about his beloved Pittsburgh Steelers or the latest technology introduced by Apple.

Limbaugh was listening to Harvey, of course. He paid tribute to him on his radio show a few days after his death in 2009, calling him "the greatest ambassador and perhaps performer in the history of radio." Limbaugh took the figurative torch from Harvey and continued his legacy of being the beacon for talk radio, the lodestar for an entire industry.

**L**imbaugh was the first real contender through the gates following the rollback of the Fairness Doctrine. But being first doesn't necessarily mean you'll be the one who lasts. So why did he succeed, and how has he maintained his level of excellence?

Let's start here: above almost all else, Limbaugh is an expert entertainer. So often when analyzing his show, the focus centers on his conservatism and political takes. But his ability to present a consistently appealing and enjoyable show, regardless of the news cycle, is peerless. Limbaugh is not reliant on the news of the day to drive his ratings; his show is a must-listen no matter who is in the White House or which party controls Congress.

As important as Limbaugh's broadcasting skill was to the growth of his show, just as essential was his understanding of the objective of all radio: making money. "Do you know what bought me all this?" Limbaugh asked journalist Zev Chafets in 2008 as he gestured at his estate. "Not my political ideas. Conservatism didn't buy me this house. First and foremost I'm a businessman. My first goal is to attract the largest possible audience so I can charge confiscatory ad rates." This was not a new observation. He said essentially the same thing early in his national radio career during a 1991 *60 Minutes* profile.

Attracting that audience was made easier because — surprise, surprise — Limbaugh is not the knuckle-dragging ogre he's portrayed as in so many corners of the media. Just listen to the show: Limbaugh is upbeat, light-hearted, and optimistic at nearly all times. He is, as he often says, having more fun than a human being should be allowed to have.

One of Limbaugh's most important innovations was to transfer the energy and irreverence of a 1970s Top 40 radio host to the political talk format. Listeners are more likely to stick around if it feels like everyone is

having fun! On air, Limbaugh carries himself as some amalgam of William F. Buckley Jr., Muhammad Ali, and Paul Harvey, combined with the spirit of the great AM radio music jocks,

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On air, Limbaugh carries himself as some amalgam of William F. Buckley Jr., Muhammad Ali, and Paul Harvey, combined with the spirit of the great AM radio music jocks.

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like Larry Lujack of WLS in Chicago (“the only person I ever copied,” Limbaugh told the *New York Times* in 1990).

Marry that style of broadcasting with an irrepressible work ethic and you’ve got the start of something really good. Someone who would know about that dedication, former Limbaugh producer Brett Winterble, wrote in an 2008 essay, “No one in this industry does more exhaustive show prep than Rush. The guy is a machine.”

Limbaugh gave a peek behind the curtain on a 2007 show, explaining he arrives at the office five hours before showtime to continue the research he began the night before. He estimated he only works his way through 30 to 40 percent of the “stack of stuff” he has ready for each program. Limbaugh is ultra-prepared for any twist or turn over the course of his three-hour broadcast, bringing his listeners stories and information they won’t hear anywhere else.

Back in 1994, Limbaugh shared an updated list of his “35 Undeniable Truths of Life” in his second book, *See, I Told You So*. The very first item states, “There is a direct singular American culture — rugged individualism and self-reliance — which made America great.” There’s no better example of this than his show, during which he has no one to rely but himself.

Limbaugh, in contrast with essentially all other national hosts, rarely welcomes a guest on the program for an interview. He takes perhaps a handful of phone calls each day. The vast majority of Limbaugh’s three hours are filled with impromptu monologues, punctuated by sound bites and audio clips illustrating his points. If you think that sounds easy, try talking about something, anything,

in a coherent and entertaining manner for a couple of hours each day. Now do it every day for a week. Now do it for thirty-two years, and you’ll begin to understand the true talent of Limbaugh.

The difficulty of his high-wire act makes it all the more impressive that Limbaugh’s program has a never-ending momentum to it. It’s one thing to be entertaining, but it’s another to truly create compelling content, the kind that tempts you to stay in the car even after you’ve arrived at your destination. That’s what the “Rush Limbaugh Show” does every weekday of the year.

Listeners flocked to the show when it debuted in part because it told them they were not alone. In the days before the internet, Limbaugh cultivated a conservative community that eventually grew to include virtually every media market across the country. Broadcast via satellite, his program became a true national radio show, available coast-to-coast thanks to local radio stations that either believed in the message or coveted the massive audience that Limbaugh attracted.

That audience remains today because Limbaugh doesn’t treat his listeners as if they are below him. Like Ronald Reagan, he has faith in the wisdom of the American people. He makes the complex understandable for millions — with the language of a long-time friend.

Over the years, the intimacy of radio has helped to produce an unbreakable bond between audience and host. Limbaugh has been a source of stability and comfort, riding alongside his



listeners through any number of crises and massive news events. His shows are dotted with hilarious parody songs, on-target nicknames for political opponents (Joe “Plugs” Biden, “Dingy” Harry Reid), and oft-repeated catchphrases that diehard listeners know by heart.

These days the die-hards are hearing a little less of Limbaugh, as he misses the occasional show to undergo treatment for his advanced lung cancer, with which he was diagnosed earlier this year. If anything, though, the news seems only to have strengthened the host–listener relationship. Days after the diagnosis was made public, a caller on the show asked to speak to producer Bo Snerdley off the air. He offered to donate a lung, if it were needed. Limbaugh was stunned. Snerdley then told Limbaugh he was getting two or three similar offers every day.

In the internet age, it’s easy to forget that for many years Limbaugh was not just the chief evangelist for conservatism in the media, he was the only voice espousing these ideas. Listeners heard arguments and points of view that were not featured anywhere else, save for the pages of a few magazines outside the realm of the mainstream media. Many younger conservatives now working in the political world cite Limbaugh’s show as a main influence on their beliefs. In a way, he was responsible for seeding the next generation (and now a second generation) of conservatives in America.

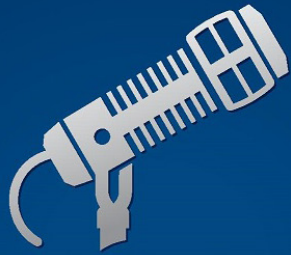
For his more than thirty years on “The Rush Limbaugh Show,” and for his work off-air on behalf of various charities, Limbaugh recently was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation’s highest civilian honor. In marking the occasion, President Trump spoke for many millions of listeners, thanking Limbaugh for his “decades of tireless devotion to our country.”

Limbaugh’s impact on the radio industry itself cannot be overstated. In the mid-1980s, many listeners had been migrating to the FM band, where music sounded crisper and cleaner. If the AM band couldn’t succeed playing the hits, what would fill the void? Political talk, led by Limbaugh, was a godsend for many stations.

“He’s a phenomenon like the Beatles,” Michael Harrison, longtime publisher of *Talkers*, told Zev Chafets in 2008. “Before Rush Limbaugh there was nothing like talk radio. He’s been to talk what Elvis was to rock ’n’ roll. He saved the AM dial.”

When Paul Harvey passed away at the age of ninety, ABC Radio Network, which syndicated his programs, couldn’t figure out what to do. They tried other hosts, of course, briefly with Gil Gross and then with Mike Huckabee. But it turns out Harvey was the rarest of talents — someone who literally could not be replaced.

Whenever Limbaugh steps away from the golden EIB microphone, the radio industry, and America, will find the same thing to be true. Someone will be broadcasting in Limbaugh’s time slot, but his show, and his singular voice, will be utterly irreplaceable. ❧



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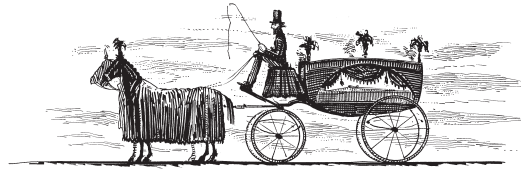
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# *Escape to Alcatraz*

*In San Francisco, an unexpected beacon of freedom during the shutdown.*

by Edward Grossman

When my old iPhone jingle-jangled a couple of days ago, the heads-up on the screen indicated Unknown Caller. As a rule I let such things go to voicemail, but this time — I don't know why — I picked up and a woman asked if I was who I am, and when I said I was, she said she was Gavin Newsom's secretary and he wanted to talk with me.

This doesn't happen much, either. In fact, the middle-aged, as-yet-unwrinkled white governor of California and ex-mayor of San Francisco had never been in touch, not during this plague and not before. I had to wonder. A joke? A hoax? A bot, maybe?

No, when he or it came on, and he or it told me what he or it told me, and I asked him or it a question, and he or it answered, kind of, I understood it was really him.

The governor was calling to say he had news that I'd been seen outside. Didn't I know that people my age, especially men, people of Paul McCartney's vintage, weren't allowed to leave home? I said I did know. But when I pointed out that I'm two months younger than McCartney he told me to get serious.

Hadn't I noticed that men like Trump, Bernie Sanders, Bernie Madoff, Anthony Fauci, Stephen King, Mitch McConnell, Woody Allen, Bob Dylan, Joe Biden, Mike Bloomberg, Wolf Blitzer, Noam Chomsky, Warren Buffett, Warren Beatty, Louis Farrakhan, Larry David, and Al Pacino were dropping like flies? Not to mention Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Charlie Rose?

Newsom said that as the highest elected public servant in the state, he's responsible for the well-being of everybody in California, be they Democratic voters, Republican voters, or irresponsible non-voters. He didn't want me becoming a statistic. Therefore he was warning me — if I was seen or detected outside again, he'd

have me put on Alcatraz until the end of my life or until there's a vaccine, whichever comes first.

But, I protested, he was opening the Golden State up. He'd just given restaurants the A-OK for curbside service and florists and sporting goods and liquor stores the A-OK to welcome customers one at a time — what if I needed a hamburger, an arrangement, a basketball, or a six-pack of Guinness?

"A-OK?" he said. "What does A-OK mean?"

"It's astronaut lingo from the '60s. All systems go," I explained.

"Well, it's not A-OK," he said, "not for relics."

I had a question: Why were the state, the nation, and the world being turned upside down and inside out, economies ruined, millions if not billions of women and men and children stripped of their livelihoods and educations, facing hopelessness, hunger, and starvation just to give a few dried-up men an additional year or three of non-productive life?

A reasonable question, which he ignored. No disrespect, he said, but it sounded as if I was into my second childhood. Again he warned me — home or Alcatraz — and then I heard a click and a dial tone.

Which was too bad — among other things I wanted to explain why I'd started defying orders and thank him for sending free restaurant meals to my door.

Detected? What had he meant? I've been taking my prehistoric iPhone when I suit up and go outside, but first I always turn it off, under the impression that if I do Eric Schmidt and Tim Cook won't be able to track me. What does a relic know? Maybe the state of California has hired some Israeli outfit capable of tracking anybody on the planet 24/7 from drones invisible to the naked eye.

Detected or seen, he'd said. Maybe somebody in my building squealed on me? That woman with the chihuahua? It's a brave, boring new 1984-ish world we're all of us blessed to have lived to find ourselves living in.

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*Edward Grossman is a long-time contributor to The American Spectator.*

**B**ut, whatever the source, Gavin's information was correct. After sheltering in place in my apartment with its view of the Golden Gate, the Bay, Alcatraz, and UC Berkeley for two months and with Jeff Bezos's "delivery service partners" bringing me contact-free peanut butter and oatmeal, I'd begun going nuts.

Things didn't get better when Newsom and the state of California started delivering free contact-free restaurant-made food to my door. Paid for mainly by FEMA, it's for all seniors with incomes of less than \$74,940, letting me truthfully squeak in. Why not? They drummed the Eleventh Commandment into us in the Israel Defense Forces — "If They're Giving, Take."

Nevertheless, whether paying for food or given it, I was shut in my apartment.

I'd looked in the mirror. Was that pasty, unshaven, wild-haired individual me, or was it Jack Nicholson in *The Shining* just before he takes an axe to Shelley Duvall? Something had to change. How many times can an Old Leftist rewatch *The Bicycle Thief* on the Criterion Channel?

BTW — Nicholson and Duvall are both elderly Californians now and as such also under house arrest but probably looking at more than \$74,940 a year.

So disregarding the governor, and also San Francisco's mayor, the middle-aged London Breed, an unwrinkled woman of color, last week I'd started putting on my beret, Uvex Bionic Face Shield With Clear Polycarbonate Visor, N95 mask, and latex-free, nitrile gloves and begun daily one-hour-long walks outside.

Yes, I know, N95s are supposed to be reserved for combat zone doctors and nurses. But I had some left over from the Mendocino wildfire a couple of years ago, back in a magical time when we could throw a dinner party, attend a Handel recital, shake hands, or go to a Giants double header or a Liz or Bernie rally without a second thought.

Suited up, I went outside. The fresh air and the sunlight and the shuttered businesses! Down I walked towards the bay past a locked-up kiddies playground and locked-up tennis courts and Heritage on the Marina, an upscale retirement home, and more shuttered businesses of every kind. A scene Bernard Rieux, M.D., hero of *The Plague* by Albert Camus, would have no problem recognizing. Even the Apple Store on Chestnut was deserted and locked until further notice.

But it wasn't me alone out there. Not quite. There were a few homeless people who apparently hadn't heard that the city was putting them up in now-deserted hotels where you get food, booze, cable, and marijuana at taxpayer expense — the opposite of a nightmare. Plus a few dog walkers with masks or without. Some of these pets — some, not all — growled at me.

And then you have the many, many Millennials and the younger of the Generation X-ers in Crissy Field and Fort Mason Great Meadow Park hard by the brilliant bluer-than-blue bay under a brilliant, non-polluted, coronavirus-era blue sky.

None wear masks, all are happy or look happy to a relic walking among them while distancing himself, kind of. Here they are jogging, biking, Frisbeeing, skateboarding, picnicking. They're invulnerable to the bug, right? I go among them, a creepy silver-haired old dude in visor, moth-eaten beret, goggles, N95, and gloves, wondering if they should be admired or pitied. WTF? Don't they understand what's happening and what's likely to happen?

If yes, they're heroic. As heroic, if not more so, than their great-grandfathers who beat Hitler. They're a new, like, Greatest Generation. But what if they don't understand yet that courtesy of the CCP, of neoliberal globalization, of the man in the orange-yellow hairpiece, of God, of Malthus, of Darwin, or of Mother Nature, take your pick of one or all, they're looking at maybe years if not decades of joblessness and homelessness?

Do they know their futures have maybe been wrecked, or are they putting on a brave face? I'm tempted to ask, to strike up a conversation. But if you know what A-OK means, to talk with another human except on Skype has become to play Russian roulette. Besides, I don't want to depress anybody or sound as if I'm throwing shade, like. So I control myself.

I go among them, keeping a minimum distance and resisting this impulse, while out in the bay just a few pretty little sailboats also keep a distance one from another and make way for the infrequent humongous container ship from the People's Republic of China steaming under the Golden Gate loaded with items for Walmarts and Costco. Frequency much reduced. Until a couple of months ago it was a couple every day and three on Sundays. But now just every few days you see one bringing



masks, gloves, sanitizer, and Tylenol for the Americans. Under the bridge, past Alcatraz, heading to the port of Oakland.

Soon it'll be fifty years since Henry Kissinger, who's now holed up in New York overlooking the UN and who'll soon be celebrating his one-hundredth birthday, put it into Richard Nixon's head to reach out to Mao Tse-tung. At the time it seemed like not a bad idea. China is heir to the world's oldest civilization, and communist or not the Chinese have long loved to do business with those who are younger and not so civilized.

Without interacting with a young person or any other soul, it's back to my virtual prison cell, where at 7 p.m. daily there's something to look forward to. Everybody in San Francisco goes to the window and bangs on kitchenware or blows a vuvuzela and goes "woo-woo-woo" in gratitude and esteem and love for the nurses and doctors. Everybody but a crazy old man.

I'll be honest. Even before Gavin's threat I was scouring the internet for places with few if any cases and no deaths and nobody buried alive. There are a few. North Korea and Turkmenistan, of course, no cases, no deaths, but can you credit their numbers? Tahiti? Sixty cases, zero deaths, but they're French. The Falklands? Thirteen cases, zero deaths, and they're English. The Seychelles, a thousand miles from anywhere, in the Indian Ocean? Even better — no cases, no deaths, and although some of the inhabitants are French, most are Creole.

But also scoring a perfect double zero is American Samoa. Nice people, U.S. territory, birthplace of the late Hunter S. Thompson's attorney. Only two problems — getting there and, U.S. passport or no U.S. passport, getting in. Despite that, I was thinking how it might be done when an Unknown Caller jingle-jangled, and I answered.

Eureka — I'd been thinking how to shlep my bones halfway around the world so as to claw back a year or two or three of halfway meaningful life when the fix was visible from my window. Gavin's threat wasn't a threat at all. It was him offering a Get Out of Jail Free card.

Granted, if the Rock was still a working prison, it would by now be like all the prisons, old folks' homes, and slaughterhouses from sea to shining sea — i.e., a killing ground. But as everybody knows it was closed just before Oswald shot JFK. Do the unmasked young know who Oswald and JFK were? Following which a band of Native Americans retook, occupied, or squatted on it until they were kicked off so the National Park Service could make it into a tourist attraction. The only visitors to the ex-Rock from then until a couple of months ago were loads of moms, dads, and kids from Dubuque packed into the Alcatraz Cruises ferry.

You ask if I've ever been.

Never — did real New Yorkers ever visit the top of the Empire State Building or Windows on the World? The nearest I've come was *Birdman of Alcatraz* in a real movie theater with the late, much-missed Burt Lancaster playing a double murderer who develops a cure for an avian viral infection, and *Escape From Alcatraz* with Clint Eastwood, a Californian who just turned ninety.

I wonder if he's toeing Gavin's line.

Anyway, both Wikipedia and the National Park website are illuminating. We learn the on-island shop carries books, memorabilia, souvenirs, posters, keychains. A fire gutted the lighthouse keeper's house during the Native American takeover,

but the light is said to operate automatically. Ditto the foghorn. This is true. I see the winking light every night and hear the horn. Plus we're told about and shown pictures of a nice-looking, well-tended flower garden created originally by inmates.

And now COVID-19 has closed Alcatraz even to Mom, Dad, and the kids from Dubuque, closed it to sightseers from Wuhan, New Delhi, Abu Dhabi, Oslo, and wherever, closed it to all but the gulls until they exhume Albert Sabin or Jonas Salk and one or both of them find a vaccine, in other words for decades if not forever.

Good — no, better than good. Ideal, provided there's water, power, refrigeration, toilet, and internet and an old man can have the visor-free, goggle-free, mask-free, glove-free run of the island. Can I assume Gavin will find a way to keep me fed? I think I can.

And so an hour ago I dialed 916-445-2841, the governor of California's publicly listed office number. I wanted to take him up on his offer, starting immediately. The flower garden? Has it been overrun by weeds? I'd be happy to spend as many hours a day as necessary to restore it, and without the state even paying me.

But when I called that number, leaving my own caller ID enabled, and asked for the governor's secretary, a lady or young woman asked how she could help, and when I told her about the governor's call and his idea and said I'd decided it was a good one, she said nothing for a couple of beats and then asked me if this was some kind of a joke. Aisha was her name, and no, there was no record of such a call, and no, she wasn't the governor's personal secretary. Could she pass me along to her? No, she couldn't. All she could do is warn me that if I ever wasted the office's time again, I was liable to be charged under the Golden State's penal code section 217 or 148.

Click and dial tone.

Google says 217 relates to assault on a public official. That's a stretch, no? One-forty-eight, not so much:

*Every person who willfully resists, delays, or obstructs any public officer ... in the discharge or attempt to discharge any duty of his or her office or employment, when no other punishment is prescribed, shall be punished by a fine not exceeding one thousand dollars (\$1,000), or by imprisonment in a county jail not to exceed one year, or by both that fine and imprisonment.*

Not a great stretch, not in the state at the end of the rainbow. A prosecutor might persuade a jury that by wasting the governor's time or the time of his staff at this time of warlike emergency I was keeping the state's top officer and/or his staff from discharging his or their duty. In response to the plague, Gavin emptied jails up and down the state of all except rapists and first-degree murderers, so wouldn't it be ironic if I got out of house arrest just to be put in among them?

For me to call again and demand to speak with his secretary would be too risky.

So here's my plan. Starting tomorrow I'll be going out not for an hour a day, but for hours and hours, trusting either a Zionist drone or the chihuahua woman or both catch me at it.

When the news reaches Gavin, and he calls to tell me he warned me, it'll be, like, A-OK. I'll say my bags are packed and I'm ready to share the gardening with Clint. 🐾



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# *As America Recovers From the Coronavirus, MAGYA*

*It's time to Make America Great Yet Again.*

by **Dov Fischer**

As this is being written, our great country has not yet reopened the doors to its full-engine economy, but by the time you are reading this, America will be on the road back. Ironically, if the slogan had not already been coined for the 2016 presidential election, this alone would be a time to launch a chant to “Make America Great Again.” With our country having experienced such a remarkable rebound during these past three years of Trump, as we recovered as a nation from the Obama Wasted Decade, perhaps the slogan now should be “MAGYA — Make America Great Yet Again.”

As Donald Trump contemplated the slogan, the clarion call was a charge to set behind us the concomitant national malaise that the Incompetent One wrought. In so little time, Obama managed to stagnate an economy that had nowhere to go but up. With so much pent-up economic demand, so many Americans bursting to regitalize the financial engines, Obama stifled us with commerce-crippling regulations. He blocked the Keystone XL and Dakota pipelines, disrupted hydraulic fracturing, and sought to kill the oil and gas industry as much as possible. Instead, he poured more than \$500 million down the Solyndra drain. He fostered and fomented racial divides and deep hatreds that had receded into America’s past, turning local incidents into national “teaching moments” that taught us nonsense and lies. It took the judicial system finally to expose the falsehoods of Ferguson and Michael Brown. A Black judge in Maryland exonerated one Baltimore police officer after another in the death of Freddie Gray. And George Zimmerman was innocent in Florida, even as we learned that the sweet hoodie picture that the mainstream media kept showing us of the thug he encountered had been taken years earlier and did not reflect the actual contemporaneous street-tough whose more recent photos showed him sticking his third finger towards the camera.

With Obama ruining our national culture by the kinds of people he honored, the sorts whom he welcomed into the White House, the causes he sought to advance, something painful had taken hold in America. Meanwhile, overseas we had lost the unique station we had occupied since World War II. ISIS, whom Obama belittled as a “junior varsity,” grew to form a veritable expanding caliphate in Syria. Vladimir Putin took the Crimea, entered eastern Ukraine, and restored Russian primacy in parts of the Middle East. Arab terror dominated the discussion for eight Obama years abroad, even as he would not say those words: “Arab terror.” Thus, when an Arab terrorist murdered our military personnel in our homeland, Obama called it “workplace violence.” Along the way, he cozied up to Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and the Castros in Cuba.



*Rabbi Dov Fischer is Rabbi of Young Israel of Orange County, a Senior Rabbinic Fellow and West Coast Vice President of Coalition for Jewish Values, and an adjunct professor of law at two major Southern California law schools. He is author of two books, and his opinion columns have been featured in RealClearPolitics and have appeared in the Weekly Standard, National Review, the Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, the Jerusalem Post, and American Greatness.*

Obama, viewed retrospectively, was a political virus. And Trump emerged as the vaccine. While Andrew Cuomo somehow managed to say publicly that America never was all that great anyway, Trump promised to make America great again — and he did. He restored the economy, opened the energy sector full blast, ended Obama’s Cuba honeymoon, reasserted America abroad, demanding that our NATO allies pay their fair share while he stomped out ISIS, took down Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi like a dog as that cowardly murderer-rapist held his children as protective shields. Trump responded to an attack on our embassy in Iraq by taking down Qassem Soleimani, the murderous villain who had been conducting the international terror campaign of the Iranian ayatollahs. He freed America from the handcuffs of Obama’s Iran deal that saw our country blackmailed into sending \$1.7 billion in cash secretly to the ayatollahs, with \$400 million in pallets of cold currency flown hastily to buy their mercy.

We forget lots of this now because the China virus of 2019 subsumed the national discussion and focus. But that is what Obama did to us and what Trump rescued us from. He made America great again. At home, unemployment dropped to record lows across the board for Blacks, for Hispanics, for women, for virtually every demographic group. The Dow Jones and Nasdaq numbers were setting new records almost every day. Abroad, he really got the Europeans to pay more towards their fair share, and he really changed the momentum throughout.

The China virus has been devastating for families hit by it physically and sometimes killed by it, and it has wreaked economic and social havoc. Even our major national sports leagues have had to sit out their seasons, while we have been compelled to remain distant from theater, concerts, restaurants, and especially from houses of worship. How frustrating it must be for a president who was preparing to run for reelection on his extraordinary record of achievement! Instead of voters contemplating celebrating the most wonderful economic period they have experienced, we instead find ourselves digging our way out of the terrible catastrophe of this once-in-a-century pandemic from a China whose wet markets repeatedly foster these global health catastrophes by purveying bats, cats, snakes, rats, and whatever food garbage they can offer in the most unsanitary of conditions.

So it will be necessary to Make American Great Yet Again — MAGYA. And America uniquely is situated to meet the challenge. To the degree that we resist and shun the siren calls to adopt socialism, a catastrophic system that has failed every single place and time it has been tried, it will be America’s capitalist drive and freedom-based spirit that will make America great yet again. With freedom, people gain the safety to think outside the box. With capitalism, people enjoy the best of incentives to take risks when new opportunities present. In such an environment, assisted mightily by Trump having unshackled so much of the economy and having deregulated so much of business, new products will emerge. New markets will be created. New methods and services will appear. Pent-up demand will be addressed and satisfied. Just as many of us previously could not have contemplated the computer, the internet, search engines, online commerce, and so much else that today is the norm in business and life, so it will be that we will rebound again if we keep the socialists and government do-gooders at bay.

As uniquely challenging as this China virus has been, America has faced pandemics before. In the late eighteenth century, the Yellow Fever virus struck us, wiping out some 10 percent of the city of Philadelphia in 1793. Because people at that time did not initially link the disease to mosquitoes, and the very notion of “virus” was not yet known, many thought it was caused by something abstract in Philadelphia’s air. People were turning yellow, vomiting blood in the streets, and dropping dead instantly. As a result, wooden wagons arriving from Philadelphia into other cities were set on fire as a precaution. In Philadelphia itself, people sought to “purify the air” by lighting outdoor fires throughout the city every night, shooting rifles into the sky, and smoking tobacco. Even kids and women started smoking cigars. Half the city’s population, including George Washington, literally fled elsewhere, and that pandemic even contributed in some small measure towards the decision to move the new nation’s capital closer to the great open-air plantation estates — Washington’s Mount Vernon, Jefferson’s Monticello, Madison’s Montpelier, and Monroe’s Highland — owned by the First Families of Virginia who would lead the country through our first half century. By the 1800s America was back on the move.

About a century later, we actually lost more of our population (675,000) to the 1918 misnamed “Spanish Flu” than we did to the concurrent World War I (53,402 in combat and another 63,114 from disease that also included more Spanish Flu victims). Fifty million people died worldwide during that pandemic, and even President Wilson contracted the disease. Yet, soon enough, we rebounded and almost overnight entered a period that we now remember as the “Roaring Twenties,” as Prohibition ended, entertainment and celebrating resumed, and the economy zoomed. America’s wealth doubled, Babe Ruth emerged to redefine baseball, and commercial radio stations appeared for the first time, expanded into the hundreds, and were reaching more than twelve million American households within the decade. Talking pictures — movies — emerged to change American culture. Henry Ford’s “Model T” hit the roads. In other words, America came back from the 1918 pandemic with a rapid sonic boom.

It is a shame that, with America truly ablaze in full recovery mode from the political virus of Obamism, so much came to a sudden halt, with COVID-19 replacing the Democrat House as the major cause of disrupting our lives and battering our economy and public policy. But our history teaches that, as long as we remain committed to preserving a society built on freedom and an economy structured on free enterprise with minimal government interference, we truly can be on the cusp of MAGYA — Making America Great Yet Again. ✨

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It will be necessary to  
Make American Great  
Yet Again — MAGYA.  
And America uniquely  
is situated to meet the  
challenge.

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# POLITICS



*Bill Wilson*



# The American Dream in 2020

*Right now, it's TBA.*

by **Larry Thornberry**

**T**he writers' mission statement for the spring/summer print edition of *The American Spectator* calls for speculations on the state of the American Dream in this melancholy and totally nutso spring. Other than to state the obvious, that most Americans are dreaming of a return to the normal that we enjoyed and took for granted so recently, one has to conclude that the contours of the American Dream are more of a moving target now than they've been in living memory.

Thanks to changing demographics, intense identity politics, and technology on steroids, there's a lot less *unum* in our *e pluribus* than there has been in the past. Our national motto may be morphing into "out of one dream, many."

Even before corona and its attendant restrictions — some of these wise, others foolish and overreaching — the traditional American Dream, usually considered to be the good and long-term job, home ownership, marriage, and 2.5 children, was getting a pretty good working over by unbridled technological "progress," robots in the workplace, exotic family arrangements, and artificial intelligence. (As for this last, what chance does artificial intelligence have against real stupidity?) Now if you Google "the American Dream," it simply says, "To be announced."

One casualty of the coronavirus and the draconian measures taken to head it off is predictability. This was pretty thin on the ground already and sinking fast, thanks to the items mentioned above. I certainly got out of the political prediction business after 2016. Nothing I predicted in that off-the-charts political year — save that Hillary wouldn't be indicted and Jeb! wasn't going anywhere — came to be. It looks like 2020 will be even trickier.

We often hear nowadays that the stock market hates unpredictability. True enough. So does just about everybody else. It's impossible to plan for and lead a competent and satisfying life if one doesn't know what's going to happen next week, or even tomorrow. One can hardly dream — American or otherwise — about a future that's a total mystery. Once the medical smoke clears on this one — and it will — we'll likely find putting the American economy back together again to be more challenging than was getting masks, gloves, and ventilators to where they needed to be and in sufficient numbers.

Alas, one thing we can surely predict is that the corona catastrophe will increase the size and scope of government and lessen our liberties. All horrific events — world wars, the Great Depression, the Great Society hallucinations of the 1960s, et al. — have had this effect. Prominent Democrats have made it clear that they




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Larry Thornberry of Tampa is a longtime contributor to *The American Spectator*. His work has also appeared in the *Washington Times* and the *Wall Street Journal*.

will use corona, as they use everything else, to advance their liberty-smothering vision. A vision in which government and politics control everything. Everything! It's unlikely Republicans will come out of this with clean hands either (no matter how often they wash them under the current protocol). Would that their limited-government game were as good as their election-time limited-government rhetoric.

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The contours of the American Dream are more of a moving target now than they've been in living memory.

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Politicians, mostly Democrats, say elect them and they'll bring about change. Could we reach a day when more astute politicians change that tune to, "Elect me and I'll slow change down"? I think there's a market for this approach just now. My vote is certainly in play.

As a man of, uh, mature years, I know it won't be that long before I leave the living and dreaming to others. I pray the dreams of younger Americans don't turn to nightmares. The immediate obstacles are considerable. But we have an enviable record of dealing successfully with catastrophes — wars, civil and otherwise, medical tragedies, and the temporary ascendancy of really bad ideas (some of the worst of which keep popping back up — see Bernie Sanders). This record gives this old American dreamer hope.

We've kicked some serious catastrophe butt before. If we haven't become hopelessly soft, atrophied by decades of affluence, ease, and participation trophies, Americans can mobilize the same resources to whip this current medical, political, and economic infarct as were brought to bear on previous catastrophes. If rebuilding after the bug doesn't get our minds off of microaggressions, tricked-up crises like global warming, insane arguments about pronouns, and other fashionable trifles, nothing will. If all goes well we can get back to working and dreaming. Americans have historically been good at both. ✨

## Intern at *The American Spectator*!

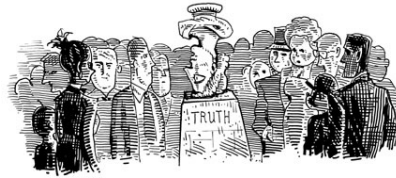
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## Après le Déluge

*After coronavirus — chaos and Zoom meetings?*

by Joseph Bottum

There's a type of writing you've probably read a dozen times in recent months: a newspaper op-ed, a magazine essay of the kind that reporters used to call a thumbsucker. A think-piece, written in a deep and pensive prose. Reflective, contemplative, and wise.

Goo, in other words. But goo of a particular sort, about how all the world has been forever changed, altered to its core, by the coronavirus — and yet, somehow, those changes are easily explained by small events in the writers' lives. "The comfort of being in the presence of others," writes a linguistics professor about the isolation she's felt since the lockdown, will have to be "replaced by a greater comfort with absence." The empty shelves of a local supermarket have empowered one sociologist to opine (not that sociologists typically need much empowering for their opinions) that the coronavirus pandemic has forever ended market society and individualism.

Meanwhile, sex has been permanently transformed by the nude selfies sent during quarantine, according to reporters at both *Vox* and the *New York Times*, who drew that conclusion when they received nude pictures from people with whom they were not having sex. After getting his art fix from online sources for several weeks — basically analogous to gulping methadone to feed a heroin addiction — an art critic has confidently assured readers that, from now until the twelfth of never, art will exist only as online streaming.

Geopolitics is a favorite for those who peer into the crystal ball of the coronavirus. The People's Republic of China is on an inevitable rise to rule the world — or maybe it's that China will soon collapse, broken into pieces like smashed dinner plates. This is the End of the West, you see. Or a demonstration of the West's great strength. Hard to say.

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*Joseph Bottum is director of the Classics Institute, a cyberethics think tank, at Dakota State University.*

But at least we know that capitalism is toast. Or that socialism has at last been exposed as the fraud it always was. Again, difficult to decide. But it's surely one or the other. Each of the thoughtful, thumbsucking writers you've read in recent weeks has had a personal experience during the crisis that provides the perfect figure, the ideal synecdoche, for proving it true. Whatever it may be.

We needn't feel left out of the general prognosticating that has taken over journalism. My own experience during the lockdown has been an experience of reading think-pieces about the long-term effect of the lockdown. And surely that's enough to provide me with some insight — which is, in essence, that every attempt to describe the changes is overstated. Every one of those thumbsuckers is overburdened with the bias of the present moment. Every claim of utterly changed society is overwrought. Every declaration of altered human nature is overbroad.

Even more to the point, most of those predictions are entirely, well, predictable — confirmation of the views held by the writer before the coronavirus. Want strong government? The virus has revealed to you the necessity for centralizing power. Want an end to global capitalism? The world crisis has demonstrated its failure. Want to end the family as a rival to the power of the state? The disease has shown that family can be abolished. Want ... oh, hell, whatever you want, the virus can be taken as either bringing it about or requiring that it be enacted.

All of this is just a way of saying that nothing should remind us to be philosophical conservatives more than the gleeful or even despairing declarations that reality itself has suddenly been made different. A little skepticism about grand explanations, in the mode of Michael Oakeshott. A little confidence in the perdurance of human nature, in the mode of Thomas Aquinas. A little faith in the resilience of the human spirit, in the mode of Winston Churchill. A little historical perspective, in the mode of Edmund Burke, and we have some shelter from the barrage of claims that what the Plague of Justinian, the Black Death, and the Spanish

Influenza failed to achieve in their time, the coronavirus has somehow accomplished in 2020.

Ah, well. None of this means that we cannot do at least a bit of prognostication. Grand notions of universal alteration are right out the window, but we might hold back from defenestration a few smaller claims. A number of social and political trends were building before the coronavirus crisis arrived in its two forms: a potential health disaster, giving way to an economic disaster. And if any of those trends intensified during the lockdown, then it seems reasonable to suspect that they will continue for years after — the enduring residue of the virus and our responses to it.

The massive increase of surveillance is the first and most disturbing of these lasting effects. To live in a major city last year was already to have one's picture recorded around thirty times a day. After forty years of the computer revolution, we already had our mail turned primarily electronic, which means accessible to hackers and law enforcement in ways no other correspondence had ever been available. The move from local hard drives on personal computers to cloud storage was doing similar work: increasingly allowing our documents to be accessible by people we did not intend to see them. The use of data-collecting apps on our cell phones was making tracking us by avaricious advertisers and curious prosecutors ever easier.

One observable change is that, last year, hardly anyone was strongly defending this kind of surveillance. Hardly anyone thought it was a good thing. And now? In its fight against infection, China has deployed the most advanced forms of computing to control its citizens. The government is monitoring cell phones and collating face-recognition data from millions of public cameras — all while compelling citizens to report their medical condition and record their DNA. Billions of these medical reports are subject to calculation by high-speed computers and advanced algorithms designed to identify the vulnerable, criminal, and undesirable parts of the population. What incentive could the Chinese government ever have to give up this kind of medical-research treasure trove or this level of social control?

Though the most egregious, China is not alone. South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan have implemented some parallel measures. To fight the virus, the Israel Security Agency is using drones and other technologies it developed to find terrorists — the country's own citizens essentially equated to its enemies. In New York and Paris alike, hotlines have been set up to encourage residents to report violators of lockdown policies. Perhaps these are necessary accessories to the public policy during a moment of health crisis, but the cities' political leaders seemed to feel no hesitation in urging a

Stasi-level of citizen reporting, with people enlisted as agents of the state to rat one another out.

Yuval Noah Harari suggests there was a bright line we didn't even notice we were crossing when we made the transition from "over the skin" to "under the skin" surveillance. "Hitherto, when your finger touched the screen of your smartphone and clicked on a link," authoritarian governments "wanted to know what exactly your finger was clicking on," he points out. But in the name of public health, those governments now want "to know the temperature of your finger and the blood-pressure under its skin."

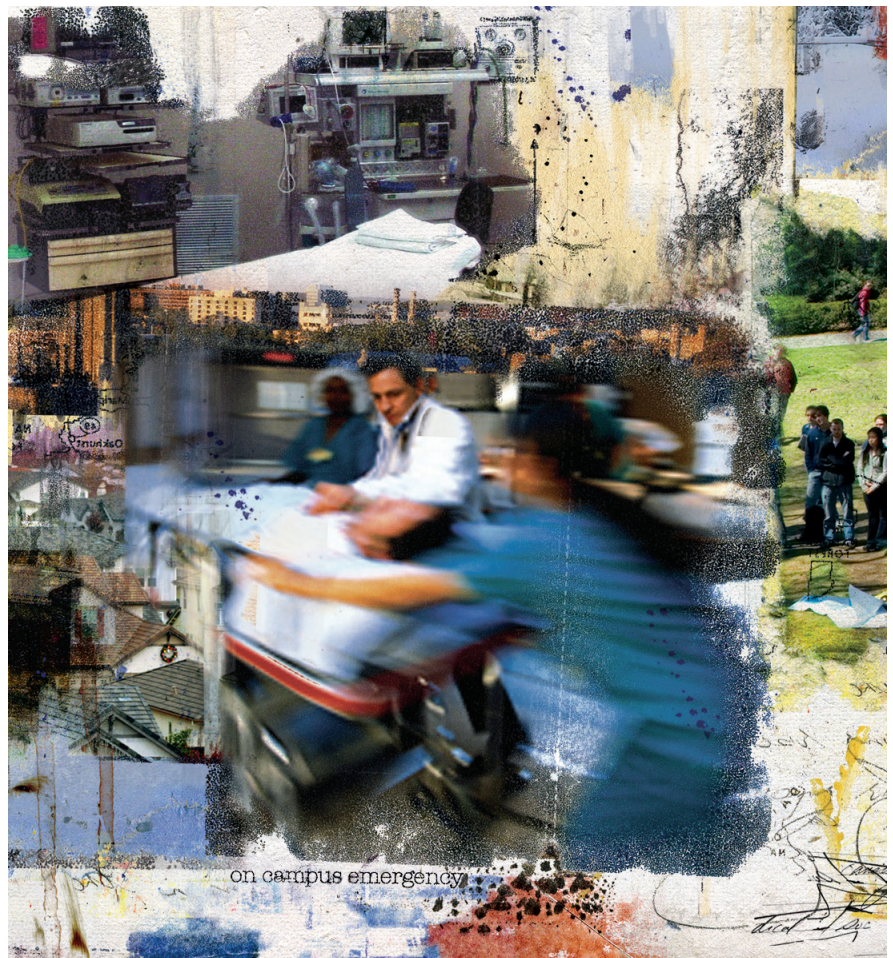
In fact, under-the-skin computing was already on the rise before the coronavirus. Companies were experimenting

with subcutaneous ID chips, computerized hearing and sight implants, chip-laden artificial organs, wearable medical-monitoring devices reporting to a central computer, and even the first tentative efforts at brain-stem additions. We've suggested that we can expect continuation from any trend that both was rising before the virus and gained broad new uses during the lockdown. By that measure, intrusive surveillance of the body itself is very likely to continue. Governments will find it far too easy to demand ever greater electronic monitoring of the health of its citizens — all the while proclaiming, in self-congratulatory tones, the need to protect public health from future pandemics.

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## The massive increase of surveillance is the first and most disturbing of these lasting effects.

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Brian Hubble

Once we have the body monitored to this degree, we will know people's physical locations and even something about their emotional states (drawing on heart rate, blood flow, and temperature data). The Soviets could only have dreamed of the social control such information allows. In the weakened state of the Western democracies, with lockdowns already sweeping aside claims of infringed civil liberty, we could easily see a race to the bottom — as health services and police demand the powers granted to their counterparts in authoritarian countries. All in the name of public health, of course. All with, we will be assured, the best of motives.

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We should not pretend that a halting of human touch comes with no social or psychological costs.

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None of the other likely enduring changes from the coronavirus scare are as threatening, although that doesn't make them good. Virtual meetings, for example — to replace the baby boomers, the rise of the baby Zoomers — were increasing in recent years, and they have, of course, vastly expanded in recent months. We can probably expect more of the same in the future. And why not? All businesses would be glad to shed the expense of travel. Even more, many of them would be happy to abandon their costly offices, with employees working from home.

It's worth noticing, however, the pressures warring against the trend. Back in the 1990s, we were constantly informed by futurologists that telecommuting was going to take over and transform the office as we knew it. The reasons it didn't still obtain. Workers often require the kind of oversight and visible competition that offices provide. For that matter, the mating impulse is strong. Most young people don't want to work for a New York firm from their parents' basement in Pierre, South Dakota. They want to move to the city, where they can meet and mingle with others their age. They want to work with comrades, colleagues, and potential mates.

Still, though the trendline will settle back down, virtual-meeting spaces will remain a factor in national life. And so, for that matter, will online education (again, a phenomenon that was building before the coronavirus). A complete revamping of American university would be a welcome change, given that we use the college system for incidental social purposes — notably, social-class formation and emotional individuation — for which it is not ideal. But the cultural investment in higher education makes that unlikely. A handful of financially vulnerable universities may go under, but young people's desire to attend physical colleges will restock most of them once they reopen. Those students, however, will have an expectation that online classes and recorded lectures will be available.

Maybe the loss of handshakes will also continue. An end to political baby-kissing. A

disappearance of social touching — a pat on the arm, a cheek rub. All in the name of public health. But these also represent a loss of the tactile and the haptic. A loss of presence, in the sense in which philosophers and psychologists speak of human interaction. And we should not pretend that a halting of human touch comes with no social or psychological costs. All of these declines in physical presence, from virtual meetings to a cessation of handshakes, represent a diminishing of something very human.

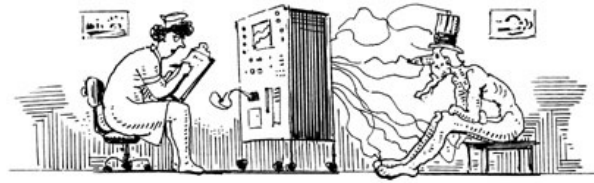
Injured freedom, damaged natural relations: This starts to sound like the grand think-pieces we started by mocking. But at least in these predictions, we see measurable trends that existed before the current crisis and grew during the crisis — and trends, moreover, related to the computer revolution. Technology has put into play capacities for social control and virtual retreat from the physical that did not exist when humanity faced previous threats to health.

The Plague of Justinian, the Black Death, the Spanish Influenza, for example — all they did was kill millions of us. The coronavirus has proved far less murderous. But perhaps it is also more dangerous. We need to resist not just the effects of the disease but also the effects of the treatment. ❧



Brian Hubble





## Coming to Terms With Contact Tracing

*There's a world of difference between an app and a medical professional.*

by Matt Shapiro

I want to write this all into a screenplay. An all-seeing, all-knowing surveillance regime, discovered affairs, mixed alliances, dire warnings, and a complete loss of trust in institutional powers could make for a great Netflix limited series on the world's reaction to COVID-19. But, to be fair, it will probably end up on HBO because Netflix always ends up flinching on the really good stuff.

As of this writing, we are on the cusp of the third month of the global confrontation with the devastating coronavirus, and the concerns have shifted from mitigation (do we have enough ventilators?) to management. The big questions on everyone's minds are, "When can we open up?" and "How much can we open up?"

In mitigation, the rallying cry has been to "flatten the curve," which refers to the concern that the infection rate will be so high that we will overwhelm our hospitals. As we enter the management phase, the phrase "test and trace" has taken its place. We can't open, we are told, without adequate testing combined with the ominous-sounding practice of contact tracing.

Contact tracing is a complex topic that has been made less comprehensible and more terrifying by the fact that everyone seems to be using a different definition for it.

In what I'm going to call "classic epidemiology," contact tracing is basically just an interview with an infected patient. An interviewer would take the incubation period (between two and fourteen days) and ask the patient where they were during that time. Were they at home? Did they go out to eat? Did they go to church? Did they visit friends? The interviewer would put together a list of people who might have had close contact with the patient while they were contagious and would check up with them. Those contacts would be tested quickly in the early stages of infection and, if they are positive, quarantined.

The idea in contact tracing is to identify those most likely to be infected and quickly isolate them to reduce the spread of the disease. Contact tracing (sometimes called contact investigation) is a basic part of the epidemiologist toolkit and is standard procedure for tuberculosis, SARS, MERS, measles, and Ebola. In those contexts, it is uncontroversial.

Unfortunately for us, uncontroversial things do not sell newspapers. A lot of media attention has been paid to a much more controversial form of contact tracing, which uses digital surveillance of an infected individual's mobile device to try to improve on this more traditional form of contact investigation. This form of contact tracing uses automated and highly detailed information about where the infected person has traveled and how long they were at any given place.

The South Korean government has even published the GPS coordinates of infected individuals. Though the government strips the data of its "personalized" markers, it does not take staggering genius to look at a map of a given phone's GPS patterns and wonder, "Gosh, that person seems to be sleeping at my house, but when he went out for that 'work meeting,' he didn't go to where his work is." And thus I get my "discovered affairs" subplot to burn a good ten minutes into my screenplay.

The reality is that, even in South Korea, the contact tracing interview is the core component of an effective trace. That part isn't invasive, excessive, or unreasonable. Humans are actually pretty good at talking to other humans and making judgments about what kinds of behaviors might constitute high risk for transmitting infection. According to an early publication on COVID-19 contact tracing, the infected patient's GPS data were used only to verify what was said in the interview. It was the human-to-human communication that drove the bulk of the follow-up testing and subsequent quarantines.

Despite the fact that digital contact tracing is not the primary form of tracking infections, there are endless discussions, controversies, and privacy threats related to it. This is driven

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*Matt Shapiro is a data visualization expert and software engineer based in Seattle.*

by the nature of our mobile application culture, that move-fast-and-break-things ethos that would rather be first than be right. There are dozens of COVID-19 tracking apps that monitor the user's position and, if a user tests positive (and says so in the application), the app sends an alert to all users who come closer than the government-approved social-distance unit of the infected user.

Even Google and Apple have gotten into the game, introducing contact tracing components built straight into their mobile operating systems that claim to use Bluetooth technology to monitor the distance of the user to other phones. The idea is that when any mobile phone user is listed as infected, every person they've been "in contact" with over the last two weeks will be notified.

**T**his is the part of the article where I step outside my detached observational façade and just start laughing. I've worked in mobile technology for many years, since before the birth of the first iPhone. The concepts behind digital contact tracing are absurd, unwarranted by the situation in which we find ourselves, and a deep threat to user privacy.

If you have ever tried to connect to a Bluetooth mouse or headset and you don't live on three acres all by yourself, you're familiar with the Bluetooth device "Maddy's speaker" or "Kitchen" or "Alexa 3." Devices can detect other devices through apartment walls or across cars in a traffic jam. Barrier types that are effective deterrents for COVID transmission, such as walls or car doors or open park air on a sunny day, are not effective deterrents according to Bluetooth. The efficacy of this method of contact tracing is tenuous.

Let's return to the South Korean model (which doesn't use Bluetooth because that is ridiculous) and investigate the entirety of their efforts to contain COVID-19. Upon entering the country, they take your temperature and you begin the process of quarantine, which involves digital location surveillance, for fourteen days. They test everyone, with results coming back within a day.

If your test is positive, the process of contact tracing begins, but it is still a blunt instrument. The government sends out a general public safety alert, performs the contact tracing interview, and reaches out to everyone they think might have come into contact with the COVID-positive individual. Those people then start self-isolation and are tested again.

Importantly, the Korean government delivers food and essentials to everyone who is in self-isolation. There is not, as far as I know, any equivalent process in the United States, and even people who are talking about ubiquitous digital contact tracing don't seem to be considering the surrounding care infrastructure it would require.

The most dangerous aspect of relying on digital contact tracing as a solution is that it might immunize people against genuine warnings. If someone is getting five notifications a day that they came within six feet of someone who ended up

two weeks later being diagnosed with COVID, they may not take it seriously when a contact tracing professional texts them that they have been working in an open office with someone recently diagnosed.

This is where the mixed alliances and dire warnings make a play. I did not initially expect to find myself in the same camp as the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institution, and Harvard's Kennedy School, but here we are. The consensus among both information security and medical professionals is that digital contact tracing is unlikely to provide enough benefit to actually change anything in this crisis. And I'm being quite generous in my skepticism. To quote data security expert Bruce Schneier:

*The end result is an app that doesn't work. People will post their bad experiences on social media, and people will read those posts and realize that the app is not to be trusted. That loss of trust is even worse than having no app at all.*

*It has nothing to do with privacy concerns. The idea that contact tracing can be done with an app, and not human health professionals, is just plain dumb.*

**S**o why do we still have this push for digital contact tracing? Why is it even still a part of the discussion?

They say that extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures, and I am, in theory, a proponent of that sentiment. In an ideal world, we could say, "This enormous moment of history in which we find ourselves necessitates actions we would not normally contemplate." The problem is that we know with some confidence that this enormous moment will come and go, but the compromises we made will remain with us for decades. As Schneier noted, "This is just something governments want to do for the hell of it. To me, it's just techies doing techie things because they don't know what else to do."

As someone who has been closely following this crisis for months, I know the effects of uncertainty. Experts and governments and media figures make promises and predictions, issue warnings, make threats. But it becomes obvious in short order that they have only a weak handle on the situation. I don't really blame them; the nature of authority is to act as if they have control over every situation, and a key component of having control is to be able to predict what will happen tomorrow. Without predictive foresight, there is no control.

But this virus laughs at our predictions and makes a mockery of our control. If you were to design a crisis meant to shatter public trust in institutions and expose the uncertainty that lies beneath the false confidence of our ruling class, you could hardly do better than COVID-19.

It's hard to see, but we do know this crisis will end. Hopefully it will end before we try literally anything on the off chance that it will make a difference. That is what digital contact tracing is: an off chance. But while it has only an outside chance of making a difference, it has an excellent chance of sticking around after the crisis has lifted.

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The concepts behind digital contact tracing are absurd, unwarranted by the situation in which we find ourselves, and a deep threat to user privacy.

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**W**ith any luck, by August or September, we will all be more familiar with contact tracing. Before COVID-19 manages to become a pandemic in any given area, it moves in clusters. It travels among small groups of people (families, neighbors, classrooms) until some super-spreader makes it nearly impossible to contain. Effective disease management in the form of contact tracing interviews, rigorous follow-up, and voluntary quarantine can help keep those clusters from spreading.

This requires an enormous amount of trust among the general population. People need to know that when they are being warned of a close contact with COVID-19, that warning is urgent and meaningful. It needs to be serious enough to require action.

This also requires enormous amounts of trust to be placed in the contract tracing interviewers and the institutions who are managing the tracing process. People have to believe that these institutions are working with clear intention and with respect for individuals and their decision-making processes. And, in return, we need state and local governments to trust their constituents to abide by the issued warnings.

An example of how this trust might work can be seen in Washington state's plan for reopening dine-in restaurants.

Restaurants will be required to collect diners' phone numbers and email addresses and record their time of arrival, all of which can be reviewed as part of the contact tracing process.

I know many of my admirably liberty-minded friends balk at this, but I see this as an exercise in public trust. Nothing stops me from giving them a fake phone number or email address. But I trust them to use this information only as needed. If I test positive for COVID, there's no reason to lie to the contact tracers and tell them I wasn't at that restaurant. And if the person across from me tests positive, I would certainly want to know so that I can also be tested.

Most importantly, this kind of manual logging of dining patrons cannot be "flipped on" at a later date. It is not something that is going to linger just because the government likes to track people. It requires trust from the dining patrons, trust from the business owner, trust from the state government. If anyone starts acting to break that trust chain, everyone will suffer. We are interdependent on the goodwill and honesty of all the involved institutions and actors.

Trust is the only way that any of this works, but that trust must work in all directions. 🐦



# Coronavirus and the Ceremony of Innocence

*Every plague reminds us of something beyond mere mortality.*

by David Catron

The coronavirus pandemic has, by historical standards, not been very impressive. Despite the wildly implausible projections promulgated by the World Health Organization (WHO), the consistently inaccurate forecasts of our government “experts,” and the absurd predictions of the “news” media, COVID-19 is unlikely to produce an ultimate U.S. death toll approaching that of the 1957–58 Asian flu. That virus produced the deadliest epidemic the country has endured since World War II, killing around 116,000 people, or about 0.07 percent of the total U.S. population of 172 million. COVID-19 will probably end up killing about 100,000 Americans, or 0.03 percent of the current U.S. population of 331 million. Nonetheless, all pandemics — whether they kill millions or merely thousands — have a way of permanently affecting our lives. The following is a brief list of some ways in which COVID-19 will change the way we live.

### *The remote revolution will finally arrive.*

For more than two decades, we have been hearing that the age of brick-and-mortar was about to end, that the “gig economy” would soon bring about the extinction of the traditional office and its grotesque offspring — the cube farm — just as surely as carbon dioxide will destroy the planet. Yet, like those portentous prophecies about the demise of Mother Earth, predictions about the imminent death of the office have thus far been no more accurate than the fabled IHME coronavirus fatality projections. The traditional white-collar workplace has proven remarkably resilient. We have continued to allow our children to be raised by people who would be otherwise unemployed in order to operate expensive and dangerous machines on crowded roads to reach drab little rooms where we spend countless hours working on devices and software that could be set up at our homes by any normal ten-year-old. Why?

Many corporate “leaders” don’t trust their employees to work as conscientiously at home as they do when the boss is down the hall taking a nap behind his closed door. American business is encumbered by a wide stratum of middle managers that exist to provide personal oversight of employees whom they insist will cut corners and fail to meet deadlines if left unsupervised.



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*David Catron is a recovering health-care consultant. In addition to his contributions to The American Spectator, his writing has appeared in PJ Media, the Providence Journal, Parnassus, Able Muse, and a variety of snotty literary publications.*

Widespread telecommuting, they claim, will reduce productivity. Their actual concern is that, without dozens of employees to pester, they will have difficulty explaining what precisely they themselves do all day. In today's technological environment, measuring the productivity of remote workers isn't hard, and numerous studies have shown that telecommuting actually increases productivity. During the plague, many companies will have discovered this. Neither employers nor employees will want to return to the twentieth century.

*Small towns and exurbs will take on a new allure.*

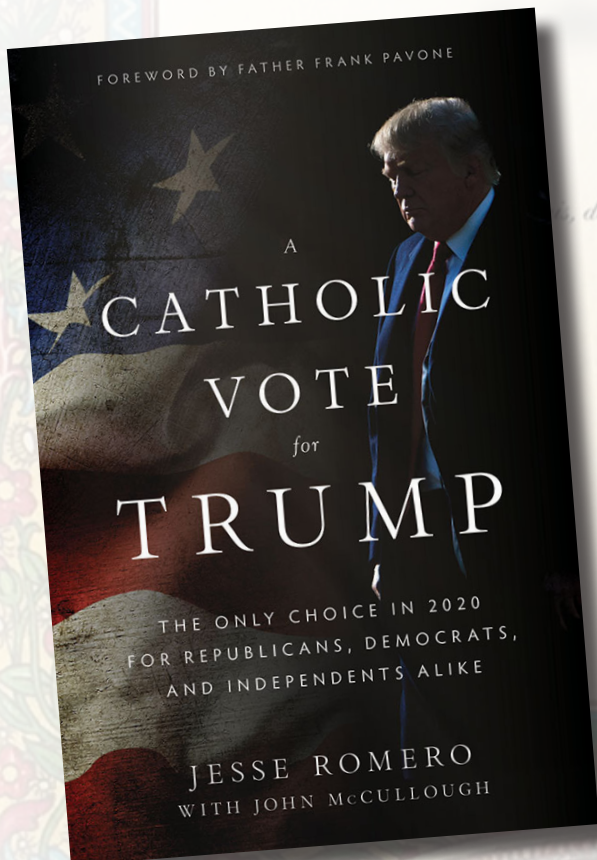
The much-maligned and hopelessly unfashionable small towns and exurbs of America have unquestionably provided a much more salubrious environment to ride out the coronavirus epidemic than have large metropolitan centers. It's a good bet that, for all but the very rich, places like New York City, Detroit, Chicago, and New Orleans have been genuinely miserable places to live during March and April. Meanwhile, the residents of small towns like Milledgeville, Georgia (population 18,933), have been merely inconvenienced. Indeed, for those of us who long ago left some large metropolitan areas, there is a sense that it was the best decision we ever made. There is very little danger here of coronavirus infection (the entire county has had 135 confirmed COVID-19 cases and four deaths), and there is no corollary to the psychic anguish *New York Magazine's* Andrew Sullivan laments,

*I began to lose it this week.... My sleep patterns are totally screwed up, and I find myself making up tense several times a night, or crashing out for 10 or 12 hours at a time. I wake up and want to go back to sleep. My appetite is waning, and my body longs for some weights to push and pull. My teeth grind all night long and my jaw is tense. I have all the time in the world to read and write, and yet I find myself anesthetized with ennui, procrastinating and distracting myself. Yes, I scan the news every day, often hourly, to discern any seeds of progress.... All of this is why, on some days, I can barely get out of bed.*

In today's technological environment, measuring the productivity of remote workers isn't hard, and numerous studies have shown that telecommuting actually increases productivity.

This is the downside of uptown living among fashionable and self-satisfied "elites." Crowded cities full of sophisticates have always been the epicenters of pandemics. It was a plague, for example, that ended the golden age of Athens. This is the price one pays for sneering at all the rubes living ordinary lives in flyover

country, where so many people voted for Trump and plan to do so again. We are free to come and go as we please because there is plenty of room to maintain social distancing. We can stroll down the sidewalk without being knocked down by a runner. We can buy gardening tools and house paint. Moreover, as I write, my governor in Georgia is beginning the process of reopening the state. Not coincidentally, local real estate agents have been receiving a lot of calls from out-of-town buyers interested in relocating here, and I have noticed that a number of "For Sale" signs have been replaced with "Sold" banners.



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*The progressive mania for mass transit is doomed.*

No matter how much carnage COVID-19 causes, it has produced at least one fatality that will be deeply mourned by the Left. Progressives and environmentalists have long nurtured the hope that mass transit would one day supersede the century-old dominance of the automobile as America's preferred mode of transportation. The ostensible motivation behind their enthusiasm for cramming us like sardines into subways and commuter trains is their fervent desire to save the planet. Whether or not one takes that proposition seriously, it's pretty clear that COVID-19 has put paid to the mass transit movement. Social distancing is just not one of your choices in a New York City subway, a Boston MBTA train, or the Washington Metro. And, given the choice of avoiding the coronavirus today or saving the planet at some undesignated date in the distant future, most sensible Americans are going to choose the former.

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It's pretty clear that COVID-19 has put paid to the mass transit movement.

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Mass transit was already moribund before the advent of COVID-19. Across the country, the use of subways and commuter trains has long been declining for a variety of social and safety reasons. People unable to telecommute and employees of companies unwilling to enter the twenty-first century were already opting to drive their own cars to work. Consequently, the advent of coronavirus dealt the coup de grâce to subway systems across the country, from New York City and New Jersey to the Bay Area Rapid Transit system in San Francisco. And the situation is no better in the upper Midwest. According to the Chicago Transit Authority, "L" train ridership is down by 82 percent. Even as far north as Canada, the Toronto Transit Commission reports empty trains at rush hour. Mass transit has been on life support for some time primarily due to its poor return on investment. The COVID-19 pandemic has finally pulled the plug.

*The ceremony of innocence is drowned.*

As noted above, the coronavirus pandemic isn't very impressive by historical standards. Consequently, it will change our lives in relatively superficial ways. Moreover, the vast majority of its victims are, by twenty-first century standards, expendable. The majority come from that most reviled tribe of villains — men. COVID-19 kills about twice as many males as women. This is true in Australia, China, Italy, the U.S., and every other country it has invaded. Consequently, some feminists may view the pandemic as condign punishment for the plague of patriarchy they claim has sickened society for millennia. A more rational way to look at coronavirus is as a wake-up call. Most of us conduct our lives as if real depravity and deprivation don't exist. Perhaps COVID-19 will drown that ceremony of innocence. ❧

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WITH FOREWORDS BY TOM McCLINTOCK AND MARK BUCHER

**STEVEN GREENHUT**

**The public's servants have truly become the public's masters.**



## Let Them Go on Welfare

*California Democrats know their new law is costing modest-income people their livelihoods — and they really just don't care.*

by **Steven Greenhut**

If we're looking for an example of heartlessness from the political class, there are few better examples than California Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez's Twitter response to moderate-income freelance workers who lost their jobs because of her law restricting companies from using contract labor. Even during the coronavirus stay-at-home orders, where a suspension of the law would help desperate people make ends meet working at home and enable contract drivers to provide much-needed home deliveries, Gonzalez largely doubled down on her support for the law.

After Vox Media announced in December its layoff of two hundred mostly California-based writers for its SB Nation sports website, Gonzalez tweeted, "I'm sure some legit freelancers lost substantial income and I empathize with that especially this time of year. But Vox is a culture." As *Reason* reported, she previously said, "These were never good jobs. No one has ever suggested that, even freelancers." She also reportedly shouted profanity at people protesting the law.

So, Gonzalez knows her law is obliterating "substantial income" for California musicians, writers, actors, speech pathologists, sign-language interpreters, you name it. But it's not a concern because she doesn't think they were good jobs. Apparently, if it's not a permanent union job on a factory floor or in a cubicle, it's just not good enough.

At this point, everyone in the state Capitol knows the unintended consequences of Assembly Bill 5. The union-backed measure targeted drivers for Uber, Lyft, and other app-based delivery services. Progressives accused these companies of "misclassifying" workers and intended to force them to hire them as permanent employees with benefits.

But even after influential lobbies representing insurance agents, Realtors, lawyers, and others carved out special exemptions, the law still ensnared many types of workers. It's a reminder of how these central planners don't understand the economy — and the myriad ways people have learned to piece together a decent living.

"I survived cancer and had 36 surgeries while raising kids, and still live with a traumatic brain injury," according to one tweet from the hashtag #AB5Stories circulated by Assemblyman Kevin Kiley, the Roseville Republican who authored



*Steven Greenhut is Western region director for the R Street Institute and is on the editorial board of the Southern California News Group. His 2009 book, *Plunder!*, described the way public servants have become the public's masters.*

a measure to suspend the law. “I can’t work a regular job. But with the support of my family, I was finally chasing my dreams as a writer, poet & Voice Over actor. Now #AB5 won’t let me.”

That’s a compelling story and one of many that have circulated on social media and in news reports. The law is taking its toll on music and the arts. “After 40+ years of classical music concerts offered outside with family and friends, the Lake Tahoe Music Festival will call a wrap to our summer festival with two performances in August of 2020,” the festival announced on its Facebook page.

“Most musicians make their livings through gigs — a word coined by jazz musicians in the 1920s to describe their freelance engagements,” reported the *San Francisco Chronicle*. “Now that California is clamping down on gig work through AB5, the new law that took effect Jan. 1, musicians have assembled to say that it could have ‘a devastating and catastrophic impact’ on them, in the words of a petition signed by more than 180,000.”

A recently announced deal would exempt musicians from the law’s restrictions, but what about the situation for so many others?

These are appalling stories, especially in a state that prides itself on its creative and gig-based industries. Yet last week, the Assembly overwhelmingly rejected Kiley’s sensible legislation to halt the bill while the Legislature addresses ways to fix it. The overwhelming majority of Democrats — fifty-five of them — voted no on the measure. They know what’s happening. They just don’t care about most of those who are suffering.

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## Writers have effectively been banned from writing more than the number of freelance articles that lawmakers arbitrarily selected.

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Lawmakers have introduced thirty-four different bills to exempt additional industries or roll back the legislation, but most of them come from Republicans. That makes them dead on arrival. Any bill has to go through the powerful Assembly Appropriations Committee, which Gonzalez chairs. So far, she’s expressed a willingness to “clarify” some provisions in the new law, but its fallout hasn’t made a dent in her plans to run for secretary of state.

Apparently, my suggestion in a February 27 *American Spectator* column was too optimistic. I had thought that perhaps the state’s ruling Democrats had gone too far with this one, but that recent Assembly vote suggests otherwise. Unions are the real power in the Capitol, and they see AB 5 as a template for similar action in other states and Congress. If they can’t compete, they’ll use the political process to kill the competition.

Meanwhile, Twitter is ablaze. “I feel like this is a losing battle and I’m sick over it. @LorenaSGonzalez calls protesters at her events ‘Trump Supporters’ and Labor Brokers. When many of us are far from it. How can we get more attention on this issue?” argued a tweet from Daniel Houze. “I’m a Dem, and hurt by AB5. I’m not a ‘labor broker’ but a single mom that



California State Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez (John Springs)

has worked 9 years starting a small business. This will be the first time I vote Rep in CA. Many others in CA feel the same,” explained another tweeter.

Gonzalez has said freelancers, who are limited to thirty-five submissions a year to a single publication, can bill on a business-to-business basis. How many struggling artists can afford the \$1,500 legal fees to set up an official business entity, the \$800 annual filing cost to the state, and the accounting fees needed to maintain it? Whatever. That’s not the Democrats’ problem. They’re too busy “protecting workers” to worry about such things. Gonzalez apparently doesn’t even believe all the hard-luck stories.

That thirty-five-submission limit is a clear affront to the First Amendment. As a federal lawsuit by the Pacific Legal Foundation argues, “By enforcing content-based distinctions about who can freelance ... defendant currently maintains and actively enforces a set of laws, practices, policies, and procedures under color of state law that deprive plaintiffs’ members of their rights to free speech, free press, and equal protection.”

It’s hard to argue with that contention. Writers have effectively been banned from writing more than the number of freelance articles that lawmakers arbitrarily selected. The ban doesn’t (as the lawsuit notes) apply to marketing, graphic design, and grant writing, which points to its arbitrary nature. In February, a federal court rejected Uber and Postmates’ lawsuit against the law, but agreed the companies probably will face “irreparable harm.”

A federal judge temporarily has suspended the law’s application to truck drivers, who filed a suit claiming the law violates interstate commerce rules. That’s an encouraging development, but legislators need to dump it in its entirety. That they are unwilling to do so reveals their disdain for working people. If you don’t have the kind of job progressive lawmakers think you ought to have, then they’re happy enough for you to go hungry. 🐛





## Colleges and COVID-19

*A professor's survey of a bleak landscape.*

by Paul Kengor

“Well, you know I’m graduating this semester. This may be the last time I see you. Thanks for everything. I’m going to miss this class and everyone.” So said one of my students, Ashley, somberly at the end of class. Typically, that’s a goodbye I hear from seniors in mid-May, not mid-March. This one came in response to an early afternoon campus-wide email announcing that doors would be closing and students and professors alike would need to head home and begin transitioning to online learning. All would evacuate campus by 5:00 the next day, and classes would be postponed until the following week. The email hit during the middle of a busy class period, prompting an immediate reaction and eruption among students with eyes on laptops. One student shuffled anxiously in his seat, shoved his hand in the air, and looked at me.

“Yes, Sean?” I said.

“The college is shutting down,” he answered. “We just got the email.”

Sean’s announcement prompted quite a reaction, as one would suspect. Our classroom discussion quickly shifted from analysis of an idiotic writing of Karl Marx to a sober analysis of what the remainder of the semester might look like at Grove City College and elsewhere.

What had prompted the college’s decision? Well, the CDC had just issued an alert urging a nationwide halt to gatherings of more than fifty people for the next eight weeks, citing the risk of coronavirus. Grove City College had seen no cases on campus, nor in our county (at that point). The college was hanging in there, but now the writing was on the wall, or at least on the CDC website.

One might think that students would have started celebrating. In fact, many nationwide did just that — thousands stormed beaches partying during spring break. North of us, at Mercyhurst University in Erie, Pennsylvania, word came in that coronavirus had entered Erie County via an obviously carefree (or stupid) student who went to — believe it or not — Europe for spring break, visiting several Level Three coronavirus risk countries.

I can tell you, however, that our students weren’t celebrating. There was a morose feeling on campus, particularly two days later as I looked out my office window from a virtually empty Hall of Arts and Letters at a campus with lovely, freshly mulched ornamental pear trees readying to bloom and welcome the spring, but not a student in sight to enjoy the experience. I was among a small group of faculty on campus that day for a training seminar on how to use something called Microsoft Teams in order to give lectures online.

Among the gloomy students was my second oldest son, who was getting ready to graduate. This wasn’t how he had planned to finish his four years. This was supposed to be his best semester, the one he set up so carefully, with favorite classes. All his friends were suddenly gone. Amid an empty campus, he felt empty. He feared he would not see them again until graduation day, and maybe not even then.



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*Paul Kengor, Ph.D., is professor of political science at Grove City College in Grove City, Pennsylvania. He is also chief academic fellow at the college's Institute for Faith & Freedom and a senior editor and regular contributor to The American Spectator.*

The situation reminded me somewhat of an old article in our campus newspaper that I read every spring semester to my “Modern Civilization” course — a retrospective on life at Grove City College during World War II. “It was a sad, sad time on campus,” remembered one alumna. “Almost the entire male student population was gone.” Another recalled, “I was a freshman. Many of the girls were crying because they had brothers who would be called to war. In just a few short weeks, a lot of the boys were gone. We had very little social life, no football team or anything like that.”

Sad as those memories were, the situation on campus in 2020 was actually more desolate. Boys and girls alike are gone. Sports, finished. Of course, that happened nationwide. There was no March Madness this year for college basketball. Excellent speakers who were coming to campus ... well, they were all cancelled. We nixed our annual April conference.

Not only did I experience this uniquely as a professor with students on my own campus, but also as a dad with not one but two sons graduating.

A couple weeks later, I drove to an empty Saint Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, with my son, a senior there. Like colleges everywhere, the college asked him and everyone to move out of their rooms — courtesy of the scourge of coronavirus. They would not be going back this semester. For my son, this was tough. He, too, never got to say goodbye to his classmates and professors. He made wonderful friendships there.

Arriving there at Saint Vincent that day was surreal. It was a beautiful day, with spring in the air, and yet virtually no faces. Over the course of about an hour and a half, I didn’t see even a dozen people. The resident directors (those few visible) were managing the process of students emptying their rooms. During the time we were moving out, only one other family was in the dorm building, and on a different floor.

Leaving Saint Vincent College was hard for me as well as my son. As was my custom upon bringing my son to the college, I wanted to stop in the glorious basilica there, as I usually did, paying a visit to the tabernacle in particular. On this day, I wanted to give

thanks for this college that was so good to my son. But it was closed. Even monks were doing social-distancing at Vespers.

I had never seen anything like it.

**T**he latest from my son’s college: They are hoping to hold a commencement ceremony not in May, but in the fall at homecoming. Or, at least, that was the thinking in early April. The question is now being raised at every college: Will the nation’s campuses even open again in the fall?

Alas, that’s the million-dollar question (literally) for colleges all across America.

It’s a question I began hearing from my students by mid-April.

Knowing that they could kiss goodbye the notion of returning to campus for the remainder of the spring 2020 semester, they began wondering if fall 2020 might be out, too. Here again, such closures would dramatically affect everything from dorms to cafeterias to bookstores to student unions to arenas to stadiums. For those NCAA sports fans reeling from the shock of no March Madness, imagine a fall with no college football. Is it possible?

Truth be told, it’s a very good question, and every college in every hot-spot area of COVID-19, particularly in the northeast

and in major cities (where the virus is most prevalent), is now grappling with the prospects. That’s particularly so as colleges have now already transitioned to online classes anyway. Some professors fear that universities will be so at ease with cheaper online courses that students will never go back. But that will not be the case. Ask professors and students if they prefer online instruction to a live teacher in the classroom, and most will tell you the latter, especially those who prefer a campus experience. Sure, many colleges will inevitably look to further transition online, but many others thrive on campus life, not to mention on dollars from room and board.

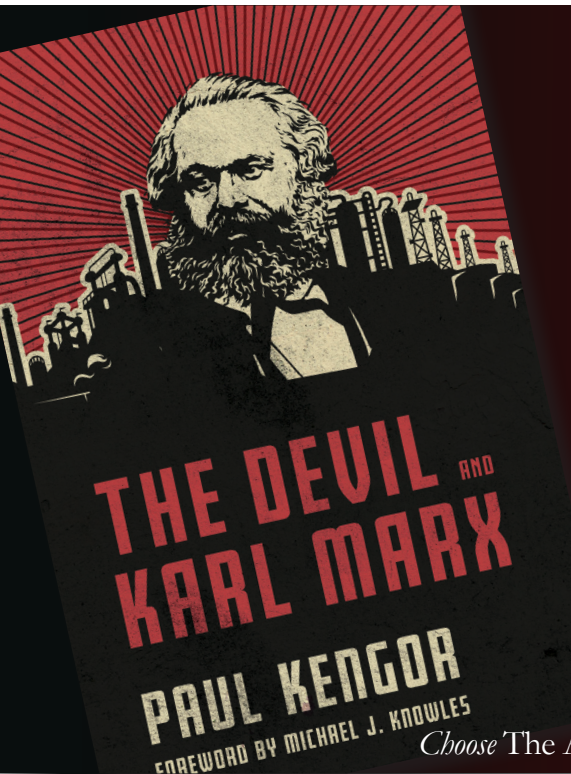
So, will they open in fall 2020?

What I’m gauging from colleagues around the country is that it currently seems highly plausible that many will not reopen in the fall unless there’s a (unlikely) near-disappearance of COVID-19

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Arriving there at Saint Vincent that day was surreal. It was a beautiful day, with spring in the air, and yet virtually no faces.

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**A penetrating look at the diabolical side of Karl Marx, a man whose fascination with the devil and his domain would echo into the twentieth century and continue to wreak havoc today. It is a tragic portrait of a man and an ideology, a chilling retrospective on an evil that should have never been let out of its pit.**

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cases in the surrounding area, or without the sudden emergence of an effective vaccine or treatment (or perhaps an accurate, widely available test for antibody screening).

Dictating and driving those precautions will be not merely concerned administrators and faculty, but parents and, no doubt, lawyers. I've heard of nervous parents (I'm completely sympathetic) phoning provost's offices demanding that university X, Y, or Z shut down now and send their child home immediately. If not, and that child ended up sick, the university would hear from the parents' attorney, pronto.

Imagine a college opening up, say, the day after Labor Day 2020, with ongoing reports of one-thousand-plus or even one-hundred-plus active COVID-19 cases in the county (a very strong possibility even by August), only to have one hundred students suddenly end up sick and testing positive by late September. Not only would it be shutdown time again, but it could be lawsuit time. And where would those students be housed while recovering? When and how could they be sent home and handed over to parents who are much more vulnerable to COVID-19's high fatality rates?

Above all, imagine hot-zone cities like New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and others with very infection rates. "There's no way that schools can reopen here in the fall," a colleague in New York tells me. "No way. Are you nuts?"

Not only would the freshman moving into the dorm be immediately exposed in a city like New York, but so would the parent moving in the child in August. And then what happens when the infected freshman goes home for fall break, Thanksgiving, or Christmas, and thereby exposes a family far outside New York, potentially initiating a new wave in a new locality?

As for an effective treatment, the inability to find one has been the scariest aspect of the war against COVID-19. Doctors have not found a solution, even as they have had an apparent good degree of success in many critical cases with hydroxychloroquine (HCQ), with the antibiotic called azithromycin, and even with some experimental approaches for people literally on their deathbeds — such as employing antibody-rich plasma from COVID-19 patients who have recovered. The lack of an effective treatment explains the shockingly high fatality rates that we're seeing in the United States and around the world.

These fatality rates are far worse than everyone imagined. As I write, the U.S. fatality rate has rapidly surpassed 5 percent, which is way beyond the 2 to 3 percent everyone initially anticipated with this nasty virus. There are now seven countries in Western Europe well over 10 percent, with four above 13 percent, which is horrific, truly frightening. By comparison, the seasonal flu has a mere 0.1 percent fatality. At the time of this writing, the fatality rate in the United States, which is one of the milder rates, is over fifty times more deadly than the flu. If this thing wasn't contained, you would see an enormous number of deaths, making seasonal flu look like a hiccup. (I'm fully aware of claims by skeptics who believe the fatality rates are skewed because of a lack of testing. But even if the fatality rates in, say, Europe, are a quarter of the 12 percent rates reported in various countries there, such rates would still be thirty times higher than the seasonal flu. COVID-19 is every bit the unique killer we fear it to be.)

And this coronavirus isn't merely killing older people with a bunch of preexisting conditions. Yes, they're the most vulnerable, but there are too damned many middle-aged people dying from this malicious virus, not to mention survivors escaping with permanent lung damage that looks like the work of a napalm bombing.

As for vaccines, there are at least two early examples that appear to have some promise and possibility of perhaps being ready by the fall semester. One is from UK researchers at Oxford University, which they contend could be ready for mass use by September, and another from the University of Pittsburgh, which researchers right out of the gate believed they could have ready in weeks. A quick word on the Pitt vaccine, which I know well, and which I've written about at *The American Spectator's* website.

On April 2, as COVID-19 cases in the United States were skyrocketing, with a flattening of the curve still two weeks away, researchers at Pitt Medical School and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center held a press conference announcing the first major candidate for a COVID-19 vaccine. They published their results in the April 1 issue of *eBioMedicine*, the online version of *The Lancet*. It could be the real deal. How did this crew pull this off so quickly?

"We had previous experience on SARS-CoV in 2003 and MERS-CoV in 2014," said lead researcher Dr. Andrea Gambotto. "We knew exactly where to fight this new virus." When the genetic sequencing for the current COVID-19 virus was identified in January, the Pitt team was "able to plug into" its existing framework "and rapidly produce a vaccine."

They were ready to go. The vaccine is being called "PittCoVacc." They're seeking FDA approval for an accelerated clinical trial.

But for colleges, could these treatments be ready by the fall semester?

In maybe a best-case scenario, consider if a vaccine was ready and approved by September: This would at the least cause a delay in students getting back to school (they usually arrive in late August). Moreover, it would be further interesting to watch the rush to get these vaccines and how the demand would be handled logistically. Further, there no doubt will be a risk that the vaccines could have unforeseen side effects, particularly if their trials and release are hurried, which will cause many people to not get vaccinated and could create civil-liberties battles by authorities demanding that certain individuals get inoculated. If and when a vaccine emerges, yet more controversies will surface.

So, yes, the fall semester is in question. But would it end there?

Alas, we would then run into the winter semester — flu season again. Dr. Anthony Fauci was warning in March that this COVID-19 outbreak could become the seasonal new norm. We'll know whether he was right come winter, just when numerous colleges throughout the fall were gingerly hoping to reschedule for January 2021.

In short, this is a remarkably fluid situation. There are a lot of dynamics to navigate. Colleges like to plan things, with all sorts of contingencies. But unfortunately, this pandemic for quite a while will remain as elusive to making plans as it has to making drugs to resolve it.

But for now, you can plan on this: the issue of whether or not colleges will open in fall 2020 is very much a giant question mark. That much we do know. These are crazy times. ❧

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The question is now being raised at every college: Will the nation's campuses even open again in the fall?

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# New York Owes America an Apology

*Cuomo and de Blasio's failures spread COVID-19 nationwide.*

by Robert Stacy McCain



*Robert Stacy McCain is the author of Sex Trouble: Essays on Radical Feminism and the War Against Human Nature. He blogs at [TheOtherMcCain.com](http://TheOtherMcCain.com).*

**O**n March 2, the day after New York reported its first coronavirus case, Gov. Andrew Cuomo appeared on CNN, where he declared that he was “mobilizing the public health system to contain the spread.” In an interview with CNN’s John Berman, the Democratic governor said his state was “ramping up our testing capacity,” but assured viewers that “we have no reason for concern” that the COVID-19 patient, a 39-year-old woman who had just returned from Iran, had spread the virus to anyone else in New York. Cuomo added, “What I am concerned about, if anything, more than a health issue, is the perception issue and the fear issue. I understand diligence and I understand anxiety and let’s do everything we can. But you can’t allow the fear to outpace reality, right?”

The grim reality of New York’s coronavirus outbreak soon outpaced the worst fears anyone might have imagined in early March. By mid-April, Cuomo’s state was reporting as many as a thousand deaths a day, mostly in New York City and its suburbs, with the city’s pandemic also driving up the death tolls in neighboring New Jersey and Connecticut. By late May, those three states accounted for 45 percent of all U.S. coronavirus deaths. Furthermore, as the *New York Times* reported May 7, researchers found that “the city became the primary source of new infections in the United States,” as infected New Yorkers fled their disease-riddled city by the thousands, ignited COVID-19 “outbreaks in Louisiana, Texas, Arizona and as far away as the West Coast.”

Hindsight is 20/20, but many in the major media (including CNN, which employs the New York governor’s brother) have sought to distort public perception of what went wrong with America’s response to the Chinese virus. Liberal journalists have devoted enormous effort to blaming President

Trump for this catastrophe, and this anti-Trump bias obscures the unique role that Democrat-controlled New York played in the deadly pandemic.

One of the favorite “gotcha” games played by the partisan press has been citing Trump’s optimistic quotes from January and February, when little was known about the disease that emerged from the Chinese city of Wuhan. “We have it totally under control,” the president said on January 22, after the first U.S. coronavirus case was identified in a man who had recently traveled from Wuhan. Nearly three weeks later, on February 13, Trump said in an interview with Geraldo Rivera, “In our country, we only have, basically, twelve cases and most of those people are recovering and some cases fully recovered.” In hindsight, quotes like this seem naïvely optimistic, but they were factually accurate at the time. What the anti-Trump media omit from their hindsight blame-game narrative is that many Democrats, including Cuomo and New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio, were saying very similar things about COVID-19 at the time, and they continued downplaying the danger of the virus even as the pandemic took New York in its deadly grasp.

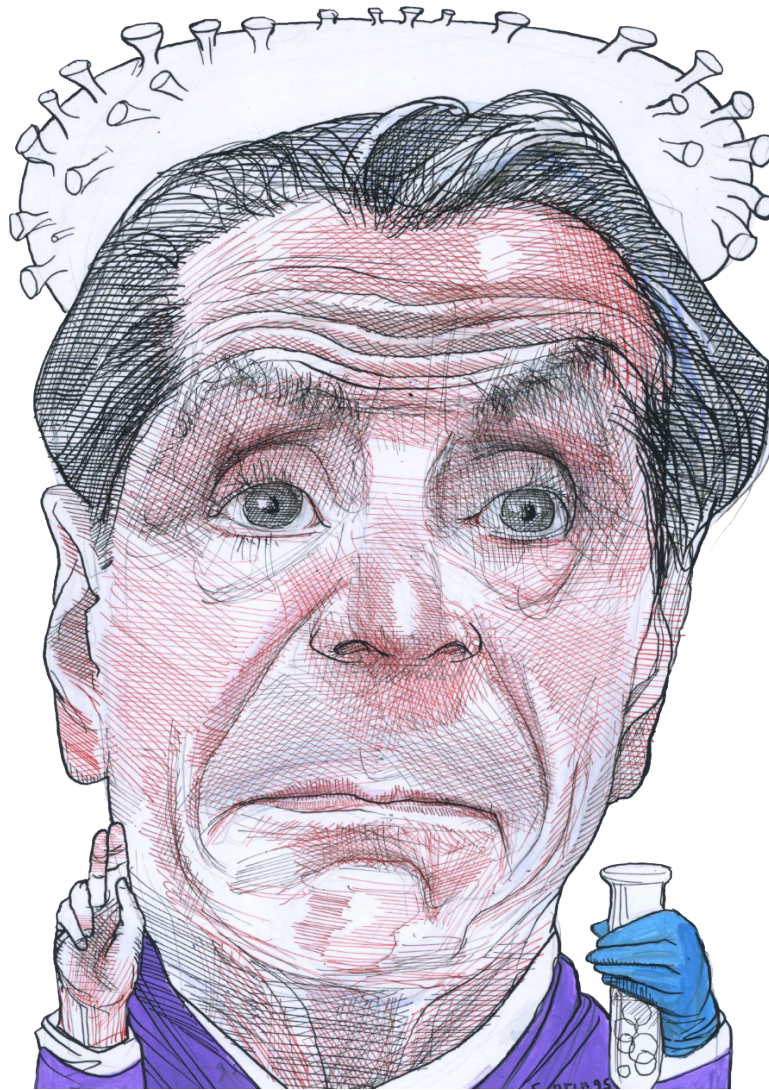
De Blasio was particularly clueless. In February, the mayor’s administration seemed most concerned that fear of the virus would reduce attendance at the city’s annual Lunar New Year celebration in Chinatown. “New Yorkers should go about our lives, continue doing what we do,” de Blasio declared on February 2. The city’s health commissioner, Dr. Oxiris Barbot, took to Twitter the same day with this proclamation: “As we gear up to celebrate the Lunar New Year in NYC, I want to assure New Yorkers that there is no reason for anyone to change their holiday plans, avoid the subway, or certain parts of the city because of coronavirus.” Three days later, Dr. Barbot was back on Twitter: “Today our city is celebrating the Lunar New Year parade in Chinatown, a beautiful cultural tradition with a rich history in our city. I want to remind everyone to enjoy

the parade and not change any plans due to misinformation spreading about coronavirus.”

Anyone in New York taking their cues from City Hall in February would have believed that “misinformation” was more dangerous than the virus itself, and this message continued to be reiterated for weeks. On February 13, for example, MSNBC’s

“Morning Joe” program featured an interview with de Blasio in which he praised the “extraordinary public health apparatus here in New York City” and said concerns about the disease “should not stop [city residents] from going about your life. It should not stop you from going to Chinatown and going out to eat.” In a March 2 press conference, Cuomo said “anxiety” over the pandemic was unnecessary because “once you know the facts, once you know the reality, it is reassuring.” The governor confidently boasted, “Excuse our arrogance as New Yorkers — I speak for the mayor also on this one — we think we have the best health care system on the planet right here in New York. So, when you’re saying, what happened in other countries versus what happened here, we don’t even think it’s going to be as bad as it was in other countries.”

Cuomo and de Blasio could be forgiven for their mistaken optimism, if the media would extend the same mercy toward Trump and other Republicans who were similarly sanguine in the early days of the COVID-19 outbreak. But the partisan bias of the press corps has never been so transparent as it was in the way anti-Trump journalists scapegoated the president for the pandemic, even as they elevated Cuomo to a status of secular sainthood. While cable-news talking heads were genuflecting at the altar of Saint Andrew of Albany, however, the governor was in fact implementing policies that resulted in thousands of unnecessary deaths. In a directive issued March 23, when New York’s cumulative death toll from the virus had not yet reached three hundred, Cuomo’s administration prohibited nursing homes from refusing admission to patients who had been diagnosed

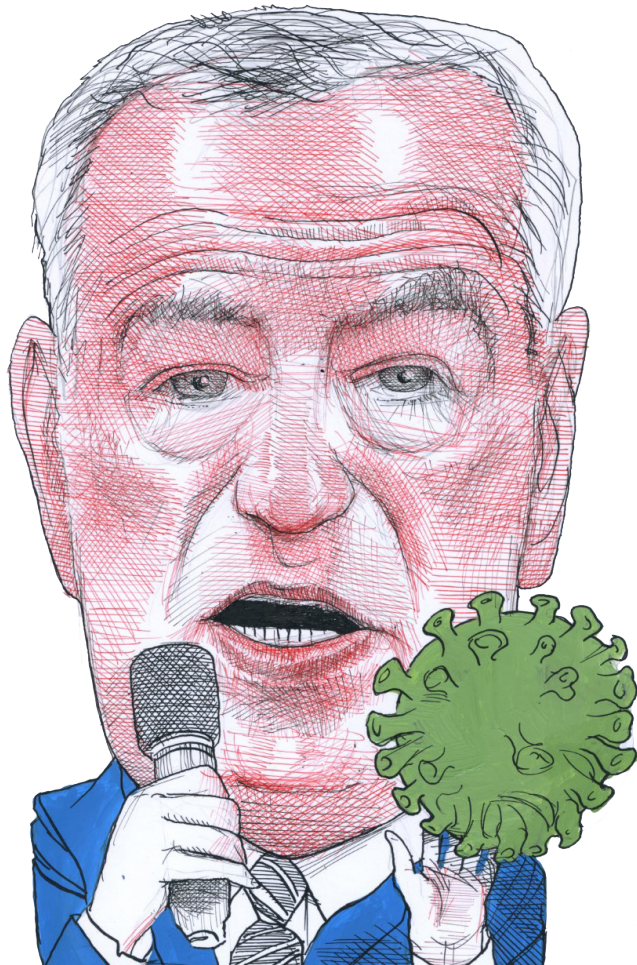


Andrew Cuomo, 2020 (John Springs)

with COVID-19. This inexplicably wrongheaded policy resulted in spreading the virus widely among New York's most vulnerable population, and more than five thousand patients in the state's senior-care facilities died.

The same media outlets that ignored the blunders in New York — scene of the deadliest outbreak in America — were quick to warn of disaster when Republican governors in states like Georgia, Florida, and Texas moved to end their coronavirus lockdowns. Yet the per-capita COVID-19 death rates in those states were a fraction of the rate in Cuomo's New York: 88 percent lower in Gov. Brian Kemp's Georgia, 94 percent lower in Gov. Ron DeSantis's Florida, and 97 percent lower in Gov. Greg Abbott's Texas. Notably, all of those GOP governors pursued policies to keep coronavirus patients out of nursing homes, the direct opposite of Cuomo's fatal policy.

"Excuse our arrogance as New Yorkers," Cuomo said. But now that his arrogance has been exposed as a deadly conceit, is it so easy to excuse him? And what about the people who elected Cuomo? New York is dominated by Democrats, who control twenty-two of the state's twenty-seven seats in the U.S. House; both of the state's U.S. senators have been Democrats since 1999, when Al D'Amato left office, and New Yorkers haven't elected a Republican governor since George Pataki won his third term in 2002. New York is effectively a one-party state, which means that Cuomo and other Democrats are unlikely to pay a political price for their failures, but the rest of the country has been forced to suffer the consequences. New York owes America an apology. We won't be holding our breath while we wait for it. 🐦



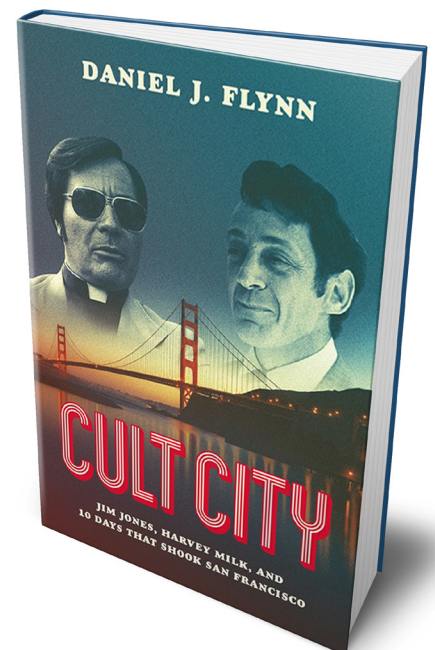
John Springs

# CULT CITY

Daniel J. Flynn

"Revisionist history at its delightful best ... *Cult City* is a scrupulously researched and sharply written story about the cruel sovereignty of politics in the allocation of glory and disgrace."

—*The Wall Street Journal*





*President Trump and Medal of Honor recipient*

# A Glimpse Into Trump's White House

*My photography internship gave me a snapshot of the workings of the administration.*

**by George Goss**

Only two weeks married and precariously close to broke, I jumped at the opportunity to move to Washington, D.C., for an unpaid three-month internship in the White House Photo Office. Set within the first year of President Donald J. Trump's tenure, it was well worth it: affording me an intern's-eye view of the most talked-about administration in history.

"Who's ready to play *The Apprentice: The White House Version?*?" Assistant to the President Omarosa Manigault asked me and a roomful of interns.

Forgoing the standard formatting of a pep talk, the former *Apprentice* contestant turned Trump aide called on an intern with orange hair, a red suit, and newfound aptitude for declaring "You're fired!" to play Trump. Transforming entertainment into impressive didactic theater, various trivia questions about the executive branch winnowed down the contestants.

Manigault's appearance was part of a regularly scheduled speaker series lineup for the interns that included Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders, former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich, and a name-dropping array of high-ranking officials.



*Official White House Photo  
by Allama Parton*

*George Goss is a multimedia producer who lives in Arlington, Virginia, with his wife and sixteen-month-old son. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs are by the author.*

# HALLOWEEN AT THE WHITE HOUSE 2017



*Halloween at the White House*



“Don’t tell the president, but I am a big fan of Rachel Maddow,” White House Chief of Staff John Kelly joked to my internship cohort during his informal speech. He went on to encourage us not to seek out the straw men on the other side, but rather those who have the strongest arguments; we would be better for it.

Then there was Energy Secretary Rick Perry reminding us, in self-deprecating style, of the irony that he was now the head of an agency whose elimination he had called for during one of his presidential campaigns. In his Texan drawl and with a beaming smile, he asked us to be good citizens regardless of our station in life — reminding us that being a good father, or a good mother, is more important than climbing the corporate ladder.

As one might expect, my work in the Photo Office was primarily editing and cataloging photos. Lots of photos. I fried three computers during my time there, most likely because of the sheer numbers of images I was working with. No sooner did the IT team suit me up with a new computer — or at least a freshly refurbished one — than my office would need to request a replacement.

The highlights for me were when I was allowed to photograph events. I chose to use my own camera. The office’s beat-up Canons, holdovers from Pete Souza’s tenure as White House photographer for Barack Obama, were in the offing, but I preferred my Nikon even if I only had prime lenses. Fixed focal length “prime” Nikon lenses often deliver stellar results, but



*Jared Kushner and others*





zoom lenses were much more sensible for events where distances are in constant flux — like the White House. Having only one camera body made it even more of a challenge. But my limited shooting options made the experience all the more thrilling.

I clicked away as Marines celebrated the Marine Corps' birthday with Kellyanne Conway, counselor to the president, stopping by. Then there were the Halloween festivities, in which I watched as Attorney General Jeff Sessions — chaperoning trick-or-treating children — seemed to spend an awfully long time talking with the president after he made it to the head of the queue.

Even more special were the assignments involving quintessential presidential roles such as the bestowing of a Medal of Honor to a veteran or the arrival and departure of Marine One — the hunter-green helicopter constantly piercing the D.C. horizon. I even got to photograph the annual turkey pardoning.

The only time, however, that I had direct contact with the president was around Christmas. At the very end of what felt like hours of posing for grip-and-grin photos with his wife, Melania, and staffers, President Trump turned to me, looked me right in the eyes, and said, “Good job.”

I was there to assist with the setup and takedown of the lights, among other menial tasks, hardly rocket science, but that was certainly a memorable moment — a fitting coda to a three-month internship that just flew by.



*Ivanka and Tiffany Trump after turkey pardon*



*Marine One's departure*



*Vice President Mike Pence*

Once I had turned over my badge and made my final walk out from White House grounds, my political celebrity spotting days were over. No longer would I see National Economic Adviser Gary Cohn hovering outside the entrance to the West Wing, or Hope Hicks clocking late hours, or former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie making his way to meet the president. I was also in need of a real job.

My wife, who was initially against our move to an unknown city with no discernible source of income, was now going to be the one directing our future. She had found stable work of her own, a radical shift from working more than seventy-hour weeks waiting tables and enduring lengthy rehearsals to “make it” as a professional ballet dancer. Despite Washington’s dearth of artists, the atrocious drivers, and our Foggy Bottom neighborhood’s uncanny resemblance to the set of a zombie film during non-working hours, it was a place she was willing to call home. Without my knowing, I had become a denizen of the Swamp after all. 🦋



## Comeback 2.0

*Will the market rebound in time to ensure Trump's reelection?*

by **Grover G. Norquist**

**P**resident Trump and the Republicans in Congress are now working to breathe life back into the economy for the second time in four years.

Their first effort was a smashing success. The week after Trump defeated Hillary Clinton, the Dow jumped 950 points — 5 percent — reflecting people's belief that a Republican House, Senate, and White House could begin to dismantle many of the regulations that, had Hillary been elected, would have gone into effect and further slowed the recovery. And the market reacted well to Trump's plan to bring the corporate income tax rate of 35 percent — the highest in the developed world, higher than communist China's 25 percent — down to 15 percent.

In the final tax reform/reduction legislation, the corporate rate was permanently dropped to 21 percent, and business investment was immediately expensed for five years. The standard deduction for a couple was doubled from \$12,000 to \$24,000, the child tax credit was doubled from \$1,000 to \$2,000, the Alternative Minimum Tax was mostly wiped out, and everyone received a reduced marginal tax rate. A median income family of four saw their burden reduced by \$2,000 each year.

The economy surged.

The Congressional Review Act was employed sixteen times to tear out

entire Obama regulations imposed in the final six months of his presidency. Other deregulation required the long march through the bureaucracy to undo the damage. The Department of Transportation reduced the cost of Obama's plans to increase the mandated CAFE standards. This will save the American people \$200 billion in total costs over the lifetimes of the vehicles and \$100 billion in regulatory costs.

When COVID-19 hit, the Dow Jones was at 29,950. Unemployment was 3.5 percent. Total employment was 152.5 million, and the average 401(k) balance reached a record high of \$112,300 at the end of 2019.

The past three years could have gone very differently. Imagine if Hillary Clinton had won.

The economy was then already weakening. The seven and a half years of the Obama "recovery" beginning in July 2009 were the weakest since World War II. Had Obama's recovery been as strong as Reagan's, seventy months after the recovery America would have had twelve million more people employed in the private sector. GDP would have been \$1.6 trillion higher after four years.

This would have been a record and a contrast for Trump to place before the American people on November 3, 2020.



*Grover G. Norquist is president of Americans for Tax Reform.*

**B**ut then the virus. And the shutdown to stop the virus. Thirty million people filed for jobless claims by May 1.

Now Trump must turn the economy around before the election. This time he starts with 14.7 percent unemployment and a declining GDP, all engineered by the federal and state governments shutting down businesses and forcing Americans to stay away from work for more than a month.

And Trump must perform this second act without control of Congress. Nancy Pelosi has a veto over any legislation.

America starts its road back to growth with one huge advantage. The policy fundamentals are strong. The lower tax rates, deregulation, and lack of foreign wars are all in place. The task is to return to success and not lurch into the unknown or flail around with “Hail Mary” passes wondering what might work.

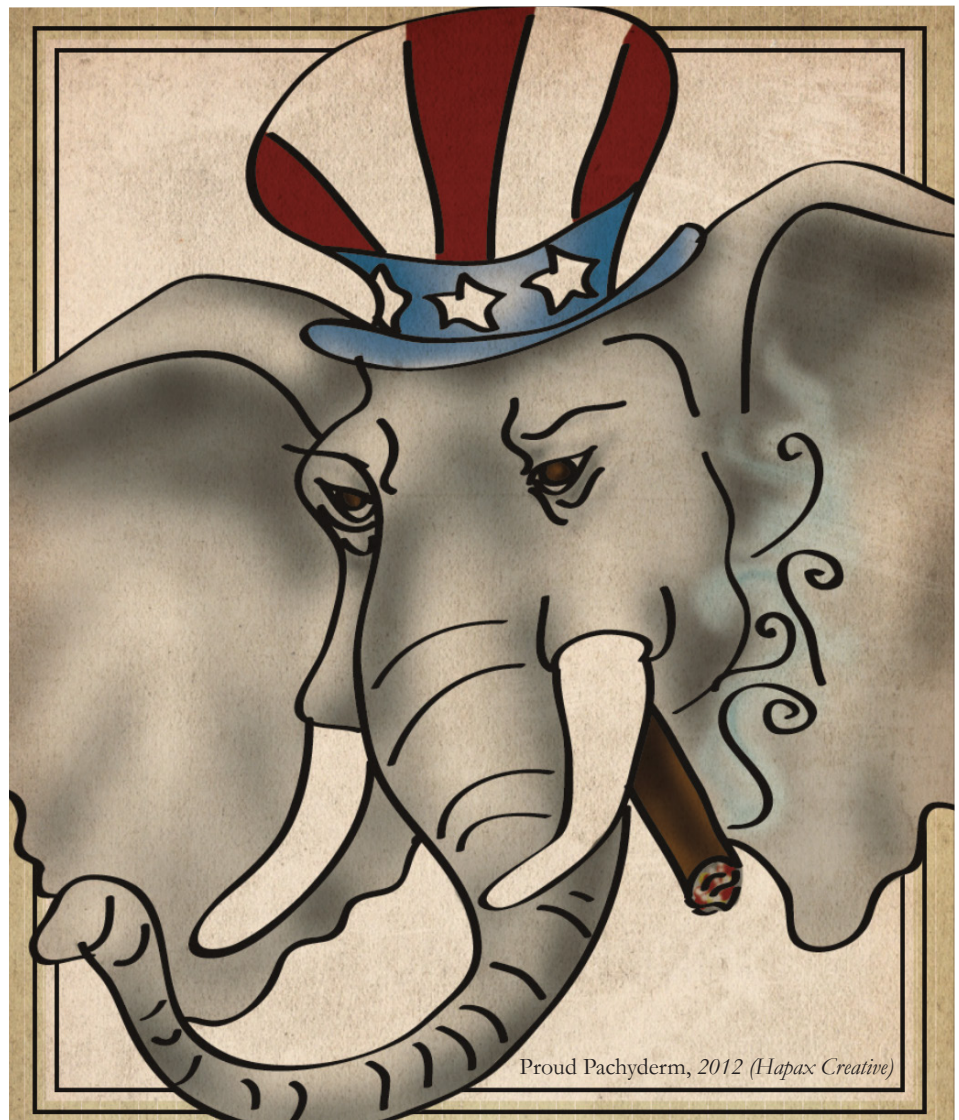
Trump’s “to do” list begins with “do no harm.” This is the rebuttal to Rahm Emanuel’s exhortation to Democrats to use every “crisis,” real or imagined, as the driver for higher taxes, more spending, and more expansive and powerful government, summarized as “Never let a serious crisis go to waste.”

So far, Trump has turned back demands by Pelosi to move to mail-in ballots for the November elections to facilitate voter fraud and ballot harvesting. He stopped the drive for a \$2 trillion “infrastructure” bill. (Infrastructure is now code for “everything except roads and bridges.”)

Trump has said no to any tax hikes. Tax increases have a nasty habit of lasting much longer than the supposed crisis that called them into being. The Federal Excise Tax on phone calls, enacted in 1898 to pay for the Spanish–American War, lasted more than one hundred years. The “temporary” 1936 Johnstown Flood tax on spirits to pay for rebuilding is still being paid by all Pennsylvanians to this day. The death tax was imposed to pay for World War I. Still with us.

Trump’s refusal to bend when the establishment winds blow is our greatest protection as we approach the November election. Not every president has withstood the pressure.

George W. Bush, confronted with the “crisis” of Enron’s meltdown, signed the Sarbanes–Oxley legislation in 2002,



Proud Pachyderm, 2012 (Hapax Creative)

creating vast new powers over corporate governance. The failures of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were used to impose Dodd–Frank’s stranglehold over the financial sector. The stock market drop in 1929 brought us income tax rates to 75 percent, wage and price controls, the New Deal, industrial labor policy, and an alphabet soup of federal agencies, almost all still looming over the economy.

**T**his time, a great deal of money was tossed into the air to reduce the damage to American businesses and workers that the “stay-at-home” orders inflicted. But that was a one-time expenditure, not the creation of a permanent tax or agency. And the early legislation to reduce the pain included the permanent repeal of Obamacare’s “medicine cabinet tax,” which hiked taxes by not allowing you to use your flexible spending account or Health Savings Account to buy flu

medicine and other over-the-counter drugs. Gone. Permanent. Trump has now signed the repeal of six Obamacare taxes.

In 2020, Congress also provided \$250 billion in retrospective payroll tax relief, allowing businesses to carry back losses five years for 2018, 2019, and 2020, allowing companies to deduct 50 percent of their interest payments in 2020, and waiving the minimum distribution requirements from your 401(k) this year.

The most cheerful news in the response to the coronavirus has been the wave of deregulation as the federal and state governments have found that government itself was standing in the way of combating the pandemic. As of May 1, more than four hundred different laws and regulations have been repealed or suspended.

The CDC and FDA had to give up their monopolies on creating and regulating testing. Telemedicine has been legalized in many areas, state licenses

for doctors and nurses and medical technicians are now being recognized across state lines, and stupid rules in Texas about never mixing liquor and groceries in the same truck (isn't this something from Leviticus?) have been suspended. Many of these deregulatory moves may become permanent. All should.

The largest barrier to restoring growth was enacted into law when the Trump administration capitulated on one very destructive Democrat demand — supplementing each state's unemployment with an additional \$600 per week, or \$2,400 per month. That increase in payments for not returning to work will not end, under present law, until August 1. As early as April, restaurants and other small businessmen were learning from their laid-off employees that they would not be returning as long as the larger unemployment checks were almost as large as their paychecks, and in some cases larger.

As August 1 approaches, Democrats will demand that the higher unemployment payments continue — conveniently guaranteeing that unemployment will stay high through the November election.

Republicans have been here before. In 1992, extended unemployment benefits were scheduled to run out just at the same time that the Bush tax cuts were to end. This fiscal cliff did not scare Republicans into extending the benefits and new jobs jumped just as unemployment benefits were running out. People do decide to stay home if their unemployment is almost as profitable as working. If Republicans hold steady, employment in August should shoot up as the oversized payments for non-work end. That gives Republicans all of August, September, and October to show monthly gains in employment. And the question as to whether or not Americans perceive the world as getting better will be a resounding yes — even if rebounding from a painfully low starting point.

There are many reforms that would speed up the return to growth: Making the present five years of expensing for business investment permanent. Ending the half of FICA taxes paid directly by workers for 2020. Those reforms require legislation, which requires Nancy Pelosi's blessing, which comes only with a big price tag of spending

for corrupt cities and incompetent governors. More likely and thus more useful are those actions that can be done through executive orders, such as ending the taxation of inflationary gains when paying capital gains taxes,

The most cheerful news in the response to the coronavirus has been the wave of deregulation.

reducing the royalties paid for oil, gas, and coal extracted from federal lands, and various deregulatory actions.

There is one thing solely under Trump's control that will strengthen and speed up the recovery and job growth — convincing the markets that Trump will be reelected with a Republican Congress. Then the deregulation and tax cuts that once brought us prosperity will continue.

The Trump and Republican campaigns will pave the way for both growth and election victory if they highlight Joe Biden's promise/threat to increase taxes by nearly \$3.4 trillion over the next decade. This is three times larger than the tax hike threatened by Hillary Clinton.

A president's reelection often follows the stock market. This year watch the markets strengthen as Trump's campaign flourishes, and that in return will create a virtuous cycle of more support for Trump leading to the stronger markets that power the Trump campaign.

Or the other way around. 🐦

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REP. DAN CRENSHAW

SEN. TED CRUZ

REP. CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS

SEN. TIM SCOTT

SEN. RAND PAUL

SEN. RICK SCOTT

**HAS YOUR ELECTED OFFICIAL SIGNED THE TAXPAYER PROTECTION PLEDGE YET?**

AMERICANS FOR TAX REFORM



## A Silver Lining Over the Atlantic

*COVID-19 could bring a golden new era for the special relationship.*

by Robert Taylor

At a time of crisis, we need hope more than ever. We need positivity and optimism. We need the American Dream. What is the American Dream exactly? Being a Brit, I didn't really know, though I had a foggy notion of a can-do, anyone-can-make-it, over-the-rainbow sort of spirit. So I looked it up on Wikipedia, and it turns out I wasn't too far wrong. To summarize, the American Dream is a national ethos that fosters prosperity and success on the basis of social mobility and rewards for hard work and enterprise.

That sounds good and noble to me. But I'd suggest it should apply, especially now, not just to America, but far beyond its shores, to all those willing to embrace it. Because a health-care crisis has become an economic crisis so unprecedented that it dwarfs even the global meltdown of 2008 and, in fact, anything since the Second World War. It's ripped up all those jolly assumptions we had at the start of the year. It's as though our world economy has been run over by a bus, which appeared out of nowhere with an evil grin on its face.

To repair the massive damage, to dust ourselves down, recover from the shock, and get back up on our feet, we need cooperation between leading states in terms of economic intervention and health resilience.

And who can lead this cooperation? Well, let's think. The UN? No way — too many competing interests. China? Nope. There's no trust, especially since this whole thing appears to have started in or near some filthy live-animal market in Wuhan, followed by weeks of obfuscation and denial.

The EU? Are you kidding? Once the coronavirus hit, the sham that is the European Union was rapidly laid bare to anyone who cared to look. Sooner than you could utter "Je suis Européen," just about every EU country

closed its national borders, forgetting that they'd spent the last twenty years committed to free movement of people and ever-closer union. And, straight after that, the richer countries of Northern Europe got all surly when asked to provide financial assistance to those in the south — Italy and Spain — whose weak economies left them helpless to fight the storm.

Ever-closer union? Solidarity? Only when the sun's shining. As soon as trouble approaches, it's every nation for itself. That's why the EU will ultimately fail, just as will any attempt to sacrifice national sovereignty on the altar of economic theory.

No. Just as in 1945, with the establishment of Bretton Woods as a basis for the global economy and international security, only the USA can lead us out of this crisis. The American Dream must become an international reality.

But it will be nothing more than a fantasy unless it recognizes just how much the world has been changed by this vile virus. All right, it's early days, but it's already clear that nations throughout the world, while resisting any more damaging slides towards protectionism, will need to be a whole lot more careful about whom they trade with, a lot more diligent at how they manage their supply chains for essential goods and services — from oil to ventilators and protective face masks — and a whole lot more suspicious of the narrative of globalization. In other words, any new settlement must consider that countries will want to do business with trusted partners and friends, who stick together when the going gets tough, not pull apart at the first sign of difficulty.

Dare I say that there are few nations that trust each other more, and have a stronger recent history of standing side by side, than the U.S. and UK? Even before all this, discussions about a grand trade agreement were advancing apace. Now, with the EU in yet another free-fall, existential crisis, the U.S.–UK relationship will be more valuable and, yes, more special, than ever. For if there's one country that can be relied upon to support the U.S. in its leadership,

to play first lieutenant to the U.S.'s captain, it is, of course, we, here in the UK.

But I'd go further, and ponder, as many others have, whether or not a broader understanding between the U.S., UK, and other major English-speaking countries could now come into its own.

For years, a range of academics, economists, and politicians across the UK, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, recognizing their common language, history, cultural understanding, head of state, and deep-rooted, intertwined identities, have advocated closer cooperation between their respective nations in the CANZUK movement (it's an acronym — get it?). While Britain has been pulling away from the EU, it has quietly been moving towards its English-speaking brethren.

The U.S. is the logical fifth, and most important, partner in this movement. Can these five countries work together now, not just for mutual benefit but to lead the world towards a new global order? Of course they can. In fact, they've been quietly cooperating, almost literally below the radar, for years. Not many people have heard of "Five Eyes," but it's a long-standing intelligence pact involving just those five Anglophone countries. And we don't even need to ask, do we, why they work so well together, even though they're spread right across the world. You got it. Trust.

What works in intelligence can work more broadly, across trade (indeed, their alliance would be a bigger trading association even than the EU) and security. No lesser a geopolitical forecaster than George Friedman describes them, acting in concert, as "The New Global Force" — and that was even before COVID-19 wrought its destruction.

Maybe I'm an idealist, but I see a massive opportunity from this crisis for old friends, pulled apart by a decades-long narrative that encouraged crude, regional trading blocs while derisively snorting at the nation state and historic trading links, to come together once again.

Wouldn't that be truly special. ✨

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*Robert Taylor is a London-based writer, journalist, and communications consultant.*



# Post-Pandemic Foreign Policy

*The challenge can be summed up in two words: stopping China.*

by **Jed Babbin**

**T**he Wuhan virus — aka COVID-19 — hasn't finished wreaking havoc on the world. Its physical, economic, and political effects will linger and affect the world for years to come. Because those effects are changing the world, we should begin to analyze how our foreign policy should deal with them.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a historic event that is already shifting regional and global balances of power. As we'll see in a moment, it may weaken or destroy alliances. It may also slow some of our adversaries' aggression.

What follows is an overview of what could, and arguably should, be America's goals and methods of conducting foreign policy over the next four years. It is based on the presumption that President Trump is reelected. If he is not, we can expect that all we consider here will be ignored or even strenuously opposed.

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, our foreign policy inevitably tilted to emphasize defense policy over economic policy in roughly an 80-20 ratio. During the next four years, the balance will be changed to roughly a 50-50 ratio. We first have to engineer our economy's recovery and then apply its force in America's interests.

The U.S. economy has been the world's principal engine of freedom since about 1942. Though damaged severely by the pandemic, there is no reason to doubt that our economy is still stronger than any other nation's. Unless we suffer a second round of the pandemic, our economy will recover quickly, probably before the year is out.

The damage to Europe is more severe, and will be longer-lasting, than the damage America has suffered. The European Union (the members of which are nearly all members of NATO) has agreed on an initial economic stimulus, but they cannot agree on solutions to the EU's underlying problems.

The EU — especially nations such as Italy, Spain, and France — have suffered many thousands of deaths and massive economic damage from the pandemic. The “Schengen Agreement,” by which all citizens of EU states could move freely across the EU, was the first casualty of the pandemic. With its advent, many EU nations imposed strict border controls.

In April, EU leaders agreed on a €500 billion relief package for member nations but rejected the “coronavirus bonds” insisted on by Italy to share its — and other poorer members' — debts with wealthier states such as Germany. Some EU nations, such as Italy, Spain, and France, are buried deep in debt. One of those nations might lead others into a default on national debts, leading to a collapse of the euro currency and, eventually, the dissolution of the EU.

One of President Trump's biggest foreign policy initiatives tried to push the NATO member nations to spend more on their own defense to relieve the burden we've shouldered since World War II. Nations such as Germany and France — worst among the deadbeats of NATO — now have every excuse to refuse to meet their defense spending commitments.

Neither NATO nor the EU will soon disappear, but both have been gravely



*Contributing editor Jed Babbin served as a deputy undersecretary of defense in the administration of President George H. W. Bush. He is the bestselling author of five books, including In the Words of Our Enemies and Inside the Asylum: Why the UN and Old Europe are Worse than You Think.*



President Donald J. Trump, joined by Vice President Mike Pence, United States Trade Representative Ambassador Robert Lighthizer, and Cabinet members, welcomes Chinese Vice Premier Liu He, Thursday, Jan. 31, 2019, to the Oval Office of the White House, following two days of U.S.–China trade talks (Official White House Photo by Tia Dajour)

weakened by the pandemic. NATO's credibility as a deterrent has evaporated.

In 2021, with a reelected president, America will again be the world's primary economic force. The economies of our principal adversaries — China and Russia — will recover more slowly, reducing, but not ending, their abilities to oppose our foreign policy initiatives.

Ambassador James S. Gilmore is the U.S. representative to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. He is one of the leaders in opposing Russia's ambitions in Europe and has given considerable thought to how the pandemic will affect America and how our economic competition with other states will continue.

Gilmore told me,

*Americans are already used to working remotely and using technological advantages such as videoconferences. The pandemic will make that even more common. While I believe that personal contact in meetings and other gatherings is usually more productive, the use of video conferencing and working at home will help our economy recover more quickly than our adversaries'. Nations such as Russia and China, because they are totalitarian or authoritarian,*

*cannot compete with us. They don't engage people's freedom to work in their own self-interest to create wealth. We will win the future economic competition with them for that reason alone.*

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**Though damaged severely by the pandemic, there is no reason to doubt that our economy is still stronger than any other nation's.**

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Gilmore is precisely right. Our economy is strong enough to recover quickly without further government interference. The \$2.2 trillion stimulus enacted in April will help, but further spending is likely to create more debt without commensurate economic gain.

China has been trying for more than a decade to replace the dollar with the yuan as the international reserve currency, the

currency that nations gather and hoard to preserve their wealth. Nations understand that because of the pandemic's devastating effect on the Chinese economy, the yuan is now vastly weaker than the dollar. Part of our foreign policy must be to ensure a strong dollar remains the international reserve currency.

Vladimir Putin's regime has been using its economy as an element of its "hybrid warfare" aggression in Eastern Europe. Putin has chosen to sell one of Russia's principal assets — its oil and gas reserves — to pay for his aggression.

Part of Russia's strategy is evidenced by the "Nord Stream" pipelines sending gas to Western Europe, attempting to make Germany dependent on its natural gas supply. If Russia cuts off its supplies, Germany and other nations will try to buy from other sources.

To deal with Russia's European ambitions, we should negotiate free trade agreements with many European nations, including many of those the Russians are targeting. Fair economic relations with Russia's other targets in Eastern Europe should be a priority for the president.

China's negligence and malfeasance in the first days of the outbreak led to the global pandemic. Its disinformation



campaign, denying its responsibility and attempting to create the false narrative that the U.S. somehow smuggled the virus into China, is typical of its actions. Holding China accountable should be a priority in our foreign policy. But care has to be taken to prevent our actions from damaging our weakened economy in the process.

China's expansion in the South China Sea is a military threat, but China's geographic expansion is limited by Japan, Vietnam, and Taiwan. More dangerous is its economic aggression through its "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI).

Since Xi Jinping began it in 2013, China's BRI has taken the form of "debt trap diplomacy." Making massive loans to entrap nations into accepting China's military and economic presence, the BRI has been turning nations of Southwest Asia and Africa into Chinese tributary states. Pakistan is the best example.

By 2018, according to a Center for Strategic and International Studies report, Chinese BRI loans to Pakistan exceeded \$62 billion, one-fifth of Pakistan's GDP. Employing Pakistani and Chinese companies and labor to build roads across that nation, the BRI brings with it a major influx of Chinese citizens, all or almost all of whom are members of China's People's Liberation Army.

The same is true for China's BRI projects in other nations. All of those nations risk Chinese domination as the price of the loans. The pandemic will make it less possible for nations to repay China's loans, further increasing China's ability to conquer them economically.

China is establishing several military bases in Pakistan, including a massive naval

base near Gwadar at the mouth of the Gulf of Oman, through which Persian Gulf oil is shipped. By establishing the Gwadar base, China is positioning its navy to control much of the world's oil supply.

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**China and Russia both aspire to be more than regional powers, but their ambitions have been limited by the pandemic's economic damage.**

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China's ability to make more BRI loans will be reduced but not ended. We cannot afford, and should not attempt, to outbid China for the allegiance of the BRI nations. In most of those nations our effort would be met with hostility for the same reason that China will find Pakistan difficult to control. The Islamist ideology will make Pakistan a very unreliable Chinese ally.

Chinese domination of Pakistan and African nations is a long-term threat that can only be answered by competing U.S. military presence in those regions. Our diplomatic and military planners and budgeters will have to include those regions in a concerted effort to restore a balance of power.

China and Russia both aspire to be more than regional powers, but their ambitions have been limited by the pandemic's

economic damage. They will be further limited by the rapidity at which our economy — and the economies of key allies such as Japan — recovers more quickly than theirs.

Trump is often accused of being an isolationist. His "America First" approach has not conformed to that concept. His engagement with China and failed attempt to reach a peace deal with North Korea have, for a brief time, defused some tensions. He should pursue broader trade agreements with the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, and Japan energetically.

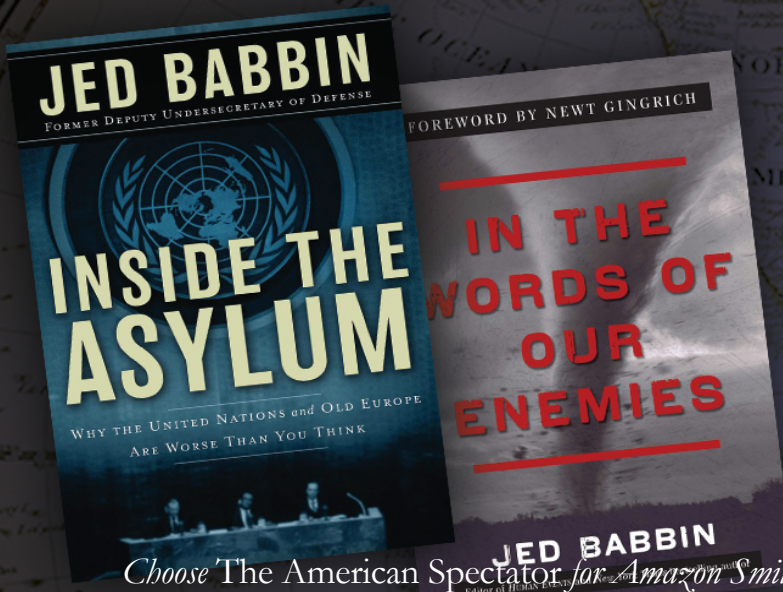
If Trump is not reelected, we must expect a Biden administration return to the Obama-Clinton formula of bashing our allies and negotiating bad deals with adversaries such as China, Russia, and Iran.

The reasoning behind that dangerous strategy was captured in a brilliant 2015 article by human rights activist Natan Sharansky, a hero of the Cold War and a former resident of the Soviet gulag.

The article, entitled "When did America forget that it's America?" argued that in failing to require concessions from Iran in negotiating Obama's nuclear weapons deal, America had deviated from its strategy of negotiation with the Soviet Union. Instead of requiring major concessions by Iran as a condition for negotiations, Sharansky wrote, we had abandoned our belief in the moral superiority of democracy over despotism.

There is no reason to believe that Biden's beliefs in the superiority of our constitutional democracy are any different from Clinton's or Obama's.

If Biden is elected, America's allies will, rightly, fear America's abandonment of them. The result will, inevitably, be that "America First" will become "America Alone." ❧



*Foreign policy explained by someone who has lived it. JED BABBIN helps make sense of our current world and the future of global freedom.*

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A collage-style painting featuring various American-themed objects. In the top left, a blue calendar page shows the word "Starlight" and the year "1976" with a red pencil mark. Below it is a yellow coffee can labeled "PREMIUM" and "4". To the right is a white mug with the number "15". In the center, a blue car is depicted. Below the car, a red car is visible through a window or opening. At the bottom right, a white container has a blue circle with the word "NASH" and a red pencil mark. The overall style is expressive and textured, with a rich color palette of blues, yellows, reds, and purples.

*The*  
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## Come Hell or Hell-Raising

*Shutdowns, protests, and riots — for better or worse, Americans will always question authority.*

by Mark Hemingway

They say tragedies always come in threes, and so far 2020 is notable for a total, months-long shutdown of the country due to a global pandemic that was followed by violent riots sweeping across more than seven hundred cities. With half the year still left, I am not anxious to see what the third panel of this Bosch triptych is going to be.

Nonetheless, it feels odd that many people don't seem to realize these two events are directly related. During the best of times, hell-raising is a national pastime in America, and after not being allowed go outside and have any fun for a few months it was only natural the place would explode. "Locking the country down filled the room with gas," noted radio host Vincent Coglianesse. "George Floyd lit the match."

It's a real tribute to our success as a nation that we typically do a great job of channeling our reckless and defiant instincts such that they are a great strength, rather than something that tears us apart. After all, hijinks and questioning authority are literally America's reasons for being.

The Revolutionary War, which defeated the most powerful empire on the planet, could be plausibly described as monkeyshines that got out of control — secret societies in the back of taverns, tarring and feathering snitches, and donning costumes to dump tea in the harbor. And over two hundred years later, Americans triumphed over perhaps the most evil empire the world has ever seen. How did we do it? Shortly before the fall of the Berlin wall in 1987, David Letterman observed that "communists are no damn good at ... laying rubber in front of the Dairy Queen." It was obviously a joke, but from afar, our culture of hell-raising probably seemed pretty intimidating to the Russkies.

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*Mark Hemingway is a writer in Alexandria, Virginia.*

Speaking of laying rubber, recall when, back in February, there was briefly a dumb controversy about President Trump's appearance at the Daytona 500 and whether or not this constituted using taxpayer dollars for a campaign event? Forget we have campaign finance laws for a moment. Just step back and contemplate how deeply weird and amazing this spectacle is in historical terms.

In America, we build machines that race each other in excess of two hundred miles per hour in close quarters, and this sometimes results in cars hitting each other and sending vehicles airborne, flying end over end, on fire. It also bears mentioning that NASCAR's multibillion-dollar racing league evolved out of rural bootleggers tricking out their cars to outrun cops and federal agents. Decades later not only is this a celebrated bit of Americana, but the president himself shows up to endorse this lawless insanity. What a country!

My dad was no bootlegger, but even he's got quite the story about the time he almost outran a cop as a teenager. (After evading the cop, he sped ahead and pulled into a driveway — the cop drove right by before noticing my dad had still had his foot on the brake, leaving the brake lights on.) Dad was no delinquent — he was high school valedictorian and went to the Naval Academy. Playing cat and mouse with the local PD was all-American behavior for a teenage boy in the 1950s. I'll spare you tales of my own exploits, except to say that if they had camera phones in the Nineties, my friends and I would be rotting in jail cells from here to Tijuana and back.

Of course, we now live in an era where everybody does have camera phones recording our every move — we even voluntarily submit to facial recognition technology and fingerprinting in order to use them. The other day on my neighborhood social network, a bunch of my neighbors publicly said that they hoped

the local government would install speed cameras on nearby streets. By contrast, it was heartening to see that when feckless New York Mayor Bill de Blasio set up a hotline to encourage New Yorkers to rat on neighbors who are allegedly violating the city's social distancing rules, it was immediately flooded with pictures of genitals and middle fingers. Still, mild rebellions we've witnessed in response to the sillier lockdown rules are probably an exception, rather than permanently recapturing the unruly American spirit of an earlier age. If American independence hinged on a revolt over small excise taxes, the surveillance American citizens now assent to probably has the Sons of Liberty spinning in their graves with the kind of RPMs normally found on a NASCAR tachometer.

Aside from the political crackdowns, there's not much good news on the cultural front, either. It used to be that if you scratched the surface of any beloved American cultural expression, there was almost always the element of rebellion. Probably the most famous modern rendition of the National Anthem belongs to Jimi Hendrix, a lanky African-American kid from Seattle whose family endured some notable episodes of discrimination. Hendrix served time in the Army, because it was either that or jail for stealing cars.

Afterwards, he got famous for mastering a bizarre new instrument invented only fifteen years before his famous Woodstock appearance, by a guy named Leo Fender who had no formal

electronics training, couldn't play music, and called the improbable guitar a "Stratocaster" because it sounded like something out of the space program. Fender and Hendrix were at least simpatico on the idea that a certain uniquely American style of music, purportedly invented when someone sold his soul to the devil at a crossroads in the Mississippi Delta, sounded really cool when amplified somewhere in excess of 120 decibels. And, quite improbably, filtering the stodgy and nearly-impossible-to-sing "Star Spangled Banner" through this mélange of questionable influences has become a truly iconic expression of patriotism.

Yes, Hendrix met an indulgent end, and it would be unhealthy to define patriotism according to rebellious archetypes such as race car drivers and rock stars. But it's also unhealthy to suffer a sustained cultural assault on the defiant and dangerous characters we used to celebrate. According to

the *New York Times*, *Ford v. Ferrari*, last year's Oscar-nominated film about legendary American racecar driver and innovative car designer Carroll Shelby, is just "telling the same-old stories about white men." Similarly, I'll be the first to admit that as an undergraduate fraternity bro aren't always my favorite people, but the way we went from Animal House defining a large cohort of young males to presuming they're all rapists seems alarming.

Indeed, in certain circles there seems to be a general wariness of any expression of male aggression these days, regardless of whether

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Our rebellious streak  
has only served us  
well because it has  
historically stood in  
opposition to our deep  
puritanical inclinations.

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it's actually symptomatic of being a predatory jerk. But if "well-behaved women seldom make history," as the bumper sticker on the Prius in front of you says, the same sentiment is true of otherwise decent men. In the meantime, ladies, please forgive us — and trust me when I say America's real enemy isn't men, it's The Man.

So in the face of threats such as mass surveillance and political correctness, how do we, to quote one very stable genius, "keep America great"? Risk-taking is a skill that must be learned and practiced like anything else, and America has been exceptionally good at transmitting this ability from one generation to the next. In this respect, the fear that younger generations aren't kindling the flame of healthy rebellion seems to be real.

The pandemic is forcing America's children to stay at home, but in troubling respects it hasn't altered their behavior much. When I was a kid, the terrifying parental pronouncement was, "It's 10 p.m. on a Friday night. Do you know where your children are?" At the time, there was the ever-present fear we were off getting frisky with each other at keggers, and, well, we were. As a forty-something father and school board member, I regret to say that for contemporary parents the answer to that question is often a pretty depressing game of Clue: in their rooms, on Instagram, fretting about getting enough "likes." A flurry of mental health studies in the last decade suggest we've reached a tipping point where social media has become a worse adolescent plague than drunk driving and teen pregnancy.

Naturally, letting anyone, let alone teenagers, do dumb and risky things is usually a terrible idea. In the middle of a pandemic I would obviously encourage people to wear masks and discourage TikTok videos of people licking random items in the produce section while shouting, "FREEDOM!" To the extent defying authority is permissible, it relies on making sure Americans have a solid moral foundation to begin with — which

is something we have been failing at as of late. Our rebellious streak has only served us well because it has historically stood in opposition to our deep puritanical inclinations, which seem to have complementary benefits and drawbacks.

Still, regular rebellion has allowed us to preserve our liberty by regularly testing the legitimacy of our laws and governance, while we harnessed the vigor of youth, made the impossible seem possible, and ultimately trusted that our collective wim would reward the right risk-takers and punish those who were truly dangerous.

But 2020 seems to be a time when we've ricocheted between two unacceptable excesses. First, the pandemic revealed a disturbingly obeisant compliance to lockdown orders that now seem egregious and painful both in terms of the economic damage done and ancillary public health issues created by myopic worry over the coronavirus. Then we saw such a complete breakdown of law and order, such that people were dying in riots in places as unlikely as Davenport, Iowa.

And as this was all happening, the media and every elite institution in the country lined up to punitively shame anyone who dared to suggest gubernatorial orders prohibiting the purchase of garden supplies was excessive, before the same self-righteous clerisy turned on a dime. They promptly started lecturing us on how thousands of people in the streets flouting social distancing rules while burning bookstores and churches was somehow a legitimate response to racial injustice.

It seems to me that 2020 is a year in which we've lost a sense of ourselves. American culture has always celebrated rebels, but the point is to venerate rebels with a cause, be it the Geronimo or Martin Luther King. Hell-raising is a great thing, and it's fundamental to who we are — but as 2020 demonstrates, too much or too little of it will simply turn America into hell. ✎

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## Hijinks and questioning authority are literally America's reasons for being.

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# After Coronavirus, the Countryside

*And a revival of the American country house tradition.*

by Clive Aslet

When Ralph Waldo Emerson lost a useful amount of his income in the banking panic of 1837, he wrote a poem called “The Humble-bee.” Busy, buzzy *Bombus* — the Latin name for the bumblebee means buzz or drone — seemed to have got life about right:

*Wiser far than human seer,  
Yellow-breched philosopher!*

So it will be during this present crisis. A lot of us will be looking to, or dreaming of, the countryside to cheer us up, provide a bit of hope, and remind us of what was normal before normal became something else. When the restrictions on daily life are over and we get out the other side, the pleasures and practicality of the countryside — it is resilient — will surely be remembered. The new normal will include more time spent out of town. There will be a renaissance of the country homes and villages where people who were previously excited by city life will want to live.

I write this from the city. No bumblebees where I am now, in the center of London. Don’t think I complain. There are also no cars, no planes overhead, no litter, nobody on the street; the buses go around empty. Of course people are anxious about their jobs and how the economy will ever restart — but purely in terms of my environment, it’s a million times improved. Let’s hope we manage to hang onto some of those benefits after La Grande Rentrée.

It helps that the time of COVID-19 has coincided, so far, with a long spell of fine spring weather. It has been quite eerie in its loveliness. Zephyrs have with their sweet breath been inspiring the tender crops (read, as regards my tea tray of a Pimlico garden, ferns, hostas, and clematis), just as Chaucer prescribed. Absolutely no “shoures soote,” or fragrant showers. Each day I walk around the tea tray, feeling like Oscar Wilde in the “Ballad of Reading

Gaol.” I note the progress of each unfurling frond. I’ve ordered some more plants.

Normally I hate the pigeons, which sit, doing disgusting things, on an elbow of drainpipe outside my study window, taunting me with their stupid gurgling noises. I am like the Bird Man of Alcatraz in reverse; he spent his confinement feeding birds, while I’m of Tom Lehrer’s persuasion and would poison them if I could. But in the garden, somehow my heart is softened.

They bill, they coo, they fly off with little bits of dried grass to make nests. Bless them. Even the loud flapping they make to lift their fat bodies into the air becomes acceptable. It’s part of the natural world, insofar as anything is natural in a city like London. Much more of this and I’ll go the full St. Francis.

In short, it’s spring, and even in the city what passes for Nature has a reviving effect. How much more is that the case outside it. Look at the pictures country friends post on Instagram. One family barbecues around a newly completed folly in Batty Langley style, designed by Quinlan Terry. Others ride horses, go on five-mile walks, spread rugs for al fresco meals. A left-wing friend, proud to live in a gritty area of the East End, has been posting artistic photographs of Snowdonia, where presumably — like all good socialists — he has a second home. It made me want to read Wordsworth.

Lucky them. I don’t pretend they form a socially representative sample of the rural population, and there are many people who are struggling. Isolation isn’t good when you’re on your own — worse when you’re in a relationship that’s collapsing. People predict a spike in the birth rate around January 2021: what else is there to do during a lockdown? But domestic violence and suicides will also increase. Remember, though, that the pressures are probably as great in town and in the country, but more people in rural areas can get outside. It’s easier to social-distance in a field than on a sidewalk. There is somewhere to sulk.

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*Clive Aslet is Editorial Director of Trighph Books.*

Admittedly the countryside is more crowded at the moment. A friend complains that the paths he usually walks along without passing anyone are now more crowded than Oxford Street (which wouldn't be difficult. I went to Oxford Street the other day and could have done handstands in the middle of the roadway; there was nobody there — not a soul.) The parking bays of Belgravia are empty; the well-heeled residents have all gone to their country places. This has caused considerable resentment in rural communities who see second-home owners as plague carriers from the city who will strain their hard-pressed local services. Or it could be that they're jealous.

Forget the real or imagined injustices for a moment. The simple fact is that lockdown has not affected the countryside very much and people are remembering how very nice it is to be there. This isn't just a British thing. On Rhode Island, the architect Oliver Cope has been out with his chainsaw, logging and planking fallen trees. He makes furniture for a hobby. He's now had time to finish the table, made to designs by the eighteenth-century French cabinetmaker André Jacob Roubo, and is after other projects. Oliver's professional life is spent designing ultra-high-end residences — city apartments, seaside places, country homes. I saw some of them recently (it seems barely possible: was there ever a time when one could travel?) for a book. They're fabulous, through being, like a piece of furniture, very carefully crafted and considered. When the economy starts again, people like Oliver will be in demand.

For one thing, we've all been getting to know our own homes rather better than we would wish. That's lockdown for you: a compulsory meditation on domestic life. I suspect that even some of the best-appointed homes will have been found wanting. Imperfections that would once have been overlooked get on one's nerves after a while of living with them. I didn't mind about the bookcases on the way down to the basement that make the stairs so narrow I descend sideways. I didn't go into the basement very often. Now I go up and down several times each day. I've always bumped into the books that stick out. Now it's annoying me. Something will have to be done.

As a matter of fact, in our case it will be, because we have been planning a project of building work for some time — we've got the plans, we've got the permissions, we can go out to tender. Not sure when builders will be allowed into people's houses, but we'll be front of the queue.

We're not the only people to feel like this. Sales of DIY goods have gone up. Householders can't stand those niggles anymore. The silence of the coronavirus city is broken by the whine of distant drills.

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Bigger questions will be raised. The family that has been stuck in a city flat for several weeks, if not months, will behave like cows in springtime, let out of their winter barn. They will rush, bound, and frolic towards green spaces. They will feast their eyes, glut their senses, and ask if, ahead of the next crisis, it wouldn't be very nice to move out. How long will it be before people feel comfortable in coffee shops and theaters? Could be a while. We've lost the habit. Selling a property in the city — or anywhere — will be difficult for a while; but what a great time for buyers.

Traditionally, architects get a burst of enquiries after Christmas and the New Year, when families have had a chance to talk over future plans. Imagine what it will be like after COVID-19.

The countryside has not only been better equipped to cope with the coronavirus horror — for goodness sake, in the last resort you can grow food on your own lot (which isn't possible when your only lot is a window box). Rural communities have been inventive. They're self-reliant. They don't expect the full range of shops and services you find in a city; they find ways of managing without. One of the lessons of COVID-19 is that local networks really matter; we rely on neighborhood stores not just for the purchases we can make from those that have stayed open but also for the friendly recognition from the shopkeepers who know us. You get more of that in small communities than in cities.



Coming Home,  
2009 (Bill Wilson Studio)



While working from home was theoretically possible before coronavirus, people didn't really believe in it. Now we have Zoom. Will employers want to return to renting expensive office space and paying executives to travel? I doubt it. And providing there's broadband, you can Zoom as well from the countryside as anywhere.

Britain is famous for its Downton Abbey-style country houses. Recently I visited twelve of them for *Old Homes, New Life*, a book that will be one of the first from the publishing company Triglyph Books, which I've founded with the photographer Dylan Thomas (not the drunken Welsh poet). Not a great time to start a publishing business, but it's been a fabulous project (more on [www.triglyphbooks.com](http://www.triglyphbooks.com)).

Forty years ago, these enormous mansions seemed to have a rocky future. They were being demolished in the 1970s. When I started to work for the magazine *Country Life* at the end of that decade, they would be advertised with the dread words "suitable for institutional use." Now, a new generation is at the helm, with young families, and they're finding new ways to keep them going. Weddings have helped — there's money in them, although some house owners have surrendered altogether, turning their ancestral homes into venues and moving out. There are other events that bring in money, from rock concerts to corporate shoots. These aren't always so original. I'm struck, though, by the number of country-house owners who see the future as being in their landholdings. They want to farm environmentally and effectively sell Nature. There's a market for wellness. In a world in which travel is likely to be more circumscribed, it will suit the post-coronavirus vibe.

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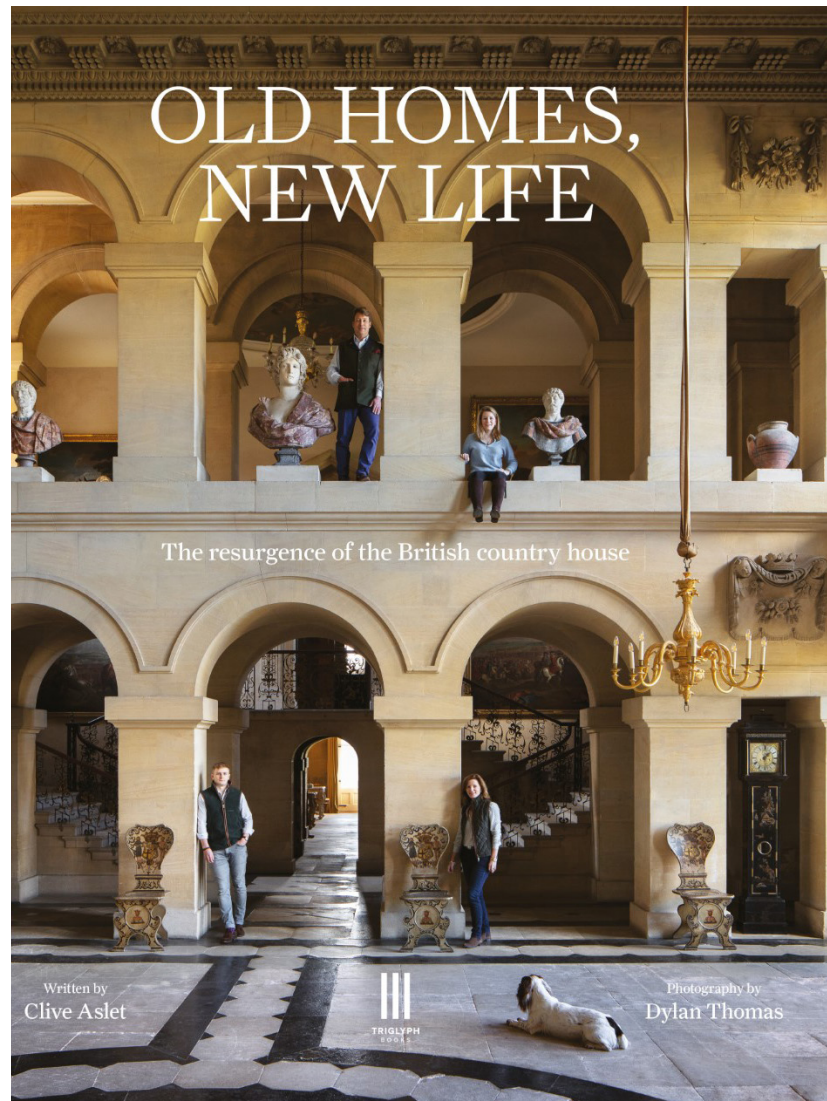
One of the lessons of COVID-19 is that local networks really matter.

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The U.S. has always done this well. For one thing, it has the National Parks. There is no true wilderness in Britain, and we are having a vexed debate on "rewilding" (rewild to what? The primeval forests were cut down before the Romans came.) But the Adirondacks remain practically virgin (sorry, reader: I realize that practically virgin is not a valid concept, any more than practically unique; one's either virgin or one's not. But I trust you know what I mean).

And because of the vastness of the country, when Americans have gone into it, they've generally done so in groups. So historically there were resort places like Newport, Rhode Island, and Palm Beach, Florida: full of big and expensive houses but close together, on relatively small lots. And families like the Rockefellers at Kykuit on the Hudson River built compounds in which different generations had their own homes, so they could create their own social lives. Which was just as well at the beginning of the twentieth century because they got scarified by the press. At Kykuit, the family stuck together and closed ranks.

When I was researching a book called *The American Country House* in the late 1980s, some otherwise well-informed American friends refused to believe that such a phenomenon existed, or had ever existed. It would have been quite simply un-American. By which they meant that, in the Land of the Free, not even a robber baron would have so flagrantly aped Europe, adopting a way of life that



was showy, idle, and anti-democratic. Wrong. Extravagant homes were one of the excesses identified as "conspicuous consumption" by the economist Thorstein Veblen in his 1899 book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Plutocrats — as they were coming to be called — cast their eyes across the Atlantic to see what lifestyle tips they could pick up, before, sometimes, sending their daughters across too, to marry into Burke's *Peerage* or the *Almanach de Gotha*. You bet they wanted the best the world had to offer, including country houses. Joseph Duveen was on hand to sell them the Gainboroughs and Fragonards to put on their walls.

But they also created something new. I met my friend Oliver while visiting the works of the great English architect Sir Edwin Lutyens, who worked during the glorious flourishing of domestic architecture that took place in the early twentieth century. The U.S. had its own flowering, due to McKim, Mead and White; Harrie T. Lindeberg; Mellor, Meigs and Howe; and their contemporaries.

Nobody would now deny that there was an American country house tradition, because it has been revived, since the 1980s, by architects like Oliver Cope. This product of the Gilded Age was different from what happened in Edwardian Britain, being designed around sport and pleasure, convenience and machines; the future Edward VIII loved it. When we all move on from coronavirus, today's equivalent will become the new domestic ideal. 🐾



## Still Life With Women and Ironies

*The centenary of the Nineteenth Amendment reveals just how poorly feminism portrays the artists it attempts to champion.*

by Franklin Einspruch

In 1903, the *Atlantic* printed the thoughts of the Rev. Dr. Lyman Abbott on why women widely did not, and should not, want the right to vote:

*In this work of direct ministry to the individual, this work of character-building, which is the ultimate end of life, woman takes the first place. The higher the civilization the more clearly is her right to it recognized. She builds the home, and she keeps the home. She makes the home sanitary; she inspires it with the spirit of order, neatness, and peace; she broods it with her patient love, and teaches us to love by her loving. Her eye discerns beauty, her deft fingers create it, and to her the home is indebted for its artistic power to educate.*

On March 6, 2020, the *Atlantic* published an essay by Ellen O’Connell Whittet titled “I Voted for Warren, My Husband Voted for Sanders, and I Feel Betrayed”:

*I just wish voting for a progressive woman didn’t feel like a once-in-a-lifetime chance, so rare that it would cause me to silently fume at my own husband for making a different decision.... What is unfamiliar is the loneliness I feel in my grief, something I haven’t been able to share with the*

*person closest to me, because of the different choices we made this time.*

(Aside to Ms. O’Connell Whittet: your fuming is not exactly silent.)

I cite these essays not to say that the anti-suffragists had a point, but rather to show that the ironies of history are as inevitable as death. The handful of exhibitions mounted at art museums around the country to recognize the centenary of the Nineteenth Amendment threatens to unleash a plague of such ironies.

The main culprit here is the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA), which has twenty-two exhibitions concentrating on women artists and has pledged to purchase art only from women artists for all of 2020. Irony No. 1 is that the move provoked revulsion from the very people it was designed to please, as reported by Kriston Capps for CityLab. Leftist critics chastised the program as inadequate, tokenistic, instigated by a man (that would be BMA director Christopher Bedford), insufficiently attentive to “Latinx, Native, and trans artists,” and evasive of the “self-critical reflection necessary to interrogate the structures of power.”

I avoid Baltimore even apart from a pandemic-prompted advisory against travel. But I did get to see “Women Take the Floor” at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (MFA), before the Wuhan virus forced its temporary closure. This exhibition was likewise timed to mark the hundredth year of women’s suffrage in the United States. Irony No. 2 is that women’s right to vote ought to be

cause for celebration, but the mood in “Women Take the Floor” is as festive as appendicitis. The exhibition greets visitors with a dire tone. The curators describe it as a “takeover” of the third floor of the Art of the Americas wing. The installation sports a sans-serif typeface and sharp-edged graphics in a red-on-white scheme that evokes emergency. It is as if the whole show is trying to tell you where to locate a fire extinguisher.

Adding to the ambience of calamity, a video of current Boston Poet Laureate Porsha Olayiwola, turned up to hit-the-back-of-the-house volume, plays her recitation of a poem commissioned specially for the show. She delivers it in a voice that makes me relish poetry readings as much as dental cleanings, with that accusatory, stentorian schmalz that some of poetry’s practitioners employ even when they’re talking about breakfast. The speaker of “what is the suffrage movement to a blk womyn? an anthem” (*sic* throughout) promises, “Pass me the torch. And the laws burn to the ground.” Later, she proclaims, “I unsign the declaration.”

Hence Irony No. 3: the exhibition notes a proud milestone of American history with a parade of anti-patriotism. America deserves recognition as a forward-thinking country, blessed with a sense of common purpose, in which unconditional enfranchisement was achieved relatively early in the history of suffrage. Many American states, particularly in the west, implemented suffrage along with their very establishment, long before 1920.

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Franklin Einspruch is an artist in Boston.



America's comportment in regard to women's suffrage was far from perfect. But whose was? Key players in the women's suffrage movement itself sometimes shrank from noble goals and rallied behind dubious ones. Susan B. Anthony and her circle refused to support any constitutional amendment that enfranchised blacks but not women. She and noted suffragette Elizabeth Cady Stanton founded a temperance society. The Nineteenth Amendment was enabled not only by the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, but the Eighteenth, as well. The topic would seem to call for some circumspection.

On the contrary, "Women Take the Floor" disdains all the good people, men included, and whites included, who wanted women and people of color to flourish in the arts and so acted accordingly. Take Elizabeth Catlett. Not every Catlett painting is a triumph, but she could be glorious, as she is in *Sharecropper* (1952, printed 1970). It depicts, in hand-colored linocut, a black woman wearing a straw hat, gazing into the distance. Her shirt is closed with a safety pin, but her expression is regal. Catlett denotes the texture of the hat brim with studied appreciation.

The wall label mentions Catlett's move to Mexico as a place that better encouraged black artists like herself. It does not mention that she got her start at the University of Iowa learning to make paintings and prints, and receiving important early encouragement, from Grant Wood. (Wood is known for his iconic 1930 painting *American Gothic*, the veritable *Mona Lisa* of American Regionalism.)

So Irony No. 4 we might call the Romantic Myth of the Underrepresented Artist. Historians who have come to discount the notion of the artistic genius working in isolation, laboring alone in his garret to reinvent the genre, nevertheless apply the same atomic approach to the achievements of representation accomplished by artists

like Catlett. In truth, the normalization of women of color in American creative life owes its success to Wood and many unrecognized sympathizers.

The politics of today's art world make that recognition impossible. What is possible, maybe even obligatory, is to mount all-woman shows and highlight the ways in which the artists experienced episodes of sexism and related prejudices. Another label relates an anecdote from Lee Krasner about Hans Hofmann. During a class in his studio, he said of one of her paintings, "This is so good, you would not know it was done by a woman."

It's true that Hofmann, born in Bavaria in 1880, was not much of a feminist. But he counted many women as students and taught Krasner to paint abstractly. This quote dates from 1937, and she worked with him for another three years. One could elect to look at the bigger picture, which favors his good side.

Irony No. 5 is that so much of the art in this exhibition is second-rate. The label describing Hofmann's quip hangs next to the worst Lee Krasner that you're ever going to see in your life. *Sunspots* (1963) is an accumulation of yellow and orange daubs that barely registers as a painting. Putting it in the same room as a magnificent Helen Frankenthaler, *Floe IV* (1965), is like

arranging a fight between Tyson Fury and Greta Thunberg.

The thinness of the MFA's holdings of modernism would ensure that a two-hundred-object show of art made from 1920 to 2020 by American men would also feature plenty of duds. But one can't help but notice how quickly the work drops off after Frankenthaler, Catlett, the striking 1973 portrait of art historian Linda Nochlin by Alice Neel, the bronze *Striding Amazon* (1926 and 1980, cast in 1981) by Katharine Lane Weems at the entrance, the lovely but disparagingly installed wire sculpture by Ruth Asawa, and the ceramics by Gertrud Natzler.

Even works I've respected on previous viewings are not holding up in this context. Laura McPhee's stagey 2004 portrait of a girl displaying a hen evinces how the trendlet of life-size, full-length Cibachrome portraits is aging prematurely and ungracefully.

Grace Hartigan's *Masquerade* (1954) justifies the critical neglect that she suffered when she switched from abstraction to figuration in the 1950s. Frida Kahlo, particularly as represented by *Dos Muerjes (Salvadora y Herminia)* (1928), is not a great artist. Georgia O'Keefe, I'm beginning to suspect, is not even a good one. Much of the rest of the show is simply unmemorable.

Irony No. 6 is that this wildly ambitious project accomplishes so little.



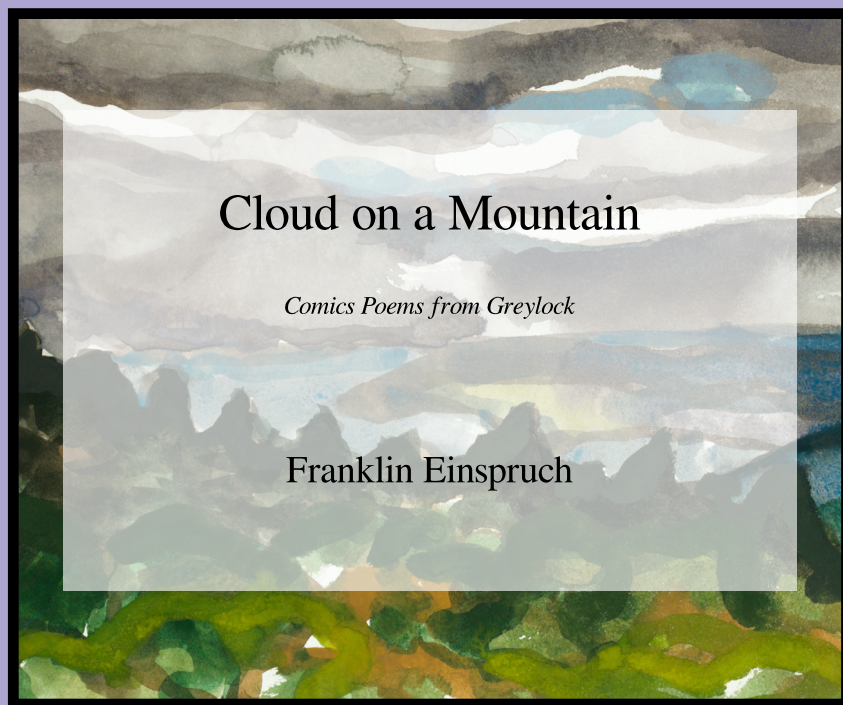
Masquerade,  
1954 (Grace Hartigan)

The museum sets out to “acknowledge and remedy the systemic gender discrimination found in museums, the galleries, the academy and the marketplace,” “[explore] art and suffrage,” “[recognize] that past feminist movements ... were not inclusive or immune from systemic racism,” and “[look] at 20th-century American art through the lens of modern-day feminism — which advocates for equity and intersectionality” — all at once.

In a sense, “Women Take The Floor” does represent an emergency — one of belief regarding the ultimate worth of an art museum. It’s possible to share the sentiments implied in the above list of goals, yet sense that the art displayed in their name has been subtly wronged, and to feel wronged along with it. An exhibition is not a lecture. Art exists for its own reasons and won’t be ordered around like a soldier, no matter how lofty the commands.

Lyman Abbot’s essay has aged badly. But he loved people for who they aspired to be. The contemporary inclination, in contrast, is to condemn people for what they should have done — see Ellen O’Connell Whittet on her husband’s primary vote. That inclination makes people into a continual source of woe.

Abbot also grasped that works of beauty could instruct silently, by their very example. On the contrary, certain curators at the MFA and BMA (though they are hardly the only ones) use art objects as vehicles for messages. This essentially turns works of art into puppets. More enfranchisement of any kind is better, in the abstract. But what good is an increase of representation if it means only a greater share of a crisis of purpose? ✎



***“Meditative, with a sly humor and a wisdom that’s both deeply engaged and transcendently detached.”***

**– Nina MacLaughlin, the Boston Globe**

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Nesting IV, 2000 (Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons)



## A Moveable Feast

*Fast food keeps America going when we're stuck at home.*

by Nic Rowan

There's a rule of thumb among disaster response teams that a crisis isn't really a crisis until the Waffle House closes. The Atlanta-based chain hardly shuts down for anything: not hurricanes, not tornados, not floods. Waffle Houses are so reliably open that, during natural disasters, FEMA uses their status as an indicator of whether or not the surrounding neighborhoods have truly been ravaged.

When the coronavirus pandemic forced more than four hundred Waffle Houses to close in late March, people justifiably freaked out. This was a "red alert" according to FEMA's tracker, something that usually only happens if a hurricane makes a direct landfall on a Waffle House.

But, as March dragged into April and April into May, it became increasingly clear that this wasn't the hurricane we feared. It was bad — and briefly horrifying in New York and New Jersey — but not so bad that every Waffle House in the country needed to close. It's no surprise that the chain led the charge when, in early May, Georgia became one of the first states to reopen its economy.

It shouldn't be a surprise either that, only days after Georgia reopened, Waffle House CEO Walt Ehmer found himself sitting across from Donald Trump,

advising the president on how to reopen other restaurants safely. After all, the federal government already uses Waffle House as its disaster bellwether; why not also use it as a guide for the nation's return to normalcy?

Ehmer told Trump that, in his view, restaurants like Waffle House have a responsibility to "get the wheels of the economy turning a little bit" by jumping ahead of the game on reopening. The most important thing at this point, he said, is saving the jobs of his employees and other people who support the fast food industry.

He was exactly right. And during the pandemic, fast food did more than just keep the economy humming. Its grease was the lubricant that kept the wheels of American life turning. While the curtain fell on movie theaters, hotels folded, and cruise ships became a supposedly fun thing that no one will ever do again, fast food filled in the gaps. Domino's hired more than ten thousand drivers. McDonald's, Popeyes, and Taco Bell saw drive-through sales skyrocket, so much that they had to design new menu items to meet the demand. And food delivery services, which were already working with many other restaurants, reported their greatest-ever increases in traffic.

And with little else to do this spring, Americans finally had the leisure to contemplate their relationship with fast



Nic Rowan covers religion and politics for the Washington Examiner.



food. For most, that just meant eating more of it. For the more discerning, it meant noticing that the desire to eat out isn't a classy craving: Most of the time, it can be solved with a McDouble.

But for me, it meant getting trapped in the Wendy's drive-through, cut-out coupons in hand, wondering why I feel so at ease after eating a Breakfast Baconator, why this food, which I know comes from a giant refrigerator, is more satisfying than anything else I've ever eaten.

The first answer that sprang to mind was that my tastebuds are just uncultured. That's the accusation often leveled at Americans, perhaps most comically by Whit Stillman's *Barcelona* (1994). Here, a WASP-y Midwesterner is struck aghast when a Spanish Stalinist says that his country is full of "fat people in shopping malls with no culture who eat hamburgers."

This, I thought, as my carinched forward, is only half-true today: the shopping malls tend to be empty, coronavirus or no. But who could deny our love of hamburgers? I think immediately of a panel in Calvin and Hobbes in which Calvin's health-conscious dad, worn out by a long road trip and his son's pleadings for grease, screams in all caps, "HAMBURGERS, HAMBURGERS, HAMBURGERS!" But of course he still buys Calvin one anyway.

Maybe it's the convenience. As a child, I loved the Holster Fries at Roy Rogers because the backs of their containers were designed to fit snugly onto my belt. Today, I still appreciate how McDonald's indents its McNuggets boxes with sauce pits, so drivers can enjoy the food quickly, before it becomes inedible.

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We've gotten pretty good at eating on the run, alone — and yet fast food is at its best when it's shared. Laying out large quantities of fried, low-quality food is a distinctly American tradition. I first remember seeing it depicted in *Talladega Nights: The Ballad of Ricky Bobby* (2006), but the practice stretches back much further than that. I myself recall how, on the

day the D.C. Sniper was arrested in 2002, my kindergarten held a celebratory meal replete with buckets of chicken from KFC and pepperoni pizzas from Domino's.

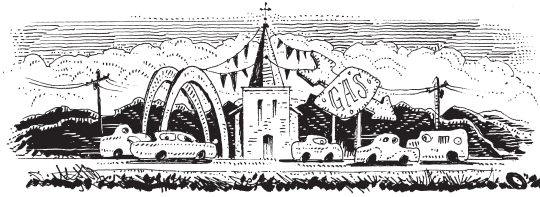
But for most people, the fast food feast is synonymous with Trump, who perfected the art during the 2019 government shutdown. Trump's fast food feast is one of his most famous acts. Here he stood, dressed to the nines and beaming, as a pile of more than three hundred McDonald's, Wendy's, and Burger King sandwiches and fries congealed before him. And his guests, the Clemson football team, were just as delighted.

No one could have known it at the time, but a portion of the feast came from a McDonald's on the site of the most famous restaurant in D.C. history: Sans Souci, from which we got the term "power lunch" — and where many of the people indicted in Watergate conducted their off-the-record business.

At its height, Sans Souci was much like D.C.'s current power-lunch hotspot, The Palm, a place to see and be seen. Of course, we're not allowed to do that in a post-corona world. Better to be like Wendy's or McDonald's or Burger King. Grab it and go.

"I like it all," Trump said of his feast. "It's all good stuff. Great American food."

Wiser words were never spoken. 🍔



# Tough Summer? Time for a Road Trip!

*Now is a great time to get your kicks on Route 66.*

by Matt Pinnell

*I want to get into my car and drive until I find what I'm looking for. Maybe it's purpose or maybe it's a new start or maybe it's just a sky with unclouded stars.*

—Author unknown

The world may truly never be the same after the COVID-19 pandemic. The virus has hit the world like a jackhammer, and now we must slowly and delicately restore what was ruined. As we emerge from the immediacy of the health crisis, many questions will be asked.

What did we learn? How did we innovate? When will we be OK again?

I would argue that big important questions like these demand the clarity and reflection that can come from a great American road trip.

A road trip with friends or family to explore new places is exactly what Americans need right now. With plenty of space to social distance, a road trip gives us time to breathe, laugh, and support small businesses along our authentic Main Streets. A time to recenter, and fuel the economy. That's what I call a win-win.

I'm blessed to live in Oklahoma, a state with back roads and blue skies for days. From our indigenous founders to more miles of the Mother Road, Route 66, than any other state, there's history and heritage around every curve. We definitely know a good road trip, and we know it's food for the soul.

"I take to the open road," said Walt Whitman, "healthy, free, the world before me." From mental health benefits to clearing our heads and hearts, a road trip just may be the healing you're looking for.

This year, we've been forced to simplify our lives. We are reevaluating things that seemed normal staples, realizing that the regular hustle and bustle doesn't have to be the norm. Maybe there is more to life than the manufactured busyness and mundane routine many of us fall into. Perhaps doing more to see the world around us can help rebuild the sense of community and empathy for others that have long been integral to the American experience. Perhaps it will help us heal from the following unrest throughout our country.

As we ask ourselves what is America, and who are we after this unprecedented pandemic, what better exercise than to actually go see it? See its raw beauty, its diversity, its freedom, and the melting pot of people and cultures that live along the pavement.

Author Michael Wallis says of one iconic road trip, on Route 66, that the road invites us to experience the country before it became generic. A Route 66



journey puts us in touch with our roots and ourselves. It is a road of phantoms and dreams that has always offered promise. While Route 66 certainly is iconic, any road trip will do. They all offer promise if you're open to it.

It's time to explore the stories of America again. It's time to see this country, its past, present, and now uncertain future — whether for purpose or a new start, or just to see a sky with unclouded stars. America's economy will roar again, Americans will be at peace again, and I believe it will start with a great American road trip. ✨

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*Matt Pinnell is the lieutenant governor of Oklahoma. In this role he serves as the secretary of tourism and branding.*



# Superhero Movies: An American Invention

*They're accessible, dependable, and fun — what's not to like?*

by Haley Victory Smith



Captain America Promotional Image

Every time I walk out of a good superhero movie, I feel the same way. I experience a sense of longing, realizing that life should be more than just doing the dishes, going to work, and doing the dishes again. It seems silly to say, but as I step down the stairs, throw away my popcorn, and head back to my car, I walk a little differently, striding as though something important lies ahead.

The desire for adventure is a human one. But more than that, the audacity to believe it is achievable, and *just beyond the horizon*, seems to me a belief that is uniquely American. The spirit of the Founders, explorers, and settlers of our great nation lives within us. Superhero films capture this yearning perfectly and leave us wanting more.

Superhero movies as we know them today are a relatively modern phenomenon. High-budget blockbusters have replaced campy romps on the small screen. There hasn't been a single Marvel Studios film that has made less than \$130 million in the United States. But that's the low end. *Avengers: Endgame* made just over \$858 million, taking in \$357 million globally on its opening weekend. A YouGov poll before the movie's release last year found that half of American adults planned to see the film.

By now, Americans know the genre well. Almost twelve years after the

release of *Iron Man* and almost fifteen after the release of *Batman Begins*, the plot of each film has become relatively predictable: world is in peril, world needs hero, hero is in peril, hero solves personal peril, hero saves world. Each film has an attractive lead, several expensive explosions, a couple of jokes to lighten the mood, and numerous punches that land unrealistically well. Even though we basically know what lies in store, we keep coming back for more. It's familiar. It's enjoyable. It's, as the Dispatch's David French puts it, "the McDonald's of American arts. And everyone loves McDonald's."

I see these films as the tract home of the movie world. They're all made of the same stuff, but each has a few unique features. That doesn't make them bad. They're dependable, and — shocker — people like dependability. Tract homes have allowed millions of Americans the opportunity to own real estate. Much like superhero films, they are accessible, and furthermore, a uniquely American invention.

But both tract homes and superhero films have been rejected by the elites of our society as lacking any form of artistry. In an interview with *Empire*, Martin Scorsese, director of the Oscar-nominated *The Irishman*, said about watching Marvel movies, "I tried, you know? But that's not cinema. Honestly, the closest I can

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Haley Victory Smith is an breaking news reporter at the Washington Examiner and a contributor for Young Voices. Follow her on Twitter: @Haley\_Victory.





think of them, as well-made as they are, with actors doing the best they can under the circumstances, is theme parks.” Theme parks: yet another thing Americans really like.

Superman made his first comic book appearance in 1938, toward the end of the Great Depression. Perhaps out of a desire to escape the perils of day-to-day life, fans ate up the comics, making Superman a fast hit. The hero’s support for “truth, justice, and the American way” quickly became a staple of his persona. Other comic book creators soon followed suit, and in 1941 an even more blatantly patriotic chap took center stage. Captain America’s first cover started out with a bang, or should I say a “pow,” when he gave Mr. Adolf Hitler a good ol’ punch in the face. After a lull in the comic’s popularity, the hero went into retirement, later returning to comic shelves as the “Commie Smasher.”

Captain America has largely carried on his patriotic legacy. At the end of *Avengers: Endgame*, when it seemed like the battle against Thanos had been all but lost, a hobbled Cap, with broken shield in hand, stood before the villain and his armies alone, yet undeterred. As David French said in a recent podcast, “If that doesn’t say #Murica. Name a better movie moment.” (Brace yourselves, reader. I’ll be quoting the illustrious Mr. French once more before this article is complete.)

Sadly, in a 2011 comic, Superman renounced his U.S. citizenship. While DC Comics co-publishers Jim Lee and Dan Didio assured the *New York Post* that the hero “remains, as always, committed to his adopted home and his roots as a Kansas

farm boy from Smallville,” Superman’s own words told a different story: “Truth, justice and the American way — it’s not enough anymore.”

Besides this incident, the superhero comic and film industries have remained almost fully committed to what made them successful in the first place. The reason for that commitment seems fairly evident. Superhero movies are

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Every age of film  
has its own genres  
of blockbusters.  
Remember  
westerns,  
melodramas,  
musicals, and  
gangster films?

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basically made for their profitability. The industry gives its fans what they want. And guess what? They don’t want vague international virtue-signaling. They want to be entertained.

The bulk of Hollywood elites have become enthralled with what they see as their responsibility, as the enlightened architects of the culture, to descend into the cave and inform us primitive creatures about the wide world outside. Every time a film’s characters fail to get

the happy ending they deserve, we’re told by the film’s director that real life doesn’t always end happily. They tell us this as if we didn’t already know it to be true, as if everyday Americans weren’t better equipped than they to determine what real life is like. But superhero filmmakers lean in to fan service, crafting storylines around consumer desires.

David French writes, “There are critics who decry the dominance of superhero movies, warning that the cinematic experience is too ‘comic-bookified.’ But American art forms always get that flak. We’re just too simple. We don’t appreciate the ‘finer things.’ Well, real Americans respond that a great joke, a big battle, and a loud soundtrack are the finer things. And, by golly, while the elites might not like it, regular folks round the world can’t get enough.”

Every age of film has its own genres of blockbusters. Remember westerns, melodramas, musicals, and gangster films? All blockbuster genres. But now, with many years passed, we can appreciate what made those movies brilliant. Similarly, superhero movies aren’t devoid of artistic value or cultural significance.

In *Captain America: Civil War*, our heroes are faced with a choice. They’ve just witnessed the destruction of Sokovia, a tragedy which was in many ways caused by their own hubris. The Avengers must now choose whether to cede their power to an international governing body or continue to operate independent of oversight. Other superhero movies, including *The Incredibles*, deal with that same quandary. These simple films have exposed broad

audiences to discussions of individual liberty and more complex aspects of political theory, such as the relative value of geopolitical multipolarity. But just ignore that, because, after all, these movies are “not cinema.”

If superhero movies went out of fashion tomorrow, some other hero genre would take its place. Brian Kaller writes for the *American Conservative*,

*All human cultures have had superhero tales, from Gilgamesh and Odysseus to Robin Hood and Zorro. When cultures are at their peak, they write about the heroic ideals to which they strive, as Sophocles did of Ajax or as Vergil did of Aeneas. During the Depression and World War II, the U.S.'s peak of power and conflict, it began creating superheroes, an image of what we would like to be.*

*When cultures abandon that heroic ideal, when they acquire the “philosophic indifference” of Gibbon’s latter-day Romans, the culture is in deep trouble.*

No matter the form in which they reveal themselves, hero stories will always be present in American life. Maybe it’s in the water, or maybe it’s in our blood, but I am convinced that Americans don’t show up to these films just to be entertained. They go to be inspired. Stasi Eldredge, in her book *Captivating*, asserts that all women desire to “play an irreplaceable role in a great adventure.” She continues, “Sometime before the sorrows of life did their best to kill it

in us, most young women wanted to be a part of something grand, something important. Before doubt and accusation take hold, most little girls sense they have a vital role to play; they want to believe there is something in them that is needed and needed desperately.” It seems clear that this principle applies to men, as well.

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All good heroes have to properly strategize their biggest battles. Use this time to plan yours.

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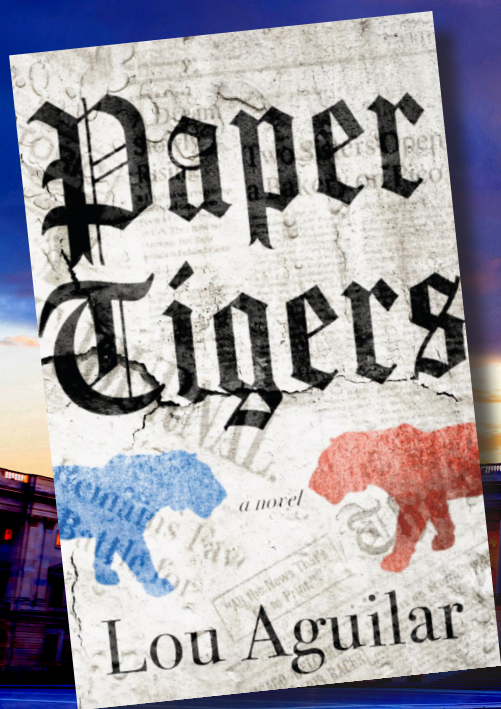
Many Americans feel a similar longing to my own when they walk out of the theater. A small hole exists inside each of our hearts, waiting to be filled. Superhero films fill that void for a few hours, but when the credits roll, we feel the empty spot once again.

When I wrote my first draft of this piece, I remarked that our country was more prosperous than it had ever been. Just a few months later, that is no longer true. I reflected that prosperity didn’t constitute ripe ground for exciting exploits. Though I never wished suffering on this nation, we certainly have received it. When the world aches with hardship, that usually serves as a wake-up call to

those seeking a life of consequence. But how can you go on an adventure from the comfort of your couch?

All good heroes have to properly strategize their biggest battles. Use this time to plan yours. Pray for those on the front lines, and prepare to help those left in the wake of this crisis. Then, watch your favorite superhero film. Use that small longing you feel as motivation to make a difference.

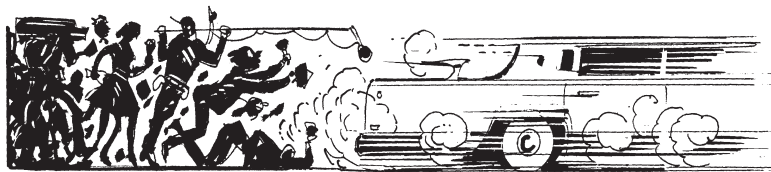
When life begins to return to normal, answer the call of the Americans who came before, the superheroes unencumbered by latex and capes, and set out on a mission all your own. ✎



VERY TIMELY FICTIONAL NOVEL THAT TAKES US BEHIND THE SCENES INTO THE NEWSROOMS OF THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA, THE HALLS OF ACADEMIA, THE CESSPOOL OF PROGRESSIVISM IN HOLLYWOOD, AND THE CORRUPT SWAMPLAND OF WASHINGTON, D.C.

— THE DAILY WIRE

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# Corona Fever Kiboshes the Car Biz

*But it might not be all bad.*

by Eric Peters

There is good news and there is bad news. The bad news is that unless Corona Fever passes soon — not the virus, but the hysteria that’s been ginned up about the virus — the car industry will shortly topple like an unevenly stacked Jenga Tower with one too many logs already on top.

Several major players were in dicey shape before the Fever struck. Ford was among the notables. Its profits are down an almost unbelievable 99 percent compared to 2018 — but not because of corona.

Rather, it was because of a belly-flopped launch — of the new Explorer, which was supposed to have been on the road before Corona Fever — in tandem with what is arguably a catastrophic decision by Ford to “invest” in electric cars like the “Mustang” Mach E, which is actually a crossover SUV that has as much in common with a Mustang as breakfast has with dinner.

But it’s not just Ford that is in trouble — and for similar reasons.

GM has been trying to jump-start Cadillac, but the motor won’t fire. Because it is a motor. Not an engine. Electrified Cadillacs like the ELR never achieved the sales success of the Pontiac Aztek — which is considered by many to have been among the greatest belly flops in the history of the car business. But GM sold tens of thousands of Azteks.

It never sold 1,000 ELRs.

It had to stop trying to sell the Volt. It has had to give away the Bolt (heavily discounted, massively subsidized). Despite the obvious hint that perhaps the market doesn’t want more electric vehicles, GM decided to make more electric models for which there are mandates.

But without subsidies — and with thirty-three million people out of work, as of this writing — this is a problematic equation.

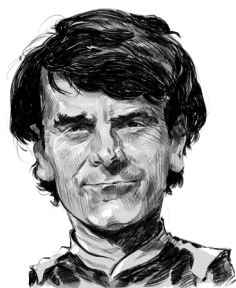
Tesla sales were tanking before the Fever — in tandem with the withdrawal of the federal \$7,500-per-car subsidy that enabled most of those sales. When you stop paying people to buy cars, they generally don’t.

GM’s Chevrolet division also flubbed a critical launch of a critical vehicle — the Silverado 1500, which was for decades America’s second-best-selling truck, after the Ford F-150.

It isn’t anymore.

Not because people aren’t buying trucks. Well, not because they weren’t buying them. Rather, they were buying other trucks — like the Ram 1500, which is now the second-best-selling truck in the country.

Because the restyled Chevy is widely regarded as hideously ugly, with a dumpster-looking puss combined with the marketing erratum of putting a turbocharged four-cylinder engine under its hood, something as out-of-place in a full-size truck as the Rockettes at the Vatican.



*Eric Peters has been writing about cars, bikes, and the politics of the road since the early '90s. His books include Automotive Atrocities and Road Hogs; his new car reviews are distributed by Creators Syndicate.*

But Fiat Chrysler's Ram has its own troubles — not because people weren't buying Ram trucks, but because Ram (and Dodge and Chrysler and Jeep) were pre-corporation bought up by French car combine Peugeot — which also acquired floundering Fiat as part of the deal.

Now add corona. Even the healthy car companies — Toyota, for instance (which is healthy because it has not bought into electric car fever to the degree most of the rest have and also hasn't flubbed its model launches) — are going to be in a world of hurt if sanity isn't restored soon. No business can take being out of business for months on end.

Inventories of unsold cars are stacking up at ports; dealers are being forced to close their doors. Debt is accruing. Balance sheets are in freefall.

Another month of this and it will all be over. For what again?

The late astronomer Carl Sagan once said when asked about UFOs that extraordinary claims require extraordinary proof. The corona "experts" claimed millions would die. Then it was hundreds of thousands. Then tens of thousands. Not that any death

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Even the healthy car companies — Toyota, for instance — are going to be in a world of hurt if sanity isn't restored soon.

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shouldn't be mourned, nor steps taken to avert avoidable deaths.

But hysteria — and innumeracy — have combined to render a large percentage of the population complicit in its own destruction.

Still, there is at least some upside to all this downside. For one — after Corona Fever dies down — we may see a return of a market-driven rather than mandate-driven car business, for the simple reason that people won't be able to afford the mandates anymore.

It is possible we may see cars that don't "transact" for \$35,000 — the average price

paid for a new car last year — because the reset after the Fever will make it economically unfeasible to mandate the things that have driven the cost of new cars through the roof, such as having to comply with impact standards that a 2000 model year Class Mercedes would fail today and gas mileage mandates that require every new car built to average at least 35 mpg — no matter how much it costs to achieve that.

And no matter how *little* gas costs us.

The record low cost of gas could also put paid to electric car fever. A "business" predicated on paying people to buy cars when gas costs less than \$2 per gallon becomes Marx Brothers preposterous.

We may even see brand-new cars (and non-electric cars) that can be bought for less than \$10,000 — you can already buy cars like these in many parts of the world — because not every country has mandates that effectively require every new car to have at least six and usually eight airbags as well as emissions control mandates divorced from any consideration of costs versus benefits.

Rent-seeking and cronyism may just fall victim to Corona Fever — and *those* would be deaths worth celebrating. ☞



The American Collection,  
2019 (Bill Wilson Studio)



# Rap Music: An American Delight

*Its themes of bravado and self-creation couldn't have come from anywhere else.*

by Karol Markowicz

Hip-hop was born in New York in the 1970s. There's some disagreement over the first use of the term "hip-hop" or "rap" to describe the burgeoning music, but it's widely agreed upon that it was started by African-American DJs in the Bronx in the late 1970s. DJ Kool Herc is often credited with first using two record players to create the beats and breaks we associate with hip-hop. Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five coined the term "hip-hop," and The Sugarhill Gang released "Rapper's Delight," putting "rap" on the map.

Hip-hop is a distinctive American art form.

There's bravado, bragging, one-upmanship. And it's beautiful. Who is the best? Who sold the most? Who is most respected? Who is not to be trifled with? It's the musical equivalent of "U-S-A! U-S-A!" chants. It's so American it could only have been founded here.

So many rappers write odes to American cities that their names become linked with the place. Jay-Z, New York. Kanye West, Chicago. Ludacris, Atlanta. Eminem, Detroit. The Roots, Philadelphia. Dr. Dre, Los Angeles. And so on. They tell the tales of those cities — broken and unhappy or glistening and successful, sometimes all of those at once.

A common thread in hip-hop music is the biographical story told by each rapper. They're not all the same story, though they do often follow a similar theme.

The lyrics speak of triumph over adversity and very much living the American dream. So much of hip-hop is about starting at the bottom and climbing to the top. No one has a hip-hop career handed to them. There's no way not to have to work.

Recent rap phenomenon Cardi B got her start on the reality show *Love & Hip Hop*. On the show, her producer doesn't take her seriously, and she frequently has to fight to be heard. There's no way to skip the line to hip-hop success. Nearly everyone on *Love & Hip Hop*, which has franchises in New York, Los Angeles, Atlanta, and Miami, is trying to make it in the business of hip-hop. So far, Cardi is the biggest star to emerge. Most of the others never will.

Every few years, a cable news segment or an article will hit alleging that rap music negatively impacts American culture. That's nonsense.

Bill O'Reilly has famously targeted hip-hop acts, from Ludacris to Jay-Z, in his segments, at one point arguing that hip-hop was responsible for the *decline of Christianity in America*. Perhaps he's watching Kanye West's Sunday Service and rethinking now. The album West released last year, *Jesus is King*, debuted at No. 1 on the Billboard 200 Chart.

On his hit song "DNA," Kendrick Lamar samples Geraldo Rivera saying,

"Hip-hop has done more damage to young African-Americans than racism." How can music be more damaging than dehumanizing discrimination? The very idea is offensive.

Most complaints against rap, however, sound like they are stuck in the 1990s. Hip-hop is hardly still the land of thuggery. There aren't gangland shootouts between the coasts anymore. Tupac Shakur was killed on September 13, 1996, nearly 24 years ago. Notorious B.I.G. died six months later. It's time to let go of the narrative that hip-hop and violence are somehow intertwined.

Today, some of the biggest hip-hop artists never rap about drugs or guns. Kanye West may be producing church music now, but even before his shift none of his albums were ever about shootouts or how much crack he was slinging. Drake, one of the highest-selling rappers of his generation, never raps about how many guns he totes. Lizzo, arguably the biggest star of 2019, is all body positivity and living your best life.

That's not to say that "beefs" don't happen in hip-hop anymore. Of course they do. But they are solved lyrically. One of the most famous ones, between Nas and Jay-Z, was squashed when Nas was signed to Jay-Z's record label and they appeared on a song together. The continued maligning of hip-hop as violent music is unfounded.

And yes, it is music. Hip-hop is just the latest of genres to have to defend itself from the accusation that it's not "music." The 2006 song "That's How We

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Karol Markowicz is a writer in New York City. She can be followed on Twitter: @karol.



Do It” by British rap group US3 includes this thought:

*The same critics talking trash and dissing rap  
Listen to jazz, rhythm and blues and classical gas  
Maybe they never studied the past or just  
don't mind  
That jazz wasn't considered a music at one time.*

Rock 'n' roll wasn't always “music” either. My grandmother would yell to turn off that “dog howling” when my father would listen to the Beatles.

It's long past the time to accept hip-hop as part of mainstream American culture. In 2018, hip-hop surpassed rock to become the most popular music genre. Like any genre, it's not for everyone. There are certainly some bad words, some bad themes. But the same can be said for rock or country, two styles rarely smeared as inappropriate. Embracing hip-hop doesn't mean endorsing those themes any more than listening to Johnny Cash means you think it's all right to shoot someone in Reno just to watch them die or listening to the Grateful Dead means you support Casey Jones driving that train, high on cocaine. It's just music, and that's OK. 🐾



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# Live Music Goes Viral

*A Florida band makes it work while not working.*

by Jaylin Hawkins



Josh Miles, 2019  
(Courtesy of Oliver J. Stewart)

As the COVID-19 pandemic controls the airwaves and the minds of millions of Americans, one resilient community is coming together to bring a sense of normalcy amid the chaos: musicians.

The live performance industry practically vanished overnight amid social distancing guidelines, the closure of performance spaces, and the cancellation of multiple music festivals. Many live industry workers are not predicting a pre-coronavirus atmosphere until 2022. But musicians, both big and small, are finding new ways to connect with their audiences.

Josh Miles, 27, lead singer and guitarist for J. M. and the Sweets, is a Palm Beach, Florida-based musician who is not letting COVID-19 ruin his connection with his fans.

“I did two Facebook Live performances recently for relief efforts and they were fun and were thrown for a good reason, but I missed the connection I’d typically have with a live audience,” Miles said. The proceeds of one of the concerts went to help a local business pay their staff during the pandemic.

“I think now more than ever smaller musicians have to stick together and really help each other out. Whether it’s doing live concerts online to reach people or finding a way to make new music together safely,

I think it’s important that we keep making music because this will all be over one day, and we will go back to our gigs,” he said.

Miles describes his sound as an “eclectic blend of soul.” He draws inspiration from artists like D’Angelo and Prince, who well proceed any sound of the 2000s. Miles has been making music for the last seven years, and his band formed around the same time.

Before COVID-19, Miles had regular weekly gigs at local bars and restaurants that were hot spots for a diverse crowd. On any given night Miles and his band can be heard playing anything from Otis Redding and Stevie Wonder to Taylor Swift and Kings of Leon.

Miles’s live audience varies depending on the venue he is playing, but he feels as though his music cuts through generations with his ability adapt to different atmospheres.

“I feel like my audience is people whose mind and soul connect with the music and people who appreciate the artistry. I’ve learned about appealing to different crowds from my childhood and growing up in situations where I had to adapt to the people that were in the room,” he said.

Miles credits his repertoire for being able to keep crowds engaged in his music, but he has also come to realize that sometimes it’s easier to experiment and find common ground with a crowd that is

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Jaylin Hawkins is a reporter, music critic, and 2019–2020 Journalism and Media Fellow with the Charles Koch Institute.

seasoned. The median age of a Palm Beach County resident is forty-four years old, according to Data USA.

“What I have realized playing for older people is that they are truly open to hearing anything as long as it is executed really well. They have a discerning ear for music, which I appreciate,” he said. “I think they are there to enjoy their time out and they just want to hear good music and I am happy to provide them with that.”

Miles said that despite his attempts at marketing the band on social media, he has found that (in normal times) most people discover his band by stopping by one of the many venues he plays and seeing his show by chance: “I think most people, especially

those who I don’t reach through my social media efforts, just stumble upon us while they’re going out for dinner and drinks.”

He also says that older people have been more deliberate about sharing his music and his performances with their friends: “So many times, people will come up to me and tell me that they came to see us play because their friend suggested it. I’m not sure if they have more time or resources but they do make it a point to share my music.”

Miles said that even though coronavirus has impacted the way he’s able to connect and ultimately work — with bars and restaurants closed through May and live audiences impossible for longer than that — he has taken the time to really practice

his craft. He is eager to get back to his gigs and personal connections with his listeners when the time is right.

Miles hasn’t been able to record new music with his band, but safety has to come first, he says.

Before the closure of Florida’s nonessential businesses in early April, J. M. and the Sweets were working on a new project and had just hosted their “Welcome to South Florida Soul” show. The show features the band alongside four other Palm Beach-based musicians, including Allegra Miles (no relation to Josh, although they love to jokingly say they are siblings), who is currently on Season 18 of the NBC show *The Voice*. 🎸



J. M. and The Sweets,  
2019 (Courtesy of Brandy Hensley)





# Wine Not?

*The shutdown cut off my wine supply, so I made my own.*

by **Eddie Burkhalter**

**T**hese are hard times, and many of us are drinking more than we probably should.

Here in Alabama, we can't get wine shipped to our homes, and that's a problem. We tried a few years ago to pass a law allowing it, but Baptists got involved and a "task force" was formed to look into it instead.

Forming a "task force" in Alabama is like hiring a hitman. The bill never stood a chance.

If I want my wine now, I've got to risk my life and the lives of my loved ones in a crowded shop, crammed full of other newly minted day drinkers.

So I've returned to fermenting my own wine. It's not hard. Any actual prisoner who's done enough time could tell you.

I talk to people serving in Alabama prisons often in my work as a journalist. They live in the most dangerous, overcrowded prisons in the country, where stabbings, sexual assaults, and homicides are commonplace, and where you can, even in the midst of a COVID-19 lockdown with no visitors coming or going, still get drugs.

Pruno, or Julep as it's often called here in Alabama, is prison wine made of bits of fruit and other sugary things, fermented in plastic bags until the sugar turns to alcohol. Thirty gallons of the stuff was confiscated

at William E. Donaldson Correctional Facility in Bessemer in July 2019.

In trying times, people find a way, so I dug out several large bags of frozen muscadines from my deep freezer, found my primary fermenting bucket, and searched for my five-gallon carboy.



Wait! Where was my carboy? (They look just like those five-gallon water cooler jugs and are used in the secondary fermentation process when, if all went correctly, most of the rest of the sugar has turned into alcohol.) No sign of it anywhere. Panic set in.

I'd have to improvise. I found a large, empty glass pickle jar and cut a hole in the lid for my airlock. (That keeps oxygen out of your wine during the secondary

fermentation and lets the carbon dioxide made by the yeast out — or else you're making a bomb.)

First, the wine must — that's the muscadines, water, and sugar mixture — went into the primary fermenting bucket, and after I got a half packet of wine yeast going in a little hot water, the yeast was pitched and cloth laid over the bucket and the lid lightly rested on top. It needs oxygen at this point.

After two days of fermenting, I transferred everything into my improvised pickle jar secondary fermenter, installed the airlock, and taped the lid air-tight with super-duty duct tape. Oxygen is bad for the wine at this point, when the yeast is eating nearly all of the remaining sugar.

The hardest part about making wine is waiting, especially if you don't have any wine to drink while you do. But soon enough, four days in fact, it was done.

The longer you let wine sit after fermentation, the better it is, but who's got that kind of time?

I suppose the answer to that is, "Most of us do." We're all doing time, though nothing like the time the people in Donaldson are doing.

As of May 1, six inmates in Alabama prisons had tested positive for COVID-19, one inmate who was terminally ill died after learning he was positive for the virus, and sixteen prison workers had tested positive.

Stay safe, make your own wine at home, and say a prayer, or send positive thoughts, to the people who work and live inside all the jails and prisons across the country. ❧

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*Eddie Burkhalter covers state politics, prisons, and the environment for the Alabama Political Reporter. He lives in Piedmont, Alabama, with his wife and four children. He has questionable taste in wine.*



# The Conservative Revolution Will Be Televised

*Trump wrote the script, and the actors are ready and waiting. All they need is someone to sign the check.*

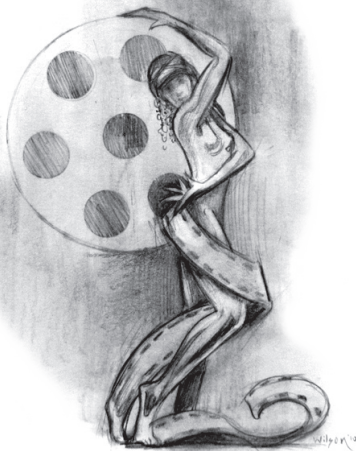
by Lou Aguilar

What Donald Trump has done to politics — uproot the status quo — conservatives must now do to the movie business. Trump ended two political dynasties, revitalized a sluggish economy, constitutionalized the federal judiciary, and is confronting a global pandemic and subsequent protests and riots while shrugging off once-dreaded liberal epithets like “racist,” “sexist,” “xenophobic,” and “homophobic.” He cleared the Grand Old Party of progressive parasites, sending phony rightist thought leaders Bill Kristol, George Will, and Max Boot scurrying to their true masters, the statist Democrats. Trump took his populism straight to the people, over the heads of shocked entertainers, leaving them to spew moronic bile from morning (*The View*) till midnight (all late-night talk shows except *Conan*) and on every low-rated awards show. But beneath these high-profile successes, Trump may have managed a more subtle yet durable achievement — providing the blueprint for conservative movers and shakers to circumvent Hollywood with richer material. And they have a literary treasure trove from which to choose.

Good traditionalist writers know as much if not more about popular storytelling as the guardians at the gate of Tinseltown. Our Hollywood-marginalized best and brightest — David Mamet (*The Untouchables*), Andrew Klavan (*Empire of Lies*), Nelson DeMille (*The Cuban Affair*),

Michael Walsh (*Hostile Intent*), and many others — have written books or scripts superior to anything George Clooney, Joss Whedon, Amy Schumer, Seth Rogen, and Judd Apatow have ever made. Yet the latter group can greenlight \$50 million projects, then publicly insult half of their potential audience for supporting the president of the United States. Yet the last movie Andrew Klavan wrote, *Gosnell: The Trial of America’s Biggest Serial Killer*, a gripping account of a real-life abortionist monster, had to be financed through crowdfunding as a small indie film starring Dean Cain. Before Klavan came out as a conservative — knowing full well the price he would pay in Hollywood — films based on his work starred Michael Caine (*A Shock to the System*), Clint Eastwood (*True Crime*), and Michael Douglas (*Don’t Say a Word*). Klavan has been calling for a shock to the studio system since long before Trump’s rise. He was inspired by the man with the plan for doing just that — Andrew Breitbart.

Breitbart’s motto was “Politics is downstream from culture.” It doesn’t matter how many electoral victories we win, he said; they will all be pyrrhic ones as long as the Left sets the narrative, which their control of academia, the news media, and the entertainment media facilitates. Breitbart intended to break the third leg of this tripod ten years ago with a conservative entertainment revolution. Klavan was an early recruit of his. I may have been his last. “We are the counterculture now,” Breitbart



*Lou Aguilar is a published novelist, produced screenwriter, and cultural essayist. His new novel, Paper Tigers — a tale of politically crossed love in the time of Trump — is available from Deeds Publishing, Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and great American bookstores.*

told me, and I was ready to march with him. But his sudden death in March 2012 derailed the movement before it began. It remained undead for three years, during which progressives under Barack Obama enjoyed both cultural and governmental dominance. Hollywood became insufferably woke.

It was the worst of times for traditionalist screenwriters like me. I remember a 2016 phone call from my agent, who'd been pitching my first novel *Jake for Mayor* as a feature film. His pitch: "A disgraced political consultant runs a small-town dog for mayor as his comeback attempt, knowing that the town will be a media laughingstock, until the dog brings out his nobler side." My agent said he got the same two-word verdict on the book from several producers — one word which I'd never heard before, but have heard often since in the screen trade: "Too heteronormative."

"So I'll make the dog gay," I offered, too late. In the frenzy of identity politics, white male artists could no longer create female protagonists (but women could do white male antagonists), white men couldn't do black protagonists (but black people could do white antagonists), straight men couldn't do gay characters (but gay people could do straight characters), and nobody

could do feminine, romantic women. At that time, an abrasive asexual woman was certain to become president and forever seal the bridge between progressive politics and culture — Breitbart's worst nightmare.

Then the earthquake hit — the election of a swaggering, right-wing, "toxic" white male. Even worse, he was married to a gorgeous, graceful supermodel who put the screeching ex-first lady he beat to shame — along with the strident male-bashing harpies overpopulating both large and small screens. The traumatized Industry players could not accept this distortion of their reality. For three-plus years, they continued to depict a liberal fantasyland where Red State patriots, like happy housewives, don't exist, or are religious fanatic villains. That those same Americans constantly reject such offensive "entertainment" fare, ensuring its commercial failure, means less to the producers than champagne toasts in Malibu. And yet, as in the poem by Andrew Marvell, at their back they always hear time's winged chariot hurrying near. They can sense impending doom.

Because as long as Donald Trump is president, the imminent conservative counterrevolution in the arts has an inspirational figurehead. What it lacks are

sympathetic investors astute enough to enter the entertainment arena the way Trump did the political one and redirect its product to the public instead of the elite. These investors would restore the culture more than by bankrolling another Republican candidate and make money in the bargain with a massive, previously ignored audience.

This hasn't happened yet. The glitterati have managed to somewhat delegitimize Trump with the help of the news media and their Democratic allies. To wit, Russia got him elected, the Ukraine call got him impeached, and now — with the Wuhan coronavirus crisis ongoing and Election Day rapidly approaching — they cling to the dream that Joe Biden will defeat him and save Hollywood. All its denizens have to do is remain in their Disneyesque bubble until November.

But that bubble is ready to burst. Right-of-center investors can either go with the progressive flow — as too many conservatives have done for far too long — or *carpe diem*, which the late, great conservative author Saul Bellow translated for the title of his early novel *Seize the Day*. There are a lot more of us where he came from. All we need are more rich visionaries like President Trump to step up and make the screen art great again. ✎



The Old Downtown Theatre, 2019 (Bill Wilson Studio)

Bill Wilson 2019



# The Frontier Code Is a Cherished Gift

*Westerns teach us values to live by.*

by Roger Kaplan

The Western theme, beset by legends and myths that too easily turn to clichés, is peopled by settlers and seekers, flawed heroes, outlaws, men and women who are giving — or mean. What else would one expect, after all? Western writing (and this is true of film-making, as well) took account of this from the beginning, naturally enough — that is why we read James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain. The men and women of the West know civilization suffocates them or limits their ambitions, their way of life; but civilization, one way or another, must accompany the settling of the wilderness. The trick is keep faith with what you know is true. In the best stories, you sometimes forget, but it is still there.

The page-turning motif of Charles Portis's *True Grit* (1968) is Mattie Ross's righteous determination to bring her father's killer to justice, or kill him in the attempt. She cannot accept that a cowardly lowlife should get away with the murder of a good and generous man who tried to help him; she loves her father and never doubts her duty.

Just so. And a man's character is his fate, spoke Heraclitus — Saul Bellow acknowledges this in the opening movement of *The Adventures of Augie March* — and so it is a girl's, as Portis shows in his tale of childhood coming into maturity under the impact of adversity and the unspoken, almost unnoticed, force of true love.

Mattie, funny and sharp-tongued, shrewd, thrifty, and wise, knows her fate, inseparable from her duty, and she follows it doggedly. She will die rich, too, as she mentions without vanity but with a certain Calvinist approval as she tells the story, late in life and content in her choice of spinsterhood, secure in the meaning of the great adventure with Rooster Cogburn that both confirmed and forged her character.

Back then, when Arkansas was still a wild place and the South was prostrate and the West was wide open and dangerous, she found a deputy marshal who worked under a court managed by Isaac Charles Parker, a true historical person known as a hanging judge. Rooster Cogburn, who rode, rumor had it, with William Quantrill in the late war, was overweight and missing an eye, but his reputation was that he found his fugitive or killed him resisting arrest.

Mattie disapproved of his personal life, and still does these many decades later, but the mission's the point, and Rooster was the man for the job, even though he required some encouragement to take the case and was reluctant to let her join the manhunt. She remembers how he tried to palm off her father's gun and explain that he needed expense money for whiskey:



Roger Kaplan divides his time between Washington, D.C., and Marshall, Texas.

*"I will trade you even for this old piece."*

*"No, that was Papa's gun. I am ready to go. Do you hear me?" I took my revolver from him and put it back in the sack. He poured some more whiskey in his cup.*

*"You can't serve papers on a rat, baby sister."*

*"I never said you could."*

*"These shitepoke lawyers think you can but you can't. All you can do with a rat is kill him or let him be.... What is your thinking on it?"*

*"Are you going to drink all that?"*

Despite her righteous self-confidence, her sense of mission, Mattie cannot help but harbor some misgivings about this large man, and she will have occasion to scold him and even doubt her decision to engage his services. Little girls can be bossy, and never more so when they have an old man in their sights; you see this again in Pauline Jiles's *News of the World* (2016). In this heart-pulling novel, Captain Jefferson Kyle Kidd, a veteran of the pre-Secession Mexican and Indian wars in the West, takes on the job of returning a girl, held captive for several years by Kiowas who massacred her German immigrant parents and siblings, to her nearest relatives, who are living in the far Southwest.

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Classics repeat ancient narrative structures, borrow motifs and characters, of necessity, but if they are as true as *True Grit* or *News of the World*, they sparkle with the freshness of new invention.

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There is a good deal of misunderstanding between Kidd and the girl he has decided to call Johanna, because the imagination she has acquired in her Kiowa upbringing is even more distant from the old veteran's as Mattie's Calvinist certitudes are from Rooster's frontier realism. Gradually, the child comes to trust the man she calls "Onkle," in a distant recall of her lost first language.

In Western novels, it is on the field of battle, or at least of extreme adversity, that the decisive, enduring bond is forged. In *True Grit*, Mattie and Rooster, with a Texas Ranger named LaBoeuf, hunt down the scoundrel and the band of outlaws he has joined:

*Rooster said, "Fill your hand, you son of a bitch!" and he took the reins in his teeth and pulled the other saddle revolver and drove his spurs into the flanks of his strong horse Bo and charged the bandits.... It was some daring move on the part of the deputy marshal whose manliness and grit I had doubted. No grit? Rooster Cogburn? Not much!*

But the ambush goes awry, and Mattie has a harrowing brush with death. A dramatic escape ensues and something happens in her heart, which already had happened in his, between the time Mattie mistakes a ruse by Rooster for desertion and finds that he has saved her — and enabled her to do her daughter's duty:

*My legs were wobbly. I could hardly stand.*

*Rooster said, "Can you hold to my neck?"*

*I said, "Yes, I will try." There were two dark red holes in his face with dried rivulets of blood under them where shotgun pellets had struck him....*

*Rooster said, "We must get you to a doctor, sis, or are not going to make it." He said to LaBoeuf as an afterthought, "I am in your debt for that shot, pard."*

Mattie later learns they made it to a surgeon, who removed part of an infected arm. She never sees Rooster again. But years later she goes to his funeral and remembers how she "avenged Frank Ross's blood over in the Choctaw Nation when snow was on the ground."

The daughter in Pauline Jiles's *News of the World* is not bent on revenge but on survival, and it is with compassion and wisdom that Captain Kidd patiently shows her that survival as a Kiowa is off the program. She is a tough little ten-year-old girl who has learned and internalized the ways of her captors. When outlaws led by a white slaver try to kidnap her again, she plays a critical role in Kidd's defensive counterattack by feeding deadly ammo in the form of dimes (the earnings of his itinerant news-reading lectures) into his shotgun. Always mindful of his responsibility, he turns the battle into a lesson in the manners of the civilization she will have to live in:

*He lay back against the rock breathing slowly. Johanna jumped to her feet, straight as a willow wand. She lifted her face to the sun and began to chant in a high, tight voice. Her taffy hair flew in thick strands, powdered with flour, and she took the butcher knife and held the blade above her head and began to sing, Hey hey Chal an aun! Their enemies had run before them. They had fled in terror....*

*We are hard and strong, the Kiowa!*

*Far below the Caddos heard the Kiowa triumph chant, the scalping chant, and when they struck the bottom of the ravine where it bled into the Brazos they did not even stop to fill their canteens.*

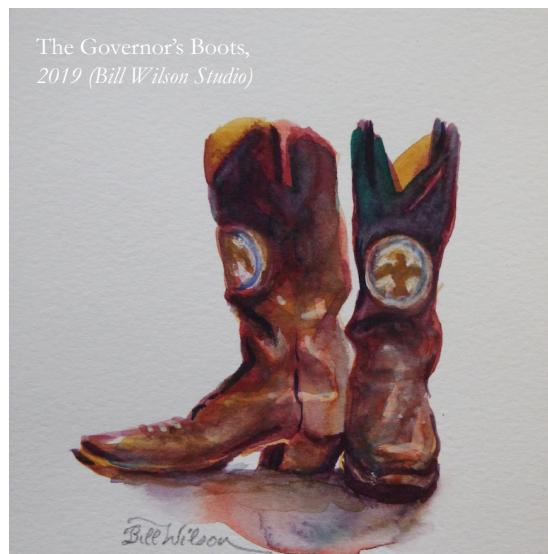
*Then she climbed over the lip of the rock with her skirts and petticoats wadded into Turkish pantaloons and the butcher knife held high. She was halfway down before the Captain came after her and got hold of her skirt.*

*She had been on her way to scalp Almay.*

*No, my dear, we don't ... it's not done, he said.*

*Haa-in-a?*

The Governor's Boots,  
2019 (Bill Wilson Studio)





Scooter & Dog, 2014 (Bill Wilson Studio)

*No. Absolutely not. No. No scalping. He picked her up and swung her up over the ledges of stone and then followed. He said, It is considered very impolite.*

Civilization is made by people, and people are uneven in their appreciation of its meaning. With the mission accomplished, Kidd realizes that Johanna's people are mean and mean-spirited — less civilized, in this sense, than the Indians. He has second thoughts, despite his deep sense of the rules under which he took the job. He turns back, spies Johanna working in a field:

*He saw dark red stripes across her forearms and hands. It was from the dog whip. The anger that overtook him nearly froze him in place. It almost shut him down. Then he said, calmly, Let's go. It's all right. Let's just go. Drop that goddam bucket....*

*Kontab, she said. Grandfather. I go with you. She began to cry. I go with you.*

A bright young rancher eventually asks for her hand, and with mixed feelings and good advice about marriage, the Captain gives her away, knowing she will be protected and happy and never be quite entirely the beautiful wife of a successful Texas pioneer that she has by all appearance become. He stays in touch, but he drifts “away into a very old age and worked again at the Kiowa dictionary until he found it hard to see. Often he remembered her cry at the Great Brazos River Ten-Cent Shootout. It had been a war cry, and she had been only ten, and she had meant it.”

Classics repeat ancient narrative structures, borrow motifs and characters, of necessity, but if they are as true as *True Grit* or *News of the World*, they sparkle with the freshness of new invention. Children and parents are inevitably part of the Western epic, from Huck Finn trading a bad father for a good one, to Newt Dobbs, in Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, finding himself anointed

successor by a man who may or may not be his father but who has watched and tested him as only a father would during a long and hazardous cattle drive from the Rio Grande to Montana.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *Lonesome Dove* are high peaks of this literature. The men and women who fill its pages are, in triumph and loss, resourceful and ultimately decent, righteous.

They may be hard, difficult men, as is Amos Edwards in Alan Le May's *The Searchers* (1954), but the sense of honor, of obligation, of chivalry, is deep enough to keep them going when others say give up: “Their goal, while it still eluded them, seemed always just ahead. They never had come to any point where either one of them could have brought himself to turn back, from the first day their quest had begun.”

They, Edwards and his family's adoptive nephew, Mart Pauley, are searching for their lost niece and sister; their fate is to find her or deny the nature of their characters. In Jack Schaefer's *Shane* (1949), neither the father nor his rival — in the eyes of Bob, the young narrator — can turn back on his mission, the one to keep his land, the other to defend his host, and Bob (Joey in the better-known film) absorbs the same fundamental truth about personal integrity from both. It is a choice reached singly; no one can make it for them, and that is why, in the words of Sharon Vaughn (which you likely heard through the voices of Willie Nelson or Waylon Jennings):

*My heroes have always been cowboys  
And they are it seems  
Sadly, in search of, but one step in back of,  
Themselves and their slow-movin' dreams.*

And that is why we should read of the West and of Western men and women in these uncertain times, before we saddle up and “light out for the Territory,” sloughing off what's gone wrong, and getting on with what we know will work, keeping us self-reliant and free. ❧



## Mr. Manners

*Nathaniel Baldwin invented headphones for moments like these.*

by Daniel J. Flynn

A few lifetimes ago — meaning a few months ago — when cramming into a diner on a Sunday morning remained obligatory rather than forbidden, a spirited, intergenerational debate erupted as a result of behavior regulated by Miss Manners rather than Dr. Fauci.

“You need to put in earbuds,” I instructed a young man whose music disrupted conversation with my brunch companions. “Mind your own business,” he responded. Instinctively, I rose, approached, and informed him that he made his music my business by opting to blare it. “You don’t know me,” he repeatedly retorted in *non sequitur* and self-parodic fashion. “I don’t want to know you,” I replied. “I want you to turn off your music.”

“Music” seems a generous characterization of the sounds emanating from his gadget. Still, whether one’s private stash of Kanye or Corelli invades a public space, the principle remains the same: do not do what you would dislike if someone else did what you are doing. But what we hear and see often depends as much on the seen and heard as it does on the seer and hearer. I saw him as born too late to fulfill his destiny on a late-1990s tabloid talk show; I saw that he saw me as a cross between Walt Kowalski in *Gran Torino* and Tom Anderson from *Beavis and Butt-Head*.

Not since that fight in *Superman II* had such drama captivated the lunch-car crowd. Nobody cursed or yelled or laid hands on another. But the tense conflict

captivated onlookers and adrenalized participants. One stranger seconded my view. I stood down by sitting down after spotting the music aficionado’s girlfriend, whose face dictated that I let him save face. The last-word rebuttal came from the waitress behind the counter. Not unlike when Roddy Piper and Cowboy Bob Orton turned on Paul Orndorff after WrestleMania I, the employee issued an apology *to the man playing the music*, which had struck its coda anyhow. Annoyed, perhaps by my usurpation of her prerogative or the size and age differential between the debating partners, she doubled down.

The waitress again apologized (with only the counter standing between us) for my behavior, this time more loudly and demonstratively, by looking at the still-mumbling young man but performing for the whole diner. His bravado, to assure the out-of-his-league inamorata of his alpha status, made sense; hers, given her dependence on paying customers, did not. I explained to the mean-mugging waitress that this restaurant was not for us, we abandoned our drinks, and without Karening off to see the manager or deigning to submit a revenge review on Yelp, I exited alongside my amused sidekicks.

The showdown lasted perhaps a minute. It proved unsettling for far longer. The waitress’s reaction bothered more than the offender’s action. Rising and approaching the young man did not present the type of example I try to set for my young companions (though it resulted in the music going from 11 to zero). This objective achieved through objection came at too high a price. My dignity, his manhood, the girlfriend’s respect for her beau, and the waitress’s wages all suffered a blow.

This unpleasantness, pitting my aversion to noise against a reluctance to butt in, leaves me less likely to again order earbuds. Days afterward, I spotted a man with a neck tattoo playing his iPhone at the supermarket meat counter; not feeling trapped as I did in the crowded diner, I smartly walked away. Yet, the more we tolerate such encroachments, the more we should expect them. Perhaps the young man thinks the same thing about my intrusion at the diner.

Manners, unlike laws, offer no promulgated, binding, written code. Some may bridle at others’ fondness for issuing loud, creative combinations of swear words. But no fixed law, only evolving custom, guides one away from the course of coarse speech — or loud music in confined public places, or sitting next to someone on an empty bus, or staring at strangers in close quarters for prolonged periods. Given the ubiquity of socially retarding gadgets, the generation raised on them may regard their loud usage as normal and an entreaty to stop favoring their own entertainment over others’ comfort as the violation of good form (and regard the bus-sitters and stranger-starkers as perfect citizens as well). It’s their time. You just live in it — and as a guest, so act accordingly. Did the loudness upset or the loud reminder that you live in sagging-pants, screeching-iPhone, neck-tattoo guy’s world?

Eric Hoffer, who once made his daily bread at a lunch counter before eating his daily bread there, probably could corral unanimity among the disputants with this observation: “Rudeness is the weak man’s imitation of strength.” Alas, on what constitutes rudeness the players surely must agree to disagree. Good manners, which never insist, insist. 🍷

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*Daniel J. Flynn, author of Cult City: Jim Jones, Harvey Milk, and 10 Days That Shook San Francisco, is a senior editor at The American Spectator.*

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