



THE AMERICAN SPECTATOR

SPRING 2022

Edited by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.



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MOTTO

Politics is too important to be taken seriously.

MISSION STATEMENT

The core purpose of *The American Spectator* is to educate, entertain, and inform readers with smart and witty investigative journalism and editorial writing from a conservative point of view. What distinguishes *The American Spectator* is its wry, youthful, and fresh perspective.

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Homage to Ukraina

by Wlady Pleszczynski

I've known Ukrainians my entire life. My parents' circle of post-World War II émigré friends included a few mixed marriages. In one case the two children of one such lively marriage saw the daughter follow her father and identify as Ukrainian, while the son preferred to be Polish like his mother. Similar divisions existed among those in my parents' generation, including one sister who "felt" Polish while the other was "staunchly" Ukrainian. (I forget what their brother preferred.) It was clear as day to me that Ukrainians were a separate people with a distinct identity of their own. No halfway measures allowed.

I also knew Ukrainians to be very kind and likable. During my graduate school days at Indiana University, the senior Slavics librarians were all Ukrainian, invariably pleasant and helpful. One always said "Thanks God" when he meant to say "Thank God." At lunch one day they urged me to be proud of my heritage and to wear the signet ring my father had given me, admiring of what they themselves didn't have.

But what they did have was a strong commitment to hard work and organization. To my mind, Ukrainians were a model ethnic group in that regard, both in the U.S. and Canada, culminating in the founding of the prestigious Harvard

Ukrainian Research Institute in 1973, always a center of leading research and scholarly integrity.

As it happened, my graduate studies concluded with three summer months in Kiev in 1977. It might have been the *Ukrainian* SSR, with token recognition of Ukrainian separateness, but nothing more, just the way Moscow liked it. Announcements on the new Metro



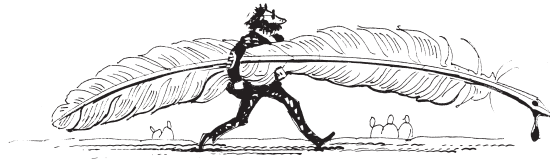
Wlady Pleszczynski is executive editor of The American Spectator.

system were in Ukrainian, as were movie posters — but the movies themselves were all dubbed into Russian. (That's how I first saw Billy Wilder's great movie *The Apartment* ["Kvartira"] in a shabby movie house.)

In Kiev, one never really knew who was Russian and who was Ukrainian. But the wool was pulled from my eyes one Saturday afternoon when the academic in charge of German scholars and I had a chat over watermelon and I asked him if he was Ukrainian. At that, shifting from Russian to Ukrainian, he launched into a long passage from Ukraine's greatest and most heroic poet, Taras Shevchenko (1814–61), words full of violent and withering disdain for oppressor Russians, which in his recitation very much matched his own. Having absorbed that, I can't say anything about Ukraine since February 24 has surprised me.

Unfortunately, that includes the unspeakable, barbaric cruelty set in motion by one Vladimir Putin, whose threats to resort to nuclear weapons were already enough to put a bounty on his head. Putin has said all along he just wants to reunify with Russia's "younger brothers" even as he insists Russia and Ukraine share a common starting point going back to ninth-century Kievan Rus'. Given that Moscow got its start in the thirteenth century at the earliest, as a lowly vassal state of the Mongols (sort of the way it's now willing to be China's), perhaps Russia would have better luck if it called itself Ukraine's younger brother.

Too late, alas. Ukrainians no longer have any use for it. No one with any self-respect wants fraternal relations of any sort with Putin and his willing subjects. It might be good to remind conservatives who've wished to wash their hands of Ukraine that Ronald Reagan fought the Cold War because, for starters, he loathed what he called the Evil Empire. No one wants it back or to see Reagan's greatest triumph squandered. Reagan chose freedom, as all along we supposedly have. Ukraine has chosen it as well, and who lately has deserved it more? 🇺🇦



Blame Biden

Weakness in the face of crazy tyranny is creating more tyranny.

by **Melissa Mackenzie**



Melissa Mackenzie is publisher of The American Spectator.

While you're swirling through a tornado, it's difficult to get perspective on the storm. Survival is all that matters. Fear is the operative emotion. Chaos is the constant.

Americans, and people around the world, are being buffeted, and our team is no exception.

Like a tornado, the news of this past year caused our editorial team to start in one place, but in the swirl, we got picked up and thrown down somewhere else. It's been a wild ride putting this issue together.

Now might be a good time to remind you of the purpose of *The American Spectator* print edition. News moves at the speed of bits and bytes now, and the online media environment is so immediately responsive that any print publication can seem hopelessly outdated. Why have a print edition at all then? Well, it's because in the tumult some stories get lost or get reported but without needed context. We seek, with our print edition, to offer that context and to elevate those stories that need to be remembered.

Two years from now, will news consumers accurately recall what happened in 2022 while new news flies through the air? We all will need a record of events, and a tangible one. That's what we aim to provide for you, dear readers. It's also why we don't have weekly or monthly issues of the magazine. It takes time and distance to get perspective.

How does one capture the geopolitical reshaping and the economic reshaping and the cultural reshaping and the religious reshaping that's happening all at once? It's a near impossible task, but we attempt it anyway.

We hope you appreciate the voices of reason we offer during this chaotic, stormy season.

Blame Biden. Joe Biden seems to be the prevailing source of chaos causing the storm. As our dear Dov Fischer recently wrote for our website, Biden has brought plague upon plague to America. But how did he get in the position to do this damage?

Even if one considers all the ways the media and Democrat operatives manipulated the 2020 election, plenty of Americans wanted Biden to be president. They bought the media hype about Biden. They bought the media hype about COVID. They buy the media hype about nearly everything and get blown about by fear.

It's not just them, though. How many rational-minded people go along to get along? The above-mentioned people are an absolute nightmare. We've all seen the videos of the masked crazies publicly screaming at their fellow Americans for wearing a Trump shirt or not wearing a mask, or really just being happy.

These folks are insane. Even in prison, everyone avoids the crazy guy. The only problem now is that a good third of the country is the crazy guy. And the crazy guys have all the power of every institution behind them.

See a garage pulley? The FBI comes to the rescue! It could be a hate crime! But it isn't. It almost always is a hoax. The spray-painted N-words, the attacks of bleach and rope in Chicago, the racist notes are usually hoaxes, but they're treated like they're the real thing. Dealing with crazy people is a pain. Better to take obvious hoaxes seriously and run to the media and grandstand before finding the truth.

Or maybe at your office, there's a gender sensitivity and CRT training class requirement from human resources. Employees should be heckling the teacher mercilessly or just walking out. But people stay. They fear getting fired. Worse, they fear the wrath of the crazy people.

Now crazy people are running the military, so recruitment videos look like welcome week at the queer dorm on a college campus. Rather than featuring a fighting force that is superbly well trained to efficiently kill the enemy, the brass has decided that it's more important to be "inclusive" than to win. But who wants to join crazy people? So Army recruitment is down.

Parents shrugged at the nutbar teacher — there was always one — who said crazy stuff to their kids. News of confronting a crazy teacher gets around to other teachers, and no one wants their kid to be in a situation where he's on the receiving end of a spiteful crazy person. But this silence has consequences. Ignoring the woke curriculum has consequences. And now instead of schools, Americans endure indoctrination centers.

In every aspect of life, from Twitter to the realms of education, entertainment, government, the military, the judiciary, and even the church, the crazy people have taken positions of power because the average, go-along-to-get-along American citizen has let them.

Americans are a tolerant people. They put up with all sorts of outlandishness because the prevailing sentiment has been to live and let live. Christians figure that people have to work out their life with their Maker, and that's a personal thing, so who's to judge?

The tolerant have been abused; their grace has been used against them. There is no such tolerance in the other direction. Nonconformity and lack of enthusiastic approval of the Left's causes have been met with increasingly tyrannical retribution. Teachers mince around on TikTok sharing ways to deceive parents. New York mandates masks for infants and small children in direct contradiction of the evidence. Young men have no presumption of innocence on a college campus. J6 protesters are housed for eighteen months for misdemeanors — their real crime, a thought-crime, being their belief that Biden isn't the duly elected president.

The crazies are in charge from Biden on down, but they've been helped along one small acquiescence at a time by average, hard-working Americans who just don't want to deal with the hassle of resisting. It happens in conversations when the liberal friend spouts nonsense and rather than persuading or arguing, one says, "Oh, would you look at that, I really need to be going!"

Engagement matters. To engage, though, one has to be educated, persistent, and on solid ground about one's own beliefs.

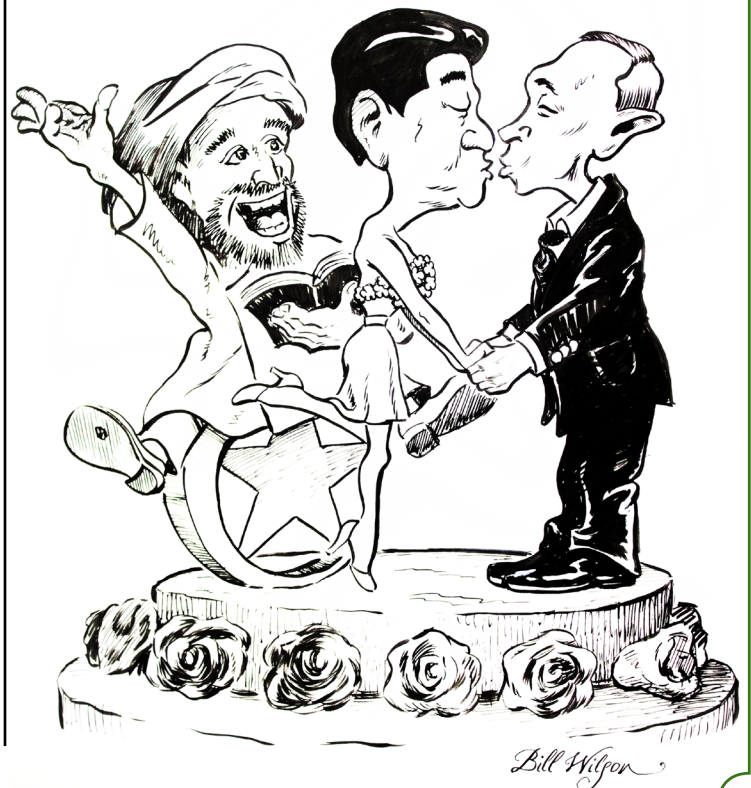
Carl Jung said, "The foundation of all mental illness is the unwillingness to experience legitimate suffering." Many of the crazies running things are using their various grievances to avoid legitimate suffering, but so are the people who refuse to confront the insanity.

In avoiding suffering, America is suffering. Hoping the crazies would wake up or grow up or go away isn't working. Being weak in the face of crazy tyranny is creating more tyranny.

Weak men create hard times, the saying goes. Indeed they do. And more hard times are coming. In fact, we'll look back at these good times in wonder. It's our lack of gratitude for these blessings and our indifference to those who would destroy a society that fosters the creation of these blessings that will create hard times.

It's easy to blame Biden, and certainly he hastens the demise, but we're a Republic made up of too many weak men. We shouldn't be surprised by hard times. 🐜

Many of the crazies running things are using their various grievances to avoid legitimate suffering, but so are the people who refuse to confront the insanity.





Donald Trump Fights Back

His lawsuit claims the Russia Collusion Hoax was worse than Watergate.

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

I read a front-page report recently in the *Good Times* about the recent doings of former President Donald J. Trump. It got me to thinking about when I first met him. The *Good Times*, incidentally, is also known as the *Washington Times*, which prints all the news that is fit to print, in a timely fashion, leaving nothing out, having its stories fact-checked by non-alcoholics, and including a happy ending if warranted. The *Good Times* is often antithetical to the *New York Times*, but I assume you know that.

As I say, the piece in the *Good Times* got me to thinking about when I first met Donald Trump in 2013. It was at our annual Washington Club Gala. He was there to receive the T. Boone Pickens Award for Entrepreneurship. I and many of the attendees that night were astonished by how gregarious Donald was, his natural charm and sense of humor and his enormous energy — a trait all great politicians have, but at the time Donald was no politician — and something more. When he got up to accept his award, he spoke briefly but on matters that resonated with our conservative audience. One thing more: he stayed the entire evening. I was informed that he had another engagement later in the evening, but for us he stayed the course. He obviously enjoyed the company, but upon reflection I think something else attracted his attention.

That night our featured speaker for the Washington Club Gala was Sen. Ted Cruz, who just happened to be the frontrunner for a growing field of Republican presidential

hopefuls. Looking back on the evening I got the idea that Donald Trump was taking Sen. Cruz's measure. If he thought he could beat him, he thought he could beat any Republican who might enter the race, and ultimately any Democrat who might face him — even the woman Bill Clinton called the “most qualified person to run for office in my lifetime” — namely, Hillary.

A few weeks later when I was in New York I stopped by Donald's office to thank him for attending our dinner. I told him I thought his remarks that evening were perfectly tailored for the dinner. We chatted some more, and I told him that he ought to think about running for president. When I started to leave, he confirmed what I had already suspected. He was going to run in 2016, and he thought his Democratic opposition would come from Hillary. A couple of weeks later I wrote my first of six columns proclaiming his availability and eventually his victory. Donald was a natural candidate.

Of course, now we know that the intelligence community was dead set against Donald Trump from the start. So was the Democratic Party. So was Hillary. One would expect the Democratic Party to oppose Donald Trump, but why were the FBI, the CIA, and the Justice Department against him? James Comey, John Brennan, and James Clapper were supposed to be neutral. Brennan spoke of Donald Trump as though his actions were “traitorous.” People at the FBI were caught on tape saying things like Donald Trump



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

was “a f***ing idiot.” Their vulgarity was so commonplace that one suspects it was uttered all the time and by a far wider circle of agents than were caught on tape. Why would they talk like this? What provoked their rage?

Well, now former President Donald Trump has filed a lawsuit against Hillary Clinton, former FBI Director James Comey, and more than two dozen others for forcing him to defend himself against their false charges when he should have been carrying out the duties of a president. The case argues in part that “Acting in concert, the defendants maliciously conspired to weave a false narrative that their Republican opponent, Donald J. Trump, was colluding with a hostile foreign sovereignty.” And the lawsuit continues, “The actions taken in furtherance of their scheme — falsifying evidence, deceiving law enforcement, and exploiting access to highly sensitive data sources — are so outrageous, subversive and incendiary that even the events of Watergate pale in comparison.”

So now maybe we shall see what made the intelligence agencies so terrified by Donald Trump. And one thing more: Glory to Ukraine! 🇺🇸



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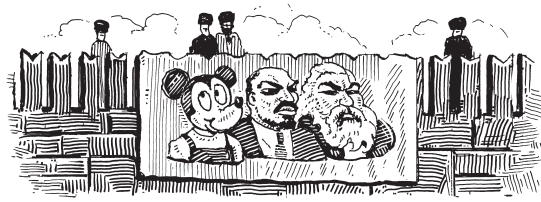
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The West's War on Dissent

Lovers of freedom are being branded as enemies within.

by Bruce Bawer

Every year, the Norwegian Police Security Service (*Politi sikkerhetstjeneste*, or PST) issues a National Threat Assessment report. Its objective is to identify what kinds of individuals or groups, either domestic or foreign, are likely to commit acts of terrorism in Norway in the year to come. Since I live in Norway and care about this question, I try to keep up with these annual documents. Granted, they tend to be rather exasperating — leaving the absurd impression, for example, that neo-Nazism is as prevalent as jihadist Islam. But this year's report, published on February 11, proved even more vexing than usual. "Over the past year," it reads, "PST has registered growing activity among individuals who advocate anti-government ideas."

Yes, "anti-government ideas." To be sure, the term "anti-government" (*anti-statlig*) isn't entirely new to PST reports. It has cropped up previously in two of them — eight times in 2018, thrice last year — but in both cases it appeared in the context of statements that "anti-government" individuals were unlikely to constitute a security threat. This year, however, the word "anti-government" can be found no fewer than twenty-two times, and the passages in which it occurs express serious concern about the danger of "anti-government convictions" (*anti-statlige overbevisninger*), "anti-government thoughts" (*anti-statlig tankegodt*), "anti-government ideas" (*anti-statlige ideer*), "anti-government sympathizers" (*anti-statlige sympatisorer*), "anti-government currents" (*anti-statlige strømminger*), "anti-government perceptions" (*anti-statlige oppfatninger*), and "anti-

government propaganda" (*anti-statlig propaganda*). The point: Norwegians who dare to disagree with the positions held by their nation's ruling parties are potentially dangerous.

It's impossible not to notice that this rhetorical sea change comes at a time when left-wing governments and media in other purportedly free countries also have begun branding dissenters from the official line as enemies of the state and attaching to them such labels as "right-wing extremist." Take the U.S., where these days, as Robert Spencer observed at PJ Media in February, "Everyone leftists don't like is a Nazi." During the Trump presidency, his supporters were routinely called "racists" and "xenophobes." When a draft report by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), leaked in September 2020, stated that the greatest terror threat facing the U.S. was posed by "white supremacists" — a group that had barely been known to exist in the U.S. a few years earlier — everyone knew to whom the DHS was referring. The utter irrationality of such name-calling is reflected in the fact that even pro-Trump black conservatives such as Larry Elder and Candace Owens have been identified as white supremacists. With equal illogic, Jennifer Ho, president of the Asian American Studies Association, has claimed that even though virtually all anti-Asian violence in America is committed by black people, it "has the same source as anti-Black racism: white supremacy."

These are only a few of the terms now used to smear dissenters. After America's 2020 presidential election, Trump voters who scratched their heads over the many suspicious election night developments were called "conspiracy theorists" and spreaders of "disinformation." The same accusation was leveled at those who didn't embrace the official line on the Wuhan virus's origins. And following the events of January

*Bruce Bawer is the author of many books, including *While Europe Slept* (2006) and *The Victims' Revolution* (2012). He lives in Norway.*

6, 2021, the two-thousand-odd people who entered the Capitol building were accused of being “insurrectionists” and “domestic terrorists” — terms that were soon applied as well to the millions of Trump supporters around the country. In late January of last year, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi contended that some of her Republican colleagues in the House constitute an “enemy ... within”; last December, Attorney General Merrick Garland jumped to attention in response to a letter from the National School Boards Association demanding that he investigate as “domestic terrorists” those outspoken parents who don’t want their young children being indoctrinated into transgender ideology. On February 28 of this year, Fox News hack Juan Williams attributed the notion that President Joe Biden is “mentally incompetent, a weakling and a failure” to “conspiracy theories.”

In the last couple of years, the term “anti-government” itself has been ubiquitous in the American media. In a recent article, two professors of political science darkly characterized January 6 as the culmination of “more than a half-century of anti-government rhetoric,” including “Trump’s ‘drain the swamp’ rhetoric.” You’d never know from their reproachful tone that the American suspicion of government goes back to Thomas Jefferson, who — in a famous 1788 letter referring to Shays’ Rebellion, which had taken place two years earlier in Massachusetts — wrote, “God forbid we should ever be twenty years without such a rebellion.... what country can preserve its liberties if their rulers are not warned from time to time that their people preserve the spirit of resistance?” Such thinking was once considered the essence of American patriotism; but in the eyes of today’s Left, it’s tantamount to treason. For these elites, indeed, “freedom” is now a dirty word — a rallying cry for dangerous subversives. As Biden so memorably said in a scoffing reference to critics of lockdown rules: “I mean come on, freedom.”

Which brings us to Canada, about whose valiant truckers one CNN talking head sneered, “They want their freedom back, whatever that means.” In a February 21 op-ed for the *Globe and Mail*, perhaps Canada’s most prominent newspaper, Beverley McLachlin, former chief justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, noted that the truckers had waved “banners demanding ‘freedom.’” But freedom, she insisted, articulating an opinion that could not differ more profoundly from Jefferson’s, is not absolute:

Our governments must draw the difficult lines that mark the limits of freedom in a particular situation. When you must wear a mask. Whether you can cross a border without a vaccine certificate. How many people can attend a party and who gets to go to school.... The heady notion of freedom, defined as the unconstrained right to do what you want free of government limits, serves as a cloak for actions that harm women, men and children who are simply going about their business and trying to do the right thing. Freedom without limits slides imperceptibly into freedom to say and do what you want about people who don’t look like you or talk like you. Sadly, the Ottawa truckers’ convoy has revealed this ugly side of freedom.... True freedom — freedom subject to reasonable limits that allow us to live together — is essential to a peaceful and prosperous future for us all. Let’s not allow the freedoms we cherish to become ugly freedoms.



I wasn’t surprised to discover that McLachlin now sits on the Court of Final Appeals in Hong Kong, where she has been accused of “helping prop up a system used to erase basic freedoms.”

McLachlin’s take on freedom is consistent with that of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who since taking office in 2015 has seemed as indifferent to the concept of individual freedom as he is gung-ho about communalism and diversity. During the COVID lockdown, however, he stepped things up, beginning to sound — and then, eventually, to act — like a dictator. Some opponents of vaccines, he said in a January interview (deliberately conflating opposition to vaccines with opposition to vaccine mandates), are “extremists who don’t believe in science. They’re also misogynists, also often racists.... Do we tolerate these people?” On January 26, he charged that the participants in the anti-mandate truck convoy from Vancouver to Ottawa “hold unacceptable views” — a supremely unsettling verdict from a so-called democratic leader. In a February 2 tweet, he accused protesting truckers, without the slightest evidence, of “antisemitism, Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, homophobia, and transphobia,” and concluded, “Together, let’s keep working to make Canada more inclusive.” In other words, dissent, formerly a mark of the inclusiveness of free societies, is now a *threat* to inclusivity. (Lost in Trudeau’s put-downs of Canadian truckers as racist, by the way, was the fact that roughly half of them are Sikhs.)

Instead of challenging Trudeau, his fellow Liberal politicians, along with the overwhelming majority of his country's academics and legacy media, echoed his bile. On February 15, Marco Mendicino, Canada's Minister of Public Safety, accused several convoy activists of having "strong ties to a far-right extreme organization ... driven by an extremist ideology," only to back down when pressed for details. And a Canadian professor assured a CNN interviewer that the truck convoy "was never really about mandates" but about "anti-government views" as well as "racist and white supremacist views, conspiratorial worldviews." In Parliament on February 16, Conservative member Melissa Lantsman chided Trudeau for maligning the truckers and wistfully recalled a 2015 statement by Trudeau: "If Canadians are going to trust their government, their government needs to trust Canadians." In response, Trudeau doubled down, accusing Conservatives of "stand[ing] with people who wave swastikas." Never mind that Lantsman is Jewish, a descendant of Holocaust survivors.

In many countries — most grimly, at this writing, in Canada — this Orwellian name-calling by public officials has been mere prelude to public crackdowns involving the restriction of individual rights, the freezing of bank accounts, the beating of innocent protesters by newly belligerent cops, mass arrests of innocents, threats to confiscate and exterminate pets, and — notably in the cases of the January 6 "insurrectionists" and the Canadian truckers — grotesque prosecutorial overreach.

What is behind all this dark authoritarian mischief? At least part of the answer, I think, is this. For a long time, partisan wrangling over relatively minor issues largely disguised the fact that Western political elites and their allies in the media, academy, financial and business sectors, and elsewhere shared a broad consensus of views on important issues that were never seriously put before the public.

They were, specifically, broadly globalist, supporting the exportation of jobs and the importation of cheap labor — activities that were beneficial for them but disastrous for millions of ordinary working people. The rise of alternative mass media — including, first, talk radio programs, and, later, online blogs and podcasts — broke the elite stranglehold on ideas, ultimately making possible the Brexit vote and the election of Trump. These two events, one on each side of the pond, were earthquakes on the political landscape — showing that free people were capable of seeing through official fictions, standing up to the multi-party and Deep State consensus, and voting for their own interests — and were recognized by the Davos elites as warnings that, barring dramatic action on their part, their power was in danger.

They responded, as we've seen, by playing rhetorical hardball — and eventually, in some cases, worse. The COVID-19 pandemic provided them with a perfect opportunity to double down on their coercion of citizens, and when ordinary people eventually rebelled against the unreasonable measures they imposed, as was the case with the trucker convoy in Canada, the elites, recognizing these mass reactions as explicit challenges to their entrenched power, responded, in many cases, with what a few years earlier would have seemed like breathtaking severity. Witness Australia's vilification of

tennis player Novak Djokovic and New Zealand's refusal to let its own citizens back into the country.

So it is that citizens demanding nothing more than their constitutionally guaranteed freedom have been represented as imperiling freedom; objective facts have been dismissed as, yes, "conspiracy theories"; and mendacious official narratives have been presented as truths beyond doubt or question. Among the more dismaying examples of the latter outrage is the 2021 book *The Constitution of Knowledge: A Defense of Truth* by Beltway veteran Jonathan Rauch, who is a fellow of the Brookings Institution, that quintessential D.C. think tank, and whom I have long admired as a straight shooter (full disclosure: he is also a longtime friend). Alas,

the book turned out to be an pious defense not of truth but of the official narrative and an assertion of the privileged role of its credentialed interpreters, such as himself. Emblematic of Rauch's audacity is the fact that one of his dust-jacket blurbs is from none other than former FBI Director James Comey, who let Hillary Clinton off the hook when evidence showed that she deserved to be tried for treason and other high crimes, and who, notwithstanding his reputedly photographic

memory, said "I don't know" 156 times, "I can't remember" seventy-two times, and "I don't recall" eight times in December 2018 testimony before the House Intelligence Committee about his agency's Trump–Russia probe.

Returning to Europe, let's examine just one of the things that are now officially categorized as unsayable. According to Norway's PST report, "right-wing extremists" in Norway have been taken in by "conspiracy theories" claiming that "Western culture will disappear" as a result of "immigration from non-Western countries and low birth rates among whites." How is this a "conspiracy theory"? In point of fact, ethnic Norwegian birth rates *are* low, immigration and high Muslim birth rates *are* rapidly increasing Norway's Muslim population, and a great many of these Muslims not only have values that diverge radically from Western values but (as the history of the post-9/11 era has shown) also are willing to kill and die for them. But to draw reasonable extrapolations from demographic facts, and to fret about those extrapolations, is, in the PST's view, to buy into a "conspiracy theory."

In France, this particular "theory" has a name. Known as the "Great Replacement" (*Grand Remplacement*) theory, it enjoys the support of upstart presidential candidates Éric Zemmour and Marine Le Pen. Reportedly, President Emmanuel Macron has affirmed it in private, and polls show that it's credited by a sizable majority of French citizens. Yet when, in February, another presidential candidate, Valérie Pécresse, appeared to give her assent to the Great Replacement theory, *Le Monde* jumped on her for promoting (what else?) a "conspiracy theory" (*théorie complotiste*), while the government media organ *Public Sénat* called her position "xenophobic."

From Britain to Austria, ordinary citizens share a deep concern about the growing population and power of Muslims in Western Europe — but are savaged as racists if they dare to voice their feelings. In 2020, German politician Thilo Sarrazin was expelled from his country's Social Democratic Party for daring

"Freedom" is
now a dirty word
— a rallying cry
for dangerous
subversives.

to discuss the issue candidly in such books as *Germany Abolishes Itself* (*Deutschland Schafft Sich Ab*), a number one bestseller for twenty-one weeks; in Denmark, after the popular politician Pia Kjaersgaard and the historian Marten Uhrskov referred to the coming “replacement of the Danish people,” a 2019 article at a public-radio website firmly rejected their thesis, citing official statistics predicting that in 2040 Muslims, now 5.5 percent of Denmark’s population, will reach about 20 percent (as if this proved their concerns to be fallacious).

How to reconcile the plain reality of Western Europe’s swift, ongoing Islamization with the reflexive elite dismissal of the Great Replacement theory as extremist bigotry? It’s not easy. The new PST report is well-nigh schizophrenic on the subject. On the one hand, it warns darkly against “certain circles in Norway that help spread the notion that Islam, as a religion, is at odds with Norway’s lifestyle and culture”; on the other hand, it acknowledges that Norwegian Muslims as young as age twelve “are participating in ... transnational online networks” that feature “extremist propaganda and instructions for making home-made explosives” as well as “[g]uidance” as to “how to carry out a terrorist attack.” Yes, pre-teen Muslims in Norway are learning how to commit massacres of the sort that took place in the Madrid train station in 2004, at the Bataclan in Paris in 2015, and at the Manchester Arena in 2017. But don’t dare get the idea that Islam is in any way “at odds with Norway’s lifestyle and culture”!

Of course, the “conspiracy theories” repudiated by the international Left involve much more than Islam. In accusing “right-wing extremists” of spreading “conspiracy theories about the COVID-19 pandemic and mass vaccinations,” the PST report echoes admonishments issued by governments around the world. With few exceptions, the governments of supposedly free countries have used the pandemic as an excuse to exercise power on a previously unheard-of scale. Two weeks of lockdown to “slow

the curve” became two years — and reasonable criticism of this extreme and seemingly capricious policy evolution was treated like treason. For years, authorities have insisted that the virus had originated in a Wuhan wet market — but to point out that a good deal of evidence suggested it had escaped from the Wuhan lab was to proffer a “conspiracy theory.” Still *verboten* in many countries, at last notice, are any statements about mask efficacy or vaccine safety that deviate from the ever-shifting orthodoxy.

As noted, the new PST report was released on February 11. At a press conference that day, PST official Hans Sverre Sjøvold admitted that the biggest challenge facing Norway, in the agency’s view, is indeed “right-wing extremism,” and he cited the “freedom convoy” in

Canada as an example of the kind of “anti-government” activity that PST fears. The next day, Norway’s major newspapers reported PST’s “findings” without a significant sign of demurral. It’s disquieting that Norway’s PST, its counterparts across the free West, and their media lackeys can seem to be more comfortable with jihadists who are out to destroy the West than with freedom-loving patriots who are out to preserve it. More broadly, it’s remarkable how quickly “conspiracy theorist” and other labels slapped on dissenters from left-wing government orthodoxy have spread around the globe and become indispensable entries in the leftist lexicon.

What’s perturbing is that this international rhetorical war on the deplorables appears increasingly to be only

the first phase of what its perpetrators hope will be an all-out police-state suppression of the kind that Trudeau hinted at in his ruthless crushing of the truckers. In the face of such would-be totalitarianism, lovers of liberty in America and throughout the West would be well advised to keep their eyes open, to keep their powder dry, and — in whatever time remains before the fireworks begin — to do their best to awaken their friends and neighbors who, however inexplicably, have yet to recognize the somber reality before us. 🐞

It’s remarkable how quickly “conspiracy theorist” and other labels slapped on dissenters from left-wing government orthodoxy have spread around the globe.

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China's COVID Surveillance State and Its Western Imitators

The pandemic is retreating, but Big Brother isn't.

by John Jiang

When the dust finally settles and we look back on the COVID-19 pandemic as a matter of history, we may well conclude that the most consequential aspect of the ordeal was not the pandemic itself but rather the explosion in state power, mass data collection, and surveillance that the pandemic incubated.

Much like the First World War had served as a seismic outpouring of the cumulative advances in warfare that had quietly taken place since the fall of the French Empire in 1870, so has COVID-19 allowed many governments in developed nations to realize decades of advancements in data surveillance.

The High-Tech Panopticon

The modern surveillance state has many antecedents, but certainly the most important at this moment is the Chinese government. The growth of China into the world's "surveillance superpower" can be traced back to at least 1997, when the country first implemented controls on the newly introduced internet. Since then, Communist Party technocrats have labored to turn their society into a closed system in which every inch is surveilled and nothing enters or leaves without official sanction.

The goal, in short, is the construction of a sort of gigantic, nation-spanning panopticon — a system of surveillance first proposed by the eighteenth-century English philosopher Jeremy Bentham as a "humane" format for prisons. Such a system, which Bentham envisioned as a circular, hollow multi-story building, would allow a single guard stationed in the center to have a full view of every room in the structure. Constantly monitoring every room would be unnecessary even if it were possible, argued Bentham: the mere credible threat of surveillance is sufficient to deter bad behavior.

Thankfully, no government has yet forced this level of transparency on the lives of its citizens (though some, such as North Korea, clearly would love the opportunity). But the Communist Party of China is certainly pushing the envelope. Beijing possesses the world's most sophisticated system of integrated and overlapping methods of mass observation and data collection.

This was not a preordained path. When the cornerstone of China's surveillance apparatus, a camera network called Skynet — yes, named after the genocidal AI antagonist of the *Terminator* movies — was launched in 2005, the average Chinese person was about



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as rich as the average North Korean. Only 8 percent were internet users. Beijing decided that China's growth would take place within the confines of a surveillance state that would grow alongside it.

As of today, Skynet is the world's largest camera network, and probably the most technologically advanced. In 2013, when the program was first publicly revealed, it already boasted twenty million cameras. As of 2021, China has around one billion cameras, around half of which are integrated into Skynet. Compare that figure to around eighty-five million cameras in the United States, most of which are privately owned.

Even so, Skynet is merely the biggest tool in Beijing's toolbox, and not even its most advanced. Indeed, it is hard at work on an even more comprehensive successor system: Sharp Eyes, officially launched in 2015.

The project seeks "100% video surveillance coverage in key public areas and major industries" and better penetration into rural regions. Most notably, it intends to connect China's public surveillance camera network with its many millions of private cameras. The end goal is likely one billion or more cameras feeding into centralized databases equipped with facial recognition and AI technology. No other polity has even attempted this kind of public-private surveillance integration, let alone on this scale.

Another area where Beijing seeks total penetration of surveillance is the internet. It should not surprise anyone to know that online anonymity does not exist for the average Chinese netizen. Every social media and gaming platform that Beijing is able to regulate enforces a policy of demasking its users, requiring ID for registration and mandating the use of real names rather than usernames or pseudonyms.

WeChat, a do-everything app with over 1.2 billion active users, is often regarded as the world's least secure major social media platform. The product of a publicly traded company, its level of information integration with government censors is unknown. But the absence of live state surveillance does not mean no surveillance at all: the app has admitted to hoarding user messages, including supposedly deleted messages, as well as geolocation data. There is little doubt that this information is

freely handed over whenever Beijing demands it.

But state meddling hardly matters in WeChat's case. Much like Western social media, Chinese social media engages in enthusiastic self-censorship. They contract this work out to giant "censorship factories," which hire recent college graduates with no better prospects and make them sift through thousands of social media posts per day, looking for references to government officials and sensitive historical events.

Of all of China's surveillance initiatives, however, perhaps none will be as consequential as its push to expunge all privacy from the financial system. The digital yuan, a state-controlled digital currency that is being publicly tested with more than two hundred million users, is slated to eventually replace all physical and digital cash alternatives.

Such a system would give the People's Bank of China unfettered access to the time, location, and nature of every transaction that occurs in the country. Granular surveillance of such a volume of data would be impossible, of course. But, as in Bentham's panopticon, the point is the threat of surveillance.

A Contagious Policy

COVID-19 wasn't the only thing taking the world by storm during the pandemic. At home, China swiftly adapted its existing surveillance system into what became the world's toughest biosecurity membrane. Abroad, it solidified its position as the world's premier surveillance exporter, in terms of both technology and policy.

Many developed democracies, following Beijing's lead, introduced unprecedented levels of mass surveillance in the name of public health.

By April 2020, when the "first wave" of COVID-19 was cresting in many parts of the world and public health authorities were scrambling for solutions, China had deployed a nationwide, color-coded virtual health monitoring app to control the movement of its citizens.

This procedure was particularly intrusive in its identity verification requirements, encouraging users to submit biometric selfies on a

nightly basis. Its stated purpose was the bulk collection of health data from civilians — and the restriction of movement for those deemed “red code,” or at high risk of carrying the virus.

At the time of its release, the app received well-deserved criticism from foreign observers. The state was, as rightly pointed out, cracking down on freedoms of privacy and free movement.

But then a sea change occurred in the attitude of Western leaders and media as the virus began to spread worldwide. Suddenly safety at the cost of freedom became a politically expedient position. Aggressive contact tracing and geolocation data harvesting apps were introduced, and continue to be introduced, in developed countries as diverse as Australia, Poland, and Israel.

The irony has not been lost in China. In the words of a retrospective analysis by University of California professor Chuncheng Liu, the free world’s embrace of mass data collection in the name of fighting COVID-19 only “further proved” to Chinese social media commentators that China “was right about surveillance from the beginning.”

Bureaucrats around the world were quick to imitate China’s methods in other ways, too. Authoritarian Russia expanded its AI-powered camera network in 2020, citing the supposed interest of public safety. Liberal Britain did the same thing at around the same time, citing the need to enforce social distancing. At the beginning of the pandemic, dystopian footage emerged from China showing loudspeaker-equipped drones warning civilians to go home; within a couple of months, drones were being used to enforce health measures in places like Greece, Spain, Ireland, and even Connecticut.

None of this is to assert that any government other than Beijing has fully embraced totalitarian surveillance methods. There are more and less harmful methods of surveillance and even mass data collection. An app that knows everything about a person at the point of contact can still, on paper, protect his or her privacy with the right combination of encryption, anonymization, and prudent data handling.

Nonetheless, the expansion of the surveillance state around the world in the past two years portends bad things to come. Even if the newly introduced methods of watching and controlling the public were to disappear alongside the pandemic, many ostensibly liberal governments tampered with civil liberties in disturbing ways, and they will have precedent to try again in the future.

Long COVID

Even worse is the likely possibility that many governments, having been given a taste of data-powered authoritarianism, will not relinquish control so easily.

Just as important as the growth of the physical tools of surveillance has been the attempted legitimization of an all-encompassing philosophy of surveillance and control. Since 2020, there has been a fundamental shift in the attitude of many bureaucrats and voters toward the role of government. Gone are the traditional progressive arguments about positive liberty, the idea that government intervention can promote freedom. Much trendier now is the “guardian state” — a government that boasts of curtailing liberty in the interest of protecting the health of its citizens and soothing their anxieties.

The worldwide shift in governance prompted by COVID-19 has perhaps only one suitable historical analogue, in the Second World War. The story of U.S. government deficits and debts is a story of the paradigm shift that occurred because of the war. Having mobilized an all-of-state effort to smash the Japanese empire and the Nazis, New Deal progressives began to wage expensive — and frequently fruitless — government wars on poverty, racism, and every other social ill.

Now a new precedent has been set for mass surveillance. “Whiteness” has already been declared a pandemic, surely as destructive as any Wuhan bat virus. Soon we may add conservative activism to that list.

When, years ago, President Barack Obama went after conservative groups with the IRS, he did so secretly out of concern for public backlash. When, this February, Prime

Minister Justin Trudeau used the threat of unprecedented financial sanctions to harass truckers protesting Canada’s vaccine mandates, he did so proudly and publicly.

As part of his campaign against civil disobedience, Trudeau effectively conscripted Canada’s banks into participating in a huge data dragnet: financial firms were forced to scrutinize the political sympathies of their customers, immediately freezing the accounts of anyone participating in, or materially supporting, so-called “illegal protests.” Such civil disobeyers were then to be promptly reported to Canadian intelligence. Not even accounts suspected of money laundering are usually acted upon so decisively by banks.

Trudeau’s actions plumbed the depths of progressive authoritarianism, and many rightly pointed this out. Yet the public backlash was disappointingly muted; the loudest opposition voice was not a Canadian at all, but Tucker Carlson. Many, it seemed, had grown accustomed to government violations of liberties and privacy in the supposed public interest.

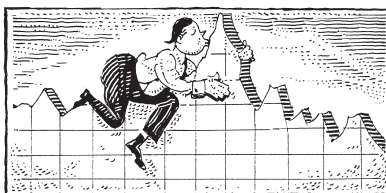
Similar breaches of privacy occurred at the hands of U.S. federal law enforcement in the wave of last year’s Capitol riots. The FBI investigation into the event was a master class in post-hoc data harvesting. According to the *Washington Post*, the case showed “a mix of FBI techniques, from license plate readers to facial recognition.”

These techniques prove that China-level surveillance penetration is far from necessary for a government to threaten civil liberties. In the case of cell phone location data, federal agents tapped multiple sources: warrants served to telecommunications providers, tip-offs from “Sedition Hunters,” and media outlets that had managed to obtain cell phone data leaked from supposedly secure data pipelines.

When a congressional panel tried to access encrypted messages sent on January 6 in September, *Politico* quoted an expert claiming that cracking message encryption “is really just a question of time and money.” Indeed, there are few surefire guarantees of privacy in a society permeated by data collection; there is only the uncertain reprieve of government indifference. When a president is in office who calls Trump supporters “domestic terrorists,” don’t count on such a reprieve.

Of course, the Biden administration faces more friction when collecting surveillance data on its citizens than the Xi administration does. The brutal crackdown on the January 6 podium-stealers, as shameful as it has been, has yet to be repeated elsewhere in the United States. Nonetheless, the fact that such capability was demonstrated so publicly should, as Bentham would have argued, have a chilling effect. ❧

Beijing possesses the world’s most sophisticated system of integrated and overlapping methods of mass observation and data collection.



The Biden Price Hike

Putin deserves the blame for a lot of things, but not skyrocketing inflation.

by Marc Carnegie

In recent years, the typical American household has spent around 5 percent of its pre-tax budget on gasoline. Apart from housing, food, and transportation — the actual cost of vehicles and their insurance — petrol is an essential item on the expense sheet of almost all Americans. And almost all Americans are thus feeling the squeeze from gravity-defying prices at the pump.

So how did we get here? All political administrations lie a little bit, and some lie a little bit more than that. But the government of President Joe Biden in little more than a year has managed to manufacture crisis after crisis in the domestic economy, without ever acknowledging that its own policies have been to blame.

After hemming and hawing for months about inflation — the administration repeatedly assured the nation it would be “transitory” — the Biden government now says the punishing surge in gas

prices is due to greedy oil companies and, of course, the all-purpose bogeyman from Russia, Vladimir Putin.

White House spokesperson Jen Psaki now routinely refers to the “Putin price hike,” while the president himself has directly accused the oil giants of intentionally taking advantage of the American consumer while supplies are somewhat limited.

It is a compelling narrative, but for one inconvenient fact: none of it is true.

“All you need to do is look at the numbers,” says Bruce Clark, a senior analyst at Informa Global Markets, a company that provides data and analysis to the financial markets. “The numbers don’t lie.”

Stat Sheet

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), which is part of the U.S. Department of Labor, prices skyrocketed throughout Biden’s first year as president — well before Putin set off to wreak havoc in Ukraine.

From February 2021 to February 2022, food prices rose a whopping 7.9 percent — what the BLS called the largest twelve-month increase in the sector since 1981. But energy prices rose nearly 26 percent during the same period. And practically all of this is

a direct result of the administration’s policy decisions.

Biden nixed the permit for the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada on his very first day in office — something he had pledged to do on the campaign trail, but something the markets had broadly already priced in. The move made a lot of headlines, but it was never clear how much oil the pipeline would have delivered. Woke progressives saw it as a chance to claim victory, and the halo over Biden’s head seemed to grow still more luminous.

But the serious work was happening behind the scenes, where Biden’s “climate czar” John Kerry — a man not seemingly allergic to his own private jets — was putting the full-court press on America’s biggest banks not to loan money to, or provide funding for, traditional oil and gas companies.

In conjunction with a United Nations initiative called the Net-Zero Banking Alliance, Kerry pushed America’s largest banks to stop money from going to entities involved in drilling, fracking, and other activities aimed at extracting energy from our own sovereign soil. In short, the United States was not supposed to use a pipeline from Canada or drill its own energy at home.

“The reality is the Biden

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administration is not standing in the way of domestic oil production,” Deputy Energy Secretary David Turk said in December. Yet that is exactly what the Biden administration is doing, and will continue to do.

While Psaki keeps claiming that thousands of potential extraction sites in the United States lie fallow, the administration’s push to block energy companies from borrowing money is tantamount to shutting those sites down. Companies live and die by the debt they can raise in the credit markets — they need cash infusions to launch new projects, which is what bonds provide — and the administration is making that as difficult as possible.

“Banks don’t want to be called names,” says Clark. “The government has essentially demonized the oil and gas markets. And when the government is knocking at their door, they don’t really have any choice but to listen.”

Bank Balance

Big banks make money by loaning money — the global size of the bond market dwarfs the size of the stock market — and restrictions on lending are a needless brake on the U.S. economy. Yet at a time when interest rates have been at historical lows, minimizing the ability of banks to profit from their loans, the Biden administration is doubling down on its efforts to block them from financing the United States from getting its oil and gas right at home.

That sounds woke enough to satisfy a certain braying section of the populace. But whatever one’s political stance, it’s simply a bad idea when banks are banned from making money.

And oil and gas companies need bank funding to undertake new drilling operations. According to general industry standards, it costs at least \$500,000 — at pre-inflation numbers — to build a new drill site, plus up to \$30 per barrel to extract the oil. If they can’t raise the money to start that via the bond markets, they simply cannot afford to drill.

“I’m not sure these fellows have thought this through,” says a senior Wall Street analyst who declined to be named because of his involvement with the sector. “You cannot argue that banks are evil while your entire economy depends on banking. They have to be free to act normally.”

All Blown Up Now

At the origin of this mess was Biden’s decision to hand out free money that the United States quite simply does not have. Driven by the squeaky wing of the party over which he nominally presides, Biden has rarely missed a chance to distribute cash on every street corner

he can find. And the COVID-19 pandemic gave him a grand opportunity to do that.

While it has become a cliché to say that freedom isn’t free, it’s worth remembering that money isn’t free either. According to a recent report from the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco, the biggest surge in U.S. inflation of late started last year with Biden’s so-called COVID “relief” package, which amounted to a staggering \$1.9 trillion.

The bank’s report — entitled “Why Is US Inflation Higher Than In Other Countries?” — succinctly lays out why U.S. inflation has spiraled out of control compared to other Western nations dealing with the COVID crisis.

“The United States is experiencing higher rates of inflation than other advanced economies,” the report says. “The sizable fiscal support measures aimed at counteracting the economic collapse due to the Covid-19 pandemic could explain about 3 percentage points of the recent rise in inflation.”

Depending where you are on the income scale, this logically means that your “free money” from Biden actually only made your household poorer. It’s the gift that keeps on taking.

Virtually every
policy decision
being taken at the
state and federal
level is wrong.

Fed Up

In the minds of many in the markets, the United States is now at an inflection point similar to that of the early 1980s, when Paul Volcker, then the chairman of the Federal Reserve, deliberately crushed the U.S. economy in order to tame runaway inflation.

He raised borrowing rates so high that it was all but impossible for companies to keep doing business. Virtually overnight he plunged the U.S. economy into a recession — the worst, it was said at the time, since World War II — and all but eliminated the rampant demand that was driving prices out of control. Angry builders put stamps on wooden two-by-fours that they mailed to Fed headquarters in protest. President Ronald Reagan’s approval ratings fell to Bidenesque lows.

It was by any standard an audacious gambit — but it worked. Inflation was tamed in time, the economy rebooted, and Reagan went on to cruise to reelection in a landslide.

Oil Over Again

Oddly enough, the 1980s crisis was in part spurred by the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, when an out-of-touch Western-style playboy autocrat was deposed by bearded religious militants who had their own ideas of what an autocracy looks like. Many in the West at the time started fretting about oil supplies in the wake of the shah’s overthrow. And now we have come full circle with Putin.

The virtue-signaling that comes with Biden’s insistence on sanctioning Russia — which supplied only about 3 percent of our oil before its invasion of Ukraine in any case — almost inevitably means we will buy more of our oil from Iran. They still chant “Death to America” there at Friday prayers, but as oil demand spikes and prices keep rising, the Islamists get ever closer to the nuclear weapons they are so desperate to possess.

As for the price at the pump here at home, virtually every policy decision being taken at the state and federal level is wrong. Many states are rolling back gasoline taxes, which will only drive more demand — and push prices even higher. California Gov. Gavin Newsom’s starry-eyed plan to give state residents a \$300 “gas card” to offset pump prices will have the exact opposite effect of what he intends to do.

Meanwhile the Biden administration keeps stumbling along, spending as much money as it can as fast as it can. And there really isn’t anybody in the markets who believes the current Fed chairman, Jerome Powell, has the backbone to stand up, as his predecessor Volcker did, and say, “Enough is enough.”

Indeed, the Fed introduced its policy of so-called quantitative easing — buying up debt to increase the supply of money in the markets — as a short-term solution to the 2008 subprime financial crisis. But quantitative easing is still going strong fourteen years later.

And while the Fed is officially tasked to keep inflation at around 2 percent, inflation is nevertheless around 8 percent overall. Powell’s recent marginal increase in rates — the central bank’s first hike in more than three years — is akin to throwing a pebble into the ocean.

“The financial markets have essentially called the Fed’s bluff,” says Clark. “They don’t believe the Fed will harm them.”

So it becomes hard to see how all this will be brought under control. But in the immortal words of the late Herb Stein, President Richard Nixon’s chief economist and a longtime friend of *The American Spectator*: “If something cannot go on forever, it will stop.” 🦋



Warnings From Watergate for the January 6 Committee

Fifty years later, Democrats are up to their dirty “select committee” tricks again.

by Geoff Shepard

Mark Twain once observed, “History never repeats itself, but it rhymes.”

As midterm elections approach, Democrats face challenges eerily similar to those following President Richard Nixon’s 1972 landslide reelection. Their response was a select committee to stage a legislative show trial where they controlled the agenda and disgraced witnesses could be called to account without the inconvenience of due process rights guaranteed by our Constitution.

They appear to be following the same playbook today, half a century later. Times have changed, but Democrats’ willingness to abuse government power to punish political enemies hasn’t. Let’s jump inside their heads for a few moments (if you can bear it) to follow the logic of their plots.

Democrats Circa 1972

We lost the election in a landslide by putting up Sen. George McGovern (D-S.D.), a progressive candidate who favored “Amnesty, Acid, and Abortion” and promised to raise taxes. Nixon won every state except Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. Fortunately, we maintained our huge congressional margins and should harness them to destroy Nixon and his people. It’s our only chance to turn the tide in our favor.

Our best opportunity stems from skillful exploitation of the Watergate break-in earlier this year. The burglars were caught red-handed,

making their convictions a certainty. But these were low-level people and federal trials are not televised, so there’s no real drama there. The key is a public investigation by a congressional committee, where we have full control. By getting actual prosecutions delayed, we’ll be the only game in town. We can rely on our media friends to echo our narrative. One thing’s for sure: the press hates Nixon and will be with us every step of the way.

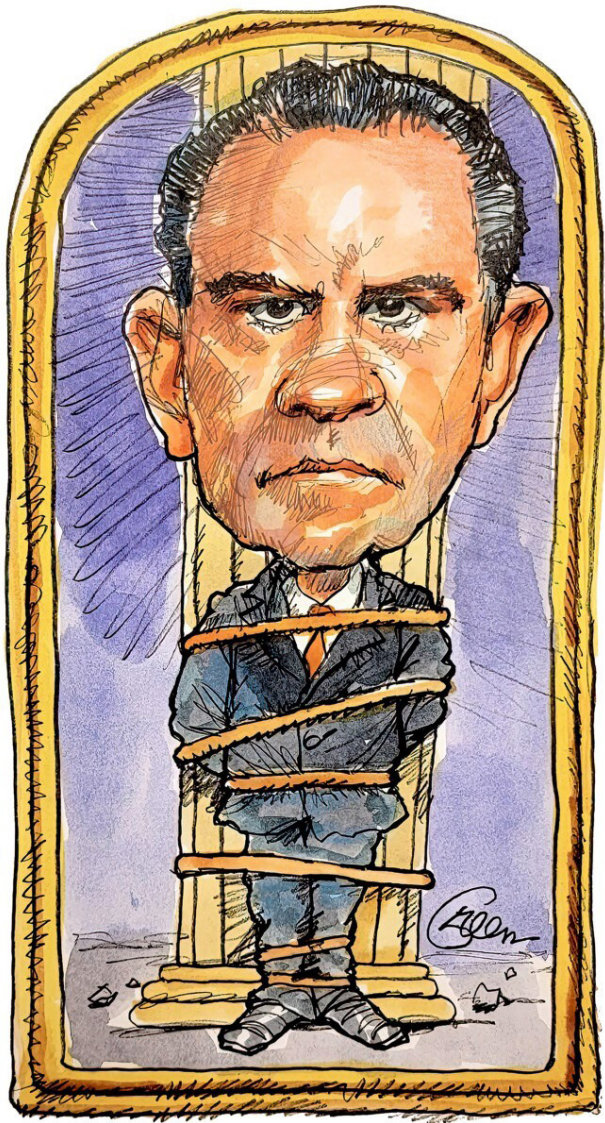
The result is that America’s understanding of Watergate comes from the riveting, nationally televised hearings of the Senate Watergate Committee, popularly known as the Ervin Committee, after its folksy chairman, Sam Ervin of North Carolina.

Democrats Circa 2022

We won a squeaker election in 2020, but that was mainly due to Trump’s combative style and to special circumstances from the pandemic. The tide’s turning against us, and we’re virtually certain to lose our razor-thin congressional majorities in the 2022 midterms. The 2024 outlook isn’t all that rosy, either. America doesn’t seem ready for our progressive policies, including open borders, defunding the police, and appeasement abroad. We have to regain control of the narrative — the sooner, the better.

Our best option is exploiting the January 6 Capitol riot by characterizing it as an armed insurrection, knowingly encouraged by Trump. The challenge is that it’s not at all clear how or why that demonstration got so out of hand — or why law enforcement was so unprepared for that possibility. Let’s use a select committee to launch widespread investigations into every aspect of the Trump presidency, preparatory to staging our own legislative show trial. Let’s also get our Justice Department friends to delay any actual prosecutions, so no adverse evidence or issues of reasonable doubt can surface. As with Watergate, we’ll be the only

Geoff Shepard served for five years on President Nixon’s White House staff, including as deputy counsel on his Watergate defense team. His recent book, The Nixon Conspiracy, can be purchased through his website, www.ShepardOnWatergate.com.



Peter Green

game in town. And we can count on the mainstream media to echo our narrative of how Trump and his people are responsible for fomenting an armed insurrection.

So how were these situations resolved? Congress has the power to pass laws and to exercise oversight of the executive branch — but not to conduct criminal investigations or to hold show trials of political opponents. Yet that’s clearly what has happened. Both select committees see their mission as expanding responsibility for known crimes (the Watergate break-in and the January 6 riot) to the most senior levels of a hated Republican presidency.

Again, the similarities between the two proceedings are striking.

Then: The Ervin Committee

The Senate Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities was created on February 7, 1973, following the convictions of the Watergate burglars. The vote was 77-0, since twenty-three GOP senators abstained rather than join in the political witch hunt. Their abstentions followed party-line votes, giving Democrats a voting majority and limiting the committee’s investigation to the 1972 presidential election instead of chancing any second look at those from ’60, ’64, and ’68, in which Nixon and Barry Goldwater were on the receiving end of campaign improprieties. The 1976 Church Committee hearings included testimony indicating that Nixon’s campaign was bugged in 1960 and again in 1968

and that the FBI had forwarded derogatory information on Goldwater’s staff to the Lyndon B. Johnson White House.

Minority Leader Hugh Scott, an Eastern Establishment Republican from Pennsylvania and no friend of Nixon’s, appointed Howard Baker (R-Tenn.), Edward Gurney (R-Fla.), and Lowell Weicker (R-Ct.) to the Republican minority. Baker, who anticipated a future run for the presidency, concluded it was in his political interest to pose as a nonpartisan truth seeker. Weicker proudly announced his overriding goal was to sink Nixon. Gurney, hardly a hard worker, received critical press whenever appearing to side with Nixon.

The committee staff was equally mismatched. The majority got 75 percent of the funds and most of the personnel. Chief Counsel Sam Dash really ran the operation, helpfully providing questions for each senator to pose in carefully scripted hearings. The result was a consistent anti-Nixon plot line, devoid of any hint of partisan bickering.

Minority Counsel Fred Thompson, while later a movie star and senator in his own right, was a babe in the Washington woods. He’d run Baker’s recent reelection campaign and saw his job as making his senator look good rather than defending the embattled president. Following Nixon’s resignation, Thompson wrote a book — *At That Point in Time: The Inside Story of the Senate Watergate Committee* (1975) — lamenting the missed opportunities to help the GOP, including the fact that both the Democrats and the CIA were well aware a break-in was being planned.

The Ervin Committee is primarily responsible for the portrayal of John Dean as an innocent whistleblower. Dean was the president’s lawyer, but he had exposed himself to criminal prosecution by running the cover-up. As it collapsed, Dean had sought out career prosecutors, looking for immunity in exchange for testimony against his former colleagues. They refused, believing Dean’s leadership role was too significant to overlook. His well-connected Democrat lawyer, however, succeeded in obtaining immunity from the Senate committee. He became their principal witness, deliberately portrayed as a national hero and fitting perfectly into the Democrat/media narrative. Archibald Cox, the original special prosecutor, even went into court, seeking to condition Dean’s immunity on him not testifying in public, saying the publicity would poison the jury pool. The committee and Chief Judge John Sirica disagreed. It was the publicity that they wanted most, after all.

Dash even met secretly on several occasions with Dean, at his home, to help craft his dramatic testimony. Unlike other witnesses, Dean was not required to submit his opening statement in advance so members and staff could prepare questions, and he was allowed to read its full 240 pages on live television. The committee promptly adjourned upon his completion, preventing any opportunity to challenge or respond to his assertions. No GOP member was willing to pose suggested questions submitted by Nixon’s defense team. Instead, they were read into the record by Sen. Joseph Montoya (D-N.M.), with Dean offering canned responses, clearly prepared in advance.

The media’s saturation coverage of Dean’s testimony contrasts with the near-total lack of coverage when Dean was disbarred the following year: for suborning perjury by others, embezzling campaign funds to pay for his honeymoon, and authorizing “hush money” payments to the Watergate burglars, including to Howard Hunt, who had helped to plan the break-in. The contents of Hunt’s office safe had been delivered to Dean, who helpfully destroyed documents which Hunt later maintained would have shown his close connections to Dean.

It later developed that Dash also had secretly met with Sirica on numerous occasions and even convinced him to dangle sentence reductions for any defendants cooperating with Ervin Committee investigations. Such *ex parte* meetings, if known at the time, may well have resulted in Sirica’s disqualification. His “encouragement” of witnesses also conveyed judicial approval of the Ervin Committee and the conduct of its

investigations. It was a united front of all three branches of government: the Ervin Committee, the special prosecutors, and Chief Judge Sirica — with the full, enthusiastic support of a monolithic, Nixon-hating media.

The Ervin hearings dominated national news for most of the summer of 1973, and they remain the primary source of public knowledge regarding Watergate. The committee leaked like a sieve, resulting in massive negative publicity. With Nixon's people already convicted in the court of public opinion, the hostility in the hearing room was palpable. Unlike an actual trial, the committee was not required to present its case first, through testimony under oath of witnesses, who were subject to cross-examination by the accused. That had already been accomplished through rumor and innuendo. Nixon's people were the only ones in the hearing room who were under oath. Because of the publicity, they were fearful of exercising their Fifth Amendment rights not to testify out of concern it would further poison an already biased D.C. jury pool. For their part, special prosecutors postponed any criminal indictments for ten months, while witness after witness was subjected to the Ervin Committee's legislative "show trial."

Contrast this with today.

Now: The January 6 Committee

The U.S. House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol was established on July 1, 2021, largely on a party-line vote. The scope of its investigation appears to be incredibly broad: a criminal investigation that, so far, has interviewed over five hundred witnesses. There appears to be no interest in exploring what law enforcement knew in advance of the riot, what role FBI infiltrators may have played, or why the Capitol was left so unprotected. Such questions might complicate the desired narrative. Instead, the committee seems intent on gathering information far afield from the Capitol Hill riot itself — no doubt to use against any and all Trump supporters in the future.

We don't know how this will end, but we can expect the committee to hold extensive public hearings, replete with massive press coverage, and then to recommend the Justice Department initiate criminal investigations — almost as though those weren't already underway. One legal analyst has already opined that any Fifth Amendment claims by potential witnesses can be used against them in future proceedings.

Neither any of the committee's members nor its staff have any intention of defending Trump or his supporters. There's not a ripple of partisan bickering apparent in any of the proceedings. The two GOP members — Liz Cheney (R-Wyo.) and Adam Kinzinger (R-Ill.) — were selected by Speaker Nancy Pelosi after rejecting GOP leadership nominations for their seven allotted slots. Both voted for Trump's impeachment and have become "estranged" from most of their Republican colleagues as a result of their committee participation.

This is a situation certain to get worse once public hearings actually begin. While Howard Baker was lionized by the press at the time, it could be argued that his lack of partisan advocacy resulted in Jimmy Carter's election in 1976 — and that Liz Cheney's anti-Trump posture could underlie similar GOP losses in 2022 and 2024.

In February of this year, Chief District Judge Beryl Howell publicly urged the Justice Department to promise reduced sentences to riot defendants choosing to cooperate with the committee — almost an exact parallel to what Chief Judge Sirica did in Watergate. It is not known if she was encouraged to make this announcement by members of the legislative or executive branches, but it has all the appearance of a judicial seal of approval on the January 6 Committee.

While there have been plea bargains for some who entered the Capitol and, after a full year's delay, several insurrection indictments, federal prosecutors have yet to bring many defendants to trial. As with



Peter Green

Watergate, it is almost as though they are deferring prosecutions to the anticipated hearings of the House Select Committee.

All three branches are again united: the January 6 Committee, Merrick Garland's Justice Department, and Chief Judge Howell — with the full, enthusiastic support of the Trump-hating mainstream media.

GOP commentators reassuringly point out that lingering concerns regarding the January 6 riot don't show up in public opinion polls, but this was also true of Watergate — at least until the Ervin Committee began its nationally televised hearings, coupled with gavel-to-gavel coverage by the monolithic media. Today, Democrats don't have the luxury of time: they have to "go public" soon to influence November's midterms. If they lose control of the House, the January 6 Committee could turn on them and refocus attention on Democratic intelligence and security failures — and decisions made by the Speaker. If they lose in November and I were Nancy Pelosi, I'd resign, too.

The singular and dramatic difference today is the absence of a monolithic media, set on advancing a single, agreed-upon narrative. There is plenty of coverage casting doubt on the legitimacy of the January 6 Committee, as well as on the motives and objectivity of its members. That was certainly not the case with the Ervin Committee. Thank heavens for a free, vibrant, and diverse press!

Watergate legitimized the criminalization of politics, which has continued to this day. To many Americans, we've seen the movie on select committees before, and we don't like the actors, the plot, or the ending. 🐉



Supersizing the IRS: Another Big, Bad Biden Idea

He wants to give your favorite government agency more money — and the power to spy on you.

by Grover Norquist

The Biden administration is dead-set on taking your money. Plan A was to repeal the entire Trump tax cut and vastly increase corporate and individual income taxes on top of new taxes on energy. Sens. Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema have slowed this down, reduced the size of any final tax cut, and perhaps killed tax cuts before the 2022 midterm elections. So plan B is to give the IRS vast new powers to squeeze more money out of taxpayers using the current code. And then there's plan C: inflation. Print more dollars and spend them.

While the world talks about possible tax hikes and the painful reality of inflation, they're missing the disturbing developments in plan B — developments that would adversely affect the lives of all tax-paying citizens.

Supersize Me

The Democrats want to supersize the IRS.

Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, and Joe Biden agree that they want to double the size of the IRS and spend even more tax dollars to harass and audit taxpayers. But wait. There's more. They also want to give IRS bureaucrats new powers to monitor the bank accounts of taxpayers and have the IRS make out your tax return and simply send you a bill for what the IRS thinks you owe.

Why? The IRS is failing in its most basic responsibilities and refuses to protect taxpayer privacy. The agency needs limitations on its existing powers and serious reform, not more money and power.

And yet the Democrats plan to give the IRS \$80 billion in additional funding over the next decade and deploy eighty-seven thousand new IRS agents. That's enough agents to fill every seat of Nationals Park — Washington, D.C.'s Major League Baseball stadium — *twice*. It's enough to fill the Roman Colosseum three times — with social distancing.

While Democrats claim (once again) that this would allow the agency to better go after “the rich” and large corporations, the IRS admits this funding would target middle-class families and small- and medium-sized businesses. The proposed billions of dollars will fund 1.2 million more annual IRS audits, half of which will hit households making less than \$75,000 annually.



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

Of the nearly \$80 billion in proposed new IRS funding in the Democrats' plan, \$44.9 billion, more than half, would go directly towards "enforcement." This is twenty-three times greater than the \$1.93 billion in funding for "taxpayer services." If you have tried to get a question answered by the IRS and been put on hold — that is not going to change.

Wealthy individuals and large corporations already have armies of white-shoe lawyers and accountants. The IRS will go after easier targets to extract money: small and family-owned businesses and the self-employed.

The Spy-R-S

The Left is also anxious to have the IRS take on a long list of new responsibilities empowering the agency to intrude into the lives of American households.

The Biden administration wants the power to peek at your bank accounts whenever it wants. As part of something called (really) a "comprehensive financial account information reporting regime," Biden plans to give the IRS automatic power to access and store your bank account, PayPal, Venmo, and CashApp inflows and outflows. No warrants. No subpoenas. No privacy.

According to an analysis by the Joint Committee on Taxation, this proposal would hit up to 134 million Americans earning less than \$400,000 per year.

Democrats have also proposed making it easier for the IRS to impose penalties and fees on taxpayers. They have called for retroactively repealing a law requiring IRS agents to receive supervisory approval before imposing penalties on taxpayers, which would make it easier for IRS bureaucrats to unilaterally levy substantial fines and penalties on individual taxpayers.

And it gets worse. The Left wants to have the IRS "study and implement" a very big change: the government will fill out your taxes for you. Then you can complain. If you dare. Democrats want to end the existing system of voluntary compliance, in which Americans are responsible for filling out their own tax returns, with a system in which the government completes your tax form and demands you pay what they calculate you owe.

Good luck changing any errors made by the IRS. And do you believe the IRS will understate or overstate your taxes owed?

Earlier this year, the IRS also attempted to quietly implement a face-scanning system that would require taxpayers to use their phones or computers to submit biometric faceprints. An IRS document outlining the agreement notes that your "geolocation can be gleaned" and "used in the event of an investigation." In English: the IRS will know where you are at any point if it wants to find you.

Trust Issues

Each of these proposals could put the data security, personal information, and financial security of taxpayers at risk at a time when the IRS has repeatedly proven it cannot be trusted with new powers.

The IRS also repeatedly has failed, or refused, to protect your tax returns from prying eyes. Last year the progressive group *ProPublica* announced that it had obtained the private tax return and audit data of thousands of taxpayers stretching back fifteen years. This sensitive taxpayer data was obtained through either an unauthorized theft by an IRS employee or an enormous data breach. Either way, the IRS failed to safeguard your privacy.

Additionally, a 2016 Treasury Inspector General report found that the IRS had lost track of one thousand laptops containing

sensitive taxpayer data. In 2015, hackers stole the personal data of 330,000 taxpayers.

The IRS has had a long history of targeting and harassing taxpayers. A 2017 Inspector General report uncovered numerous examples of IRS overreach, including violations of the Eighth Amendment and failure to notify taxpayers of their basic rights when seizing their property on a mere hunch.

The agency is also sloppy in its handling of evidence used in enforcement proceedings. Treasury Department investigators did a walk-through of IRS offices and found "evidence placed in hallways, stacked outside cubicles, and in break rooms." The agents simply do not follow the agency's own rules.

And in case you've forgotten, the IRS destroyed the Tea Party movement. How? Working with the Obama White House, the IRS refused to let state and local Tea Party groups incorporate as nonprofits before the 2012 elections. Without nonprofit status, new Tea Party groups could not successfully fundraise. They atrophied and died. In a three-year period, the Lois Lerner-led IRS approved only *one* conservative nonprofit group. Yes, you read that correctly: one group.

By crushing the Tea Party organizations, the IRS delivered the 2012 election for the Democrats from the presidency to state legislatures.





With all that going on, perhaps it's not surprising that the IRS is apparently too busy to fulfill its basic duties. As noted in the National Taxpayer Advocate's 2022 report, the IRS does not provide clear, timely, or accurate information to taxpayers. The NTA also notes that only 11 percent of calls to the IRS were answered by a real person in 2020. During the busiest month, the number dropped to 4 percent.

Many IRS employees prefer to be hard to reach. In 2012, the NTA outlined how tax examiners can simply disregard taxpayer cases because they know taxpayers may give up after examiners fail to answer the phone.

Time for Change — And I Don't Mean Currency

Clearly, the IRS should be reformed and its powers limited. To start, the politicization of the agency must be reversed.

The left-wing National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) is famous for aggressive use of lawsuits in order to advance Democrat union priorities. The union collects dues from roughly seventy thousand IRS employees, nearly half of NTEU's total membership. Is the IRS "nonpartisan"? No. This union shovels 97 percent of its contributions to Democratic candidates.

IRS employees regularly perform union work on the taxpayer dime. In 2019, IRS and other Treasury Department employees spent 353,820 hours of taxpayer-funded union time, costing \$19.8 million in salary and use of government property.

More than forty of the 201 workers who spent all their time working for the union were paid more than \$100,000 per year. There is not a Republican party in any state with staff that large and well paid.

The IRS has a long history of incompetence, corruption, and blatant disregard for taxpayer privacy. We have tried to solve these problems by giving them more expensive computers and more staff, and we've passed laws on privacy that they ignore.

The only possible reform is to reduce the size, scope, and complexity of the personal and corporate income tax to reduce the power of the IRS: Move to

a single rate tax rather than a graduated or "progressive" income tax. Tax income once: not when you earn it, when you invest it, and again if you are stupid enough to die.

Simple laws are easy to understand and more difficult for government to abuse. ❧

The Left wants to have the IRS
"study and implement" a very
big change: the government will
fill out your taxes for you.



The Deeply Satisfying Destruction of the Ruling Elite

They've earned every humiliation that's coming to them.

by **Scott McKay**



Scott McKay is a regular columnist at The American Spectator, the publisher of TheHayride.com, and the author of five books, including the upcoming Revivalist Manifesto, due out May 1 from Bombardier Books.

In February, far-left San Francisco underwent a political shock quite appropriate to a city used to the ground shifting under its feet. But the recall election in which three members of the local school board were blown out of office should be reverberating across the country as a warning of a massive earthquake to come.

What happened in those recalls, which saw woke leftists Gabriela López (sent packing by a 75-25 count), Alison Collins (79-21), and Faauuga Moliga (72-28) all clobbered by more than 70 percent of the voters, was an even more demonstrative example of what happened in the Virginia elections last fall. Namely, that disgusted public school parents rose up to punish the politicians who have politicized and poisoned their kids' education.

How? Critical race theory, transgender advocacy, and Branch Covidian hysteria, which have become the three main sacraments of left-wing public education's new religion. It turns out that even San Franciscans won't take it anymore.

López and Collins saw their political careers destroyed, interestingly enough, not by "racist" white voters but by Chinese Americans, who are 26 percent of the electorate in San Francisco. That's a very, very bad sign for today's Democrat Party, as it turns out that the "Asian American" vote they've spent the past year and a half pandering to on the basis of declaring their victimization is not impressed.

Why would they be? Everyone knows that the "Asian Hate" the Democrats and the progressive ruling elite say they're so determined to stop is perpetrated in two typical ways. First, Asians, typified by Americans of Chinese and Korean extraction, are routinely discriminated against in areas like university admissions. And second, Asian Americans in predominantly black neighborhoods, who very often plow everything they have into small businesses serving those neighborhoods, are disproportionately victimized by the criminal class.

It's left-wing Democrats who make the decision to shut out the Asians at those universities, and it's left-wing Democrats who defund the police and open the door for thugs to abuse Asians on the streets. This doesn't go unnoticed, and it's becoming clear



Bill Wilson

that Asians are not placid members of the progressive coalition. Like Hispanics, they're beginning to melt away.

And while it's certainly not in evidence that the GOP is about to make a big comeback in San Francisco, the Chinese community there has become troublesome for López and Collins. Writing in the *New York Post*, Ann Hsu, a former Silicon Valley exec and activist San Francisco mom, explained why:

Chinese people in the United States, especially first- and second-generation immigrants, have historically paid little attention to politics because Chinese culture does not encourage civic engagement. We are either too busy making money to support our families or we think the games that politicians play do not affect us.

To be honest, I was like that, too. But the pandemic has made me realize that the decisions made by local elected officials do affect our actual lives!

During 18 months of online classes, my son was completely unengaged in school and wasted his time all day, every day, playing

video games. But San Francisco Board of Education members Gabriela López, Alison Collins and Faauuga Moliga did not recognize or try to fix the problem — instead they focused on renaming schools.

Then they ignored protests from the Asian American community and canceled the merit-based admissions system at Lowell HS. Adding fuel to the fire, Collins blatantly discriminated against Asians with her racist tweets. "Many" Asian Americans "use white supremacist thinking to assimilate and 'get ahead,'" she wrote, and added, "Being a house n—r is still being a n—r."

Asians are being told they're "white-adjacent" by the woke Left, largely because the cultures they come from refuse to accept excuses for failure brought on by unsuccessful behaviors the Left promotes. Asian families generally stay intact, Asian street crime is rare, and it's uncommon to see Asians homeless or dependent on the government.

And Asian cultures, particularly East Asian cultures, place a prime emphasis on education. So when an Alison Collins comes along and declares she’s “looking to combat anti-black racism in the Asian community,” or when López says of her recall, “If you fight for racial justice, this is the consequence,” how do you think that plays?

Left-wing writer Lee Fang noted on Twitter that the answer is: not well. “It’s easy to look at social media, NGOs or elite media/activists and assume wokeism is somehow popular,” he tweeted on February 16, the night of the recall landslides. “But every time it goes to a vote, a tsunami of opposition from regular people. Now from abolishing the police in Minneapolis to recalling the school board in SF?”

Fang went on: “No one watches Fox News here. There’s no real right wing influence. The leaders of the recall are nonwhite immigrants. The media will lie nonstop about this but the fact that an overwhelming majority of Democrats recalled San Francisco’s ultra woke school board speaks volumes.”

Those San Francisco recalls could be but a small taste of what’s coming. Just ask George Gascón, the George Soros-backed neo-communist district attorney in Los Angeles who is embroiled in a similarly robust recall effort backed, interestingly enough, by a large number of Hollywood executives and celebrities for his own hug-a-thug policies.

A year ago, longtime Democrat political guru James Carville made waves when he said, “Wokeness is a problem.” It’s clear, though hardly surprising, that Carville was correct — but Carville’s party isn’t listening.

Pro-criminal, anti-tradition, pro-illegal alien, anti-freedom, and pro-COVID restriction policies, all of which are *de rigueur* for the woke progressive crowd, are the kinds of things that cause the general public to rise up in opposition. Just see the trucker protest

in Canada, which exposed that country’s woke leftist government for the tyrannical regime that it is.

That trucker protest was headed south when Democrats lined up to demand it be treated similarly in America. “Perfect time to impound and give the trucks to small trucking companies looking to expand their business,” Arizona Democrat Rep. Ruben Gallego tweeted after reading a *Washington Post* story about the impending American trucker demonstration.

It isn’t just the politicians, by the way. A Trafalgar Group poll that found Americans in support of the Canadian truckers by a 55-35 count showed Democrat responders as major outliers. Democrats backed the heavy-handed Trudeau regime by a 65-17 margin.

That kind of disconnect gets repaid in turmoil at the ballot box. Which is coming, barring strange developments.

A Rasmussen Reports survey of the generic congressional midterm ballot in late February showed Republicans with an eye-popping 50-37 advantage over Democrats. That came following an Emerson survey showing the GOP with a 50-41 generic congressional ballot lead.

Carville is still playing Cassandra; in fact, he’s starting to sound more like the guy eulogizing the woke progressives’ rule.

“Seventy percent of the people in San Francisco tried to warn us,” said Carville after the recalls in San Francisco. “They’re not popular. People don’t like you.”

“You’ve got to give people the sense that they may not be all that happy in 2022, but if they vote for the Republicans, they’re going to lose a lot of the things they have now,” Carville said.

But even James Carville doesn’t get it. Or maybe he thinks he has to pander to the woke in order to get their attention.

“Ninety-eight percent of people on the Mall on Jan. 6 were white,” he said. “We need better white people in the United States.”

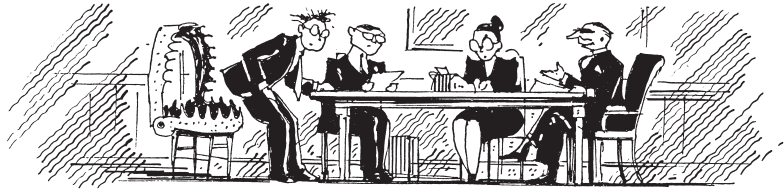


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The Jan. 6 Committee's Bogus Insurrection Incitement Charge

Trump did no such thing.

by **George Parry**



George Parry is a former federal and state prosecutor. He blogs at knowledgeisgood.net and may be reached by email at kignet@outlook.com.

On January 13, 2021, one week before his term of office expired, President Donald Trump was impeached for a second time. All Democratic and ten Republican members of the House of Representatives adopted a single article of impeachment charging him with “incitement of insurrection” as manifested in the January 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol.

The article alleged, in part, that Trump “engaged in high Crimes and Misdemeanors by inciting violence against the Government of the United States.” It also averred that during an address to supporters on January 6, Trump “willfully made statements that, in context, encouraged — and foreseeably resulted in — lawless action at the Capitol such as: ‘if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.’”

At Trump’s Senate impeachment trial, the House managers showed video of the president’s January 6 speech on the Ellipse in which he protested the slanted reporting of the news media and claimed the election had been rigged to defeat him.

The House managers stressed the following statement by Trump: “We fight like hell. And if you don’t fight like hell, you’re not going to have a country anymore.”

This was their smoking gun that purportedly proved Trump had sent his supporters to attack the Capitol as Congress met to certify the election.

But Trump’s defense lawyers countered by citing this part of his speech: “I know that everyone here will soon be marching over to the Capitol building to peacefully and patriotically make your voices heard.”

Trump’s lawyers correctly argued that these words proved he was not calling for either violence or lawlessness.

Trump was acquitted when less than two-thirds of the Senate voted “guilty.”

Nevertheless, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi followed up by handpicking the so-called “January 6 Committee” and tasking it with investigating, among other things,

“the facts, circumstances, and causes relating to the domestic terrorist attack on the Capitol.”

That investigation is underway. The committee has illegally subpoenaed members of the Trump administration and held in contempt those who have rightfully refused to comply with the subpoenas. The unstated but obvious goal of the committee is to hold Trump responsible for supposedly inciting an insurrection against the government.

Whatever happened at the Capitol on January 6, calling it an insurrection has always been a stretch of ludicrous proportions. Which leaves the question of whether, as a matter of law, Trump incited the Capitol Hill violence.

The answer to that question can be found in the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1969 decision in *Brandenburg v. Ohio*. That case dealt with the arrest and conviction of Clarence Brandenburg, who, in a speech at a Ku Klux Klan rally, had protested the federal government’s treatment of the “White Caucasian race.” After condemning blacks and Jews, he announced that the Klan was planning a protest march on Washington and hinted at the possibility of “revengeance” if the federal government didn’t stop trying to “suppress the white, Caucasian race.”

Brandenburg was convicted of violating an Ohio statute which made it a crime to “advocate ... the duty, necessity, or propriety of crime, sabotage, or unlawful means of terrorism as a means of accomplishing industrial or political reform.” He was fined and sentenced to prison.

Despite the case’s obvious First Amendment free-speech implications, the Ohio courts upheld the conviction. But then the U.S. Supreme Court granted *certiorari* and reviewed the case.

Previously, in the 1919 case of *Schenck v. United States*, the Court had held that the government could punish speech if it posed “a clear and present danger of bringing about the substantive evils that Congress may prohibit.”

But, in its decision reversing Brandenburg’s conviction, the Court expanded the legal protection of free speech by holding that it could be punished only “where such advocacy is directed to inciting or producing imminent lawless action and is likely to incite or produce such action.”

So, was Trump’s speech *directed* to inciting or producing lawless action? If so, was it *likely* to incite or produce such action?

The simple answer to those questions is “no.” By explicitly urging his audience to “peacefully and patriotically make their voices heard,” Trump neither “directed” his speech at the goal of inciting violence nor uttered words “likely” to incite or produce violence. To the contrary, Trump’s speech was clearly intended to promote a peaceful protest and, as such, was entirely legal and protected by the First Amendment.

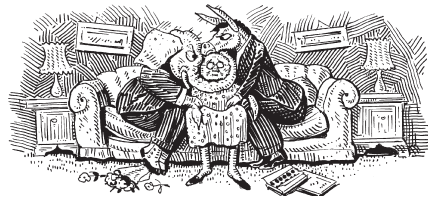
But do not expect law, facts, or logic to deter the January 6 Committee. Just like the banditos in *The Treasure of the Sierra Madre* who didn’t need no stinkin’ badges, the January 6 Committee needs no stinkin’ facts or law to execute its blatantly partisan political mission to take down President Trump and render him ineligible for reelection.

In this regard, it is well to keep in mind the Prime Directive by which our Seat of Government operates: when it comes to politics versus truth, justice, and the law, politics will prevail every time. 🐉



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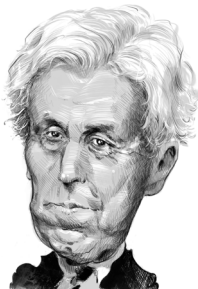
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Liz Cheney and Adam Kinzinger's Vendetta Politics

The January 6 Committee is running a Stalinesque show trial against Trump and his supporters.

by Jeffrey Lord



Jeffrey Lord, author of *Swamp Wars*, is a former Reagan White House associate political director and contributing editor of *The American Spectator*.

Recently, Wyoming “Republican” Rep. Liz Cheney published a piece in the *Wall Street Journal* with this amusing headline:

The Jan. 6 Committee Won't Be Intimidated

We are focused on facts, not rhetoric, and will present them no matter what our critics say.

Facts are stubborn things, as President John Adams famously said. He went on: “Whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passions, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.”

No, they can't. But the disingenuous Cheney is giving it the old college try as she pursues her anti-Trump vendetta.

Adams' wisdom comes to mind in reading Cheney's *Wall Street Journal* article and comparing it to what she and her fellow “Republican” on the January 6 Committee, Illinois Rep. Adam Kinzinger, have actually said and done on the subject. These stand in sharp contrast to Cheney's claims of a “just the facts” investigation in her article.

Cheney begins by saying this:

I keep on my desk a copy of the oath my great-great-grandfather signed when he re-enlisted in the Union Army in 1863. Like the oath given by all those who serve in government and every member of our armed forces, Samuel Fletcher Cheney swore to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic.”

One suspects Cheney's great-great-grandfather is somewhere shaking his head at what a descendant of his, a sitting member of the United States Congress, has been up to. The true "facts" are that she's really "focused" on involve aiding and abetting the seizure of the cell phone records of more than one hundred American citizens.

These records contain data on "tens of thousands of moms, children, clergy, reporters, and Republican and conservative influencers who were in touch with everyone from White House aides to prominent activists," as my colleague Melissa Mackenzie reported in *The American Spectator*. She points out that "It is unconstitutional for any congressional body to pursue criminal investigations."

She also notes the ill-disguised real purpose of the January 6 Committee:

The select committee's stated purpose is to explore better ways to keep the Capitol building secure and create policies that do so. That's not what Nancy Pelosi and her minions are doing. They're conducting a massive data-gathering expedition to create a blacklist of Trump allies, and, if possible, set up criminal charges against them.

That is not only decidedly unconstitutional but also the methodology of a police state and a vivid example of vendetta politics — and Cheney and Kinzinger have eagerly signed on for it.

Cheney, incredibly, also says this:

Those who do not wish the truth of Jan. 6 to come out have predictably resorted to attacking the process — claiming it is tainted and political. Our hearings will show this charge to be wrong. We are focused on facts, not rhetoric, and we will present those facts without exaggeration, no matter what criticism we face.

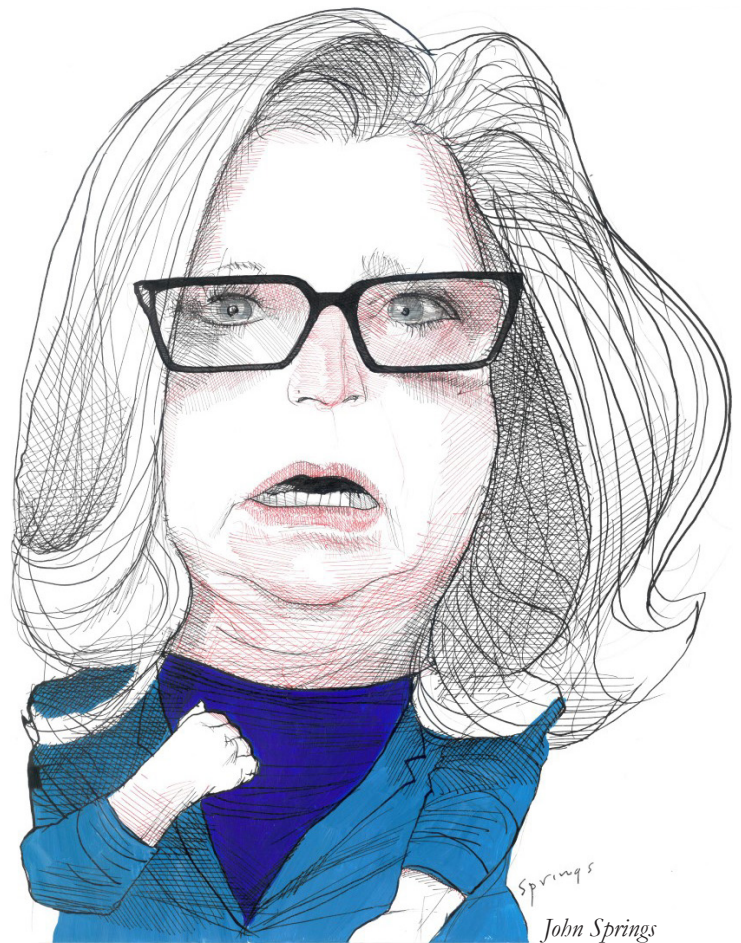
The committee's investigation is a decidedly un-American proceeding, and Cheney and Kinzinger are active participants.

The January 6 Committee is "focused on facts"? Really?

Here's a fact: House Republican Leader Kevin McCarthy has the authority to appoint the Republican members of the committee. His appointments of Reps. Jim Jordan of Ohio and Jim Banks of Indiana were refused by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who then usurped McCarthy's authority and appointed Cheney and Kinzinger.

Why? Because she and her fellow Democrats hate Trump. This tactic is called "stacking the deck," and Pelosi used it to make sure that the committee delivers an anti-Trump verdict.

This immediately established the committee as a Stalinesque show trial. The committee's investigation is a decidedly un-American proceeding, and Cheney and Kinzinger are active participants.



The committee is curiously selective in the "facts" it decides to pursue. Republican Reps. Lauren Boebert, Andy Biggs, Mo Brooks, Madison Cawthorn, Matt Gaetz, Louie Gohmert, Paul Gosar, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Jody Hice, Jim Jordan, and Scott Perry all have been subpoenaed to "get the facts." But, strangely, Pelosi has not been subpoenaed. Neither has House Administration Committee member and Democrat Rep. Jamie Raskin, who had responsibility, along with Pelosi, for security of the Capitol on January 6, 2021. Cheney is not demanding the facts from either of them.

Cheney has presented herself and the January 6 Committee as an impartial group of fact-finders. But by her own frequent admissions, Cheney is not even close to having an impartial view of Donald Trump.

She has called Trump "unfit for office," "dangerous," a "threat," and someone who "clearly can never be anywhere near the Oval Office ever again." Those are hardly the words of an impartial, fact-finding investigator. Those are the words of a leader in a political lynch mob.

Cheney has also offered this biased view on Trump's response to January 6: "We have a threat America has never seen before. A former president who provoked a violent attack on this Capitol in an effort to steal the election has resumed his aggressive effort to convince Americans that the election was stolen from him."

To say Trump "provoked a violent attack" is a flat-out lie. I was not at the Capitol on January 6, but I had a literal front-row seat at the White House rally preceding the events at the Capitol. I personally heard the president urge the crowd to protest

“peacefully and patriotically.” There was not a word provoking violence. And no one that I saw at the rally — and I have it on video — was urging violence. To the contrary, they were dancing to the rock music blaring from the loudspeakers.

Cheney says the fact that Trump told his supporters to “fight like hell” is an example of his violent rhetoric. Really? Politicians of all stripes use the word “fight” to describe their own political activities. Cheney herself has used the same language repeatedly. For example, in an interview with NBC’s *Today Show*, she said she was “in a fight to help to restore our party, in a fight to bring our party back to substance and principle and in a fight to make clear that we won’t participate in the really dangerous effort that’s underway.” Three times over she borrowed exactly from Trump. She is a walking example of one rule for thee, another for me.

Cheney’s hypocrisy is incredible. As mentioned above, she is interested in the private communications of all manner of American citizens, but she is curiously completely uninterested in the private communications of Pelosi and Raskin. Where is her demand that they, along with all the members of the committee — including herself and Kinzinger — turn over all their emails, texts, and phone records so that the public can see them? Nowhere.

And, of course, if you’re in the media and you oppose the committee, Cheney will make a point of reading your private emails aloud and into the public record — as she did to Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham. So much for freedom of the press.

Cheney goes on in her *Wall Street Journal* piece to say this of Trump’s claims of election fraud, which, she argues, provoked the events at the Capitol:

He falsely claimed that the election was stolen from him because of widespread fraud. While some degree of fraud occurs in every election, there was no evidence of fraud on a scale that could have changed this one.

But how would she know how much fraud there was without investigating? As I’ve written, my own state of Pennsylvania has a long record of serious voter fraud. One need only investigate the Pennsylvania elections of 2016, 2015, 2014, 2012, or 2008, or go back even further to 1994, to find people have been indicted and convicted for running massive voter fraud operations.

In 1994, a federal judge even overturned a state Senate election because of a “massive scheme” (the judge’s words) by Democrats to steal the election. But Cheney is completely uninterested in the extensive list of documented facts about fraud in previous Pennsylvania elections, which helps explain why Trump believes that fraud may have influenced the 2020 election, as well.

Cheney ends her article with this unbelievable statement:

Those who do not wish the truth of Jan. 6 to come out have predictably resorted to attacking the process — claiming it is tainted and political. Our hearings will show this charge to be wrong. We are focused on facts, not rhetoric, and we will present those facts without exaggeration, no matter what criticism we face. My friend the late Charles Krauthammer once said: “The lesson of our history is that the task of merely maintaining strong and sturdy the structures of a constitutional order is unending, the continuing and ceaseless work of every generation.” Every generation of Americans has fulfilled its duty to support and defend the Constitution. That responsibility now falls to us.

Say what? Liz Cheney “will present those facts without exaggeration”? The all-too-obvious fact is that the January 6 Committee, with the full cooperation and assent of Cheney and Kinzinger, is nothing more than a vitriolic hit job on Trump and his supporters. They are in no way interested in facts that contradict their anti-Trump narrative.

The words of President Ronald Reagan about dealing with communists come to mind in looking at the words and actions of Cheney, Kinzinger, and their fellow January 6 Committee members as they go about their anti-Trump vendetta:

They ... have openly and publicly declared that the only morality they recognize is what will further their cause, meaning they reserve unto themselves the right to commit any crime, to lie, to cheat.

Bingo. 🐘



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Newsom's Inaction Worsens Nation's Supply Chain Woes

Don't expect them to let up anytime soon.

by **Steven Greenhut**

With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a looming battle over President Joe Biden's first Supreme Court nomination, and continued controversies over vaccine mandates and COVID-related policies, it's easy to forget about the nation's ongoing supply chain issues. Yet those issues remain severe — and are contributing to Jimmy Carter-era levels of inflation.

The ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach handle 40 percent of the nation's containerized cargo, yet cargo ships have been backing up for weeks before making it into the port for unloading. Port officials are pleased that the backlog has subsided. But the port mess remains a monumental problem that continues to gum up the entire U.S. economy.

"Although the ship backup is the smallest it has been since Nov. 11, congestion remains severe by historical standards," the *Wall Street Journal* reported in early February. "Container ships are waiting an average of 18 days to unload at the Port of Los Angeles, the busiest of the neighboring gateways. Before the pandemic, it was unusual for ships to have to wait for a berth."

At the worst point of this crisis, 109 container ships had queued up to enter the Southern California ports, but that number had fallen to seventy-three in mid-February. For perspective, the ports' historically worst backup saw only seventeen ships waiting to unload their cargo. We're still a long way from solving the problem, leaving businesses and consumers across the country dependent on the decisions of California's political leaders.

Unfortunately, the Gavin Newsom administration has done little to address the matter — beyond approving a few superficial reforms, earmarking more money, and holding some press conferences. The governor signed an executive order in late October, but the edicts offer little confidence — and months later not much really has improved.

In his order, the governor called on the California Department of Transportation and industry stakeholders "to evaluate and identify priority freight routes to be considered for a temporary exemption to current gross vehicle weight limits." He also called for a variety of task forces to evaluate additional sites for storing containers, improve job training, and analyze other aspects of the problem.

This was a typical Newsom response. He issues largely symbolic orders that supposedly address major problems before he moves on to other, more ideologically



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*A ship waits outside the Port of Long Beach,
October 15, 2021 (Cleansunrise/Shutterstock)*



oriented issues. I met with prominent members of the state's business community in November, and they were frustrated at his go-slow approach and refusal to reach out to corporate leaders.

As I pointed out in my *Orange County Register* column, California's Democratic leaders "are unusually bold" in their approach to public policy: The governor "and his progressive allies believe our state can pass labor laws that revamp the economy, provide affordable healthcare for all residents and even change the trajectory of the Earth's climate."

But when it comes to a major issue that threatens to rattle California's and the nation's economies, suddenly their hands are tied. The administration and the Legislature could have embraced any number of substantive policies. Business groups told me that economic and agriculture-related issues appear to be at the bottom of the priority list in a state Capitol that has plenty of time for symbolic nonsense.

"While we agree that some of the port congestion is driven by pent-up demand and the ongoing impact of COVID-19, the supply chain crisis at the ports is the inevitable culmination of a lack of coordinated focus to invest and improve this important sector and a series of state, regional and local mandates forced upon every aspect of the goods movement economy," wrote nineteen of the state's largest business groups in an October letter to Newsom.

They called for the governor to declare a state of emergency at the ports, which would allow him to suspend some of the many regulations that have worsened the port disaster. Newsom wasn't exactly shy about flexing his executive muscle during the COVID-19 health crisis. Republican Assemblyman Kevin Kiley of Roseville, for instance, released a 138-page document listing the four hundred times Newsom unilaterally changed state law as of March 2020.

The business groups' main proposals involved easing the state's regulatory rules, including California Air Resources Board diesel restrictions that have reduced the number of available trucks to transport cargo from the ports. It called for suspending the implementation of Assembly Bill 701, which forbids large warehousing companies from imposing production quotas on employees. That legislation arguably has slowed the movement of goods.

The letter also called for the suspension of Assembly Bill 5 — the infamous union-backed ban on independent contracting. Although the Legislature had exempted one hundred industries from its provisions and voters exempted ride-share drivers by passing Proposition 22, the trucking industry continues to suffer

from its provisions. The vast majority of truck drivers servicing the ports are owner-operators, yet the law requires drivers to be permanent company employees.

The business groups went on to ask the governor to expedite the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) permitting process, which continues to impede the construction of warehouses, rail lines, and other projects that service the ports. Actually, CEQA — the 1970 "landmark" environmental law that gives any stakeholder standing to file a lawsuit challenging the environmental sustainability of any project — has derailed all types of projects, including housing developments.

Of course, none of these measures would instantly free up the ports, but they could help around the margins and avoid future backlogs. But the governor has no interest in offending environmental activists — even though "we have floating warehouses, idling off the coast" that have a greater "environmental impact than the requests contained in this letter." The port backlog may even be the reason for a massive Orange County oil spill in October of last year.

Eighteen union-allied legislators sent a letter to Newsom denying that these rules have exacerbated the port crisis and arguing that the proposals are a "thinly veiled attempt to cut costs on the backs of essential workers and skirt enforcement issues." You can probably guess whose advice the governor is following. After he toured the ports in mid-November, we heard little from his office about the crisis.

Then in January he released his 2022–23 budget, which addresses the matter in an underwhelming way. "The draft budget ... proposes investing \$2.3 billion in the state's congested ports," *The Verge* reported. "That includes \$875 million for zero-emission vehicles and infrastructure — with a majority earmarked for trucks." Instead of offering regulatory relief that impedes the trucking and warehousing industries, he's throwing money at ZEVs.

Newsom finally is taking seriously another port-related issue — the looting of cargo containers as they sit in rail backups near downtown Los Angeles. The governor in January described the scene of busted containers and looted packages as similar to "third-world" conditions. His plan boosts spending on law enforcement, but it also focuses on the tangential issue of "getting guns and drugs off our streets."

The governor met with Biden in late February to talk about investments in supply chain and port issues, but don't expect any short-term solutions. Americans are stuck depending on the competence of California's officials, which means they should expect the supply chain problems to disrupt their lives for the foreseeable future. ❧



Biden Names a Black Woman to SCOTUS as Promised

At least her last name isn't Harris or Obama.

by **Dov Fischer**

He promised to name a Black woman to the Supreme Court, and so President Joe Biden nominated Ketanji Brown Jackson, since Sonia Sotomayor apparently was not dark enough a Woman of Color to satisfy the “progressive” Left.

So be it. Under the accepted rules, the president gets to name whomever he likes, and the Senate approves. Historically, Republicans have honored those rules quite civilly, while Democrats sabotage the system at its core when not in power, assassinating honorable reputations, destroying noble lives, and — if all else fails — undertaking to change the core rules.

They destroyed the very name of Robert Bork in 1987. Before him, they destroyed Clement Haynsworth in 1969 and then G. Harrold Carswell in early 1970, two back-to-back conservative Nixon nominees, forcing Nixon to name extreme liberal Harry Blackmun, who later delivered the opinion in *Roe v. Wade*. They nearly destroyed Clarence Thomas in 1991, ensuring that he always will suffer footnotes and asterisks about a supposed hair follicle. They did it again, in the presence of the nominee’s wife and daughters, to Brett Kavanaugh, whose name forever will be associated with a perjurer who never was prosecuted for lying under oath. And, of course, if the Democrats could have actualized it, they would have stacked the nine-justice Court with six more Left-Woke justices.

Many Republicans understandably await administering payback to the Democrats. But GOP electoral prospects for November looked too enticing to risk damaging as Democrats did to their chances in 2018 by smearing Kavanaugh so disgracefully. So Democrats once again evade payback. Not only do the perjurers never get prosecuted but the very Democrats who most directly violate the norms of civility during Judiciary Committee hearings benefit personally, emerging among their party’s leading candidates for president. In the case of Kavanaugh, the character assassination gambit saw Kamala Harris, Cory Booker, and the one who eats salads with her hairbrush all contend seriously for the throne, with Harris ultimately securing Biden’s trademark “Black Woman” set-aside. It is evil.

Nevertheless, Ketanji Brown Jackson undeservedly glides in. First, conservatives now hold a Supreme Court majority of five solid justices: Thomas, Alito, Gorsuch, Kavanaugh, and Barrett. Yes, they each will disappoint conservatives on occasion because, as honest legal scholars true to the Constitution, they will approach issues



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by interpreting the law, not superimposing personal views. Conservatives cannot have it both ways. If we want impartial judges who read the law honestly without imparting their own legislative preferences, then such judges will call them as they honestly see the text. For example, the late Justice Antonin Scalia occasionally reached conclusions seemingly quite liberal on free-speech cases because that is how he read the First Amendment.

With five conservative justices and Chief Justice John Roberts committed to roaming back and forth so as to prove “We do not have Obama judges or Trump judges,” Ketanji Brown Jackson brings the Left to a distinct minority of three with Justices Kagan and Sotomayor. That’s OK. Nor is it even good politics to shut out the Left excessively. A Court that is 7-2 conservative will enjoy less legitimacy when it reins in *Roe v. Wade* or reaches a copacetic *Bush v. Gore* result than a Court with at least three hardened leftists.

Merely because she was selected for her skin color and female parts does not mean Jackson is per se unsuited for the Court. Rather, the foolish way Biden handled her selection, conveying long before he selected her that he was not looking for the best, the brightest, nor the most qualified but primarily for a “Black woman,” has colored her obituary more than Republicans otherwise could have done. And it could have been worse. Biden might have named Michelle Obama or even Kamala Harris, if only to evacuate her as veep. So be grateful for small favors.

In Jackson, Biden has a politician in robes who supports abortion on demand. Biden made clear he wants a judge who sees a “living Constitution” with “unenumerated rights” — that is, a document she can change each day without regard to the Founding Fathers’ intent or the Constitution’s actual text. NARAL Pro-Choice America has endorsed her, and she wrote an amicus curiae brief for them. Another such group, “Demand Justice,” which actively has pushed for stacking the Court and shamelessly pressured Justice Stephen Breyer to retire, similarly supports Jackson’s nomination.

So she will not be interpreting law as drafted but joining the other “progressive” women justices in fashioning their own laws. Towards that end, the best questions to ask her at her committee hearings may well have been two suggested by “Tondaleo,” a reader of *The American Spectator*: “Do you like puppies?” and “If you were a tree, what type of tree would you want to be?” Her views on legal issues are irrelevant.

From the moment she was named, two matters jumped out. First, that she had a clearly coordinated paid public-relations campaign in place, replete with a Twitter storm, highlighting her background as a former public defender. Indeed, when Jackson was a public defender, she represented several Guantanamo Bay terrorists — and, tellingly, continued representing them pro bono after she moved into private practice. Her Twitter campaign emphasized that unique

background, failing to explain why there are so few former public defenders on the High Court: *such experience is irrelevant*. It is like claiming that a new NFL quarterback will be extra special because he previously was a singer. *So what?*

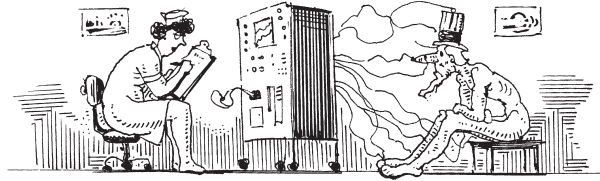
Rather, an appellate jurist is best judged by a record of cogent prior published analysis. In Jackson’s case, however, she has published only one appellate opinion more than did Dr. Seuss. In light of that paucity of product, we look to her holdings as a federal district judge, and we find a surprising number of times she was reversed on appeal for judicial overreach.

Jackson comes with a record of regularly upholding Obama government regulations that were challenged by corporations such as meat packers and a coalition of timber, livestock, and off-highway vehicle organizations. She has upheld racial preferences in the awarding of government contracts. In *American Federation of Government Employees v. Trump*, she struck down three Trump executive orders limiting labor unions — and she was reversed unanimously by the left-leaning federal D.C. appellate circuit on grounds she lacked jurisdiction to adjudicate those matters because the statute explicitly requires challenges first be brought within the pertinent agency, the Federal Labor Relations Authority, and any appeals from there go straight to the D.C. Circuit and not to a district judge.

She was reversed again for judicial overreach when she tried stopping a Trump rule expanding the Department of Homeland Security’s definition by which illegal aliens may be deported. In that case, *Make the Road New York v. McAleenan*, a majority-Democrat D.C. Circuit panel concluded Jackson had set aside the Trump administrative rule while lacking jurisdiction under the Administrative Procedure Act even to review that policy.

So that’s our new justice. Black. Female. Guantanamo pro bono. Reversed repeatedly by majority-Democrat appellate panels for judicial overreach in her district court in pursuit of her woke agenda built on a “living Constitution” with “unenumerated rights.” No meaningful record of appellate opinions. Adequate, mediocre. But at least not Kamala. 🐾





The COVID Aftermath: Repentance and Reconciliation

The mandates are falling away, but so much work remains to heal the wounds they have caused.

by Matt Shapiro

At the end of February, literally the week before President Joe Biden’s State of the Union address, there was a slaughter. Dozens of state and local mask mandates and vaccine requirements were cut down as they stood, freeing American students and citizens from nearly two years of government mandates unlike anything we’ve seen before.

This makes me happy. This is exactly what I’ve wanted, the exact scenario that I’ve been anticipating since May 2020 and actively advocating since vaccines were widely available and it became clear that mask mandates made no impact on rates of COVID cases.

We have finally reached what we have so desperately needed: an agreement about free choice regarding COVID mitigations. We now agree that these mandates are not needed and that people should be allowed to make their own decisions on their own timeline using their own sense of risk assessment. This was always the only possible endgame for COVID restrictions; the hidden debate has been about when our policies should most appropriately reflect this reality.

This is in stark contrast to our approach the last two years. The terms of the debate over COVID restrictions were set early with the expectation that COVID infections could be entirely prevented. This view was promoted by public health officials and encoded into COVID mitigation strategies. For months into the pandemic, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention held to “near-zero incidence” thresholds that could shut down an entire county if a few families tested positive. Under this guidance, businesses were shuttered, schools were closed, volunteers were turned away, and the sick were isolated from their friends and families.

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In a scenario where COVID really could be eradicated, these mitigations would be seen as harsh and painful but necessary. But it became clear within a few months that eradication was not possible. Once we came to this realization, these harsh restrictions transformed from a necessary pain to prevent sickness to an extra layer of self-imposed punishment.

This realization that mitigations were not fulfilling their promise did not come to everyone at the same time. Some people realized this a few months into the pandemic, and some realized it after the winter surge of 2020 hit every region regardless of their COVID mitigation plans. Some people (including many of our elected officials and decision-makers at the CDC) are still struggling to realize this. After two years of mandates and mitigations, however, we have largely come to a bipartisan cultural agreement that we need to stop and let people make their own choices. That agreement should be celebrated, yet the division remains.

Resentment

The reason we have such a deep resentment in spite of wide agreement is because agreement simply isn’t enough to mend the damage that has been done over these past two years. We’ve all been slowly coming to the same conclusion, yet our social and media cultures constantly have insisted that, at any one moment in time, everyone on one side of the debate is smart and good and everyone on the other side is cruel and dumb. For two years we’ve made moral judgments of each other over something that we all now accept. As such, it’s not enough to say, “Okay, I don’t like masks anymore, can we just drop the mandates?” We are far past that point. We need something akin to repentance before we can find reconciliation.

I don't want this essay to be a commentary on broad social movements. We will never get "liberals" to apologize to "conservatives" for mask or vaccine mandates, and we will never get "conservatives" to apologize to "liberals" for not taking COVID seriously enough.

For one thing, those labels are close to meaningless in the realm of COVID. Attitudes on policies to manage this disease have been all over the map, and political boundaries have not been a particularly good marker for COVID mitigation decisions. This time last year, in the interest of capturing a precise moment in history, I began to interview as many people in as many states as possible about their state and local COVID response. I found that the on-the-ground response between blue and red states was far more similar than it was disparate. States without mask mandates still had substantial mask compliance, and states with mask mandates still had people ignoring the rules.

But beyond the political spaghetti that is pandemic policy preferences, anyone who wants to set one side against the other will always be able to haul out a particularly bad view and use it as an avatar for "your team said this." This strategy has been used by bad actors to drive a wedge between friends and families for political advantage. Reconciliation isn't possible between broad ideologies or political entities.

Repentance and reconciliation are only possible in the context of mutual respect and community, so that is where we need to start.

This is where the equality of COVID outcomes is so important. Finally, two years after the beginning of the COVID pandemic, we are all in the same boat. When even New York City has removed its masking and vaccine mandates, we can conclude in a bipartisan way that these mandates were not a plausible or optimal long-term strategy. There are still some stragglers as some venues may require a negative COVID test, but we can all see that organizing our every interaction around COVID spread is not something we can reasonably demand from government policy.

Once we understand that the only possible long-term equilibrium is to remove all COVID restrictions, we can start to see that everyone will come to this conclusion at some point. This is where humility needs to infiltrate our minds. The ultimate answer was here all this time; we just needed to find our path to it. We can't allow ourselves to harbor anger that another person figured this out sooner or later than we did. Everyone had to make their own journey to this destination, and this gives us the essential common ground to start the path back to unity.

Recognizing our common ground is the easy part. The more difficult task is to repair the relationships that have been broken along the way. We need to renew the art of repentance.

Repentance

Repentance is far more than changing course. It is regret for past behavior and a promise for the future. It's not enough to finally break down and say, "We don't need mandates"; there needs to be a recognition that the people who were saying that we don't need mandates last year were doing so in good faith and that the implication that they took their position without care and thought was demeaning

and dehumanizing. These people don't need to demand an apology from those who disagreed at the time, but they are certainly owed an apology for the implication that they were disagreeing due to ignorance or carelessness. The goal here is rebuilding relationships, and that cannot be done while one side refuses the other this dignity.

There also needs to be a reckoning about the harms that have been caused during this pandemic.

This damage falls into two categories: institutional and personal. The institutional damage has been enormous and wide-ranging. People have been fired. Children have been denied education. The dying have been denied

the comfort of their friends and family and the survivors denied the comfort of a proper funeral. Stephanie Murray recently wrote in the *Atlantic* of the terrible toll that children in speech therapy have been forced to endure. Much of this is ongoing, even at this late stage.

The personal damage is often less visibly severe but more emotionally meaningful. Very few of us were fired by a personal friend over a vaccine mandate, but many relationships have been strained or broken between people who have questioned the value of COVID mitigations and those who have accepted whatever restrictions are imposed. Statements of even minor dissent have driven instinctual revulsions and often personal denunciation. "I think you are wrong" is a difficult enough conversation to have with a friend, but many of these escalated into accusations of dishonesty, cruelty, or indifference. Any real repentance requires the recognition of these personal and institutional harms and the admission that those who argued against them did so in a spirit of honesty and in the interest of dignity.

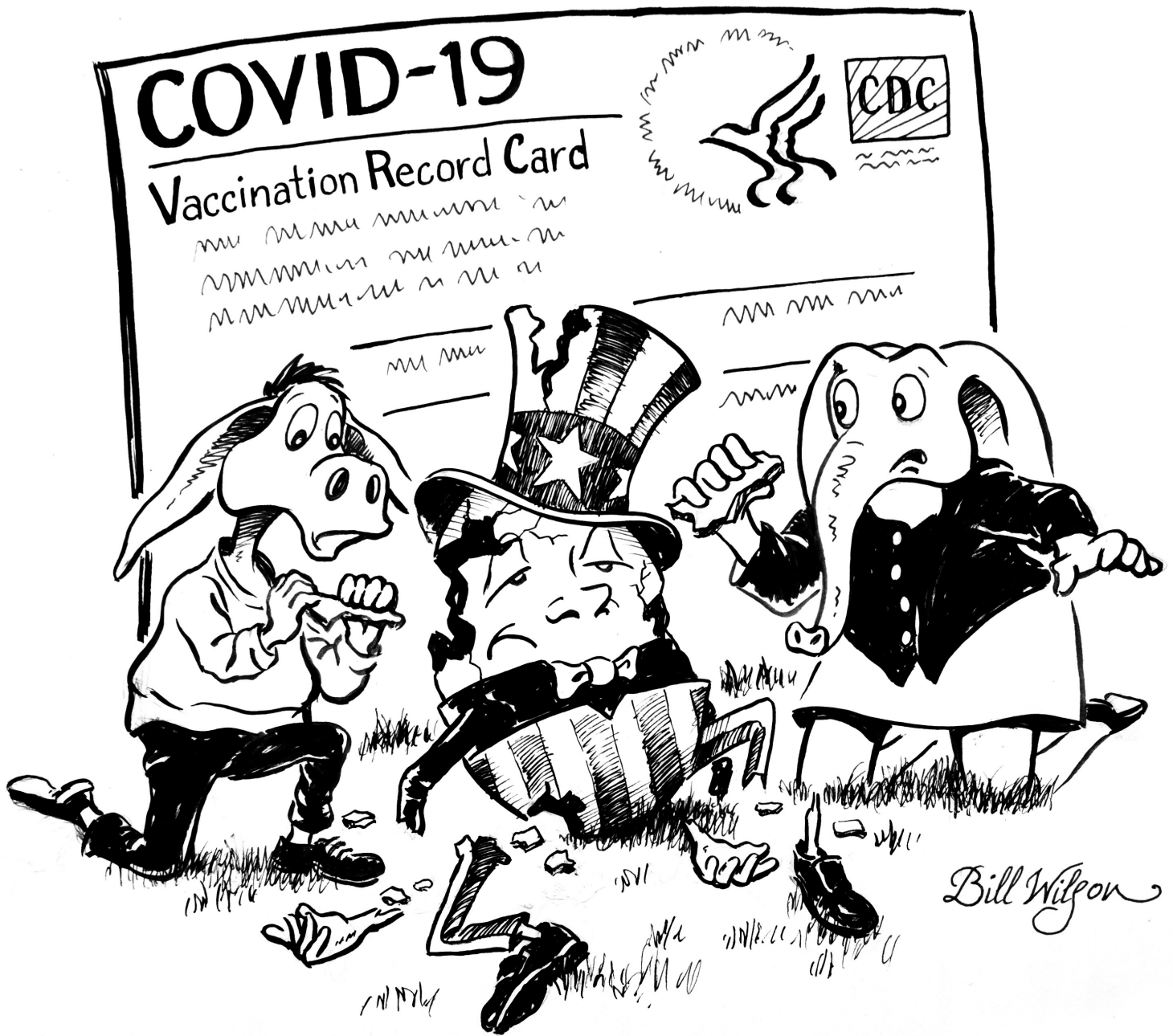
Recognizing the dignity of dissent and inquiry is far more important than relitigating any single fact or position or which exact date it became socially permissible to hold that position. Mask mandates may have disappeared overnight, but the political will to make them disappear took many months to build. During those months, the people who were accused of carelessness were laying groundwork, changing minds, slowly but surely gathering a consensus that made the dismissal of these mitigations possible. Many of them did so at risk to their personal reputations or the strain of broken relationships. Those relationships can't be repaired without first recognizing that we would not all now agree if they had not first disagreed.

While apologies and a desire to repair and rebuild our relationships is a necessary condition of reconciliation, it is not sufficient. While most of these pandemic mitigations are finally falling away, there are still some straggling limitations. At this writing, toddlers are still masked in much of New York City, federal judges are still imposing mask mandates on unwilling counties, vaccine mandates remain in place in California, and masks are still mandatory on airplanes and public transit with no end in sight.

Reconciliation and the Road Ahead

Even the abandonment of many mitigations has come with the caveat that they may return with the next surge. That would be an excellent time to demonstrate our newfound unity. Right now, rejecting the use of government pressure to implement any and all pandemic mitigations is our implicit agreement. We need to make that agreement explicit. We quietly agree that masking

Repentance and reconciliation are only possible in the context of mutual respect and community, so that is where we need to start.



should be a matter of individual choice. Now we need to loudly agree on it.

After the initial shock of the first months of this pandemic, it was clear that we would need to find a path back to normalcy and that path would, in the end, require nothing more than allowing individuals the ability to assess the danger in the world around them and make their own choices without government or social interference. This lesson extends to every part of life. It should be our choice to mask or not mask, to vaccinate with our own discretion and on our own schedule. We should be able to send our children to school or speech therapy on our terms, using our own faculties of reason and caution. We should be able to visit our sick and mourn our dead, and we need to accept that, whatever path we choose, we choose it with clear eyes and our own calculus of caution.

To the extent that we have denied our friends or family this presumption of dignity in self-determination, we need to apologize and reconcile ourselves to them. There can be no half-measures here. There should be no smug indication that they were totally wrong

until the moment we came to agree with them. There shouldn't be a partisan declaration of superiority or any resentment in this admission. We can't, under any circumstances, say, "Fine, you got your way. Now can we drop this?"

We can't drop this because the core of this isn't about the pandemic. It is about including the dissenters who were ignored and shoved to the periphery even as they were the only ones talking sense in criticizing mandates. They weren't right because some poll told them to be right. They thought and considered and researched and debated and came to find this truth even as it was labeled misinformation and attacked at the highest levels of power.

In this, they have earned a place at the table when we discuss next steps. Policy should not be made unilaterally by politicians who ignored the dissenters until they were forced to agree, not through a process of data or scientific investigation, but through the steady grinding away at public patience. Those politicians need to step back and give the floor to the people who now have years of hard-won practical experience in changing hearts and minds. 🐘

Australia, 2021

Australians demonstrated across the country on November 20, 2021, in cities including Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, and Sydney, which is pictured. Protesters sang the national anthem and protested vaccine mandates as well as lockdowns. A former Liberal member of Parliament, Craig Kelly, who has since joined the right-wing populist United Australia Party, gave a speech at the protest where he called on Prime Minister Scott Morrison to ban vaccine passports. (A Sharma/Shutterstock)



Canada, 2022

Members of the Freedom Convoy walk through a brigade of trucks lined up in Ottawa, Canada, on February 5, 2022. Triggered by vaccine mandates imposed on truckers but expanded to include other pandemic restrictions, the protest held the capitol at a standstill and shut down the Ambassador Bridge. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau invoked the Emergencies Act in response to the convoy, using it to order banks to freeze accounts belonging to people who violated regulations the government established to break up the protest. (Christopher O'Donnell/Shutterstock)

France, 2022

Protesters gather in the eastern French city of Strasbourg on February 12, 2022, at the same time as similar demonstrations inspired by Canada's Freedom convoy took place in other French cities. The protesters directed their ire at a plan to put a health pass into place until 2023. French police announced the protests would be banned from taking place in Paris, claiming that their objective was to "block the capital." (NeydtStock/Shutterstock)



CULTURE



Liz Cheney (Bill Wilson)



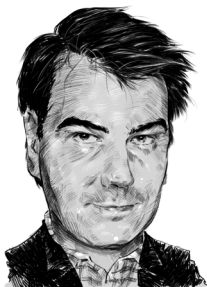
The Theft of a Nation: Ukraine's Fight for Existence

“A nation’s identity cannot be removed like the initials of a pocket handkerchief,” wrote Victor Hugo.

by Matthew Omolesky

Few might have realized it at the time, but the year 1845 was significant, indeed seminal, in the history of the Ukrainian people. It was the year that the preternaturally gifted poet and painter Taras Shevchenko produced some of his finest verses, as well as an album of exquisite watercolors depicting Ukrainian heritage sites like the onion-domed Ascension Cathedral in Pereyaslav and the modest chapel of Bohdan Khmelnytsky in Subotiv. It was the year that Ukrainian literature finally began to be disseminated abroad, thanks to the publication of Friedrich von Bodenstedt’s collection *Die Poetische Ukraine*. And it was during the winter of 1845 that three Kyiv-based activists — the journalist Vasyl Bilozersky, the lawyer Mykola Hulak, and the renowned historian Nikolay Kostomarov — founded the Brotherhood of Saints Kirill and Mefodii, a secret confraternity also known as the Ukrainian–Slavic Society. The goal of this nascent organization was to secure national autonomy for Ukraine, and for other Slavic nations languishing under czarist rule, while advancing the universal values of freedom of speech, religion, and thought.

This was an ambitious program, and potentially a revolutionary one, though the Kirillo-Methodians envisioned a gradual ascent up the gentle slope of civilizational progress, taking decades or even centuries, rather than the sort of violent popular upheaval that would mark the subsequent Springtime of Nations. Imperial authorities in St. Petersburg were nevertheless aghast at any talk of Ukrainian home rule, let alone independence, and early in 1847 the secret police of the Third Section of His Imperial Majesty’s Own Chancellery were ordered to quash the brotherhood, whose members were swiftly apprehended and banished. As short-lived as the suppressed secret society may have been, we must remember that, in the words of Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most.” The Kirillo-Methodians had courageously taken that first step, and those who came after them would be able to utter a new word, “Ukraine,” a word to strike fear in the hearts of Russian authorities accustomed to dismissing the region merely as *Malorossiya*, “Little Russia.”



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



Bill Wilson

The ever-vigilant Third Section did not stop with its first wave of arrests and vowed to run to ground anyone even tangentially associated with the Ukrainian–Slavic Society. While rifling through the possessions of one of the arrested Kirillo-Methodians, agents of the secret police stumbled upon two poetic manuscripts signed by Shevchenko. The first poem, “Kavkaz,” was written in response to Russia’s brutal war against Imam Shamil in the Caucasus. It lamented how

*The ground
Is strewn with conscripts’ scattered bones.
And tears? And blood? Enough to drown
All emperors with all their sons
And grandsons eager for the throne
In widows’ tears.*

The second poem, “A Dream,” was likewise a “mournful dirge,” a “dismal howl,” this time for Shevchenko’s Ukrainian homeland, where the people’s “bloodied skins” and “sinews” had been used as cloth and thread for the czar’s “purple robes.” “Make merry, wicked, vicious czar,” snarled the poet, and “be damned, be damned, be damned!” Shevchenko joined the Kirillo-Methodians in prison on April 5, 1847, and would thereafter be sent into exile “under the strictest surveillance, without the right to write or paint.”

Prince Alexey Orlov, head of the Third Section, reported to Czar Nicholas I that Shevchenko was to be considered a “harmful and dangerous” writer and “one of the most important criminals” involved in the Kirillo-Methodian affair. “Instead of eternally cherishing reverent feelings for the persons of the august imperial family, who honored him with redemption from serfdom,”

Shevchenko had “composed poems in the Little Russian language of the most outrageous content,” describing “the imaginary bliss of the times of the Cossack Hetmanate, about the happiness of returning to these times, and about the possibility of Ukraine existing as a separate state.” The poet had even “expressed lamentation about the imaginary enslavement and disasters of Ukraine.” These were unacceptable ideas that “could be sown and subsequently take root.” Something had to be done about this troublesome poet and his ilk.

Count Sergey Uvarov agreed. “Russian Slavdom,” he wrote in support of the crackdown on the Kirillo-Methodians, “must in its pure form express unconditional allegiance to orthodoxy and autocracy; everything which passes beyond these bounds represents the admixture of alien concepts, the play of fantasy or a mask behind which the ill-intentioned try to ensnare inexperience and entice dreamers.” To ensure that “alien concepts” — like speaking one’s mother tongue, practicing one’s religious rites, or remembering one’s history — did not take root in Ukraine, czarist authorities would issue the Valuev Circular in 1863 and the Ems Ukase in 1876, the former banning the use of the Ukrainian language in religious and educational texts and the latter prohibiting its use in any printed form. This combination of superciliousness and harsh repression would characterize czarist, Soviet, and post-Soviet dealings with Ukraine for decades to come.

Ukraine’s eventual declaration of independence from the Soviet Union changed nothing, at least according to chauvinistic Russian intellectuals and policymakers who had no intention of allowing their “little brother” to escape their geopolitical orbit. A “gathering of the Russians” would inevitably return the Ukrainians into the Russian fold, alongside the Belarusians and the ethnic Russians of Kazakhstan. The Ukrainians themselves could have no say in the matter, since, as Russian ultranationalist philosopher Aleksandr Dugin maintained, “Ukraine as a state makes no geopolitical sense. It has no particular cultural message of global importance, no geographic uniqueness, no ethnic exceptionality ... the independent existence of Ukraine (especially in its current borders) makes sense only as a *cordon sanitaire*.” Vladislav Surkov, sometimes called “Putin’s Rasputin,” has referred to Ukraine as “a muddle instead of a state ... but there is no nation. There is only a brochure.” Vladimir Putin himself declared that if Ukrainians continued to resist his savage, senseless invasion, “They need to understand that if they keep doing what they are doing ... they will put into question Ukraine’s future as a country,” a threat uttered not long after a February 26, 2022, editorial from the state-backed media organ *RIA Novosti* praised Putin’s decision “not to leave the resolution of the Ukrainian question to future generations,” pointedly employing a phrase redolent of the toxic concept of a *Judenfrage*, or “Jewish question.”

This supremely bigoted condescension has hardly changed since the middle of the nineteenth century, preserved as if in aspic. As it percolates down into the Russian populace, it becomes ever more garbled and vulgar. Hence social media postings by Russian soldiers on the eve of the Ukrainian invasion promising, for example, to fight “for the future of all White Russian children” and to “chase away Khazars from Russian lands,” a bizarre, presumably anti-Semitic reference to the semi-nomadic polity that ruled parts of Ukraine in late antiquity, significant numbers of whom converted to Rabbinic Judaism. This is the sort of ludicrous nonsense one would normally expect to encounter scrawled on the wall of a public toilet, but it is a widespread sentiment in Russian nationalist intellectual circles. And it plays no small part

in fueling an almost ethnocidal animus against the Ukrainian people, first evident in czarist cultural suppression, then in the Stalinist terror famines that killed millions upon millions, and now in Putin's barbarous onslaught, all of which makes a mockery of any talk of brotherly love between "fellow Russians."

These prevailing attitudes have failed to take into account what anthropologists call "schismogenesis," the process by which two social groups drift apart and come to define themselves in opposition to one another. Thus twentieth-century Ukrainian intellectuals like Mykola Khyvolyvi, though constantly under pressure to Russify, instead adopted the slogan *Het' vid Moskvu*, "Away from Moscow," while embracing "psychological Europe." Vyacheslav Lypynsky, meanwhile, realized that "in restoring our traditions of nation, statehood, and Hetmanate we must not pin our hopes on receiving help because of our orientation but, on the contrary, we should anticipate that various outside forces will hinder us in this as much as possible." The restoration of Ukrainian traditions and nationhood was therefore destined to proceed in fits and starts — a brief taste of self-government in 1917, outright independence in 1991, the Orange Revolution of 2004, the Revolution of Dignity in 2014, and the people's war for national survival in 2022 — but proceed it did. And it proceeded notwithstanding the efforts of kleptocrats like Viktor Yanukovich, who pursued closer ties to Moscow while lining his pockets and residing in his billion-dollar Mezhyhirya Residence, that appalling monument to corruption and bad taste. And it proceeded notwithstanding the increasingly deranged efforts of Putin to dominate his Western, and increasingly "psychologically European," neighbor.

As I write this, Russia is attempting a partition of Ukraine every bit as brutal and cynical as the three eighteenth-century partitions of Poland. Victor Hugo described Poland's harsh treatment as the "prototype and model for all those dreadful eliminations of states that have since struck down many a noble nation.... The partition of Poland is a theorem by which all present political crimes are corollaries." Yet Hugo insisted that "rightfulness is everlastingly persistent in its protest against such doings. There is no statute of limitations on the theft of a nation. These great swindles have no future. A nation's identity cannot be removed like the initials of a pocket handkerchief." These are words of consolation in a time of great darkness, when the apartment blocks, churches, maternity hospitals, and bread factories are collapsing under the weight of Russian shelling, and when the cities of Kharkiv, Chernihiv,

Mariupol, Kherson, Hostomel, and Volnovakha have each been awarded the title "Hero City" for their desperate resistance in the face of Russia's invasion.

Czarist authorities worried that Shevchenko and the Kirillo-Methodians had taken the first steps towards Ukrainian independence, sowing ideas that might subsequently take root. Shevchenko admitted as much, and he concluded "Kavkaz" with these immortal words:

*Until then I will sow my thoughts,
My savage despair. Let them grow
And speak with the wind.
The quiet wind from Ukraine
Will carry my thoughts to you with the dew.
With a brotherly tear
You will greet them, my friend,
You will read them quietly ...
And you will remember the mounds, the steppe, the sea, and me.*

The winds from Ukraine are now anything but quiet, the steppes are ablaze, and the Black Sea filled with warships. Yet Shevchenko's message of savage despair and unfaltering hope still rings out with all the clarity of a silver Cossack trumpet. The Ukrainian soldiers and civilians who have defended their country with such tenacity took this message to heart, providing an irrefutable answer to Russia's so-called "Ukrainian question." They are deserving of more than just a sympathetic tear in recompense, as the free world works to ensure that Putin's grotesque swindle has no future, and that there will be no statute of limitations on the Kremlin's attempted theft of a nation. ❀



Bill Wilson



Give War a Chance: The Sequel

With Putin and Biden leading Cold War II, shelve this one with your Stephen King novels.

by Itxu Díaz

I hate that Putin waited until P. J. O'Rourke died to invade Ukraine. The Russian is more afraid of satire than of NATO Security Councils. Without P. J., this war is a bore. All I hear are tedious perorations from experts in geopolitics, a subject that dumps on you the full weight of the combined grimness of politics, dullness of geography, and dreariness of geology.

Television has been filled with ugly talk show hosts spouting rubbish like “Wars, you know how they begin, but not how they end,” “Two do not argue if one does not want to” (oh, yes, I see), and “I prefer an unjust peace to a just war.” This last nonsense is attributed to Cicero; perhaps that is why he said on another occasion, “I will always seek, I will often doubt, and I will distrust myself.” Well done, Cicero. We, too, distrust you.

The thing that bothers most people in a war is mainly the bombs. It's the pacifists that bother me. Granted, anti-aircraft guns do not deliver the kind of musical accompaniment you'd want your wedding band to play. But at least they are predictable. Pacifists, on the other hand, improvise: they can't shut up, they don't flash, so you can't dodge them, and, instead of exploding, they chant slogans that would make a three-year-old blush. I don't understand why we are not already building bunkers to protect ourselves from pacifists.

Every time I come across a pacifist, it makes me want to go to war. The only good thing about this conflict Putin has started is that the far-left pacifists aren't screaming

“no war,” burning containers, and trying to assault conservatives. At the end of the day, Volodymyr Zelensky represents everything the communists hate, but since they can't say that, instead of shouting in the streets, they'd rather stay home uploading pictures of kittens to Twitter.

The main thing in a war is to pick sides. It is important, in the event that things become heated, to know whom to shoot at. And then to pick who's to blame for it all. I guess it's easy for an American to put the blame on Putin, because he's the invader. The bad thing is, with no war here at home, we can't blame anyone for Biden.

I predicted in *The American Spectator* that we would not be seeing any more wars this century because the Instagram generations are not ready to watch streaming videos of corpses. I was wrong. Maybe O'Rourke was right: “I can understand why mankind hasn't given up war. During a war you get to drive tanks through the sides of buildings and shoot foreigners — two things that are usually frowned upon during peacetime.” I admit I did feel an adrenaline rush watching a video of a Ukrainian farmer towing a Russian tank away with his tractor. It was so riveting that I don't even care if it was fake and actually a discarded shot from *Saving Private Ryan*. Stealing a tank with a tractor is a more than good enough reason for having a war. Freedom can be overrated; not so with fun. Sometimes as I write this stuff, I hear the voice of Will Rogers telling me, “Everything is funny, as long as it's happening to somebody else.”



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Anyway, Russia should watch where it damn well treads. The president of the United States does not have Trump's negotiation skills, nor Bush's perseverance, nor even Obama's excuse for doing everything wrong because he was too busy being the first black president in history. Joe Biden is in the White House, and he is quite capable of hitting the nuclear button while trying to turn the lights on to go for a pee in the middle of the night. During the State of the Union he tried to send a heartfelt nod of encouragement to Ukraine and unwittingly sent it to Iran instead: "He'll never gain the hearts and souls of the *Iranian people*." I live in fear that any time now, he will order a strike on Madrid, meaning to bomb Moscow.

I remember when Trump was a threat to the world, according to the Left. Now that he's gone, it's impossible to live in peace. Someone should take a good look at why the Left is always wrong. There's one thing everyone knows, except progressives: never trust someone who worked for the KGB. Not even if she is tall, blonde, and blue-eyed; and this is not the case with Putin. Personally, I would only let myself be fooled by Maria Sharapova.

On the other side we have Zelensky. That a comedian should be standing up to Putin has a ring of poetic justice. Since the end of World War II, I don't think anyone has shown that much courage. Putin boasted of being the fox about to gobble up the chicken in one bite, but Zelensky has turned out to be a bit of a rooster. It seems that the Ukrainian is the brave one, and Putin the clown.

Then there's the fake news problem. Now that we have a thousand news channels, we know less than ever before. The ones I fear most, though, are the army of bored liars. In Spain, we call them *ninis*, which could be translated as *neither-nors* (they neither study nor work). The *ninis* sit around at home all day on the computer, have learned everything they know about foreign policy by getting drunk in sporting events, and everything they know about geography by visiting web pages with underdressed girls. Which is why the *ninis* spend their days in online forums making up nonsense.

My favorite *nini* is MorenoMadurito66, who left the same message recently on a hundred different YouTube channels: "A nuclear missile is heading right now towards Moscow. Countdown 45 minutes." Can

you believe that a lot of angry people sided with the Russians because of that? People were convinced that MorenoMadurito66 was a reliable source. You know what's worse? That those people vote. And so does MorenoMadurito66. Luckily, another *nini* named BlondeSexy21 replied playfully, "MorenoMadurito66, I'm alone at home, waiting for your missile. Is it radioactive?"

The progressive talk show hosts who yesterday were experts in viruses today are experts in geopolitics. They say that those of



us who think that Putin is nothing more than a dirty communist don't know what we're talking about. Good. Maybe Putin doesn't believe in communist economics. But, judging by the bombs he's dropping on Kyiv, he doesn't seem to have reverential respect for private property either. Moreover, he started this war applying the same tactic the Left uses to discredit the Right: calling them Nazis. And then, immediately afterwards, he acted like a Nazi himself.

Putin may not be a communist, but he walks like a communist, talks like a communist, purges his own like a communist, lies like a communist, invades neighboring countries like a communist, threatens freedom like a communist, and makes money by living off his people's labor like a communist. Something about Putin reminds me of BLM. They were only too happy to tear up cities to fight fascism. Those of us who spoke out against their barbarism, to them, were fascists. But the truth is that they smashed up cities, and so

we paid taxes to rebuild them. Putin, too: he announced a "peace mission" in Ukraine and, one minute later, started bombing it.

With Trump, the U.S. stopped being the world's policeman. With Biden, it has become the mother of a teenager. Since Putin has been bad, let's take away his video games. NATO and the EU have finally agreed on something: they don't want to go to war, but they don't want Ukraine to find out. So they have unleashed sanctions that inconvenience the enforcer more than the victim. It all sounds too social-democratic to be an American idea. You can't trust this White House. Biden said there's no need to worry about Putin's threats of nuclear war. So I went down to the store to buy special protective gear for the whole family, and I just started building a bunker in the backyard. If there's one thing I've learned about politics, it's that when Biden says not to worry, it's time to worry.

Long story short, Trump knew how to protect us. Biden does not. We must act with a level head and intelligence against Putin. And these are two things that are nowhere to be seen among today's main Western leaders. Biden may display a certain cool — rigor mortis, rather — but not intelligence. Macron has neither. And Johnson has intelligence, but he's hot-blooded. I'm at a loss when it comes to Trudeau, because I'm not sure cockroaches have brains. I skipped biology class that day.

And then all the others. I'm a cultured guy. I mean, I don't need to know how snails mate to have

a more or less enlightened view of what's going on in the world. And what's going on in the world — in this Trump is right too — is that most of the great nations are in the hands of featherheads. It might be that the only way for us to win this war is for the bad guys to be even dumber.

As I write this, Putin is losing the war, at least the communication war. He lost his head some time ago. Consequently, he has threatened to use nuclear weapons and is heading towards Kyiv with a sixty-kilometer column of armored tanks. Something tells me he hasn't sent his boys there to buy bread. Besides, there is none left. Ukrainians have been lining up for days to buy food. Russians, too, but out of line. Ukrainian propaganda says that Putin has sent them off with food that went out of date in 2015. It must be horrible to invade a country with diarrhea. But that's not the worst of it. Far worse is that they were sent off with an ideology that expired in 1989. ☹️



Paganism Casts Its Spell Over Methodist Seminary

Iliff School of Theology epitomizes the West's spiral into relativism.

by Ellie Gardey

Iliff School of Theology is an official theological school and approved seminary of the United Methodist Church that in 2017 received \$806,763 from the denomination to train future ordinands. The school was founded in 1892 as part of Colorado Seminary (now the University of Denver) by Episcopal Methodists and became its own institution in 1903.

Today, the school shies away from an explicit relationship with Christianity. On the “about” section of Iliff’s website, the school avoids calling itself “Christian” and doesn’t mention Jesus or God. Instead, their webpage reads, “Related to the United Methodist Church, Iliff serves more than 30 denominations and faith traditions.”

Iliff is what happens when a historically Christian institution discovers that it is embarrassed by its Christianity. As teaching Christianity as truth is not an option in that view, Iliff sells itself as a neutral arbiter of transformative debate and dialogue for students of every faith background. Students who step into Iliff Hall and pay \$19,824 each year in pursuit of a master’s degree

can expect to break down everything they ever thought they believed and challenge their every preconception — including the existence of the divinity behind the theology that they ostensibly came to study.

“Iliff is a great place to question and learn about the issues that have faced the world,” the “about” section of the school’s website continues. “At Iliff, we recognize that dialogue is important, no matter how complicated or uncomfortable that may feel.”

Gianna Elvia, who graduated in 2019, says that her professors created a “safe space” for questioning “almost *everything*.” Those professors, she said, pushed her to “re-examine” her beliefs. Another student, Tiffanie Lyon, a Methodist pastor who graduated in 2020, reported that Iliff “challenged” and “enriched” her Christian perspective, which she called a “double blessing.”

Tom Wolfe, the president of Iliff, who has been an ordained Methodist elder for over forty years, said in 2020 that the school’s focus is “engaging the moral discourse in the context of multiple cultural constructions of human meaning.”

Here’s where it becomes stranger than fiction: Iliff takes Wolfe’s mandate seriously. The school gives alternative “constructions of human meaning” the same weight as Christianity.

The school employs as an admissions representative a Norse Heathen named Alexandra Ravenscroft, who is the head clergy, or *Gudellri*, of her pagan organization, Forn Sidr of America. Ravenscroft joined Iliff in 2021. In her job at Iliff, she recruits and develops relationships with potential students.

Ravenscroft says she grew up in a conservative Christian family but at the age of seventeen began experimenting with paganism. First, it was Wicca, which incorporates Celtic mythology and occultist beliefs. Next, it was Roman Polytheism, the religion of ancient Rome, which includes gods such as Jupiter, Juno, Neptune, Minerva, Mars, Venus, Apollo, and so on. She followed that with Tibetan Esotericism while attending “Tibetan-inspired” Naropa University, a Colorado college founded by a Buddhist. It was after those explorations that she settled on Norse Paganism.

Forn Sidr of America says of Ravenscroft:

Alexandra was called to Heathenry unexpectedly by Odin and her Disir (female ancestors) during a ritual, drawn to the Norse worldview for its views on personal sovereignty and identity. Her current practice focuses upon reparative ancestral work, transitional work, death

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work, spirit relationships, landvaettir, space cleansing, banishment, Spacecraft, Seidr, and transformative mysticism. She maintains close relationships with Hel, Freya, her Dísir, and others.

Imagine how much the leadership of a Christian school must hate Christianity to hire a pagan priestess to recruit its students. And she is indeed a priestess: her specialties include “facilitating spiritual rites, ceremonies, and services.”

Ravenscroft is not alone in bringing paganism to Iliff. The school actively promotes other students and alumni who are pagans.

Student David Dashifen Kees, a Wicca priest who identifies as a “nonbinary transperson” and uses “they” and “them” as his pronouns, says in a feature of himself promoted by Iliff and marketed towards potential students that he knew there was a place for him at Iliff after he sat next to someone on a plane who was also a pagan and who had graduated from the school.

Iliff’s mandate to “challenge everything” applies to pagans as well as Christians. Kees says that he was surprised by how much he was challenged in his own faith at Iliff. “Studying the great theological debates of the last few thousand years or discussing the intersection between race and racism and religion,” he said, “has forced me to examine and re-examine parts of myself that I thought were built on firmer spiritual foundations.”

He found himself grappling with “the startling lack of diversity in some Pagan groups”:

As an intentionally Eurocentric religious path, it means that we have always struggled with race and racism, but in the last few years, some of our symbols have been used by white supremacist organizations to promote their work. This only exacerbates the situation. Furthermore, the language and ritual structure of many traditions is explicitly linked to a gender binary, something that has caused strife within the trans community within Wicca.*

Tearing down anything anyone thought they ever believed seems to be the mandate of Iliff. Kees was elected last fall to the student Senate, which has five members. He was not the only pagan. A person who goes by the name Kyndyl Greyland, uses “they/ them” pronouns, and works at “Wyte Ravyn Church, an inclusive Wiccan Church,” was also elected.

Another non-Christian who has graced the halls of Iliff is Kirt Hodges, who graduated in 2018. When he arrived at Iliff, he had a “leadership role” with “an Earth-based spiritual community.” During his time there, however, he began dabbling in Unitarian Universalism before eventually adopting that as his “home” after a class challenged him to consider the importance of “traditional institutionalization.” Unitarian Universalism does not have a particular set of beliefs and encourages its members to develop their own theology.

Some students have made wokeism a religion unto itself.

Hodges says on a webpage oriented to recruiting students that for non-Christians at Iliff, “100% of the time there is a place for you that will ultimately enrich the class.”

Iliff faculty members have even taught classes on paganism. In the spring of 2020, students were given the opportunity to take “Social Justice in Western Earth-Honoring Traditions.” The course description says:

In this course we explore primarily modern, Western earth-honoring traditions as they intersect with social and ecological justice. The course materials and discussions consider the ways these Western earth-honoring traditions, such as goddess spirituality/ Wicca, polytheism/animism, eco-womanism, creation spirituality and deep ecology: 1) provide unique resources for the pursuit of justice and, 2) both critique and reinscribe systems of social inequality and violence. Students will explore the ways in which their own religious, a-religious and spiritual perspectives might more effectively empower them and their communities to create justice with both human and other-than-human communities.

Even the most progressive of Christian students who attend Iliff are surprised by the presence of these non-Christians at their seminary.

“I did not expect the diversity that Iliff has,” said Sam Fisher, a United Methodist pastor who graduated from Iliff with a Master of Divinity degree last year. “One

cannot overestimate what it is like to sit in a Bible class with people who have never read or heard many of the stories.”

While Iliff has many classes that teach explicitly Christian and Methodist subjects, such as “Intro to the History of Christianity,” “New Testament Greek Exegesis,” and “Intro to the New Testament,” it has many others whose religion seems to be twenty-first-century American wokeism. Classes for the spring 2022 semester also include “Exploring Womanist Perspectives: A Practice in Solidarity,” “Earth Activism,” “Justice and Spiritual Care,” “Decolonizing Congregational Leadership,” and “Race, Religion and Constructive Theologies.”

Another class, from 2018, was titled “Queer Spirituality in the Visual Arts” and included topics such as “Queer Tarot,” “Sacred bodies of People of Color,” “Lesbian feminist art,” “Contemporary images of a queer Christ,” and “Use of traditional techniques/imagery to express queer sacred reality.”

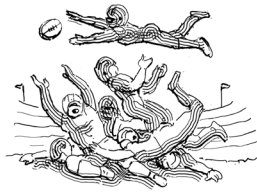
Some students have made wokeism a religion unto itself. Student Isabela Leonor Rosales says in a promotional video for Iliff, “I fell in love with the study of religion because it was so much more than Bible. It was also a different lens to approach social justice issues and in a way that really meshed with my values.”

Iliff’s mandate to question everything is really a cover for relativism. The true dogma of Iliff is the belief that there are no moral truths or absolute facts — including the veracity of Christianity.

But humans wither under relativism. Eventually, a person must grasp onto something — we’re not made to be in a state of constant questioning, as some answers must be settled and some conclusions must be drawn.

At Iliff, many are embracing wokeism as a substitution for Christianity. But for many, wokeism is not enough to satisfy the enduring human need for worship and ritual which has shaped all of known human history. Thus, Iliff and the United Methodist Church’s crisis in confidence in teaching the faith leads people to flail about in even wackier spiritual and political directions.

Similarly, our society cannot survive without a god to turn to and without answers to any of the important questions in life. The infiltration of paganism at a Methodist theological school is just one bizarre example of the dangerous beliefs that are rushing to fill the West’s moral void. We should pray that they don’t soon take hold over us. ☞



Brady Is Back

The GOAT retired — and then unretired — at the top of his game.

by W. James Antle III

And on the fortieth day, Tom Brady unretired. In an NFL off-season that has been defined by change, the legendary quarterback's announcement that he was going to return for his twenty-third season after all might have been the most momentous. But coming back does give Father Time one more shot to beat Brady.

Trailing 27-13 in the fourth quarter of what was already rumored to be the final game of his career, Brady stepped up in the pocket. On just the third play of the drive, the Tampa Bay Buccaneers signal-caller connected on a beautiful fifty-five-yard pass to wide receiver Mike Evans for a touchdown. It was the beginning of a frenetic comeback attempt that fell short when a defensive letdown prevented the Bucs from forcing overtime.

A side-by-side comparison of Brady's throw to the 2007 touchdown pass that gave the New England Patriots an undefeated regular season and this late period touchdown strike was later posted

on social media. At age forty-four, Brady's movement, mechanics, arm strength, and ball placement were almost identical to how he had looked in his prime over fourteen years earlier, despite his being pummeled by the fearsome Los Angeles Rams' pass rush all day.

"Brady made it feel like he would try to achieve everything that was conceivably possible," wrote Rodger Sherman in *The Ringer* after the short-lived retirement announcement. "In the end, he settled for simply achieving more than anybody else in football history ever has."

Had that remained Brady's final game, it would have meant something without precedent in team sports. Football fans would have never seen Tom Brady not look like Tom Brady, even as he played well into his forties. In fact, the least like himself he ever looked was in the beginning of his career, not at the end — so far.

Drew Brees saw his arm strength decline. Ben Roethlisberger at thirty-nine hobbled around on the field like a much older man. Peyton Manning was a shell of his former self at the end, even if he did go out on the high note of a Super Bowl win.

In 2021, Brady led the league in passing yards, completions, attempts, passing first downs, touchdown passes, Pro Football Focus grade, and Defense-adjusted Yards Above Replacement, orchestrating a high-powered offense in early middle age. A powerful case could be made that he should have once again been league MVP.

Brady is among a handful of quarterbacks to have beaten every team in the NFL. He defeated critics who attributed his success to playing in a certain "system" or the air pressure in footballs. In partnership with legendary head coach Bill Belichick, he helped lift a New England sports franchise that had too often been a league bottom dweller into a perennial contender. Then, without Belichick's watchful eye, he went down to Tampa and did it again. He defied expectations for professional athletes as they age.

The system quarterback argument against Brady's greatness was always the silliest. Not only did the offenses in which Brady played consistently morph based on the personnel — two or three tight-end sets, run-heavy formations, the spread offense that lit the NFL on fire in 2007 — but it's a system in which only Brady and his backups

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thrived. No Belichick deputy has ever been able to replicate it. Two number one draft picks who bookended Brady, Drew Bledsoe and Cam Newton, failed in this system. It took a decade and a half for it to produce a second bona fide NFL starter in Jimmy Garoppolo, who seems likely to be dislodged from his position next season. You can make a better case that Joe Montana was a product of Bill Walsh's system.

Over the past decade, a virtual cottage industry of Brady doubters has sprung up trying to either explain away the quarterback's success or predict its imminent end as he fell off the "cliff." This hall of shame includes Max Kellerman, Rob Parker, and a slew of far more obscure figures seeking to rile up talk radio listeners or generate cheap clicks. By the end, Brady had shut them all up.

In an era of parity and participation trophies, envy and mediocrity, many football fans hated Brady for his sustained excellence, often at their preferred teams' expense, and chiseled good looks. But somewhere in the Tampa Bay heat, even this attitude largely mellowed. First grudgingly and then admiringly, Brady's skeptics had to admit they were watching something they were unlikely ever to see again.

While other athletes faded over time, Brady's greatness became almost self-fulfilling as he aged. In seemingly impossible situations, such as being down 28-3 late in the Super Bowl, Brady could will his team to win. When he stepped into the huddle and promised that victory was still possible, his younger teammates, who had grown up watching him achieve the improbable their whole lives, believed him.

Even some of Brady's uncharacteristic defeats show what a competitor he was. In the 2007 Super Bowl defeat that spoiled a perfect season, Brady lofted a seventy-yard pass toward Randy Moss in the final moments of the game that if caught — and it was catchable — would have set them up perfectly to go 19-0. Or the 2016 AFC Championship Game against the Peyton Manning-led Denver Broncos, in which Brady took a pounding from pass rushers. As the announcers were ready to pack up and go home, Brady uncorked an excellent forty-yard pass to tight end Rob Gronkowski on fourth down, followed by a touchdown that came within a two-point conversion of overtime.

Brady is first in Super Bowl titles, career touchdown passes, passing yards, and a whole host of individual accolades that may

never be topped. Now he has a chance to add even more. What about an eighth Super Bowl ring, tying Eli Manning's number of career playoff wins? That would surely be a talking point to (partially) make up for those losses to the Giants.

In playing this upcoming twenty-third season at age forty-five, Brady is once again betting on himself. He can enhance his legacy or come to a more familiar end. The other Manning brother threw for thirty-nine touchdowns in his penultimate season. This plummeted to just nine his last year in the league. Peyton's passing yards similarly collapsed from 4,727 yards in 2014 to 2,249 in 2015. Peyton went out a Super Bowl champion, to be sure. He also tossed nearly twice as many interceptions as touchdowns that final season.

Why did Brady retire in the first place? There have been rumors of a move to the Miami Dolphins, in a front-office role if not as a player, that was blown up by fired

coach Brian Flores' racial discrimination suit against the NFL. There may have been unrealized hopes of joining his boyhood team, the San Francisco 49ers, but the logistics proved too onerous. Perhaps there was a power move in Tampa Bay, whose fortunes depend heavily on his return.

I would like to think the Buccaneers, who seemed destined to be a two-year wonder, made the case to Brady that they could provide him with a championship-worthy supporting cast. With the return of Chris Godwin and the signing of Russell Gage, their coach (and general manager) would not turn into a pumpkin. Right on cue, eighteen days after Brady came out of retirement, head coach Bruce Arians — with whom there were reports of tensions last season — entered it, stepping into a front-office role with the team.

That might have been all it took to get Brady to suit up and to seize his favorite Super Bowl ring: the next one. 🍂



Peter Green



Teenage Dream

Why old pop music has staying power.

by Nic Rowan

I live across the street from a high school, and every weekend I get an earful of whatever music is popular among the young and reckless. For about a year, it was nothing (thank you, Gov. Northam), but ever since Virginia mandated that students go back to school, I've been catching snippets of tunes that are oddly familiar.

I should explain. Many of the kids in my neighborhood drive Jeep Wranglers, which happens to be the same car I drove in high school. These cars come equipped with powerful subwoofers and surround sound speakers that, when blasted at full volume, make you feel immortal. And whether you want to or not, you share that awe-inspiring noise with everyone around you. Even when the Wrangler's canvas cover is up, every nearby driver — and people sitting quietly in their homes — can hear your racket. When I was seventeen, that was usually Taylor Swift, Kanye West, or Death Grips. For the kids these days, it seems, not much has changed.

The favorites are pre-1989 Taylor Swift, Kanye West before he went wobbly with *Yeezus*, and Katy Perry, who, as far as I can tell, hasn't put out anything memorable since *Teenage Dream*. I can't tell you how many times I've heard pubescent voices belting out the chorus to "We Are Never Getting Back Together" or "I Knew You Were Trouble." A lot of this music comes from the era of what I call the Obama Soundtrack, which was designed basically to be pleasant, a bit lively, and, on the whole, bland and unobjectionable.

Sometimes, when I'm feeling wistful, I put on The National or Vampire Weekend and wallow in the days of the Beer Summit and the Tan Suit. I've found plenty of bars both in the Washington, D.C., area and farther afield whose



owners want to keep me in this mood forever. A favorite spot in South Bend, Indiana, plays mostly LCD Soundsystem: the hits, the deep cuts, sometimes that live album they recorded at Madison Square Garden. The feeling that place conjures up is the Great Recession in *saecula saeculorum*. When you're there, you don't have to leave that headspace, not if you don't want to.

That's actually how most music listening works these days. For every Matt Berninger fan such as myself, there's another guy who is filling his dead air with Thom Yorke or Lou Reed or Patti Smith. It's a comfortable way of listening, and there's no central arbiter of popular music pressuring us to act differently. Yes, the Billboard Top 40 chart still exists, but it isn't what determines popularity for new songs. Instead, when songs do blow up, it's on TikTok or Instagram or some other app.

The high schoolers in my neighborhood are keyed in on the hits of ten years ago most likely because they heard them in a viral video. Or, with some of the most recognizable pop mainstays, they like an old song simply because it has staying power. Probably the starkest example of these phenomena occurred in 2020 when a TikTok video of a guy on a skateboard made Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams," which was a smash hit in 1977, a smash hit all over again, hitting the top ten more than forty years after it topped the charts the first time. The same thing happened to Steely Dan's "Dirty Work," which was never one of the band's

signature songs. But it had the strange luck to be used in a scene from *The Sopranos*, itself a cultural relic at this point, which is making a comeback among discerning Zoomers. "Dirty Work" is now Steely Dan's most frequently downloaded song on Spotify and, to anyone under the age of fifty, their most recognizable track.

Old songs currently represent about 70 percent of the music market, according to MRC Data, a music analytics firm. Many people argue that this is bad not only for the industry but also for the creativity of young people, who, up until recently, were always on the cutting edge of pop music. The music critic Ted Gioia in a recent essay for the *Atlantic* argues that a seeming disinterest in exploring new forms of pop is mostly the fault of record executives, who have "lost their faith in the redemptive and life-changing power of new music." Perhaps the industry will collapse, he says, and new music will arise in the most unexpected place and sweep the airwaves once again.

I'm sure he's right. But I'm also not concerned about a long wait. Nearly fifteen years passed between Mozart's death and the moment when Beethoven's *Eroica* completely changed the state of music. We're never stuck on one thing forever. We're just in between eras. The high schoolers in my neighborhood listen to the hits of my youth because, like me, they're waiting for a new — doubtless very different — Kanye West. ❧

Nic Rowan is managing editor of *the Lamp*.

Free to Choose: The Rise of Non-Alcoholic Booze

More drinking options is a trend worth raising your glass to.

by C. Jarrett Dieterle

When you walk into a high-end cocktail bar these days, there's a good chance you'll notice something a little different. Many of these mixology havens are now offering drinks that seem to be missing a key ingredient: alcohol.

This is not a cruel practical joke but rather a conscious decision, as Americans of all ideologies, places, and ages are increasingly interested in drinking fancy concoctions sans the booze. While some longtime drinkers like to joke good-heartedly about the seeming contradiction of a non-alcoholic cocktail or beer, the rise of no-alcohol by volume (ABV) drinks is best understood as a prime example of why free markets work better than government coercion.

According to Nielsen, non-alcoholic beverage sales have risen by 33 percent in recent years, as popular no-ABV brands like Seedlip and Athletic Brewing Company make waves. At the same time, sophisticated no- and low-ABV cocktail books have started popping up on bookstore shelves, including Julia Bainbridge's *Good Drinks* and Derek Brown's just-released *Mindful Mixology*.

Dropping the name "mocktails" — and leaving behind the cloying and sophomoric non-alcoholic options of yesteryear — Bainbridge and Brown are at the vanguard of this new trend. Some have referred to this renewed interest in non-alcoholic drinks as the "sober-curious" movement, which itself may be a bit of a misnomer since many of the folks who choose to drink no-ABV beverages also frequently imbibe boozy drinks as well.

As Bainbridge and Brown note, there are many reasons someone may choose not to drink in certain settings, including everything from mental health issues or personal choice to pregnancy or specialized diets. Or, as Brown quipped in a *Washington Post* interview, because "they're running a marathon the next morning."

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It would also be a misconception to characterize the no- and low-ABV movement as anti-alcohol — Brown opts for the term "mindful drinking." Brown, who notes that he's "not averse to alcohol" but rather "immersed in it" by function of his career as a bartender, simply wants consumers to have options: "The important thing is that they have choices."



This gets at the most striking — and promising — feature of the modern non-alcoholic movement: It's premised on choice, not force. Nearly one hundred years ago, in response to concerns over alcohol, many Americans pursued a different option. They decided to ban alcohol entirely, first at the state and local level and eventually nationally with the onset of Prohibition.

The inevitable result was the rise of a prolific black market abetted by criminal syndicates. But even many well-meaning Americans suddenly were turned into criminals if they so much as used their homemade cider press to ferment apples from the family orchard. The Prohibition experiment backfired, of course, underscoring the folly of using government power to outlaw an activity that people have engaged in for generations.

It may be tempting to toss Prohibition into the "lesson learned" bin of history and

celebrate the fact that it will never happen again. Unfortunately, in contrast to the sober-curious or mindful drinking movement, recent years have also seen an escalation in so-called neo-Prohibitionist sentiments.

Publications like *Vox* have published thinkpieces arguing that Prohibition was actually good, or at least misunderstood, and called for higher alcohol taxes as a way to make alcohol less available. At the same time, entities like the European branch of the World Health Organization have suggested that "there is no safe level for drinking alcohol." The United Kingdom's chief medical officer echoed this "no safe level" sentiment in 2016 after releasing new strict drinking guidelines for Brits — only to later be caught by the media enjoying wine with her family.

As booze aficionado Kevin Kosar has put it, "Full-on prohibition of the sort we had a century ago is unlikely, but a slow, creeping version is all too possible. First, government declares something to be dangerous; then it ratchets up the taxes on it, reduces access to it via regulations, and demonizes its consumers."

Rather than marching down the road of ever more government restrictions, rules, and prohibitions, drinkers and non-drinkers alike should realize that there is a better alternative right in front of us. In response to increased consumer interest in no- and low-ABV beverages, our dynamic marketplace has responded by providing more non-alcoholic options than ever.

These options can help everyone from those struggling with addiction to those who simply choose to forgo booze one night in order to catch an early-morning flight the next day. But the key is choice. More than ever, consumers can choose, based on their own priorities and needs, what works for them when it comes to drinking.

Whatever people decide to put in their glasses, we should all be able to cheers to that. 🍷

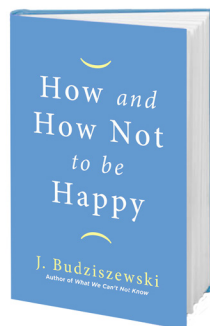
What Is Happiness Good For?

by J. Budziszewski

An excerpt from
How and How Not to Be Happy
By J. Budziszewski

Regnery Gateway, 256 pages, \$30

"For I ask all men whether they would prefer to have joy in truth or in falsehood. They hesitate no more in preferring the truth than in wishing for happiness itself." —St. Augustine



I am about to argue that consummate happiness must lie in union with God — in fact, that happiness lies in the mind's gaze upon Him, in His own being, in what He is in Himself.

Unacceptable! Isn't that what Christians say? If the argument converged on a Sufi or a Buddhist conclusion, perhaps no one would object. These days, Christianity arouses protests. Notice, though, that even though this essay will arrive at something that Christians believe, it will make no use of Christianity to get there. So I promise those who suffer visceral responses to the claims of faith that for now, at least, their viscera are safe. I don't promise not to endanger their viscera later.

The argument can be stated in a few sentences, and the only reason for expanding them is to respond to a few inevitable objections. Not to all possible objections, of course. New objections can always be raised to any argument whatsoever; new objections can be raised to any of the replies to the objections. The inability to think of still more

objections may prove that the objector lacks imagination, but it is not a reasonable test of an argument's cogency. There is no escape from the need to exercise judgment.

Let's get started, then. I've previously argued that happiness is an activity. What activity is it? The word activity is related to the word actualize, and this is no accident. An activity brings into actuality some power or potentiality that would otherwise be only latent. Eating actualizes or fulfills the nutritive power; breathing actualizes or fulfills the respiratory power. We don't just happen to have these powers; we have them for the sake of their actualization. Each of them is for something. So to ask, "In what activity does happiness lie?" amounts to asking, "Of what power or powers is happiness the actualization or fulfillment?"

The very idea that natural powers may have purposes that can be attained, fulfilled, or actualized is deeply objectionable to some people. In fact, denial of natural purposes is pretty well drummed into us today, because our education is so steeped in materialism. It is supposed to be unscientific to believe in natural purposes. In order to explain why this objection is wrong, let me address its three main variations.

One version of the objection is that attributing natural purposes to things

is a form of animism, like attributing deliberation and will to a rock, a river, or the wind. But I am not doing anything of that sort. To say that the purpose of the heart is to pump blood is not to make the ridiculous claim that the heart has a will of its own and that its intention is to keep the blood moving; it is merely to say that the heart both accomplishes something and exists to accomplish it. Unlike a deliberating mind, the heart is not thinking about the matter. It only acts as though it were. We use the same word for purposes in minds and for purposes in things because they are analogous, not because they are identical.

Another version of the objection is that although thinking of inanimate things as having purposes may once have led to interesting discoveries, science has gotten beyond all that now. But science has not, in fact, gotten beyond all that. Fields as diverse as optics and quantum mechanics make extensive use of what physicists and mathematicians call "variational principles," according to which systems tend to behave in such ways as to minimize, maximize, or hold constant certain quantities. For example, a beam of light passing through a prism seeks the path that minimizes the optical distance, which is the physical distance multiplied by the angle of refraction. Materialists dislike saying that the light "seeks" the path of least optical distance, because the term "seeks" is suggestive of a mind with a will. To avoid that suggestion, they prefer to say that the prism "makes" the light bend. It is hard to see what they gain by this. If we are not allowed to use language that might remind us of minds, then the language of seeking something and the language of making something do something ought to be equally suspect! Let's just say that light beams, prisms, and other things act as though they had minds even though they don't, and let it go at that.

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Still another version of the argument is not so much materialistic as skeptical; it says not that there aren't any natural purposes, but that we can't know them, because only the maker of something knows what it is for. I know the purposes of my own works, such as the house that I've built, because I know my own mind. I don't know the purposes of natural things, such as eyes, because the Creator made them, and how can I read His mind? But I don't need to read the divine mind to know what eyes are for. I only need to know (1) that eyes see, and (2) that I can't even explain why I have eyes in the first place without referring to this fact. The reason for the existence of eyes is to enable me to see.

We were asking, "Of what power or powers is happiness the fulfillment or actualization?" Presumably it would be our highest powers. Why? Because those are the ones that define us. I am most myself, most in tune with my nature, not when I am employing the lower powers that I share with the plants and beasts, such as eating, growing, or receiving sense impressions, but when I am employing the higher powers that distinguish me from them, such as deliberating about what to do or trying to ascertain the truth about something. This is why, even though both our higher and lower powers are true aspects of us, we don't compliment ourselves for self-command when our minds obey our passions, but when our passions cooperate with our minds. And this is why, even though we are more than naked minds, we view the decisions and conclusions of our minds as the decisions and conclusions of our whole selves. The man who is ruled by his feelings and appetites is in bondage.

Against this view, three arguments are offered: (1) reason is not the highest power because it cannot rule the passions; (2) reason is not the highest power because it should not rule the passions; and (3) it doesn't matter which element of us rules, because nature does not know any "higher" or "lower." Let us consider these in turn.

A proponent of the first objection is David Hume, who called reason "the slave of the passions" and said that it could never pretend to any other function than "to serve and obey them." But as we also saw there, Hume's argument is circular: he first defined all impulses that affect the will as passions and then said that only passions can affect the will. The supposed tyranny of feelings is

certainly convenient; it provides us with an excuse for doing whatever we want. When challenged about our choices, we need only say, "I can't help how I feel, and I feel I have no choice." But it is a fallacy.

The second objection — not that the passions inevitably do rule but that they should — had an apostle in the poet John Keats: "O for a life of sensations rather than of thoughts!" And we all know how the galaxy was saved when Luke Skywalker finally followed the advice of Obi-Wan Kenobi, "Luke! Trust your feelings!" Heaven forbid that he should have trusted his judgment. This idea that the feelings

The man who is ruled by his feelings and appetites is in bondage.

should rule has numerous variations, each proposing a different kind of feeling as the ruler. Moralists propose moral feelings; religious folk of the emotional sort propose religious feelings; hedonists, pleasant feelings; aesthetes, beautiful feelings; Romantics, ecstatic feelings; and transgressivists, morbid or forbidden feelings — transgressivism being the point to which all Romantics come if they follow the Romantic path to the end, for if the feeling that you crave comes from crossing normal boundaries, then eventually you will have to cross the boundaries of normal feeling. But the problem is the same in each case: the passions that are nominated as rulers are themselves in need of rule. So the second objection is mistaken too.

The third objection was that it doesn't matter which element of us rules, because nature doesn't know any "higher" or "lower" — that such distinctions are imposed upon nature from outside. But are they? Plants have only such powers as growing and absorbing nutrition. Beasts have these but also additional ones, for example the power of perceiving things through their senses. Human beings rise still higher, for we have rational powers. Not only can we perceive things through our senses, but we can grasp universals — for example, we can know not just a good taste, but the idea of good taste, and in fact the idea of good in general. Moreover, not only can we seek things

according to instinct, but we can deliberate. So the sensitive powers rank above the vegetative powers, but the rational powers are still higher. It makes no more sense to deny the reality of higher and lower powers than of higher and lower mountains.

Consider too that plants seek their ends automatically, without even knowing what they are seeking. Animals "know" their ends in the sense that they pursue them, but they do not know them in a reflective sense, for they do not even grasp the concept of an end. We not only pursue our ends but also know that they are ends — we experience them not just as felt impulses but as meanings, as rational purposes, as reasons for doing what we do. Rationality is more, much more, than being clever or knowing many things. One can even imagine a beast that is cleverer than we are, knows far more than we do, and can do many more things than we can — yet is not rational. For rationality takes the lower powers up into reason, brings them into partnership with reason, imbues them with sense and context. We seek not bare life, but a human life, which is a considered life. We not only respond to our inclinations, but regulate them, wonder about them, and inquire into them, just as we wonder about all things. Until we find their meaning — until we are in accord with this meaning through and through — we cannot be at rest.

Suppose, then, we agree that happiness must lie in an activity of our highest power, and that our highest power is reason. Is our work done? No, there is one step more, because our fulfillment would have to lie in the highest activity of our highest power, and reason has more than one activity. One of its activities is practical: we deliberate about and organize our lives. The other is contemplative: we also seek and reflect upon the truth. Which of these two is highest?

Practical reasoning may seem highest because, as we have seen, even the fragmentary and imperfect happiness of this life depends on the exercise of the virtues, and the virtue of prudence, or practical wisdom, is the one that sets all the other virtues in proper order.

That is nothing to snort at! But on closer examination, practical reason couldn't be reason's highest activity, for doing presupposes knowing. Even the most hard-headed person wants to organize his life in accordance with what is really true. Don't we in fact try to do so, even if we aren't

always thinking about it, and even if our assumptions about the truth are wrong? If someone were to become convinced that his whole life had been based on a delusion, he would fall into despondency. That is the point of the quotation from Augustine that I placed as the epigraph to this essay, for even though we profoundly desire joy, we are no more hesitant to prefer truth than we are to desire joy itself. Ignorance may produce the illusion of bliss, but ignorance is not bliss. Leave that to the cows and the sheep. We are men and women.

The curious thing about us is that we desire knowledge not just to guide our deliberation but also for its own sake. And it is more than curious, isn't it? In this desire lies much of the nobility of the human creature. "All men by nature desire to know," writes Aristotle. "An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses," he explains, "for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things."

Even shabby tabloid journalism exploits our desire to know truth. The *National Enquirer* catapulted itself to greater prominence in the 1980s by means of the advertising slogan, "Enquiring minds want to know." You would think that the tabloid's marketing experts had read Aristotle. More likely they were capitalizing on the obvious.

But just as our highest rational power is directed to knowing, not just doing, so some objects of knowledge are higher than others. Wouldn't it be the case, then, that the highest activity of our highest power would lie not in knowing the most trivial and base objects of knowledge, but its very highest and noblest objects — especially the truth about God? For what activity of our minds could be higher

than to see God — to know Him as He is in Himself?

At this point another objection might be proposed, for it may seem implausible that happiness lies in any kind of knowledge if we understand knowledge as the grasping of abstractions, the way an intellectual knows the proof of a theorem — which does, by the way, seem to be how the thinker Aristotle viewed the happiness of contemplation. Two different responses to this objection are possible.

We seek not bare life, but a human life, which is a considered life.

One response is that it underestimates the joy that those capable of understanding abstractions do take in grasping them, but I admit that most of us find this response unconvincing. It would make happiness very much the business of an intellectual elite, such as mathematicians or philosophers, and there are an awful lot of unhappy mathematicians and philosophers, aren't there?

The other response is more compelling. When we say that happiness is a kind of knowledge, we should be thinking not so much of mathematicians or philosophers, but of lovers. The happiness of knowing God would not be the happiness the intellectual has in knowing a theorem or abstraction, but rather the kind of happiness the lover has in knowing the beloved. But in this case, the knowledge would be perfect and all-consuming, and the beloved would be the infinitely lovable — the Divine Source of all good and beauty, the Origin of love itself. The vision of God would seize and consume us. And this response seems satisfying.

Even now I am not yet making a faith claim. The argument to this point is simply reasonable.

For consider: There *has to be* a First Cause, a First Reason. Otherwise we cannot explain why there is anything else. The village atheist who says, "Oh, yeah? If God created everything, who created God?" merely betrays his misunderstanding of the argument. Things that *don't have to be*, contingent beings, require causes; things that *have to be*, necessary beings, do not require causes. God is not a thing among others to be explained. He is that without which nothing is explainable. To reject Him, then, is to say that there don't have to be reasons for things, that, in the end, nothing has to make sense.

Pagan mythology was more or less explicit about nothing making sense. It didn't picture the First Reason creating all things from nothing and then calling all things back to Himself; rather it pictured the gods themselves inexplicably coming from the void. Since everything was held up by nothing, ultimately nothing was held up at all. To believe in the First Reason is the very opposite of believing in that kind of god; this sort of God is the very precondition of things making sense.

And let us be very clear: No one who believes that things don't have to make sense has any business saying that anything at all is true or false, or that anything does or does not exist. For how would he know? Do not reproach me with chaos theory. What mathematicians call chaos is not things not making sense, or not possessing order. Rather it has to do with the limits of prediction in certain kinds of highly ordered systems. The study of such systems does not require the abandonment of reason.

And so we arrive at the conclusion that the beginning of this essay foreshadowed. There is no higher activity than seeing God, knowing Him as the lover knows the beloved, face to face. ❧

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Holding Fast to Good Things

Roger Scruton's essays remind us what it means to be conservative at heart.

by Matthew Walther

Against the Tide: The Best of Roger Scruton's Columns, Commentaries, and Criticism
Edited by Mark Dooley

Bloomsbury Continuum, 256 pages, \$28

Nearly everything in this collection originally appeared in a newspaper or a magazine, among these the one you are holding in your hands. From 2006 to 2012, the philosopher Sir Roger Scruton contributed a monthly column to *The American Spectator*. These essays represented a fraction of his total journalistic output, and even the prodigious volume of Scruton's occasional writings seems unimpressive set beside the extraordinary number of books he wrote — by my count, fifty-six.

Of these, everyone will have his favorite. While I very much admire Scruton's work on Wagner, especially the volume on *Parsifal* (with which it is easy to imagine the present pope finding himself very much in sympathy), I think the book most likely to find a wide and appreciative readership in the years to come is the monograph on beauty from 2010, of which I cherish my first edition (with an error on the back of the dust jacket dating the cover painting by Botticelli to *circa* 1840). *On Beauty* would later be reprinted in Oxford University Press's "Very Short Introduction" series, to which Scruton also contributed perhaps the only lucid thing on Kant ever written by a native English speaker. My copy of the latter, picked up some years ago from a second-hand bookstore in Washington, D.C., was the most thoroughly annotated volume I have ever owned, with entire pages colored in blue highlighter by some no doubt grateful undergraduate.

In addition to being rather more prolific than most philosophers, Scruton lived a somewhat more eventful life. Thousands of anti-communists inveighed against the Soviet menace from the pages of journals and well-remunerated think tank positions; Scruton, whose opposition to communism was philosophical and (as he would later come to understand) religious rather than pecuniary,



actually went underground, risking his life to teach Czech dissidents in the 1980s. In the same decade, he sacrificed what he had expected to be a rather comfortable position as a lecturer in philosophy at Birkbeck, University of London, to found the *Salisbury Review*, a magazine whose delightfully quixotic *raison d'être* was arguing that Margaret Thatcher's Conservative governments were not meaningfully conservative. He would continue to criticize politicians in both parties for the remainder of his life, even after finding himself advising prime ministers and receiving a knighthood.

Meanwhile, Scruton continued to scribble for the press, popular and highbrow, on any number of subjects, a stream that continued more or less unabated until his death in January 2020. Most of these pieces were one-offs solicited by editors. In *Against the Tide*, we see him arguing against teachers' strikes and expressing his disappointment with the post-Cold War governments in Eastern Europe, where he found to his chagrin that everyone in power claimed to have been a dissident; predicting with almost terrifying accuracy both the policy and ultimate legacy of Anthony Blair's government at a time when this charlatan was beloved by conservatives on this side of the Atlantic; and lamenting the fact that in the United States "conservative journals spring up constantly, find large and sympathetic readerships and frequently attract funding from foundations and business."

This last theme, the nature and definition of "conservatism," was one to which Scruton often returned — perhaps too frequently. But the basic premise of his writings on this subject — that conservatives could neither indulge themselves with "fantasies of a life outside civilization" nor gainsay the philistine populism of their own electoral base — remains as

relevant now as it was in the 1980s. It was for this reason that he found himself thoroughly unimpressed by Donald Trump, whom he dismissed as "a product of the cultural decline that is rapidly consigning our artistic and philosophical heritage to oblivion." For Scruton, our forty-fifth president was above all "a creation of social media" who had "lost the sense that there is a civilization out there that stands above his deals and his tweets in a posture of disinterested judgement."

Scruton's measured assessments of Trump, Thatcher, and others did not lead him to strike any of the tedious poses expected of so many other conservatives who abandon the party whip. Indeed, Scruton was a lifelong defender of many of the Right's least fashionable causes long after they had been abandoned by politicians. Chief among these is tobacco. With the possible exceptions of Christopher Hitchens and Auberon Waugh (who once published a pamphlet on the dangers of second-hand "hamburger fumes"), the rights of smokers found no greater champion in my lifetime than Scruton.

One recurring (and, one gathers, both handsomely paid and enjoyable for its own sake) feature was his column on wine for the *New Statesman*, the venerable liberal English weekly, which he wrote from 2001 to 2009.

Probably no anecdote better illustrates the cultural decline that Scruton spent his life decrying than his own treatment by the snottish young editorial staff of that once-esteemed periodical. In 2019, George Eaton, then an assistant editor at the *Statesman*, published what were ostensibly unedited extracts from an interview with Scruton. This "series of outrageous remarks," as they were described, were roundly criticized on social media, and within hours of their appearance it was announced that Scruton would be removed from his (naturally) unpaid position as an adviser to a government commission on public architecture. Eaton immediately took to Instagram, where he captioned a rather vulgar picture of himself enjoying a bottle of champagne with the following caption: "The feeling when you get right-wing racist and homophobic Roger Scruton sacked as a Tory government adviser."

Not long afterward it came to light that Eaton's seemingly faithful transcription of

Matthew Walther is editor of the Lamp, a Catholic literary journal.



Scruton's remarks had been at best dubious, and at worst libelous. Every ellipsis or reporter-supplied full stop concealed a qualification or even an outright dismissal of the bigoted position or conspiracy theory being imputed to Scruton.

I mention all of this not because it is especially remarkable as a piece of journalistic malfaisance or because anyone (least of all Scruton himself) would have placed it very highly among the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind, but rather because it illustrates just how steeply our literary culture has declined even in the last decade. The twenty- and thirty-somethings who have recently come into their own in journalism here and in Britain are not only totally unscrupulous; they find it incomprehensible that anyone who does not share their views could be interested in high culture or, indeed, anything else of value.

What a shame. For it was in these *New Statesman* columns (many of which were collected in 2009 as *I Drink Therefore I Am*) that we see what distinguished Scruton from his journalistic peers: the philosophic toughness beneath the surface of good humor and grace whose real antecedent is

the essays of Hilaire Belloc and George Bernard Shaw in the golden age of Edwardian periodicals. It is difficult to think of any of Scruton's contemporaries who could have pulled off anything like "Put a Cork In It," his broadside against the screw-top bottle:

To the native observer, the cork is there to keep the wine in the bottle and the air out of it, with the result that 5 percent of vintage wines are 'corked'—meaning spoiled by a defective stopper. To such an observer, the screwtop is the answer. I would respectfully retort that the risk of corking is essential to the ritual. The drinking of precious wine is preceded by an elaborate process of preparation, which has much in common with the ablutions that preceded ancient religious sacrifices. The bottle is retrieved from some secret place where the gods have kept it guarded; it is brought reverentially to the table, dusted off and uncorked with a slow and graceful movement while the guests watch in awed silence.

In addition to journalism, *Against the Tide* contains a great deal of unpublished autobiographical material, apparently extracts from a diary. Here we are reminded that, among many other things, Scruton was a keen observer of American life. Long before it had occurred to me, he had zeroed in on what I expect will very soon become yet another terminal crisis: the disappearance of the baby boomers, who, whatever their faults, were at least public-spirited enough to give their time and money to unglamorous causes and activities such as municipal government and officiating in youth sports leagues. "The wealth and security of America are no more durable than the public spirit of its people," he warned, and "if ever one day Americans ceased to volunteer for things, the show would be suddenly over."

The present volume has been ably edited by Mark Dooley, who had a difficult task in choosing representative selections from a half-century of material. (It was nice to be reminded that in 1971, when he was virtually unknown in the English-speaking world, Michel Foucault was already being politely dismissed by Scruton in the *Spectator*.) If I were to venture a criticism, it would be that in 2022, many of the polemics directed at the so-called "New Atheists" now seem more dated than articles from decades earlier; so far from being the voice of the zeitgeist, Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and others increasingly find themselves uneasy allies of religious conservatives on questions related to gender ideology. Otherwise, my only other complaint is that for no stated reason the type in the index is nearly three times larger than in the main body of the text.

But it would be churlish to end upon such a note. Instead I will only say that about twelve years ago, I purchased my very first copy of *The American Spectator* from a newsstand. I enjoyed most of what I read, but far and away the best thing was an essay by Scruton from the same series I mentioned above, this one on Wagner's *Ring* cycle. Some years later, as an employee of the magazine in question, I was invited to a dinner at which Scruton would be speaking and a subsequent private reception. I cannot recall what prevented me from attending, but whatever it was it cannot have been more valuable or life-enhancing than I now realize an evening spent in his company would have proven. The regret I feel knowing that I shall never have the chance to enjoy his conversation is as good a reminder as any that Scruton was right. Long before we imagine, those persons, places, and things that are good and to which we must hold fast will be gone, and we will find ourselves mourning the disappearance of something we never knew. ❧

Count Communist

A young adult novel about the downfall of Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceaușescu.

by Hannah Rowan

I Must Betray You

By Ruta Sepetys

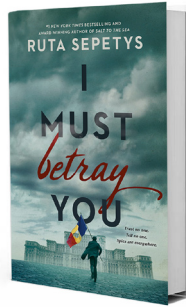
Philomel Books, 336 pages, \$19

Ruta Sepetys writes about a different kind of vampire. The young adult novelist's new book, *I Must Betray You*, is set in Romania, an Eastern European country whose most famous villain is Count Dracula. But according to Sepetys, that title rightfully belongs not to the fictional monster who made famous the country's central region of Transylvania, but to its last communist dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu.

Thanks to Ceaușescu, the end of communism in Romania was particularly bloody. After the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the communist regimes united by the Warsaw Pact began to topple, most of them peacefully. But "Draculescu" kept his fangs sunk in Bucharest until protests in the western city of Timișoara spread throughout the country and tore away what Sepetys calls the "last flap of the Iron Curtain." Thousands were killed and more injured, and Ceaușescu and his wife, Elena, fled and were soon executed.

So Romania makes a particularly dramatic setting for the classic story of communist dissidents: The state preys on a people kept in poverty and fear, sucking them dry to feed its own dysfunction, and amid all this material and psychological warfare, it takes a hero to stand up and remind his fellow captives of the existence and possibility of freedom.

This is a common enough plot for Cold War histories and essays, but perhaps not for young adult fiction, which prefers Nazis as the more marketable villains when it bothers with historical fiction at all. And Sepetys, too, began her career as a novelist with World War II. In 2011's *Between Shades of Gray*, she wrote about Lithuanian refugees sent to Siberian labor



camp after Stalin's invasion in 1941. The repression and mass slaughter of the Baltic people at the outset of the war was relatively unknown, and after the hearing stories of Lithuanian survivors during a visit to relatives, Sepetys found her genre and mission: historical fiction and historical memory.

On her website, Sepetys calls herself a "Seeker of Lost Stories," and the *New York Times* calls her the "champion" of "whole populations lost in the cracks of history."

If this sounds like a softie redefinition of historical fiction, fine. But Sepetys has found a winning formula in inspiring narratives of individual triumph over state-perpetrated evils — usually with a young romance to keep things sweet and a family member or two to rescue to keep everything wholesome. She does her homework, with bibliographies with further reading for those whose curiosity is piqued. But she moves at an admirable clip, and short chapters keep the pages turning.

And it works. My sister, a middle-school English teacher, told me one of her students, the kind of boy who crafts his cool-kid persona around statements like "Reading is lame," stayed after class to thank her for assigning Sepetys's *Salt to the Sea* last year.

That 2016 novel offered up similar fare to *Between Shades of Gray*, retelling the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, a German ship attacked by a Soviet submarine during the 1945 evacuation of East Prussia — the world's largest maritime tragedy, with more than six times the casualties of the *Titanic*, and one of its most overlooked.

And 2019's *The Fountains of Silence* managed to situate a young Texan photographer's *Bildungsroman*, complete

with a trans-Atlantic love story, amid his discovery of thousands of forced adoptions of mostly Basque children into more "acceptable" families in Franco's Spain.

Now *I Must Betray You*'s protagonist, Cristian Florescu, a high school student and budding writer, takes on the real-life vampire of Romania. Cristian instinctively and viscerally despises "Beloved Leader" Ceaușescu, "Heroine Mother" Elena, and the surveillance state under which he was raised. In 1980s Bucharest, where the Ceaușescu live in splendor while starving dogs attack children on the street, families use Kent cigarettes as currency, and Party spies conscript teenagers to narc on their friends and neighbors, this makes sense.

Cristian, too, turns traitor, spying on an American friend to try to win scarce medical treatment for his grandfather. But the deal falls through; he rebels; he writes about it; Ceaușescu loses power; and you can guess whether or not Cristian gets the girl. It's no *Gulag Archipelago*, but *I Must Betray You* manages to be earnest while entertaining and informative while inspiring.

Sepetys's success is heartening for those who watch with trepidation every time the teenagers in their lives go near the young adult section of the bookstore. Since its rise as a distinct market in the 1960s, young adult fiction has too often preyed on the weaknesses of its audience. Recent teen-targeted hits in genres like science fiction (the murder theater of *The Hunger Games*), the social novel (the appalling suicide ideation of *13 Reasons Why*, if so grotesque a treatment of that subject can be called "social"), and fantasy (the kiddie porn of *Twilight*) induce shudders.

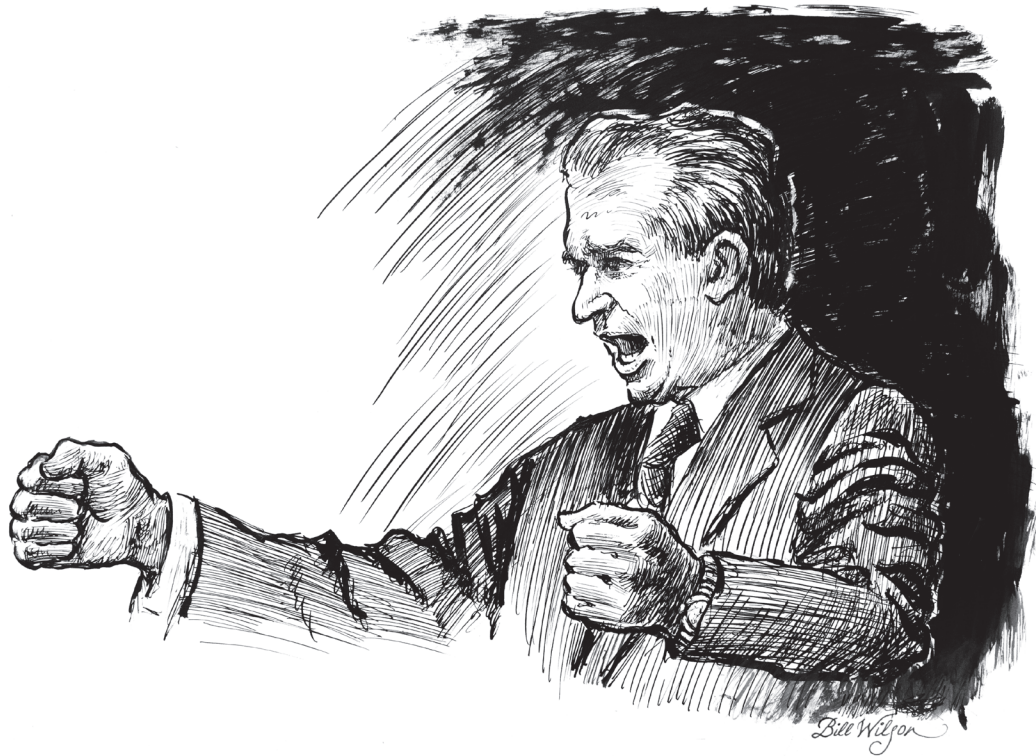
Psychologically, these books are no better than the social media destroying young people's mental health (and at least the Instagram algorithm occasionally offers up a cute kitten to lower one's blood pressure). They suck vampirically at their readers' insecurities and immature desires. They validate dysfunctional relationships and self-images. The narcissism they foster makes them addictive.

Hannah Rowan is managing editor of *The American Spectator*.

So Sepetys's brand of young adult fiction stands out simply for inviting readers to one of the fundamental experiences of literature: curiosity about minds and worlds outside one's own. This should be determined not by the stage of development of one's prefrontal cortex or the issues auto-suggested by predatory authors and algorithms, but by historical importance and humane interest.

This is a low bar to clear. But it may be why Sepetys closes *I Must Betray You* with an author's note containing her credo — "Historical fiction allows us to explore underrepresented stories" — and her call to arms to her young readers. "Please share the history with someone," she writes. "You are the stewards of history who will carry our fading stories into the future." There's a certain urgency, or even desperation, in that parting plea.

Sepetys believes we have a moral duty to attend to overlooked stories. If she evangelizes a bit, and repeats herself a bit, it's because she can't look away from the fangs stuck in too many of our necks. Communism, after all, sucks. 🐉



A Deal With the Dragon

How China used its communist framework to unfair advantage to become the world's largest economy.

by **Leonora Cravotta**

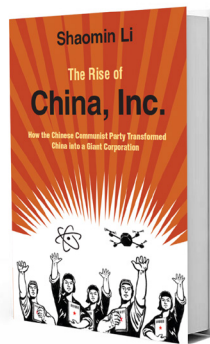
The Rise of China, Inc.: How the Chinese Communist Party Transformed China into a Giant Corporation

By Shaomin Li

Cambridge University Press, 346 pages, \$30

The symbiotic relationship between China's government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) enables China to function like a corporate entity which reaps the financial rewards of its authoritarian structure. President Xi Jinping, who also serves as the secretary general of the CCP, enjoys absolute power as its de facto CEO.

Leonora Cravotta is director of operations at The American Spectator.



That's the central claim of Shaomin Li's *The Rise of China, Inc.: How the Chinese Communist Party Transformed China into a Giant Corporation*. Li, a professor of international business at Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, juxtaposes China's legal system, in which every transaction is filtered through the CCP, against the Western rules-based model, which limits

power through separate government branches. He delineates the historical events that catapulted China from the brink of financial collapse in the 1970s to the world's largest economy with a current purchasing power of \$23 trillion and provides context on how the West unwittingly facilitated China's ascent to the catbird seat.

The pivotal moment for China came in 1976, when, after the death of Chairman Mao Zedong, his successor Deng Xiaoping implemented market reforms and opened the financially struggling country to foreign capital investment and trade partnerships while downplaying its communist ideology and human rights violations.

Then as today, the Chinese do not have personal liberties. They cannot secure a home, attend school, or start a business without the

government's permission. Those who defy the CCP are often punished with social isolation, housing and income deprivation, prison, and even death.

Yet China's successful bid for membership in the World Trade Organization in the late 1990s was championed by President Bill Clinton, who said, "The more China liberalizes its economy, the more fully it will liberate the potential of its people — their initiative, their imagination, their remarkable spirit of enterprise." Clinton and many others heard the 1989 pro-democracy protests in Tiananmen Square as a clarion call to democratize China.

But they were wrong about China's intentions. They overestimated China's interest in economic freedom and underestimated its leadership's ability to manipulate narratives to their advantage. They also misunderstood China's class structure. Since the state controls all means of production, the middle class works hard not to acquire property rights or personal liberties but to please the state so that it will reward them with goods and services.

And they were wrong about how China does business at home and abroad. The CCP has de facto ownership of all firms in China, including state-owned firms; firms with close ties to the CCP, which act as subsidiaries; and private firms, which function as joint ventures with the CCP. The CCP, which controls 56 percent of China's GDP, is the country's largest employer, with 173 million employees out of a population of 1.44 billion. The CCP's control of production resources, along with limited regulatory requirements and a low regard for human rights, facilitates greater dexterity, higher productivity, and lower labor costs than the democratic powers enjoy.

China also benefits from the party-state's tremendous influence apparatus,

which includes a propaganda department with a \$7 billion annual budget. The CCP's United Front Work Department mobilizes politicians, academics, and business leaders outside of China to support its cause under the rubric of sharing Chinese culture. China has infiltrated Western universities by funding over five hundred Confucius Institutes in 146 countries. The "Thousand Talents Plan," which provides financing to industry experts to set up research centers in China, is another vehicle for siphoning Western intellectual property, technical innovation, and management know-how.

Li highlights China's practice of punishing trade partners by accusing them of using language that "hurts the feelings of Chinese people" in response to actions and positions that challenge the CCP and its interests. In April 2020, when the Australian government called for an investigation into China's involvement in the origins of the COVID-19 outbreak, a Chinese court sentenced an Australian citizen, Karm Gillespie, to death for drug trafficking. China also restricted the importation of Australian coal, wine, beef, barley, and cotton and threatened to limit Chinese leisure and academic travel to Australia.

Although the United States and the other democracies have benefited financially from trade access to China's vast population and cheap supplies, they have only recently begun to attempt to hold China accountable for its business and human rights violations. In March 2018, President Donald Trump imposed trade sanctions on \$50 billion in Chinese imports in retaliation for China's theft of intellectual property. In November 2018, the Department of Justice instituted the China Initiative to safeguard the United States against potential economic espionage, predatory investment, and propaganda from China. President Joe Biden

continued these tariffs, but on February 23, the DOJ argued that the China Initiative unfairly targeted the Chinese people and announced plans to replace it with a broader, non-country-specific program. In addition to explaining the workings of China, Inc. for the general reader, Li's book is a practical treatise for multinational corporations (MNCs) considering partnerships with China. He advises that MNCs choose direct investment opportunities, in which the investor receives firsthand information from the company, over riskier indirect portfolio investments, in which the publicly available reporting and auditing information is poor.

Li concludes by asking who has the most to lose if the democracies suspend all trade partnerships with China. A return to a closed-market status would crater the Chinese economy and put the country at risk of infighting for resources. But Li concludes that the democracies are still better off politically and economically with an open China. He proposes that these countries form an alliance and demand that China "practice democracy, follow the rule of law, and respect human rights." And if China refuses or retaliates with punitive measures, the alliance must respond with a "tit for tat" response with "appropriate punitive measures to effectively pressure the CCP to make desired changes, and they must be ready to go all the way to delink with China."

The Rise of China, Inc. provides a vivid and at times shocking portrait of how China leverages the agility of its party-state structure to enrich its economy, export its communist ideology, and silence opposing voices. Although Li still maintains that an open China is more desirable than a closed society like North Korea, he makes a persuasive case for the democracies to band together to force the Red Dragon to play fair or be thrown out of the game. ❄️





The Gayest Generation

Gen Z is more LGBT than you — and they want you to know it.

by Daniel J. Flynn

The marketing campaign looks like a success. Gallup notes that Americans identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) eclipse 7 percent. That more than doubles the figure the polling organization reported a decade ago.

At this rate, gays will exceed 100 percent of the population sometime around 2060. Homophobia hopefully will dissipate thereafter. But one can never be too vigilant.

The sustained Madison Avenue-style barrage, a cross between Uncle Sam's "I Want You" Great War declaration and Nike's ubiquitous "Just Do It" slogan from the 1980s, sold homosexuality with "Yep, I'm Gay" magazine covers, obligatory LGBT characters on MTV reality programs, and *Milk*, *Moonlight*, *Brokeback Mountain*, and other films. Americans, particularly young Americans, bought it.

The pressure campaign's underlying theme posited that sexuality, like race, constituted an immutable characteristic that defined criticism of the pursuits of consenting adults as bigoted and irrational. This persuaded — eventually.

Until victories in 2012, gay marriage appeared on the ballot thirty-two times and lost thirty-two times, including in California, Michigan, and Hawaii. A decade ago, Barack Obama still opposed gay marriage. Gallup found just a minority in 1977 supporting gays becoming doctors, clergy, and teachers, and the legalization of homosexual acts.

The lone response to that 1977 Gallup survey buttressed, if obliquely in the ever-

changing percentages of people identifying as LGBTQ, by subsequent Gallup polls indicated that just 13 percent regarded homosexuality as "something a person is born with."

"There is no 'gay gene,'" Andrea Ganna, lead author of a massive study published in *Science*, summarized its conclusions to *Nature*. How to reconcile greater and greater percentages of gays since Gallup first asked about it with the shibboleth that sexual identity predates birth?

The recent Gallup poll shows dramatic fluctuations between age groups regarding LGBT populations. Less than 1 percent born before 1946 label themselves as LGBT. More than 20 percent of Generation Z identify as LGBT. Twice as gay as Millennials, five times as gay as Gen X, eight times as gay as Baby Boomers, and twenty-six times as gay as Traditionalists, Gen Z stands as the gayest generation.

Jazz Jennings, perhaps the first celebrity Zoomer, identified as transgender at age five. While Christians do the born-again thing once, JoJo Siwa proved that one could come out of the closet repeatedly, and stay in the headlines, by ritualistically declaring herself "queer," "gay," and "pansexual." Matt Bernstein, who wears long lashes and longer nails, achieves internet celebrity by spreading provocative memes, including "Reagan's Grave Is a Gender Neutral Bathroom" and "Is Gen Z the Queerest Generation Ever, or Were You Just Never Paying Attention?"

This last point suggests that Zoomers merely embrace their sexuality to a greater degree than closet cases of the past. This seems impossible to prove, and, if possible to disprove, impossible to disprove to Matt Bernstein.

Let no man, woman, demiboy, ursula, otter, or two-spirit tell you that all identities

find our age accommodating. "Super straight," an orientation just recently appearing on the radar, describes men attracted only to women born with female genitalia. TikTok, YouTube, and Reddit removed material promoting the not-very-now proclivity. "A 'sexuality' based entirely on trans exclusion isn't a preference," an *InsideHook* subheadline explains, "it's prejudice." Good to know.

However one interprets the zeitgeist, greater numbers of up-front gays undeniably followed the mass-marketing onslaught.

The mutability of sexual identity in some invalidates an LGBT article of faith, not LGBT people themselves. Misconduct allegations against the band PWR BTTM's lead singer Ben Hopkins *from women*, for instance, indicate variation not just between generations but within individuals. Following the civil rights movement, gay liberation naturally imitated. This appeared forced. One size, in templates as in trysts, does not fit all.

Acknowledging that environmental factors influence human behavior does not risk reinstating sodomy laws. Rather than casting gays as extending the civil rights movement, a more honest depiction leans more heavily on a basic component of American liberty embraced by smokers, gun enthusiasts, and home-schoolers: live and let live.

Thomas Jefferson articulated this ethos as it pertained to God, but it also applies to gays.

"The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others," he wrote in *Notes on the State of Virginia*. "But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

Welcome to the Right, alphabet people. 🏳️

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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A classical oil painting portrait of James Madison, showing him from the chest up. He has white powdered hair, a serious expression, and is wearing a dark blue coat over a white cravat. The background is dark and indistinct.

THE MIND OF MADISON



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