

HOOVER DIGEST

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ON PUBLIC POLICY

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ON THE COVER

Czar Nicholas II, the last ruler of imperial Russia, leads his troops in what this poster proclaims to be a holy war. This highly stylized image, reminiscent of heroic paintings from the medieval era, shows the czar at the head of a modern army of infantry and Cossacks arrayed against the forces of Germany and Austria-Hungary during World War I. Nicholas, of course, did not lead his armies to victory; Russia suffered severe losses in the war and the czar eventually abdicated. Then came the revolution. See story, page 220.



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What Will You Do?

Protest takes us only so far. Americans must reject recrimination, face old problems squarely, and seek justice for all.

By Condoleezza Rice

Words cannot dull the pain of George Floyd's family. Like many black families before them, they find themselves in the spotlight for reasons that every parent, sibling, and spouse dreads. While his death has catalyzed a symbolic call to action, he was not a symbol to his loved ones—he was a father, brother, and son. I can only pray that they find the “peace that passes understanding.”

In the wake of Floyd's death, Americans and people around the world are experiencing shock, grief, outrage—a set of emotions that too often are repeated. If the past is a guide, these feelings will fade and we will return to our lives.

But something tells me—not this time. Floyd's horrific death should be enough to finally move us to positive action.

Perhaps this is like the moment in 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of the bus. Or perhaps this is like that fateful Sunday in September 1963, quite personal to me, when a bomb in a Birmingham church killed four girls from my neighborhood and shook our nation to its core. Some six decades later, perhaps all of us—regardless of skin color—are, to quote

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Mississippi sharecropper and civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer, “sick and tired of being sick and tired.”

Our country has often moved forward and been made better through peaceful protests. But our cities must stop burning. Innocent people, including many minority and immigrant business owners, have watched their livelihoods go up in smoke. There is no excuse for looting and criminality, and offenders must be stopped. But a call for calm is not enough, either. This time, we must remain vigilant and maintain our determination to make a difference.

Beyond justice for Floyd, systemic change is necessary to make our institutions more just. Yet all the structural reforms in the world are insufficient to



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

remove the shadow hanging over every incident of this kind. To be black is to be forced to overcome implicit and explicit reactions to the color of your skin. It might be dismissiveness or underestimation or presumption of how you think. In some circumstances, it might be fear. We encounter these responses even among decent people who sincerely do not want to react that way. The good news is that these emotions can be overcome—and often are—with the respect that builds when people know one another as human beings—as friends, neighbors, co-workers, and teammates.

Still, we simply must acknowledge that



society is not colorblind and
probably never will be. Progress comes when people
treat one another with respect, as if we *were* colorblind.

Unless and until we are honest that race is still an anchor around our country's neck, that shadow will never be lifted. Our country has a birth defect: Africans and Europeans came to this country together—but one group was in chains. In time, the very Constitution that counted slaves as three-fifths of a man became a powerful tool in affording the descendants of slaves their basic rights. That work has been long and difficult, but it has made a difference. We are better than we were.

I grew up in segregated Jim Crow Alabama, where no one batted an eye if the police killed a black man. There wouldn't have been even a footnote in the local press. So it is a source of pride for me that so many have taken to the streets—peacefully—to say that they care: that they, too, are sick and tired of being sick and tired. Yet protests will take our country only so far. The road to healing must begin with respectful but honest and deep conversations, not judgments, about who we were, who we are, and who we want to become. Let us talk with, not at, each other—in our homes, schools,

workplaces, and places of worship. And if we are to make progress, let us vow to check the language of recrimination at the door.

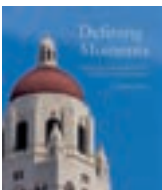
As united Americans, we

can then turn our fears into faith, hope, compassion, and action. And then we can accept and carry out our shared responsibility to build “a more perfect union.”

Yet, any call to action will be empty if it does not move us to individual responsibility. We all have a role to play in moving our country forward, in ensuring that our democracy delivers not just for those who have but also for those who seek and for those in need.

So I ask my fellow Americans: what will each of you do? My personal passion is educational opportunity, because it is a partial shield against prejudice. It is not a perfect shield, I know, but it gives people a fighting chance. In my conversations, I want to discuss why the learning gap for black kids is so stubborn and what can be done about it. What is your question about the impact of race on the lives of Americans? And what will you do to find answers? ■

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Still Shining

To Hoover fellow **Ayaan Hirsi Ali**, America's promise remains undimmed.

By **Peter Robinson**

Peter Robinson, Uncommon Knowledge: She grew up in Africa and the Middle East, lived in Europe, and is now an American. Ayaan Hirsi Ali, thank you for joining me.

Here is a tweet that you put up on June 9: “What the media do not tell you is that America is the best place on the planet to be black, female, gay, trans, or what have you. We have our problems and we need to address those. But our society and our systems are far from racist.”

And here is a statement by Ben & Jerry's ice cream company: “What happened to George Floyd”—that is, of course, the brutal killing of George Floyd—“was the predictable consequence of a racist and prejudiced system and culture that has treated black bodies as the enemy from the beginning.”

You hold that the ice cream company is not just a little bit mistaken, but completely mistaken. How does an ice cream company come to a conclusion like this about American history and feel that it is somehow its duty to present it?

Ayaan Hirsi Ali: It's cynical. It's a marketing gimmick. And Ben & Jerry's believes that they can get away with it. The killing of George Floyd—those

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and the founder of the AHA Foundation. Peter Robinson is the editor of the Hoover Digest, the host of Uncommon Knowledge, and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.

nine minutes of video—obscene, disgusting. And every one of us who feels outrage is completely justified. I am outraged by that.

But what we've seen in response to the outrage, I'll say there are three kinds. One, peaceful protests and protesters—people saying, "Please, let's address police misconduct, especially towards black men."

The second one is the rioting, looting, and destroying of property. I think some of it was just for the fun of it, really. Young men seeking a thrill, and not only young men.

But then the third response—which I find quite sinister—is all these calls to defund the police, or abolish our justice system. People who call themselves "Black Lives Matter," but who from almost every action of theirs show that they really are not interested in black people, the pain of black people, or how to help black communities.

Then, you have the Ben & Jerry's of this world. You put all that together and here we are in America.

Robinson: You've written a column in the *Wall Street Journal*. "Outrage and critical thinking seldom go hand-in-hand. An act of police brutality became the catalyst for a revolutionary mood." Here is a video clip showing the destruction of a statue of Ulysses S. Grant, who short of Lincoln himself did more to bring about the emancipation of African-Americans in this nation than anyone else.

What is going on? How do we get from justified outrage at the killing of a black man by a white policeman to the toppling of a statue of Ulysses S. Grant, on which I think it's impossible to place any rational construction?

Hirsi Ali: This irrational toppling of statues was going on before the killing of George Floyd. It's been going on for years now. It's not just here in the United States. In the United Kingdom and other countries, the iconoclasm and this impulse to destroy has been with us for a while.

What we are seeing now is this mishmash of people who call themselves "Black Lives Matter" have found the hook. They found a way of going about the business of destroying what we stand for—the idea of America—by constantly harping on the things we did wrong about which we all agree, like slavery and segregation.

We are a nation made up of human beings, and we fail. Our human frailties have been well-documented in the past. If you would just grab any one of them—the most outrageous, of course, is the slave trade—and then say, "Well, here we have a reason to destroy everything that America stands for," this is what these people are saying.



“OUR LEADERS ARE NOT LEADING”: Hoover fellow Ayaan Hirsi Ali says that *“I think it’s time now for most of us to stand up and say, ‘Now here’s what we value. It’s who we are.’”* [Gage Skidmore—Creative Commons]

I think it’s time now for most of us to stand up and say, “Now here’s what we *value*. It’s who we are.” Also, to expose people like Ben & Jerry’s—to call them out and remind them what it is that they’re doing, and how they’re bringing this about. Appeasement calls for more.

Robinson: You referred to a “revolutionary mood” in your *Wall Street Journal* column.

This will take a moment to set up the question, but you’ll understand what I’m getting at. The moment before the French Revolution, the monarchy is bankrupt. The entire government is riddled with scandal. And for at least two decades, there has been agitation and unrest. You can see what the revolution arose from.

Before the Russian Revolution in 1917 you had a poor, small country. But there were professional, dedicated revolutionaries—Lenin, Stalin, many oth-

ers—at work for at least a quarter century before the revolution takes place. The monar-

“They found a way of going about the business of destroying what we stand for.”

chy is weak; the peasants want land. And then comes the catastrophe of the First World War. As in pre-revolutionary France, you see a system coming under increasing pressure.

Now just before this revolutionary moment in the United States, only a few months ago, we had a booming economy. African-Americans were registering the lowest unemployment rate in history since records began to be kept. Millions of people—especially those least well off in this country—were beginning to lead better lives. Of course, I’m not challenging your description. But this is nothing like France or the pre-Bolshevik moment. How does this happen?

Hirsi Ali: We’ve been living through a time of rapid change. And I think what you’re describing speaks to that.

In 1989, we defeated the Soviet Union and we thought, “Well done. History ended.” Of course, it didn’t. And I would say a vision took hold of our establishment when we went for globalization. In that process, I think, we did forget about large swathes of the population living in the United States and in other parts of the Western world.

Over the years, President Clinton and his administration didn’t see this thing coming. He was distracted. Along came President George W. Bush, and again, he became distracted with 9/11 and all the conflicts that followed. But this process of change, globalization, was going on and on, and inequalities were becoming ever larger.

And then we got President Trump, and I quote here someone I never thought I would, Michael Moore, who in 2016 is trying to understand what is

happening to the white, blue-collar male population. And he says: “Hey, you guys, you forgot about us. You took the businesses away. You took manufacturing away.” Here are the economic consequences of globalization that no one was paying attention to except those who are making money from it.

And now you have this big middle finger to the establishment. And the crazy thing that we are seeing now is that the establishment is not responding—at least not all of them are responding with the true American spirit of, “OK, we made a mistake. How can we salvage this? What can we do to make things right?”

That’s not what our elite, our establishment, is doing right now. Some of them are taking the cynical path of trying to appease who they think are the mob. And the others are just really at each other’s throats. Our leaders are not leading. They’re not giving us the sense that they’re actually capable of sitting together in a room and saying, “Let’s figure this out.”

A BEACON OF HOPE—STILL

Robinson: In your *Wall Street Journal* column you described growing up in Africa and the Middle East, gaining firsthand experience of internecine wars, anarchy, and real racism. You and I have talked before, and you have made the point, “I’m an African-African. I haven’t had the full African-American experience.” Tell us how the United States looked to you before you came here.

Hirsi Ali: Before I do that, I want to acknowledge the descendants of slaves in the United States and the descendants of people who lived through segregation before they had

civil rights—that is really

quite painful and appall-

ing. And I don’t in any

way want to downplay

the pain of the true African-American people who live here and who have suffered here.

“We are a nation made up of human beings, and we fail.”

From our vantage point, America was the beacon of hope and freedom. For many of us growing up as Africans, it was the place to go where you could get away from the daily pain caused by fellow blacks—disorder, anarchy, tyranny, militias, economic despair. To this day, there are more Africans wanting to come to America and give it a try than want to stay in Africa.

We have problems in America. Let’s not downplay those problems. The institutions of freedom, the idea of America—let’s get it together and figure

it out. Please, let's not throw that out in our outrage against *some* of our problems.

America is also an idea. It's not about your skin color. It's not about your religion, gender, whatever. I know people are trying to make it all about that, but it isn't. This idea of freedom—leave me alone to do what I want to do for me, as long as I abide by the law—that's America. And in that sense, America is far superior to many of the European countries and other Western countries in terms of assimilating minorities.

What I'm really pushing back against is these people who are organizing themselves, like "Black Lives Matter," who are saying instead of an individual

coming to America or an American-born individual lifting themselves, getting the opportunity to lift themselves out of a bad situation, "Let's just give everything to the govern-

"Now you have to ask yourself, what has this got to do with black lives and what has it got to do with George Floyd?"

ment. The government will do it for us." I think that idea is very, very bad and it's almost always led to a bad outcome.

Robinson: In your column in the *Wall Street Journal* you wrote, "Although I am a black African, I am keenly aware of the hardships and miseries African-Americans have endured for centuries. I know the history. I know that there is still racial prejudice."

But your tweet of June 9 said, "America is the best place on the planet to be black." How do you square those two?

Hirsi Ali: There are still countries in the world where simply by being black, you're spat upon or you're beaten. There are laws in many of these countries that literally being black and being *the other*—the foreigner, the alien—robs you of your rights in these nations, communities, societies. You know you'll never get out of that.

I look at the black immigrants who are trying to come through a country like Libya. And as soon as the Arabs see the black Africans, they react in ways that are just unimaginable in America. I lived in Saudi Arabia, where the misogyny of gender segregation and the racism are so in your face. You can't turn away from it.

So, I would like to say to a lot of my fellow black people in America, absolutely we have our problems. We have racism. But I have never come across a society so determined to erase racism as Americans are.

You want to argue with that? Travel. Go to those places and see for yourself.

POWER AND VICTIMOLOGY

Robinson: You raised the point that “there are people among us who don’t want to figure it out and who have an interest in avoiding workable solutions.” That’s a very grave charge to level.

Hirsi Ali: The people I’m talking about right now are “Black Lives Matter,” which is in the news and is this mishmash of organizations. It’s not what they want. The teachers’ unions, it’s not what they want. I see this from a different perspective: here are the true, and tried, and tested ways of lifting up black people.

But it’s not about lifting up black people. It’s not about ending racism for them. It’s not about social justice. It’s about power.

Robinson: There are two competing diagnoses for how to help African-Americans. One says American history has placed African-Americans in a uniquely vulnerable position, and to overcome racism, African-Americans require affirmative action, other forms of racial preference, perhaps reparations. The body politic did them a historic injustice and now we have to take collective political action to correct it.

And here’s Jason Riley from his book *False Black Power?* on what I’m calling diagnosis two:

“I have never come across a society so determined to erase racism as Americans are.”

“Blacks set about acquiring the values, habits, and skills necessary to thrive. The gains were steady and undeniable. If blacks want to begin replenishing that human capital—true power—they shouldn’t look to politicians. They should look to their own past.”

These two are not questions of degree or nuance. These are fundamentally opposed analyses. How do we talk to each other?

Hirsi Ali: First, let me say I wholeheartedly agree with Jason Riley. I find him so brave, so wise. And it’s just so heartwarming that there are so many of us who see exactly what is in human capital versus political.

The first diagnosis is all about turning us into victims, robbing us of our agency. Giving it to the government or some group who wants to use our misfortunes and spin political power out of it.

Those of us who believe in human capital and developing the values, the habits, the customs—America gives us that opportunity. Those of us on the Jason Riley side of the argument, we want to have a conversation. We want to present data. We know how hard the trajectory is, how hard the journey is to improve one's life and one's community's lives.

The other side want to shove their beliefs and orthodoxies down our throats. They are not interested in conversation. They want power. And people like me and Jason Riley are in their way. I went on the “Black Lives Matter” website and I looked at some of their demands. They're insane. They want to abolish the justice system. They want to abolish the immigration system. They want to defund the military.

Now you have to ask yourself, what has this got to do with black lives and what has it got to do with George Floyd?

FREEDOM AND ORDER

Robinson: You wrote, “There will be no resolution of America's many social problems if free thought and free speech are no longer upheld in our public sphere. Without them, honest deliberation, mutual learning, and the American problem-solving ethic are dead.” First we defend freedom of speech and freedom of thought, is that correct?

Hirsi Ali: Absolutely. Every day when we watch this insanity, we ask ourselves: how is it that so many young people in their thirties have become so invested in this? Listen to the language used: microaggression, safe spaces, systemic racism, white privilege, black victimhood, intersectionality. Where did all this come from? This is what's happening in classrooms. And I thought at first it was only limited to colleges and only some parts within the college system.

Universities are where you go to grow up, and where you've always had groups with strange ideas. But now it has gone all the way down to K-12. Our kids are being indoctrinated. A majority of kids now come out, if they're white, feeling that they're racist and they have something to correct. If they're of color, they feel that they're a victim of the system and that something is owed to them. Everyone is saying, “reform the police.” What about education?

Robinson: Academics are some of the most privileged people in this society—benefiting from tenure, academic freedom, and good income—and all society asks of them is to use their minds. How could so many people who followed that calling have accepted a dark or negative view of this country?

Hirsi Ali: I don't know. Perhaps it's this combination of complacency, where it was, "oh, the whole thing is going to pass," and then appeasement when it didn't, and negligence when you look at the selection, recruitment, and tenuring of professors. Somehow, the ideologues found their way to determining our culture. The result is not that all our kids have become crazy Marxists. That's not the case. What we're seeing is that they have succeeded in brainwashing a subset of the student population who then go on to take jobs and leadership positions. But the rest of us are rendered silent because we weren't paying attention.

We were negligent. We turned away. No one stood up to them.

Robinson: Suppose the United States remains paralyzed. Suppose freedom of speech is undermined—effectively replaced by mob intimidation and the politics of the mob. People will still lead comfortable lives in this country, but the rule of law will erode. Innovation becomes muted. We decline as China rises. If that were to happen, what would the world have lost?

Hirsi Ali: Well, we would have lost the glory of what made America special. For 244 years we were able to balance what every human being needs: freedom and order. So, we would get only order.

I come from a tribal society. I understand tribal logic. And what I'm seeing right now happening to America—and especially our universities—is an advancement of this tribal logic.

I'm optimistic, though. I think we still have our institutions intact. They're dented, but they're not destroyed.

Robinson: Are you hopeful that this is a moment when others will come forward? Are you hopeful? What is the good that could come of this?

Hirsi Ali: This is my message to the Republican Party: please, shed this image of all white men and listen to, and amplify, the voices of African-Americans, Hispanics, Indians, Chinese. Amplify the voices of those people who chose to come to America because of that balance of freedom and order. ■





Pride and Humility

A fresh commitment to America's founding principles and leadership in the cause of human rights.

By Peter Berkowitz

The callous taking of George Floyd's life provoked both peaceful protests and violent rioting in American cities. The turmoil in our streets underscored the essential importance of a criminal justice system rooted in the rule of law and of a free press that reports accurately on the actions of citizens and government officials. The questions roiling the nation about police brutality, civic unrest, and America's commitment to human rights will linger. They gave even greater urgency to the work of the Commission on Unalienable Rights, created in July 2019 by Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, which released its final report this past summer.

Secretary Pompeo emphasized when he introduced the report that the commission's purpose was not to make concrete policy. Its mandate, rather,

Key points

- » Under the guidance of Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, the Commission on Unalienable Rights sought to reground American commitments.
- » America took the leading role in drafting the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for the United Nations.
- » The new report aims to paint the broadest picture of US commitment to human rights and spark conversation about securing them.

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was to reground America's formal and informal commitments to human rights in the nation's founding principles and constitutional traditions, and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the UN General Assembly approved, with US support, in 1948.

The report bears no resemblance to the one-dimensional and hyperpartisan work that its critics were certain the commission would produce. Among the most common and confounding of the criticisms—put forward bluntly by human rights activists, former public officials, and Capitol Hill lawmakers—has been that the commission's work was superfluous because human rights and America's commitment to them are well understood, settled, and uncontroversial. But the commission's critics confuse their own certainties with near-universal consensus. They would leave the post-World War II human rights project, which has deep roots in the American constitutional system, exposed to attacks from left and right and increasingly unable to explain itself to a nation that seems to grow more polarized by the day.

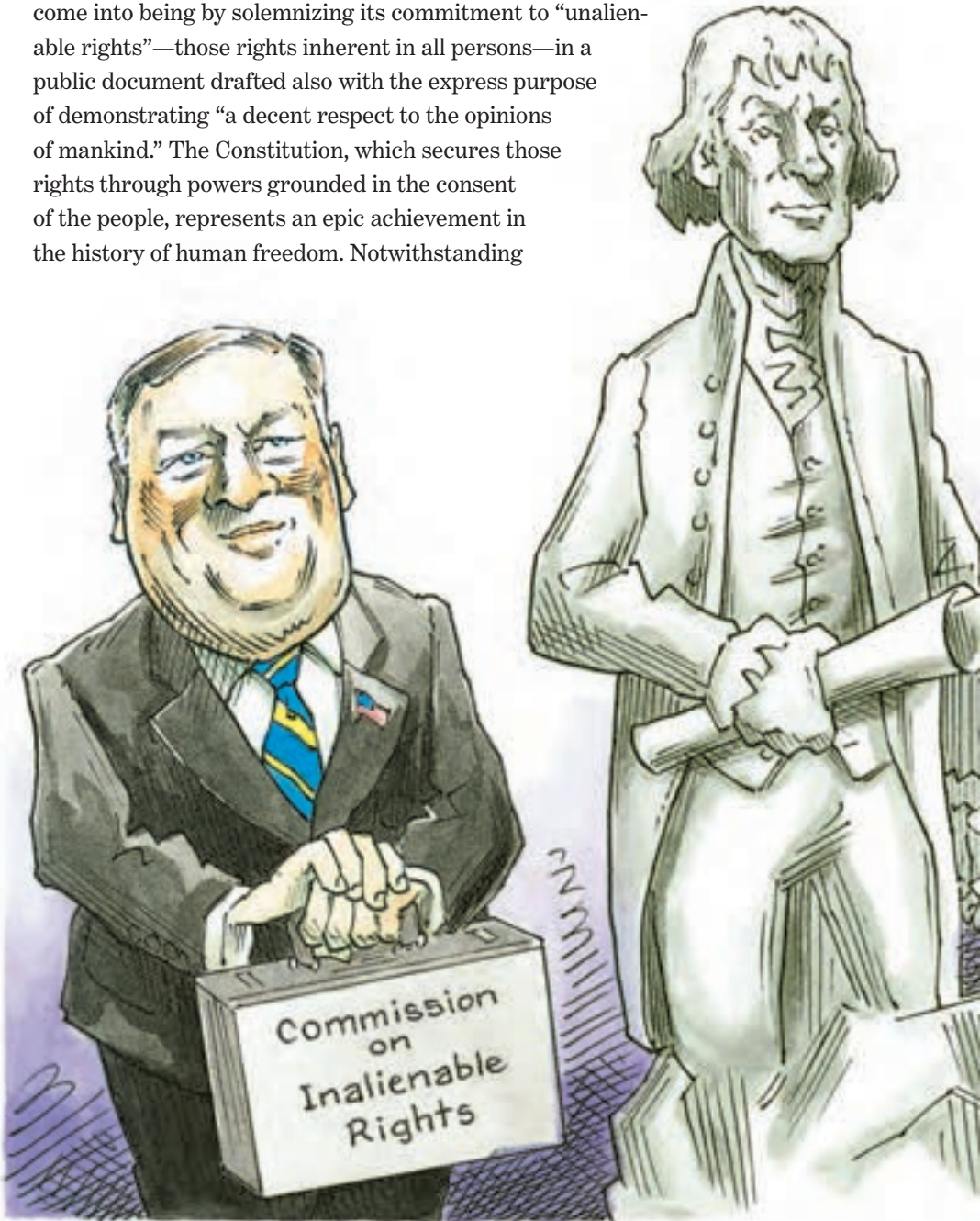
Among the benefits flowing from the re-examination of America's distinctive rights tradition is the lesson in pride and humility that it furnishes. The pride has its source in the principles inscribed in the nation's founding and the progress over the centuries that has been made in living up to them. The humility stems from an appreciation of the nation's imperfections and of the urgent and unfinished work the United States confronts at home and abroad. That lesson of pride and humility bridges political divides and fortifies the making of foreign policy.

In a *Wall Street Journal* article last year announcing the commission, Secretary Pompeo underscored its limited and specific purpose: "The commission's mission isn't to discover new principles but to ground our discussion of human rights in America's founding principles." In addition, the secretary asked the commission to examine the interplay between America's founding principles and the obligations the country embraced in the twentieth century. Highlighting "the human rights panel Eleanor Roosevelt convened in 1947," he wrote, "the Commission on Unalienable Rights will study the document that resulted from that effort, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, along with our founding documents and other important works."

Such an undertaking is necessary because for more than a generation professors and pundits have demonstrated a pronounced tendency in their discussions of the United States' founding and unfolding to focus on one dimension of a complex whole. Some concentrate on the United States' great achievements. Others dwell on the nation's grave transgressions. Few seek the bigger picture, which includes both.

“A MAXIM FOR FREE SOCIETY”

Much about America justifies citizens' pride. In 1776, the US Declaration of Independence marked the first time in human history that a nation had come into being by solemnizing its commitment to “unalienable rights”—those rights inherent in all persons—in a public document drafted also with the express purpose of demonstrating “a decent respect to the opinions of mankind.” The Constitution, which secures those rights through powers grounded in the consent of the people, represents an epic achievement in the history of human freedom. Notwithstanding



the present turmoil, the United States' nearly two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old experiment in liberty under law has resulted in a nation whose citizens enjoy a freedom, pluralism, and prosperity that few countries have equaled and which remains the destination of choice for great numbers of immigrants around the world seeking to better their lives.

At the same time, reflection on the American experience encourages humility. The Declaration of Independence takes as self-evident truths that human



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

beings are equally endowed with certain rights that are inherent in all persons and that government's first purpose is to secure those rights. Yet at its founding the new nation fell gravely short of fully respecting those magnificent principles.

Our struggle for unalienable rights is soaked with blood: of slaves, who were shipped to America in chains, and whose descendants toiled for more than two centuries as their owners' property; of African-Americans who, following the Civil War, were granted the formal rights of citizenship but were deprived of the realities of freedom and equality by the brutalities of Jim Crow; of Native Americans driven forcibly from their ancestral lands and subjected to racism and

discriminatory laws; of immigrants who also suffered discrimination and were compelled to undertake backbreak-

At home, the United States faces social and political turmoil not seen for decades.

ing outdoor labor and suffocating work inside factories and sweatshops to eke out a meager wage to support their families; and—despite the conscientiousness and professionalism of most the nation's police officers—of the victims of lawless violence that persists within the criminal justice system.

But the country's failings, beginning with the legal protection that the Constitution gave to slavery, do not negate the founders' surpassing achievement, which was to build a country around a universal standard in light of which the nation could be judged and reformed. Under that regime established by the Constitution, slavery was abolished, women won the vote, equality has been enshrined in the law of the land, and the United States became the foremost champion of human rights around the world.

A similar lesson in pride and humility derives from consideration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The UDHR's aim was to establish, as its preamble states,

a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

A nonbinding but authoritative document that enables nations to measure themselves as much as judge others, the UDHR followed in the footsteps of

America's Declaration of Independence. As Abraham Lincoln emphasized, while the Declaration did not emancipate the slaves, it made a decisive contribution to the universal cause of freedom inasmuch as it "set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere."

The United States should take pride in the leading role it took in drafting the UDHR and in winning approval of it in 1948 in the UN General Assembly. After the carnage of two world wars, the United States did what no victorious great power had ever done: it declined claims to territory or reparations and instead demonstrated a commitment to individual freedom and human dignity by incorporating the advancement of human rights into its own foreign policy and by working with other countries to recognize the securing of human rights as a shared concern of all nations. The international human rights movement that the UDHR energized helped discredit Soviet communism and emancipate the nations of Eastern and Central Europe. It contributed to the dismantling of

apartheid in South Africa. And today, while addressing violations around the world, it

rightly focuses on the most systematic abuses of human rights. These prominently include the Chinese Communist Party's re-education camps, in which the CCP has imprisoned a million Uighurs; the CCP's attacks on Christians; the CCP's ruthless monitoring and censoring of the Chinese people's speech; and the CCP's infringement of the rights of the people of Hong Kong.

Yet defenders of human rights in the United States and elsewhere have good reason to be humble. The immediate moment at home is sobering: the United States faces the challenge of addressing, in a manner consistent with citizens' rights and constitutional imperatives, social and political turmoil not seen for decades.

STUBBORN AUTOCRACY

The international context presents challenges of a different order of magnitude. Some seventy years after the UN General Assembly passed the UDHR, approximately half the world's population lives under authoritarian

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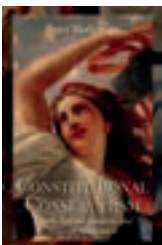
governments that routinely trample on fundamental freedoms. Moreover, some of the international organizations that were created to promote human rights have been captured by autocratic powers that pervert those institutions to serve illiberal and antidemocratic ends. The world's most populous nation, the People's Republic of China, not only rejects the idea that governments must be constrained by respect for the dignity of the individual but seems bent on refashioning an international order hostile to the principles of freedom.

Meanwhile, the human rights movement in the United States is mired in controversy. Influential voices on the left disparage the cause of human rights as a vehicle for imposing Western hegemony. Powerful critics on the right regard the institutionalized apparatus of the human rights movement as a thinly disguised system designed to entrench progressive transnational government. Now, scandalized by the killing of George Floyd, many Americans are tempted to blur the difference between autocracies that systematically deny fundamental rights and liberal democracies whose governments and citizens respond with indignation and anger when public servants abuse their power by denying fellow citizens' basic rights.

In light of the United States' genuine accomplishments and its real failings, and with a view to the perplexities that beset the cause of human rights, Secretary Pompeo established the Commission on Unalienable Rights. Not the least of the commission's contributions will be to renew the nation's understanding of that complex combination of pride and humility that is among the most elusive and essential prerequisites for a foreign policy—and a domestic policy—grounded in America's founding principles.

The report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights invites the State Department, fellow citizens, and lovers of liberty around the world to join in the conversation about the principles and practices of freedom and the perpetuation of the political institutions that secure it. ■

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Genuine Hope and Change

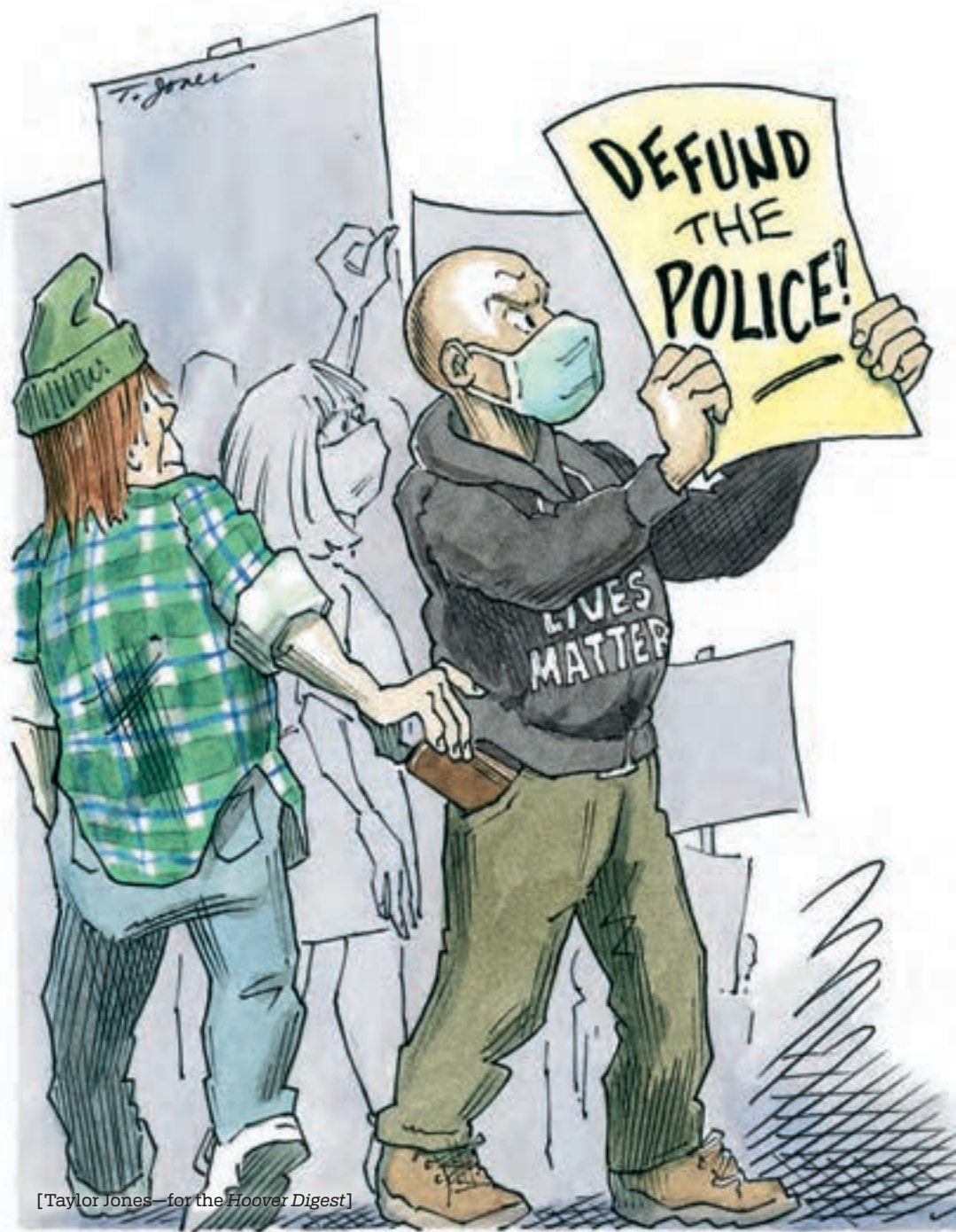
“Defunding the police” is just a new way for cities to throw good money after bad—bad social programs, that is. There are better ways to tackle crime and promote opportunity.

By John Yoo and Horace Cooper

Nationwide protests over the death of George Floyd have sometimes descended into violence and looting, but they have also successfully increased the pressure for policing reforms. Lawmakers have been putting forward programs, giving conservatives the opportunity to propose a truly radical program to address our failing inner cities.

Under the Constitution, the primary responsibility for criminal-law enforcement lies with the states, not the federal government. Maintaining law and order and protecting public health and safety fall squarely within the “police powers” reserved to the states under the Tenth Amendment. While the federal government plays a significant role in regulating interstate crime

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[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

and sending money and support to states, the Constitution gives Washington no explicit power to handle garden-variety crime.

Nevertheless, Democrats in Congress are pursuing legislation to address violence by police. They plan to ban certain procedures, such as chokeholds and no-knock warrants, and require body cameras, a national database of officers and complaints, and even nationwide police training standards. “The martyrdom of George Floyd gave the American experience a moment of national anguish as we grieve for the black Americans killed by police brutality today,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said, adding that the moment “is being transformed into a movement of national action.”

None of these reforms truly addresses the Floyd killing, and many of the proposals circulated are repackaged and stale ideas from well before. Progressives are revealing their actual agenda through proposals to beef up spending on existing social programs. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden “supports the urgent need for reform—including funding for public schools, summer programs, and mental health and substance abuse treatment separate from funding for policing—so that officers can focus on the job of policing,” a campaign spokesman said.

Police unions and teachers’ unions both exist to protect the employment of their members rather than serve the public good.

This spend-first, assess-later approach will only repeat the mistakes in social policy from the time of the Great Society. According to some estimates, the federal government has poured anywhere from \$15 trillion to \$22 trillion into these welfare programs. Meanwhile, problems in the cities have not improved or have even gotten worse. Our urban K-12 public schools are a disgrace, homelessness runs rampant, and a permanent underclass has developed that cannot escape the inner cities. Academic studies show that while the Great Society programs have transferred trillions of dollars of income to alleviate poverty, they may have also actually harmed communities by creating incentives against family formation, work, and personal responsibility.

DON'T TEAR DOWN, BUILD UP

Liberals at the state and local levels are pursuing changes that will do even worse than those of the Great Society. Minneapolis, home to the Floyd killing and some of the worst riots, has voted to eliminate its own police

department. “Defund the police” has become a rallying cry at protests in many of the nation’s largest cities where, it must be pointed out, liberals have enjoyed political dominance for a half century. Several left-wing mayors and city councils, such as in Los Angeles and San Francisco, have voted to transfer hundreds of millions of dollars from police budgets to social programs.

We could not imagine changes that would produce worse unintended consequences than shutting down or severely cutting back police departments. One of the few success stories in our cities has been the stunning drop in crime. After hitting a high of about 2,605 in 1990, murder in New York City has fallen in absolute numbers—562 in 2018—to levels not seen since 1960. Improving neighborhood safety and protecting business development in working-class communities is critically important to improving the quality of life for minorities and the poor.

Rather than tear down our law enforcement operations across the nation, there are several constructive solutions that, if adopted, will help keep our communities safer and strengthen public support (especially in the inner city) for policing generally.

» **Provide more support, not less.** Instead of “defunding the police,” conservatives should push to increase police budgets. Reducing the financial support of our nation’s police departments is a recipe for elevated crime and lack of safety in our communities, particularly those of minorities and the working class. Take New York City. More than 80 percent of its police department operations budget is personnel-related. In New York, the proposed budget cut of \$1 billion would translate to three thousand fewer officers and a

reduction in overtime-pay authorization—meaning fewer officers available around the clock.

Even though we continue overall with historic

A spend-first, assess-later approach will only repeat the social-policy mistakes dating back to the Great Society.

low levels of crime nationally, there are pockets in our country where crime is rising dramatically. Murders, robberies, and assaults in cities such as Baltimore, Chicago, and New York have spiked and should be stopped in their tracks before we see a return to the crime levels of the Sixties and Seventies. Washington should offer more grants to target high-crime areas, and local communities that experience elevated levels of crime should redirect their budgets to the same activities.

» **Police officers shouldn’t be tax collectors for the welfare state.** Conservatives should advocate for a restoration of traditional law

enforcement roles for peace officers. Too often our police departments act as the tax man. During the most recent recession, state and local government embarked on an ill-fated strategy to increase the number and amount of fines and fees imposed on our citizens for everything from minor traffic infractions to municipal code violations. While this may have staved off the need to adopt higher sales and property taxes, this action has generated a significant level of animus against law enforcement by minorities and the working class (groups that typically bear the brunt of these fines and fees). Tax collection is never popular, and police in particular shouldn't be saddled with this duty.

Revenue raising should be returned to the state- and local-government bureaucrats, freeing officers to stay focused on traditional crime fighting—activities that all

Americans can support.

Also, we've stretched out police departments far too much by turning them into all-purpose regulation authorities

even when fines aren't assessed. Police now enforce smoking bans, stop kids' unlicensed lemonade stands, regulate overconsumption of sugary beverages, and attend to a host of other violations. Not only do these responsibilities distract from their more important duties, they increase the likelihood that minor infractions can escalate into major altercations.

» **Unions should represent the interests of great officers, not cover up for bad ones.** There may be left-right support for reform with regard to union representation by law enforcement. There is some truth to the claim that police unions have protected officers such as Derek Chauvin, Floyd's killer, from punishment for misconduct. The left's critiques of police unions mirror those by conservatives against teachers' unions. Both unions exist to protect the employment of their members, rather than serve the public good. Taxpayer resources in our inner cities have been overextended as competition among police, fire, social service, prison guard, and education unions seek the best financial terms and employment protections for their members. Too many cities—and even states—have financial obligations that extend well beyond their capacity to honor, all because public sector unions have managed to pile on more and more obligations over the past few decades.

When police unions aid their members in drafting use-of-force reports to place fault unfairly on suspects or to minimize their own members' failure to

Shut down police departments? We can't imagine changes that would provoke worse unintended consequences.

follow procedures, it makes it difficult for local communities to improve the performance of their police forces.

Moreover, police departments today often must undergo an arduous negotiation process in order to put into place meaningful changes in their departments. States should change their labor laws to limit the ability of unions to interfere with the changes that police departments need to make to be as responsive as possible to their local communities. Unions also should be limited in their ability to “coach” their members to avoid accountability when “incidents” do occur.

» **Aim for better officers, not fewer.** Police departments should undertake a renewed effort for excellence in law enforcement. This means they should increase the requirements for new recruits and work to improve the professionalism of their existing workforce. Instead of affirmative action hiring and promotion, standards for being in law enforcement should be made tougher and should focus on getting the best individuals regardless of color or creed.

Furthermore, the use of body cameras should be expanded. They provide increased transparency, make investigations easier, and help the entire community gain greater trust in law enforcement. Officers should also be dis-

couraged from interfering with or even arresting passersby who record them while carrying out

Inner city public schools hold a monopoly on children’s education.

their responsibilities. If conservatives are open to the expanded use of body cameras, liberals should accept a broader use of cameras in public spaces, roads, and businesses to provide for more effective crime deterrence and detection.

» **Emphasize prevention, not correction.** All too often, law enforcement officers are tasked with handling responsibilities that society broadly has failed to address. Illiteracy, unemployment, homelessness, and mental illness present frequently as crimes of violence.

Rather than wait for law enforcement to resolve these issues, we should proactively adopt policies that will minimize the need for police involvement. However, unlike the strategy of the past fifty years of spending first and assessing later, we should look at time-tested approaches—faith, free markets, and community responsibility—to aid us in our efforts. Our inner cities have trapped their residents in failing schools and corrupt government for far too long. Rather than repeat the failed Great Society programs, conservatives could propose solutions to inner city problems that depend on greater decentralization and weaker, not more powerful, government. Allowing

residents to choose their service providers and forcing governments to compete will increase individual liberty and effectiveness in public programs.

Building on existing opportunity zones, Washington and the states should focus on promoting education and job skills. More charter schools and school choice should

come to our inner cities.

Government should invite religious organizations back into these communities to offer educational assistance,

too. Washington should consider allowing tax credits for any American who would sponsor high school or college tuition for inner city residents. Inner city public schools enjoy a monopoly on education, and as we would predict, the lack of competition has produced a fall in quality and instead a focus on profits—here, excessive spending for teachers’ unions.

Great Society programs have transferred trillions of dollars of income but may have actually harmed communities.

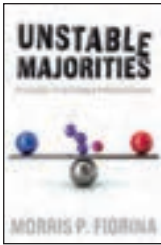
ACTIVATE THE COMMUNITY

Alexis de Tocqueville first observed that the United States differed from Europe in its reliance on private groups, such as civil associations and churches, rather than the government, to address social problems. We would do well to allow these groups to flourish again in the inner cities. Faith-based organizations can offer mental health and drug treatment. Groups such as Teen Challenge, along with other churches, mosques, and synagogues, should be re-invited to promote family formation, civic virtue, and the importance of other voluntary associations within our distressed communities.

Decentralizing city government can also help resuscitate work and jobs in our inner cities. Conservatives should call for regulation-free zones that waive occupational licensing, minimum-wage rules, and restrictions on the gig economy. We could start with suspending minimum-wage laws, which studies show reduce starting jobs for teenagers and minorities. Also, we should adopt the “No Taxation Till the End of Education Act,” which exempts youths twenty-two and under in those same jurisdictions from having to pay FICA (Federal Insurance Contributions Act) while they are in school. This would boost take-home pay and simultaneously make inner city residents attractive to employ. Also, we should waive the Davis-Bacon Act’s requirement that federal programs pay high union wages as part of any new infrastructure initiative, to ensure that small businesses in the inner city have a chance to compete for federal and state contracts.

Ultimately the discussion about law enforcement is an important one, as is the role that police officers play in our society. Refocusing law enforcement so that it can play its critical role more effectively, while bolstering the foundations of our communities, will help make our inner cities not just safer but also places of opportunity and hope. ■

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Black Livelihoods Matter

Rigid regulations still deny low-income African-Americans the upward mobility they need.

By David R. Henderson

The killing of George Floyd has led to many protests. It has also led many people to go beyond the issue of police brutality and think about what policies would help us act on the principle that black lives do indeed matter. Some obvious low-hanging fruit is to end the drug war, which, even on other grounds, should be ended. Beyond that, what can an economist say about how to help black Americans?

Quite a lot, it turns out. One of the main ways is to recognize that black livelihoods matter.

The vast majority of black Americans, like very many non-black Americans, are not born into great wealth. The

Key points

- » To get ahead, people need both skills and the freedom to use those skills. Governments often stand in the way.
- » Minimum wages make it less likely for an unskilled worker to be hired in the first place. They also cut into budgets for training, to the worker's detriment.
- » Occupational licensing favors existing practitioners. Consumers don't benefit.
- » Governments can also help black people by easing housing permits and allowing more charter schools.

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BUILDING SKILLS: Amazon worker Samaira Johnson walks among the robotic moving shelves at a fulfillment center in Baltimore. Certain classes of work are sometimes disparaged as “dead-end jobs,” but such jobs are typically a stepping stone to higher-skilled jobs with higher wages. [Clodagh Kilcoyne—Reuters]

biggest challenge they face is how to make a living for somewhere between forty and fifty years. And they don’t just want to make a living. Most black people, like most whites, want to make a good living.

That typically means having a decent car, a house or apartment, and some discretionary income to spend on clothes, trips, and restaurant meals. To get those things, you typically need more than a minimum-wage job. To get such a job, you need two things: some skills; and few or no barriers that limit your ability to apply those skills. Although people have choices about getting skills, governments often have large negative effects on the acquisition of skills and can impose barriers that limit people’s ability to apply those skills.

A sure way to make many black people better off is to get rid of the government restrictions that make acquiring skills more difficult as well as the government barriers that prevent people from exercising those skills.

Three top targets for abolition are the minimum wage, occupational licensing, and other business licensing. Also, a way to make a good living easier to acquire is to allow more production of some of the components of a good

living. One important component is housing; ending the restrictions on building houses would cause a massive increase in building, bringing with it a large reduction in housing prices.

NO HELP AT ALL

One of the most tragic regulations ever imposed on black people in the United States in the twentieth century was the federal minimum wage, which Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration introduced in 1938. Why tragic? Because a requirement that an employer pay a minimum wage makes it less likely that he will hire an unskilled or low-skilled worker in the first place. Remember that a minimum wage law does not guarantee a job. All it does is guarantee that if the employer offers a job, he is legally required to pay the minimum wage. To get the job, therefore, a potential employee must have enough skill to produce an output worth at least what the employer pays in wages, payroll taxes, and benefits.

Economists who studied employment and unemployment data early on found that one of the groups hardest hit by the minimum wage was black people. In his 1944 classic, *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, social-democrat economist Gunnar Myrdal, who was later co-winner of the 1974 Nobel Prize in Economics, pointed out the harmful consequences. Myrdal wrote, "When government steps in to regulate labor conditions and to enforce minimum standards, it takes away nearly all that is left of the old labor monopoly in the 'Negro jobs.' "

Economists often discuss the harmful effects of the minimum wage as an "unintended consequence." In fact, the effects were intended. Even as late as 1957, when US senators could get away with being openly racist, Senator John F. Kennedy (D-Massachusetts), at a hearing on the minimum wage, argued for increasing the minimum wage to protect white workers in the North from competition with black workers in the South. He stated:

Of course, having on the market a rather large source of cheap labor depresses wages outside of that group, too—the wages of the white worker who has to compete. And when an employer can substitute a colored worker at a lower wage—and there are, as you pointed out, these hundreds of thousands looking for decent work—it affects the whole wage structure of an area, doesn't it?

While Myrdal was discussing the minimum wage's effects on black people in general, his argument applies even more strongly to black youths. On average, black youths are less productive than middle-age blacks and somewhat

less productive than white youths. Economists are not quite sure why. My guess is that an important source of the difference is that a much higher percentage of blacks than of whites are raised without a father present.

So the minimum wage makes it harder than otherwise for a black youth to get that all-important first job. Why is the first job so important? Because it gives the worker a chance to acquire basic skills. One such basic skill is showing up on time. You might think this is basic. It is, and that's the point.

One sure way to make black people better off is to get rid of government restrictions that make it hard to acquire and use skills.

In the summer of 1967, when I was sixteen, I had a job paying just above the minimum wage at a resort in Minaki, Ontario. I did the job well but I had one main problem: I didn't

show up on time. After I was late for three days in a row, Chef Rudy told me that if the next day I didn't show up promptly at eight o'clock, I shouldn't bother coming in. Do you think I showed up on time the next day? I sure did. And I was never late again.

Another way you acquire skills on a low-wage job is by learning on the job—by observation or by practice, or by others training you. One sometimes hears about low-wage jobs being “dead-end jobs.” But the jobs are typically a stepping stone to higher-skilled jobs with higher wages. Ironically, if the government imposes a high minimum wage, it can cause employers to make low-wage jobs into somewhat higher-wage dead-end jobs because the higher minimum wage makes it difficult for employers to take time to train someone on the job. If the time taken by employers to train plus the minimum wage plus benefits all exceed the worker's productivity, something has to give. What sometimes gives is training.

Interestingly, the Economic Policy Institute, an organization in Washington that gets a large amount of its funding from labor unions, admits this tradeoff. In a July 21, 2009, fact sheet supporting the July 2009 increase in the minimum wage, the EPI stated, “Employers may be able to absorb some of the costs of a wage increase through higher productivity, lower recruiting and training costs, decreased absenteeism, and increased worker morale.” How would an employer reduce training costs? Reduce training.

The good news is that the federal minimum wage has been stuck at \$7.25 an hour since 2009. The further good news is that inflation has eroded its real value and diminished its harmful impact. Many state governments, however, have set their minimum wage above, and often well above, \$7.25 an

hour. If it were doubled to \$15 an hour, as Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden and most congressional Democrats favor, look out. In low-wage states such as Alabama, such an increase would have devastating effects on the employment prospects of black youths.

Another factor that hampers black and white people's attempts to increase their income is occupational licensing. Last year, I wrote:

In the early 1950s, according to labor economists Morris Kleiner, a professor at the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs, and Alan Krueger, who was a professor at Princeton, "less than 5 percent of the US workforce was in occupations covered by licensing laws at the state level." By 2000, they found, that number had risen to at least 20 percent.

A graph on occupational licensing done by Veronique de Rugy and Rizqi Rachmat for George Mason University's Mercatus Center shows fourteen occupations that low-income people often engage in for which workers must spend an average of fifty to fifteen hundred days getting either education or experience.

One of the most pernicious occupational regulations is for hair braiding, an area in which producers and consumers alike are disproportionately black women. Sixteen state governments require hair braiders to get a cosmetology license.

Black people have always been hit hard by the minimum wage.

The process involves no chemicals. Can you guess one of the most important things one learns to get a cosmetology license? The proper use of chemicals.

You might think the main reason for occupational licensing is to protect consumers. But that view comes up against an inconvenient fact: virtually all of the push for licensing occupations comes from existing practitioners with nary a word from consumers. That makes sense. Occupational licensing limits competition and consumers tend to like competition. Kleiner and Krueger found that "licensing is associated with about 14 percent higher wages." Those higher wages reflect a reduction in supply, which necessarily leads to higher prices.

One other kind of licensing hurts people with little capital to start a business, a group that includes a lot of blacks and Latinos. That is licensing of street vendors and food carts. As economist Steven Horwitz pointed out in a 2015 study, the governments of New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia all have tough regulations on street vendors. Chicago's government, for

example, insists that street vendors get a special license to prepare food. It also prohibits them from working less than two hundred feet from a brick-

and-mortar restaurant. I wonder why.

A hopeful note: in 2012, when my California assemblyman, Bill Monning, introduced a bill

requiring food trucks to park at least fifteen hundred feet from any school during school hours, he faced enormous opposition. The bill would have banned food trucks in 80 percent of San Francisco. Monning, now a state senator, relented and withdrew his bill.

OPEN UP HOUSING AND SCHOOLS

A major component of a decent living, as I stated above, is housing. House prices in New York City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Boston, and San Diego make it very difficult for middle-class people to rent or buy and virtually impossible for lower-income people. You might think that's because land in those areas is so scarce. But as economists Edward Glaeser of Harvard and Joseph E. Gyourko of the University of Pennsylvania have shown using a clever but simple methodology, the relevant scarcity is not of land but of building permits. If land scarcity were the binding constraint in expensive cities, they argued, then two houses that are basically the same and in the same area but differ only by the amount of land they're on should have radically different prices. Glaeser and Gyourko show that a house with twice the amount of land but only one house allowed sells for only a tiny bit more than the house with less land. Radical deregulation to allow more building would bring housing prices down substantially. Wouldn't it be refreshing if lower-income people, among whom blacks are disproportionately represented, could once again

live in these cities?

Another way to make black people better off is to allow more of them to send their children to charter schools, where they can typically get a

better education at a lower cost to taxpayers. A 2018 University of Arkansas study found that the funding per pupil at charter schools in 2015–16 was a whopping \$5,828—or 29 percent—less than the average funding per pupil at

***Why is that first job so important?
Because it gives the worker a chance
to acquire basic skills and habits.***

Low-wage jobs are sometimes disparaged as “dead-end jobs.” But they’re typically a stepping stone to better-paying jobs.

traditional public schools. Allowing more charters, which many state governments have limited, would be a win-win for black children and taxpayers.

Notice what all my proposals for helping black people have in common. All involve deregulation, all would expand the US economy, and some would actually save the government some money. That's win-win-win. ■

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Ironies of the Plague Year

Protesting violence with violence, destroying economies to save them—these have been months of bitter paradox.

By Victor Davis Hanson

The ancient Greeks created words like *paradox* and *irony* to describe the wide gap between what people profess and assume, and what they actually do and suffer.

Remember the blind prophet Teiresias of ancient drama. In the carnage of Athenian tragedy, he alone usually ends up foreseeing danger better than did those with keen eyesight.

After a catastrophic plague and endless war, ancient democratic Athens was stripped of its majestic pretensions. Soon it was conducting mass executions—on majority votes of the people.

Throughout history, revolutions often do not end up as their initial architects planned. The idealists who ended the French monarchy in 1792 thought they could replace it with a constitutional republic. Instead, they sparked a reign of terror, the guillotine, and mass frenzy. Yet the radicals who hijacked the original revolution and began beheading their enemies soon were themselves guillotined.

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It was not democracy but rather the dictator Napoleon who put an end to French domestic unrest. He assumed more powers than had the executed Bourbon king Louis XVI, who had set off the revolution in the first place.

The Covid-19 epidemic, the nationwide mass quarantine, and the protests, looting, rioting, and arson that all followed the police killing of George Floyd resulted in similar paradoxes. Social distancing and mandated lockdowns for many months have been the source of fighting between the people and their governments. Red and blue states often adopted diametrically opposite policies. Meanwhile, the massive demonstrations and rioting saw hundreds of thousands of protesters

jammed together and often without masks.

Ultimately that mass

disobedience to sheltering in place will teach us, better than any university modeling, whether the virus spikes or is indifferent to thousands who congregate in the streets.

The lockdowns were politically weaponized during this election year. Blue states thought the sinking economy would hurt President Trump's reelection bid. Red states wanted to open up as quickly as possible to get the economy up and running before November.

Blue states pride themselves for their liberal governors, big-city mayors, police chiefs, and state attorneys general. But progressive urban bastions like Los Angeles, New York, Minneapolis, and Philadelphia were also ground zero for arson, violence, and looting, and are places where racial relations are the worst. As violence spiked, there were public and private calls to disband or vastly curtail police forces throughout California, Illinois, and New York—the very states where security and safety were the most unsure.

If blue city councils do manage to defund and/or dismantle their police forces, as a veto-proof majority of councilors has pledged to do in Minneapolis, they will teach Americans whether social problems, crime, and urban decay are made better by the absence of their own police.

Our recent protests started out idealistically by calling attention to the racism that had allowed four Minneapolis police officers to kill George Floyd while in police custody. But that tragic killing sadly became overshadowed by protests and violence where cruel irony abounded.

White antifa arsonists occasionally helped torch black-owned small businesses—in the name of Black Lives Matter.

***We're seeing raw human nature,
stripped of its pretenses.***

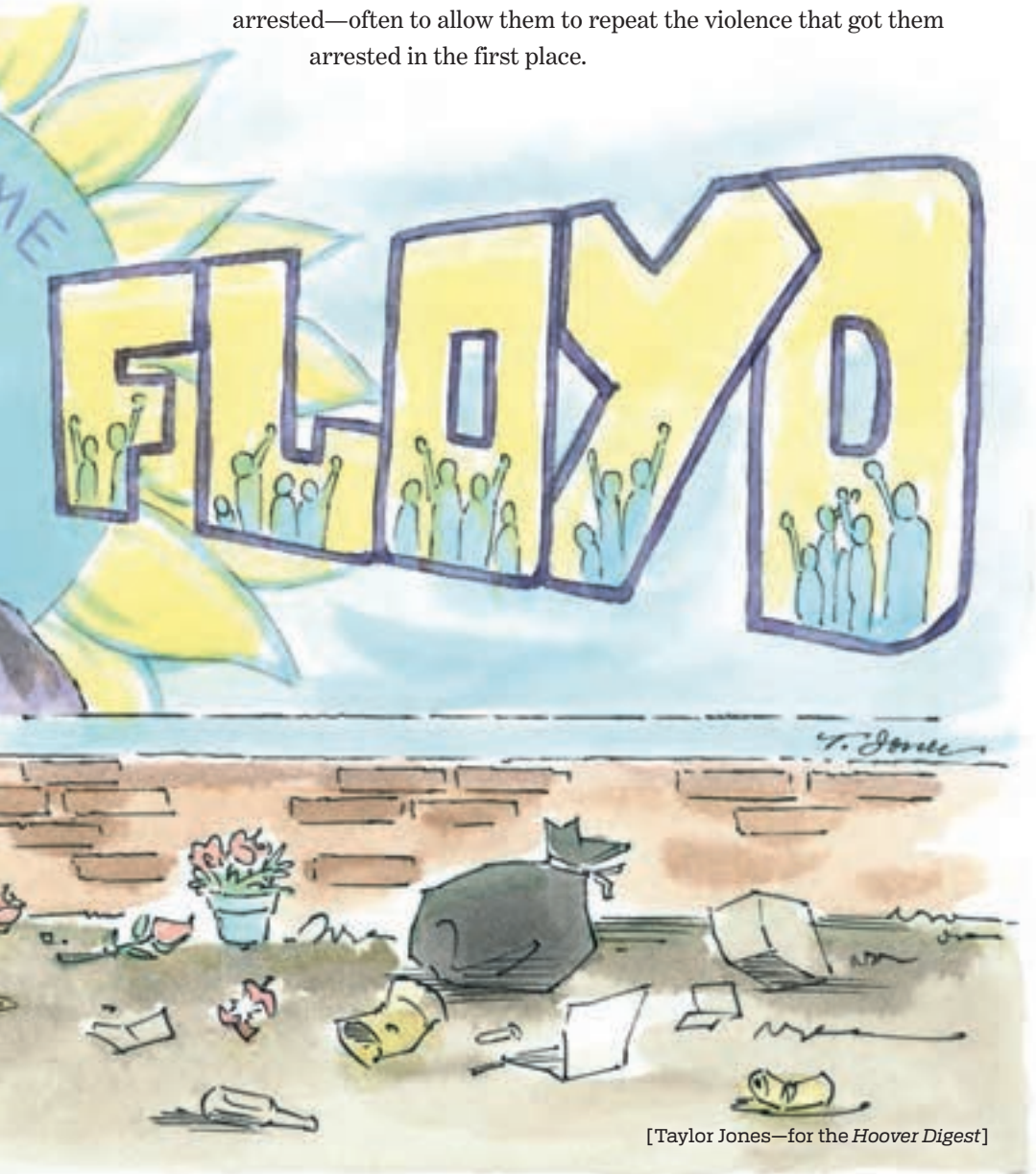
Liberal *New York Times* senior editors were damned as sellouts and racists for allowing free expression on their editorial pages—by their own younger woke staffers, who claimed to be more ethical.

Videos appeared of children screaming that their own parents were racists. Professionals took a knee to own up to their supposed racist sins—in Maoist-like mass confessionals. NPR asked listeners to decolonialize their bookshelves.



The NFL now confesses it was wrong to have asked football players to stand for the National Anthem. But those very protests once sank their television ratings, turned off fans, and slashed attendance. Quarterback Drew Brees one day declares that he is disturbed when the American flag is sullied; the next, he is shamed into apologizing for his patriotism—just as if he had been reprogrammed in a re-education camp.

Zero-bail policies have released violent protesters hours after they were arrested—often to allow them to repeat the violence that got them arrested in the first place.



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

No matter—oblivious, the revolution only steamrolls ahead. Women shave their heads to curb their “whiteness,” by clipping off their “straight” hair,

Americans soon will learn whether social problems, crime, and urban decay are made better by the absence of their own police.

as if in some fairy tale their self-confessed white privilege disappears with their bangs. Demands rise that colleges spend more for racial administrators and programs as they face

insolvency and faculty layoffs. Mayors who failed to protect supermarkets and discount stores from burning and looting now demand that such terrified chains not abandon their inner cities.

As these natural and mandate catastrophes continue, we see raw human nature, stripped of its pretenses. The result is tragically ironic and often not a pretty sight. ■

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To Protect and to Serve

As globalization totters and disease spreads, an old principle, the sovereignty of the individual state, re-emerges as a bulwark of freedom.

By Russell A. Berman

Once upon a time, there was an illusion that the state would disappear. It was the fiction Marxists told each other at bedtime, and it was the lie of the Communists once they had seized state power. For even as they built up their police apparatus and their archipelago of gulags, they kept promising that one day the state would vanish.

Of course, in a sense, they were right—communism ended, and so did the communist states in Russia and Eastern Europe. Yet the death of those regimes is in no way an argument for the death of statehood itself.

Key points

» States exist because danger exists, and because leaders must respond to threats.

» States are rethinking the benefits of globalized supply chains, which were severely strained during the pandemic.

» Western hopes that China would liberalize were based on misunderstanding. China, in fact, proves that post-nationalism is a myth.

» Powerlessness is tempting. But autonomy rests on the ability to defend oneself.

Russell A. Berman is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, co-chair of Hoover's Herbert and Jane Dwight Working Group on Islamism and the International Order, and the Walter A. Haas Professor in the Humanities at Stanford University.

The state is the expression of sovereignty, and sovereignty is the ability of national communities to decide their own fates. Such independence is far from obsolete, and certainly not for the countries on the eastern flank of the European Union. After decades of Russian occupation, they regained their state sovereignty. They will continue to insist on it, and rightly so.

Capitalists, too, have indulged in the fantasy of the end of the state, especially in the neoliberal version of an economy free of political constraints. This peculiar fiction grew pronounced in the millenarian hallucination of an “end of history,” which preached that the epochal change of 1989 had ushered in a Kantian era of perpetual peace. Global capitalism was supposed to erase borders, replacing national solidarities with abstract universalism. Genuine conflicts were predicted to dissolve into rules-based competition, while existential threats would dissipate in a thoroughly benign cosmos. After all, with the fall of communism, all enemies had disappeared, which made states obsolete.

Hence the idealists’ horror at the rise of national populisms after the 2008 financial crisis. Today respectable public opinion still views populism as deplorable, hoping that the next election cycle will bring a return to a normal trajectory of an ever-diminished nation-state, ever-larger supranational organizations, and a programmatic neutralization of all political decisions.

DANGEROUS WORLD

And then came the virus from Wuhan, the global pandemic that signals the end of globalization and therefore the reassertion of the state, for several distinct reasons.

First, despite the illusions—Marxist, capitalist, or anarchist—that the state will vanish because the world is a friendly place, the virus reminds us that danger never disappears. The state is the vehicle with which a political community can respond to ever-present existential threats. One prominent feature of the response to the pandemic is the recognition that sooner or sometimes tragically later, the state must respond to enemies. The responsibility to do so rests ineluctably with the political leaders who must make crucial decisions. Without them and without the state, we would be helpless. The mirage that the state might end is nothing more than an expression of what Karl Heinz Bohrer once called *der Wille zur Ohnmacht* (the will to powerlessness).

When Donald Trump banned travel from China in January, his critics called him a racist. When he stopped travel from Europe, those same critics complained that he had acted too slowly, while the EU leadership denounced him for acting alone. Within a week, the European Union had instituted



DOSE OF REALITY: A worker prepares medicine at a plant in Russia. Amid the coronavirus pandemic, national security concerns are being raised with regard to the globalization of pharmaceutical supply chains. For the United States most medicine, including penicillin, is manufactured abroad. [Sergei Savostyanov—TASS/Sipa USA]

travel bans similar to those for which they had attacked Trump, but only after leaders of individual states, such as Austria's Sebastian Kurz, had made similar decisions.

It is no coincidence that we have seen national leadership emerge by way of renewed assertions of control over national borders: a state that cannot control its borders is a failed state. The border closings of 2020 are the retraction of the German border openings of 2015.

Second, the re-emergence of the state marks the end of globalization in a pending economic restructuring. The excessively praised free flow of capital opened national economies to foreign direct investment, just as it enabled companies that developed in one country to shift production and investment overseas in search of lower wages. Yet all that glittered was not gold. Chinese capital buying up European firms has damaged domestic economies and contributed to accelerated technology transfer, legal and illegal.

In response, Western countries have begun to subject foreign investments to national-security scrutiny because it might not be wise to sell off one's domestic industries to foreign investors beholden to undemocratic and hostile regimes.

Today, however, similar national security concerns are being raised with regard to the globalization of supply chains. For the United States most medicine, including even penicillin, is manufactured in China: we can thank the starry-eyed globalists for this dangerous vulnerability. Fortunately, there are now moves afoot to bring supply chains back home, while also retrieving jobs thoughtlessly exported overseas. Deglobalization is the watchword of the state.

WRONG ABOUT CHINA

Third, the willingness to sacrifice state sovereignty in the name of globalization was always based on a misunderstanding about China. The West has fooled itself repeatedly that communist China will undergo a political liberalization: it never has.

China remains a dictatorship ruled by a Marxist-Leninist party. During the past half century of the supposed rapprochement with China, it has neither liberalized, nor established an independent judiciary, nor carried out free and multiparty elections. Sadly, China's access to Western economies was never made contingent on any respect for human rights.

While Western states subordinated themselves to the illusions of postnationalism—the European Union is the best example—China only grew stronger as an illiberal surveillance state. Hence the crisis of the Wuhan virus: Chinese authorities knew of the illness in December, if not earlier, but they chose to suppress the information, punishing the brave whistleblower professionals who tried to sound the alarm. If addressed promptly, the novel coronavirus might have been contained in Hubei province. Instead, thanks to the Chinese

leadership and its lies, we faced a pandemic, with countless deaths and enormous economic losses. Party Chairman Xi Jinping should be held

The West has fooled itself repeatedly that China will undergo a political liberalization. It never has.

accountable for this suffering. There are no grounds ever again to believe any statistic coming out of China—at least not until Beijing allows the Chinese people to enjoy freedom of speech and a free press.

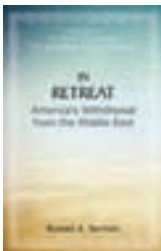
The China question, however, is not only about the origin of the virus or even the vicissitudes of globalization. This coronavirus moment reminds us

that the genuine purpose of the state is to respond to all dangers that jeopardize the life of the political community. The family of Western democracies—not only in the geographic West but also on the periphery of the Eurasian landmass including South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, India, and Israel—faces concerted efforts by China and Russia to disrupt the world order. To be sure, Chinese and Russian interests do not always coincide, and they engage in complicated relations with North Korea and Iran, hardly satellites in the Cold War sense. But ultimately all are part of a multifaceted challenge to our ways of life.

It is not because the virus came from China that we should recognize these dangers, but the virus is an acute reminder that the world is replete with threats, whether epidemic or political, military or economic. Those who argue for the end of the state have to explain who else, other than the state, will ward off another invasion, such as took place in Crimea, or prevent similar aggression in the South China Sea. The answer is: no one. The argument against the state is an argument for capitulation and powerlessness.

Such powerlessness is evidently attractive. It reflects a certain element of conflict aversion inherent in human nature, especially endemic in the academic class. Yet our capacity to live in institutions of our own making—whether individual or collective—based on our traditions and our aspirations, is predicated on the will to mount a defense against external threats. The primary vehicle for self-preservation of the political community is the state. State sovereignty is the best chance we have to fend off adversaries. We defend our freedom by exercising power through the state, not through global illusions or cozy provincialism. This commitment to the state is called patriotism. ■

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Democracy Endures

The coronavirus has persuaded democracies around the world to trade individual rights for public health measures, surrendering liberty for safety—or so we keep hearing. Not so, says Josef Joffe. Citizens are not “endlessly docile.”

“Democracy is dying” runs the coronavirus-infected message across the opinion pages of the Western world, Israel included. Here are some typical refrains from the United States: for would-be despots, “a population gripped by terror creates extraordinary opportunities.” The “autocratic creep continues.” So, “authoritarianism may be just around the corner.” Watch out for duces and caudillos!

In Europe, postmodernist philosopher Giorgio Agamben warns: “A society . . . in a permanent state of emergency cannot be free.” Ours “has sacrificed freedom to the so-called demands of

Key points

» The coronavirus raised confused alarms about the death of democracy. In fact, democratic nations have preserved civil rights and the separation of powers.

» States have pushed back against exertions of central power.

» Emergencies, even grave ones, do not topple constitutional walls.

*Josef Joffe is a distinguished visiting fellow at the Hoover Institution, a member of Hoover’s Working Group on the Role of Military History in Contemporary Conflict, and a senior fellow at Stanford University’s Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies. He serves on the editorial council of *Die Zeit* in Hamburg and the executive committee of *The American Interest*.*

security and condemned itself to a permanent state of fear and insecurity.” In Israel, a *Haaretz* headline blares: “Coronavirus crisis accelerates Israel’s slide into Erdoğan-style authoritarianism.”

How do the soothsayers know? And which democracies have flipped—or are about to fall to the virus of despotism? The merchants of fear love to dredge up evidence that misses the point. Invariably, they cite familiar thugs who arose long before the coronavirus. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the would-be sultan of Ankara. Viktor Orbán, who is pounding Hungary into a one-party state. Poland’s Jarosław Kaczyński, copycatting Józef Piłsudski, the marshal who turned his country into an autocracy in the 1920s. Vladimir Putin, Russia’s post-Romanov czar. Throw in Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil and Rodrigo Duterte in Manila.

These are nasty characters. Alas, as exhibits, they don’t work—no matter how often they are dragged into the dock. They did not ride to power on the back of a pandemic. Their machinations go back as far as 2008, when Putin launched his grab. Or to 2010, when Orbán’s Fidesz party scored a landslide victory. So, when he used the virus to rule by decree, he merely dispatched a parliament he had emasculated long before.

Fingering the Covid-19 emergency ignores the history of neodespotism. The claim runs into two fallacies. One is to confuse pretext—“the emergency made me do it”—with causality. The pandemic cannot explain today what Putin, Orbán, et al. unleashed a decade ago. The other is the trap of reasoning by analogy: because these strongmen did it, so will Frau Merkel in Berlin as well as Messrs. Conte in Italy, Macron in France, Netanyahu in Israel, and Trump in the United States.

Naturally, bad news always beats good news in the battle for attention, as fought by pundits and philosophers. Still, all the Cassandras, who started ringing the death knell for democracy in February and March, might now want to think again—and above all, to take a sober look at the settled democracies. For these matter, unlike the eternal autocracies such as Russia or the barely rooted democracies of Eastern Europe.

Let’s run the test in the West. In Italy, one of the three hardest-hit victims of the coronavirus (in terms of deaths by population), Blackshirts, who brought Mussolini to power, are not roaming the streets of Milan. Prime Minister Conte’s carabinieri obey the rule of law. No truncheon-wielding gendarmes in Paris. No latter-day Gestapo in Germany. The truly bad stuff happens in totalitarian China, what with wall-to-wall surveillance, systematic coverups, and government lackeys banging on doors to take temperatures and drag the infected off into prisonlike quarantine.

Germany, once a haven of totalitarianism, makes for a most instructive test case. The nation, as elsewhere in the West, has not been forced into submission to the regimen of store closures and social distancing; it sticks to the rules freely. Chancellor Merkel has not introduced an “enabling law” like the one that killed democracy in 1933. As between Stockton, California, and Stockholm, the press is as vigilant as ever, as it cannot be in Beijing or Budapest.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

The larger point is about the resilience of the liberal state and its institutions, above all, the separation of powers and sacred civil rights. If the doomsters were right, these checks and balances would have gone first. Yet in April, the German Constitutional Court struck down an ordinance that in the name of social distancing sought to ban antigovernment protests. No, said the court, a blanket injunction against the freedom of assembly is *verboten*. Health must not trump inalienable rights.

Next to go would be states’ rights in favor of an almighty center. It so happens that public health belongs to the sixteen *Länder* of the Federal Republic,

all the way down to the county level. When Merkel claimed nationwide power over local jurisdiction, the governors revolted—and the chancellor backed off.

The pandemic can’t explain what Putin, Orbán, and other despots unleashed a decade ago.

Same in the United States, when Donald Trump asserted “total authority” over the states. The power grab was soundly rejected across party lines. Orbán and Putin would not have tucked tail.

The trickiest case is Israel. Here, Benjamin Netanyahu has indeed played the coronavirus card to the max, trumpeting in so many words: how could he be denied the prime minister’s office when Covid-19 had breached the nation’s borders, inflicting all-out war? He tried everything in the book, as if coached by his good friend Vladimir Putin. He sought to cow, if not outflank, the courts and the Knesset, and he won at least another eighteen months.

So, is Israel ripe for a strongman? Let history answer. Surrounded by a sea of enemies, no Western democracy was more predestined to degenerate into a “garrison state” than Israel. Such a Moloch would have had to sacrifice liberty on the altar of security. Yet after seven decades of war and terror, a historical record, Israel has not so degenerated. Instead, it has vaulted from a Third World country into a regional superpower blessed with both wealth and democracy.

Cynics might quip that Israel's problem is too much democracy. Or as the old joke has it: "two Jews, three opinions, four parties." And five new ones next week. Hence kaleidoscopic coalitions, no solid majorities, and wondrous opportunities for callous tacticians to bend the institutions to their will—with or without a pandemic.

For all of Netanyahu's shenanigans, the good news is the vast distance separating Israel from

Real authoritarians don't return what they've seized.

the neo-authoritarians. Netanyahu has dented the institutions, as he has done in the past ten years; he has not damaged, let alone demolished them.

WHERE THE CENTER HELD

The past, at any rate, should give pause to the prophets of doom who conjure up an Erdoganized West. Since only the Daniels and Isaiahs were gifted with foresight, the prediction of democracy's demise is as dependable as a sure-fire tip at the races. History is a more reliable guide. Let's run through the list of democracies that withstood the lure of authoritarianism amid deadly national crises. Nowhere did catastrophe trigger collapse.

» **United States.** Given its 230-year-old Constitution, America's descent into fascism has occurred only in fiction—as in Sinclair Lewis's *It Can't Happen Here* and Philip Roth's *The Plot Against America*. Yet even in these novels, the good guys prevailed. America's past offers a reassuring message. Trump's predecessors regularly failed to break the constitutional mold during the country's worst national tragedies.

In the midst of America's most deadly war, Abraham Lincoln imposed censor-

The 2020s are not the 1930s, when mass misery gave rise to fuehrers and duces.

ship and suspended habeas corpus, a pillar of Anglo-Saxon liberalism. A federal court struck the edict down, but Lincoln kept harping on the enemy inside. The point, though, is that the ban on arbitrary detention was back after the Civil War. Real authoritarians don't return what they have seized.

After Pearl Harbor, the War Powers Acts granted Franklin D. Roosevelt unprecedented license, enabling him to decree censorship and the internment of Japanese-Americans. (Even before the Supreme Court intervened in December 1944, FDR had nixed the detention order.) After 1941, the United States turned into a Soviet-style command economy, with the Feds

taking more than half of GDP. After V-J Day, the share declined to the normal 20 percent, and the free market bounced back with renewed vigor.

During the Korean War, Harry S. Truman nationalized the steel industry. The Supreme Court smacked him down. Even in war, seizing private property demanded congressional consent, the court ruled. Truman obeyed. All these examples add up to a reassuring story.

» **Britain.** In World War II, legislation placed all “persons, their services, and their property at the disposal of the Crown.” So, forget the Magna Carta. Winston Churchill was granted the most sweeping emergency powers in modern British history. Yet after victory, the electorate promptly ejected him from 10 Downing Street. The time for strongmen was over.

» **Italy.** In the 1970s, the country was shaken to the core by the terrorist Red Brigades. Going on a killing spree, they scored fourteen thousand acts of violence. Yet no Mussolini II arose. Neither is there one today, even

though Italy ached under Europe’s toughest lockdown and one of its highest death rates, surpassed only by Belgium, Great Britain, and Spain. In Madrid, there is no Franco in the wings.

» **Germany.** Also in the 1970s, the Red Army Faction terrorized the country with murder and kidnapping. Just a quarter century after Hitler, liberty seemed at stake. Yet, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt circumvented neither parliament nor constitution. Nor did the courts unhinge due process to catch and convict the culprits.

The people, the real sovereign, are unwilling to trade inalienable rights for total safety. Nor are they endlessly docile.

REASON AND PATIENCE

The moral of this tale should calm the angst-ridden who see authoritarianism lurking just around the corner. Emergencies in the West, the record shows, do not lay low constitutional walls; it is not safety *über alles*. Parliaments and courts may currently convene by Zoom only; they do not issue blank checks to the executive.

Those learned crystal-ball gazers who predict the end of the liberal state overlook two critical points. First, the 2020s are not the 1930s, when mass misery gave rise to fuehrers and duces. While Depression II may be rearing its head, the modern welfare state provides trillions to soften the pain. It

supplements wages and props up failing industries. When government delivers, there is no need for Pied Pipers.

Second, entrenched democracies rely not on force, as in China, but on consent, as reflected in so many polls measuring high approval rates for Covid-related restrictions.

Radical parties are not on a roll; in hard times, those at the helm actually are the beneficiaries of trust. But consent is

conditional—like a loan to be called when the need subsides. The people, the real sovereign, are not willing to trade inalienable rights for total safety. Nor are they endlessly docile.

Throughout the West, governments have been yielding to vox populi, lifting lockdown restrictions from Tel Aviv to Toronto. If Western rulers were indeed out to strangle democracy, they would stoke fear and dramatize the state of siege to justify untrammelled control. Instead, they have been loosening up, returning liberties to the people. Power-hungry politicians would increase repression.

Predicting doom is more fun than celebrating the good news, and in the battle for attention and op-ed space, it is better to be wrong than unheard. Prophecy is not given to ordinary mortals. But the great unwashed have eyes and ears. They recognize cheery realities by heeding Yogi Berra's advice: "You can observe a lot by just watching." There are no potentates in the pipeline. ■

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Taiwan's Triumph

Snubbed by the World Health Organization and the world at large, Taiwan has performed magnificently during the pandemic. It deserves the world's praise—and restored recognition.

By Michael R. Auslin

Since the Carter administration officially recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) on January 1, 1979, the Republic of China on Taiwan has existed in international limbo. It lost its seat in the United Nations and swiftly saw its major diplomatic partners cut ties. Taipei has almost no official standing among the community of nations, a byproduct of the world's half-century desire to trade with the PRC.

It's long past time to rectify that historical mistake. Taiwan deserves to be brought back into the global community, not least because of its actions during the Covid-19 pandemic.

If global governance is based on openness and cooperative behavior, then Taiwan has more than cleared the bar. At a time when the future of international organizations is increasingly in doubt, Taiwan has been eager to join them and

Key points

- » Taiwan has cooperated with world health authorities and eagerly helped other countries with the pandemic.
- » Taiwan developed possibly the world's most effective policy for containing the virus.
- » A healthy democracy since the 1980s, the Republic of China is a key regional ally of the United States and would benefit from greater US support.

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add its expertise. Moreover, it has proved itself a good global actor during the coronavirus crisis, eschewing the kind of nationalism that worries many who are committed to internationalism.

According to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office, Taiwan's non-embassy in the United States, more than two million Taiwan-made N95 masks have already been donated to the United States, more than five million were gifted to the European Union, and another five million will be dispersed globally, even as the country has needed them for its own purposes.

It is now known that Taipei early on tried to warn the World Health Organization that coronavirus might be transmitted between humans, but was ignored by that body. The WHO, under Chinese influence, refuses to allow Taiwan membership and refused to act on Taipei's warnings. If the WHO and Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus had acted responsibly, the Covid-19 crisis could have been significantly contained, even in the face of Beijing's misleading the world about the nature of the virus and the numbers of infections and deaths in China.

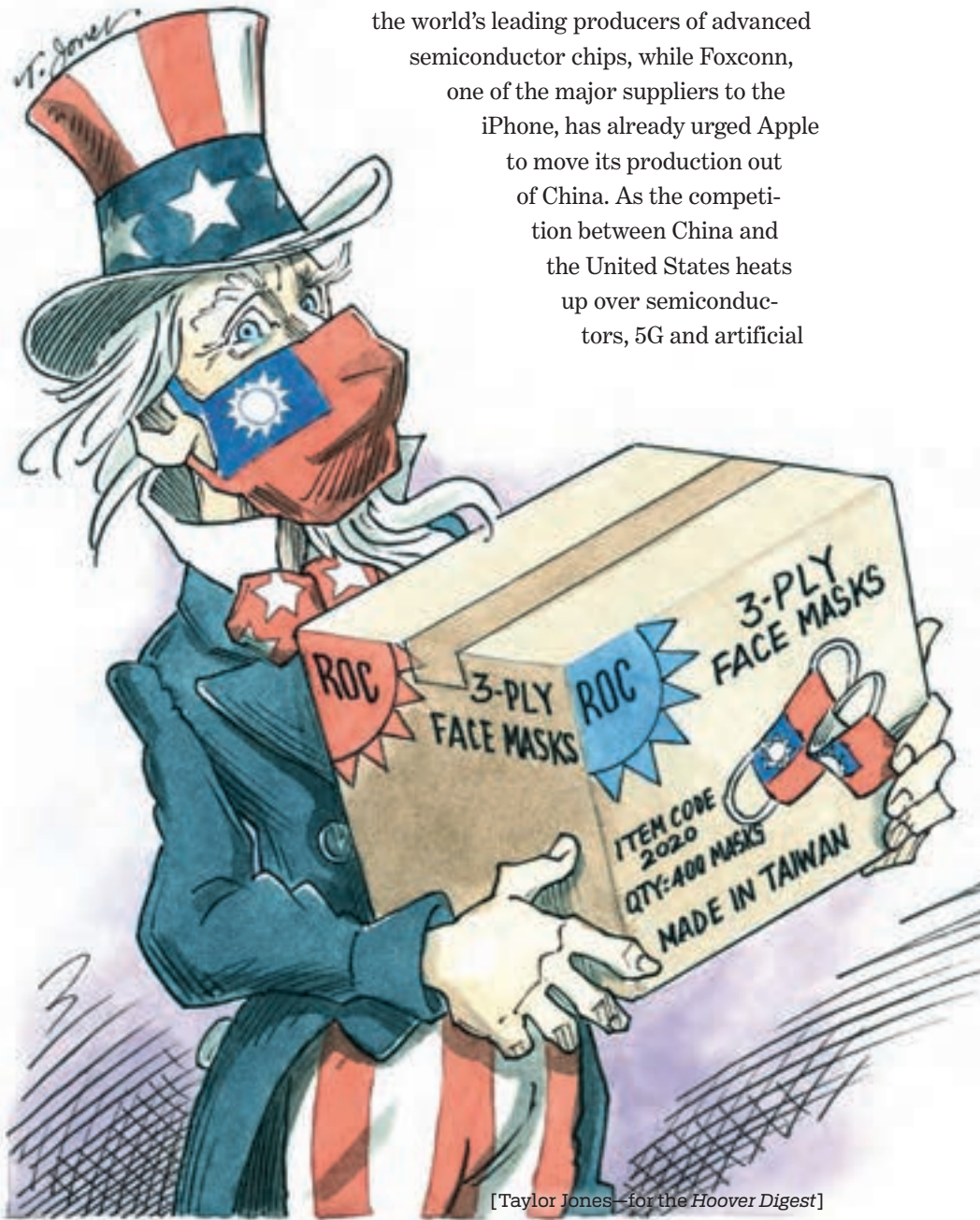
Perhaps most surprising, Taiwan has had perhaps the world's most effective policy for mitigating the spread of coronavirus, despite being on the front lines. It imposed a sweeping ban on travel from China, maintained a ban on Chinese food products, and rigorously tested and monitored infections, allowing it to avoid the type of nationwide shutdown playing havoc with Western economies. Learning from the 2003 SARS epidemic, Taiwan has emerged as a model in preparedness and early action, something that many nations will likely model themselves on, so as to avoid a repeat of the catastrophic effects of Covid-19.

As democracy has retreated around the world in recent decades, Taiwan has remained a beacon for those transi-

tioning from authoritarianism to freedom. It has been a thriving democracy since the late 1980s, regularly transferring power between its two main political parties, the KMT (founded by Sun Yat-sen and the party of Chiang Kai-shek) and the currently ruling Democratic Progressive Party. Taiwan's twenty-three million citizens not only increasingly think of themselves as Taiwanese and not displaced mainlanders, but they have proved that a flourishing democracy can take root in an ethnically Chinese society.

If global governance is based on openness and cooperative behavior, then Taiwan has more than cleared the bar.

For decades, Taiwan has been a leader in the high-tech economy, and will become increasingly important as global supply chains shift away from China because of China's maturing economy, President Trump's trade war, and now the coronavirus. It has long been one of the world's leading producers of advanced semiconductor chips, while Foxconn, one of the major suppliers to the iPhone, has already urged Apple to move its production out of China. As the competition between China and the United States heats up over semiconductors, 5G and artificial



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

intelligence, a closer tech relationship between American and Taiwanese firms should be a priority.

Strategically, Taiwan is situated at the confluence of the East and South China Seas and is a linchpin in defense of a free and open Indo-Pacific region. Beijing's goal of taking control of Taiwan, a priority for Chinese Communist Party General Secretary Xi Jinping, is as much about Chinese domestic politics as it is about the ability to dominate the inner seas of Asia and the western Pacific Ocean. Beijing continues to intimidate Taiwan, sending jet fighters near its airspace and conducting naval exercises near its waters. Keeping Taiwan out of Chinese hands is vital to the future of free navigation and the security of American allies like Japan.

Reacting to the souring of US-China relations that began during the Obama era, the Trump administration has done more to deepen relations with Taiwan than any other since the 1970s. It has agreed to sell advanced defensive equipment and upgraded diplomatic

contacts. Last spring, it signed the TAIPEI Act, sponsored by Senators Cory Gardner, R-Colo-

rado, and Chris Coons, D-Delaware, designed to encourage other nations to increase ties with Taiwan and to prevent Taipei's fifteen remaining diplomatic partners from buckling under to Chinese pressure to abandon the island.

More can and should be done, however. Washington must use its budgetary might to get Taiwan as a full member of international groups such as Interpol and the International Civil Aviation Organization. The US government should work toward getting WHO's member states to invite Taiwan into the organization.

Congress should also pass the Taiwan Assurance Act, sponsored by Senator Tom Cotton, R-Arkansas, which calls for joint US-Taiwanese military exercises, higher-level bilateral exchanges, and a free trade agreement, among other recommendations. Creating a new pan-Asian democracy forum with Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, India, Australia, and other nations will also normalize Taipei's participation in international events. In these as in other ways, Washington must take the lead to encourage other states to do the right thing.

At the private level, representatives from democratic Taiwan should be prioritized in grass-roots exchanges and leadership programs, and American research laboratories, worried about potential espionage from Chinese

The WHO, under Chinese influence, refuses to allow Taiwan membership or to act on Taipei's warnings.

researchers, can instead reach out to Taiwanese scientists. If Taiwan started an alternative to the Communist Party-funded Confucius Institutes to teach Americans about traditional Chinese culture and Taiwan's democratic society, then American universities should welcome it.

In a post-Covid world, prudently reassessing America's relations with China should include recognizing historical mistakes. It is long past time to bring Taiwan in from the cold. ■

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Choose Economic Freedom

To preserve our economic liberty, we must remember how difficult it was to win.

By John B. Taylor

In our new Hoover Press book, *Choose Economic Freedom*, George P. Shultz and I point to clear historical evidence—and words of wisdom from Nobel economics laureate Milton Friedman—to show why good economics leads to good policy and good outcomes, while bad economics leads to bad policy and bad outcomes. But we also recognize that achieving economic freedom is difficult: one always must watch for new obstacles.

Many such obstacles are simply arguments rejecting the ideas that underpin economic freedom—the rule of law, predictable policies, reliance

Key points

- » Three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, students are unfamiliar with the risks of socialism and deviating from market principles.
- » Fortunately, there are still many ways to expand economic freedom and protect it from renewed threats.
- » “Government failure” needs to be confronted.

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on markets, attention to incentives, and limitations on government. If an idea appears not to work, it must be replaced. Thus, it is argued that the rule of law should be replaced by arbitrary government actions, that policy predictability is overrated, that administrative decrees can replace market prices, that incentives don't really matter, and that government does not need to be restrained.

These obstacles were common in the 1950s and 1960s, when socialism was creeping in everywhere. Many tried to stop the trend, and many were successful. But the same obstacles are now reappearing. For example, there are renewed calls for such things as occupational licensing, restrictions on wage and price setting, or government interventions in both domestic and international trade and finance.

Even the Business Roundtable has weighed in, announcing that US corporations share “a fundamental commitment to all of our stakeholders,” including customers, employees, suppliers, communities, and, last on the list, shareholders. That is a significant departure from the group’s 1997 statement, which held that

“the paramount duty of management and of boards of directors is to the corporation’s stockholders; the interests of other stakeholders are

relevant as a derivative of the duty to stockholders.”

The benefits and incentives of market-determined prices far exceed anything central planning could accomplish.

Moreover, as that earlier statement was right to point out, the idea that a corporate board “must somehow balance the interests of stockholders against the interests of other stakeholders” is simply “unworkable.”

After the demise of the Soviet Union, real-world case studies that showed the harms of excessive government intervention and central planning were forgotten. There are no longer discussions about how centrally imposed plans might lead a Soviet production plant to complete its objective by producing one five-hundred-pound nail instead of five hundred one-pound nails. Three decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it is understandable that

A BETTER ROAD: Economist Friedrich Hayek (opposite page), author of The Road to Serfdom, stressed that central planning could never work because “the ‘data’ from which the economic calculus starts are never for the whole society ‘given’ to a single mind.” [Everett Collection—Newscom]

today's undergraduate students are unfamiliar with the risks of deviating from market principles.

That is why we need to teach history. What was said in the past is often the best reply to renewed claims in favor of socialism. In his introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of Friedrich Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom*, Friedman pointed out that the book was "essential reading for everyone seriously interested in politics in the broadest and least partisan sense, a book whose central message is timeless, applicable to a wide variety of concrete situations. In some ways, it is even more relevant to the United States today than it was when it created a sensation on its original publication in 1944."

In 2020, the book is more relevant still. Its key message is that the benefits of market-determined prices and the incentives they provide far exceed anything that could come from central planning and government-administered prices. In his 1945 essay "The Use of Knowledge in Society," Hayek explained that the problem of optimizing the use of available resources in an economy "can be stated best in mathematical form: . . . the marginal rates of substitution between any two commodities or factors must be the same in all their different uses." But, he hastened to add, "This . . . is emphatically not the economic problem which society faces," because "the 'data' from which the economic calculus starts are never for the whole society 'given' to a single

mind which could work out the implications and can never be so given."

Nowadays, students sometimes ask me why they need to study market economics at all. With

If markets are to work, and if economic efficiency and liberty are to be achieved, the rule of law needs to be front and center.

artificial intelligence and machine learning, won't governments soon be able to allocate people to the best jobs and make sure everyone gets what they want? Hayek's old answer to that kind of question is still the best.

This is hardly the first time that the American political system has lurched toward massive expansions of government power and spending. In 1994, Friedman, in a *New York Times* article titled "Once Again: Why Socialism Won't Work," lamented that "the bulk of the intellectual community almost automatically favors any expansion of government power so long as it is advertised as a way to protect individuals from big bad corporations, relieve poverty, protect the environment or promote 'equality' . . . The intellectuals may have learned the words but they do not yet have the tune."

Fortunately, there are still many ways to expand economic freedom and protect it from renewed encroachments. The point to remember is that government programs have costs as well as benefits. There is not just market failure but also government failure. And there are indeed private remedies to economic externalities. But if markets are to work, and if

Case studies have long shown the harms of excessive government intervention and central planning.

economic efficiency and liberty are to be achieved, the rule of law needs to be front and center, with clear monetary- and fiscal-policy rules in place.

Moreover, a wealth of new data can now help us demonstrate the benefits of economic freedom more widely. The Heritage Foundation's Index of Economic Freedom, the Fraser Institute's Economic Freedom of the World, and the World Bank's Doing Business rankings are each published annually. Taken together, these reports show that good and bad economic outcomes in countries correlate strongly with good and bad policies. The stories behind the data are fascinating, and they can tell us what works and what does not.

But even if we shoot down all the arguments against economic freedom, there will still be obstacles to its realization. Moving forward requires that we put the ideas of economic freedom into practice. Otherwise, as Friedman put it in his 1994 introduction to Hayek's book, "it is only a little overstated to say that we preach individualism and competitive capitalism, and practice socialism." To get the job done, people must be clear about the principles, explain them, fight for them, and decide when and how much to compromise on them. ■

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Dangers of Disengagement

Should we roll back US foreign commitments? When? By how much? These are serious questions, and **simplistic thinking doesn't help.**

By H. R. McMaster

In the decades after the US withdrawal from Vietnam, the simplistic but widely held belief that the war had been unjustified and unwinnable gave way to “the Vietnam syndrome”—a conviction that the United States should avoid all military interventions abroad. The mantra of “no more Vietnams” dominated foreign policy, muting more concrete discussions of what should be learned from that experience. Instead, the analogy was applied

Key points

- » The mantra of “no more Vietnams” dominated foreign policy for years, muting discussion of what should be learned from that conflict.
- » A new mantra, born of frustration, calls for “ending endless wars.”
- » Disengagement would actually bring new dangers to the United States, and the costs of responding to them would rise.
- » America is no longer protected by its “moat.” Threats from transnational terrorists (or viruses) spread easily.

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indiscriminately; US military operations in the Balkans, the Horn of Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East prompted assertions that the use of force would lead to “another Vietnam.” It was not until the United States won a lopsided victory over the military of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein in the 1990–91 Gulf War that President George H. W. Bush could declare that the United States had finally “kicked the Vietnam syndrome.”

Nearly three decades

later, however, a new mantra of “ending endless wars” has emerged from frustrations over indecisive, protracted,

and costly military interventions abroad. These frustrations have reproduced the Vietnam syndrome in a new guise: the Afghanistan-Iraq syndrome.

Across the political spectrum, many Americans have come to believe that retrenchment would not only avoid the costs of military operations overseas but also improve US security. They have found support for this belief in analyses like those that appeared in *Foreign Affairs* last spring, in a package titled “Come Home, America?”

The authors of those articles offered different variations on the retrenchment theme. But what some of the articles have in common is an appeal that reflects strong emotions rather than an accurate understanding of what went wrong in the wars that followed the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Proponents of a US withdrawal from its military commitments play to visceral feelings of war weariness and argue that the difficulties of those wars were the inevitable consequence of the United States’ misguided pursuit of armed domination. Some retrenchers depict US foreign policy since the end of the Cold War as a fool’s errand, impelled by a naive crusade to remake the world in the United States’ image. And although advocates of retrenchment often identify as realists, they subscribe to the romantic view that restraint abroad is almost always an unmitigated good.

In fact, disengagement from competitions overseas would increase dangers to the United States; the paltry savings realized would be dwarfed by the eventual cost of responding to unchecked and undeterred threats to American security, prosperity, and influence.

***Sometimes wars choose you
rather than the other way around.
Retrenchers tend to forget that.***

MAKING BAD SITUATIONS WORSE

In their critiques of the post-9/11 wars, retrenchers fail to acknowledge the hidden costs of their recommendations. Although a majority of Americans

now agree that the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 was a mistake, retrenchment advocates ignore the consequences of the withdrawal of US forces from Iraq in 2011 and of the broader disengagement from the Middle East that accompanied it. Those steps ceded space to jihadi terrorists and Iranian proxies, thereby creating an ideal environment for the return of sectarian violence and the establishment of the self-declared caliphate of the Islamic State (or ISIS).

The Obama administration made similar mistakes in Libya earlier in 2011, after pushing for a NATO air campaign that helped depose the dictator Muammar Gadhafi. Although it was determined to avoid the mistakes of the George W. Bush administration's war in Iraq, the Obama administration paradoxically exceeded them, failing to shape Libya's political environment in the wake of Gadhafi's demise. Nearly a decade later, the Libyan civil war rages on, and the country remains a source and a transit point for millions seeking escape from turmoil in northern Africa and the Sahel.

Retrenchers ignore the fact that the risks and costs of inaction are sometimes higher than those of engagement. In August 2013, the Syrian regime used poison gas to kill more than fourteen hundred innocent civilians, including hundreds of children. Despite President Obama's declaration in 2012 that the use of these heinous weapons to murder civilians would cross a red line, the United States did not respond with military force. US inaction enabled the regime's brutality, emboldening Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his Iranian and Russian supporters to intensify their mass homicide.

In 2017–18, President Trump finally enforced the Obama administration's red line, retaliating against the use of chemical weapons by Assad with strikes against the Syrian military. But Trump's decision in 2019 to withdraw US forces from eastern Syria complicated efforts to eliminate ISIS and bolstered the influence of Assad and his sponsors in an area whose control would give them a significant advantage in the war.

Almost nine years after the Syrian civil war began, a humanitarian catastrophe continues in Idlib province, which, at the end of 2019, generated over a million more refugees, many of whom succumbed to extreme cold or the novel coronavirus.

Despite evidence that US disengagement can make a bad situation worse, retrenchers have pushed for a withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan. The agreement signed between the United States and the Taliban in February 2020 will allow the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and various other jihadi terrorists to claim victory, recruit more young people to their cause, gain control of more territory, and inflict suffering through the imposition of draconian



COUNTING COSTS: Last May, an exhibit outside the city hall of Mission Viejo, California, features military personnel killed in Afghanistan and Iraq. Many Americans are frustrated over indecisive, protracted, and costly military interventions abroad—but disengaging from US foreign commitments would come at a cost, too. [Mindy Schauer—Orange County Register]

sharia. Just as the Syrian civil war and the rise of ISIS generated a refugee crisis that reached into Europe, the establishment of an Islamic emirate in a large portion of Afghanistan would generate another wave of refugees and further destabilize Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation of more than 220 million people. Terrorist organizations that already enjoy safe haven in the Afghan-Pakistani border region will increase their profits from illicit activities such as the narcotics trade and apply those resources to intensify and expand their murderous campaigns.

Retrenchment advocates are relatively unconcerned about enemies gaining strength overseas because they assume that the United States' geographic blessings—including its natural resources and the vast oceans

that separate it from the rest of the world—will keep Americans safe. But in today's interconnected world, threats from transnational terrorists (or viruses, for that matter) do not remain confined to particular regions. The humanitarian, security, and political consequences of the conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen have reached well beyond the Middle East and South Asia. Just as China's concealment of the coronavirus forestalled actions that might have prevented a global catastrophe, the United States' withdrawal of support for its partners on the front lines against jihadi terrorists could generate staggering costs if the terrorists succeed in pen-

Withdrawing US forces from Iraq in 2011 ceded space to jihadi terrorists and Iranian proxies.

etrating US borders as they did on September 11, 2001. And a reduction of US support for allies and partners along the frontiers of hostile

states, such as Iran and North Korea, or revisionist powers, such as China and Russia, could result in a shift in the balance of power and influence away from the United States. Retrenchment could also result in a failure to deter aggression and prevent a disastrous war.

Retrenchers also overlook the trend that the security associated with the United States' geographic advantages has been diminishing. In 1960, the historian C. Vann Woodward observed that technologies such as the conventional aircraft, jet propulsion, the ballistic missile, and the atomic-powered submarine marked "the end of the era of free security." Those technologies overtook "Americans so suddenly and swiftly that they have not brought themselves to face its practical implications." Retrenchers are out of step with history and way behind the times.

WISDOM ABROAD

Even the most compelling arguments for sustained engagement overseas are unlikely to convince hard-core retrenchers, who believe that an overly powerful United States is the principal cause of the world's problems. Their pleas for disengagement are profoundly narcissistic, as they perceive geopolitical actors only in relation to the United States. In their view, other actors—whether friends or foes—possess no aspirations and no agency, except in reaction to US policies and actions. Retrenchers ignore the fact that sometimes wars choose you rather than the other way around: only after the most devastating terrorist attack in history did the United States invade Afghanistan.

In the “Come Home, America?” articles, Jennifer Lind and Daryl Press argue that abandoning what they describe as Washington’s pursuit of primacy would quell China and Russia while providing opportunities for cooperation on issues of climate change, terrorism, and nuclear proliferation. Writer Stephen Wertheim asserts that a less threatening United States could “transform globalization into a governable and sustainable force” and bring about a reduction in jihadi terrorism, a less aggressive China, a curtailment of Russian interference, the cessation of Iran’s proxy wars, the termination of North Korea’s threat to US and regional security and human rights, and even progress against the threat from climate change.

If these promises seem too good to be true, it’s because they are. Retrenchment hard-liners are confident in such claims because they assume that the United States has preponderant control over future global security and prosperity. In reality, adversaries have the power to act based on their own aspirations and goals: American behavior did not cause jihadi terrorism, Chinese economic aggression, Russian political subversion, or the hostility of Iran and North Korea. And US disengagement would not attenuate those challenges or make them easier to overcome.

The movement in favor of retrenchment is in part a reaction to the excessive optimism that

animated US
foreign policy
in the 1990s.

When the
Soviet Union

collapsed and the Cold War ended, some thinkers and policy makers assumed that the process of democratization that was unfolding in Eastern Europe would be replicable in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. But they failed to give due consideration to local contexts and to political, social, cultural, and religious dynamics that make liberal democracy and the rule of law hard to reach.

Similarly, after the United States’ lopsided military victory in the Gulf War, some assumed that future wars could be won quickly and decisively because US technology had produced a “revolution in military affairs.” But this presumption ignored continuities in the nature of war, such as the enemy’s say in a war’s course of events and its political, human, and psychological complexities. Excessive optimism soon grew into hubris, setting the United States up for unanticipated difficulties in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The best antidote to such overconfidence, however, is not the excessive pessimism offered by retrenchers. Policy makers should instead adopt what

***The best antidote to strategic overconfidence
is not excessive pessimism. The antidote is
“strategic empathy.”***

the historian Zachary Shore calls *strategic empathy*: an understanding of the ideology, emotions, and aspirations that drive and constrain other actors. Strategic empathy might help at least some advocates of retrenchment qualify their adamant opposition to democracy promotion and human rights advocacy abroad and might allow them to accept that the United States cannot determine, but can influence, the evolution of a world in which free and open societies flourish.

In recent years, protests against authoritarian rule and corruption have flared up all over the world. In Baghdad, Beirut, Caracas, Hong Kong,

Khartoum, Moscow, and Tehran, people have made clear that they want a say in how they are governed. Support for those who strive for freedom is in

The risks and costs of inaction are sometimes higher than those of engagement.

the United States' interest, because a world in which liberty, democracy, and the rule of law are strengthened will be safer and more prosperous. Disengagement from competitions overseas would cede influence to others, such as the Chinese Communist Party, which is already redoubling efforts to promote its authoritarian model.

Retrenchment may hold emotional appeal for Americans tired of protracted military commitments abroad, but blind adherence to an orthodoxy based on emotion rather than reason would make Americans less safe and put the United States further in the red. ■

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A Game of Finesse

“Cut and run” or “stay the course” in the Middle East? This is a false choice. We should think instead in terms of a continuum of ways to use both soft power and hard.

By James O. Ellis Jr.

In classical logic, the false dichotomy, or false dilemma, is defined as an argument where only two choices are presented yet more exist, or a spectrum of possible choices exists between two extremes. False dilemmas are usually characterized by “either this or that” language but can also be characterized by the omission of choices. This insidious tactic has the appearance of forming a logical argument, but under closer scrutiny it becomes evident that there are more possibilities than the either/or choice that is presented.

The dichotomy appears often in policy debates touching on the role of the United

Key points

» Situational awareness is the key to an intelligent Middle East policy.

» Both technology and a deeper study of social dynamics are part of situational awareness. A military adage says, “You can’t surge trust.”

» Quietly exercising power, and not disclosing plans and deployments, keeps potential enemies off guard. It also sustains credibility.

James O. Ellis Jr. (US Navy, retired) is the Annenberg Distinguished Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution and a member of Hoover’s task forces on arctic security, energy policy, and military history. He is also an adjunct professor in Stanford University’s Department of Management Science and Engineering.

States in the Middle East. On the one hand, politicians (and successful presidential candidates) on both sides of the aisle vowed a policy of retrenchment to end the region's "forever wars" that have been the primary focus of American national security policy for almost two decades at a cost of trillions of

As George Shultz often notes, "trust is the coin of the realm."

dollars and thousands of lives. On the other hand, pragmatists note the difficulties that come with

such wishful thinking: America still has enduring vital interests and lasting allies in the region, and efforts to focus elsewhere have brought a resurgence of Islamic extremism, humanitarian disasters, and repeated geopolitical failings.

In US Middle East policy, the choice is often perceived as "stay the course" or "cut and run." The reality is that there exists a continuum of possibilities, a range of engagement options, a spectrum of costs, and an ability to vary them in size, scope, and character in ways appropriate to our national security needs, reassuring and supportive of regional allies and partners, and confounding to potential adversaries. In electrical engineering terms, we do not want to install an on/off switch when what we need is a continuously adjustable rheostat.

THE KNOWN KNOWNS

The key to an effective Middle East policy is situational awareness—a deep understanding of the political, social, economic, and security environment and, more important, emerging trends. Technology, in many ways, is increasing our ability to observe, orient, decide, and act, enhancing the classic "OODA [observe, orient, decide, act] loop" of military tactics and strategy. In past decades, that required a large human presence; no longer. As Peter Singer wrote over a decade ago: "Throughout history, from the wheels that powered the pharaohs' chariots to the early use of cannon to batter down the walls of Constantinople, the greater Middle East has long been a cauldron for military change."

Today, the latest revolution in technology and war is the growing use of unmanned systems, better described as the "robotics revolution." Ranging from palm-sized drones to unpiloted aircraft with the wingspan of a Boeing 737, aerial surveillance vehicles have become ubiquitous and, as the ability to couple that with broader space-based imagery and signals intelligence has grown, we are now able to remotely compile vast amounts of data and then draw on artificial intelligence, nodal analysis, and pattern recognition



SITUATIONAL AWARENESS: US strategy in the Middle East contains a continuum of possibilities, a range of engagement options, a spectrum of costs, and an ability to vary them in size, scope, and character—while supporting regional allies and partners and confounding potential adversaries. [Allison Diner—ZUMA Press/Newscom]

to separate the needles from the haystack. Finally, as we have seen recently in the attack on Qasem Soleimani, there remains the undetected capability—within policy, ethics, and law of armed-conflict guidelines—to take decisive kinetic action.

Technology has also brought sweeping societal and sociological change. Using that newfound capability to listen and understand what is happening in the region is now an essential element of situational awareness. Nine out of every ten young people in the Middle East use at least one social media channel every day, and increasingly they do so on their phones. Mobile social media in the region has doubled in the past five years, now reaching

44 percent overall. Much of that information can be monitored easily, heard remotely, and even engaged with appropriately. I am not talking espionage here, though that has its place, but rather the societal “buzz” in which anyone with a computer and the requisite language skills can immerse himself. As I often remind myself, listening is not the same as not talking; we have to actually *hear*.

There is an active, continuously evolving, vibrant, and to some degree transparent social pulse in the region that even the best of diplomats and

advisors cannot tap. We need to be more of a part of that, appreciating cultural differences, bringing broader perspectives, and encouraging positive outcomes while remembering that American

It's not helpful to announce our planned presence, or departure, from every overseas engagement and commitment.

exceptionalism is not the same as American triumphalism.

Former secretary of state George Shultz, drawing on his decades of international engagement, often notes that “trust is the coin of the realm.” The military corollary injects the time dimension, noting that “you cannot surge trust,” implying that it must be cultivated and nurtured over time. Despite the points I made above, the building and sustaining of personal relationships does ultimately require presence, but we need to think differently in scope and scale, not necessarily interacting the way we always have. A strategically cohesive and coordinated whole-of-government plan of professional diplomatic presence, regular high-level commercial delegations, and episodic, targeted military-to-military engagement can lay the foundation, but we need to sometimes reduce the scope and do more at the local and personal level.

For example, decades ago, during the brief Kosovo conflict, I visited the chief of staff of the armed forces of the then-Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Arriving at headquarters, I was amazed to be greeted by a British brigadier general. In British parlance, he had been “seconded” to the headquarters for an extended period of time and, working within the general staff, was a key architect of the Macedonian national security planning, including their Balkan border with Kosovo. Needless to say, the insights gained in an hourlong conversation with him were worth hundreds of dispassionate intelligence reports and pages of overhead imagery. In addition to capability, he could also talk in detail on politics, people, personalities, capacity, and intent.

SUBTLETY IS THE WORD

A final area where we can tailor our regional efforts is in the timing of our presence. Why do we insist on announcing our planned presence, much less our departure, from every overseas engagement and commitment? Rather than just large set-piece force deployments, why not expand episodic land, sea, and air exercises tailored to need or partner capabilities? In times of constrained resources, not every presence requirement needs an aircraft carrier strike group or a bomber wing; we also need to continue to tap our Coast Guard, National Guard, and police partners whose capabilities are often a closer match with the needs of our regional allies. Arriving quietly, largely unannounced, professionally conducting our training engagement, and departing without fanfare can reduce the regional pressure on our friends, build reliable and enduring partnerships, establish the optics that US forces are “always around,” and create uncertainty on the part of our foes as to whether we have really left and when we might return.

The choice to either leave or stay in the Middle East is false, dangerous, and unnecessary. Announcing that we are staying the course, as currently structured, implies we aspire to a hegemonic role we can no longer afford, are no longer willing to play, and that is increasingly unacceptable to friends and allies. An announced departure creates a geopolitical vacuum and understates the costs of retrenchment by failing to account for the possibility that we can be drawn back in. It ignores our painful experience with devastating terrorist attacks, the rise of ISIS, the creations of jihadist sanctuaries in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, and the perceptions of abandonment of allies who have

fought alongside us
and on whom we rely
for counterterrorism
intelligence and critical
early warning.

In electrical engineering terms, we don't want to install a policy on/off switch when what we need is a rheostat.

Finally, and perhaps most important, as Yaroslav Trofimov wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* last year: “In other parts of the world, people and leaders are closely watching the fallout from America’s behavior in the Middle East—and drawing conclusions that will affect the global balance of power.” Binary, black-or-white thinking doesn’t allow for the many different variables, conditions, and contexts in which there would exist more than just the two possibilities put forth. It frames the argument misleadingly and obscures rational, honest debate.

Why choose one of the extreme solutions when we can appropriately adjust the rheostat? ■

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Cold Days Ahead

As we seek to manage our newly frosty relationship with China, lessons from the Cold War can help.

By Timothy Garton Ash

Let's be honest: there is a new cold war between China and the United States. The coronavirus crisis has only heightened the antagonism. There are few, if any, countries in Africa or Latin America where the two superpowers do not loom large as rivals. When Chinese and Indian soldiers clash with brutal hand-to-hand fighting on a disputed frontier, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo hastens to take the Indians' side. British parliamentarians have formed a China Research Group—with the word “research” meaning opposition research, as in the European Research Group. The question of whether Huawei is a security threat is being asked almost everywhere.

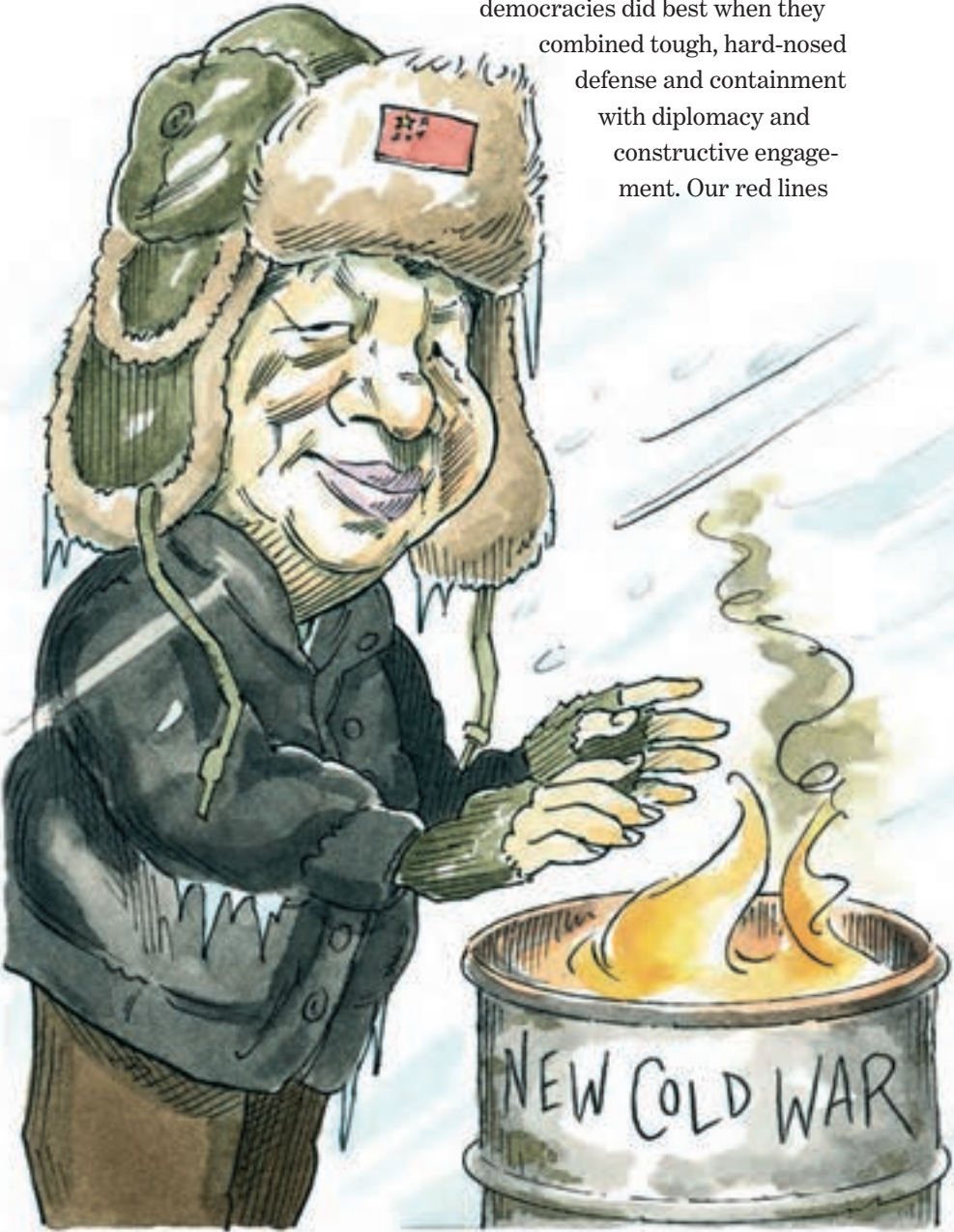
Every historical analogy is imperfect, but if the essence of cold war is a world-wide, multidimensional, long-term struggle between two superpowers, this is a new cold war. The question for the rest of us is: What do we do about it? Do we put our heads in the sand and say: “Please make this go away”? That is roughly the attitude of most Europeans. Or do we recognize the reality and try to shape it towards the best possible outcome? The latter is obviously the right course. With that in mind, here are nine lessons from cold war I for cold war II.

» **We must think long term.** The first cold war lasted more than forty years. The People's Republic of China has huge strengths, including sheer

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scale, national pride, evolutionary innovation, an entrepreneurial society, and a Leninist party that has systematically learned from the collapse of the Soviet Union so as to avoid the same fate. This will be a long haul.

» **Combine competition and cooperation.** Détente policies were not distinct from the first cold war—they were an intrinsic part of it. Liberal democracies did best when they combined tough, hard-nosed defense and containment with diplomacy and constructive engagement. Our red lines



on issues such as the security of Taiwan should be crystal clear, but so should our continued readiness to work with Beijing. The EU correctly describes China as at once a partner, a competitor, and a “systemic rival.” Given the degree of interdependence between China and the liberal world, as well as global threats such as climate change and Covid-19, we’ll need to embrace a twin-track approach.

» **Focus on China’s internal dynamics.** The primary cause of this new cold



[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

war is the turn taken by the Chinese Communist Party leadership under Xi Jinping since 2012: more oppressive at home, more aggressive abroad. We have to understand why the Chinese party-state took this turn away from the more pragmatic, evolutionary strategy—“crossing the river by feeling for the stones”—that for decades enabled the country’s peaceful rise and won China such broad international appeal at the time of the Beijing Olympics. And what forces or circumstances might bring it back to such a path? We need all the expertise we can get on Chinese history, culture, and politics, and on Asia as a whole.

» **Don’t believe we can engineer their system.** One of the recurrent delusions of Western policy in the first cold war was that it could directly and predictably change the other side’s domestic politics. Remember all that behavioral-psychology nonsense about strengthening the doves and weakening the hawks? The entirety of our policies will be at best a secondary cause of change in the Chinese system. Avoid behavioristic hubris.

» **Always remember that we are addressing a society as well as a state.** The more we—rightly—criticize the party-state’s policy in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea, the more we need to emphasize that this is not an attack on the Chinese people, with their rich, fascinating culture and history. Every action and statement should be assessed for its impact on Chinese society as well as on the party-state. In the end, it is the Chinese who will change China, not us.

» **China is not the Soviet Union.** Learning from the first cold war also means understanding how this time is different. Just as the Soviet Union was a mix of Leninist politics and Russian history, so China blends Xi’s Leninism with Chinese culture and tradition. Francis Fukuyama argues that China was “the first world civilization to create a modern state” and that for centuries “Chinese regimes were centralized, bureaucratic, and merit-based.” China’s strengths and weaknesses also flow from an unprecedented combination of Leninism and capitalism. Other historical comparisons are illuminating, such as with the economically modern but socially conflicted pre-1914 Wilhelmine Germany, which challenged imperial Britain as Beijing now challenges the imperial United States.

» **If you don’t know what to do, do the right thing.** We watch with horror the tragedy of Hong Kong, the totalitarian oppression of the Uighurs in Xinjiang, and the muzzling of brave individual dissidents. The British government has done the right thing in offering a path to full British citizenship for up to three million Hong Kong residents, even though this will do nothing to prevent the slow strangling of that city’s glorious high-rise synthesis of east

and west. The Norwegian Nobel committee was right to award the peace prize to Liu Xiaobo, although it could not save that brave and lucid Chinese patriot from a painful death in prison.

» **Unity is strength.** At the moment, the liberal world is at sixes and sevens over China. Beijing has endless opportunities to divide and rule. A recent official paper laying out Washington's new "strategic approach" to the other superpower says the first objective of US policy is "to improve the resiliency of our institutions, alliances, and partnerships," but President Trump does the opposite. An effective twin-track response to the Chinese challenge requires a strategic unity that is geographically wider than the pre-1989 alliance of Western Europe and North America. The EU, the post-Brexit United Kingdom, and the US administration should sit down with representatives of other democracies early next year to chart common ground.

» **Cold wars are won at home.** By far the most important single thing that liberal democracies did to prevail in the first cold war was to make our own societies prosperous, free, open, and attractive. The same will be true this time. A former Chinese student of mine has written a fascinating essay about the attitudes of Chinese students who return home after studying at Western universities. His conclusion: the experience of living in the West does not make returning Chinese students, as we might once have hoped, perfect pro-Western liberal democrats. Instead, they become "double dissidents," highly critical of both systems. It's not our foreign policy that will ultimately convince them. It's what we do at home.

Oh, and one last thing. I call this a new cold war because my job as a political writer is to call a spade a spade. That doesn't mean Western politicians would be well-advised to deploy a phrase with such negative connotations. Wise leaders don't say all they know. ■

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Serbia, Russia, and the New Great Game

After twenty years of uneasy peace in the Balkans, Belgrade is moving closer to Europe—but also displaying Russian-style autocracy while flirting with China.

By Jovana Lazić Knežević and Norman M. Naimark

Upon arriving at Nikola Tesla airport near Belgrade, visitors for many years have encountered a large billboard depicting intertwined Serbian and Russian flags that proclaims, “Partnership for the Future.” The billboard invokes a commonly held perception in the country of Serbian-Russian relations: that of Slavic, Orthodox brothers who share a common historical and civilizational bond and, by implication, shared interests and a shared future. The symbolism is unmistakable, linking the countries’ pasts, presents, and futures in a seamless continuum.

The streets of Belgrade are adorned with pro-Russia and pro-Putin banners proclaiming Russian-Serbian historical brotherhood. T-shirts and mugs

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featuring Vladimir Putin's image are prevalent at souvenir stands throughout the city, leading one Russian journalist to dub the Serbian capital "Putin-grad." Oligarchs and right-wing groups in both countries promote common Russian and Serbian "values" of patriotism, family, nationality, and Slavic unity.

The Russian and Serbian Orthodox churches have played an important role in fostering this relationship. During his January 2019 visit, Putin visited the newly restored Church of Saint Sava in Belgrade, to which the Russian energy giant Gazprom had donated around ten million euros for the gilded mosaic that lines the church dome. (Gazprom, which holds the majority share of NIS, the Petroleum Industry of Serbia, is also the sponsor of the "Partnership for the Future" billboard.) During a trip to Belgrade in June 2020, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov proclaimed the "majestic" Church of Saint Sava "the symbol of our spiritual unity."

Narratives of Serbian-Russian brotherhood are reinforced daily by an active propaganda and disinformation campaign waged through Russian state sponsored media outlets, most significantly the Sputnik news agency, which started broadcasting in Belgrade in 2015. The Center for Euro-Atlantic Studies (CEAS), a Belgrade-based think tank, estimates that there are more than a hundred pro-Russian media outlets and nongovernmental organizations in Serbia. By providing free or very low-cost media and leveraging a range of platforms, including radio, mobile, and web, they reach a broad audience. Their broadcasts and reports are picked up and disseminated through mainstream national media, spreading anti-NATO and anti-EU narratives that exploit the Serbian sense of victimhood at the hands of the West. They rail against the 1999 NATO bombing campaign of Serbia, the secession of Kosovo in 2008, and the rulings at The Hague against Serbian war criminals. The result of these media interventions is the growing popularity in Serbia of Russian president Putin. According to a 2018 poll, Putin is the most popular foreign leader in Serbia, enjoying a 57 percent approval rating, the same as the country's president, Aleksandar Vučić.

LESS THAN MEETS THE EYE

The widespread notion among Serbs of Russia's enduring support is reflected in the false belief that Russia is one of Serbia's top foreign donors. In reality, the \$98 million that Russia gave Serbia between 2010 and 2016 represents only 2.8 percent of the aid given by the European Union during this same period, and 40 percent of US aid to Serbia. Russia's soft-power gains are also offset by the comparative lack of economic, political, and military clout that

Russia currently holds in the region. In reality, Serbia's cooperation with Western institutions is much more robust than its ties to Russia.

Although there is much pomp and circumstance in the media relating to the supposed eternal historical friendship between the Russians and the Serbs, there was great antagonism, even threats of war, between the predecessor states of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. The notion that Russia came "to the rescue" of the Serbs in 1914, at the outbreak of World War I, has been widely challenged by historians. Even the current rapprochement dates back only twenty years.

Under Boris Yeltsin, the Russian Federation cooperated with the international community by supporting sanctions against Belgrade during the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Russian Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov was en route to Washington when the 1999 NATO bombing of Serbia, in response to the war in Kosovo, began. Protesting what Russia saw as a unilateral action by a US-led NATO coalition, he demonstratively ordered his plane to be turned around over the Atlantic and returned to Moscow. Still, Russian troops ultimately joined the Kosovo peacekeeping force (KFOR), in which NATO described Russia as playing "an especially important role" because of its linguistic, cultural, and religious affinities with the local Serbian population.

Russian investment in Serbia and Montenegro boomed in the first decade of this century. Most significant, in 2008 Gazprom acquired the national Petroleum Industry of Serbia (NIS) well below market price. The deal has been widely characterized as a political trade-off for Russia's support in blocking the recognition of Kosovo's independence with its veto in the UN Security Council. But Russian economic moves in Serbia also have been troubled. Most notable was the failure of the South Stream pipeline, which was designed to transport natural gas from Russia through the Black Sea and Serbia to Austria. The sanctions imposed on Russia after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 ultimately forced Russia to withdraw from the project. Serbia has refused to support these sanctions against Moscow. Russian policy, meanwhile, uses its influence in Belgrade to disrupt the integration of southeast European countries into the EU and to undermine the influence of the transatlantic alliance in the Balkans.

The Serbian government has pushed back against some of Russia's more audacious activities. Serbia denied Russia's request for diplomatic status for the Russian-funded Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center built in 2012 in the Serbian city of Niš. The center, which over the years has gotten positive press coverage for its efforts in disaster relief, is seventy-five miles from



FACE MASK DIPLOMACY: An electronic sign in Belgrade reads, “Thanks, Brother Xi,” alongside a picture of the Chinese leader. President Aleksandar Vučić has downplayed the EU’s pandemic assistance while lauding China for a shipment of medical supplies and doctors. [Djordje Kojadinovic—Reuters]

Camp Bondsteel, the main NATO base in Kosovo, and was suspected of being an intelligence-gathering center. In August 2018, the Serbian government also closed down a youth military “patriotic” camp that had been organized by ENOT Corp., a Russian ultranationalist group that functions as an ostensibly private military company in Serbia and has recruited fighters from Serbian right-wing circles for pro-Russia separatist groups in eastern Ukraine.

Despite the fact that Serbia curries favor with Russia, Belgrade sees Moscow as one pillar of its strategic orientation to the West. Since 2011, when Serbia became a candidate for EU accession, Vučić has explicitly and openly declared, even in direct dealings with Moscow, that Serbia is “on the European path.” In military matters, Serbia follows a policy of neutrality. Serbia is an observer to the “Collective Security Treaty Organization” (Russia’s counterpart to NATO) and participates in military exercises with Russia. Serbia also relies heavily on Russia for weapons technology.

President Vučić has been explicit that Serbia will not enter NATO (84 percent of Serbs oppose NATO membership). Still, Serbia joined NATO’s

Partnership for Peace program in 2006 and signed a special joint action plan in 2015. Between 2006 and 2016, Serbia engaged in hundreds of activities with NATO. In 2017 alone, the Serbian military participated in eighteen common exercises with NATO and US troops, including Exercise Double Eagle, which brought together two hundred Serbian and American paratroopers at Batajnica airfield in Serbia, which had been damaged in the 1999 NATO bombing campaign.

THE KOSOVO CAULDRON

Arguably the highest-stakes issue in the Balkans is the independence of Kosovo. Peacefully resolving the status of Kosovo is the key to security in the region and crucial for Serbia's integration into the European Union. "I'm obsessed with Kosovo," President Vučić declared in an interview with the *Financial Times* in May 2018. "Without resolving that problem, everything I have achieved so far won't be sustainable." But Kosovo is a rallying point for Serb rightists and nationalists and a lightning rod for grievances against the West. It is also Russia's most important lever in its relations with the West in the Balkans.

Russia's ongoing support on Kosovo has led the majority of Serbs to view Russia as Serbia's most important ally in resolving this seemingly intractable problem in a way favorable for Serbia. However, the motivation behind Russia's Kosovo policy is more self-interested and strategic than its rhetoric might suggest. Russia may not want the conflict to be resolved at all so that it can keep Serbia reliant on Russia's veto power in the UN Security Council. If Belgrade and Priština reach a settlement under EU or American auspices, Russia stands to lose leverage over Serbia and therefore the region more broadly.

The most significant step taken towards normalizing relations between Serbia and Kosovo was the EU-mediated Brussels Agreement reached in 2013. While the agreement was formally ratified by Kosovo, the Serbian government neither legally adopted the document nor treats it as an international agreement. Over the years, some progress was made in the areas of justice, energy, telecommunications, and, most significant, the establishment of the Community of Serb Municipalities in Kosovo. However, tensions still ran high, and have been fueled by inflamed rhetoric, economic problems, and even political violence. Some attempts to break through the impasse focused on a territorial exchange in northern Kosovo, also euphemistically referred to as a "border correction." Both Serbian and Kosovar governments signaled that they are open to this possibility, for which Washington also voiced support. As prominent EU officials noted, such adjustments could, however, lead to wider demands for territorial changes in the Balkans, especially in Bosnia

and Herzegovina, which might provoke war. The Kosovo-Serbia dialogue was suspended in November 2018 when Kosovo imposed a 100 percent tariff on Serbian imports. Kosovo further antagonized Serbia by seeking membership in international organizations, as befits a recognized sovereign state. Serbia, in turn, launched a campaign to get countries to revoke their previous recognition of Kosovo's independence. By March 2020, fifteen countries out of one hundred and fifteen had rescinded their recognition of the country. Thus, Serbia and Kosovo have remained in a frozen conflict.

This year has seen a revival of the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue, largely because of renewed US interest in the matter. Commentators suggest that the newly appointed US special envoy for the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue, Richard Grenell, former ambassador to

Germany, is trying to score a diplomatic victory for President Trump ahead of the November election. In June, Grenell

Both the European Union and the United States give more aid to Serbia than Russia does.

invited Serbian President Vučić and Kosovar President Hashim Thaçi to the White House in June for the first part of the current round of negotiations. However, these talks were scuttled days before they were to take place when Thaçi was indicted for war crimes in The Hague. These efforts have been focused on economic issues, where Washington sees that the most progress can be made. On September 4, President Vučić and Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti signed an “economic normalization” agreement at the White House that for the most part renewed commitments both parties previously had made to cooperate in areas of transportation, energy, and finance. The parties also agreed to a one-year moratorium on seeking or thwarting Kosovo's international recognition. More difficult political issues were deferred to be negotiated under EU auspices.

ENTER THE DRAGON

The great powers have a new actor to contend with in the Balkans: China. As part of its Belt and Road Initiative, China has actively worked to secure trade routes and market shares in the Balkans and Eastern and Central Europe more broadly. Through its investments in these under-resourced states, China is establishing a bridgehead into Europe. Serbia and neighboring Hungary in particular have been important gateways to Europe for China's infrastructure and investment projects. For example, China is providing 85 percent of the funding for the reconstruction of the Belgrade-Budapest railroad.

Analysts suggest that China's ultimate aim is to link the port it acquired in Piraeus, Greece, with Western Europe.

China's investments in Serbia have been expanding, with an estimated loan of \$6 billion for highways, railroads, and power plants in addition to contracts for a 5G network and the installation of Huawei Safe City facial recognition technology for surveillance in Serbian cities. China ranks third in Serbian imported goods, and Serbia has attracted the highest level of Chinese loans and investment in the Western Balkans. In fact, it is Europe's fourth-biggest recipient of Chinese foreign direct investment. The two countries signed a strategic partnership agreement in 2009, which was upgraded to a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016 and was followed with the lifting of visa restrictions in 2017. While moving in determined fashion to build its economic influence in Serbia, Beijing is careful not to alienate Moscow, emphasizing the primacy of traditional Russian interests in the country.

Ironically, the Covid-19 pandemic saw an increase in China's presence and popularity in the Balkans. Vučić criticized Europe for not being willing to sell ventilators to Serbia, downplaying the EU's assistance while making a spectacle of receiving a shipment of medical supplies and Chinese doctors at the airport alongside the Chinese ambassador. Serbia has been particularly open to China's "face mask diplomacy," which has aimed to gloss over China's responsibility for the outbreak. These developments have been accompanied by proclamations of Serbian-Chinese brotherhood and a "steel friendship" that binds the two peoples. New banners have started appearing on the streets of Belgrade depicting the Serbia-China connection in a way typically seen in relation to Russia; in some cases, the new banners physically cover over the old.

Meanwhile, clauses in the September 2020 economic normalization agreement call for both parties to prohibit the use of 5G telecom equipment supplied by "untrusted vendors" and to "diversify their energy supplies"—and these signal that the United States sees this deal as an opportunity to check both Russia's and China's influence in the region. And Washington's commitment to open an office of the US International Development Finance Corporation in Belgrade, the only one in the region, which will support the building of a "peace highway" connecting Serbia and Kosovo and other infrastructure projects, can be seen as an attempt to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative.

OPEN TO OPPORTUNISM

The Serbian president so far has managed an impressive balancing act in Belgrade's relations between East and West. Vučić has resisted suggestions



GREENLIT: Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić, right, and China's ambassador to Serbia, Cen Bo, in face mask, visit a construction site of the Belgrade-Budapest high-speed railway near Stara Pazova. China is providing 85 percent of the funding for the railroad's reconstruction. [Dragan Gojic—Betaphoto/SIPA]

from Western officials that he must choose sides and maintained good relations with Russia while staying committed to Serbia's EU path. Vučić defends his stance by emphasizing Serbia's sovereignty and its right to pursue its own state interests in its foreign policy, just as the great powers do. In an interview at Davos in January 2020, in response to a question regarding Serbia's relations with Russia and China in light of its commitment to EU accession, he asserted with some frustration: "To tell you the truth, I'm fed up of being lectured and told by all the others about our cooperation with China, Russia, and then I see all the others meeting Xi Jinping and Putin even more often than I do. Do your job. You are sovereign states. Serbia is a sovereign state. We do everything that is for the best for our people and for our country."

In his approach to foreign policy and in particular in balancing between Western powers and the Kremlin, Vučić has invoked Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito's attempts to stay neutral in the international system and promote the nonaligned movement. Serbia can benefit, he claims, from open markets with and investments from the EU, Russia, Turkey, China, and Japan. The

realist in Vučić knows that Serbia's future is still more secure with Europe, but whether for ideological reasons or pragmatic ones, he is hedging his bets and building relationships with a multiplicity of foreign powers that will help him advance Serbia's national interests and his own political fortunes, to the degree that he can even separate these two.

The balancing act that Vučić performs is not just external. Domestically,

Serbia has been particularly open to China's "face mask diplomacy," which aims to gloss over China's responsibility for the Covid-19 outbreak.

he proclaims European values while curtailing media freedoms, stifling political opposition, and engaging in polling fakery. Having himself emerged from the Serbian nationalist

milieu, he instinctively supports right-wing causes. Significantly, Vučić took a page directly out of Putin's political playbook when he transitioned from the premiership to the presidency in 2017 and took power with him, installing a political neophyte as prime minister who has since faithfully toed the party line. In Serbia's 2020 parliamentary election campaign, Vučić's populist Serbian Progressive Party won by a landslide; the boycott of the election by opposition parties resulted in only about half of the electorate turning out. Reflecting this democratic backsliding, Freedom House demoted Serbia from a "semi-consolidated democracy" to a "transitional or hybrid regime" in 2020.

At the same time that Vučić has been moving Serbia domestically in the direction of greater Russia-like autocracy, he has been moving it closer to the EU and NATO. For the most part, the EU has not held Vučić accountable for democratic backsliding or courting of authoritarian regimes, which indicates that Europe's priority is to have a partner for stability in the Balkans. The EU has been slow to stand up to the rise of authoritarian regimes in its own member states of Poland and Hungary as well. The lack of EU unity and its inability to deal with problems like Brexit, immigration, and the growth of populism has left an opening for Russia and China to exploit.

Putin's widespread popularity in Serbia is linked to the growing autocracy in the country. During the Russian president's most recent visit to Belgrade in January 2019, the Serbian government organized a rally of nearly one hundred thousand people. The "Putinization" of the Serbian state seems on course, even if a substantial percentage of Serbs are advocates of Western democracy. Serbia still has a long road to EU membership—it is five years

and numerous reforms away from accession—but Russia is unlikely to recruit Serbia to its camp in any formal way. The best Russia can do is to bolster an autocratic Serbia that resembles Russia not just culturally but also politically, and in this way maintain leverage in this pivotal Balkan state even after it joins Europe. It appears that the primary beneficiary of Belgrade's balancing act between East and West, however, has been Vučić himself and his own vision of Serbia, which many of his citizens do not see as aligned with their national interests.

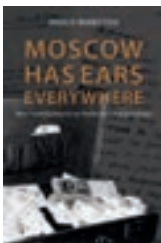
QUIET EROSION OF DEMOCRACY

The Balkans have not drawn the same level of attention from American policy makers as other parts of the world. The US 2018 National Defense Strategy makes no references to Serbia, the Balkans, or Eastern Europe. The references in the document to Europe focus on deterring Russian adventurism in countries on its immediate borders, namely Georgia and Ukraine. Similarly, the April 2020 Congressional Research Service report, *Renewed Great Power Competition: Implications for Defense*, makes no references to Serbia or the Balkans and only two to Eastern Europe.

The present danger in the Balkans may not be so much a new war, which in the 1990s was in part the result of great-power lack of interest in the Balkans, but the continuing erosion of democracy in Europe. Russia's recent involvement in Serbia to bolster authoritarian government and fan anti-EU sentiment and extreme nationalism is a good example of Moscow inserting itself into a vulnerable region where EU and especially American involvement has become desultory.

So, while historical ties between Russia and Serbia that have been used to mobilize public opinion should be treated with circumspection, one thing history has demonstrated time and again is that when the world ignores the Balkans, it does so at its own peril. ■

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The Day after Juneteenth

Thanks to charter schools, black students are taking giant steps forward. Why are politicians and unions trying to hold them back?

By Thomas Sowell

For decades, there has been widespread anxiety over how, when, or whether the educational test score gap between white and nonwhite youngsters could be closed. But that gap has already been closed by the Success Academy charter school network in New York City.

Its predominantly black and Hispanic students already pass tests in mathematics and English at a higher rate than any school district in the entire state. That includes predominantly white and Asian school districts where parental income is some multiple of what it is among Success Academy students.

Key points

» Successful charter schools refute theories of genetic determinism and claims of cultural bias in tests.

» Admission to New York City charter schools is by lottery, disproving the charge that such schools “skim the cream” of competent students.

» Many states put arbitrary limits on charters. Their only purpose is to impede the exodus from failing public schools.

» Only voters can stand up to the vested interests trying to block charter schools.

*Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. His latest book is **Charter Schools and Their Enemies** (Basic Books, 2020).*

New York's charter school students are predominantly black and Hispanic, and live in low-income neighborhoods. In 2019, most students in the city's public schools failed to pass the statewide tests in mathematics and English. But most of the city's charter school students passed in both subjects.

Such charter school results undermine theories of genetic determinism, claims of cultural bias in the tests, and assertions that racial "integration" is necessary for blacks to reach educational parity with whites.

Back in 2013, a higher percentage of the fifth-graders in a Harlem charter school passed the mathematics test than any other public school fifth-graders in the entire state of New York.

The success of New York City's charter schools is not only a threat to educational dogmas. Competition from charter schools is an existential threat to traditional public schools in low-income minority communities, which tend to have even lower educational outcomes than traditional public schools as a whole.

In a number of low-income minority communities in New York City, charter school classes and classes in traditional public schools are held in the same buildings, serving the same communities. Some of the contrasts are almost unbelievable.

In twenty-eight classes in these buildings, fewer than 10 percent of the students reached the "proficient" level on statewide tests. All twenty-eight classes were in traditional public schools. All charter school classes at the same grade levels in the same buildings did better—including six grade levels where the charter school majorities reaching the "proficient" level ranged from 81 percent to 100 percent.

Not all charter schools succeed and not all traditional public schools fail. But, by and large, in New York City the hard data in my new book, *Charter Schools and Their Enemies*, show most charter schools doing decisively better than the traditional public schools housed in the same buildings.

Although New York's charter schools usually come out ahead in comparisons based on data, traditional public schools often come out ahead in comparisons based on rhetoric.

One piece of rhetoric that seems plausible on the surface is that charter schools "skim the cream" of students, leaving the public schools worse off. But this ignores the fact that admission to New York City charter schools is by lottery—that is, by luck—and not by students' academic records or test results.

No doubt more motivated students are more likely to apply to charter schools. But only a fraction of those who enter the admissions lotteries win.

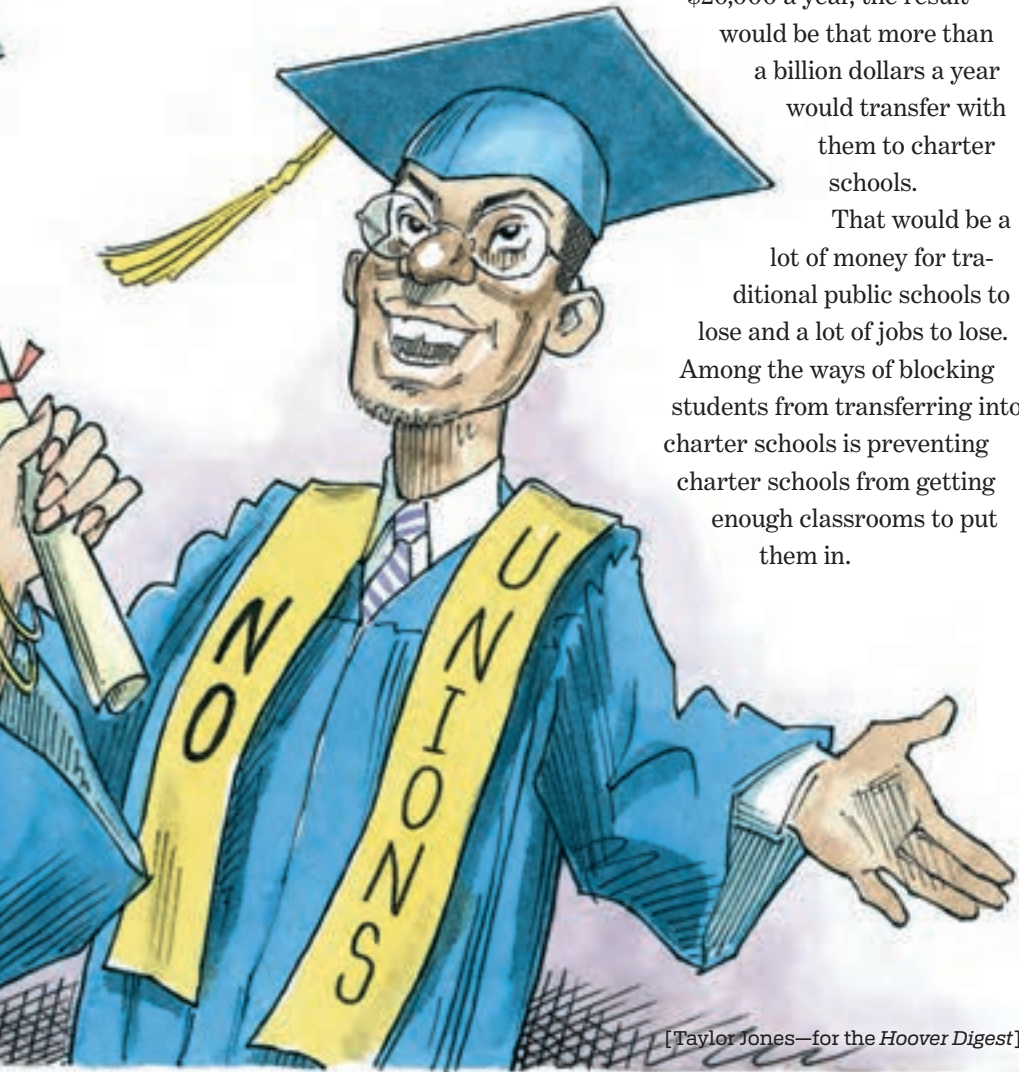


This means that the majority of those motivated students remain in traditional public schools. The fraction that go into charter schools do not prevent traditional public schools from properly educating the much larger number who remain. If traditional public schools fail to do so, that is their own responsibility, and cannot be blamed on charter schools.

Teachers' unions and traditional public school administrators have every reason to fear charter schools. In 2019 there were more than fifty thousand New York City students on waiting lists to transfer into charter schools.

If that many students were allowed to transfer, in a city where expenditures per pupil are more than \$20,000 a year, the result would be that more than a billion dollars a year would transfer with them to charter schools.

That would be a lot of money for traditional public schools to lose and a lot of jobs to lose. Among the ways of blocking students from transferring into charter schools is preventing charter schools from getting enough classrooms to put them in.



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

One way to do that is to put an arbitrary limit on the number of charter schools allowed—regardless of whether these charter schools are good, bad, or indifferent. Most states have such laws, though the only purpose these laws serve is to impede the exodus of students from traditional public schools.

In cities across the country, public school officials are blocking charter schools from using school buildings that have been vacant for years to

prevent transfers
into charter schools
from taking place.

Even in states
where blocking
charter schools

In 2019, more than fifty thousand New York City students were on waiting lists to transfer into charter schools.

from using vacant school buildings is illegal, these laws have been evaded. In some places, vacant school buildings have been demolished, making sure no charter schools can use them.

These and other anti-charter-school tactics by public school officials, politicians, and teachers' unions call into question pious statements by them that what they are doing is "for the sake of the children." But actions speak louder than words—and their actions show repeatedly that protecting their own turf from the competition of charter schools is their top priority.

Only the voters, who hold the ultimate power in a democracy, can stop politicians, bureaucrats, and teachers' unions from sacrificing the education of children to the vested interests of adults who run the schools. The stakes are very high for children whose education is their best hope for a better life. ■

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Empty Pedestals, Hollow Minds

Those who failed to learn history are especially eager to erase it.

By Chester E. Finn Jr.

Portraits of four previous speakers have been removed from the Capitol's corridors by order of Nancy Pelosi, although they led the US House of Representatives for a total of ten years. George Washington's memorial in Baltimore has been defaced. Washington and Thomas Jefferson were both toppled in Portland, Oregon. Statues of Washington and Benjamin Franklin have been spray-painted in Philadelphia. Andrew Jackson's statue needed police protection to avoid being pulled down by vandals in Lafayette Square.

Christopher Columbus's very name is turning into a four-letter word, joined by the toppling of statues commemorating him all over the country. A group of Wisconsin protesters even brought down—and tossed into Lake Monona—the statue of a little-known immigrant from Norway who served as a colonel in the Union army.

Nor is this violent repudiation of the past confined to American shores. Winston Churchill's statue in London has been vandalized and may be moved from Parliament Square to a museum, though one must wonder if the defacers wish that Hitler had won. And Cecil Rhodes's statue will vanish

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from Oriel College, Oxford, though it's doubtful they'll surrender the mining fortune that pays for Rhodes scholarships.

What's next? Must Columbus, Ohio, now change its name? How about Jefferson City, Missouri? Washington and Lee University? Cortez, Colorado? Yale University? Then there's the nation's capital itself. Why should its name memorialize a slave owner? And what of that tall obelisk honoring him just south of the White House? Hmm . . . "White House." Perhaps appropriate for the incumbent but surely a poor choice of names for the chief executive's residence going forward.

MYSTIC CHORDS OF MEMORY

What's happening to our history? Is it getting toppled, too, because we disapprove of some actions and practices of past individuals, never mind how central their roles may have been to the history that we want our kids to learn more about?

A clear and present risk in history education has long been what historians call *presentism*, viewing the past—and passing judgment on its events and actors—through the lens of today's values and priorities. Viewed through that lens, what's important about an historical event or person isn't why it

happened the way it happened when it happened, but rather our opinion as to whether it should have happened. What gets added in our hyper-woke

People won't learn all sides of historical figures if we erase them from view as if they had never existed.

age is the judgment that if any aspect of an historical personage or event is now unpalatable, that person or event should be criticized, disavowed, and if possible, erased, no matter what else they may have accomplished or what difference they may have made.

I understand, obviously, that putting someone's likeness on a pedestal in the form of a statue, or on a high-profile wall in the form of a portrait, serves to highlight and call attention to them, perhaps glorify them. But mankind has been doing that forever. Well-known figures aren't necessarily depicted and displayed in public venues because viewers—or the artists—think well of them, but because they are famous personages who played large roles in shaping the world we live in today.

When it comes to Jefferson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Churchill, say, they're depicted in portraiture and statuary because they did great things that most people today appreciate and approve of, notwithstanding other parts of their



♪ DON'T KNOW MUCH
'BOUT HISTORY... ♪



[Taylor Jones—for the Hoover Digest]

lives that we may now deplore. Do the deplorable parts justify defacing or tearing down their images?

I get the distinction between them and Confederate generals, most of whose statues went up during the Jim Crow era. If their principal contribu-

tion to US history was doing their utmost to preserve slavery while sundering the Union, I can't defend celebrating them—though, once again, displaying Josef

“Presentism” is the practice of viewing the past—and passing judgment on its events and actors—through the lens of today’s values and priorities.

Stalin's portrait doesn't necessarily signal praise. I do think kids should learn a lot about the Civil War, however, in which the likes of J. E. B. Stuart were as consequential as William Tecumseh Sherman. (It also needs to be recalled that Robert E. Lee was a distinguished officer in the US Army—including service in the Mexican War and superintendent of West Point—for thirty-two years before, as we now say, “turning traitor” after Lincoln offered him command of the Union army.)

I also get the distinction between statues torn down because people disapprove of the person being commemorated and a few situations where it's

more about the statuary itself. The main issue with the statue of Theodore Roosevelt facing Central Park isn't about him so much—though he definitely slaughtered a lot of

Famous figures aren't necessarily depicted and displayed in public because viewers—or even the artists—think well of them.

animals—as the depictions of a Native American man and an African man at his side. Keep in mind, though, that when that “heroic” grouping debuted in 1940, it wasn't widely seen as offensive, however much it may appear that way to today's onlookers.

ALREADY FAILING HISTORY

Here's the point: few young Americans are learning American history in school. We have ample data showing that, including the recent NAEP results. Insofar as they're learning and perhaps retaining some knowledge of the nation's past, it's mostly coming from other places, from Ken Burns documentaries, from David McCullough's books, from watching *Hamilton*, and from visiting Monticello and Mount Vernon and Mount Rushmore and

Independence Hall. And, maybe, just maybe, from eyeballing and driving by and walking past and perhaps visiting the statues and monuments that have been erected in traffic circles, public parks, the National Mall, and elsewhere.

Do we really want them to learn even less? And do we really want them to view George Washington as a slave owner rather than the “father of his country”? To regard

Churchill as an imperialist rather than the leader who wouldn’t appease Hitler and roused Britain

to fight back? Of course they should learn both. But that won’t happen if we erase these figures from view as if they had never existed.

As the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board correctly noted, “This current anti-monument wave degrades what originated as a legitimate grievance: the presence of Confederate monuments, many erected during the Jim Crow era to perpetuate the ‘Lost Cause’ myth and advance white supremacy. But that idea has been taken over now by what has turned into a mob intent on willy-nilly eradication of chunks of American history.” ■

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Your Money and Your Life

Call it financial wellness: Hoover's Michael J. Boskin and John Shoven have launched an innovative personal-finance class to guide students on "your life journey."

By May Wong

They've taught through economic booms and busts, using their scholarship and policy experience to deliver lessons that explain how the economy and financial markets work.

Now, with a pandemic upending nearly every corner of life, Michael Boskin and John Shoven have launched Introduction to Financial Decision Making, a class with an added urgency neither of them expected when designing the syllabus.

"You cannot teach a personal-finance course without talking about the stock market collapse, the impending deep recession and the personal financial, social, as well as health distress that will be going on in real time outside

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the course,” said Boskin, a Hoover senior fellow and the Tully M. Friedman Professor of Economics.

Boskin’s longtime colleague agreed. “Coronavirus affects almost everything,” said Shoven, the Charles R. Schwab Professor of Economics (Emeritus). “It challenges our social safety net, our fiscal and monetary policy. It upsets people’s retirement plans, their labor market earnings—just about everything. It will be incorporated into the course.”

Even before the coronavirus pandemic spurred the university’s unprecedented, interim shift to holding all classes online, Boskin and Shoven’s inaugural spring course, Economics 43, had overtaken Econ 1 as the largest economics class at Stanford. The class quickly hit its original capacity of 160 enrollees, drawing interest from far stretches of the university—from medical students to student researchers at the Hopkins Marine Station on Monterey Bay. Still, more students wanted in—and after the sudden change to a virtual lecture hall, more were allowed to sign up. Enrollment climbed to 221 a week before its April 6 launch.

The professors are top economists whose expertise has guided policy makers and influenced federal reforms. Boskin has chaired the President’s Council of Economic Advisers, led the influential Advisory Commission to Study the Consumer Price Index, and is a frequent adviser to government agencies and

congressional committees. Shoven has

helped shape tax

policies and has been a consultant for the Federal Reserve Board, the CEA, and the Treasury Department. Boskin co-founded the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research (SIEPR) and Shoven was SIEPR’s director for twenty years.

The course description is tantalizing: “The purpose of the class is for you to obtain greater comfort making the major financial decisions your life journey will require. We hope to help students avoid damaging mistakes in the decisions that will determine their financial flexibility and safeguard them against life’s uncertainties.”

Clearly, there’s more uncertainty than ever. Pre-pandemic, student debt was already at an all-time high. The housing market was out of reach for many. And the future of Social Security and retirement pensions was no longer a sure thing.

Lecturer Alex Gould, who joins Boskin and Shoven in teaching Econ 43, put it this way: “This course is really about how to manage uncertainty. We

“Coronavirus affects almost everything.”



TIMELY ADVICE: Economics 43, taught by Professor Emeritus John Shoven, left, and fellow professor Michael Boskin, a Hoover senior fellow, has overtaken Econ 1 as the largest economics class at Stanford. The course's goal of helping students guard against "life's uncertainties" has taken on new meaning as the coronavirus pandemic has upset economies large and small. [SIEPR]

can't tell students what to do, but we can help empower them to try to figure out what they ought to do."

TO YOUR HEALTH

The idea for the course germinated in the 1970s. Boskin was Stanford's director of undergraduate studies and persuaded Shoven, a fresh Yale PhD graduate, to start teaching financial economics at Stanford. The subfield that combined finance with economics was burgeoning, and Shoven was one of the economists in the forefront.

Shoven's introductory course on financial economics for juniors and seniors, Econ 140, has evolved over the years and since become a mainstay

in the economics department. Gould and Shoven reworked the course in the late 1990s to focus on a mix of investments, corporate finance, and financial markets. The class has been offered annually since, while another complementary Econ course on public finance is taught by Boskin.

But students from decades ago had already expressed directly, and in surveys, their desire to learn more about the basics of personal financial decisions, Boskin recalled. As years passed, in conversations with students during small group lunches, Boskin and Shoven would repeatedly hear similar requests from students. “I’d ask them, ‘What do your peers, especially those not majoring in economics, know about personal finance?’ And the best answer I got was ‘nothing,’” Boskin said.

“For a long time, I thought that we should have some way to deal with that,” he said. “There are bits and pieces of that all over Stanford now—like the financial well-

ness class Mind over Money—but I thought maybe we needed a more formal undergraduate course that was widely available.”

One of the first lessons: everybody makes mistakes when it comes to finances.

Fast forward to autumn 2018. In a conversation in a round of golf with Charles R. Schwab, founder of one of the nation’s largest and most innovative financial services corporations and a longtime advocate for financial literacy and education, the idea of a widely available personal finance class at Stanford re-emerged. Boskin decided to commit after Schwab’s encouragement and offer of support—as long as he could persuade his close colleague, Shoven, to pilot the class with him and teach it for five years.

Shoven, who officially retired in 2019, agreed. “I didn’t elect to teach anything this year, but I’m doing this,” Shoven said. “It’s valuable, and I’m excited about it.”

A PROMISING START

Boskin said hundreds of alumni have told him they wished there had been such a course during their Stanford years, “and maybe they would have avoided some financially damaging decisions like not signing up for their 401(k).”

The inaugural Econ 43 course attracted a diverse group—from freshmen up to graduate students, many of whom were not economics majors. The syllabus promised to teach them right off the bat that everybody makes

mistakes when it comes to finances, and to explore the reasons. Students learned a bit of micro and macro—the underpinnings of which could help them make smarter personal decisions—how psychology plays a role, how and when debt is a friend or a foe, and much more.

“We hope to help students avoid damaging mistakes in the decisions that will determine their financial flexibility and safeguard them against life’s uncertainties.”

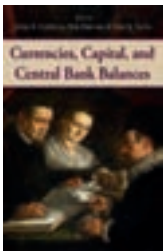
“It will take us teaching it a few times for us to make sure we’re pitching the course at the right level and leaving enough avenues for people of different backgrounds to engage,” Boskin said. “Our

hope is that it’ll be important and valuable to students.”

The switch to an all-online format was new territory for Boskin and Shoven—and will remain challenging as their passion for teaching is grounded in the ease of in-person interactions, building relationships and mentorships. “It is unfortunate to have this initial offering of Econ 43 online without students physically present,” Shoven said. “But it pales in comparison with the other challenges facing the country and the globe.”

The Econ 43 course does not have prerequisites and is slated to be offered each spring for five years. ■

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A Free and Healthy Market

Singapore's health care system thrives on transparency and competition. Why can't ours?

By George P. Shultz and Vidar Jorgensen

Does a real health care market exist anywhere in the world? Certainly not in the United States, where health care providers don't tell patients in advance about pricing, outcomes, or alternatives. Consumers don't know what they're buying or how much it costs. And the costs are largely paid by insurance companies, which don't spend their own money. With a health care market this dysfunctional, little wonder the United States spends 18 percent of gross domestic product on health.

If the United States wants lower costs, better outcomes, faster innovation, and universal access, it should look to the country that has the closest thing to a functioning health care market: Singapore.

The city-state spends only 5 percent of GDP on medical care but has considerably better health outcomes than the United States. Life expectancy in Singapore is 85.2 years, compared with 78.7 in the United States. Singapore's

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infant and maternal mortality rates are less than half the corresponding US rates and rank among the lowest in the world.

What does Singapore do that's so effective? A few things:

» **Price transparency.** All health care providers in Singapore must post their prices and outcomes so buyers can judge the cost and quality.

» **Health savings accounts.** Singaporeans are required to fund HSAs through a system called MediSave and to purchase catastrophic health insurance. As a result, patients spend their own money on health care and get to pocket any savings.

» **A limited but effective safety net.** The MediFund program serves those who, after exhausting their health savings and government subsidies, still need help paying their bills.

The combination of transparency and financial incentives has led to price and quality competition so intense that health care costs are 75 percent lower in Singapore than in the United States. Scripps College economist Sean Flynn estimates a heart valve replacement costs \$12,500 in Singapore (\$160,000 in the United States) and a knee replacement \$13,000 (\$40,000).

Singapore's system of health care finance shouldn't seem foreign to Americans, nor should we doubt that it could work here. The United States has already seen that the combination of competition and price transparency can be successful: witness the falling prices for Lasik eye surgery and cosmetic procedures, which aren't covered by insurance.

America also has HSAs—Congress authorized them in 2003—and one alternative model for US health care would have employers and government provide everyone with a fully funded HSA. Consumers' financial incentives would be aligned with keeping costs down, since this money would now be theirs—to spend on health care or to save for other purposes, such as retirement or giving to relatives.

US transparency is improving, too. The Trump administration has put forward an executive order that would require insurers and providers to make price information available to beneficiaries, enrollees, and participants in health care plans. While this will take some time to implement, companies like MyMedicalShopper and Healthcare Bluebook have already “cracked the code,” finding secretly negotiated prices in the American market. People spending their own money can turn to them for the information they need to find value.

Key elements of the Singapore model can be implemented by US employers right now without any additional legislation. Thanks to the Employee Retirement Income Security Act of 1974 (ERISA), employers have a fiduciary



STEP FORWARD: People wearing protective masks walk along Orchard Road, a well-known shopping district in Singapore. A combination of price transparency and financial incentives has led to competition in health care in Singapore, with costs that are 75 percent lower than in the United States. [Maverick Asio—SOPA Images/Sipa USA]

responsibility to know and justify the costs of health spending—just as they must for retirement funds. ERISA exempts health insurance plans from various state-specific laws, allowing employers to adopt HSAs and self-insure. About 60 percent of covered American workers are in self-funded plans subject to ERISA.

Rising prices and lackluster outcomes are already leading US employers to drop large insurance networks. Instead, they're contracting directly with providers via risk arrangements that hold providers accountable for fixed costs and guaranteed quality outcomes. Large employers can manage the financial risks of self-insurance, and smaller employers can purchase stop-loss insurance to cover large unanticipated expenses. Many employers who go to full self-insurance save 20 percent their first year and up to 40 percent by the fifth year with better outcomes and higher employee satisfaction.

Some employers with direct-contracting plans and their own onsite or shared near-site clinics, like Rosen Hotels and Resorts in Orlando, Florida, share some of the savings with their employees. As a result, Rosen has much

higher employee satisfaction and retention rates than the best-known competing hotels.

Employers and employees can get better care and outcomes at a lower cost through direct contracting with centers of excellence—health systems and hospitals that offer exceptionally good or innovative care related to a particular expertise. Walmart, Lowe’s, and many other employers are using financial

incentives to encourage their employees to undertake elective surgeries at centers of excellence like the Mayo and Cleveland clinics. Employers like these have found that

Singapore spends only 5 percent of GDP on medical care but has considerably better health outcomes than the United States.

when employees can get second opinions at these centers, a large share of the most expensive procedures aren’t medically necessary—including 50 percent of spine operations and 30 percent of hip and knee replacements. In these cases, less-expensive treatments yield superior results.

It has been well established by the RAND Health Insurance Experiment, the Dartmouth Atlas of Health Care, and similar research that consumer involvement in price and treatment decisions results in savings and improved outcomes. New investments in digital health solutions are making market competition—facilitated by price and outcome transparency—increasingly achievable in America.

Let’s follow the path of Singapore, Rosen Hotels and Resorts, and Walmart by using markets and competition to make health care affordable for all while improving quality and innovation. ■

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Fear Is Not Our Master

The Constitution is clear: even during emergencies, government powers are never unlimited.

By Clint Bolick

Fear is a powerful driver of public policy. Ordinarily, that is not greatly troubling. We have speed limits, food sanitation laws, and many other regulations based on rational fear of harm.

Sometimes in extreme circumstances, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, fear is so pronounced that it leads government officials to declare an emergency, which under various enacted laws expands their powers to meet the crisis.

We have probably all been surprised, even before the pandemic, at the number of emergency powers Congress has extended

Key points

» The states alone inherently possess the “police power” to regulate for public health and safety. But the Constitution still protects individual rights.

» The Japanese-American internment, at first justified as a wartime emergency step, later served to build a barrier against boundless executive power.

» The Supreme Court checked President Truman’s attempt to seize the steel industry, saying he had exceeded his powers.

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over the years to the president. Likewise, governors and even mayors have exercised sweeping emergency powers in the face of the public health crisis.

But are those powers still bound by the Constitution, or do government's constitutional powers expand in times of emergency? This question has been fiercely debated in presidencies spanning from Abraham Lincoln's to Donald Trump's.

Few questions of constitutional law have categorical answers, but this one does: in our constitutional republic, emergencies do not expand the boundaries of constitutional authority.

The US Constitution bestows enumerated powers upon Congress and the president. By its text, only one power expands in emergency: the writ of habeas corpus may be suspended in time of rebellion or invasion. The remaining powers and limits are firmly set.

Likewise, the individual rights enumerated in the Constitution do not contain emergency exceptions.

For states, the matter is somewhat different. As the organic units of American government, the states alone inherently possess the "police power" to regulate for public health and safety. By virtue of the Tenth Amendment, those powers not expressly delegated to the national government remain with the states or the people. Local governments, in turn, derive their powers from the state.

But state powers are not without limits: not only does the US Constitution protect individual rights against abuses by state and local governments, but state constitutions provide greater protections of individual rights and stricter constraints on government power than do their national counterpart.

Two US Supreme Court cases from the past century illustrate the debate over the expansion of government power in emergencies and its ultimate resolution. The first is one of the most reviled and discredited cases in the history of American jurisprudence: *Korematsu v. United States*. After the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, acting on his powers as commander in chief of the armed forces and later authorized by Congress, issued an order allowing exclusion of people from certain domestic military zones. In turn this led to military orders requiring internment of Japanese-Americans. Twenty-three-year-old Fred Korematsu refused to leave his home and was forcibly removed.

By a 6-3 vote, the Supreme Court upheld the internment as a "military imperative" based on reasonable fear: "There was evidence of disloyalty on the part of some, the military authorities considered that the need for action was great, and time was short."

The "compulsory exclusion of large groups of citizens from their homes," the majority recognized, ordinarily "is inconsistent with our basic governmental

institutions.” But the perceived emergency expanded the government’s constitutional powers: when “our shores are threatened by hostile forces, the power to protect must be commensurate with the threatened danger.”

In a dissenting opinion that Justice Antonin Scalia would later say was his favorite ever written, Justice Robert H. Jackson acknowledged the exigencies of war, but rejected the notion that constitutional rights shrink in their shadow. Jackson believed

that the order, based on national origin, violated the due process rights of those forced to leave their homes. But he took the longer view: “a

judicial construction of the due process clause that will sustain this order,” he urged, “is a far more subtle blow to liberty than the order itself.”

Jackson reasoned that the military order, noxious though it was, would expire with the perceived emergency. “But once a judicial opinion rationalizes such an order to show that it conforms to the Constitution,” Jackson warned, “the principle then lies about like a loaded weapon, ready for the hand of any authority that can bring forward a claim of an urgent need.”

The appeal of a strong response to crisis can be so alluring that both Justice Hugo Black, a fervent constitutionalist, and Justice William O. Douglas, a renowned civil libertarian, joined the *Korematsu* majority. But both justices may have experienced buyer’s remorse, because only eight years later they joined another 6-3 majority, this time expressly repudiating the notion of boundless executive power in time of crisis.

In the midst of the Korean War, President Harry S. Truman feared that a threatened national strike would shut down the vital steel industry. Rather than use authority provided by Congress to avert the strike, Truman issued an order seizing the steel companies and requiring company managers to operate them to supply the war effort.

Truman defended his orders as commander in chief and under the president’s inherent powers. In *Youngstown Sheet & Tube Co. v. Sawyer*, the court rejected those arguments. “In the framework of our Constitution,” the court declared, “the president’s power to see that the laws are faithfully executed refutes the idea that he is to be a lawmaker.”

This time Justice Jackson was in the majority. He noted that when the president acts pursuant to congressional authority, his power is at its apex—but even then it is bound by the Constitution. As commander in chief, he

The strength of a constitution for a free people is measured by its vitality in times of crisis. So far, thankfully, ours has withstood many challenges.

controls its military forces, Jackson wrote, but is not thereby “also commander in chief of the country, its industries, and its inhabitants,” and must exercise his powers “consistent with a constitutional republic.”

As to inherent presidential authority, Jackson observed, this was “something the forefathers omitted” from the Constitution. They “knew what an emergency was, knew the pressures they engender, knew, too, how they afford a ready pretext for usurpation,” Jackson argued. “We may also suspect that they suspected that emergency powers would tend to kindle emergencies.”

The president’s order, Jackson concluded, “represents an exercise of authority without law.” Truman promptly returned control of the steel companies to their owners.

The Youngstown steel case and others like it illustrate the principle that emergency powers, though broad and often justified by law, are always limited by the Constitution. Whether a constitution for a free people will endure is measured by its vitality in times of crisis; and so far, thankfully, ours has withstood many challenges. Still, the debate over whether constitutional powers expand in emergency persists.

But those seeking to invoke the expansive presidential power articulated in *Korematsu* are out of luck. In 2018, when the Supreme Court divided bitterly over presidential authority in a case called *Trump v. Hawaii*, all nine justices agreed on one thing: after nearly seventy-five years, *Korematsu* should be relegated to the jurisprudential dustbin. As Chief Justice John Roberts aptly put it, “*Korematsu* was gravely wrong the day it was decided.” And so was its notion of unbounded executive power. ■

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Rude Awakenings

Commit an outrage, react to the outrage, repeat: why do California's racial crises recur?

By Bill Whalen


As a product of the East Coast, I've found a way to understand what's occurred in California in recent months: cicadas. If you're not familiar with the word, it refers to an insect that emerges from the earth—some annually, some periodically—to engage in the business of perpetuating the species. California's cicada appears with alarming regularity, every twenty-seven or twenty-eight years or so. It emerged in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles in August 1965, again in LA's South Central neighborhood (now South Los Angeles) in April 1992, and this year in wider portions of Los Angeles County (most notably, the upscale pockets of Beverly Hills and Santa Monica).

The two defining characteristics of the California species: an unforgivable act of violence against a black man that triggers outrage and anger; despite lawmakers' promises, post-rioting, to get to the heart of California's many divides, the result is relatively little progress.

Consider: at the time of the 1992 riots, the poverty rate for families in South Los Angeles was higher than it was at the time of the 1965 Watts riots (30.3 percent vs. 27 percent). Twenty-six percent of South LA youths ages sixteen to nineteen were high school dropouts; one in three adults had left school before finishing the ninth grade.

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Let's advance the calendar to 2020. African-Americans make up 8 percent of Los Angeles County's population, yet they account for an estimated 42 percent of the local homeless population; in South LA, the share of black households experiencing severe rent burdens approaches 50 percent.

Meanwhile, over half of South LA schools with the largest concentration of black students are rated poor in academic achievement; districtwide, in Los Angeles, only two out of ten African-American students are proficient or at grade level in math, with only three out of ten proficient in English.

Progress it isn't.

FAMILIAR ROADBLOCKS

If the cicada analogy holds true and California witnesses civil unrest again by the middle of this century, what will have changed by then?

Yes, the state will have been overseen by at least four governors (I'm giving the current incumbent, Gavin Newsom, and his successors a full eight years in office each) and countless likewise term-limited legislators. Just as, from the time of the 1965 Watts riots to present, California has had nine governors and ten US presidents.

Rest assured the state government in Sacramento won't lack for suggested improvements. Newsom's already formed a task force to review policing policies; two measures advertised as responses to racial inequality were taken up in the state assembly—one a constitutional amendment seeking to reinstate affirmative action in colleges and state universities (Proposition 16 on November's ballot); the other exploring reparations to slave descendants.

Meanwhile, down in Los Angeles, Mayor Eric Garcetti wants to remove up to \$150 million from the Los Angeles Police Department's

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]

\$1.8 billion annual budget and devote it instead to poor and minority communities.

But here's the catch: Garcetti had been pressured by what the *Los Angeles Times* described as "a group of local and community leaders" to strip \$250 million from the LAPD's budget (raising a serious question as to the force's ability to patrol the streets of LA, as up to 97 percent of the LAPD's budget goes to salaries or payroll costs). Among the notables leaning on the mayor: United Teachers Los Angeles. Why does that matter? Because, name an attempt to change the status quo in Los Angeles's public schools—expanding charter schools, introducing private school vouchers—and you'll find UTLA standing in the way. And yet, despite decades of black students trapped in a school system that fails to provide them with a high-quality education that can serve as an escape hatch from poverty, it's the status quo—that is, a powerful teachers' union—trying to dictate the terms of a more just California.

If California is indeed to get the better of the cicada, what's required is elected leaders willing to break with partisan convention.

In other words, who will dare to be the next Jack Kemp?

IN SEARCH OF A GO-BETWEEN

Born in Los Angeles eighty-five years ago last summer, Jack Kemp was the son of a father who owned a small trucking company in downtown Los Angeles and a mother (fluent in both English and Spanish) who was a social worker. Kemp's life was learning about diversity—its application in schools

(raised as a Christian Scientist, he attended a largely Jewish high school in Los Angeles), the workplace (he was a professional quarterback, founding a players' union),

More than half of South LA schools with the largest concentration of black students are rated poor in academic achievement.

and the predominately blue-collar Buffalo, New York, congressional district he represented.

What separated Kemp from other Republicans of his time—during a political career that spanned from his first congressional run in 1970 to serving as Bob Dole's running mate on the 1996 Republican presidential ticket—was his self-identification as a "bleeding-heart conservative."

Kemp didn't merely offer lip service to improving minority communities, he offered concrete ideas—chief among them selling public housing to the poor and creating regulatory-light "enterprise zones" to return businesses

and investors to America's inner cities (the latter an idea likewise championed by former House speaker Paul Ryan, who perhaps not coincidentally once worked as a Kemp aide, and earlier championed in the United Kingdom by Margaret Thatcher).

Kemp didn't get far with his inner city agenda. As the housing secretary in George H. W. Bush's presidency, he found the White House generally uninterested in his innovation

(which would come back

to haunt Bush when rioting commenced amid his re-election effort).

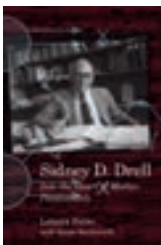
Indeed, Bill Clinton—

the Democrat who ended the first Bush presidency—took Kemp's idea and rebranded it as “empowerment zones” for inner cities, though Clinton's concept was more government-driven than Kemp's.

Jack Kemp won't have a seat at any future conversations involving California's future, as he succumbed to cancer over a decade ago. But it's the spirit that counts. If the conversations are to be dominated by Democrats too beholden to special interests and Republicans reflexively averse to government, progress will be illusory.

And California's cicada? It will keep emerging from the ground. ■

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The Hunger (for Admission) Games

The University of California's decision to scrap standardized tests earns an "F." The move does nothing for fairer admissions or better schools.

By Chester E. Finn Jr.

In May, driven by exquisitely progressive intentions, the regents of the University of California made the worst policy decision in the recent history of American higher education: to eliminate SAT and ACT admissions testing for in-state applicants to all nine of their undergraduate campuses, which comprise one of the country's biggest and historically most prestigious state systems.

Naturally, this was done in the name of equity, in pursuit of a more diverse student body, one that "looks like California," and on the assumption, as regent Jonathan Sures asserted, that the SAT (and presumably the ACT) is "inherently racist."

In abolishing the future use of those tests, the regents went notably farther than a number of colleges that have made admissions "test optional," meaning that students could submit their scores for consideration if they wish.

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Although the UC system will function that way for the next two years, the regents stated that when the time comes to consider admission for young Californians now finishing the eighth and ninth grades, no test scores will be considered. (It's unclear as yet how the campuses will handle out-of-state applicants, who represent a sizable fraction of enrollees, particularly at high-status Berkeley and UCLA—and who also pay much larger tuitions.)

Meanwhile, the university will look into developing a new and ostensibly “fairer” test to deploy starting in 2025, but with no commitment that this will actually happen. Says former president Janet Napolitano—a former Democratic governor of Arizona and longtime liberal stalwart—“Generally the right test is better than no test, but a flawed test should not continue to be required.” Or now, apparently, even considered.

WHAT ABOUT PREPARATION?

What's cockeyed and ultimately unfair is that it's not the SAT and ACT that are flawed. There's no denying that their scores tend to correlate with test-takers' socioeconomic circumstances and often with their race, but that's not because the

tests are biased, a hoary allegation that the test-makers have long since addressed. No, it's because in California,

as elsewhere in the United States, the K-12 education system has shown itself incapable of producing remotely equitable academic outcomes among racially and socioeconomically diverse students.

Consider, for example, that on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, among Golden State eighth-graders in 2019, an overall 30 percent were “proficient” (or better) in reading, somewhat worse than the 33 percent for the nation as a whole. But when we look at group performance, we find that 45 percent of California's white youngsters and 57 percent of Asian students made it to that level, but just 10 percent of black pupils and 19 percent of Hispanics did so. Which is to say, fewer than one in five youngsters in those two huge minority groups were truly literate when they entered high school. Is it any wonder that their SAT and ACT scores, a few years later, average far below those of their white and Asian classmates?

Like most universities, leaders and faculty at the University of California—and legislators who furnish much of its budget, not to mention progressive thinkers and civil rights advocates all over the place—want its

Most professors want academically prepared students in their classrooms.

undergraduate demographics to be far more “representative” than today, when Latino students have actually come to outnumber whites, but both are dwarfed by Asian enrollments, and just 4 percent of undergrads are African-American. A referendum back in 1996 barred the use of racial preferences in California public colleges (though a state constitutional amendment to restore these preferences will be on the November ballot). Since then, UC

Expect backlash among Asian-American applicants, whose rejection by UC will in fact constitute a form of racial discrimination.

admissions officers have striven to diversify their entering classes, and in fact have succeeded better at this than kindred institutions in other states. But not well

enough for equity hawks and social justice impresarios, who comprise large fractions of the university’s professoriate and leadership.

There was huge dissent across the campuses over this issue, and the regents’ decision flies in the face of a faculty task force that—just a few weeks earlier—had urged that admissions testing be brought back after the current Covid-19-forced testing hiatus.

Most professors want academically prepared students in their classrooms, young people ready to succeed in bona fide “college level” academics, which means “proficient” (or better) in all the core skills one should possess at the end of high school and with a solid knowledge base in subjects they will pursue further. Yet the regents chose to shoot the test messenger rather than push hard on the unwelcome message: that California’s schools are failing to educate their students of color well enough to place them on a level playing field when the time comes for college.

By doing away with admissions testing, the university is bringing a host of new problems upon itself, its faculty, its academic reputation, and ultimately its state. Four such problems will prove especially vexing.

A NEW GAME IN TOWN

First, huge added pressure will now be placed on the other forms of evidence that applicants supply to admissions offices of these highly selective campuses: course grades, teacher recommendations, student essays, extracurricular activities, and all the rest. Perhaps imaginative new indicators will be devised and deployed. Far more likely, however, is worsening grade inflation, teacher favoritism, padded student résumés, and new advantages for privileged kids whose parents will now arrange for essay coaches and soccer coaches and all

manner of rarefied out-of-school activities. The test-prep firms may take a hit, but what a bonanza awaits those who coach fencing and conduct summer study tours to exotic places. In the end, hard-pressed campus admissions teams, lacking truly comparable and objective metrics across applicants and high schools, will substitute subjective judgments based on hasty reading of individual portfolios, tucked into which are clues as to kids' ethnicity.

Second, as at Harvard and elsewhere, there will be backlash among angry Asian-American families and their well-educated daughters and sons, whose rejection by UC will in fact constitute a form of reverse discrimination.

Third, the universities' classrooms will contain more ill-prepared students, which will force instructors to simplify what they teach. It won't be termed "remedial," yet a larger portion of it will consist of what should have been learned in high school. This is apt to lead to gradual lowering of academic standards, resentment

by better-prepared students, more dropouts by discouraged kids whose admission to UC did not, in fact, signal their readiness for college work,

and eventual trouble with graduate-school admission and employment, if it becomes clear that a UC bachelor's degree does not mean what it once did.

Fourth—perhaps obvious but worth emphasis—state policy makers and education leaders will feel even less pressure to fix what ails California's schools. The pushback against true education reform was already strong, much of it coming from the state's powerful teachers' union. The drive by many families to prepare their children satisfactorily for UC's competitive, test-linked admissions process was a valuable countervailing force. Now that force will weaken, to be replaced by pressure to elevate kids' grades and ingratiate themselves with reference-writing teachers.

The education system in California has shown itself incapable of producing remotely equitable academic outcomes. It's not the tests' fault.

A STRIKE AGAINST THE UC SYSTEM

It's ironic that on the same day the regents voted to make UC admissions more subjective—and inevitably more vulnerable to favoritism and influence peddling—Californians Lori Loughlin and Mossimo Giannulli agreed to plead guilty to fraud conspiracy charges in connection with their involvement in the college admissions cheating scandal known as Varsity Blues. Though the University of Southern California, to which their daughters were applying, is a private institution, hence not directly touched by the regents' vote,

it doesn't take much imagination to see how UCLA and Berkeley and their fellow campuses will be even more vulnerable to kindred forms of chicanery and mischief in the future.

This doesn't just bid fair to tarnish one of our biggest and most respected university systems. By its example and influence, it diminishes all of American higher education. ■

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More Students Left Behind

Decades ago, California voters soundly rejected race-based college admissions, and women and minority applicants thrived. A ballot measure threatens to reverse that progress.

By Lee E. Ohanian

Mere weeks from now, California's 1996 constitutional amendment that prohibits public institutions from preferentially discriminating by race, sex, and ethnicity may be reversed. Proposition 16, if approved by voters, would restore explicit affirmative-action policies.

Some social-justice groups and state legislators argue that opportunities, incomes, and college admissions of people of color and women are significantly depressed by significant racial, ethnic, and gender biases. According to these groups, the road to equal opportunity for women and people of color is giving job and college admission preferences to them to offset the racism and biases that these groups face.

But claims that these preferences are needed to give these people a fair shot are not supported by a substantial body of research studying the effects of race- and sex-based preferential treatment. In fact, several studies indicate

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that protected groups may have significantly worse outcomes with these preferences than without.

The impact of Proposition 209 on minority student academic performance and graduation rates appears to be positive and substantial. Professor Gail Heriot studied student performance at UC-San Diego and found immediate improvement among underrepresented groups. Immediately before

Several studies indicate that protected groups may have significantly worse outcomes with such preferences than without.

the implementation of Proposition 209, only one black student in a first-year class of more than three thousand students had a GPA of 3.5 or higher, compared to 20 percent of

the white students in the first-year class. But the following year, 20 percent of black students had a 3.5 GPA or better after their first year, comparable with whites.

Moreover, 15 percent of black students and 17 percent of Native American students had grade-point averages lower than 2.0 before Prop. 209, compared to 4 percent of white students. Immediately after Proposition 209's implementation, this record changed substantially, with the black and Native American rates falling to just 6 percent, nearly the same as that of whites.

More broadly, the University of California reported that underrepresented minority four-year graduation rates rose from about 31 percent just before Prop. 209 to 55 percent by 2014.

Moreover, six-year graduation rates for underrepresented minorities has increased to about 75 percent. Admission rates also rose significantly for all underrepresented minorities except African-Americans, which stayed about the same. Hispanic student enrollment rates increased from 15 percent to 23 percent, and the rate for Asian-Americans increased from 28 percent to 37 percent. The UC student body is by far the most diverse in its history.

THE RIGHT FIT

A study by four Duke economists shows that after Prop. 209, minority graduation rates in California increased, reflecting in part better matching between students and colleges. *Matching* is the idea that a student will flourish at a college that is the right fit for the person but may have a very difficult time at a college that is not a good fit.

For example, suppose that under ethnic-admission preferences UC-Berkeley aggressively recruits a Latino student, but then the student discovers

that UC-Berkeley is not the right fit and drops out. Under the existing provisions of Prop. 209, what may happen is that this hypothetical student has a lower chance of admission at Berkeley but instead chooses a different UC campus that ultimately will be a better match.

As Professor Heriot, a member of the US Commission on Civil Rights, describes, there are many gifted minority students, but not enough to fill the nearly insatiable demands for racial and ethnic diversity by colleges. With racial and ethnic preferences, colleges compete against one another to see who can assemble the most racially and ethnically diverse first-year class, and the students who fall through the cracks are ultimately the ones who are hurt.

I personally have seen the enormous harm that can be done to a struggling minority student who is not at the right college. I began my teaching career at the University of Pennsylvania. While I was there, an African-American student came to see me, explaining that she was really struggling with her schoolwork and apologizing for her failing grade in my class. We spoke for quite a long time. She was very bright and creative but had gone to a poorly performing high school where she learned far less than her student peers at Penn. She was extremely depressed and I helped her connect with student counseling.

She ended up leaving Penn, but we kept in touch afterwards. She enrolled in a community college to learn what she needed, and ultimately

she graduated from the University of Maryland. I was delighted to see her succeed, but at the same time, it is sad to think of the many students like her who do not.

The Duke study also found that colleges have done a much better job since passage of Prop. 209 in supporting these students should they face academic or other challenges.

There is an important inconsistency regarding the argument of those desiring to restore race-based preferences. Students of Asian descent are much more represented in the UC system, compared with their population share, since the passage of Proposition 209. And in terms of gender bias, women now represent nearly 59 percent of the UC student body. This suggests that doing away with Proposition 209 is not about bias and bigotry per se. Instead, the argument is simply used to justify preferential treatment of certain groups.

The impact of Proposition 209 on minority students' performance and graduation rates appears to be positive and substantial.

BEING AFFIRMATIVE—FOR BETTER SCHOOLS

What is the solution? An incredibly important issue that many California legislators refuse to discuss is the deficient performance of California's K-12 educational system. California ranks fortieth for educational quality among US states.

And this is just a relative ranking. Compared to those around the world, American outcomes are roughly in the middle of the pack of peer countries and, in some years, below average and trailing those of much poorer countries. In math achievement, even the highest-performing states significantly

trail the countries with the leading education systems.

More striking is that within California, students from low-income families typically attend the worst-performing

“Having institutions of higher learning pick winners and losers based on nothing more than race is an abhorrent practice,” says state senator Ling Ling Chang.

public schools. It has been estimated that only about 5 percent of African-American students are attending high-performing schools, while whites and those of Asian descent are much more likely to attend a high-performing school.

Creating a high-performing school system is a key part of the foundation of a society where all have the knowledge and skills to succeed. Year after year, California school performance remains far below acceptable, despite substantial budget increases. The bulk of peer-reviewed research shows that this deficiency is significantly related to policy.

This body of research concludes that implementing commonsense reforms to the rules governing tenure and promotion, to pay criteria, and to the high costs of firing a poorly performing teacher would substantially raise student performance. These reforms have become so obviously needed that they are constantly advanced within policy circles, but they ultimately are suppressed by teachers' unions, which in turn have a very close political relationship with many California lawmakers.

California state senator Ling Ling Chang (R-Diamond Bar) recently remarked, “Our academic admission process should be fair and even for all who apply. Having institutions of higher learning pick winners and losers based on nothing more than race is an abhorrent practice and something that should not be allowed ever in this country.”

Senator Chang's statement should be heeded. The evidence indicates that implementing racial and gender preferences may significantly harm the very groups targeted to benefit from this policy. There are commonsense education reforms that will do so much more than race-based preferential policies, but these reforms are blocked by the legislators who claim, ironically, to be the strongest representatives of these targeted groups. Meanwhile, another generation of students from poor households will receive a deficient K-12 education and will face adulthood with far fewer opportunities than they could—and should—have. ■

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“Looking in the Wrong Direction”

Matt Ridley, author of *How Innovation Works*, explains that all innovation involves an element of surprise—as do challenges, such as Covid-19, that we can only meet by innovating. “We should have been worrying about pandemics all along.”

By Peter Robinson

Peter Robinson, *Uncommon Knowledge*: Today we have the author of the marvelous new book *How Innovation Works*, the journalist Matt Ridley, or as he is known in the House of Lords, the Right Honorable the Viscount Ridley. A graduate of Magdalen College, Oxford, with a degree in zoology, Matt wrote for a number of years at the *Economist*, spending some five years in the United States. He is the author of many books on science and technology, including his classic 2010 book *The Rational Optimist*. Since 2013, Viscount Ridley has sat as a Conservative in the House of Lords. Matt, thanks for making the time for this special plague-time edition of *Uncommon Knowledge*.

Matt Ridley: Peter, it's great to join you.

Robinson: You wrote recently in the *Spectator*: “Until this year I thought this kind of infectious pandemic could not happen today. The defeat of infectious

*Matt Ridley is the author of **How Innovation Works: And Why It Flourishes in Freedom** (Harper, 2020). Peter Robinson is the editor of the **Hoover Digest**, the host of **Uncommon Knowledge**, and the Murdoch Distinguished Policy Fellow at the Hoover Institution.*

diseases as a cause of death has been so complete as to seem invincible: plague, smallpox, cholera, typhoid, measles, polio, whooping cough, and many more eradicated or nearly so. It turns out that I and many others were badly wrong.” How did you miss it?

Ridley: Well, two reasons. One is I got so used to people crying wolf and being wrong that of course I did not pay enough attention to people who were crying wolf and were right. Actually, there are out there some very prescient warnings about what is happening in Chinese wildlife markets; about what is happening in terms of understanding the infectivity of coronavirus in bats in China. It turns out they can infect human beings without adapting first. They don’t need to go through an evolutionary phase; they can go straight into it. That is a discovery that I’d missed, but it was made four or five years ago.

I think a big part of this is that we’ve been looking in the wrong direction. We’ve been panicking about climate change as a world, and we should have been worrying about pandemics. The specific argument I made in that paragraph was that every other pandemic threat from Ebola to SARS to swine flu to bird flu had proved to be overblown and they had disappointed, if you like, as pandemics. I thought that was because our new genomic knowledge of these viruses was so fast and so good that we could read their genomes in hours and we would be able to mobilize the work of science against them. It turns out that vaccine development really has lagged behind other forms of innovation. Actually, I found a very interesting article from last year—before the

“People are unrealistically optimistic about their individual lives and unrealistically pessimistic about the bigger picture.”

pandemic—by Wayne Koff, who is the head of the Human Vaccines Project in New York, saying we need to get better at making vaccines. It’s far too slow and old-fashioned, with very little being done about it. I think he was right.

Robinson: Is it correct to say that vaccines are still developed the way most drugs used to be? That is to say, by hit or miss. These days, as I understand it, our knowledge of molecular structure has reached the point where you can effectively use the computer to design the drug you want, and you have narrowed very dramatically the number of different outcomes. You’ve shrunk the cone of trial and error, so to speak. But with vaccines for some reason it’s still the old-fashioned way—you just try this damn thing and if it does not

work you try another. It's like Thomas Edison trying six thousand different fibrous plants before he hit on the right filament for the light bulb. Is that so?

Ridley: Well, yes and no. I think you're not wrong that there is a huge amount of hit or miss and trial and error in vaccine development, but there is still in drugs too.

As that example from Edison shows, one of my arguments is that we must not take away the space for trial and error because actually that is how we've always done innovation, and it's a hugely important part of innovation. You never get it right the first time. Your brilliant insight isn't what counts; it's honing that insight through trial and error. I don't think that's really the problem. The problem is once you get what you think is a vaccine, you have to test in animals and you have to expose animals to the disease; that takes time. You then have to try to find out that it's safe in human beings, and then you have to give it to a bunch of human beings and hope they come in contact with the disease. Otherwise you don't know if it works. There's no other way. So, it's very time consuming.

The example of Ebola is very interesting, because firms did develop Ebola vaccines in 2014–15 when the epidemic was happening in Africa. But by the time they got them going, the epidemic was over and there weren't enough volunteers to come forward to test the vaccines, so in the end, they never got properly tested. That's a very nice example of why vaccines aren't profitable for the drug industry.

Vaccines are very specific; they only deal with one disease. If they work, they do themselves out of business very quickly, and even if they don't work the disease usually goes away very quickly because the kinds of things they are dealing with tend to come and go. So, unlike statins, which you can go on giving people for year after year, vaccines are not very lucrative. Recognizing that problem, the Gates Foundation and the Wellcome Trust did something rather good a few years ago. They got together with the Norwegian government and the Indian government and set up something called the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, which is all about speeding up vaccine development. But it has only just got going.

IMPROBABLE PROGRESS: Matt Ridley appears at the Thinking Digital conference in 2013. Reflecting on how innovation works, he says, "You never get it right the first time. Your brilliant insight isn't what counts; it's honing that insight through trial and error." [Ian Smith—Creative Commons]

THINKING



Why on earth didn't the World Health Organization do that twenty years before? Why didn't the governments of the world with their aid budgets look into doing that? Why did it take Bill Gates to come along and say, "here is a better way of spending money" to achieve this? I think vaccine development is something that could be speeded up. There are lots of new avenues for doing it, and they need to be tried.

HOW INNOVATION WORKS

Robinson: In *How Innovation Works*, you write: "Innovations come in many forms, but one thing they all have in common: they are enhanced forms of improbability." I love that phrase, but it certainly needs to be explained.

Ridley: The world tends toward more chaotic and improbable structures. In other words, your bedroom gets less tidy if you do nothing about it. You need to put energy into making your bedroom tidier. When you have done so, you have made your bedroom less probable, more improbable. Every single one of the books behind me is an incredibly improbable arrangement of atoms—not only to make the structure of the book but to make the pattern of letters and the words in the book—they couldn't come about by chance. That's what energy does for us. We have to put energy into this to reverse entropy; that is, to reverse chaos and to create order and improbability.

When you think about it, everything useful in the world has a sort of improbable structure; it is very precisely designed. That's what we human beings are in the business of, and by the way, so is Mother Nature. That's what evolution is doing: creating improbable structures like bodies and brains. We're in the business of creating improbable structures like buildings and videoconferences. These are improbable ways of reorganizing the atoms of the world. We're searching for other improbable outcomes that are useful to us. In doing so, we have to apply energy, and that's why I start my book with energy, because I think it's very important. My old friend Douglas Adams, the author of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, wrote in one of his books: "A rocket was driven by an infinite improbability drive." So, I say that human civilization is an infinite improbability drive, which I think is what Douglas was getting at.

Robinson: It's a wonderful phrase. One more quotation from the beginning of your book, which feels like a terrible admission at the beginning of a book about innovation. "The surprising truth is that nobody really knows why innovation happens and how it happens, let alone when and where it will

happen next.” It’s the nature of innovation that it always contains an element of surprise.

Ridley: It’s partly that we don’t know where it’s going to flare up in terms of which technologies are going to be subject to innovation. People think all innovation is speeding up, but that isn’t the case. Consider transport. The 747 is an airplane invented in 1969. Using a computer invented fifty-one years ago is impossible to imagine. Computers and communications have speeded up incredibly in my lifetime, whereas transport has hardly changed at all. When I was born, we thought the opposite was going to be the case. All the futurology of the 1950s is about how we were going to see personal jetpacks, gyrocopters for commuting, routine space travel, supersonic airliners, all that kind of stuff, none of which happened. Instead we got amazing computers and communications, which they did not see coming, mostly. In that sense it’s unpredictable.

It’s also unpredictable globally in the sense that you can come up with good reasons why California has been the center of innovation for the last fifty years and you can come

up with good reasons why Italy was in the 1400s. You can come up with good reasons why China was in the 1000s.

But it’s all a bit random,

spontaneous, unplanned. This is a precious plant that grows in the ground, and what you do is till the ground and make it ready rather than plan an outcome. You cannot really plan innovation; you cannot say I am going to go in and create exactly the following innovations. Because we’re fantastically bad at predicting the future in technology. We didn’t see search engines coming as an important technology, for example.

“Nobody really knows why innovation happens and how it happens, let alone when and where it will happen next.”

Robinson: Right. One last quotation from *How Innovation Works*: “In this book I shall try to tackle this great puzzle. I will do so not by abstract theorizing but mainly by telling stories.” For a layman like me, that’s wonderful because you have a few dozen fascinating stories there. But why that technique?

Ridley: Because I like reading stories. Human beings like reading stories—tales about people’s lives, about who they were and why they did things and what happened to them. This to some extent contradicts the theme of my



HAPPY SURPRISES: A girl plays a video game using a virtual-reality headset. Matt Ridley explains that innovation is unpredictable because “we’re in the business of creating improbable structures like buildings and videoconferences. These are improbable ways of reorganizing the atoms of the world. We’re searching for other improbable outcomes that are useful to us.” [Sara Monika—Newscom]

book, which is that people don’t matter. If Thomas Edison had been run over by a tram, the light bulb would still have been developed. Twenty-one different people came up with the idea of the light bulb around the same time. As it happens, he was the one who made sure it was reliable and affordable and so on. So, in a sense, Edison doesn’t matter—he’s dispensable. But in another sense, he matters all the more because if anyone can do it, then it’s clever of him to be the person who does it. So, it’s in telling these stories about people that I sort of bring other themes about the technology effort.

THE OPTIMISM GAP

Robinson: Back for a moment to the virus. In both *Rational Optimism* and *How Innovation Works*, you argue that things get better and better; we just unleash human creativity and, although the process is unpredictable, over

the longer term the material circumstances of our lives get better and better and we ought to appreciate that. On the other hand, there does seem to be something in us that likes to be frightened. Why else would the press overplay the pandemic, or every story? There is something in us that wants to be told what to do—go into your home and we'll let you know when it's safe to come out. How does one describe it and what do you make of it?

Ridley: It's truly a difficult puzzle because there is something called the optimism gap, which reflects the fact that people can be extremely pessimistic about the fate of the planet and their own countries, pretty pessimistic about their own towns, but optimistic about their own lives. They think they're going to earn more than they do, or stay married longer than they do. There are all sorts of ways in which people are unrealistically optimistic about their individual lives and unrealistically pessimistic about the bigger picture. Why is that? In their new book *The Power of Bad*, John Tierney and Roy Baumeister discuss the point that the media tell people to be pessimistic about the world; they don't tell them to be pessimistic about their own lives, where their own experience counts for much more than the bigger picture. That's part of it. Now why are the media so pessimistic? Well if it bleeds it leads—bad news is more salient, more interesting. Bad news is more sudden; good news tends to be gradual. And deep within us there is undoubtedly a psychological bias to pay more attention to bad news than good news.

It probably made sense back on the savannah. You and I are walking to the water hole, and you say I don't think we should go this way because there might be a lion behind that rock. I say no, hadn't you read Matt Ridley's book? Everything is getting better; it's all going to be fine. I'm dead; your genes are in the next generation via my girlfriend.

Robinson: Right.

Ridley: There is a beautiful point made by the late Hans Rosling, who is one of the godfathers of rational optimism and one of the people who put me on to these ideas. He did a poll of one thousand people in the United States, and he repeated it in the United Kingdom and other countries. He asked: "In the last twenty years, has the percentage of the world population that lives in extreme poverty halved, doubled, or stayed the same? In the United Kingdom and the United States, about 65 percent of people think it has doubled and only 5 percent think it has halved. The 5 percent are right and the 65 percent are wrong. That's striking enough, but he then says: "Hang on a minute, if I wrote those three answers on three bananas and I threw them to

a chimpanzee, the chimpanzee would pick up the right answer 33 percent of the time, not 5 percent of the time.” It would do six times as well as human beings at answering a question about human society. That’s the measure of how much we have indoctrinated ourselves into global pessimism.

RESTART THE INNOVATION ENGINE

Robinson: Back to *How Innovation Works*: “There is little doubt that the innovation engine has fired up in China. Silicon Valley’s will sputter on for a while but it is likely that in the coming few decades China will innovate on a grander scale and faster than anywhere else.” China will lead the world in innovation. Why?

Ridley: I’m basing this on empirical facts, which is that China is way past the stage of catching up with Western economies by doing cheap manufacturing for them and emulating their technology; it is now innovating. You can see that particularly in consumer behavior. Consumers don’t use cash in China but they don’t use cards either; they have gone full e-commerce.

Robinson: You hold up your phone and every transaction takes place electronically.

Ridley: Yeah. How is that possible given that this is a repressive, centralized regime that would do justice to the Ming empire in terms of its authoritarian-

ism? The answer is that the system Deng Xiaoping created, which has persisted, is surprisingly free at the lower levels but extremely unfree at the top level.

“I got so used to people crying wolf and being wrong that of course I did not pay enough attention to people who were crying wolf and were right.”

Robinson: Deng Xiaoping succeeds Mao and in 1979 he begins talking about socialism with Chinese characteristics, and he begins the opening to the market. Deng Xiaoping is long dead, but he’s the man in the late 1970s through the 1980s who begins the market revolution in China.

Ridley: Right. While Xi Jinping is a much more authoritarian figure than that, on the whole what his Communist Party is doing is insisting that there be no innovation in politics. You can’t start a political party; you can’t disagree; you can’t start a free press. But as long as you don’t deny the Communist Party, if you want to start a business making a widget and in doing so you need to

build a factory and in building the factory you need to reclaim some land, then the rules and regulations you have to go through to produce an innovative product are an order of magnitude less than in America or Europe.

Robinson: I see.

Ridley: That's my hypothesis. I have read a lot about it, but I haven't been there often, so I don't pretend to be an expert. My argument is that it is an exception to the idea that you need freedom to innovate. But the freedom is there—just below a certain level. I don't think that compromise can last forever. It feels to me very uncomfortable if the world comes to rely on an innovation engine

that is run by the Communist Party. That does not feel like a sustainable future. That's why I'm desperate for

“Silicon Valley's [innovation] will sputter on for a while but it is likely that in the coming few decades China will innovate on a grander scale and faster.”

the West to rediscover the genius of innovation and indeed for India, which is of course the other emerging giant here—an innovative country that is addicted in a way to spontaneous order. It has always been the best example of how society is a sort of bottom-up phenomenon rather than a top-down one. It doesn't look very ordered when you're in a traffic jam in Delhi, but that is where it's coming from. I feel in the long run India will save us if America and Europe do not.

Robinson: So, my noble lord, short of surrendering to these people, what are we to do?

Ridley: Well, the answer is to unleash the innovation engine in our own economies again. For me, the number one thing is speed of decision making by government. I see it on a very small scale if I need a permit for something trivial in my garden. I see it on a very large scale if my country needs a new runway for its main airport. Decisions are taken in a lethargic manner with absolutely no urgency. I have come to the conclusion that the problem with bureaucracy is not that it says no to innovators, but that it takes a very long time to say yes. During that time, the money runs out and you give up.

You see this in spades, for example, in the nuclear industry, where it has been impossible to innovate because regulators take so long to approve a new design that you are broke before you even break ground. I think speed of decision making is the key thing that we need to address.

We tend to take a top-down view of innovation, particularly in this country at the moment. We think that it's about putting money into the universities and hoping that widgets come out the other end of the pipe. That isn't the way it works. One of the points I'm trying to make in the book is that the linear model where discovery leads to invention leads to application is wrong. It's not *always* wrong. It's sometimes right, but it's just as often the other way around.

A very nice example is the CRISPR—the genome editing technology that is a very exciting development of the last ten years—which looks like a purely academic discovery if you read the conventional accounts of it.

Robinson: Yes.

Ridley: It's all about whether Berkeley deserves the patents or MIT deserves the patents. But actually, when you drill down further into it, where does it come from? It comes out of the yogurt industry, because if you're growing yogurt your bacteria sometimes get sick so you need to send for the vet to cure them. One of the things that you therefore do is to put money into understanding the bacterial immune system: how bacteria don't get sickened

“We will get past this. We will restore liberty. We will sail on into the sunlit uplands of the 2020s, have a very innovative time, and do great things.”

by viruses. It emerged from work done with the help of the salt industry in Spain, oddly enough, that there were these weird sequences in bacteria that turned out to have

something to do with their system for defeating viruses. So, all this comes out of a very practical problem in industry—how to solve bacterial cultures going sick—but it ends up going into universities, where it gets retooled as a genome editing tool. It comes back into industry now as a potential device for both healing people of cancer and giving us better crops for agriculture. So, it is a very nice example of the two-way flow between science and technology, between universities and business. We need to understand that much better if we are to unleash innovation again in the world.

LOST CAUSE?

Robinson: *How Innovation Works* is appearing at a moment when your government and mine are engaging in the most comprehensive suppression of ordinary freedoms since the Second World War and pretty arguably ever. We have in China under Xi Jinping a movement toward authoritarianism and

greater control. Ordinary citizens are being tracked on their phones and by cameras on every street corner. If you jaywalk, the government knows about it and makes it more difficult for you to get a hotel reservation or to borrow from a bank. Matt Ridley says: “Freedom is a good in and of itself but it is also essential for us in the West to preserve our way of life. We must remain free because we must innovate.” It feels as though Matt Ridley is brilliantly championing a lost cause.

Ridley: Well, it wouldn’t be the first time in my family. One of my ancestors was burned at the stake for championing a lost cause.

There is a huge battle to be fought as we come out of this pandemic to regain the freedoms that we have surrendered in a flash. We have passed some horrendously illiberal legislation through Parliament in the past few months; likewise in Congress. Not only that, we have seen the police in this country doing the most ridiculous over-interpretation of the rules that have been passed. And there are quite a lot of people who are not in the police who are only too happy to tell their neighbors off for walking down the street too slowly. The petty bossiness of society that has emerged is really frightening. It has been ten years since *The Rational Optimist* came out, and in every single one of those years I’ve been interviewed about the thesis of that book. People have invariably started the questions with “well, you might have been right up until now, but look at what is happening now”—an Ebola epidemic, war in Ukraine, war in Syria, a eurozone crisis—whatever it is that year, people have thrown at me and said, see, it’s all going wrong. We got past those, and we will get past this. We will restore liberty. We will sail on into the sunlit uplands of the 2020s, have a very innovative time, and do great things.

Robinson: Do you have your diary on your desk? Because I would like to make an appointment to interview you again in a decade.

Ridley: You’re on. I want to live to 2050—I will be ninety-two then—because there are so many predictions about what the world can be like, most of them extremely pessimistic. I think that will be a great year to say, “I told you so.” ■





Vandalizing History

Today's ideologues are only re-enacting the same tired melodrama that dates from the Sixties—and the audience must not fail to applaud.

By Bruce S. Thornton

From one perspective, the surreal absurdity of this year's protests, vandalism, and riots barely compares to the disruption and mayhem of the political violence in the Sixties and Seventies. We have not yet seen the kidnappings, murders of judges, and scores of bombings that roiled that era. In 1967 alone there were 159 riots, and in the Seventies fourteen people were killed and six hundred wounded by politically motivated bombings.

But what's going on now is actually more dangerous, for the ideologies driving the disorder reflect just how successful the leftist "long march through the institutions" has been at corrupting American education and culture over the past half century. As a result, ideas and behaviors that by consensus were out of bounds then have now been normalized and abetted by civic leaders and politicians as well as popular culture, schools, and even sports.

I spent the Seventies in college and graduate school, so I had a front row seat for the "long march." In the early years there were, of course, radical professors who opposed the war in Vietnam and hated free-market capitalism.

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They preached abandoning the bourgeois virtues like self-restraint of desires and appetites, especially of sex. Those virtues were redefined as tools of political oppression. As cultural Marxist Herbert Marcuse put it, “The civilized morality is reversed by harmonizing instinctual freedom and order: liberated from the tyranny of repressive reason, the instincts tend toward free and lasting existential relations—they generate a new reality principle.”

Such opinions were a minority among an otherwise liberal faculty. But as the decade progressed, they steadily became more mainstream. One reason is that a consumer-driven economy had long found sex to be a great marketing tool and impulsive

behavior to be good

for business. And so

this corrosive politiciz-

ing of promiscuity was

promoted by many big

businesses. The powerful

sex drive, recognized as a potential force of destruction by our Greco-Roman and Hebraic traditions alike, was legitimized and idealized as fashionable “liberation.” Leftist ideology now had a potent ally in subverting all authority, and in masquerading its illiberal politics in the rhetoric of liberation and freedom. “If it feels good, do it” became the foundational mantra of politics and consumerism alike, one we see taken to excess in the wanton and gleeful destruction and vandalism of the current disorder.

More important, political freedom as ordered liberty founded on law was transformed into what the founders called “license,” the freedom to do what one wants, no matter how destructive to one’s self and others.

SICKLY PANTOMIME

The rejection of traditional sexual morality and mores thus extended to all authority, particularly that of tradition and religion. This rejection of the past is ideal for utopianism, the notion that there can be a perfect politico-social order with perfect equality and justice. History now becomes the systematic demonization of our ancestors for their flawed humanity and failure to create an impossible utopia. The West now is notable only for its crimes against that idealism, while its unique transcendence of those crimes, its recognition that certain behaviors and institutions *are* crimes, is forgotten.

For example, slavery, the historical evil that so exercises the “woke” protestors and rioters, is a historically unexceptional, universal institution. In the past it was no more problematic than the domestication of animals. But the

The disorder shows just how successful the leftist “long march through the institutions” has been at corrupting American education and culture.

rejection of slavery happened only in the West. It was the fourth century BC Greek rhetorician Alcidas who said, “The god gave freedom to all men, and nature made no man a slave.” And it was the Christian American and British abolitionists of the early nineteenth century, who finally brought about the end of slavery in the West.

But because the left sees only the West’s flaws, today we are watching the violent assault on public monuments to people from the past, even statues of Abraham Lincoln, the president who ended slavery in the United States. In the Sixties and Seventies left-wing terrorists bombed military recruiting offices and university labs that allegedly served the “military-industrial complex.” Apart from a few police precincts, today’s Jacobins are focusing their rage on private businesses and public statues, the latter the tangible and communal celebrations of our past and the all-too-human people who now don’t measure up to the exalted expectations of callow, entitled, badly educated young people. The goal is to “cancel” Western Civilization.

This vandalism of the past, moreover, is a visible sign of what has happened to the profession of history beginning in the Sixties: it has been turned into a Leninist “who, whom” melodrama, with crude, moustache-twirling Western villains endlessly tying to the railroad tracks of history an equally crude roster of innocent victims “of color.” Human complexity, mixed motives, failed good intentions, and unforeseen consequences—the tragic heart of good history ever since Thucydides—are all cast aside for therapeutic bedtime stories

History is now the systematic demonization of our ancestors.

comprising the creepy, sadomasochistic theater of guilty whites and their victims “of color.” This vandalizing of history has

now triumphed, for today it dominates the curricula of schools from kindergarten to university.

In addition to the vandalism of monuments, we have the spectacle of mayors, governors, and members of Congress abasing themselves before the “woke,” shedding crocodile tears for offenses they never perpetrated and their punishers never suffered. Worse yet, such empty moral preening changes nothing for the people they’re supposed to help. The dysfunctional conditions of the black underclass—a product of the Sixties’ abandonment of traditional morality and virtue, denigration of fatherhood, and destruction of character through failed antipoverty programs—continue to destroy thousands of black lives a year that don’t “matter” to the “woke” shock-troops. Meanwhile, a president who has done more for “black lives” than Barack

Obama and the Congressional Black Caucus put together is slandered as a “racist” and “white supremacist.”

We also are witnessing the most blatant examples of the leftist principles that flourished in the Sixties: “any means necessary” and “never let a crisis go to waste.” The former explains what seems to be the pointless protests and violence. Even the so-called “peaceful protests” have no legitimate purpose other than hysterical virtue-signaling. The protesters have said, and even some conservatives have agreed, that the protests and accompanying violence were legitimate since they expressed the “grief and anger” of the people and forced the nation to confront a

serious crisis. But does anyone really believe that the issue of police encounters with black men is unknown to anyone, especially since the

How can history’s heroes ever measure up to the expectations of callow, entitled, badly educated young people?

Rodney King episode nearly thirty years ago? Or that public displays of alleged “grief and anger” on the part of strangers have any practical utility?

The culprit in Minneapolis was fired and charged with second degree murder within a week. What other practical actions were supposed to follow? And how does killing and beating people, or vandalizing and looting small businesses, advance the “conversation” Americans allegedly refuse to have?

The crisis is not just a tool, as was the Vietnam War in the Sixties, to advance a leftist political agenda. The crisis is being manufactured. All the available data show that police shootings of unarmed black men are rare—nine in 2019—and usually happen when a suspect resists arrest. In fact, police shootings in general are down by almost half over the past few decades. Yet videos of police arrests that are atypical of the millions of police contacts with citizens every year saturate the Internet, social media, and cable news, creating the illusion that such lethal abuses of force are common.

The purpose, then, of the protests and violence has little to do with correcting a widespread abuse, or the mythic “systemic racism.” It’s about leveraging the rare dramatic instances of police misbehavior into political power—not letting the crisis go to waste. Black Lives Matter, which has been at the forefront of this “crisis,” has been raking in millions of dollars from corporations eager to pay tribute. As well as enriching the movement’s leaders, this lucre will be spent on fomenting even more protests and disturbances, and on promoting an explicitly Marxist agenda that the movement cannot as of now persuade enough voters to accept at the ballot box.

THE WAGES OF APPEASEMENT

The response of civic authority these days is very different from how disorder was handled in the Sixties. Back then, despite some sympathy from progressive politicians, most state and federal government officials understood that keeping order and protecting citizens was their primary responsibility. Today, mayors, governors, and police chiefs in blue states have stood down in the face of violence, and even issued public declarations of support and sympathy for the rioters and their goals, including preposterous proposals like “defunding the police” or redirecting resources to nonlethal responses to dangerous domestic abuse emergencies. Meanwhile, most of the few criminals who are arrested are not charged or held, but instead are put back on the street.

This mostly blue-state dereliction of civic duty is unprecedented, and illustrates just how thorough the multigenerational corruption of education has

been. We are now entering the third generation of those who have been indoctrinated rather than educated, which means that the politi-

Public officials shed crocodile tears for offenses they never perpetrated and their punishers never suffered.

cal ideologies of a minority in the Sixties today are even more widespread and embedded in the halls of government, as well as in popular culture and entertainment.

We sowed that wind in the Sixties, and now we are reaping the whirlwind. The longer we appease public violence and disorder, the bolder the rioters become, and the more death and destruction will follow. At some point there will have to be a reckoning to restore the prestige and deterrent power of civil authority. For now, that possibility has to wait on the choices we the people make November 3. ■

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*Available from the Hoover Institution Press is **Democracy's Dangers and Discontents: The Tyranny of the Majority from the Greeks to Obama**, by Bruce S. Thornton. To order, call (800) 888-4741 or visit www.hooverpress.org.*



Self-haters, Sit Down

Western civilization, the pearl of great price.

By Andrew Roberts

On Tuesday, December 3, 1940, Winston Churchill read a memorandum by the military strategist Basil Liddell Hart that advocated making peace with Nazi Germany. It argued, in a summary written by Churchill's private secretary, Jock Colville, that otherwise Britain would soon see "Western Europe racked by warfare and economic hardship; the legacy of centuries, in art and culture, swept away; the health of the nation dangerously impaired by malnutrition, nervous strains and epidemics; Russia . . . profiting from our exhaustion." Colville admitted it was "a terrible glimpse of the future," but nonetheless courageously concluded that "we should be wrong to hesitate" in rejecting any negotiation with Adolf Hitler.

It is illuminating—especially in our own time of "nervous strains and epidemics"—that in that list of horrors, the fear of losing the "legacy of centuries" of Western European art and culture rated above almost everything else. For Churchill and Colville, the prospect of losing the legacy of Western civilization was worse even than that of succumbing to the hegemony of the Soviet Union.

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Yet today, only eight decades later, we have somehow reached a situation in which Sonalee Rashatwar, who is described by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* as a “fat-positivity activist and Instagram therapist,” can tell that newspaper, “I love to talk about undoing Western civilization because it’s just so romantic to me.” Whilst their methods are obviously not so appallingly extreme, Rashatwar and the cohorts who genuinely want to “undo” Western civilization are now succeeding where Adolf Hitler and the Nazis failed.

The evidence is rampant in the academy, where a pre-emptive cultural cringe is “decolonizing” college syllabuses—that is, wherever possible removing Dead White European Males (DWEMs) from it—often with overt support from deans and university establishments. Western Civilization courses, insofar as they still exist under other names, are routinely denounced as racist, “phobic,” and generally so unwoke as to deserve axing.

Western civilization, so important to earlier generations, is being ridiculed, abused, and marginalized, often without any coherent response. Of course, today’s non-Western colonizations, such as India’s in Kashmir and China’s in Tibet and Uighurstan, are not included in the sophomores’ concept of imperialism and occupation, which can be done only by the West. The “Amritsar Massacre” only ever refers to the British in the Punjab in 1919, for example, rather than the Indian massacre of ten times the number of people there in 1984. Nor can the positive aspects of the British empire even be debated any longer, as the closing down of Professor Nigel Biggar’s conferences at Oxford University on the legacy of colonialism eloquently demonstrates.

We all know the joke that Mahatma Gandhi supposedly made when he was asked what he thought about Western civilization: “I think it might be a good idea.” The gag is apocryphal, in fact, first appearing two decades after his death. But very many people have taken it literally, arguing that there really is no such thing as Western civilization, from ideologues such as Noam Chomsky to the activists of the “Rhodes Must Fall” movement at Oxford University, who demand the removal from Oriel College of the statue of the benefactor of the Rhodes Scholarships.

Increasingly clamorous demands by African and Asian governments for the restitution of artifacts “stolen” from their countries during colonial periods are another aspect of the attack, an attempt to guilt-shame the West. It also did not help that for eight years before 2016, the United States was led by someone who was constantly searching for aspects of Western behavior for which to apologize.



A PRISM DARKLY

This belief that Western civilization is at heart morally defective has recently been exemplified by the *New York Times* and its inane, wildly historically inaccurate “1619 Project,” which essentially attempts to present the entirety of American history from Plymouth Rock to today solely through the prism of race and slavery. “America Wasn’t a Democracy until Black Americans Made It One” was the headline of one essay in the *New York Times Magazine* launching the project, alongside “American Capitalism Is Brutal: You Can Trace That to the Plantation” and “How Segregation Caused Your Traffic Jam.” When no fewer than twelve—in the circumstances very brave—American Civil War historians sent a letter itemizing all the myriad factual errors in the project’s founding document, the *New York Times* refused to print it. Yet the project plans to create and distribute school curriculums that will “recenter” America’s memory.

None of this would amount to much if only schools and colleges were not so keen to apologize for and deny Western civilization, and to abolish or dumb down the teaching of important aspects of it. The classics faculty at Oxford University, to take one example of many, has recently recommended that Homer’s *Iliad* and Virgil’s *Aeneid* be removed from the initial module of the Literae Humaniores program in ancient literature, history, and philosophy, giving as their reason the difference in recent exam results between male and female undergraduates, and the difference in expertise in Latin and

Greek between privately and publicly educated students. The supposed guardians of the discipline are therefore willing to

A pre-emptive cultural cringe is “decolonizing” college syllabuses.

put social experimentation and social leveling before the best possible teaching of the humanities, a disgraceful position for one of the world’s greatest universities to have adopted.

A glance at the fate of “Western Civ” courses in the United States suggests that there is a deep malaise in our cultural self-confidence. The origin of the concept of Western civilization as a subject is found in the “War Issues” course offered to students at Columbia University in 1918, just after the United States’ entry into World War I. By learning the politics, history, philosophy, and culture of the Western world, students were given the opportunity to understand the values for which they were about to be asked to risk their lives. In 1919, the Columbia course was developed into “An Introduction to Contemporary Civilization,” which was followed by a similar innovation at the University of Chicago in 1931.

By 1964, no fewer than forty of the fifty top American colleges required students to take such a class, which, to take Stanford University as an example, had evolved into a core canon of around fifteen works, including those by Homer, Virgil, Plato, Dante, Milton, and Voltaire. While the content of the Western Civ courses

was considerably more flexible, complex, and diverse than subsequent critics have suggested (as Herbert Lindenberger's study *The History in*

The generations who grew up learning about democracy, rather than weltering in guilt and self-doubt, were the lucky ones.

Literature: On Value, Genre, Institutions explains), the courses did indeed treat Western civilization as a uniform entity. In the past decade, that was derided as so inherently and obviously evil that Western Civ courses had disappeared altogether, miraculously holding out in their Columbia birthplace and in a few other places, including brave, non-government-funded outposts of sanity such as Hillsdale College in Michigan and the incipient Ralston College in Savannah.

For all that we must of course take proper cognizance of other cultures, the legacy of Western culture, in terms of both its sheer quality and its quantity, is unsurpassed in human history. We are deliberately underplaying many of the greatest contributions made to poetry, architecture, philosophy, music, and art by ignoring that fact, often simply to try to feel less guilty about imperialism, colonialism, and slavery, even though the last was a moral crime committed by only a minority of some few people's great-great-great-grandparents.

As a result, future generations cannot be certain that they will be taught about the overwhelmingly positive aspects of Western civilization. They might not now be shown the crucial interconnection between, for example, the Scrovegni Chapel by Giotto at Padua, which articulates the complex scholasticism of Saint Augustine in paint; Machiavelli's *The Prince*, the first work of modern political theory; Botticelli's *Primavera*, the quintessence of Renaissance humanism in a single painting; the works of Teresa of Ávila and Descartes, which wrestle with the proof of discrete individual identity; Beethoven's symphonies, arguably the most complex and profound orchestral works ever written; and Shakespeare, whose plays Harold Bloom has pointed out, "remain the outward limit of human achievement: aesthetically, cognitively, in certain ways morally, even spiritually." Even if students are taught about these works individually, they will not be connected in a context that makes it clear how important they are to Western civilization.

We cannot therefore know, once the present campaign against Western civilization reaches its goal, that our children and grandchildren will be taught about the living thing that intimately connects Europe's Gothic cathedrals, which are mediations in stone between the individual and the sublime; the giants of the nineteenth-century novel, from Dickens to Flaubert to Tolstoy, in whose works contemporary life realistically observed becomes a fit subject for art; the Dutch masters of the seventeenth century such as Rembrandt, who wrestled visually with the human condition in a fashion that still speaks to us across the centuries; and Versailles, the Hermitage, and the Alhambra, which, though bombastic, are undeniably ravishing expressions of the human will. Faced with the argument that Western culture is no longer relevant, it's tempting to adopt Dr. Johnson's argument, aim a good kick at the nearest neoclassical building, and announce, "I refute it thus."

Mention of the Alhambra in Granada prompts the thought that any course in Western civilization worth its name ought also to include the Umayyad caliphate, of which Córdoba in modern-day Spain was the capital between 756 and 929. In the wake of the conquest of Spain and the establishment of the Muslim confederacy of Al-Andalus, Córdoba became a flourishing, polyglot, multicultural environment in which religious tolerance, despite Jews' and Christians' being obliged to pay a supplementary tax to the state, produced an atmosphere of intellectual progressiveness that made it one of the most important cities in the world. Discoveries in trigonometry, pharmacology, astronomy, and surgery can all be traced to Córdoba. At a certain point, then, a very particular set of historical circumstances produced an equally particular set of intellectual ideas, which had significant material consequences. The study of Western civilization is therefore emphatically not solely that of Christian DWEMs.

TIMELESS HUMANITY

Stanley Kurtz, in his book *The Lost History of Western Civilization*, reminds us that what the Western Civ courses really did was to root a people in their past and their values. The trajectory of Western culture was shown to have

PRESERVATION: The Gothic-revival Basilica of Notre Dame de la Treille in Lille, France (opposite page), was built in the nineteenth century in homage to an eleventh-century church destroyed during the French Revolution. The legacy of Western culture, in sheer quality and quantity, is unsurpassed in human history—even so, early Western Civ courses never tried to argue that it was flawless. [Velvet—Creative Commons]



run from Greece via Rome to Christendom, infused by Judaic ideas and morality along the way via Jerusalem, but then detouring briefly through the Dark Ages, recovering in the Renaissance, which led to the Reformation, the Enlightenment, and thus the scientific, rational, and politically liberated culture of Europe and European America. “From Plato to NATO,” as the catchphrase went.

At the center of this transference of values across time and space was democracy, of which Winston Churchill famously said, “Many forms of government have been tried, and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.” The generations who grew up knowing that truth, rather than weltering in guilt and self-doubt about “false consciousness” and so on, were the lucky ones, because they were allowed to study the glories of Western civilization in a way that was unembarrassed, unashamed, and not saddled with accusations of guilt in a centuries-old crime that had absolutely nothing to do with them. They could learn about the best of their civilization, and how it benefited—and continues to benefit—mankind.

As Ian Jenkins, the senior curator of the Ancient Greek collection at the British Museum, put it in his book on the Elgin Marbles—politically correctly titled *The Parthenon Sculptures*—“Human figures in the frieze are more than

mere portraits of the Athenian people of the day. Rather they represent a timeless humanity, one which transcends the present to encompass a universal vision of an

Marxism-Leninism began as a Western concept but was overthrown in the West. Tragically, it still thrives elsewhere in the world.

ideal society.” The Parthenon itself set out the architectural laws of proportion that still obtain to this day, and later in the book Jenkins points out how the sculptures “transcend national boundaries and epitomize universal and enduring values of excellence.” It was no coincidence that interest in them permeated the Western Enlightenments of the eighteenth century.

While the Parthenon was being built, Pericles contrasted the openness and moderation of Athenian civic life with the militaristic, secretive, dictatorial Spartans in his Funeral Speech of 430 BC, and this struck a chord with the Enlightenment thinkers of twenty-three centuries later, just as it should continue to do with us today, reminding us why Western values are

indeed superior to those that actuate the leaders of modern China, Russia, Iran, Venezuela, North Korea, and Zimbabwe. Marxism-Leninism began as a Western concept but was overthrown in the West, whereas it tragically still thrives in other parts of the world. And yes, we know that the architect Phidias employed slaves and metics (foreigners) in building the Parthenon, not just Athenian freemen.

“Carved around the middle of the fifth century BC,” writes Neil MacGregor, former director of the British Museum, the Elgin Marbles “are the product of a creative culture

that is credited with the invention of such aspects of modern Western civilization as democracy, philosophy, history, medicine, poetry, and drama.”

Twentieth-century students had more common sense. They were not looking for ever-new ways to be offended.

Of course, no one is claiming that Oriental, Persian, and Arab civilizations did not have all of those listed—except democracy, which they did not have then and most still do not today—and no one suggests that Aboriginal Australians, South Sea Islanders, the Aztecs and Incas, ancient Egyptians, or the Khmer empire that built Angkor Wat for the god Vishnu did not have their own worthy civilizations, too.

Yet even the very greatest achievements and physical creations of those other civilizations simply cannot compare to what the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian Western civilization has produced in philosophy, history, medicine, poetry, and drama, let alone democracy.

Anyone reading Charles Murray’s superb and unanswerable book *Human Accomplishment* cannot but accept that the contribution made to mankind—the whole of it, not just the West—by DWEMs has statistically utterly dwarfed that made by the whole of the rest of the world combined. Whilst the transformative powers of cathedrals and concertos are relatively debatable, Nobel prizes for science and medical breakthroughs can be numerically compared, as can the fact that there is no one in any other civilization who can objectively match the sheer volume and density of the poetic and dramatic work of Shakespeare. To deny that is to start going down the route of the discredited Afrocentrist historians who were reduced to claiming that ancient African civilizations had visited Latin America and significantly influenced the cultures they found there.

If Pericles had lost an election or been ostracized in the annual vote of Athenians, he would have stood down from office in the same way that Boris

Johnson, Donald Trump, and Emmanuel Macron would after a defeat in a free and fair election in their countries, whereas that is inconceivable in many totalitarian countries not infused by the ethics of the West. That is ultimately why we should not apologize for Western civilization, why it should be proselytized around the world and certainly taught as a discrete discipline in our schools and universities.

EXCHANGE AND CONNECTION

Our word *civilization* derives from the Latin *civilis*, from *civis* (citizen) via *civitas* (city). The city is the locus for human encounter and understanding, for exchange and connection, for the development of communal and peaceful coexistence, for the flourishing of both everyday exchange and sophisticated arts. Opponents of the teaching of Western civilization object that European countries built their wealth and cultural achievements on the colonial exploitation and enslavement of non-European peoples. Yet as Homer demonstrates in the *Iliad*, the development of civilization has always been predicated upon darker forces.

The Crusaders of medieval Europe were no more bloody and cruel than those carrying out the wars of conversion of the expanding Islamic world in the seventh and eighth centuries. The Ethiopian empire (1270–1974) was founded upon slavery, as was the Ottoman empire (1299–1924). If the history of the West needs to be taught critically, then so too does that of the East or the so-called global South. No civilization has been morally pure.

“Competition and monopoly,” writes Niall Ferguson sagely in his book

Civilization: The West and the Rest, “science and superstition; freedom and slavery; curing and killing; hard work and laziness—in each case, the West was the father to both the good and

If you want to understand why we do not have child slavery, or disenfranchised women, or imprisonment without trial, you must study our cultural history.

the bad.” Those early Western Civ courses never tried to argue that it was flawless—Karl Marx sometimes used to be taught in them, after all—but in the twentieth century, students had more common sense and took that for granted, and were not looking for ever-new ways to be offended.

Christians abolished slavery in the 1830s (or three decades later, in America’s case), whereas outside Christendom the practice survived for much longer, and identifiable versions of it still exist in some non-Christian

and anti-Christian countries today. The abolition of slavery did not merely happen by votes in Parliament and proclamations from presidents; it was fought for by (and against) Christians with much blood spilt on both sides. That would not have happened without the Judeo-Christian values and the Western Enlightenment that are so central to Western civilization.

The Royal Navy ran its West Africa Preventive Squadron for more than sixty years with the sole task of fighting slavery, during which time it freed around 160,000 slaves,

and an estimated 17,000 British seamen died of disease or in battle achieving that.

When considering “the rest”—those civilizations

that did not produce what Western civilization has—Ferguson is unblushingly honest. “We must resist the temptation to romanticize history’s losers,” he writes. “The other civilizations overrun by the West’s, or more peacefully transformed by it through borrowings as much as by impositions, were not without their defects either, of which the most obvious is that they were incapable of providing their inhabitants with any sustained improvement in the material quality of their lives.” For all my earlier concentration on art and architecture, poetry and music, Ferguson is also correct to point out that “civilization is much more than just the contents of a few first-rate art galleries. It is a highly complex human organization,” which is why his book is “as much about sewage pipes as flying buttresses.”

There is an entire industry devoted to trying to topple DWEM heroes from their pedestals—literally, in the case of the British activist Afua Hirsch’s attempt to have Admiral Nelson removed from his column in Trafalgar Square in London on the grounds that he did not campaign to abolish the slave trade (which was not abolished by Britain until two years after his death in 1805).

The climate-change movement is similarly riddled with anti-Western assumptions, whereby capitalism, development, and growth are demonized, all of them supposedly primarily Western concepts. A glance at the actual carbon emissions from the new coal-fired power stations still being built every month in China should put Western climate self-haters right about the importance of development and growth, but campaigning against democratic, guilt-ridden Western governments is far easier than taking the fight to Beijing and Delhi, which now is where the real difference can be made.

Christians abolished slavery in the 1830s (or three decades later, in America’s case). Outside Christendom, versions of slavery still exist.

When Greta Thunberg denounces Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party outside the Great Hall of the People, she will be worthy of our respect; until then, she is merely playing on Western guilt, like every other demagogic critic of the West so beloved of the left.

Western self-hatred, which is quite different from healthy self-criticism, has gone far too far in our society. American self-haters such as Noam Chomsky and Michael Moore have made hugely successful careers out of a knee-jerk reaction that whatever ill befalls the West is solely its own fault. They argue, of course, that they in fact like their country—rarely “love,” as that would differentiate it from other countries—and it’s only one particular administration or policy with which they take issue rather than the whole culture. Yet this is false. If after a lifetime one has never—as in Jeremy Corbyn’s case—once supported a single Western military operation under any circumstance, and always had a good word for every opponent of the West, whether it be a state actor or a leftist terrorist group, then the truth becomes obvious.

Mention of Corbyn prompts the thought that all too often consideration of the contribution of Judeo-Christian thought to Western civilization tends to underplay the first—Judeo—part of the conjoined twins. It is impossible not to spot an enormous overlap between hatred of the concept of Western civilization on one side and at least a certain haziness over anti-Semitism on the other. In America, there are unfortunately still those who believe that Western civilization is at risk from Jewish culture. This view is as ignorant as it is obnoxious. For without the “Judeo” half of the phenomenon, Western civilization would simply not exist. Philo-Semitic Gentiles such as I enjoy boasting about the contribution the Jews have made to Western civilization in every sphere. Beware the hater of Western civilization; very often there’s an anti-Semite not very far away.

If you want to argue that Kanye West’s lyrics are as good as Shakespeare, or Mongolian yurts are as sophisticated a form of architecture as Bauhaus, then Michel Foucault will support you all the way. But if you want to understand why we do not have child slavery in the West, or disenfranchised women, or imprisonment without trial, or the imprisonment of newspaper editors, you simply have to study the cultural history that produced such an unusual and extraordinary situation in human history. It is inescapable and not susceptible to postmodernist analysis. It’s not about the aesthetic or literary superiority of certain artworks, but about the unequivocal good of human dignity.

A Westless world would be a neo-Darwinian free-for-all in which every state merely grabbed what it could, a return to the world Hobbes wrote about in *Leviathan*. The left should beware what it claims to wish for, and Western civilization should be taught once more in our schools and colleges. For as Churchill knew as the bombs were falling and London was burning in December 1940, it is worth fighting for. ■

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From Flanders Fields

The red poppies of November are not just remembrances of things past. They suggest losses yet to come.

By Niall Ferguson

This is the time of year when I get the paper-flower question. Living in California but born in Britain, I am one of a tiny number of people here who wear a poppy in the week before Remembrance Day. Hence the question: “Hey, Niall, what’s with the red paper flower?” I don’t mind explaining. I wear it in memory of my grandfathers, John Ferguson and Tom Hamilton.

The former fought the Germans on the Western Front for most of the First World War. The latter fought the Japanese in Burma during the Second World War. Both survived—otherwise, there would be no me—but each had his life shortened by the damage war did to his lungs. And I wear the poppy to commemorate the tens of millions of people—not only the British servicemen—whose lives were cut much shorter.

Sometimes I also point out that this is not some British eccentricity. It was an American woman, Moina Michael—a professor at the University of Georgia—who originally suggested wearing a poppy as a symbol of remembrance.

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SOLEMN OBLIGATION: A red Remembrance Day poppy is pinned to a British soldier's uniform alongside his Afghanistan campaign medal. [Corporal Paul Morrison—Ministry of Defence]

She in turn was inspired by a Canadian, John McCrae, whose 1915 poem “In Flanders Fields” still resonates. Beginning in 1919, a Frenchwoman, Anna Guérin, sold artificial poppies in America to raise money for orphans in the war-torn regions of France. The tradition may have died out in America, but it is alive and well in Australia and New Zealand too.

If my interlocutor has not fled by now, I add that I would not have become a historian without such symbols of the past. For poppies, like the stone war memorials that were so numerous in the Scotland of my youth, prompted the earliest historical question in my mind: why did that happen? Why did my grandfathers, when they were still such young men—a mere teenager, in the case of John Ferguson—end up in mortal peril so far from home? It’s a version of Tolstoy’s more profound question at the end of *War and Peace*: “What is the power that moves nations?” It is the question I have spent my adult life trying to answer.

Remembrance, in short, has never been enough for me. We also need to learn from history. Here is one of the lessons that are too seldom learnt. Scraps of paper matter, and I don't mean paper flowers.

What became the Great War—only later renamed the First World War after the Second had begun—might simply have been the Second Franco-German War if Britain and its empire had not joined it on August 4, 1914. Why did that happen?

Formally, Britain went to war because the German attack on Belgium violated the 1839 Treaty of London, which—under article VII of the annex to the treaty—bound all five of the great powers of Europe to uphold Belgian neutrality. There were other reasons for intervening, naturally: the geopolitical calculation that a German victory over France, unlike in 1871, would pose a strategic threat to Britain, and the domestic political calculation that if the Liberals did not go to war, their government would fall and the Conservatives would go to war anyway. But Belgium mattered.

On August 6, the prime minister, Herbert Asquith, explained to the House of Commons “what we are fighting for.” His speech focused on Britain’s “solemn international obligation” to uphold Belgian neutrality in the name of both law and honor, and “to vindicate the principle that small nationalities are not to be crushed.” The evidence suggests that this *casus belli* did indeed

resonate with the British public.

The German chancellor, Theobald von Bethmann-Hollweg, lamented that “England should fall upon

them for the sake of the neutrality of Belgium”—for “*un chiffon de papier*.” But scraps of paper count, even if the 1839 treaty was only (as one cabinet minister observed) a convenient “plea . . . for intervention on behalf of France.”

How many Britons in 1914 knew the terms of that treaty? Not sixteen-year-old John Ferguson, I’ll be bound. And yet the commitment to Belgium, along with a sustained emphasis on German atrocities towards Belgian civilians, became central to British war propaganda.

Are there any similar commitments today, forgotten by the general public and yet capable of plunging the world into war? I can think of two. In each case, they exist on paper. In each case, they have lost or are losing credibility,

Poppies, like the stone war memorials so numerous in my native land, prompted the earliest historical question in my mind: why did that happen?

so that potential foes might be forgiven for dismissing them as mere scraps of paper.

The first is Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty of April 4, 1949, which binds each signatory to consider “an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America . . . an attack against them all,” and, in that case, to take “such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”

The second is the Taiwan Relations Act of April 10, 1979, which states that America will “consider any effort to determine the future of Taiwan by other than peaceful means, including by boycotts or embargoes, a threat to the peace and security of the Western Pacific area and of grave concern to the United States” and that America “will make available to Taiwan such defense articles and defense services in such quantity as may be necessary to enable Taiwan to maintain a sufficient self-defense capability.”

With respect to NATO, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, gave a damning interview last year. “To my mind,” he told the *Economist*, “what we are currently experiencing is the brain death of NATO”:

Economist: Do you now believe that Article 5 doesn’t work, either; is that what you suspect?

Macron: I don’t know, but what will Article 5 mean tomorrow? Will [Donald Trump] be prepared to activate solidarity? If something happens at our borders?



WE SHALL NOT REST: Moina Michael, shown in this 1948 postage stamp, was an American college professor who pioneered the wearing of red paper poppies to remember the sacrifices of war. Her inspiration, of course, was John McCrae’s 1915 poem “In Flanders Fields.” [US Postal Service]

Tolstoy wondered, “What is the power that moves nations?”

With respect to Taiwan, a similar question could easily be asked. Would President Trump feel bound by the 1979 act if China sought to end Taiwan's autonomy and force it to submit to rule from Beijing? That is no remote scenario. Last fall, Taiwan's foreign minister, Joseph Wu, warned that China might resort to military aggression towards Taiwan as a means of deflecting internal political pressure as the mainland economy slows down.

So go ahead, ask me why I am wearing a poppy. Commemoration is about more than showing respect to past generations. It is also about being alert to future dangers: red flags, as well as red flowers. ■

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Days of Reckoning

As the year of the coronavirus nears an end, consider the devastating flu epidemic of 1918–20, an even more severe trial of the American spirit.

By George H. Nash

Since at least the time of ancient Greece and Rome, massive outbreaks of disease have repeatedly ravaged the human race. Until quite recently, epidemics of cholera, smallpox, typhus, yellow fever, and influenza were commonplace, collectively taking, over the centuries, hundreds of millions of human lives. Occasionally these plagues have become disasters known as pandemics, spreading far from their points of origin to batter much of the world.

Perhaps the most infamous and fearsome of these afflictions was the bubonic plague, or Black Death, of the late Middle Ages. Originating in Asia, where it apparently killed many millions, it arrived in Europe in 1348. In the next six years it snuffed out the lives of an estimated twenty-five million Europeans, at least one-third of the continent's population. During the next several centuries, lesser outbreaks of the bubonic plague erupted as many as forty times in parts of Europe and Asia.

North America has not been immune to the diseases of the Old World. Indeed, European settlers unknowingly brought some of them, such as smallpox and influenza, to the New World in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yellow fever probably arrived in the Americas via the slave trade and became a source of epidemics in cities such as New York and New Orleans. In

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1793 an outbreak of yellow fever in Philadelphia killed nearly one-tenth of the city's population and prompted President George Washington and the new federal government to flee what was then the nation's capital.

By far the most lethal pandemic in American history occurred just over one hundred years ago, when the "Spanish influenza" (as it was then called) mysteriously erupted and invaded every continent on earth. The first known wave of it seems to have arisen in the United States in the spring of 1918, as World War I was nearing its climax. At that time the US Army was training hundreds of thousands of draftees in more than forty crowded encampments before sending the soldiers in crowded ships to the battle zone in Europe. During the spring many of these servicemen caught the influenza, and some carried it to Europe, but relatively few died—at first. Many civilians also fell ill with the disease, but they generally survived.

For a time in the summer of 1918, the pandemic seemed to peter out. Then, in late August—in Europe, the eastern United States, and a section of Africa—it returned in mutated form. This second wave was far more deadly than the first, and it spread like a silent tornado. Striking first at US sailors in Boston Harbor on August 27, it soon found its way inland. According to the New England Historical Society, on September 8 it reached Camp Devens (about forty miles from Boston), where 50,000 US soldiers were stationed. By September 23 more than 10,500 of them were sick with the influenza. By September 29, they were reportedly dying at the rate of 100 per day.

Along the Atlantic seaboard and beyond, the pandemic spread with incredible speed and ferocity, assailing more and more of the civilian population.

America was much less urbanized and "wired" in 1918.

In Philadelphia, where the disease arrived via a visiting ship in September, hundreds of workers in the Navy Yard quickly

became infected. Despite this warning sign, the city's public-health director refused to cancel a scheduled Liberty Loan parade designed to raise money for the war effort. At least 200,000 people jammed the parade route on September 28. Within a week 45,000 residents of the city were stricken with the influenza. Within six weeks, 12,000 Philadelphians expired from it, the highest death toll for any American city.

By the time the pandemic's second wave subsided in early 1919, at least 45,000 residents of Massachusetts had succumbed. By the time a third wave of the epidemic ended in the spring of 1919, an estimated 500,000 to 675,000 Americans had died of the disease, in a period when the US population was



PATIENCE: San Franciscans line up along Montgomery Street to buy face masks in 1918. At the height of the influenza crisis that year, most people behaved stoically and pulled through, despite losses of life that far exceeded those of today's coronavirus pandemic. [Hamilton Henry Dobbin—California State Library]

less than one-third of what it is today. In the US Army, which sent more than a million soldiers to fight overseas in World War I, more personnel perished from the influenza than from combat wounds.

The United States was not the only nation to suffer from the catastrophe. Historians estimate that the Spanish influenza killed at least 40 million to 50 million people worldwide (and possibly 100 million), probably eclipsing the ghastly record long held by the Black Death. Because, unusually, the virus hit young adults hardest, they died in disproportionate numbers. It is thought that as many as 10 percent of young adults in the entire world may have succumbed to the disease. In all, nearly one-third, and quite possibly more, of the world's population became infected (although most survived). The influenza pandemic of 1918–19 has been called “the deadliest disease outbreak in human history.”

A DISTANT CENTURY

What might we, in the midst of our own pandemic, learn from America's ordeal a century ago? As a historian, I am impressed by the many contrasts

between then and now. In 1918, the American medical community lacked the knowledge and resources to combat the new menace effectively. It did not know what caused the disease or how to cure it. No vaccine for influenza existed. The pharmaceutical industry and the network of scientific-research laboratories that we take for granted today were barely out of their infancy in 1918.

Moreover, the supply of doctors and nurses on the American home front was abnormally low. Many of the younger ones were serving in the Army and service organizations in Europe. This dearth of civilian medical personnel added to the tremendous strain on the medical system when the pandemic swept through the cities.

Nor was the communications environment—so important for public-health initiatives—at all similar in 1918 to our own. Telephones and automobiles

were uncommon, radio stations did not yet exist, and the main source of information for average citizens was the local newspaper. If you wanted to communicate with

For a while in 1918, some public-health officials deliberately de-emphasized the gravity of the pandemic.

friends and relatives beyond your town or city, there was just one inexpensive method: mailing a letter. Today, of course, we live in an age of saturation media and instantaneous communication in which the flood of news never stops. We learn of distant disasters (like an epidemic in China) with ease. The whole world has become our “neighborhood.” Not so in 1918.

In part because the United States was much less urbanized and less “wired” in 1918, the public response to the pandemic that year was much less centralized and coordinated than what we are witnessing in 2020. Although the federal government had a Public Health Service that issued reports and advisories, the federal bureaucracy (except for the War Department and temporary wartime agencies) was minuscule compared with today’s. Hence most governmental responsibility for fighting the pandemic fell on municipal authorities, not Uncle Sam.

In fact, for a while in 1918, some local and federal public-health officials—including the surgeon general of the United States—deliberately de-emphasized the gravity of the pandemic, out of fear of undermining wartime morale and frightening people into hysteria. During the summer and even into the autumn, a number of officials insisted that the rampaging influenza was merely a variant of normal, seasonal flu and that there was “no cause for



SHARED BURDEN: Red Cross nurses move an influenza patient in St. Louis in October 1918, around the peak of the flu death toll. Throughout the country, nurses whose own lives were at risk cared for the sick and the dying. Their example enhanced the prestige of the nursing profession. [St. Louis Post-Dispatch Archives]

alarm” if “ordinary precautions” were observed. Today no one would accuse the American public-health establishment of minimizing the peril. Instead, it is facing criticism in some quarters for relying upon statistical models that allegedly exaggerate the threat.

Interestingly, one intervention that public-health authorities did not attempt in 1918 was the sweeping suspension of economic activity for an extended period as a form of what was then called “crowding control.” To be sure, during the worst of the pandemic, many (but not all) municipalities closed schools, churches, and entertainment venues and quarantined the sick. Some cities ordered stores and businesses to alter their hours of opening and closure in order to relieve congestion on public transportation. And the disease on its own temporarily disrupted some businesses, when large numbers of ailing workers were unable to report to their jobs. But to the best of my knowledge, no one in authority in 1918 proposed what has been done

in 2020: a deliberate, government-ordered shutdown of most of the nation's economy on a scale never before witnessed in history.

Why not? Two reasons stand out. First, after entering the world war in 1917, the Wilson administration initiated an unprecedented program of intervention in America's free economy. It nationalized the railroads, set controls on food production and consumption, and imposed a sweeping regime of regulation and "war socialism" in order to mobilize America's resources to help win the war. It justified these intrusions as essential to defeating the highly regimented masses and army of imperial Germany. For most senior American war planners and managers, one suspects, winning the war against the human enemy was paramount, and the eruption of a virulent disease was a secondary problem, to be addressed, as such challenges always had been, mainly at the local level.

Furthermore, a primary objective of Wilson's war mobilization was to dramatically increase production of food, ships, weapons, and other products

This year's deliberate, government-ordered shutdown of most of the nation's economy is on a scale never before witnessed.

required by the United States and its allies for victory. To empty the nation's factories and order everyone to stay home might have slowed down the flu pandemic,

but it might also have lost the First World War. I doubt that the idea of enforcing "social distancing" on such a scale ever occurred to anyone.

The second reason the federal government took no further steps in 1918–19 may be found in the attitude and priorities of the nation's commander in chief. During the fifteen months that the Spanish influenza ravaged the United States, President Woodrow Wilson, though aware of the scourge, made no public statement about it at any time. Focused on winning the war and forging a new world order, he left it to the Army and others to manage the public-health emergency at home. In fairness to Wilson, we must note that in 1918 the American people did not consider their president to be their

DEADLIER THAN COMBAT: Medical personnel treat a patient at Fort Porter, New York (opposite), in mid-November 1918. The United States was not the only nation to suffer from the influenza catastrophe. Historians estimate that it killed at least 40 million to 50 million people worldwide (and possibly 100 million), probably eclipsing the toll of the Black Death. [Everett Collection—News-com]



consoler-in-chief. Only in recent times have we come to expect our presidents to “feel our pain,” visit sites of natural disasters such as flood and hurricanes, and offer victims words of compassion (and the promise of federal assistance). In 1918, apparently no one criticized Wilson for his silence. Today such presidential aloofness would be roundly condemned.

Another contrast between then and now is also noteworthy. If America today, with its much larger population, were to suffer mortality rates similar to those of 1918–19, the total fatalities would probably exceed two million people. By this standard, the pandemic of 1918 dwarfs its successor. Let us hope and pray that—unlike 1918—our current virus, after receding, does not return in a second and more deadly wave.

THEY OVERCAME

This points to another important difference between then and now. In 1918, the United States was embroiled in a titanic war against a foreign foe. It was this conflict—not the battle against influenza—that dominated the headlines most of the time and aroused the patriotic fervor of most of the American

people. In 2020, by contrast, the United States is not deeply engaged in a foreign war, with its relentless pressures for national unity. Instead, the

In 1918, emptying the nation's factories and ordering everyone to stay home might have slowed down the pandemic. It might also have lost the war.

struggle against Covid-19 is occurring in a political environment beset by disunity, polarization, and partisan rancor not witnessed in many years. Initially, some months ago, it seemed that the stunning appearance of Covid-19 might become the “external shock” that would liberate Americans from their bitter political passions and unite them in a concerted effort against a common threat. That outcome looks increasingly unlikely.

Nevertheless, a review of some parallels between 1918 and 2020 may give us some grounds for encouragement. In 1918, the American people confronted challenges similar to those we face today—and overcame them. Then, as now, the pandemic was most baleful in crowded urban areas. Then, as now, mass-transportation systems—streetcars, railroads, and troop ships in 1918, and international air travel in 2020—greatly facilitated the spread of the contagion. Then, as now, authorities with no medicinal remedies promoted what we now call “non-pharmaceutical interventions,” such as face masks, rigorous hygiene, and the practice of social distancing. Especially at the height of

the crisis in 1918, most people behaved stoically and pulled through, despite losses of life that far exceeded our own.

A number of them also did something else, which should forever inspire us. In Philadelphia, for instance, in the grim autumn of 1918, when the pandemic was out of control, a committee of citizens stepped forward and organized medical personnel to oversee every section of the city. Families accepted orphaned children into

their homes. Priests driving horse carts went street by street, urging traumatized people to give up the dead bodies in their houses. In Philadelphia and elsewhere,

nurses whose own lives were at risk cared bravely for the sick and the dying. Their example enhanced the prestige of the nursing profession. In Boston, teachers—temporarily unemployed because the schools were closed—were told that they could receive their salaries if they performed relief work. Despite the risk, many volunteered to assist the beleaguered nurses.

Today countless Americans are responding to our own pandemic with similar compassion and resourcefulness. The examples are legion. Doctors, nurses, and other first responders have worked long hours in crowded hospitals, while people outside cheered them on. Musicians have given concerts in streets and at food pantries. High school seniors donated their graduation robes to hospitals where medical gowns are scarce. Volunteers deliver food to

lonely shut-ins. Pharmaceutical companies and other businesses have been racing to develop antiviral drugs and produce medical devices at record speed.

Hotels and owners of RVs offered space to medical staff who dared not return home after work, lest they inadvertently infect their own families. Churches used Zoom and other devices to overcome enforced isolation and encourage their brothers and sisters in the faith.

For more than a century, historians and foreign visitors have noted and marveled at the American spirit of voluntarism, mutual support, and

President Wilson, though aware of the scourge, made no public statement about it at any time. Today such presidential aloofness would be roundly condemned.

Herbert Hoover's "rugged individualism" didn't mean selfish, cutthroat competition. It meant cooperative, problem-solving initiatives taken by free and resourceful people.

community uplift in both good times and bad. Years ago, Herbert Hoover called it “rugged individualism.” By this he did not mean selfish, cutthroat competition but something more noble: cooperative, problem-solving initiatives taken by free and resourceful Americans at the grass roots—people

who did not wait to be told by a distant authority what to do. It was the spirit, he argued, that America’s pioneers had exhibited when they traveled in wagon trains and settled the West.

At first, it seemed that Covid-19 might liberate Americans from their bitter political passions and unite them against a common threat. That looks increasingly unlikely.

To Hoover, a distinctive characteristic of America’s political system was what he called “self-government of the people outside government.” This is a striking formulation. Time and again in our history—including moments of peril such as 1918—“ordinary” people have arisen to overcome obstacles and improve the lot of others. This generous, can-do spirit is still alive today.

In the coming months, Americans will likely face many vexing difficulties, both medical and economic. In this time of distress, it might help to recall our history and the words of an old hymn: “Brighten the Corner Where You Are.” Whatever our perspective on our current challenges, let us address them in a manner befitting our forebears—with pluck and dignity—and do our best to “brighten the corner” where we live. ■

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“America First” and a Road Not Taken

The records of the America First Committee raise an intriguing question: what if a celebrity isolationist had captured the White House in 1940?

By Jean McElwee Cannon

Several years ago, in pursuit of an incredibly rich archive of materials related to the anti-interventionist movement in America just before the attack at Pearl Harbor, I traveled to Florida to interview a man whose father had been a high-ranking member of the America First Committee (AFC) during 1940–41. America First, an influential grass-roots organization championed by aviator Charles Lindbergh, opposed American entry into World War II—which they referred to as “the European affair.” The movement’s supporters campaigned desperately against what they saw as a blunder—aiding Britain against Germany—that would lead the United States down the road to complete economic ruin and possibly the end of democracy. In their view, American participation in the First World War had led to the Great Depression; a second foray into European conflict would damage the nation beyond repair or even survival.

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In the process recording an oral history with this gentleman, who was approaching his nineties at the time and thus had been a young boy when activists such as Lindbergh had visited his home, I asked him what his father's view of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt had been in 1940. His eyes immediately grew wide, he emitted a gasp, and declared, "He thought he was a monster." And then, almost as soon as he had spoken, he shook his head vigorously as if to indicate, "Maybe we should take that out." He looked, in fact, shocked that he had said such a statement out loud and, even more important, on tape.

The reality that eight decades after the end of World War II defiance toward Roosevelt could evoke such strong emotions impressed me deeply—obviously this gentleman and his family members had lived most of their lives with the knowledge that their connection to isolationist politics made them vulnerable to smear campaigns against those who had opposed Roosevelt's policies and American entry into the war. His viewpoint was distant from the generally accepted "Greatest Generation" mystique that surrounds his father's generation. Both my grandfathers, for example, fought in World War II and believed America's participation in the war was of resounding moral and political, if not economic, interest. My maternal grandfather, even in the late stages of dementia, could be asked whom he would vote for in the next election and would answer, "FDR." Aside from his president, the only thing he consistently remembered during that stage of his life was how to pray. In my young adult mind, FDR and salvation were fused.

My experiences in Florida caused me to question that equation—or at least to try to understand that my grandparents' pro-FDR viewpoint, colored perhaps by victory and the postwar economic boom they enjoyed, was not the only, or even the most unilaterally popular, political stance in the years before American entry into the war. Which Americans had opposed the war, why, and how had Roosevelt reacted?

The question sent me down a line of research happily facilitated by the fact that the Hoover Archives houses the records of the America First Committee, a treasure trove for understanding the people who founded and participated in the movement, how they quickly grew their base of support, where they failed, and what relevance or parallels their movement has to the politics of today.

Popular interest in the years 1940–41, particularly about the intervention debates that raged in America just before the Pearl Harbor attack, has risen recently in part because of the nationalist politics of the Trump era, but also because of significant histories and television shows that capture the global

Principles of the America First Committee

1. Our first duty is to keep America out of foreign wars. Our entry would only destroy democracy, not save it. "The path to war is a false path to freedom.
2. Not by acts of war abroad but by preserving and extending democracy at home can we aid democracy and freedom in other lands.
3. In 1917 we sent our American ships into the war zone and this led us to war. In 1941 we must keep our naval convoys and merchant vessels on this side of the Atlantic.
4. We must build a defense, for our own shores, so strong that no foreign power or combination of powers can invade our country, by sea, air or land.
5. Humanitarian aid is the duty of a strong, free country at peace. With proper safeguard for the distribution of supplies, we should feed and clothe the suffering and needy people of the occupied countries.

RESOLVED: The America First Committee originated with a young, relatively unknown activist, Yale law student Robert Douglas Stuart Jr. He believed that the United States had gained little but economic ruin from its participation in the Great War. He resolved that his generation would not repeat that mistake.

[America First Committee Collection—Hoover Institution Archives]



THREAT: This poster suggests that American democracy would be maimed by war in Europe. The America First Committee gained great support in the Midwest, largely because of editorials and cartoons in the sympathetic Chicago Tribune. It would receive less enthusiastic responses in the pro-interventionist South. [America First Committee Collection—Hoover Institution Archives]

tension and crises of leadership during those years. Erik Larson's recently published bestseller *The Splendid and the Vile*, for example, details Winston Churchill's political maneuvers during the London Blitz and the Battle of Britain—with special emphasis on his courtship of FDR and his desperate need to gain support from his last democratic ally. The recent HBO television series *The Plot Against America*, based on a 2004 novel by Philip Roth, asks an enticing “what if?” question for history buffs: what if Charles Lindbergh, running on an anti-interventionist platform supported by the America First Committee, had beaten FDR during Roosevelt's quest for an unprecedented third term as president of the United States? What would have happened if America had not fought in the Second World War? Toggling between the imagined Lindbergh administration and a Jewish neighborhood in New Jersey, the television series depicts America as increasingly divisive, anti-Semitic, and pro-Nazi.

An examination of the years 1940–41, and in particular the isolationist movement led by the America First Committee, leads to pressing questions about the expansion, checks, and balances on executive power; the social contract between the individual and the state within a democracy; strategies for rescuing a depressed economy; and how to identify, accept, or reject nationalism, populism, or fascism. Perhaps most important, this time period invites us to evaluate leadership styles through iconic, distinct figures: Roosevelt, Churchill, and “Lucky Lindy.” The archives of the America First Committee are a lens to focus on what was at stake in this era, how leaders communicated with the public, and why dissent toward war created such a violent disturbance throughout America.

FROM SMALL BEGINNINGS

Though the America First Committee would, during its short, roughly year-and-a-half existence, attract both celebrities and well-known political figures, the formal organization of the movement originated with a young and relatively unknown activist: Robert Douglas Stuart Jr., a Yale law student and son of a Quaker Oats executive. As a student studying government and international relations at Princeton during the Depression-era 1930s, Stuart came to believe the United States had gained little but economic ruin from its participation in the Great War. Dedicated to the idea that his generation would not repeat the mistakes of the previous generation, Stuart recruited three friends (one of them was football star and later American president Gerald Ford; another was future Supreme Court justice Potter Stewart) and drew up an anti-interventionist petition aimed at college and postgraduate



students. As law students, the core group first focused on policy issues: the demand that the Neutrality Act of 1939 be upheld. Roosevelt, they felt, was overexerting executive power, aiming to expand loans and shipments of goods to Britain—money and supplies that should be reserved to defend America should an attack come from Germany or another foe.

The movement spread quickly from New Haven to college campuses across the country, and in the summer of 1940 Stuart established a base of operations in Chicago, his hometown. The Midwest, with a large population of conservative-leaning “old right” voters loyal to what they perceived as traditional American values (and perhaps in reaction to the Wilsonianism of the World War I era), remained throughout 1940 and 1941 a stronghold for isolationism. Stuart and his small but quickly growing staff courted support and financial backing from local businessmen. They recruited General Robert E. Wood, a retired Army brigadier general and the chairman of the board of Sears, Roebuck, and Company, as the committee’s president. A World War I veteran, former quartermaster general for the Army, and critic of the New Deal, Wood brought military experience, a sense of patriotism, measured conservatism, and a great deal of wealthy business connections to the eager young men and women working at the America First Committee headquarters. (Ford, fearing retaliation from Yale, where he was coaching football at the time, resigned from the executive committee once national organizing and visibility began in full.)

On September 4, 1940, the America First Committee made its first public announcement of its principles and beliefs: the United States must build its own defenses; no foreign power should be able to defeat America if America were sufficiently prepared for attack; US democracy could only be preserved by refusing to be drawn into the European war; and aid to Britain would weaken American national defense and threaten to ensnare the United States in a second and disastrous world war. Furthermore, America Firsters believed that the Atlantic Ocean was America’s best defense; if Europe immolated itself, the United States would still be able to survive by trading with large and varied Latin American markets.

THE LONE EAGLE: Aviator Charles Lindbergh became a celebrity in 1927 after his daring solo flight across the Atlantic. In 1941, after he and his family had been in the news for years, he became the America First Committee’s celebrity spokesman—a figure widely respected in the United States who also had influence abroad. [Library of Congress]



MR. ROOSEVELT'S WAR

JUST SAY **NO** TO

The AFC held that entering a second world war would bring both renewed economic depression and a social disintegration that would threaten the existence of democracy itself. The most conservative wings of the AFC believed that mobilization for a war would bring wage inflation, more federal control of all areas of production, expanded executive power, and the possibility

[Taylor Jones—for the *Hoover Digest*]



of socialism. Overall, the committee aimed to unite Americans against the war despite rising fear about Adolf Hitler's ambitions. They aspired to open local chapters around the country, provide antiwar literature to the public, sponsor rallies, and ultimately, influence Congress and elections. The committee was emphatically nonpartisan (though most members were at least moderately conservative) and not pacifist, though certainly many pacifists were members. Their platform opposed not war itself but "Mr. Roosevelt's war" specifically, and this dissent was characterized as proof of patriotism. In fact, Robert Douglas Stuart Jr. and many other young men heavily involved in the America First movement in 1940–41 would join the Army and fight once America officially entered the conflict.

In addition to being a political movement of note, the AFC also holds the distinction of being a model of grass-roots organizing: Stuart and his staff worked indefatigably on behalf of the cause, and keenly understood the power of recruiting or seeking help from significant individuals with power or funds. The movement gained many members almost immediately, as well as quiet backers of note: men or women who were sympathetic to the isolationist cause. Many of these notable supporters feared smear campaigns or accusations of apostasy; others had conflicts of interest. Joseph Kennedy, father of the future president, supported the goals of the AFC and introduced Stuart and his colleagues to individuals in the highest corridors of power and influence—but, as ambassador to Britain, Kennedy could not join a group so antagonistic to Churchill and his needs for American aid. (Kennedy's young son John, however, mailed the AFC a hundred dollars, noting



GULLIBLE, OR WORSE? Charles Lindbergh emerges from the White House on April 20, 1939, after meeting with President Roosevelt. The aviator had already publicly clashed with the president, criticizing FDR's decision (later reversed) to award airmail contracts to the Army Air Corps. By the late 1930s Lindbergh was also advocating a negotiated peace with Nazi Germany and even accepted an award from Luftwaffe chief Hermann Göring, who convinced the American that Germany's air power was unstoppable. Lindbergh's approach to Hitler's Germany would haunt him for years afterward. [Harris &

Ewing Collection—Library of Congress]

that “what you are doing is vital.” When Stuart asked the future president to work for the committee full time, however, JFK declined.)

Herbert Hoover, having played a significant role in humanitarian food relief during World War I as head of the Commission for Relief in Belgium, shuddered at the idea of resurgence of war in Europe and quietly monitored the progress of the anti-interventionist movement, largely through his friend and confidant William R. Castle, a diplomat whose papers are housed at the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library. Because Hoover in 1940 was again

overseeing government food relief in war-torn Europe, he felt it inappropriate to antagonize Roosevelt by formally joining the AFC. Stuart, however, was hopeful that the former president would reverse course and become publicly involved. On December 5, 1940, Stuart wrote Wood that

Mr. Hoover is terribly interested in the work we are doing. He has promised me that he will, after the completion of his committee to promote relief to the little democracies, give us all of the time that he possibly can.

Ironically, in lieu of giving his time to Stuart and the AFC in 1940, Hoover was giving time to his library and archives at Stanford, where he opened the Hoover Tower in 1941—and where Stuart would deposit the records of the AFC in 1946, after returning from duty overseas. Illustrating the many contradictions of the prewar era, Hoover discreetly corresponded with America First campaigners while also allowing the government to use his conspicuous new tower as a center of espionage: the original blueprints of the Hoover Tower show a “radio room” on the ground floor that was used by the military to intercept broadcasts from abroad (recordings which now exist as the US Foreign Intelligence Broadcast collection at the Hoover Archives).

Other colorful stories concerning membership abound in the records of the AFC held in the Hoover Archives: controversial playwright and actress Lillian Gish was a fiery member of the AFC until coerced into giving up her membership by the studio system that would later blacklist her during the postwar red scare; Henry Ford was an early member but was later dropped by the committee due to his notorious anti-Semitism; World War I flying ace Eddie Rickenbacker was an enthusiastic member until he realized that his zeal jeopardized lucrative federal mail delivery contracts for his aviation firm, Eastern Air Lines. The hundreds of boxes of America First records that document local chapter membership rosters from across the country, however, signify that the backbone of the movement was on the ground, among average citizens who donated small amounts to the committee and contributed time to write congressmen and the White House and attend anti-war rallies in their areas. Nonetheless, Stuart understood star power and the need to recruit respected or adored celebrities to draw crowds and attention.

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED

In April 1941, Stuart got his biggest catch of all: the internationally known aviator and American icon Charles Lindbergh, who agreed to be a regular speaker on the America First rally circuit. Lindbergh's first solo transatlantic

flight in 1927 had captivated the world, and the 1932 kidnapping and murder of his son and the controversial trial and execution of the convicted kidnapper had been sensational news for years. The press followed every move made by Lindbergh and his wife, Anne Morrow; perhaps only Roosevelt himself was as closely watched by the press. Lindbergh guaranteed to pack the house at any speaking engagement.

What Stuart and his colleagues in the movement could not have fully anticipated, however, was that though a fiery orator capable of rousing a

crowd, Lindbergh was also prone to—as was his trade—fly solo. Often at the podium or microphone Lindbergh would go off script or deviate widely from official AFC tenets—and increasingly,

The records of the America First Committee are a treasure trove for understanding how the movement grew and failed—and what the movement might mean today.

Lindbergh's unsanctioned messages would reveal that his political views, and personal antagonism toward Roosevelt, far superseded the positions taken by other leaders of the isolationist movement.

As historian Lynne Olson notes in her fascinating book *Those Angry Days*, Lindbergh had clashed with FDR in 1934 by publicly criticizing the president's decision to strip private airlines of their federal airmail delivery contracts and award them to the US Army Air Corps. The plan, a colossal flop that had to be reversed, was a huge embarrassment to the president, and his spleen for the dashing young man who had scorned his mistake only amplified as the aviator continued to speak out against Roosevelt's subsequent national policies.

Lindbergh, however, did not just represent a threat to domestic politics; he also had influence on the international stage. Certainly, all the members of the AFC were against America entering the war, but many took the position one step further: they advocated a negotiated peace with Germany. Lindbergh was the most outspoken advocate of this position, which was complicated by his several visits to Germany in the 1930s at the request of American ambassador Hugh Robert Wilson and his military attaché and intelligence analyst, Truman Smith. As correspondence in the Hoover Archives' Truman Smith collection attests, Lindbergh was asked to review the power and machinery of the Luftwaffe, and met and socialized with Hermann Göring and other high-ranking Nazi leaders. In the most controversial moment of Lindbergh's visits, Göring surprised the American aviator by awarding him a Medal of the Golden Eagle—a decoration which, for years afterward, Lindbergh's detractors



PLAIN TALK: Lindbergh was by far the America First Committee's most sought-after speaker. Requests from local chapters, radio stations, and the broadcast networks poured into committee headquarters. AFC founder Robert Douglas Stuart Jr. wrote the aviator, "If you can just arrange to divide yourself in 118 equal parts, all the America First representatives will be happy." [Everett

Collection—Newscom]

would berate him for accepting and not returning. After touring the Luftwaffe facilities and fleet (which historians have posited was doctored to look stronger and larger than it actually was at the time), Lindbergh reported to Allied intelligence officers that German air power was unstoppable. His defeatism, many historians speculate, possibly contributed to Neville Chamberlain's decision to appease Hitler at Munich in September 1938.

Many historians have debated the influence of Lindbergh's fatalist reports on the unfolding of war in Europe, to the extent of asking, "Would there have been a World War II without Lindbergh?" Certainly, Britain's victory

in the Battle of Britain in 1940 determined that the Luftwaffe was able to be deterred, raising questions about the veracity of Lindbergh's reports or the level at which he had been misled by Göring. Or, as historians sometimes ask

Charles Lindbergh, though a star orator, was also prone to—as was his trade—fly solo.

treason and accusations of diplomatic gullibility would follow Lindbergh forever after his visits to Germany, making him, in 1940 especially, a marked target for mudslingers. Speeches in which Lindbergh rallied to “make America great” were interpreted by critics as “make America German.”

The escalation of war in Europe and Lindbergh's rise in prominence within the America First movement made Roosevelt's tenuous hold on public approval ever more fragile. Additionally, the Lend-Lease debate that raged in America between December 1940 and March of 1941 increased momentum and visibility for the AFC. Roosevelt, seeking the power to send supplies and food to Britain in exchange for not cash but jurisdiction over foreign military bases, was accused of assuming dictatorial control to violate the Neutrality Act. During the nationwide debate over the Lend-Lease bill Wood, Castle, and Lindbergh all testified in Congress; petitions circulated; local chapters held rallies with indignantly pitched rhetoric; the AFC headquarters fired off incendiary recordings to be broadcast on radio; and by February 1941, America First had 650 chapters across the United States. It had 300,000 members in January 1941; by December it would have 800,000, with most of the new members joining while Lend-Lease embroiled America in heated tumult before finally being signed into law on March 11, 1941.

Lindbergh was the most outspoken advocate of a controversial position: a negotiated peace with Germany.

“patriotic” or “sincere,” but also would depict them as possessing ostrich-like naiveté in the face of Hitler's aim of world domination. As Britain's need for aid grew under constant air raids by the Luftwaffe and support for the AFC increased, Roosevelt's aspersion toward isolationists became more pointed. In a Fireside Chat on September 11, 1941 (a broadcast that Lindbergh would

more darkly, was Lindbergh a Nazi sympathizer and therefore deliberately reporting the invincibility of the German air fleet?

Spy or dupe, the taint of

In an attempt to avoid divisiveness in the days before the Lend-Lease bill was introduced, Roosevelt had often characterized America Firsters as



AMERICA FIRST COMMITTEE RALLY, HOLLYWOOD BOWL, JUNE 20th, 1941

Speakers: Col. Charles A. Lindbergh, Sen. D. Worth Clark, Kathleen Norris, Lillian Gish.

Declared by members of the Hollywood Bowl Association to be the largest gathering ever held at the Bowl.

HIGH-WATER MARK: AFC officials estimated that 65,000 people attended a June 20, 1941, rally at the Hollywood Bowl. The AFC distributed photographs of the large crowd to major newspapers across the country. (Actress Lillian Gish, a featured speaker, was later forced by the studio system into giving up her AFC membership.) After Japan attacked US forces at Pearl Harbor in December, the AFC urged Americans to “give their support to the war effort” and pledged its aid to President Roosevelt. It dissolved days later. [America First Committee Collection—Hoover Institution Archives]

listen to, infuriated, just before he delivered his most controversial speech on the rally circuit later that evening), Roosevelt called for Americans to guard themselves against the “tender whispering of appeasers that Hitler is not interested in the Western Hemisphere” and the “soporific lullabies that a wide ocean can protect us from him.”

In 1940, the AFC had been a small grass-roots annoyance, and Roosevelt enjoyed the leisure of disdaining their message while applauding their First Amendment rights; by the following year, as the movement gained the favor

of congressmen and added the celebrity Lindbergh to their rally circuit, the America First movement was threatening to sway public opinion and jeopardize Roosevelt's Lend-Lease project for protecting Britain. In the fall of 1940 and spring of 1941, Roosevelt always referred to America First supporters as "isolationists" (while the AFC preferred the titles "anti-interventionist" or "nationalist"), but at roughly the same time Lindbergh joined the movement Roosevelt's speeches began referencing "appeasers"—an allusion perhaps to Lindbergh himself, and also a word smacking of at best cowardice and at worst treason.

The rhetoric on both sides of the interventionist/noninterventionist argument became sharper during the tense months leading up to Pearl Harbor. No longer did Roosevelt condescend to isolationists as misguided simpletons amusingly flexing their freedom of speech; instead, he alluded to Lindbergh

Speeches in which Lindbergh rallied to "make America great" were interpreted by critics as "make America German."

and the America Firsters as "Hitler's advance guards—not only his avowed agents but also his dupes among us." Disputes over Lend-Lease flared anew when on June

22, 1941, Hitler attacked the Soviet Union and Roosevelt offered aid to Josef Stalin. For many conservative America Firsters, extending aid to communists was beyond the pale: an alliance with Stalin was every bit as repulsive as rule by Hitler. Lindbergh cried at a rally, "I would a hundred times rather see my country ally herself with England, or even with Germany, with all her faults, than the cruelty, the godlessness, and the barbarism that exists in Soviet Russia."

LINDBERGH DRAWS FLAK

In the HBO show *The Plot Against America*, Charles Lindbergh is cast as the leader and hero of a virulently anti-Semitic isolationist movement. In truth, Lindbergh almost single-handedly struck the death knell of the movement, specifically by brandishing anti-Semitic rhetoric unsanctioned by the committee.

At a rally in Des Moines, Iowa, on September 11, 1941, Lindbergh identified the parties he believed would drag America into the European war, with the most dangerous offenders being the British and Jewish peoples. "Instead of agitating for war," he said, "the Jewish groups in this country should be opposing it in every possible way, for they will be among the first to feel

its consequences. . . . We cannot blame them for looking out for what they believe to be their own interests, but we must also look out for ours.” Not only does Lindbergh contrast Jews with “our” America, but the statement that Jews will be “first to feel its consequences” indicates capitulation, defeat, and eventual subjugation of Jews by Germans. In the press, Lindbergh was characterized as pitting white, conservative American politics against the Jewish people, with menace. He was also accused of supporting the idea of indestructible German power at a moment when American servicemen and women might be asked to fight it.

Lindbergh’s Des Moines speech not only was violently attacked in newspapers and on radio, but it divided the isolationist movement itself. Herbert Hoover told Lindbergh flatly that the speech was a mistake. John T. Flynn, the dynamic leader of the highly active New York chapter of America First, was furious about the speech and wrote Wood and Stuart that it undercut organizing in an American city with an enormous Jewish population—and that it affected a chapter where the office manager, research director, and publicity director were Jewish. “I want to make a very formal protest now against any repetition of this sort of thing,” he stated.

In Chicago, the AFC executive committee had an all-day meeting to discuss how to handle the bad publicity surrounding the event. Lindbergh, asserting his notoriously strong will, did not retract his statements; he offered to issue a public announcement declaring that the views expressed at Des Moines were his own and not the official view-

Roosevelt, irked by the isolationists, called for Americans to guard against the “tender whispering of appeasers.” He later called them “Hitler’s advance guards.”

points of the committee. Lindbergh did not make that announcement, but even if he had, it perhaps would not have reached a large audience: increasingly after the Des Moines speech, large media outlets such as CBS barred him from the airwaves.

As public debate reached a peak in mid- to late 1941, Lindbergh became increasingly paranoid in his thinking (though perhaps he had reason: he and his wife had both received death threats) and incendiary in his speech. Invectives hurled against Roosevelt became more savage, emphasizing the president’s grasp for authoritarian power. In a radio broadcast recorded in Fort Wayne, Indiana, in the aftermath of the Des Moines speech, Lindbergh claimed the president was “drawing more and more dictatorial powers into

his own hands,” and the voters could put a stop to his expanding powers. “But what if there are no elections next year?” he asked, for “such a condition may not be many steps ahead on the road our president is taking us.”

Whether truly anticipating the suspension of legal elections or employing a scare tactic, Lindbergh and other ranking members of the AFC nonetheless began to contemplate the possibility of forming a nonpartisan independent political party. In fact, many members advocated for Lindbergh to run for president in 1944. High-powered advertising executive and AFC member Chester Bowles wrote to Robert Stuart, “Isn’t it vitally necessary to develop a democratic party of the people who will approach it the traditional democratic, American way? To my mind, Lindbergh may, when the war is over, loom as the logical spokesman for such a group. Unless I am greatly mistaken, his prestige will be very high when the war is over—whether we go in or stay out.” Bowles suggested Lindbergh run for the Senate from Minnesota (a seat his father held as an anti-interventionist during the World War I era) so that he could lead the “millions upon millions of Americans who are determined to bring about the right kind of economic and social system through traditional American, democratic methods.”

As America First Committee historian Wayne Cole notes, the polemics and personal attacks in the summer of 1941, which grew even more intense after Lindbergh’s infamous Des Moines speech in September, undermined the effectiveness and attractiveness of the AFC with the general public. Yet as vituperative as the committee speeches became, the organization never turned to the strategy of calling for impeachment or British defeat. Stuart believed that seeking impeachment would risk losing popular sup-

port: moving to impeach would seem overly partisan, political, personally hostile, and divisive to the point of being viewed as treasonous. Highly critical of Roosevelt, however, the committee repeatedly accused

Lindbergh charged that FDR was “drawing more and more dictatorial powers into his own hands” and only the voters could stop him. “But what if there are no elections next year?”

the administration of abusing power, essentially participating in the war through executive orders sanctioned by neither Congress nor the people. Not trusting polls conducted by (in their view) possibly partisan organizations such as Gallup, they argued for a nationwide referendum on the issue of war or peace.

AFC speakers believed that a silent majority of Americans opposed war, but feared speaking out and being vilified as quislings (a word that was born of Norwegian collaboration with Hitler the previous year). In fact, AFC paranoia was not completely without foundation: in

1941 Roosevelt requested the FBI investigate the AFC in search of spies or traitors, but could find

no actionable offense. The committee's largest embarrassment came after it hired aviator Laura Ingalls as a speaker in late 1941; Ingalls was convicted and imprisoned as a German spy in 1942. Baron Ulrich von Gienanth, the head of the Gestapo in the United States and a second secretary of the German Embassy, had specifically instructed Ingalls to infiltrate the America First Committee. Other AFC members were not aware of her Nazi ties.

On December 11, 1941, four days after Pearl Harbor, the America First Committee officially dissolved.

ABRUPTLY OVER

In the wake of Lindbergh's Des Moines speech, support for the America First movement dwindled both in public opinion and amongst members themselves. The attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, brought the committee's final crisis: continue or disband? On the evening of the attack, the AFC released a statement of solidarity with the nation: "The America First Committee urges all those who have subscribed to its principles to give their support to the war effort of this country until the conflict with Japan is brought to a successful conclusion. In this war the America First Committee pledges its aid to the president as commander in chief of the armed forces of the United States." On December 11, the America First Committee officially dissolved.

Justus Drew Doenecke, in his masterful history of the AFC titled *In Danger Undaunted: The Anti-interventionist Movement of 1940-41 as Revealed in the Papers of the America First Committee*, concludes that though the committee or its factions may have been controversial politically, as a movement it represented core values of democracy: free speech and the right to dissent. He wrote,

Overall, the committee contributed to the nation's political vitality. By rallying dissenting opinion, it forced debate on major administration measures and did so amid attacks that were often as sweeping as they were unfair. The health of any democracy

depends on the degree of tolerance it grants its dissenters. . . .

If Americans had failed to speak out against what they saw as threats to the nation's security, they would have been abdicating their responsibilities as citizens.

Wise or misguided, antiwar activists had the right—the responsibility—to speak against those in power. The records of the America First Committee held at the Hoover Archives show valuable evidence of the power of dissent in a democracy, but also of the fact that divisiveness within a democratic country can be overcome in times of great national need. ■

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“Dear Mr: President-elect...”

While a banking crisis deepens in early 1933, outgoing president Herbert Hoover makes an extraordinary gesture: a letter to his successor, Franklin Roosevelt, seeking his help.

By Bertrand M. Patenaude

Late in the evening of February 18, 1933, Secret Service operative John West made his way to a banquet room inside the Hotel Astor in midtown Manhattan. He carried a large brown envelope. His instructions were to deliver the package directly into the hands of President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt. FDR was the guest of honor at the annual satirical revue put on by a group of New York political reporters called the Inner Circle. Security at the hotel was tight. Three days earlier, Roosevelt had narrowly escaped an assassin's bullets at an outdoor event in Miami, an attack that mortally wounded Chicago Mayor Anton J. Cermak.

FDR's Secret Service detail had been alerted to West's mission and instructed to allow him direct access to Roosevelt. West had received the package and his instructions at the White House that afternoon and taken the five o'clock train up from Washington. As he handed the president-elect the envelope, he explained that it was a personal communication from President Herbert Hoover. FDR opened the envelope and found a ten-page letter

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written in Hoover's hand. "A most critical situation has arisen in the country of which I feel it is my duty to advise you confidentially," it began.

I am therefore taking this course of writing you myself and sending it to you through the Secret Service for your hand direct as obviously its misplacement would only feed the fire and increase the dangers. The major difficulty is the state of public mind—for there is a steadily degenerating confidence in the future which has reached the height of general alarm.

Roosevelt would have immediately guessed the source of the alarm. As the merriment continued around him, he quickly read the letter, then put it back in its envelope and passed it under the table to his most trusted adviser, Raymond Moley, signaling for him to take a look. Opening the envelope, Moley was astonished to see a handwritten letter from the president. "Circumstances made it impossible for me to read it carefully," he later wrote, "but a glance was enough to tell me the news it brought. The bank crisis was getting out of hand."

Millions of panicked Americans were descending on the nation's banks to withdraw their money and gold, threatening the complete collapse of the US banking system. "Capital was fleeing the country," Moley recounted of this latest alarming chapter of the Great Depression. "Hoarding was reaching intolerably high levels. The dollar was wobbling on the foreign exchanges as gold poured out. The bony hand of death was stretched out over the banks and insurance companies."

Moley was the founding member of the so-called Brain Trust, a small group of academics, most of them economists and legal experts, assembled during the 1932 presidential campaign to advise Roosevelt. Moley, forty-six years old at the time, taught criminal justice at Columbia University. Later he would break with FDR and become a bitter critic of the New Deal he helped to brand and launch, but in the days of the presidential interregnum he was Roosevelt's alter ego. A joke at the time had it "that one needed to go through Roosevelt to get an appointment with Moley." His political influence unsettled the Democratic Party establishment. Texas Congressman Sam Rayburn

TENSE TIMES: By the end of 1932, the US economy had resumed its slide after a summer in which economic indicators had been improving. President Herbert Hoover's Christmas card from the White House (opposite page) suggested a subdued holiday season. In the weeks to come, Hoover would insistently reach out to the incoming president but would be repeatedly rebuffed.

[Hoover Institution Archives]



A Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year
from Herbert Hoover

confronted Moley in a railroad dining car in December 1932 and growled, “I hope we don’t have any goddamned Rasputin in this administration.”

Roosevelt and his inner circle had been keeping a close eye on the banking collapse, especially since February 14, when Michigan Governor William A. Comstock’s decision to close his state’s banks set off a national panic and threatened a fatal run. “We had all expected that to happen, just as Roosevelt had expected that someone, someday, would take a shot at him,” Moley wrote in *After Seven Years*, his 1939 memoir. “But the letter from Hoover announcing that the breaking point had come somehow made the awful picture take on life for the first time, and nothing I had imagined eased the shock of that reality.” Moley had marveled in Miami at FDR’s composure after the attempt on his life. Now, in a banquet room of the Hotel Astor, he was awestruck once again. “I looked up at Roosevelt, expecting, certainly, to see some shadow of the grim news in his face or manner. And there was nothing—nothing but laughter and applause for the play actors, pleasant bantering with those who sat at the table with him, and the gay, unhurried, autographing of programs for half a hundred fellow guests at the dinner’s end.”

The banking crisis capped an especially fraught presidential interregnum that lasted four months. The Twentieth Amendment to the US Constitution, which moved the date of the inauguration forward to January 20, had been

ratified that very month but would come into force only in 1937. Roosevelt would thus not enter the White House until March 4. In the meantime the

“The bony hand of death was stretched out over the banks and insurance companies.”

Depression deepened, while in Europe and Asia the forces of extremism and militancy were on the rise. On January 30, Adolf Hitler was named chancellor of Germany. The following month, Japan, censured for its conquest of Manchuria, gave notice of its intention to withdraw from the League of Nations.

Leaving the Hotel Astor, FDR and a few of his close advisers reconvened at his home on East 65th Street, where Hoover’s letter was passed around and discussed. In it, Hoover claimed that his policies had largely subdued the Depression by the summer of 1932, but that progress had stalled after Roosevelt’s election victory and the speculation it raised that the new administration would unleash inflation, devalue the dollar, take the United States off the gold standard, and let budgets go unbalanced. Hoover did not



SIDELINED: President Hoover makes a campaign appearance in 1932 with his wife, Lou Henry Hoover, at his side. Franklin D. Roosevelt would defeat Hoover in a landslide, winning 57.4 percent of the popular vote to Hoover's 39.7 percent. It was a stunning reversal for Hoover, whose presidency had begun with such promise. [Harris & Ewing Collection—Library of Congress]

directly accuse Roosevelt of having such policies in mind, but he implied that the president-elect's failure to repudiate loose talk along those lines, chiefly among congressional Democrats, was causing great harm. "I am convinced," Hoover wrote, "that a very early statement by you upon two or three policies of your administration would serve greatly to restore confidence and cause a resumption of the march of recovery."

"Remarkable," "astonishing," "provocative"—these are a few of the adjectives historians have used to describe Hoover's letter. Roosevelt called it "cheeky." He assumed that the cause of the bank panic was not American citizens' concerns about inflation or the United States leaving the gold standard, but about the soundness of the banks in which they kept their

money. Hoover's request for a reassuring statement, said Moley, "assumed that Roosevelt would succeed—where Hoover had repeatedly failed—in hornswoggling the country with optimistic statements which everyone knew weren't justified." For FDR to comply with Hoover's request would mean to risk squandering political capital he would need to launch the New Deal. Yet to explicitly turn it down would risk appearing obstructionist. Roosevelt thus decided that the prudent thing to do was to let Hoover's letter go unanswered.

Famously inscrutable even to the Brain Trusters, Roosevelt now gave the appearance of being oblivious to the gravity of the banking crisis. Either he "did not realize how serious the situation was," Moley observed, or he "preferred to have conditions deteriorate and gain for himself the entire credit for the rescue operation." Whatever was the case, "Roosevelt went serenely through those days on the assumptions that Hoover was perfectly capable of acting without his concurrence; that there was no remedy of which we knew that was not available to the Hoover administration; that he could not take any responsibility for measures over whose execution he would have no control; and that, until noon of March 4th, the baby was Hoover's anyhow."

THE BATTLE ON A THOUSAND FRONTS

Roosevelt had defeated Hoover in a landslide in 1932, winning 57.4 percent of the popular vote to Hoover's 39.7 percent, and taking 472 electoral votes to Hoover's 59. It was a stunning reversal for Hoover, whose presidency had begun with such promise. The stock market crash of October 1929, rather than harm his reputation as the Master of Emergencies, seemed to enhance it. As Hoover biographer Kenneth Whyte observes, "It was just the sort of emergency the American people had with so much confidence elected him to meet."

Hoover placed a premium on voluntary measures and local initiative, though with muscular encouragement and coordination from Washington. He met at the White House with the nation's banking, railroad, business, and

"ASTONISHING": A printed program signed by the president-elect (opposite page) is a souvenir of the satirical revue and dinner at the Hotel Astor during which President Hoover's letter arrived. Roosevelt quickly read the letter and passed it to adviser Raymond Moley. After discussing it later with his inner circle, FDR decided to let it go unanswered. [Raymond Moley Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

F869.



Franklin Roosevelt
Feb. 18th
1933

Doc Wilson
Pres. Club
Raymond M. Wiley
C. W. Woodin
Miss Connelley

ANNUAL DINNER
INNER CIRCLE
HOTEL ASTOR
FEBRUARY EIGHTEENTH
1933

Luhon
Spencer
Sumner & Rossmore

union leaders in an attempt to build consensus on the most sensible way forward. Industrialists agreed to maintain wage rates. The Federal Farm Board supported agricultural prices. The Federal Reserve eased credit. By year's end the worst-case scenarios had not been realized. "There had been no bank runs or significant bank failures," Whyte observes, "no massive layoffs by leading employers, no unusual labor unrest, and no aftermath of public hysteria."

Yet the Crash of '29 had left America's fragmented and disorganized banking system vulnerable, and the final weeks of 1930 saw an outbreak of bank failures, 600 in all, bringing the annual total to 1,352. Hoover, meanwhile, failed to prevent passage of the Smoot-Hawley tariff legislation of June 1930, which would encourage the protectionist scramble to come. For now, though, the depression—not yet perceived as the Great Depression—appeared to be merely a cyclical downturn, albeit a severe one. As historian David M. Kennedy remarks in his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, *Freedom from Fear*:

Down to early 1931, the American depression seemed largely to be the product of American causes. A decade of stagnation in agriculture, flattening sales in the automobile and housing markets, the piratical abuses on Wall Street, the hair-raising evaporation of asset values in the Crash, the woes of the anarchic banking system—these were surely problems enough. Still, they were domestic problems, and no American better understood them than Herbert Hoover, nor was any leader better prepared to take up arms against them.

In 1931 there came a series of shocks from Europe. It began with an Austrian and German bank panic, which set off a regional and then inter-

national wave of panic.

European countries reacted to the credit crisis with escalating protectionist measures, erecting tariff barriers and applying export controls on capital.

There was speculation that the new administration would unleash inflation, devalue the dollar, take the United States off the gold standard, and let budgets go unbalanced.

Most of them eventually abandoned the gold standard, notably Great Britain in September 1931. The wave of fear then washed over the United States. "Foreign investors began withdrawing gold and capital from the American banking system," Kennedy recounts, while domestic depositors



RIGHT-HAND MAN: Raymond Moley (left), was President Roosevelt's most trusted adviser and the founder of the "Brain Trust," a coterie of academics formed to help FDR during the 1932 campaign. Later he would become a bitter critic of Roosevelt's New Deal, but at the time of the presidential handoff he was Roosevelt's alter ego. [Raymond Moley Papers—Hoover Institution Archives]

“renewed with a vengeance their runs on banks, precipitating a liquidity crisis that dwarfed the panic in the final weeks of 1930. That earlier crisis thus served both as rehearsal and foundation for the full-blown catastrophe that hit in 1931. Five hundred twenty-two banks failed in the single month following Britain's farewell to gold. By year's end, 2,294 American banks had suspended operations, nearly twice as many as in 1930 and an all-time American record.”

The US banking system needed liquidity, yet the Federal Reserve, prioritizing foreign withdrawals of capital over domestic runs on deposits, moved to tighten the money supply by raising its discount rate, just as gold-standard doctrine prescribed. Hoover, looking to stabilize the banking system by balancing the federal budget, raised taxes and cut spending. With respect to the gold standard and the sanctity of a balanced budget, Hoover adhered to

the economic orthodoxy of the day. Yet in his quest to put “some steel beams in the foundations of our credit structure,” as he phrased it, he proved to be open to innovation and experimentation. His most radical and successful initiative by far was the creation in January 1932 of the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC), an agency to provide emergency loans to banks, railroads, and other private financial institutions. Congress endowed the RFC with a capital base of \$500 million and authorized it to borrow up to \$1.5 billion more. “It was a momentous decision to use public funds to bail out the financial sector in peacetime,” Whyte observes. “Nothing like it had been done before. Some found it mind-boggling not least because it came from Hoover.”

Apprehensive about the dangers of establishing a permanent dole, Hoover was reluctant to extend federal relief to the unemployed, but he came under increasing pressure to do so as the unemployment rate approached 20 percent at the beginning of 1932. Many laborers holding jobs were working shorter hours, upwards of one-third of the labor force was working part time, and most people on the payroll were earning a smaller paycheck. Hoover eventually agreed to a compromise measure, the Emergency Relief and Reconstruction Act, signed into law on July 21, 1932, which empowered the RFC to fund up to \$1.5 billion in public works and make an additional \$300 million available to the states.

By the summer of 1932, with economic indicators heading in a positive direction and the banking system seemingly stabilized, it appeared to Hoover that victory was in sight in what he called the “battle on a thousand fronts.” In certain respects, Roosevelt’s campaign proposals for economic recovery were not easily distinguishable from Hoover’s. Indeed, a focal point of his attacks on Hoover was the federal budget deficit. The Democratic Party’s platform was mainstream. It pledged “a sound currency to be preserved at

all hazards,” though it did not promise to maintain the gold standard. Inflationist proposals,

“Until noon of March 4th, the baby was Hoover’s anyhow.”

meanwhile, enjoyed strong support in both houses of Congress, notably in the House of Representatives, where the Democrats enjoyed a slim majority.

One clear contrast between the two candidates was their views of the origins of the Depression. Roosevelt attributed the crisis to domestic causes. Hoover’s thesis was that the Depression was rooted in the Great War, in particular the precarious postwar financial arrangement regarding reparations and debts. The Germans owed the British and the French steep reparations



NO REPLY: Roosevelt's "Brain Trust" (Moley at center, Roosevelt at right) was closely monitoring the banking collapse that continued to worsen during the long presidential interregnum. Hoover, in his letter to the president-elect, claimed that his policies had largely subdued the Depression by the summer of 1932 but that progress had stalled after Roosevelt's victory. Hoover thus sought FDR's public support for measures he thought would restore confidence in the banking system. (Other members, left to right: Cary Grayson, Norman Davies, Rexford Tugwell, and William Woodin.) [Raymond Moley Papers—

Hoover Institution Archives]

resulting from the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, while the British and the French owed the United States upwards of \$10 billion as a consequence of wartime and postwar loans from the US Treasury. "The Germans relied on the continuing infusion of private American loans to make reparations payments to the British and the French, who in turn applied those sums to their own bills at the American treasury," Kennedy explains.

This surreal financial merry-go-round was inherently unstable. It had been rudely shoved out of balance when the stock market crash of late 1929 dried up the well of American credit, knocking a crucial link out of the circuit of international cash flows. In this sense it could be argued that the American

crash had helped to initiate the global depression, but Hoover's point still stands: that the shock of the Crash fell on a global financial system already distorted and vulnerable because of the war.

Looking to stabilize Germany and Europe financially and politically and to protect American banks exposed to those markets, in June 1931 Hoover proposed a one-year moratorium on intergovernmental debts and reparations. It was a bold political move, as the idea of debt forgiveness was extremely unpopular with the American public. Congress backed Hoover, giving its formal approval to the moratorium that December. Now, a year later, with the moratorium about to expire, the intractable debt issue returned. Opinion in financial circles strongly favored outright cancellation, but Hoover knew this was politically impossible. His proposed solution was an elaborate plan to make further concessions on indebtedness contingent on European disarmament. But that plan would need approval from Congress, and at this point congressional leaders were taking their cue from the president-elect.

One week after the election, Hoover sent Roosevelt a lengthy telegram explaining his international debt plan and asked for a meeting, hoping to enlist his successor's support. The prospects for cooperation on this issue were in fact almost nonexistent. Roosevelt had no desire to become entangled in the debt question or to assume responsibility for any arrangement Hoover might negotiate with the Europeans. FDR would not take the bait but he felt obligated to take the meeting, agreeing to an informal courtesy call at the White House. It took place November 22 in the Red Room. Roosevelt was accompanied by Moley. The atmosphere was tense. The meeting went nowhere.

Hoover came away confirmed in his belief that Roosevelt was completely out of his depth and that his focus on domestic priorities might well lead him to abandon the gold standard, devalue the

The stock market crash of October 1929, rather than harming Hoover's reputation as the Master of Emergencies, at first seemed to enhance it.

dollar, and unleash inflation. "Roosevelt and his advisers had no such clear-cut agenda in late 1932," Kennedy states, "but before another year had passed, events would confirm Hoover's fears."

By the end of 1932 the US economy had resumed its slide. Stocks fell, agricultural prices plunged, and bank closings multiplied, especially in January after Congress began publishing the names of the banks and other financial



DON'T BOTHER: Washington newspaper cartoonist Clifford K. Berryman (1869–1949) depicts a disheveled President Hoover struggling with multiple crises at Christmas time as a nonchalant Franklin D. Roosevelt declines to step in. [Clifford K. Berryman—National Archives]

institutions that had received RFC loans during the first five months of the agency's operations, information that had previously been kept confidential. Hoover vigorously opposed the measure, and with good reason, for it exposed even the rescued banks to hefty withdrawals by jittery depositors. Hoarding now reached epidemic proportions. People hid their savings under a mattress, in a sock, in coffee tins—anywhere but the bank.

The crisis reached a breaking point with the failure of the massive Guardian Group of Detroit, controlled by Henry Ford. That triggered runs on other banks, in Michigan and throughout the country, and precipitated Michigan's bank holiday on February 14. "Louisiana had had a banking holiday just two weeks before the Detroit crisis," Moley remembered. "But it was the news

from Detroit that jolted the nation into panic. Before the week had passed—the week in which it became clear that the Michigan panic could be neither stemmed nor localized, despite enormous loans from the RFC—we had a pretty definite idea of just what we were in for.”

DEADLOCK

These were the circumstances that prompted Hoover’s ten-page handwritten letter to Roosevelt on February 18. Among the helpful things he suggested FDR could do was to signal to Congress to have the RFC stop publicizing its business. Public confidence in the nation’s banking system and in the bankers was collapsing, with an assist in the final days of February from the revelations coming to light in the Senate Banking and Currency Committee hearing room, where testimony about the stock exchange practices of the National City Bank of New York made shocking headlines. Disaffection with investment bankers carried over to commercial bankers, and in fact the two were often the same.

Hoover also told Roosevelt he would welcome an announcement of the new treasury secretary, “as that would enable us to direct activities to one point of action and communication with your good self.” The leading candidate was thought to be Virginia Democratic senator Carter Glass, father of the Federal Reserve System, established in 1913, and treasury secretary under President Woodrow Wilson. Hoover assumed that the appointment of Glass would ensure a measure of continuity between the administrations. Instead, on February 21 Roosevelt announced the selection of William Woodin, a Republican manufacturer and a major donor to Roosevelt’s campaign. Hoover’s man at Treasury, Ogden Mills, immediately began to importune Woodin for some form of joint action to stop the bank runs and the withdrawal of gold from the country. Woodin replied for Roosevelt that Hoover should act on his own authority in whatever way he felt justified to meet the crisis.

On February 28, as state after state announced bank holidays, Hoover decided to appeal to Roosevelt in writing once again. “A declaration even now on the line I suggested,” he pleaded, “would save losses and hardships to millions of people.” Hoover now also proposed that Roosevelt announce he would call a special session of Congress soon after the inauguration. FDR continued to insist that no mere statement on his part could stem the bank collapse. Hoover was reluctant to act without Roosevelt’s endorsement; Roosevelt was determined not to give it. Secretary of State Henry Stimson came away from a meeting with Roosevelt believing that the president-elect had decided to “put it all up on to Hoover, and evidently to get the benefit of having matters as bad as they can be now before he comes in.”



TRANSITION: Outgoing president Hoover and his successor ride down Pennsylvania Avenue on Inauguration Day, March 4, 1933. Meanwhile, Hoover's and Roosevelt's staffs were working feverishly on an emergency banking bill. On March 12, Roosevelt gave the first of his Fireside Chats, reassuring Americans that the US banking system was in good hands. FDR's speech had been drafted for him by Hoover's own treasury undersecretary, Arthur Ballantine.

[National Archives and Records Administration]

By March 1, with the banks closed entirely in seventeen states and partially in many others, Treasury Secretary Mills, together with Undersecretary Arthur Ballantine and Adolph Miller of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, urged Hoover to assume special emergency powers under the World War I-era Trading with the Enemy Act to control foreign exchange and gold withdrawals. Hoover's attorney general questioned the legality of invoking the act, causing Hoover to vacillate. The following day, the Federal Reserve Board joined Treasury Secretary Mills in urging the president to go further and use the wartime act to declare a national banking holiday. Hoover was not prepared to close the banks, but he said he would use the emergency power to limit foreign exchange and suspend gold withdrawals if the Fed

Board would formally advise him to do so and if Roosevelt would publicly endorse the action.

“When we arrived in Washington on the night of March 2nd, terror held the country in grip,” Moley remembered. Up to then, FDR had been able to avoid having to take a public position on how best to respond to the bank crisis. “But that night,” Moley wrote, “shortly after we were installed at the Mayflower, word came through Woodin that, for the first time, proposals had

been made which called for grave consideration.” Officials at the Treasury and the Fed, Roosevelt was told, were encouraging Hoover to use emer-

Hoover was reluctant to act without Roosevelt's endorsement; Roosevelt was determined not to give it.

gency wartime powers either to control withdrawals of currency and gold or to declare a national bank holiday. Would Roosevelt publicly support either proposal? FDR huddled with his advisers and Democratic congressional leaders to consider the situation, but the result was the same. Word was sent back to the White House that Roosevelt saw no need for joint action; the president should act as he saw fit.

On March 3, Hoover's last day in office, as news arrived of crippling withdrawals of gold and currency, notably from the banks in New York and Chicago, he decided to make one last attempt to enlist Roosevelt's cooperation. At the customary call of the president-elect and Eleanor Roosevelt on the retiring president and the first lady that afternoon, Hoover quickly got through the formalities and called in Secretary Mills and Fed Chairman Eugene Meyer. Roosevelt, having been tipped off to what was afoot as he entered the White House, had sent for Moley, who rushed over from the Mayflower. Hoover again requested Roosevelt's endorsement of his use of the Trading with the Enemy Act to control foreign exchange and gold withdrawals. Roosevelt replied that his attorney general-designate accepted the act's authority, as did he himself, but that he would not formally endorse any action Hoover might take. The stalemate held.

Hoover was not yet done. At eleven-thirty p.m. he telephoned FDR at the Mayflower to say that banking officials in New York and Chicago, the nation's two largest banking centers, were trying to decide whether to close their banks. Again Hoover asked Roosevelt to endorse a presidential proclamation to control foreign exchange and gold withdrawals. Again FDR declined to do so.

At one a.m. Hoover telephoned once more. As Moley sat listening to FDR's end of the conversation, Hoover told Roosevelt that the officials of the

Treasury and the Fed were still at work in the Treasury Building. According to Moley, Hoover left it at that; he told Roosevelt he merely wanted to keep him informed. "Roosevelt thanked him and suggested that both of them turn in and get some sleep."

By the morning of March 4, Inauguration Day, governors in thirty-two states had shut down the banks entirely, while in the remaining states banks were either partially closed or had placed strict limits on withdrawals. Hoover joined Roosevelt for the two-mile ride down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol for the inauguration ceremony. The morning was cold and grey. In photographs taken that morning, Hoover appears somber while FDR, though hardly ebullient, grins and waves. Both men were utterly exhausted. The image has come to be emblematic of their contrasting fortunes and of the final act of their tense standoff. Behind the scenes, however, a very different kind of presidential transition story was unfolding.

Overnight, the governors of New York and Illinois had suspended banking in their states after it was forcefully impressed upon them that the alternative was complete collapse. The men doing the forceful persuasion were Treasury officials of both the outgoing and incoming administrations. Shortly after Hoover's one a.m. phone call to FDR, Moley had accompanied Woodin to the Treasury, where they joined Secretary Mills, Undersecretary Ballantine, Fed Chairman Meyer, and three or four colleagues. As Moley recounts, "with Roosevelt and Hoover hopelessly deadlocked, and with the whole

"The kind of bipartisan collaboration for which Hoover had long pleaded was now happening, but under Roosevelt's aegis, not Hoover's."

banking system drifting toward catastrophe, the subordinates were to join in the sort of cooperation which they believed to be essential to the paramount interests of the nation." These subordinates joined forces without authorization, and thus were taking something of a risk.

But we all realized that Hoover and Roosevelt were so fatigued and that the personal bitterness between them was so great that a meeting of minds between them was out of the question at this late and critical hour. . . . From the time we entered the treasury secretary's office that dark morning, everyone forgot political differences. Our concern was to save the banking system.

The following day, Sunday, March 5, President Roosevelt issued a proclamation invoking the Trading with the Enemy Act to suspend all transactions in gold and to declare a four-day national banking holiday. A second proclamation called a special session of Congress on March 9. The collaboration of Hoover's and Roosevelt's men continued meanwhile inside the Treasury Building, now focused on preparing an emergency banking bill for the special session. Mills and Woodin merely switched chairs on either side of the desk in the treasury secretary's office. "The kind of bipartisan collaboration for which Hoover had long pleaded was now happening," Kennedy notes, "but under Roosevelt's aegis, not Hoover's—and not, all these men hoped, too late. When the special session of Congress convened at noon on March 9, they had a bill ready—barely."

That evening, FDR signed into law the Emergency Banking Act. The act reaffirmed and approved the steps Roosevelt had already taken under the Trading with the Enemy Act, granted the president increased power to control gold outflows and foreign exchange transactions, authorized the RFC to purchase preferred stock in banks desperately in need of finance, and enhanced the Federal Reserve Board's ability to issue currency. The banking holiday was extended through the following weekend, the reopening scheduled to begin on Monday, March 13.

There was still one essential piece of business to take care of. On Sunday evening, March 12, at ten p.m. on the East Coast, Roosevelt took to the radio

to address the nation in the first of his Fireside Chats. In the course of thirteen minutes he explained, in language understandable to ordi-

"The policies which vanquished the bank crisis were thoroughly conservative policies," Moley insisted.

nary Americans, how the banks worked and what had gone wrong, what his administration had accomplished in the whirlwind week just passed, and what now needed to happen. The immediate goal was to end the hoarding so that the banks could safely reopen. "I can assure you, my friends," Roosevelt told his listeners, "that it is safer to keep your money in a reopened bank than it is to keep it under the mattress." The following morning, as the phased reopening of the banks began, customers stood in long lines to return their hoarded cash into their bank accounts.

"Roosevelt's message to the people explaining what had been done and asking them to put their money back into the banks marked the end of the nightmare of panic," Moley wrote. The fact that FDR's speech had been drafted for

him by Hoover's own treasury undersecretary, Arthur Ballantine, was of a piece with the spirit of cooperation that was essential to resolving the crisis. "It cannot be emphasized too strongly," Moley concluded, "that the policies which vanquished the bank crisis were thoroughly conservative policies. The sole departure from convention lay in the swiftness and boldness with which they were carried out." The banking system had been saved and would remain stable for the remainder of the Depression. The radical experimentation that became a hallmark of the New Deal would soon begin. ■

Special to the Hoover Digest.



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On the Cover

Czar Nicholas II, the last ruler of imperial Russia, leads his troops in what this poster proclaims as a holy war. The highly stylized image, reminiscent of heroic paintings from the medieval era, shows the larger-than-life czar at the head of a modern army of infantry and Cossacks arrayed against the forces of Germany and Austria-Hungary during World War I. “God With Us,” reads the motto on his shield. History would firmly contradict the czar’s confidence in his military leadership.

Russia had already suffered an ignominious defeat at the hands of Japan in 1904–5, losing its fleet even as Nicholas boasted of Russia’s power and condemned the Japanese as weak and inferior.

A decade later, when Germany and Austria-Hungary declared war on Russia in the summer of 1914, Russia’s army was vast but still poorly prepared. It would have to travel much greater distances to the front than did the enemies’ armies. The czar’s railways were much less developed than Germany’s—and this would be a war of movement, expertly choreographed by the Kaiser’s generals. Russian defeats came immediately: in East Prussia the Battle of Tannenberg (August 26–30) saw the annihilation of an entire army. Follow-up battles led to further serious losses, although the czar’s men did prevail over Austro-Hungarian forces in the Battle of Galicia. Russian armies were hampered by incompatible railway tracks—the gauge changed at the border—poor interior roads, lack of secure communications, and the need to provision large numbers of horses for the Cossacks.

At home, the already restive Russian public began to demand political reforms as the news from the battlegrounds worsened. Nicholas assumed the role of commander in chief in September 1915, which personally associated him with the bloodshed even though his staff made all significant military decisions. Far from leading armies into battle, as pictured in this poster, the czar remained ensconced at army headquarters in Mogilev (in today’s Belarus), hundreds of miles from the growing storm in his court and the Duma, reviewing troops and carrying out ceremonial duties. The riots, strikes, and mutinies of the February Revolution forced him to step down in 1917. “They



want my abdication,” Nicholas wrote in his diary on March 2. “. . . In order to save Russia and keep the army at the front in tranquility I must decide on this step. I agreed. . . . All around is treason and cowardice and deceit!”

The military position continued to crumble. Revolutionaries, pressured to end the war, reached an armistice with the Central Powers in December 1917. The eventual treaty, signed in March 1918, imposed harsh reparations and loss of territory. Vladimir Lenin said the ensuing peace was “unstable in the highest degree,” but it held until Germany was defeated in the West.

One hundred years ago, the Russia that Nicholas II imagined himself leading in a holy war was instead convulsed in a civil war between Red and White forces. The Bolsheviks would prevail. The remains of the czar and his family, all murdered by revolutionaries in July 1918 and dumped in unmarked graves, today are enshrined at a cathedral in St. Petersburg. At a specially built church in Yekaterinburg they are, meanwhile, honored as saints.

—Charles Lindsey



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