

VOLUME XXI, NUMBER 1, WINTER 2020/21

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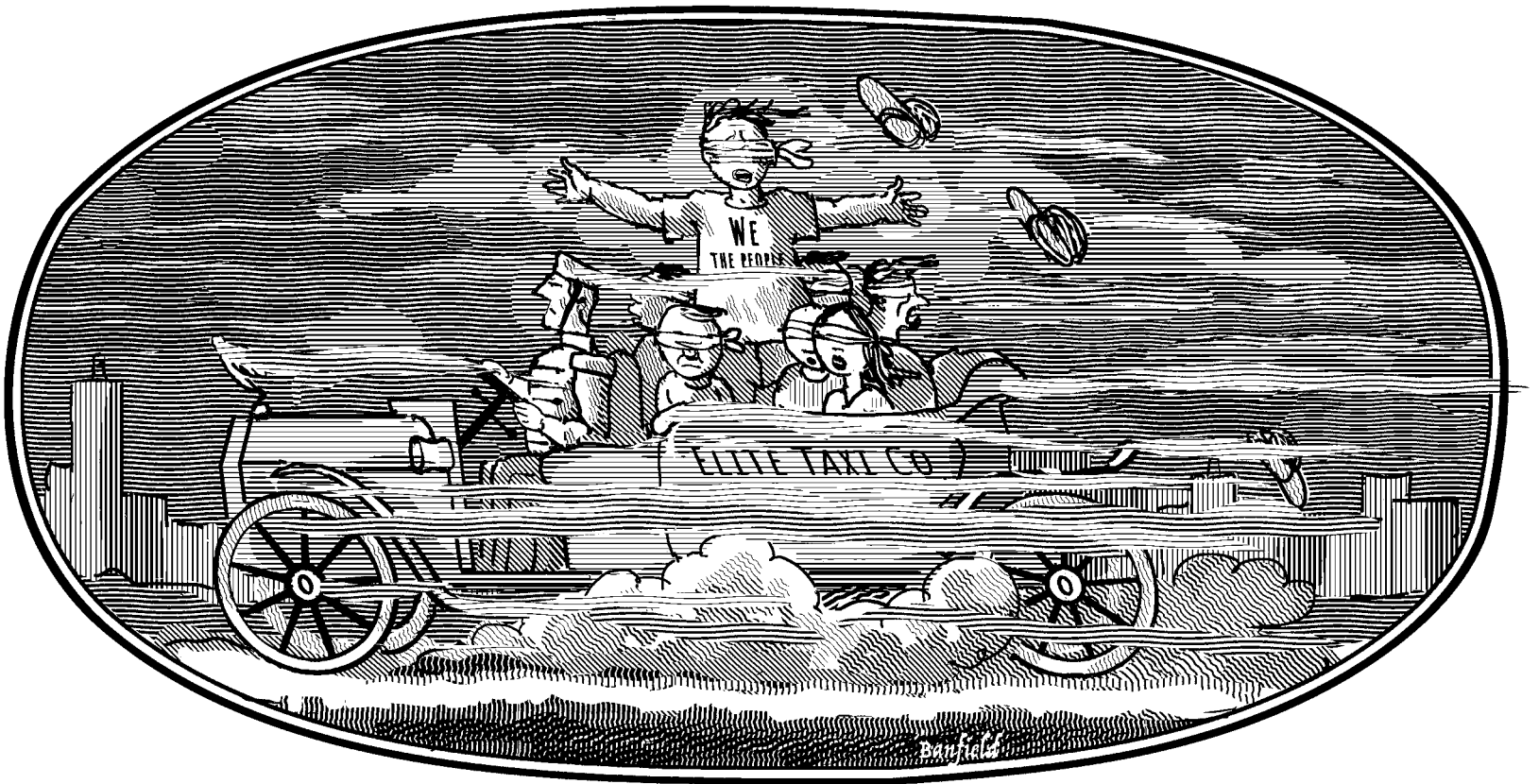
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Essay by Michael Anton

THE CONTINUING CRISIS

The election and its aftermath.



FIVE PEOPLE DIED IN THE CHAOS ON Capitol Hill on January 6. An unarmed 14-year veteran of the Air Force, Ashli Babbitt, was shot point-blank by a Capitol Police officer. Four others, one of them another Capitol Police officer, apparently died of medical emergencies. All of these deaths were tragic and unnecessary. At least one of them, and possibly two, may have been the result of criminal acts—though early reports of Officer Brian Sicknick being beaten with a fire extinguisher are now being, as they say, “walked back.” His family says he died of a preexisting medical condition and have asked the media to stop politicizing his death. Further complicating the official narrative, Officer Sicknick was an avid supporter of Donald Trump.

If it turns out that Officer Sicknick was attacked by a protester, the legal system will—as it should—avenge his death. But the shooting of Babbitt will be investigated and almost certainly found “justified” or, at most, regrettable but no one’s fault except her own. That might even be the correct outcome, and we pray, whatever the verdict, it will be the re-

sult of a fair or judicious legal process. Recent experience, however, more than suggests that those perceived as supporting present ruling arrangements are, and will be, treated much more gently than those seen as opposing them.

A full understanding of what happened that Wednesday would begin with the ruling class’s decades-long betrayal and despoliation of what would eventually come to be called Red or Deplorable or Flyover America. But the more proximate cause was the 2020 election—easily the highest intensity such contest of my lifetime. Each side felt that the stakes were existential. The accuracy of those feelings doesn’t matter; their existence was enough to drive events.

As an incumbent seeking a second term, President Trump—even after the COVID lockdowns had tanked America’s previously supercharged economy—seemed to have a lot of things going for him: near-unanimous support from the base, high primary turnout even though he faced no opposition, a seemingly unified party, approval ratings not far from Barack Obama’s in 2012. According to Gal-

lup, in September 2020 56% of Americans reported doing better than they had four years prior—a level that, in ordinary times, would all but guarantee an incumbent’s re-election.

But these were not ordinary times. It was also easy to see—and many friends and supporters of the president did see, and warned about—shoals ahead. The Democrats used the pandemic as an excuse to accelerate and intensify their decades-long effort to loosen and change American election practices in ways that favor their party. In the spring, they began openly talking about staging a coup: literally using the military to yank Trump from power. It’s one thing to hold a “war game” and plot in secret about a president’s ouster, but why leak the result? Only if you want the public prepared for what otherwise would look like outrageous interference in “our democracy.” Democrats and their media allies also, and for the same reason, assiduously pushed the so-called “Red Mirage” narrative: the story that, while you are likely to see Trump way ahead on election night, he will certainly lose as all the votes



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are counted. This was less a prediction than preemptive explanation: what you see might look funny, but let us assure you in advance that it's all on the up-and-up.

In response (or lack thereof) to the other side's assiduous preparations, the president, his staff, his campaign, and his party committed four serious errors of omission. First, they made hardly any attempt to work with Republican state officials—governors, legislatures, and secretaries of state—to oppose and amend rule changes that would disadvantage them and favor their opponents. As far back as the 2016 election, Trump had complained that Hillary Clinton's popular vote total had been padded by *several million* votes by illegal immigrants. Yet he and the GOP did very little to tighten state election procedures. Second, after having failed adequately to oppose those changes, they mounted far too few legal challenges to get them overturned or modified. Third, having declined to challenge the changes, they barely even tried to ramp up their own mail-in voting operation to rival the Democrats'. Fourth, despite numerous loud predictions—both as boasts and warnings—that the election outcome would be unclear and disputed in several states, no team was assembled in advance to investigate and, if necessary, litigate the results. Florida 2000 came as a surprise to candidates Al Gore and George W. Bush. Nonetheless the Bush campaign was able to field almost immediately an army of lawyers, including experts on election law, headed by a former secretary of state, the wily James Baker. The Trump team had at least six months' warning and, as far as I can see, did nothing to prepare.

Reasons to Doubt

THEN CAME THE ELECTION ITSELF. UNSURPRISINGLY, the "Red Mirage" did appear. But was it a mirage? There are reasons to doubt. (Perhaps the single-best summary of the irregularities is "Memorandum: How the 2020 Election Could Have Been Stolen," by Claes Ryn, a professor of politics at the Catholic University of America, published online at the *American Conservative*.)

Vote counting seemed to be inexplicably halted in five states (Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin)—or, more precisely, in Democratic Party-controlled big cities in those states—late on election night as Trump was piling up seemingly insurmountable leads. There are numerous eyewitness reports of election officials in the affected precincts telling the Republican observers to go home, because no more counting would be done that night, only to resume

counting as soon as said observers were out of sight. Then suddenly, when the count was made public again, Biden was ahead in all five states.

Officials "found" huge tranches of ballots that overwhelmingly—and in some cases exclusively—favored Biden. Sometimes the dead "voted," along with other ineligible people (e.g., felons and people who had moved to other states). Meanwhile, registered voters showed up to vote in person only to be told that they had already voted absentee despite having never requested an absentee ballot. There are sworn affidavits alleging the backdating of ballots; there are mail-in and absentee ballots which appeared without creases (so how did they get into their envelopes?); as well as thousands upon thousands of Biden ballots without a single choice marked for any down-ballot candidate.

Then there are the statistical anomalies. For instance, political scientist Patrick Basham reports in the *Spectator* that "[i]n Georgia, Biden overtook Trump with 89 percent of the votes counted. For the next 53 batches of

Does the Blue coalition really have the chops to cow and dominate at least 75 million ornery Americans?

votes counted, Biden led Trump by the same exact 50.05 to 49.95 percent margin in every single batch." What are the chances of *that*? And that's only one example.

Beyond the statistical, there are historical anomalies. Since the 19th century, not a single incumbent president who gained votes in his second run has lost. To the contrary, winners often shed votes. Barack Obama's total, for instance, dropped by 3.5 million. President Trump's rose by more than 11 million. Certain states and counties have long served as "bellwethers": win them, and you win it all. President Trump won all the bellwether states and 18 of 19 bellwether counties. Successful incumbents tend to have "coattails": they carry down-ballot officials from their party over the finish line. The Republicans gained 11 House seats, did not lose the Senate (at least not on election day) in a year when more than two thirds of defending incumbents were Republican, and cleaned up at the state level. Finally, primary voting has long been a leading indicator of the November outcome: dominate the primaries, win the general. No incumbent

who received 75% or more of the total primary vote has ever lost re-election; President Trump got 94%.

No precedent lasts forever, and perhaps one or more of these really were broken in 2020. But *all* of them?

A Leadership Vacuum

ALL OF THIS, AND MORE, LED THE president to believe that he had been cheated. Yet despite the gravity of that belief, he did not organize a serious effort on his own behalf—not, as noted, before election day despite ample warning, nor even on the morning after when so many of the predicted irregularities proved true. For a while the president was even silent, and at other times inconsistent. There was no leadership, no rallying point: not for the staff, the campaign, or the party.

From here he drifted into errors of commission. The leadership vacuum encouraged freelancing by outsiders, of whom it was never clear if they were, or were not, speaking for the president, the White House, or the party. Many were credible people with admirable records, but little (if any) experience litigating disputed elections, much less presidential elections in several states at once. Several of them undermined their reputations, if not their prior accomplishments, through the advancement of extraordinary claims. The president seemed at times to egg them on, at other times to ignore them, and at still others to repudiate them. But extraordinary claims demand extraordinary evidence, of which none was provided. This had two predictable, unhelpful, and contrary effects: raising expectations among his base, while persuading anyone hitherto uncertain that any and all allegations of fraud were "baseless" conspiracy theory hogwash.

Which, let's be clear, they are not—not all of them, at any rate. That's not to say that any have been proved. They've barely been investigated, whether at the federal or state level, in the courts, or by the media. For it's quite clear that most of the people who really run America don't want to know what really happened. More to the point, they don't want *you* to know. Republican officials fear the uncovering of something that should have obligated them to act. The Democrats are happy with the outcome and either don't want to look a gift horse in the mouth, or have simply redefined "democracy" to mean achieving the correct outcome, no matter how. And so for all their bleating about "our democracy," these dedicated ideologues have come to believe the incorrect outcome is ipso facto "anti-democratic."

Not that uncovering any real facts would have mattered much. Big Tech and the media have made clear that the matter is closed, the science (as they say) “settled,” and will brook no questions. Irregularities that our own State Department considers sufficient proof to declare third-world elections fraudulent are, here at home, not even enough to qualify as “evidence.” The standard of proof for Republicans is set so high as to be (deliberately) unmeetable.

All this is to say, the battle to demonstrate fraud in such a way as to force a reversal of the outcome was uphill at best—the system wasn’t going to allow a change to a result it liked—and not helped by the wilder claims made on Trump’s behalf. As a result, no one really *knows* for sure how much and what kind of fraud was committed, whether it was of sufficient magnitude to change the election result, and, thus, who truly won.

But the worst error of all was to raise expectations well beyond any ability to deliver. To be blunt, millions of the president’s supporters became convinced that the outcome of the election would be reversed and that he would serve a second term. Not merely that this was the right or correct or just outcome, but that it *really would happen*. The rally on January 6 may have been the spark that set off the run to the Capitol, but the kindling had been accumulating for weeks.

As for the event itself, it may be true, as many participants have said, that at least the first groups to get inside genuinely believed they were not trespassing but simply entering a public building with the knowledge and blessing of those entrusted with its care. One protester who’s already been arrested by the FBI reports having had a door to the Capitol held open for him by a Capitol Police officer. What was he supposed to think? There is video (perhaps by now censored and banned) of Capitol Police standing by while protesters stream in. Perhaps the officers were under orders not to escalate the situation; perhaps they just didn’t know what to do; perhaps some of them even sympathized. The real reason for their passivity is not yet known and likely never will be.

But as in any large crowd—especially one fueled by unrealistic hopes—a few showed up looking for trouble. The sequence of events is unclear still, but the mob spirit eventually took over.

Once inside, the majority of protestors did not burn, smash (apart from, as far as I know, a few windows), loot, or steal. In the aftermath, the unsympathetic *New York Times* published an account of the damage to the building and found little. Instead, they mostly...wandered

around. A few hammed it up for the cameras. In the words of an equally unsympathetic eyewitness account published in the *Nation*, “the mood was less coup and more college football tailgate.” The only expression of seriousness of which I am aware is a participant recording and posting online his reasons for being there, in moderate and sensible tones. He has since been doxxed and fired, will likely be prosecuted, and have his life ruined. As will, no doubt, many others.

The most striking and least surprising thing about the whole episode is the way it is being treated by official Washington and the larger ruling class. The very same pundits, politicians, professors, and CEOs who, all through spring and summer 2020 had denied, excused, and extolled the mass sacking of some 200 American cities, which cost some \$2 billion in damage and three dozen lives, leapt to condemn all the MAGA marchers—the “mostly peaceful” majority as vociferously as the rioting few. Solons who could muster no outrage, or even concern, about the summer’s destruction—Kamala Harris even had lauded the riots and said they should continue—thundered from on high about the “Stop the Steal” march. The new president himself said that the response would have been much harsher had the Capitol been stormed by BLM—apparently forgetting last spring’s numerous scenes of cops literally kneeling before mobs, and authorities’ literal abandonment of police precincts and even whole neighborhoods.

How many campus buildings were taken over and besieged in the ’60s and ’70s (and since) by protesters lionized in every organ of our establishment culture? Also, when left-wing protestors took over the Wisconsin state capitol in 2011, no less than Nancy Pelosi lauded the four-month siege as an “impressive show of democracy in action.” Of course, any pro-Trump protesters who thought that, because the Left is praised for occupying buildings, they would be too (or at least excused) were foolish. But that doesn’t make the hypocrisy any less brazen.

Few law enforcement agencies could find anyone to charge for participating in 2020’s midyear mayhem—in part because most didn’t look. That emphatically includes the United States Department of Justice, which immediately leapt to action against the Capitol protesters, charging 13 within two days. More are sure to follow.

Capping this display of world-historical hypocrisy were the nauseating crocodile tears shed over the alleged disrespect to the sanctity of the Electoral College—an institution the Left has been gunning to dis-

card since the 1970s, and howled against as recently as 2016. And would be howling against now had it delivered the election to Trump. And which they are still (just slightly more quietly for the moment) seeking to scrap, since a national popular vote guarantees a Democratic win in every presidential election henceforth.

Enemies of the State

SOME ARE TRYING TO FIND A SILVER lining in all this—“white pills,” as the kids say. Among those advanced are, first, that the event shows that the revolutionary spirit which gave birth to this nation is not entirely dead and may in fact be stirring toward more outward expressions of discontent. Others see our titular rulers’ hysterical overreaction to “mostly peaceful protesters” as a sign that the rapidly consolidating woke hegemony may not be nearly as strong as it appears to be.

However these may be, the event will be treated—is already being treated—as an excuse for the mass curtailment of civil liberties. Private firms acted swiftly, de-platforming not just the president but thousands of his followers. More will follow. The government is gearing up to get into the act, with new legislation proposed by Senator Dick Durbin, and seemingly endorsed by President Biden in his Inaugural Address, that criminalizes speech by linking regime opposition to “white supremacy” and “terror.” Yes, it’s true that everything they’re doing now and will do they were probably going to do anyway. But the speed and intensity with which they are now doing it are entirely the result of January 6. This crisis will not be allowed to go to waste!

The single biggest loser of January 6 was Donald Trump himself. His entire presidency will now be forced and filtered through this one deliberately distorted lens. All the good he did will be demonized, denied, and then forgotten. But collectively, the biggest losers are his supporters. Trump’s sensible program—secure borders, fair trade, a modest foreign policy—will be branded (to the extent that it hasn’t been already) indistinguishable from fascism. And then abandoned—to their detriment.

The vast majority of those who went to the Capitol did so without a plan, but they did have a goal: to be heard. Which was also the reason they voted for Donald Trump in the first place: they had not been heard in at least 30 years. But the actions of a few not only ensured that they would not be heard, but that instead they would get an earful of the same

stuff most of them have been hearing their entire lives, only this time much louder: that everyone in the heartland, at least half the South, and anyone who voted for Trump is deplorable and irredeemable; that America itself is systemically racist; that most or all police are stormtroopers; that equal treatment under law is unjust; and that there are, fundamentally, two classes of people in the United States: the genetically deserving and the genetically guilty.

And now, in addition to all that, calls from the wise and good to investigate and “hold accountable” and cleanse from industry and employment people who did not storm the Capitol but who simply supported a politician and his agenda, as if this were somehow criminal. The *Washington Post*’s Eugene Robinson has proposed an effort to “deprogram” Trump voters. Prominent members of the Democratic Party such as former Labor Secretary Robert Reich have called for a “truth and reconciliation commission” like the kind that has followed the fall of shameful autocratic regimes. (And that, not coincidentally, uncovered little truth and produced even less reconciliation.) The Berggruen Institute’s Nils Gilman—a man who, perhaps not incidentally, recently called for my death—is having none of that. “These people need to be extirpated from politics,” he recently tweeted.

In Gilman and company’s eyes, Trump’s voters have no moral, political, or intellectual standing and no legitimate interests—only obligations arising from their inborn moral culpability. There is no reason at all to address their concerns or listen to them. Indeed, it’s dangerous even to let them speak lest they lead others into error. Worst of all is to allow them to organize around what they perceive as their interests, which inevitably leads them to express and perpetuate racism and other sins.

So that’s what Trump supporters *hear*; what do they *see*? Double standards and hypocrisy everywhere. Mike Flynn’s life ruined over a non-crime while the man who ruined it, James Comey, laughs about his handiwork on an Upper East Side stage. Four years of constant lies about Russian collusion and no reckoning, either for those who broke the law to get it going, or those who used their megaphone to keep it going. Changes to the voting system designed to help one party and

marginalize theirs. A country flooded with immigration for more than half a century, padding the votes of the other party, driving down wages, and enriching oligarchs. A trade regime seemingly designed to ship their jobs overseas, close their factories, and empty out their towns. A media and intellectual class that no longer makes any pretense of fairness or objectivity but openly operates as the propaganda arm of the regime—to the extent it is not *itself* the regime. And now, an increasing tendency to demonize all dissent as terrorism and lock out of the political system—permanently—at least 47% of the population.

What we now have, more and more, is a one-party oligarchy. This was the nemesis of the Trump presidency. Like all oligarchies, ours rules by coercion, not consent. It exerts its power primarily by constraining allowable, expressible opinion: it knows that the thing which cannot be said eventually becomes that which cannot be thought. And the chief thoughts it wishes to suppress are objections to its own misrule. When and where it cannot “persuade”—that is, propagandize—it punishes, with the defiant fired from their jobs, made unemployable, cut off from the financial system, even, in some cases, shunned by friends and family. This is not “death,” exactly. But how much less cruel is it, really, to cut people off from human contact and the means of making a living? And how much real misery—and desperation—does it produce?

Against recalcitrant groups, organizations, even whole states, our ruling class uses its control of communications to wage demonization campaigns akin to two-minute hates, except lasting much longer. Witness, for example, corporate America’s united boycott of North Carolina over “transgender” bathrooms and the now-routine practice of Blue states issuing travel and other bans on their agencies or employees doing any business with Red states that don’t entirely toe the latest Blue line.

The Course of Human Events

CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL RECENTLY observed in the *New Republic* that

[i]n the 1860s, three major Western countries—Germany, Italy, and the United States—each fought similar wars of national unification, in which

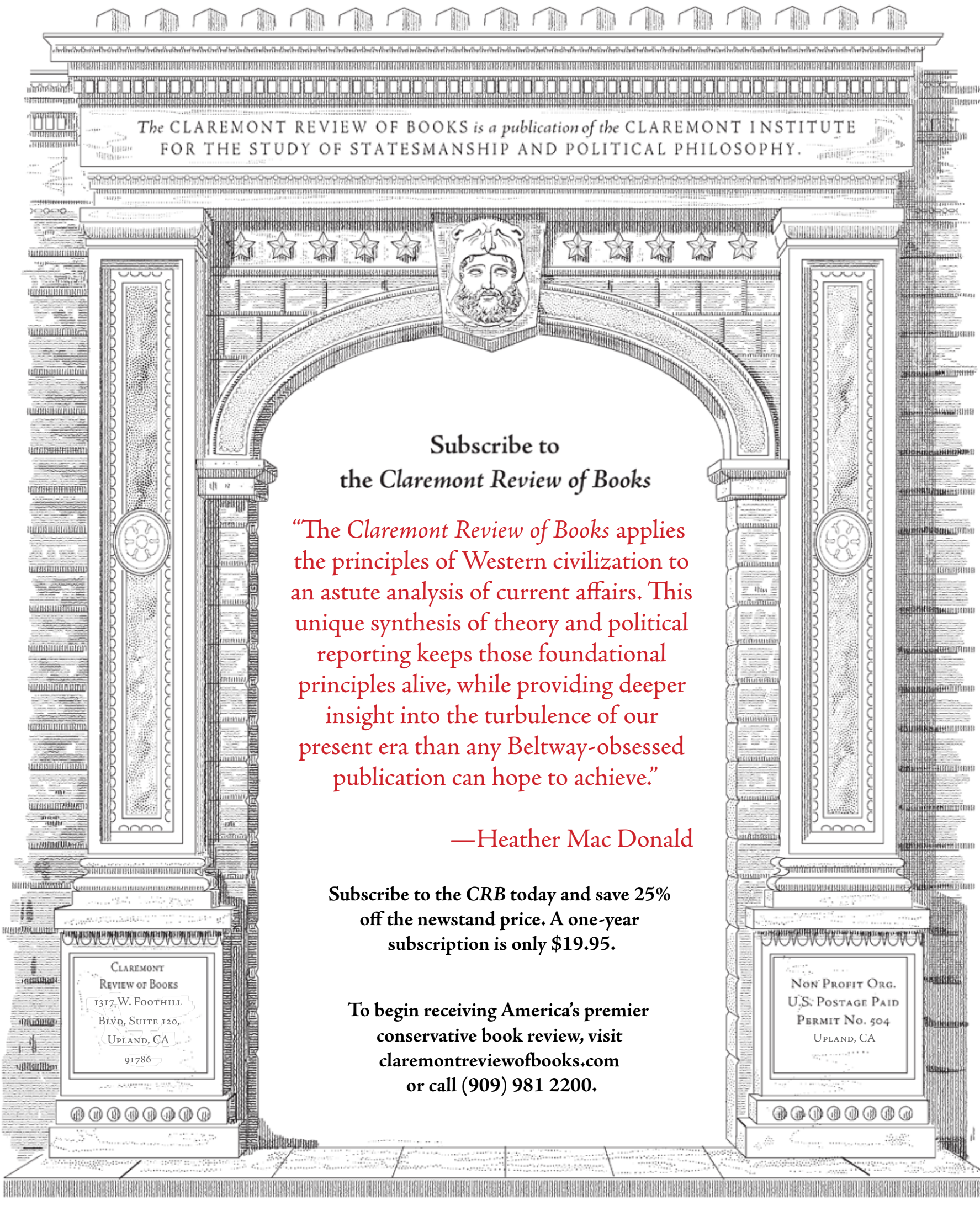
the more dynamic part of the country subjugated the more bucolic (or backward) part. In our time, Democrats are the party of relatively greater technological and demographic dynamism, Republicans the party of relatively less.

Subjugation, certainly, is the aim—with the events of January 6 to be used to justify whatever means are necessary. I wonder, though, whether the effort can turn out as successfully as the examples Caldwell cites. Does the Blue coalition really have the chops—that is, not merely the will but also the wherewithal—to cow and dominate at least 75 million independent-minded, self-sufficient, and (in many cases) ornery Americans?

The ruling class has backed Middle America into a corner. Keeping them there will require a level of cleverness and competence that, to say the least, our would-be masters have yet to demonstrate they possess. If they can manage, it will likely be because of new tools—above all Big Tech—no prior ruling class even dreamed of. Since we’re in uncharted waters here, the possibility cannot be ruled out. But even if technology does turn out to enable present arrangements to trundle on for a while, how long might that be? Five years? Ten? Twenty?

At any rate, there are reasons to believe that a resurgence of American spiritedness is possible—foremost among them the second-highest vote total in history, for a presidential candidate whom the entire socio-intellectual-media complex ordered the people to reject with prejudice. But there are also reasons—e.g., the opioid crisis—to fear widespread resignation and apathy. The longer present conditions can be made to continue, the more reasonable it is to assume that the latter will spread. Should half of America surrender to defeatism and its consolations—booze, drugs, porn, junk food, video games, streaming services, and sportsball—we shall test Blue America’s very high opinion of itself. For at that point we will find out whether the coasts are capable not merely of surviving without the heartland, but of rising to even greater heights without all that dead weight.

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