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# CLAREMONT

REVIEW OF BOOKS

*A Journal of Political Thought and Statesmanship*

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## Trump and Political Speech

Having read Martha Bayles's tirade against "exhibitionist" Donald J. Trump ("Enemy of the People," Spring 2016), I found myself agreeing with part of her complaint but exasperated by the other part. Bayles is correct that Trump has sounded vulgar and inconsistent in some of his statements about his opponents and about politics in general; and undoubtedly his appeal as a reality-TV host has aided his rise as a political celebrity. Like Ms. Bayles, I would prefer the rhetorical style of Winston Churchill or some other traditionally well-educated political leader to the embarrassing gaffes and verbal monstrosities that have issued from Trump's mouth. But contrary to Bayles's warnings, I intend to vote for this onetime star of *The Apprentice* not because I admire his style but because he speaks out, however opportunistically and crudely, about issues that matter to me. The emphatic rejection of political correctness, a more effective control of America's borders than recent Republican and Democratic administrations have provided, and concern for our working class, as opposed

to globalist elites, are three such issues.

Contrary to Bayles's suggestion if not explicit statements, Trump has not degraded the discourse in our presidential races to some unprecedentedly low level. That was already happening under (among others) our recent Republican presidential candidates, who couldn't help cringing in a shameless manner whenever the subject of minorities came up. To his credit, Trump doesn't shy away from the problem of black crime or from denouncing Black Lives Matter for inciting violence against police. One of Trump's most vehement critics, and the GOP standard-bearer four years ago, Mitt Romney, seemed terrified to contradict his enemies even when they accused him of causing the deaths of his employees. Was President George W. Bush behaving in a more dignified manner than Trump when he went to Senegal in July 2003 and apologized before a Third World dictator for our white American sin of slavery? Recoiling from what the media don't want politicians to discuss or bending spinelessly to their will disgusts me far more than anything that Trump has said. Such conduct indicates appalling timidity, which is not Trump's vice, whatever else we may choose to charge him with.

Finally, I'm not sure where Martha Bayles is coming from when she scolds our society in general and Trump in particular for "abandoning voluntary restraint" in speech. As a retired academic who has written many books—and not Bayles's presumed or preferred Trump voter, a "low-income white man"—let me assure her that the academic world in which I spent more than 40 years shows all the verbal spontaneity of the Russian presidium under Joseph Stalin. Where (pray tell!) in our ideologically managed media, educational system, and political culture are all those shockingly insensitive speakers

about whom Bayles is worried? Certainly their number wouldn't include those fake revolutionaries who are rallying to Bernie Sanders and who are only interested in further empowering public administrators to strangle our liberties and take away our incomes. I'm also not struck by the verbal license of black and gay tenured professors and street organizers whose verbalizing enjoys the enthusiastic approval of our government and media leaders. In any case, noisy dissenters who march to a non-leftist drummer did not abound in my workplace—or in our national politics for quite a while, until Trump, "the creature of reality TV," brought his game to the presidential race.

If Bayles is shocked by all the nastiness in Trump's comments, I'd urge her to look back at the election of 1800 and read what was said and written then. Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and their hired hands slung more mud at each other than we've seen thrown around in the current presidential contest. And while Bayles is at it, she should read Harry Truman's rants against Tom Dewey in 1948. Surly political rhetoric didn't start with Donald Trump.

**Paul Gottfried**  
Elizabethtown College  
Elizabethtown, PA

*Martha Bayles replies:*

One's first impulse, upon reading a letter like this, is to beg the writer to re-read the article in question. I suspect that won't work, because it never does. At the same time, it is hard to let such a serious misreading stand. So here are some brief responses.

1) Professor Gottfried praises Donald Trump for his "emphatic rejection of political correctness, a more effective control of America's borders than recent Republican and Democratic administrations have provided, and concern

for our working class, as opposed to globalist elites." My essay does the same. In particular, it credits Trump with having raised "issues that both parties have been avoiding," such as "the heavy-handed enforcement of 'diversity' in education and the workplace; the lack of control over America's borders; the massive shift of jobs overseas; the willingness to capitulate to America's enemies; and the general feeling that the American Dream is fading." (As it happens, I'm writing this on the day Trump invited Russia to release the data it hacked from the website of the Democratic National Committee. This forces me to retract the line about "willingness to capitulate to America's enemies." In this regard, Trump is more willing than any Democrat. His eagerness to do Putin's bidding would be pathetic were it not so dangerous.)

2) But Gottfried ignores my next argument, which is that, despite having raised important issues, Trump is not "a true tribune, cutting through the moral evasiveness and verbal smog that passes for campaigning nowadays. Instead, he's a creature of reality TV." Perhaps the reason why Gottfried has nothing to say about this part of my essay (which includes a brief discussion of exhibitionist reality TV in Russia) is that, as "a retired academic who has written many books," he does not waste time watching reality TV. I fear that if he were to start now, it would only deepen his pessimism. But on the other hand, a few hours of *Celebrity Apprentice* might help him to see my point.

3) A small quibble: Gottfried says he is "not Bayles's presumed or preferred Trump voter, a 'low-income white man.'" Here are my exact words: "Of all the demographic groups in America, the one most frequently tarred with [politically correct] accusations is low-income white men without a college degree. No wonder they cheer when Trump says, 'The hell with political correctness!' I

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defy Professor Gottfried to find either presumption or preference in these words. They contain only fact—and empathy.

4) The final part of Gottfried’s letter makes me wish I had made myself clearer. In a previous article for the CRB (“Whistleblowers and Deaf Ears,” Winter 2014/15), I used the term “voluntary restraint” to refer to ordinary standards of civility, decency, etc., as opposed to coercive censorship by either a state or an institution. To illustrate the point, I offered the examples of hate-speech laws in France and speech codes on U.S. campuses, because to the extent that they are coercive, they a) do not prevent hate speech and may in fact encourage it; and b) have a deadening effect on intellectual and political life. I prefer voluntary restraint to coercive censorship, just as I prefer self-government to tyranny. But this is precisely why I am not going to vote for Mr. Trump.

## Our Crumbling Infrastructure

I want to echo the concern you set out in your editorial “The Subway to Nowhere” (Spring 2016). For much too long, this country has neglected attention to the need for managing government programs effectively, both “the big stuff” and “the small stuff.” Professor Paul Light, a distinguished longstanding observer and critic of the field of public administration, late last year published a study amplifying your point. He set out a long list of failures in public management since 2000, ranging from the biggest, like the inability of our national security agencies to cooperate and “connect the dots” before 9/11 and the botched launch of healthcare.gov, to the relatively simple—the collapse of an interstate highway bridge in Minnesota or the scandalous inability of the Veterans’ Administration to allocate medical resources where needed. Here in New York City I

could point to huge expenditures on long-delayed transportation projects—our version of subways to nowhere.

I can well understand the need for a certain skepticism about government. But the point of your essay cannot be to belittle government. We need it, among other things for infrastructure. I could cite stories of great success and dedication. Arbitrarily denying programs funding or cutting headcount without clear analysis of needs and excesses leads to amplifying the problems.

Yes, far too often, management has fallen short—sometimes for lack of funding, more often from lack of getting the right people into the right jobs in the right organizations. Knowing when and how to engage and oversee private contractors to carry out the work and to promote competition is too often neglected. The need is apparent in the area of national security as well as in essential civilian programs.

None of that seems to rise to sensible political debate even in this election year. But it’s those repetitive failures that have undercut faith in government itself, and that’s a very large problem.

Liberals and conservatives alike ought to find common ground. Simply calling for newer expanded programs in infrastructure or elsewhere or cutting funding here and there to express frustration won’t succeed—not without attention to the need for competent management up and down any administration.

What’s at issue in this election year is nothing less than faith in our democracy—a sense that government most of the time can do the right things with reasonable efficiency. That faith won’t be restored by great promises and new spending programs or by simple attacks on “bureaucracy” and public service.

It will take years to bring the management of our federal government—our states and localities, as well—up to the standards we want. We have the resources to start the process—the thou-

sands of talented public servants within government who want to play a part; the schools of public policy and management that haven’t received the attention they deserve.

Thomas Edison made the point a century ago: “Vision without execution is hallucination.” We are veering too far in that direction. It’s time to find the common ground in sensible public management, helping to restore the sense of trust fundamental to democratic government.

Paul A. Volcker  
New York, NY

*William Voegeli replies:*

I appreciate Paul Volcker’s thoughtful attention to “Subway to Nowhere,” and agree with much of what he says. Certainly, no sensible person could oppose bringing government management at every level of our federal system up to the standards we want, and have every right to expect, by getting the right people into the right jobs in the right organizations. I also agree that faith in our democracy will crumble unless citizens have good reason to believe in government’s capacity to do the right thing most of the time with reasonable efficiency.

I believe, however, that Volcker’s assessment, sensible as far as it goes, does not fully account for the *politics* of this management problem. He seeks an Aristotelian mean between conservatives, who make simple attacks on bureaucracy and public service while calling for indiscriminate spending cuts, and liberals, who reflexively make great promises and call for new spending programs. The sensible centrists who reject these extremes must undertake the years of work necessary to enlist talented public servants and schools of public policy and administration in the project of making government work again.

The very fact that the changes Volcker calls for are so clearly necessary, however, argues that



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the earnest public-spiritedness he summons is unlikely to make much difference. The need for competent public management is obvious, permanent, indisputable, and urgent. And yet, somehow, it's conspicuously lacking from innumerable government agencies and undertakings, with severe, palpable consequences. It's unthinkable that American government simply forgot or lost interest in such a basic requirement. More fundamental causes must be involved.

I'll suggest two. First, since the New Deal the Democrats have been the party of government, committed to the proposition that bold, persistent public-sector experimentation can solve problems and right wrongs. It has also, however, become the party of government in the sense that a large part of its electoral and financial support comes from public employee unions. Like all labor unions, the ones representing public employees are zealous about their members' compensation, benefits, and job security, but resist proposals to hold those members to rigorous performance standards or outsource their work to non-union members.

Unlike private-sector unions, however, the ones representing public employees do not have to curtail their demands for fear that foreign competitors will win market share at the expense of their employer. In addition, public-sector workers get to vote and campaign for—and against—the public officials who will be sitting across from them at the bargaining table, giving them negotiating leverage not even the most powerful private-sector union can exercise. In theory, then, the Democratic Party's mission is to show that activist government works. In practice, its operation is all too often to make sure it works for connected, powerful insiders. Mere citizens' and taxpayers' interests are routinely sacrificed to those of the public employee unions.

Second, the liberal ideology that looks to activist government to address an endless list of

problems and dissatisfactions is seriously flawed with respect to governmental efficacy. As I argued in my book *The Pity Party*, governing on the basis of their compassion inevitably leads liberals to insist that government must *do* something about fill-in-the-blank problem. Their deeply felt and proudly displayed compassion leaves them, however, incongruously indifferent as to whether activist government *accomplishes* anything. What we have come to call "virtue signaling" is the central point, not a peripheral consideration.

Long before Mr. Volcker's blue-ribbon commission on improving government management has issued its preliminary report, liberals will have lost interest. Fighting the next noble social justice battle is much more gratifying than the dull, hard work of seeing that the existing government structures are operating effectively, efficiently, and accountably. Even those Democrats who realize that public-sector unions saddle activist government with severe structural defects also realize that the political risk-reward calculation almost always calls for capitulating to the unions now, and confronting them in some very distant, very hazy future.

I'd love to be wrong. Volcker's case for the importance of running the government well is unassailable. If proposals like those he outlines get traction and really do bring government "up to the standards we want," no one will be happier than I am. Or more surprised.

## From Slavery to Freedom

In his thoughtful review ("Up from Slavery," Spring 2016), Allen Guelzo worries that my book *Eighty-Eight Years* is tainted with the "self-emancipation" thesis—a term I studiously avoid because of its long association with James McPherson's mischaracterization of the Freedmen

and Southern Society Project's documentary history of emancipation. I do indeed seek to understand the role of resistance among people of African descent, and place black agency in the center of the story, where it belongs. In Guelzo's view, one can either argue for the role of black agency in the final emancipation or against it. But to claim that the enslaved played a role in their liberation is hardly to assert that they played the only role.

The question is really about how the slaves and their allies helped effect emancipation. Here, the comparative approach I take lets us explore the different ways resistance could influence abolition. My book argues that the experience of final emancipation in the United States was singular in the Atlantic world, for here the "slave power" existed cheek-by-jowl next to a thriving free-labor economy, and it possessed more than its fair share of political power. What's more, that power was shared in a highly democratic political system that sought to bury the slavery issue whenever it threatened to sunder two-party politics. (Yes, Jacksonian democracy actually raised the threshold for ending slavery in the U.S.) As a result, extirpating slavery here could be accomplished through no simple act of Parliament or regal dictate—and certainly not the normal operation of two-party politics. It required the fracturing of the political system, and a resort to extra-political means: war.

In the United States, a dense layer of participatory politics mediated the gulf between black resistance and final emancipation. These politics submerged the significance of slavery's moral status and of those who initially argued on behalf of slavery's demise, highlighting instead the consequences of slavery on free society. As a consequence, and as I detail in the book, this alone was insufficient to end slavery. That required the participation of institutions, powerful people, and those with no sympathy for

the enslaved. I whole-heartedly agree when Guelzo notes that "most white Northerners...were more interested in attacking slavery as a medieval and aristocratic labor system...than they were in liberating black people from bondage."

And yet, ultimately, one causal fact cannot be evaded. None of this could have been possible without slaves who were willing to register their resistance to slavery. This may be so obvious that it is often ignored. Yet it should not be, for nothing else that was done to end slavery—not arguments over tariffs, not efforts to deny slavery's expansion into the territories, not the fight against gag orders in Congress or the censorship of Southern mails—would have mattered had not the enslaved themselves registered a steady stream of discontent. This was the ammunition abolitionists throughout the Atlantic world used to argue that slavery was not the benign, civilizing influence its defenders proclaimed it to be, but a barbaric affront to developing notions of human liberty and human equality.

The abolitionist movement may have begun with those who pled for the basic equality and humanity of the slave, but without an alternative appeal it could never have found the necessary traction in a highly democratic, and in our terms highly racist, political system. That appeal emerged most clearly in the form of the "slave power" argument, which posited slaveholders as a threat to the civil liberties of free white Northerners.

The pressure that slave behavior placed on Union policy played a clear role in promoting the emancipation policy that transformed Union aims from the reversal of secession to the abolition of slavery. I strenuously disagree with Guelzo when he asserts that the Emancipation Proclamation came first, with "the flight from slavery following." Voluminous evidence demonstrates that the runaway slaves presented Union generals and policymakers with



innumerable fits from the earliest stages of the war. Even before hostilities began, enslaved African Americans fled to Union-held Fort Pickens in Florida in hope of securing their freedom. As early as May 1861, Union generals were declaring runaway Confederate slave laborers “contraband of war.” It was this pressure—exerted in multiple theaters over the course of the first year of the war—that led Abraham Lincoln to imagine that African Americans might aid the cause militarily rather than be colonized elsewhere. His transformation is evident in the differences between the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation of September 1862 (which advocated colonization) and the final Proclamation of January 1863 (which provided for freedmen’s enlistment in Union forces).

Patrick Rael  
Bowdoin College  
Brunswick, ME

Allen C. Guelzo replies:

I am no more fond of the term “self-emancipation” than is Patrick Rael. It is, for one thing, too vague. For another, it is too redolent of Marxist romanticism about the proletariat’s need to emancipate itself without the aid of other classes or sympathizers. But for good or for ill, the “self-emancipation thesis” has become a factor in interpretations of the Civil War and emancipation. And as much as he insists that “to claim that the enslaved played a role in their liberation is hardly to assert that they played the only role”—a statement I could not endorse more strongly—Rael undermines that qualification in the previous sentence when he says that he seeks to “place black agency in the center of the story.”

Perhaps it will help if we specify just what it is we are talking about when we speak of slavery and emancipation. *Eighty-Eight*

*Years* is about slavery, and in any account of slavery, the slave really is the central figure, since without the slave, it would be difficult to have a story about slavery. In fact, to keep the slaves’ story central to *slavery* is, it seems to me, essential to asserting and defending the humanity of the slave.

But emancipation is a different story, and a more confusing story because of the variability in our use of the word “freedom.” A slave may be considered spiritually free when there is a refusal to concede ultimate property. A slave may also be considered *free* in a *de facto* sense if the slave is able to be removed from the immediate locale of oppression. Whether in the swamps or on the streets of Boston, the slave is free when loosed from the constraints that used to bind.

But the slave, even if free in these senses—even if free by self-initiative—is not thereby *emancipated*. That can only happen if the principal stalk of slavery, namely the possibility of chattel property in human beings, is cut down and dug up by the root. Emancipation is a legal process, enforceable by the same law which once defined the slave as chattel. To say otherwise is to cloud understanding with words, to accept for fact what is actually metaphor.

I recite all of this, not hoping to try Rael’s patience, but because the “self-emancipation thesis” has flourished largely because of a confusion over what we are talking about when we use terms like *freedom* and *emancipation*. So, for the simple sake of clarity, can we not agree this far:

- ♦ Did slaves achieve freedom by resisting and running away? Yes.
- ♦ Was that freedom a permanent and legally defensible status? No.
- ♦ Did the Emancipation Proclamation confer such a status? Yes.

Finally, is there really “voluminous evidence” which “demonstrates that the runaway slaves presented Union generals and policymakers with innumerable fits from the earliest stages of the war”? True, runaway slaves sought refuge even before the outbreak of war at Fort Pickens; what Rael neglects to add is that the commandant, Lieutenant Adam Slemmer, just as routinely returned them to their owners. One slave even paddled out to Fort Sumter; he, too, was returned. The same Benjamin Butler who created the category of “contrabands” to receive runaway slaves at Fort Monroe also assured slaveowners in occupied Baltimore and New Orleans he would certainly aid “in suppressing, most promptly and effectively, any insurrection” by slaves against their masters. The list of Union commanders who ordered the rendition of runaways to their Confederate masters is long and embarrassing—Halleck, McClellan, Grant, Sherman—as is the behavior of ordinary Union soldiers.

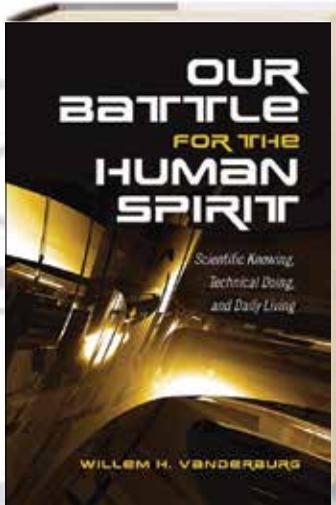
Although Sergeant Samuel McIlvaine of the 10th Indiana was fighting to deny “the right of any portion of the people of the United States to sever, or rive in twain, and destroy this government, which stands out to the rest of the world as the polestar, the beacon light of liberty & freedom to the human race,” he did nothing when “three or four slave hunters” entered his regiment’s camp after Fort Donelson and dragged away two or more blacks who “had mixed with the Negro cooks and waiters and were thus endeavoring to effect their escape to the North.” They “had counted on being protected in the regiment,” but McIlvaine and his compatriots, who were so concerned to be a beacon light of liberty and freedom, allowed them to be disarmed and taken “without molestation on our part.”

Rael objects to my placing the Emancipation Proclamation as the real trigger of black flight. But that was not how the fugitives themselves saw matters. Captain Charles B. Wilder, the superintendent of the contraband camp at Fortress Monroe, noticed runaways from as far as North Carolina crowding into the camp who “knew all about the Proclamation and they started on the belief in it.” When Richard Hill was interviewed by a congressional committee on Reconstruction in 1866, and asked when he became free, Hill replied, “When the proclamation was issued,” and it was then that he decided to run away from his master in Richmond. Nor does Rael, any more than I do, possess data sufficient to tell us how many slaves actually took the high road to freedom (Secretary of State William Seward thought it was no more than 200,000, which would place Southern black fugitives at a lower number than Southern *white* refugees) or how they would have been able to exercise “influence” on the decision-making of white politicians in Washington and the Northern state capitals.

Where the slaves probably exercised their greatest influence for freedom was, ironically, in the South—first, by providing the manual labor that the Confederates used to fortify themselves (and thus convincing white Northerners that emancipation would provide an incentive for them to desert), and second, as a simple threat-in-being, since no nightmare haunted Southerners more, or kept more able-bodied Southern whites from the front lines, than the prospect of an uprising by slaves on their own plantations. They also served who only stood and waited.

For more discussion between Patrick Rael and Allen Guelzo of slavery and emancipation, please visit CRB Digital at [www.claremont.org/crb](http://www.claremont.org/crb).

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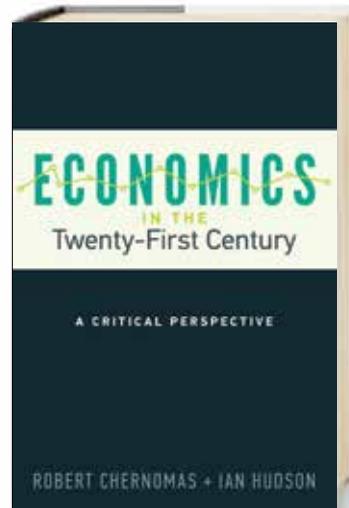


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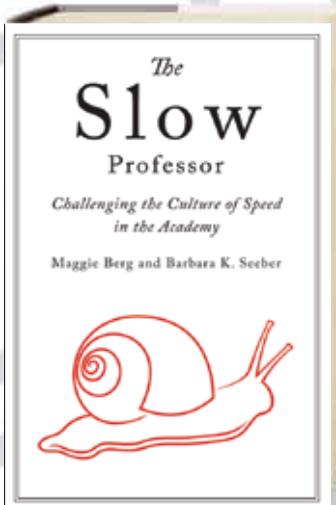


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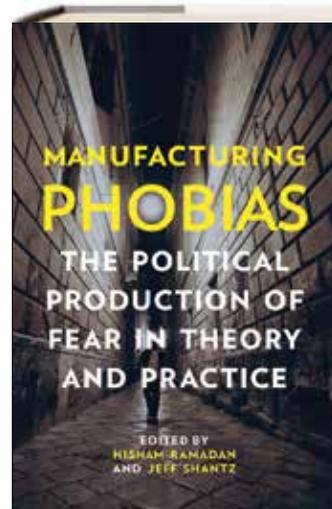


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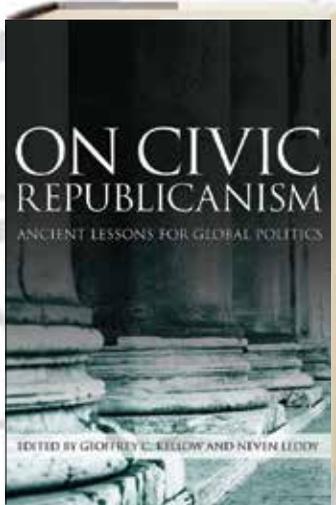


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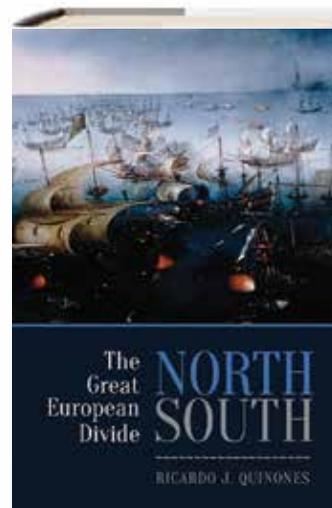


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