

THE EPOCH TIMES

# ARTS & CULTURE

PUBLIC DOMAIN



The woman who contributed to our nation's beginning. A portrait of Mercy Otis Warren, circa 1763, by John Singleton Copley. Oil on canvas. Museum of Fine Arts Boston.

## HISTORY

## Freedom Fighter With a Pen

Mercy Otis Warren and American liberty

JEFF MINICK

Any American with a high school diploma should recognize the names and deeds of our country's most renowned Founders, patriots like Washington, Jefferson, and Abigail and John Adams. Some former students may recollect less familiar figures from that era who appear in most history texts, like Nathan Hale, Lafayette, Molly Pitcher, and John Paul Jones.

Behind these heroes stand a host of other patriots—thousands of them, little



**The most accomplished woman in America.**

*John Adams, second president of the United States.*

known except to their immediate contemporaries—their names and faces long lost to those now living. Here were the men who fought at places like Saratoga and Cowpens, who wintered in Valley Forge, and who read and debated the points of the proposed Constitution. Here were the sisters, wives, and mothers who kept the home fires burning, tending livestock and growing crops, educating their children, and bolstering the morale of their families.

Between these two groups—the great and the obscure—stand a few others, participants in that earth-shattering revolution

who were known far and wide in their day, but today live on only in the pages of some dusty, neglected book of history. Few of us have heard of John Randolph, that gloomy Virginia libertarian, most famous for saying: "I am an aristocrat. I love liberty, I hate equality." And Ethan Allen more likely brings to the minds of many Americans the furniture company rather than the rip-roaring Vermonter from whom the name is derived.

In this company, we find Mercy Otis Warren (1728–1814), widely known in her time, all but forgotten today.

*Continued on Page 4*





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Captain John Beatty (Michael Shannon, L) and Guy Montag (Michael B. Jordan) burn books in the 2018 release of "Fahrenheit 451."

### LITERATURE

## Bradbury's 'Fahrenheit 451,' Free Speech, and Modern Censorship

WALKER LARSON

In 2020, a group of time-honored American novels including Harper Lee's "To Kill a Mockingbird," Mark Twain's "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," and John Steinbeck's "Of Mice and Men" were banned from Burbank, California, schools over parents' complaints of racism and racial slurs in the books. Back in 1951, Ray Bradbury predicted this type of censorship would happen and even offered hints about how to navigate it.

The prediction came in his futuristic dystopian novel "Fahrenheit 451" (1953) in which all books are banned, and the job of firemen, such as the protagonist Guy Montag, is not to put out fires but to set them: specifically, to burn books whenever a stash of them is discovered. Bradbury said he was inspired to write the book when he heard about the book burnings that took place in Nazi Germany and elsewhere; he imagined how such a thing could come to pass in America.

### Step 1: Pleasure, Only Pleasure

Over the course of the novel, Montag transforms from a book-burning fireman to a book-reading renegade, with the spark of conviction that books play an essential role in the welfare and even survival of a civilization. As his fire chief, Beatty, gradually learns of Montag's shifting loyalties, he tries to talk him out of this "insanity." He explains to Montag how books came to be contraband, breaking the process down into a few stages. First, as people's attention spans decreased and the desire for instant gratification and pleasure increased, the study of the humanities declined.

"Classics cut to fifteen-minute radio shows. ... School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected." The people in Bradbury's dystopia live only for hedonism and the accompanying "serenity," which really means freedom from any unpleasant thoughts, good or bad. Above all, they don't think—in fact, they must not be allowed to think. As Beatty puts it, "Don't give them slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with." That will disturb their "serenity."

There is much here that may remind us of our own societal trends. Around the time I finished grad school, I learned that my college's English department would no longer require English majors to read Shakespeare. Think about

that for a moment: English writing and literature majors can now pass through four to six years of postsecondary education and never once open a Shakespeare play or contemplate one of the Bard's sonnets. This is criminal.

Even if we agreed with the naysayers' claim that Shakespeare isn't a brilliant writer, his massive impact on literature and culture remains a historical fact that any English major ought to have a thorough knowledge of.

But we have seen not just a growing negligence of great writers and classic works, but a decline in interest in the humanities generally. From 2012 to 2020, the number of students majoring in the humanities plummeted 25 percent. COVID only accelerated the train wreck of humanities education. One of the liberal arts colleges near me recently cut most of its humanities programs entirely, turning its focus to nursing and business degrees.

### Step 2: The Fear of Offending

Beatty's description of the second step toward book banning also bears similarities to our culture. He continues:

"Now let's take up the minorities in our civilization, shall we? Bigger the population, the more minorities. Don't step on the toes of the dog-lovers, the cat-lovers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons, Baptists, Unitarians, second-generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Texans, Brooklynites, Irishmen, people from Oregon or Mexico. The people in this book, this play, this TV serial are not meant to represent any actual painters, cartographers, mechanics anywhere. The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy. ... It didn't come from the Government down. ... Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressures carried the trick."

The example cited at the beginning of this article isn't the only instance in which fears of offending a minority group have led to censorship. The interests of minority groups with some degree of victim status now often shape our public discourse and even our artistic and literary ecosystems.

Too often, the questions asked about a work are not based on its literary, moral, or artistic merits but on something like, "Does this book offend anyone whom we must not offend?" or "Does this book reinforce or challenge existing power dynamics?" Literature bows to politics in such cases.

While I understand the concerns of parents whose children might be upset by perceived racism in "The Adventures

of Huckleberry Finn," the objection arises from a fundamental misunderstanding of what makes for good or bad art. Art must begin by telling the truth, even when the truth includes reminders of historically racist actions or words. If those racist elements are present, surely, we must not pretend they never happened and let them sink out of sight in the river of time.

### Step Back: Remember the Past

More importantly, we can learn from the classics about human nature, including its errors and how to avoid those errors in the future. One of those errors that classics like "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" can point out, after all, is the tendency of some people toward prejudice.

At one point in "Fahrenheit 451," Montag laments the frequency of modern wars, injustice, and the like. But he understands that the solution is not to bury the past and what it has to offer just to avoid uncomfortable topics—quite the

**The job of the protagonist, fireman Guy Montag, is not to put out fires but to set them.**

reverse. "Maybe the books can get us half out of the cave. They just might stop us from making the same damn insane mistakes!" he says. Exactly so. Great books offer us the collective wisdom of the past, which can guide our future.

This leads to the crucial point: Great literature directs us toward the good, the true, and the beautiful. But sometimes, in order to do that, it must show us the opposite. What makes for a "bad" work of literature is not the presence of evil in the work, but whether or not the work depicts the evil for what it is. We can't gain a firm grasp of the problems of free speech and censorship unless we make that distinction.

At the end of "Fahrenheit 451," Montag, who has escaped from the epicurean city to the countryside, encounters a band of exiles and drifters, former intellectuals who have memorized various classic books to preserve them for the day when society will be rebuilt. Their preparations will be needed, for the city that Montag has fled vanishes in the

flash, flare, and rumble of a detonated nuclear weapon.

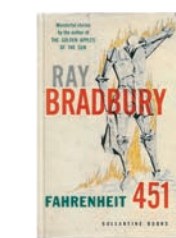
In the post-apocalyptic landscape, Montag and his new friends cling to those forgotten fragments, those words of beauty and power and insight echoing up from the past for those with ears to hear. These hold the key to the future.

There are lessons for us here, too. We, like Bradbury's exiles, could do worse than to gather up these scattered and neglected tomes, storing them up not just in our homes but also in our hearts against the day when humanity awakens from its present illusions and recalls, at last, the need to set aside our discomforts and embrace the wisdom of our ancestors.

*Walker Larson teaches literature and history at a private academy in Wisconsin, where he resides with his wife. He holds a Master's in English literature and language, and his writing has appeared in The Hemingway Review, Intellectual Takeout, and his Substack, "TheHazelnut."*



The Nazi book burnings horrified Ray Bradbury and inspired him to write "Fahrenheit 451." United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



The original cover of "Fahrenheit 451" shows a drawing of a man, who appears to be made of newspaper and is engulfed in flames, standing on top of some books.

TRUTH and TRADITION

In Our Own Words

## The World Through a Journalist's Eyes

Dear Epoch VIP,

Thank you for your continuing support—we are at your service.

My name is Petr Svab and I've been covering politics, courts, police, immigration, economy, and other topics during my 16 years at The Epoch Times.

**It is my pleasure to work for a newspaper that stands for values I can wholeheartedly endorse and fittingly summed up in our motto of Truth and Tradition.**

I believe that truth is the living world, and an infinite journey of exploration. The more topics I tackle, the more issues I delve into, the more I realize how complex, multifaceted, and enormous the world truly is. We can never dream of grasping it all, but, with diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities.

Moreover, I've found, a journalist can open doors closed to others, give readers the facts of the story, the context that enlightens them, as well as the insights of the participants.

I remember walking the streets of West Baltimore a few years ago. My plan was just to interview some local business owners to see what the city was doing about some of its issues—from piles of trash and abandoned houses to homelessness and crime.

Within five minutes of my arrival, a man on the street noticed me and started to shout: "Guy with a camera! There's a guy with a camera here!" A group of young men further up the street took notice as I approached.

"Are you a cop?" asked one of them. He was a young man with wide eyes that looked like they'd already seen more than their share.

I introduced myself and my business of the day, handing the gentleman my card. The young man's expression softened as he realized I was here to report on a story—the story of his home.

As it turned out, the young man was not only ready to share with me his insights on the local issues, but also to offer advice on where to find what I was looking for. We parted ways with a handshake.

In all my experience talking directly to the people



“With diligent effort, a journalist can map a part of the journey and present it to readers, hoping to help them navigate their own realities.”

Petr Svab  
Reporter

involved in various events, **the truth seldom (if ever) favors partisan narratives—it's much more colorful: sometimes humorous, other times tragic.**

Consider the story, for example, of Trayvon Martin. According to some, an innocent child killed by a racist man. According to others, a thug killed in self-defense. But after filmmaker Joel Gilbert retraced Martin's last moments, weeks, and months, it turned out neither narrative was quite true. Gilbert told a story of a young man whose life was falling apart and ultimately plunged into a tragedy that nobody wanted.

So if that's truth, what is tradition, then? For me, it is the lessons of history. It's the distilled universal wisdom collected by our ancestors over millennia—the timeless lessons of the enlightened, the sages, and the saints. This treasure chest of the past is where we can turn to help us better understand the truth at present.

My work is to safeguard this treasure, let it live through the pages of The Epoch Times and the hearts of our readers.

While it may seem the foundations of the civilization itself are now under attack, I truly believe our readers will be best equipped to withstand the storm—through clarity and peace of heart. For whatever the future holds, I believe the path will be less treacherous for those who walk it steadily, making choices informed both by truth and tradition.

What I pledge to you is yet more meticulous research, analysis, and fact-finding. I'll do the digging for you, while letting you make up your own mind. Furthermore, I'll also hone my wit to give you an ever-better read along the way.

Yes, we strive to be an influential media in the world, but **I believe that our true success is measured in minds sharpened, hearts uplifted, and lives improved.**

Once again, thank you for joining us on this journey. We do live in truly epochal times, wouldn't you say?

In Truth and Tradition,

Petr Svab  
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## HISTORY

# Freedom Fighter With a Pen

Continued from Page 1

## Daughter, Wife, Mother, and Luminary of Literature

In "The Muse of the Revolution: The Secret Pen of Mercy Otis Warren and the Founding of a Nation," biographer Nancy Rubin Stuart opens with a garland of praise delivered by some of Mercy Warren's illustrious contemporaries. John Adams once called her "the most accomplished woman in America" and described her written works as "incontestable instances of genius." One of Mercy's closest friends, John's wife Abigail, delighted in her poetry and plays. Both Jefferson and Washington touted her skills and insights as a writer. Though not included in Stuart's inventory of admirers, in a 1791 letter to Mercy after reading a volume of her poems, Alexander Hamilton wrote to her: "Not being a poet myself, I am in the less danger of feeling mortification at the idea, that in the career of dramatic composition at least, female genius in the United States

has outstripped the Male."

In many ways, this recipient of Hamilton's praise was very much a woman of her time. The third child of 13 of James and Mary Otis, Mercy appears by all the evidence to have grown up in a loving, prosperous household in Barnstable, Massachusetts. She learned the usual household arts from her mother and was showered with affection by her father, a lawyer and a politician active in the independence movement. At 26, older by several years than the average bride of the time, she married James Warren, a 28-year-old merchant and farmer who also advocated separation from Great Britain. Judging by the letters that survived them, Mercy and James deeply loved each other throughout their 54-year marriage. That union produced five sons, three of whom Mercy outlived.

Until shortly before her death in 1814, Mercy remained a vivacious conversationalist and welcoming hostess to all who visited her.

## In 1805, Mercy Warren published her three-volume 'History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution.'

A bronze statue of Mercy Otis Warren, by David Lewis, at Barnstable County Courthouse, Mass.

## 3 Men Make Their Mark

So, who helped forge this wife and mother into a woman of letters and the revolutionary firebrand whose poems and prose impacted our history and helped bring about the Bill of Rights?

First up among these influences was Mercy's father, James Otis. Eventually a member of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, he carried political news and opinions home with him, and shared them with the family. Moreover, when Mercy was 9, and contrary to the custom of the time, James gave her permission to join her brothers in their tutoring sessions with their uncle, the Reverend Jonathan Russell. Mercy learned to write from her uncle. As Stuart tells us in her biography, Mercy "devoured Pope and Dryden's translations of Virgil and Homer," and read the Bible, Shakespeare, and Milton.

Her older brother James, called "Jemmy" by the family, encouraged Mercy in her studies, often discussing their reading once the tutorial sessions had ended.



An excellent biography on Mercy Warren by Nancy Rubin Stuart.

When Mercy was 11, James left home to attend Harvard, but he continued to encourage his sister in her education through letters and on his visits home. And even more than his father, he was an ardent believer in American liberty. It was James, in fact, who in the 1760s originated and popularized the expression, "Taxation without representation is tyranny."

Her beloved husband, James Warren, also proved most crucial in Mercy's writing pursuits. Sometimes affectionately calling her "Scribbler," Warren encouraged his wife in her literary endeavors throughout their many years together. Like his in-laws, he too was a strong believer in American independence, holding several important offices during the Revolution, though later falling out of favor with the new government over his stance on Shays's Rebellion and his opposition to the Constitution, particularly its initial lack of a bill of rights.

## The Scribbler at Work

Using a pen name, in the early 1770s Mercy wrote a trio of plays criticizing Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson, works having tone and subject matter that foreshadowed the American Revolution. Her plays helped lead to the removal of the governor. During the Revolution, she continued to compose plays, poems, and pamphlets in support of the American cause. Following the war, she also published her collection "Poems, Dramatic and Miscellaneous," the first writing of any kind she issued under her own name.

In 1805, Mercy Warren published her three-volume "History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution." Today, that history, which extends from the time of the first colonists to the ratification of the Constitution, would attract few general readers—in large part because of the florid style, typical of the period, in which Mercy wrote her magnum opus. Even in her own day, sales of the book were poor, and criticism was mixed.

One reader, however, reacted violently to Mercy's history. Her good friend and a longtime admirer of her writing, John Adams, was offended by her treatment of him and his place in America's history. In a fiery exchange of letters, he attacked her for misinforming the public about his actions and intentions while also sniping away at mistakes in the book. Though the two had a bitter falling out, Abigail Adams remained Mercy's friend. And after several years, just as she had done with the rift between her husband and Thomas Jefferson, Abigail repaired the friendship between the Warren and Adams families.

## Helpmate to the Bill of Rights

A second strain between the two families, and between many Americans, had occurred years before the appearance of Mercy's history of the new country. Adams and many others were Federalists, desiring a stronger central government to cope



with the problems facing the new nation after the Revolution. The Constitution was largely the product of this party.

Opposed to these efforts were the anti-Federalists, represented by men like Thomas Jefferson. Mercy Warren and her family stood staunchly in this camp, fearful that the Constitution as written, especially with no direct statement regarding rights and liberties, would establish a federal government that might trample on the freedoms of the people. The Federalists put out newspaper articles, later collectively called "The Federalist Papers," supporting the Constitution in preparation for a vote on the matter. The anti-Federalists followed suit in a less organized fashion, issuing pamphlets denouncing certain points of the Constitution and calling for a Bill of Rights.

One of those writers was Mercy Warren, who anonymously authored a much-read pamphlet, "Observations on the new Constitution; and on the federal and state conventions." Though over a century passed before historians realized that Mercy had penned these arguments—a descendant discovered a revealing reference in one of Mercy's letters—her eloquent plea helped bring about the rights and liberties that we enjoy today. As Danielle Herring of the Law Library of Congress notes, "Mercy Otis Warren has a lasting legacy as the secret muse of the American Revolution and the Bill of Rights."

## Lessons From a Life

Mercy Warren's life reveals the vital importance of education, morality, and a loving family to a happy life. Her husband's unstinting support and love underscore the significance of these same attributes in

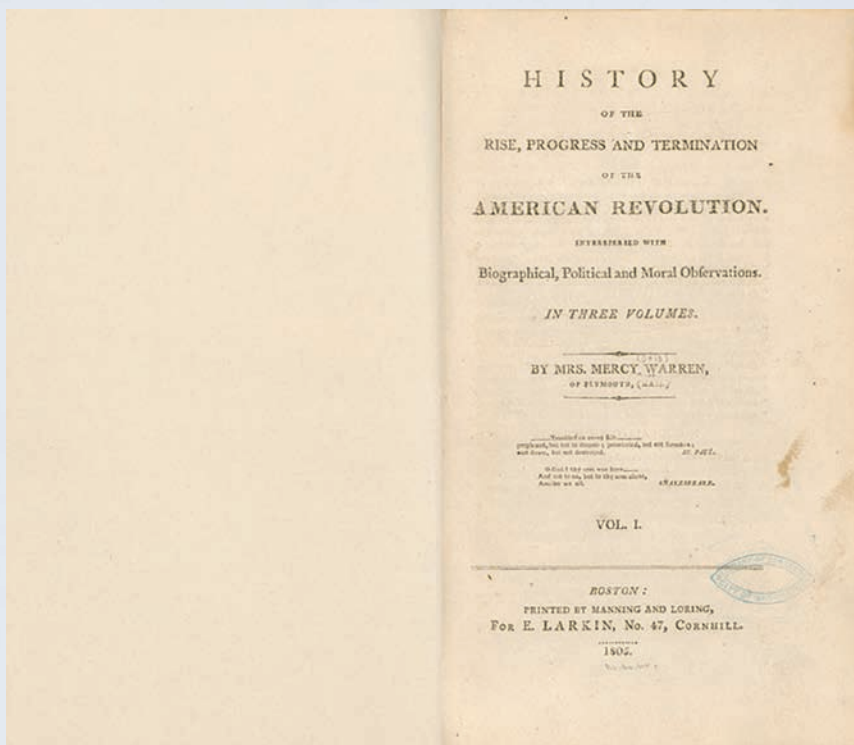
Mercy Otis Warren has a lasting legacy as the secret muse of the American Revolution and the Bill of Rights. "Scene at the Signing of the Constitution of the United States," 1940, by Howard Chandler Christy, United States Capitol.

development and growth. The many snippets of Mercy's correspondence included in "The Muse of the Revolution" reveal an independent woman who took pleasure in friends and family, who returned that same gift to those around her, and who squarely faced up to hardships and criticism.

Moreover, by her words and deeds, Mercy Warren reminds us once again of that old warning "Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty." She stood post to guard to those liberties. May the rest of us remember her and do the same.

Jeff Minick has four children and a growing platoon of grandchildren. For 20 years, he taught history, literature, and Latin to seminars of homeschooling students in Asheville, N.C. He is the author of two novels, "Amanda Bell" and "Dust On Their Wings," and two works of nonfiction, "Learning As I Go" and "Movies Make The Man." Today, he lives and writes in Front Royal, Va.

The title page of a copy of Warren's "History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution, Vol. 1," from Thomas Jefferson's library.



KENNETH C. ZIRKEL/CC BY-SA 3.0



"Lady With an Ermine (Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani)," circa 1490, by Leonardo da Vinci. Oil and distemper (paint that uses vegetable glue or animal glue, but not egg, as a binder) on panel; 21 inches by 15 1/2 inches. National Museum, Krakow, Poland.

## FINE ART

## Lost in Plain Sight, the Often Unseen Language of Fine Art

### Leonardo da Vinci's 'Lady With an Ermine'

LORRAINE FERRIER

Without knowing the language of Renaissance art or the customs and etiquette of the day, anyone viewing Leonardo da Vinci's painting "Lady With an Ermine (Portrait of Cecilia Gallerani)" might find it a little odd. It's of a lady embracing a stoat (an ermine).

In its time, Leonardo's portrait of Gallerani spoke volumes without uttering a word. Instead of syntax, Renaissance painters like Leonardo carefully strung a series of motifs together that portrayed their subjects' status, character, and vir-

tures. Renaissance viewers recognized this visual language of art, regardless of the language they spoke.

The meanings of these motifs had been set centuries before. Medieval Christians believed that each of God's creations held a divine purpose, so they classified birds, animals, and even fantastical creatures in religious texts known as "bestiaries." The bestiary detailed each creature's habitat, location, and physical attributes and then connected the creatures to Christian morals and allegories.

The Morgan Library & Museum in New York holds a fascinating late-12th-century "Workshop Bestiary." Its first illumination is of Christ. On the same page, two lions lick their stillborn cubs back to life, an allegory of Christ's resurrection.

Inspired by the bestiary tradition, 16th- and 17th-century emblem books became popular across continental Europe. These books contained religious and secular content, with artists sometimes looking back to ancient Greek and Ro-

man literature such as "Aesop's Fables" and Plutarch's "Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans" for inspiration. Each entry in the emblem book had an illustration, a motto, and explanatory text.

## In its time, Leonardo's portrait of Gallerani spoke volumes, without uttering a word.

### What About Leonardo's Ermine?

Leonardo made a bestiary of his own in his later years, with an entry for ermines that echoes other bestiaries. In it, he mentions that the ermine eats once a day, and it would sooner surrender to hunters than flee into its muddy den.

The ermine's white winter coat therefore represented moral purity and moderation, and as such, the rich echelons of society prized the ermine's pristine

white fur with its black-tipped tail. European kings and queens even wrapped themselves in ermine coronation cloaks, silently announcing that they'd reign with moral purity and moderation.

Leonardo illustrated the ermine's behavior well in his pen and ink drawing "The Ermine as a Symbol of Purity." In the drawing, a hunter is about to kill the creature. The ermine doesn't flinch or flee. It would rather die than soil its pure white fur while escaping.

### Why a Lady Embraces a Rodent

In his "Lady With an Ermine," Leonardo painted 16-year-old Gallerani in a rich velvet and brocade dress, with her head turned in the opposite direction of her body, a dynamic pose for the time. Renaissance painters portrayed maidens available for marriage with their hair loose, while betrothed or married ladies wore their hair parted in the middle and tied back. Leonardo depicted Gallerani's hair neither up nor down, but in a coazzone, a Spanish-style

"The Ermine as a Symbol of Purity," circa 1494, by Leonardo da Vinci. Pen and brown ink over traces of black chalk on paper; diameter: 3 1/2 inches. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, England.



PUBLIC DOMAIN

braid popular in northern Italy. Her hair is bound at the back yet wrapped around her face, with a headband circling her forehead that holds a gold-edged veil in place.

He painted the ermine's head mirroring Gallerani's pose, suggesting that the young lady aligns with the ermine's emblematic purity and modesty.

However, hidden meanings also lie in Gallerani's ermine. Some scholars believe it represents Gallerani's name, "Gale" being Greek for ermine. Others believe it indicates Gallerani's connection with Leonardo's most important patron, the Italian regent and Duke of Milan, Ludovico Sforza, who commissioned the painting and who belonged to the chivalric Order of the Ermine. The order's motto was "MALO MORI QVAM FOEDARI," Latin for "Death rather than dishonor."

Many Renaissance paintings like Leonardo's "Lady With an Ermine" hold entire stories like this—rich in tradition and iconography.



## BOOK REVIEW

# How an American Captive in Barbary Saved His Homeland from War

A stranger-than-fiction true story certain to inspire readers

DUSTIN BASS

There are hidden gems among the treasures of history, and when historians and writers stumble across them, it is a true gift when they share them with the rest of us. Des Ekin, historian and journalist, has found such a gem in James Leander Cathcart among the treasures of American history. In his new book, “The Lionkeeper of Algiers: How an American Captive Rose to Power in Barbary and Saved His Homeland From War,” he has shared it with the rest of us, and we can only be so grateful.

I rarely start a review in such an immediately complimentary capacity, but I found myself so absorbed in this book that I find it difficult to start any other way.

## A Story on Hold

Ekin discloses early on that he came across Cathcart’s story years ago but had other projects to produce. The slowdown that resulted from the pandemic resulted in this new work of early American non-fiction. Cathcart’s story is one of capture, slavery, and survival in a period when those three things could be expected.

Ekin pulls the reader into the story, not simply with his imagery, seamless transitions, and surprising humor but also with how he treats the reader. The author plays the role of storyteller with the rare occasion of using second person. His ability to pace the story swiftly and then stop it or slow it down for either reflection or clarification is impressive, because it works and is enjoyable, and provides a sense of almost familial comfort.

The story itself, however, is oceans away from comfort. No, it is a tale that exemplifies man’s capacity for cruelty. But more importantly, it exemplifies the indomitable spirit and man’s capacity for unselfishness and sacrifice.

## A New Nation’s New Enemy

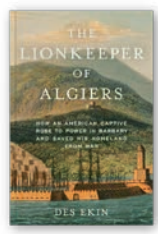
In 1785, America is a new nation without a navy facing a new enemy across the Atlantic Ocean. When the Barbary pirates are recalled in American history, it is often the pirates from Tripoli during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. But before the heroic events of that era and the battles that ensued, American merchant ships also faced the threat of Algerian pirates. At 18, Cathcart becomes a prisoner of what is termed in Ekin’s book as the “crazy capital.”

The capital along the African coast; the various characters (Algerian, American, British, French, and otherwise); the harsh treatment and punishing climate; the constant threat of violence and execution; the ebb and flow of hope and disappointment; the surprise of kindness and the beauty of goodwill: There is so much in Cathcart’s story assembled by Ekin that it becomes nearly impossible to stop reading. He provides not only a well-crafted story but also insight into the early struggles of American geopolitics.



**CAPT CROKER HORROR STRICKEN AT ALGIERS,**  
*on witnessing the Miseries of the Christian Slaves chain'd & in Irons driven home after labour by Infidels with large Whips.* Page 161d

British captain witnessing the miseries of Christian slaves in Algiers, 1815.



**‘THE LIONKEEPER OF ALGIERS: HOW AN AMERICAN CAPTIVE ROSE TO POWER IN BARBARY AND SAVED HIS HOMELAND FROM WAR’**  
By Des Ekin  
Prometheus Books  
March 15, 2023  
Hardcover  
272 pages

**This story exemplifies the indomitable spirit and man’s capacity for unselfishness and sacrifice.**

## A New American Hero

The plight of the Barbary prisoner (and the many other prisoners) is a harrowing one. Ekin does not avoid the harshness, but he does not pursue an overly graphic narrative. The beatings and the beheadings are readily conceivable without going into extensive detail.

Cathcart’s innate ability to adapt to his surroundings—abilities that stem from his linguistic talents, his approachable personality, and his good-heartedness—is the crux of the story. It is this young man’s dexterity for handling people of all rank and file that ultimately benefits himself, his fellow prisoners, and his country.

Ekin has presented an individual who should quickly be elevated to the status of American hero. Perhaps not on the scale of a George Washington or a Benjamin Franklin, but indeed with those like a John Paul Jones or a Benjamin Tallmadge.

Along with heroes there are villains, primarily the Algerian prison guards, but even including the British and French consuls to Algiers. As Ekin details, it is not just survival that Cathcart has to consider but also outwitting his opponents, even those who do not possess the power of life and death in the “crazy capital.”

There are moments in this book that seem stranger than fiction (but that is often the definition of truth). Cathcart, an American prisoner in a foreign land, becomes a tavern owner (actually, multiple taverns). Ekin

describes Cathcart and his pub Mad House as a quasi Rick’s Café Américain from the film “Casablanca.” The author also describes Cathcart as being somewhat Humphrey Bogart-esque. The Mad House was a type of refuge. Or as Ekin so aptly wrote: “If you wanted to escape the lunacy of the ‘crazy capital,’ the Mad House was the only place to go.”

## A Debt of Gratitude

For all his efforts to keep his men alive, alleviate their suffering, and broker a peace deal all while remaining a hostage, Cathcart is owed a debt of gratitude. As Ekin notes at the end of his book, Cathcart has been overlooked. It is understandable, as there have been so many heroes who have come along in America’s story. But as the author states, his book is an attempt to “remedy the oversight.” He adds that the book “does not attempt to nominate [Cathcart] for sainthood.” For my money, I would rather a true-to-life Rick from “Casablanca” than a saint.

For history enthusiasts of early America, this is a highly recommended read. For anyone looking for a fast-paced and wonderfully written story that indulges in dark humor, heroism, and arguably the insane (there’s a reason it’s called the “crazy capital”), “The Lionkeeper of Algiers” will be a book you won’t be able to put down and, once you finish, won’t be able to forget.

*Dustin Bass is an author and co-host of The Sons of History podcast.*



James Leander Cathcart was kidnapped and enslaved in Algiers.

## HISTORY

## A Natural Wonder With Distinguished Ties

DEENA BOUKNIGHT

On my way up to see Pennsylvania family and friends from my home in western North Carolina, I spotted a small road sign in Rockbridge County, Virginia, on Interstate 81 that piqued my interest. I pulled down a simple road and into a parking lot that indicated it was the entranceway to the official state and historical landmark called “Natural Bridge.”

Besides a short trail that afforded an opportunity for a bit of fresh air, I recognized that the forested path provided surprising historical tidbits. Primarily, placards indicated that George Washington once traversed the area and Thomas Jefferson built a home there.

Although the focal point is the 90-foot-wide, 215-foot-tall limestone strata arch dubbed Natural Bridge—considered a geological marvel touted by the Department of Conservation and Recreation as “one of the oldest geological features on the East Coast”—learning about two Founding Fathers’ marks on the area proved much more enticing.

## Washington’s Mark, or Not

According to one historical marker, young

George Washington worked as a surveyor long before he solidified his place in American history as commander of the Continental Army and as the country’s first leader. By age 20, Washington had completed around 200 surveys, and centuries of speculation put him at Natural Bridge during his travels, with “proof” in the form of his supposed initials carved into rock.

Even though some historians question whether the initials are, indeed, Washington’s, there is less doubt that he navigated the area.

Eric Wilson, a cultural historian and executive director at Rockbridge Historical Society in Lexington, Virginia, said: “The ‘graffiti’ might be bogus, but it’s plausible that Washington, as an 18-year-old surveyor, was surveying with Peter Jefferson’s [Thomas Jefferson’s father] team in the area in the 1740s.”

**George Washington once traversed the area and Thomas Jefferson built a home there.**

## Jefferson’s Investment

Further research determined that Thomas



“Natural Bridge, Rockbridge Co., Va.,” 1858, from “Album of Virginia,” by Edward Beyer. Lithograph. Virginia Fund, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

paid 20 shillings to obtain the land warrant, get the property surveyed, and file the necessary papers with the secretary of the colony in Williamsburg. Jefferson’s rustic Rockbridge County property was 120 miles (by horse) from his more refined Monticello property, so he built a two-room log cabin retreat near Natural Bridge and invited family and friends to view the fascinating site. A few later guests would become historically noteworthy, including Henry Clay, Sam Houston, and Martin Van Buren.

Jefferson wrote about the area: “Looking down from this height about a minute, gave me a violent head ach[e]. If the view from the top be painful and intolerable, that from below is delightful in an equal extreme.

It is impossible for the emotions arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing as it were up to heaven, the rapture of the spectator is really indescribable!”

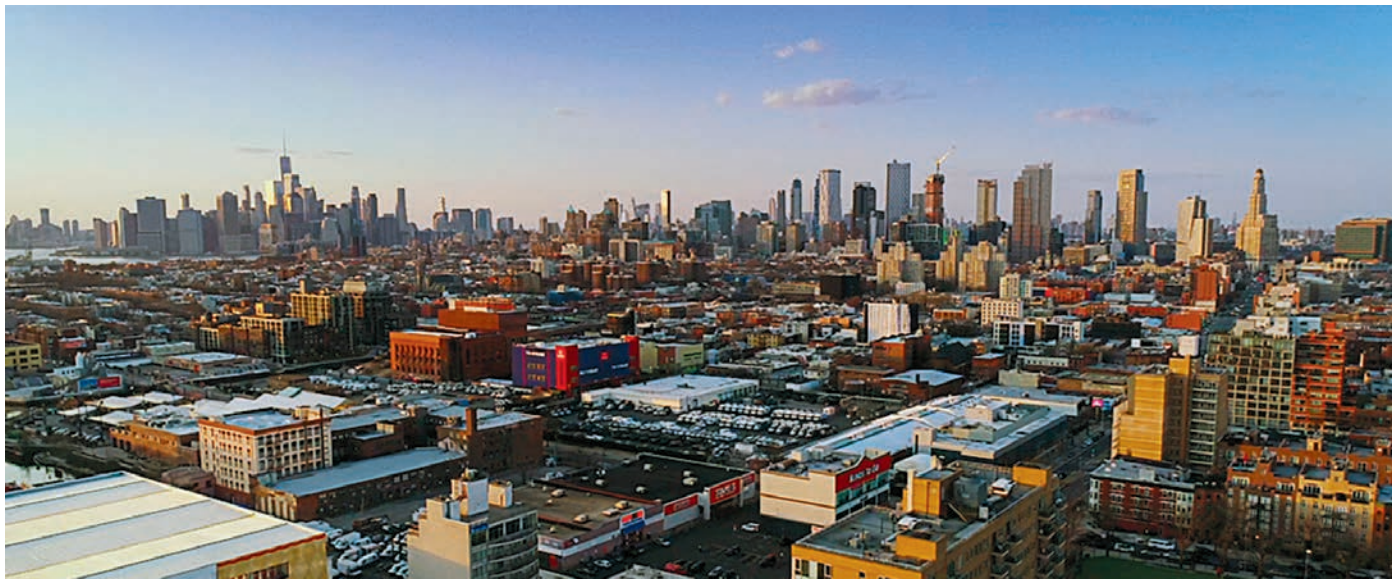
Jefferson’s family members were just as enthralled. Cornelia Jefferson Randolph, one of Jefferson’s granddaughters, wrote in 1817: “We are return’d from the natural bridge more anxious to see it again than we were at first, because in the first place it far surpasses our expectations.”

Jefferson retained ownership of his Natural Bridge property until his death in 1826. Afterward, the property was sold and stayed in private hands until an arrangement was made with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation.

Visitors to this historic area have an opportunity to contemplate how Washington might have, and how Jefferson certainly did, stand captivated by the lofty rock arch that man’s hands did not create.

*A 30-plus-year writer-journalist, Deena C. Bouknight works from her Western North Carolina mountain cottage and has contributed articles on food culture, travel, people, and more to local, regional, national, and international publications. She has written three novels, including the only historical fiction about the East Coast’s worst earthquake. Her website is DeenaBouknightWriting.com*

As it entered the 1990s, New York City was faced with many serious problems, as seen in “Gotham: The Fall and Rise of New York.”



GRAVITAS VENTURES AND ELECTROLIFT CREATIVE

## FILM REVIEW

## Saving America’s Biggest City From Itself

MICHAEL CLARK

Covering the tenures of six New York City mayors from the year 1966 through 2013, director Matthew Taylor’s “Gotham: The Fall and Rise of New York” is an atypical rags-to-riches story that proves even the worst deeds of inept leaders can be rectified by people who actually know what they’re doing.

Written by Taylor and produced by his wife, Michelle, “Gotham” hits the ground running and keeps a brisk but measured pace for its entire 2-plus hours in length. Before the opening credits start, the filmmakers deliver a rapid-fire plethora of problems facing New York as it was entering the 1990s.

## Train Wreck

There was a bad education system, high crime, decay and disorder, rampant destruction of public and private property, the mass exodus of fed-up residents, and the like. Perhaps most sobering are these statistics: Every year on average, there were 2,200 murders, 93,000 violent robberies, and over 50,000 felonies committed.

Even more jaw-dropping is the collective laissez-faire attitude of four consecutive mayors who, when not throwing good money after bad, took a collective “What are you going to do?” shrugged-shoulder attitude. Corruption and malfeasance at every level of city government was treated

as a given. And the worse it got, the more the top brass began accepting it as newer versions of the “new normal.”

Serving in the office for eight years beginning in 1966, John Lindsay brought with him movie-star looks and a certain “Kennedyesque,” new-frontier attitude. During one speech, Lindsay stated that in a single day, one resident would be killed, multiple children would be bitten by rats, 50,000 drug addicts would need a fix, 50 jobs would leave town, and everyone was breathing in polluted air that was equal to smoking two packs of cigarettes.

## Not So Great

Lindsay’s answer to all of this was to double down on then President Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society” program, which increased welfare roles, effectively paying people not to work. This continued through the single-term administration of Abraham Beame who, on the upside, entered office facing a \$1.5 billion deficit and left office four years later with a surplus of \$200 million. Even with this impressive feat, Beame was defeated in the primaries by his replacement, Ed Koch.

Exhibiting the pep and exuberance of a high school cheerleader, Koch proudly wore his “New York attitude” on his sleeve, something which endeared him (if only temporarily) to those residents with a similar mindset.

Although he received praise for beefing up the police force and signing a \$5.5 billion housing bill in 1986, Koch’s time in office was also marred by corruption scandals, poor relations with minority leaders Al Sharpton and Jesse Jackson, and a marked rise in crime.

Viewed in retrospect, the single term served by Koch’s successor, David Dinkins, is considered a success. Being New York’s first and, to date, only black mayor, he was able to ease racial relations, which led to a small drop in crime.

## POPCORN AND INSPIRATION

## ‘Places in the Heart’

RUDOLPH LAMBERT FERNANDEZ

Decades before the Depression, the southeastern states lost considerable cotton acreage under cultivation to boll weevil attacks or droughts or heat waves or storms.

Until mechanized farming became commonplace, this economy depended on one person: the cotton picker. Bent at the hip, one arm picking, the other flinging cotton into sacks slung from the head or shoulder, pickers—men, women, and children—picked from dawn to dusk until wagons were loaded for buyers. The picker’s hands told a story. Torn thumbs and fissured fingers spoke of defeat after defeat, and some victories so sweet because they were so rare, so hard-won.

Screenwriter-director Robert Benton, born in 1930s Waxahachie, Texas, weaves unique insights into his screenplay and direction of “Places in the Heart,” a fictional portrayal of his boyhood town and its townsfolk.

## Meet the Family

After her sheriff husband is accidentally killed while on duty, Edna (Sally Field) has to care for her two children and their family farm. As she tentatively weighs her options, including growing cotton in a cruelly competitive market, she has to overcome her fears in order to meet her family’s needs in a town riven with racism.

Two strangers, both men, offer to help. One is black drifter Moze (Danny Glover), who knows his way around a farm. His incisive understanding of the market ends up giving Edna the edge she needs with traders out to make a fast buck on the back of her naivete. The other man is white and blind, Mr. Will (John Malkovich). He turns up as a kindly tenant paying a rental income that sustains Edna during tough times.



(L-R) Frank (Yankton Hatten), Possum (Gennie James), Edna (Sally Field), and Moze (Danny Glover) survive during the Great Depression, in 1984’s “Places in the Heart.”

The film won two of its seven Oscar nominations, including Field’s for Best Actress. Benton won an Oscar for his screenplay and a nomination for his direction. Field, Glover, and Malkovich are outstanding; you feel their fears, embarrassments, their likes, their dislikes, their faults, and hopes.

Field portrays Edna’s fear of being exploited for her ignorance, her dependence on Moze to tell poor grain from good or to hire pickers, and her dependence on a banker to learn to sign a check. She transforms from a cocooned wife to a widow, working her hands and knees raw under a blazing Texas sun.

## The Need for Each Other

Two fibers run through Benton’s cotton narrative: faith and fate.

Faith hovers above the town like a giant cloud of cotton, shielding them from despair. Families close their eyes, bow their heads, and fold their hands in prayer before meals. They sing hymns in church.

Edna takes a leap of faith in trusting Moze, even after he’s caught stealing her silver spoons. He responds through his backbreaking work on and off the farm. She takes another leap of faith, welcoming

**Corruption and malfeasance in every level of city government was treated as a given.**

Defeating crime, particularly the mob, was the biggest factor in securing victory for U.S. district attorney Rudy Giuliani in 1993. Freely admitting that his expertise was limited to the law, Giuliani wisely surrounded himself with experts in other fields of endeavor, yet was never able to fully grasp the politics that came with the office.

Many of the successful policies instituted by the Giuliani administration were continued by his successor, billionaire tycoon Michael Bloomberg who, not surprisingly, treated running the city like a business. He left office in 2013 with a \$3 billion surplus and is arguably the most successful New York mayor since Fiorello H. La Guardia (1934–1945).

While sure to be appealing to some, Taylor’s employment of dramatic re-creation, although not frequent, adds little and sometimes works against the film’s otherwise streamline and efficient presentation.

## Some Backstory Would’ve Helped

It might have also helped if Taylor had included a tidbit or two of information regarding Robert F. Wagner Jr., Lindsay’s predecessor. During his three terms, Wagner slowly but surely separated the mayor’s office from Tammany Hall, a political organization and the de facto brain trust behind the city’s Democrat Party. In place since the late 1700s, Tammany became synonymous with graft and corruption (particularly William M. “Boss” Tweed), often resorting to base tactics and measures that more resembled the types of practices associated with organized crime.

During the movie’s extended epilogue, Taylor breaks from his just-the-facts approach and lays (deserved) lavish praise on Giuliani and Bloomberg. He again points out that it was their policies and business-like approach that rescued America’s biggest and most storied city from total collapse.

Also included in this piece is a five-second clip of Bill de Blasio and his wife, Chirlane, celebrating his victory in the 2013 election, insinuating with dark accuracy that the old and ineffective ways of running New York had sadly returned.

If the Taylors ever consider making a sequel to this film, I’ve got a title they might like: “Gotham 2: The Second Fall.”

*Originally from Washington, D.C., Michael Clark has provided film content to over 30 print and online media outlets. He co-founded the Atlanta Film Critics Circle in 2017 and is a weekly contributor to the Shannon Burke Show on FloridaManRadio.com. Since 1995, Mr. Clark has written over 4,000 movie reviews and film-related articles. He favors dark comedy, thrillers, and documentaries.*

**‘Gotham: The Fall and Rise of New York’**

## Documentary

**Director:** Matthew Taylor

**Running Time:** 2 hours, 5 minutes

**MPAA Rating:** Not Rated

**Release Date:** March 21, 2023

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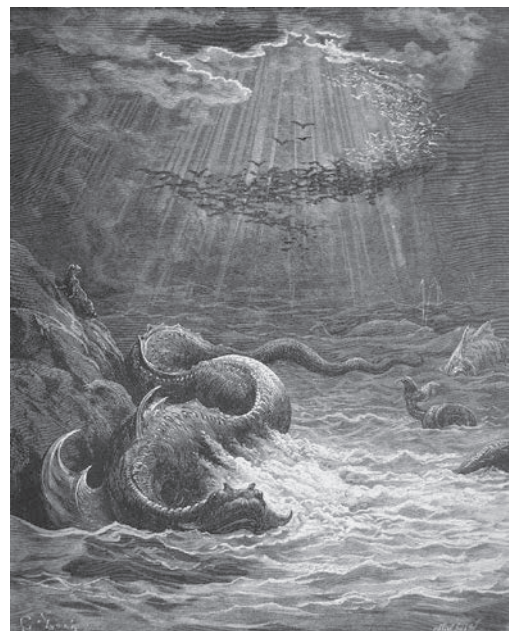
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ALL PHOTOS IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN

And God said: "Let the waters generate Reptile with spawn abundant, living soul; And let fowl fly above the earth." (VII, Lines 387–389), 1866, by Gustav Doré for John Milton's "Paradise Lost."



into a positive one. No matter how much evil and destruction is brought his way, he only reacts in such a way that good is the outcome, and this is why he is celebrated.

#### God Gives 1 Commandment

Earlier, it was mentioned that God purged those things that were dark and averse to life before creating the world. It was also mentioned that God was providing a path for human beings to ascend to Heaven.

To prove themselves worthy, they must be tested and pass the test provided by God. God introduces the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and asks Adam and Eve to not eat its fruit; they can enjoy everything else that Earth provides, just not any fruit from that tree:

"This garden, planted with the trees of God, Delectable both to behold and taste; And freely all their pleasant fruit for food Gave thee, all sorts are here that all th' earth yields, Variety without end; but of the Tree Which tasted works Knowledge of Good and Evil, Thou may'st not; in the day thou eat'st, thou die; Death is the penalty imposed, beware, And govern well thy appetite, lest Sin Surprise thee, and her black attendant Death." (Book VII, Lines 538–547)

Eating the fruit gives human beings the knowledge of evil along with their knowledge of God. The fruit from that tree reintroduces the destructive darkness that was averse to life; it brings Sin and Death in its wake.

In an earlier part of this series, we introduced Sin and Death as the children of Satan. They guard the gates of Hell and await Satan's success in tempting Adam and Eve.

#### The Natural State of Creation

The consistent theme here is creation through purging evil. Milton begins by suggesting that he does not receive the revelations from the Heavenly Muse without first being purged of evil. God purges Heaven of the rebel angels to maintain the goodness of Heaven and creates a good situation from a bad one by creating Earth. Before creating Earth, God first purges evil from space itself. Human beings are created in God's image with a body made of earth and a soul made in Heaven, and in embodying the characteristics that please God—virtue and obedience—can fashion themselves and Earth to be worthy of Heaven. Obedience suggests purging all of those things that are not aligned with the benevolence and goodness of God.

It's interesting, however, that the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil is not the Tree of the Knowledge of Evil. To me, this suggests that, since everything is created in the spirit of God's benevolence, evil can never be absolute. Evil as that which destroys instead of creates must be purged for the natural state of creativity to occur.

Every moment of every day, we have the opportunity to explore this type of creativity in our lives. We can pay attention to our hearts and minds and do our best to purge those things within ourselves that might be averse to life. In this way, we can guide our hearts and minds toward virtue and obedience to God. We can try to create good circumstances out of bad ones by thoughtfully considering all possible outcomes of our actions. In this sense, we purge what is destructive and let what is creative remain.

*Gustav Doré was a prolific illustrator of the 19th century. He created images for some of the greatest classical literature of the Western world, including "The Bible," "Paradise Lost," and "The Divine Comedy." In this series, we will take a deep dive into the thoughts that inspired Doré and the imagery those thoughts provoked.*

*Eric Bess is a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Doctoral Studies in the Visual Arts (IDSVA) and assistant professor at Fei Tian College in Middletown, N.Y.*

#### God Creates Humans

On the sixth day of creation, before he rested, God created man:

"Let us make now man in our image, man In our similitude, and let them rule Over the fish and fowl of sea and air, Beast of the field, and over all the earth, And every creeping thing that creeps the ground. This said, he formed thee, Adam, thee O man Dust of the ground, and in thy nostrils breathed The breath of life; in his own image he Created thee, in the image of God Express, and thou became'st a living soul." (Book VII, Lines 519–528)

From the dust of the earth, God creates human beings in his own image. This, of course, goes beyond mere appearance. The breath that God breathes into human beings gives them a soul that gives them life, a life that originates in Heaven. Existing with bodies from Earth and souls from Heaven, human beings are the bridge between Heaven and Earth.

With this heavenly link, they are to rule over Earth as heavenly beings rule in Heaven, that is, with benevolence to things on Earth and obedience to God in Heaven. Accomplishing this, they prove themselves worthy to ascend to Heaven to replace the rebel angels now in Hell.

When God rests, the angels in Heaven sing his praises:

"... greater now in thy return Than from the Giant angels; thee that day Thy thunders magnified; but to create Is greater than created to destroy. ... Who seeks To lessen thee, against his purpose serves To manifest the more thy might: his evil Thou usest, and from thence creat'st more good." (Book VII, Lines 604–607, 613–616)

Despite the war that just occurred in Heaven and the fact that the rebel angels were expelled, God still found a way to use the act of creation to turn this negative situation

affects the soul of the obedient, but also affects the world itself, making the world a reflection of Heaven. At the very beginning of His creation, God separates virtue from vice:

"... God the heav'n created, thus the earth, Matter unformed and void: darkness profound th' abyss: but on the wat'ry calm His brooding wings the Spirit of God overspread, And vital virtue infused, and vital warmth Throughout the fluid mass, but downward purged The black tartareous cold in infernal dregs Adverse to life ... ." (Book VII, Lines 232–239)

The "vital virtue" of God spreads throughout the lifeless, dark abyss. These key words, "vital virtue," in contrast to the lifeless, dark abyss, reveal a lot about the act of creation in Milton's poem. God is all that is virtuous and vital. That is, God is all that is good and beneficial to life and its creation. This characteristic of being good and beneficial to life is spread throughout that which is dark and adverse to life and purges it in the process. The mere presence of God's benevolence is enough to eliminate that which is not benevolent.

Doré illustrates Milton's description of creation: Light is separated from darkness, and water is brought to land. The coexistence of these opposites provides the living environment for everything, as the animals of the water, land, and sky emerge.

Doré's illustrations reveal dynamic, high-contrast interpretations of nature's exuberance in its unadulterated state. For instance, "Wave rolling after wave, where they found;/ If steep, with torrent rapture" shows water, reflecting heaven's light, traveling through craggy rocks and falling from above the clouds. No creature is yet in sight.

On the other hand, "And God said: Let the waters generate/Reptile with spawn abundant, living soul;/And let fowl fly above the earth" depicts sea creatures dwelling amid the crashing waves and birds flying across the sky. Rays of light cascade from heaven upon all of creation. God sees it as good.

#### ERIC BESS

John Milton was blind by the time he wrote "Paradise Lost" in 1667. Throughout the text, he occasionally calls out to a "Heav'nly Muse" to inspire him to tell the story of human sin, as he does at the beginning of the book. He opens Book VII with a call to the Heav'nly Muse, who then visits him and drives out the evil around him and only then shows him a truth, a truth he wishes to share with his audience—that is, with us, the readers.

In the previous part of this series, we ended with Archangel Raphael telling Adam how the war in Heaven began. Inevitably, the angels in Heaven defeat the rebel angels and drive them to Hell. After receiving and sharing the events that occurred in Heaven, Milton asks the Heavenly Muse to return him to Earth so he can finish the rest of the revelation. The fact that evil is driven away before Milton continues his poetic revelation is a theme that is repeated.

#### God Creates the World

Adam's inquiries don't end with the war in Heaven. According to Milton, Adam asks Raphael why God created the world. Raphael tells Adam that one of the reasons the world was created was to replenish the universe with a new earth when the rebel angels were expelled from Heaven. This time, however, the newly created human beings on this earth would have to prove their merit before being accepted into Heaven:

"... I can repair That detriment, if such to be to lose Self-lost, and in a moment will create Another world, out of one man a race Of men innumerable, there to dwell, Not here, till by degrees of merit raised They open to themselves at length the way Up higher, under long obedience tried, And earth be changed to Heav'n, and Heav'n to earth, One kingdom, joy and union without end." (Book VII, Lines 152–161)

Here, merit means obedience to God. Only through obedience to God over long periods of time does one become worthy of making it to Heaven. Yet obedience to God not only

#### BOOK REVIEW

## 'How to Save the West: Ancient Wisdom for 5 Modern Crises'

ANDREW BENSON BROWN

Those who don't value tradition usually speak of "ancient wisdom" with squinty eyes and a wrinkled nose, as if they are being force-fed something that tastes bad. The implicit judgment of these people is that such scornful attitudes are indicative of "modern foolishness." But the distinction is something of a false dichotomy.

When looking to ideas of the past for guidance, one seldom thinks of the sophist Gorgias's position that "nothing exists"—but if it does, it cannot be known, and even if it can be known, this knowledge can't be communicated. That students were once hypnotized by such a view, as today's students are of postmodernism, reminds us that the proper distinction to be made doesn't involve a war between old and new ideas, but between ancient wisdom and equally ancient foolishness—between old ideas that work and old ideas that don't.

As Spencer Klavan shows in his new book, "How to Save the West: Ancient Wisdom for 5 Modern Crises," wisdom is rightly recognized by its adherents as occurring within a continuum of civilization. But he also demonstrates that what makes foolishness in all times and places so peculiarly foolish is how it falsely repackages itself as new.

The irony is that the lifestyle of "do what feels good" barely acknowledges its roots. The Greek philosopher Epicurus also taught that people should spend their lives devoted to pleasure.

Adherents to a foolish idea are largely oblivious to its history of failed applications. The view that proposes eliminating the Western Canon from schools is naively perpetuating the same old intellectual errors as the lesser theories within it. Our current dilemma is a perfect exemplar of Spanish American philosopher George Santayana's dictum that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

#### Scope of the Book

Klavan is, in some ways, a latter-day Russell Kirk, providing intellectual coherence to the embattled conservative movement. Like Kirk, he has arisen at a time when liberalism has been culturally dominant, and many feel that it's time for a change.

Unlike Kirk's classic book "The Conservative Mind," which has a timeless quality in its lack of references to day-to-day events, "How to Save the West" frequently ties in ancient wisdom with modern relevance to popular culture. While this will date the book more quickly, it is a necessary and effective method for addressing the "5 Modern Crises" referred to in the book's subtitle.

These crises—of reality, of the body, of meaning, of religion, and of the regime—comprise the book's five sections. Each section contains two chapters: one that draws on an ancient thinker to describe the contemporary version of the problem and one that offers a solution through another ancient idea.

Klavan defines the reality crisis as "a moment at which it seems unappealing, inconvenient, or even naïve to believe that some



PUBLIC DOMAIN

"How to Save the West: Ancient Wisdom for 5 Modern Crises" talks about ancient foolishness and wisdom, the latter being useful today. "Wisdom," 1560, by Titian. Marciana Library, Venice.

**Adherents to a foolish idea are largely oblivious to its history of failed applications.**

things are more real than others." He compares living in Mark Zuckerberg's Metaverse to being shackled in Plato's Cave, mistaking shadows for reality.

Spokespeople for Big Tech usually deny any meaningful distinction between the "real" physical world and the "fake" digital one. But, Klavan reminds us, Plato taught that there is a world outside the cave, an unchanging and eternal reality. From this perspective, someone living their life on a virtual reality headset looks pretty pathetic.

In "The Body Crisis," Klavan draws on the Roman philosopher Plotinus, who despised his own body in favor of the soul, to draw a connection to the modern gender dysphoria problem where people feel "trapped" in the wrong bodies. He then uses Aristotle to explain how soul and body, form and matter, exist as an intertwined and inseparable union.

Klavan defines the crisis of meaning as a world where "there is no inherent system of values or intentions in nature itself." He returns to Plato to show how his dialogue, the "Timaeus," contains an ancient version of biologist Richard Dawkins's "meme" theory, which explains how cultural phenomena spread through imitation and transformation. In Plato's view, time and space are a copy of the infinite timelessness in which the one creator dwells. But where Plato glimpses an objective reality behind the copying, Dawkins sees only "copies of copies, all the way down"—and hence no ground for moral standards.

In "The Crisis of Religion," Klavan addresses the claim that science has killed God. Far from being disproved by any scientific experiment, philosophers of science simply "wrote God out of the picture." In the process, the system promulgated by Francis Bacon and Auguste Comte has become the new priesthood, evolution the new creation myth, and multiverse theory a mystical, unprovable theology.

"Kick faith out the front door," Klavan writes, "and it will come in the back."

The book's climax comes near the end of chapter eight, where Klavan brings together various strands of his earlier arguments to describe a theory of language that accounts for the word of God. He maintains that the thing we are really trying to express, at bottom, is love. Love informs our morality by giving us a sense of what is good and evil. The yearning after truth is, too, "in itself a kind of love" in trying to discover what is good in the world. Klavan's argument, only a few pages long, is a tour de force that should become paradigmatic for many conservative thinkers today.

In "The Regime Crisis," Klavan draws on the Greek historian Polybius's theory of cyclical regimes to explain how our republic has become vulnerable to "the oligarchy of Big Tech, Big Media, and Big Government that wield extraordinary power over the nation." He cites Aristotle's view that political communities are bound together by "philia"—friendship or love—and that this is the key to rediscover our strength.

#### Hold On to What's Real

So just how do we save the West? In his proposed solutions, Klavan is less concerned with putting forth specific programs than suggesting a correct orientation to approaching life and society. Solving the reality crisis involves, in part, a refusal to submit to Big Tech companies that push their technology on us. To solve the body crisis, we must learn to value motherhood again.

The crisis of meaning needs to be overcome by conservatives who create and promote art that finds beauty, truth, and goodness in the world while representing it in a realistic way. The crisis of religion can (obviously) only be solved by finding God again as a culture.

Some might complain that the "how" part of "How to Save the West" is vague, if not wishy-washy. But Klavan's point is that public policies such as Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" are just the opposite of what we need. What is required, rather, is to change our habits of mind, work on building families and civic engagement, and recapture the West within our hearts.

"The way out of this mess, paradoxically, is to think smaller and not bigger," he writes. The solution, in other words, is love.

*Andrew Benson Brown is a Missouri-based poet, journalist, and writing coach. He is an editor at Bard Owl Publishing and Communications and the author of "Legends of Liberty," an epic poem about the American Revolution. For more information, visit [Apollologist.wordpress.com](http://Apollologist.wordpress.com)*

#### 'HOW TO SAVE THE WEST: ANCIENT WISDOM FOR 5 MODERN CRISES'

By Spencer Klavan  
Regnery Publishing  
Feb. 14, 2023  
Hardcover  
256 pages

Plato's allegory of the cave shows the difference between shadows and reality. "Allegory of the Cave."

#### LIGHT COMMENTS ABOUT INTERESTING ART

## Protective Intentions: 'A Boy Defending a Baby From an Eagle'

YVONNE MARCOTTE

My mother once told me this story. When I was three months old, my parents took me camping in northern Wisconsin. We stayed in a small tent. My father went hunting, so my mother sat in a sunny clearing near the tent and put me on a pink blanket nearby. She soon noticed a large bird, possibly a bald eagle, looming high above. Each time it circled, the raptor dropped a little lower. Directly over me. My mother rushed over to me and quickly gathered me back to the tent, safe from a dangerous predator.

Frederick Leighton (1830–96) catches such a moment in his painting "A Boy Defending a Baby From an Eagle." Unaware of its danger, a small sleeping baby would be an easy meal for a large raptor. Perhaps the parents thought the child was safe in a covered area.

Leighton chooses a moment of intense action: An eagle had swooped down and grabbed the baby's blanket. A young boy, who might have been in the field helping his family harvest the grain, rushes forward with arms poised to strike with a scythe. The eagle sees the threat and throws its claw toward the little protector.

The painting is all about intense movement that will end in a clash. The artist captured the intensity of the moment with the eagle and the boy in full action mode. Two physically intense figures are poised to attack.

**The painting is a tondo, a circular painting that was a popular form in the Renaissance.**

Although only a bird, the eagle's ferocity makes it physically imposing. Exuding hunger and power in equal measure, the large predator will let nothing stand in the way of its meal. The eagle's wings are in full flying mode with a fearsome claw ready to pierce the little boy. The other claw will soon take the child itself.

But the eagle is no match for a young boy ready to protect a loved one. Every part of the boy is moving to destroy this threat to the little child. His legs propel him directly toward the danger. His fierce expression shows that he means business. There's no backing away.

The boy's fierce attack suggests a familial relationship to the sleeping child. Living in the same home, eating meals together, and working together make for close relationships. Big brothers have a special place in a growing family. When called upon, they can indeed protect younger siblings from danger.

The painting is a tondo, a circular painting that was a popular form in the Renaissance. The figures flow around the circular shape, as does the receding field of grain on one side and thick greenery on the other. A grayovercast sky balances the gold and green backdrop to the intense action, and the dark brown of the eagle's feathers plays against the white blanket and pink skin of the child.

Frederick Leighton was one of the most influential artists of the Victorian era, and he painted figures in a traditionally



"A Boy Defending a Baby From an Eagle," circa 1850, Lord Frederick Leighton. Oil on canvas, 19 1/4 inches by 19 1/2 inches.

classical manner.

He built an impressive collection of artwork and established an artistic salon for up-and-coming young artists. The Art Story, an online resource for art, describes Leighton's becoming "renowned as a campaigner for artistic and architectural conservation both in London and abroad."



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REWIND, REVIEW, AND RE-RATE

# One of Actor Randolph Scott's Overlooked Western Gems

IAN KANE

I've always been a big fan of George Randolph Scott, more commonly known by his stage name, Randolph Scott. His career spanned more than three decades. And over those many years, he was able to mature into a fine actor, eventually showing off an incredibly diverse range. Although Scott was excellent in almost any genre of film he appeared in—from dramas and comedies to musicals and war films—he is most closely associated with the great American Western.

In fact, Scott's final film was the superlative Western "Ride the High Country" in 1962. But he also starred in a lesser-known (although equally impressive) 1958 movie of the same ilk, titled "Buchanan Rides Alone." It was based on the novel "The Name's Buchanan" by American author Jonas Ward and was helmed by the great American director Budd Boetticher.

Scott stars as Tom Buchanan, a drifter who crosses the border from Mexico into the small, dust-strewn town of Agry, California. As Buchanan rides past the sheriff's office, he is immediately ordered to dismount his horse by Sheriff Lew Agry (Barry Kelley), who tells one of his deputies to search the drifter's saddlebags. During the search, the sheriff's young ne'er-do-well nephew, Roy Agry (William Leslie), flies past them on his horse wearing bloody scratches on his face.

Finding no contraband, the sheriff menacingly tells Buchanan not to "linger" in town for too long. After the rude reception, Buchanan reserves a room at the Agry Town Hotel down a dusty street, managed by another Agry named Amos (Peter Whitney). Although Amos looks somewhat like Quasimodo and seems to possess the mental faculties of a dimwit, he's a shrewd man who quickly surmises that Buchanan possesses more money than his raggedy appearance would suggest.

Buchanan walks across the street to yet another Agry establishment (see a pattern now?), a funky joint hilariously named the

**For his 62 years, Randolph Scott moves spryly around the set's border town.**

## 'Buchanan Rides Alone'

**Director:**  
Budd Boetticher

**Starring:**  
Randolph Scott, Craig Stevens, Barry Kelley

**MPAA Rating:**  
Not Rated

**Running Time:**  
1 hour, 20 minutes

**Release Date:**  
Aug. 6, 1958

★★★★☆



Agry Palace Saloon, where Roy is threatening the bartender to hand over a bottle of whiskey. Apparently, the older Agry men don't want the young hothead to be drinking, so the bartender resists as best he can before Buchanan interrupts the commotion and knocks the latter out in self-defense after the lad turns on him.

When Roy comes to, he glowers with murderous intent at Buchanan, who is nonchalantly sitting in the saloon and grubbing down on a steak. Roy tells Buchanan that he's going to kill him as soon as he's done downing a bottle of whiskey. But the troublemaker doesn't have to wait long for some action. Suddenly, young Mexican Juan de la Vega (Manuel Rojas) storms into the saloon and shoots Roy dead. It seems that the scratches on Roy's face have something to do with the impromptu killing.

Soon, Buchanan is pulled into the small town's murky orbit, chiefly due to the head of the crooked Agry clan: the aspiring politician and scheming judge Simon Agry. The Agrys hastily cobble together a threadbare narrative that has Buchanan somehow being involved in Roy's death. Buchanan is thrown into jail with the Mexican shooter, and the two are put on the fast track for a public hanging. Will the corrupt sheriff get his rushed lynching (and subsequent pilfering of Buchanan's \$2,000)?

### An Entertaining Western

Although this movie deals with some rather serious subject matter (an assumed rape and rushed lynching), it manages to remain

buoyant and never falls into the doldrums that many Westerns in later decades did. On the contrary, there's quite a bit of humor injected into many of the scenes—and not just through dialogue.

Simply watching Amos Agry waddling his hefty, sweaty body around town while either eavesdropping or delivering some choice bit of strategically placed gossip to various parties had me laughing out loud. Watch Peter Whitney act out his character's devious machinations and you can see why he was considered such an amazing character actor.

Randolph Scott was likewise excellent in his role and looks great for his 62 years at the time. His lanky frame rides high in his saddle and moves spryly around the troubled border town.

The film's taut pacing moves the 120-minute running time along nicely. With all of the scheming, backstabbing, and plot twists going on, by its end, it seemed like I'd watched a much longer movie.

"Buchanan Rides Alone" is one of the more engaging films of Randolph Scott's later career and a great watch, purely for its entertainment value—and for the shrewd watcher, clever subtexts of more serious issues.

You can watch this film here: *Vudu, Apple TV, Crackle.*

*Ian Kane is an U.S. Army veteran, author, filmmaker, and actor. He is dedicated to the development and production of innovative, thought-provoking, character-driven films and books of the highest quality.*

Riding high in his saddle, Randolph Scott is great in one of his final film roles as drifter Tom Buchanan, in "Buchanan Rides Alone."

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