Cultural Restitution and the American Political Order: A Book Review Symposium

A Conservative Quest to Reclaim and Recover America: Localism Light and a Sacred American Founding

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Both of these 2019 books are co-authored by relatively recognizable conservatives who, in the main, are academics with doctoral degrees in political science. In each of the books, the authors describe in wholly unoriginal ways what almost everyone on the right views as an interconnected series of recent changes, even potentially fatal ones to American culture, politics, and life more generally. Both pairs of authors offer similar cures that involve encouraging localism, though without consistently confronting why localism, in reality, is noxious to American progressives who currently view state-level and local racism as the most destructive feature of American social and political life. It is as if they—more than they recognize and in a contradictory fashion—side with progressives on the need to police American states and local communities to prevent morally-repugnant racism and sexism.

Both sets of authors also insist on the need for a deeper appreciation of the genius of the American founding, though without necessarily believing that this history must rest on factual historical accounts offered by historians, who have no place in either work. Instead the four authors are primarily concerned with advancing a sacred history. More particularly for Lawler and Reinsch, they do so by following the vision offered by an obscure nineteenth-century Catholic convert and man of letters, Orestes Brownson. While

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being generally opposed to John Locke's putative controlling influence on the American Founding and the pervasiveness of individualism among elite Founders, both books bizarrely and wholly ignore every contrary secondary treatment written opposing the historical standing of the individualism they insist on reifying and every other body of thought and practice then available.[1] The intellectual world of the late-eighteenth century was one in which educated men read far more widely than the four authors seem to recognize, be it works generally associated with classical republicanism, English and Scottish Enlightenment authors, continental natural law theorists, or the powerfully formative influence of English/British constitutional law and practices.[2] It is as if they wish to create in Lockeanism a straw man that they will then partly replace with some bipartisan synthesis of diverse elements: be it Northern and Southern ways, liberalism and conservativism, or individualism and egalitarianism.

Maybe, in the end, it is the authors' vision of American history and what they believe their ecosystem of conservative publishers, reviewers, and readers desire—as claimed by the blurbs on the back of their dust jackets—that is one of the captivating features of these two brief books and what they might say, even if only implicitly and mostly uninspiringly, about these interlocking communities. Before turning to these and other matters, though, let me begin by providing a brief overview of each text.

In the first section of *Coming Home*, McAllister and Frohnen explain that their historical claims rest on seven key assertions, with the most prominent being that what would become the United States always had a soul divided between conservativism and liberalism; that the Federal Constitution embodies both; and that early-twentieth century Progressives are hostile "to all American intellectual traditions" (xv-xvi). An additional six claims are made in the second part of the book regarding what Americans must do "to reclaim their civilizational home": 1) reanimate township government; 2) make the family, once again, the center of local life; 3) return religion, also, to the center of American life; 4) regain control over our borders; 5) resist globalist elites as they seek to de-

[1] The absence of any consideration of contrary views is striking. One might begin with two contrasting older takes on Locke published the same year by the same press: Barry Alan Shain, *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) and Michael P. Zuckert, *Natural Rights and the New Republicanism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). A recent work has done much to illuminate the mostly post-WWII creation of "Lockeanism" as central to founding-era political thought. See Claire Rydell Arcenas, *America's Philosopher: John Locke in American Intellectual Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022).

[2] See Donald S. Lutz, "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought," *The American Political Science Review* 78, no. 1 (March 1984), 193, where he lists the most cited authors by decade, with Montesquieu and Blackstone being by far the most frequent.

stroy "the economic independence of families and local communities"; and lastly, 6) regain control of local schools and universities and "break the monopoly on educational power currently held" by national elites (xxiii-xxiv). Almost all of these concerns and goals, even if lacking in originality, will prove congenial to conservative audiences, but how our authors envision that these ends can actually be achieved will prove far less compelling.

There are several troubling features of the other book, *A Constitution in Full*, that, from the outset, should be emphasized. First, six of the seven chapters were previously published by one or the other of the two authors (with Peter Lawler having died far too young before the book was largely finished by Richard Reinsch) and, thus, there is a lack of continuity and a great deal of repetition in what in truth is a book of essays. Next, the book's insistence on closely following the thought of Orestes Brownson in his characterization of America is hard to accept without first assuming that Brownson's historiography is inerrant and deeply insightful. This is urged but there is never any attempt to demonstrate it; it is to be accepted as a matter of religious-like faith. Finally, far too much of the writing in this book is ponderous, even approaching obscure.

A Constitution in Full begins with a lengthy and an especially difficult-to-read prologue recommending Brownson's post-Civil War historical analysis. In it, Lawler and Reinsch commend his view of America as a combination of New England egalitarianism and Southern individualism (13). This is asserted without the authors ever considering that a better understanding of America and its future may be found in what had been the middle colonies rather than either the North or South. Then, in an unexpected segue to a second chapter or essay, the authors consider the role of the Bill of Rights as viewed by Alexander Hamilton and, then, by a number of contemporary academics. Strikingly, the authors move from 1787 to the twentieth century without any exploration of the intervening 120 years of history, especially without ever mentioning or considering the role of *Barron v. Baltimore* (1833), which upheld a model of states' rights very different from the individualist understanding of the Bill of Rights which we live with now, in nearly 100 years of Supreme Court jurisprudence.

Lawler and Reinsch, later in the work, end with an almost poetic meditation on the Southern Stoicism of Walker and Will Percy and the aristocratic superiority of the Southern planters who viewed themselves "as ruling the blacks and ordinary whites paternalistically, as gentlemen who by nature and education deserved to rule" and that "their class was displaced in the early twentieth century by more 'populist' or angrily racist and vulgarly democratic political leaders" (142). On display here is the authors'—quite likely uniquely the surviving author's—elitist intoler-

ant hostility to Trump and his populist voters (144-45). The substantive chapters (with an epilogue to follow) thus close in concluding that Walker Percy "was, in fact, a homegrown American Thomist," who endorsed the aristocratic criticism of clueless middle-class voters and their ignorant vulgarity (145). Beyond a sense of aristocratic entitlement exuded by these authors, what exactly does "a homegrown American Thomist" mean? Similarly, what is meant by an equally opaque religious reference that "true religion is catholic—and because American political power is limited by that fact—Brownson could say without any irony that America, in form, is a Catholic country" (16)? Possibly such comments, without much greater clarification, make sense to certain readers, but for the uninitiated, these comments may appear insightful while ringing hollow, like so much of this work.

In a manner that almost all on the right will view as welcome, in *Coming Home*, McAllister and Frohnen begin by claiming—Lawler and Reinsch will similarly imply as much—that contemporary America is deeply diseased and one of the central causes is that Americans have lost faith in their "essential ideals and institutions," and that this has led to their becoming effectively homeless (ix-x). In particular, the sense of homelessness they find in America is due to the Progressive thought of the early-twentieth century, in which "all that used to be safe and understandable has been rendered toxic and bewildering" (xiii) by this putatively alien body of thought. And at least as concerning to the two books' authors is the left's conquest—in the years following the turmoil of the 1960s—of the universities; of the legal profession and the courts; of public schools; and of journalism (70-72), so that today the "leftists have formed an interlocking network of institutions dedicated to transforming America. They have real power" (72). Even if unoriginal, can anyone on the right, and even some on the left, no matter his or her particular set of commitments, disagree with this? Likely few will or can, but I fear that the authors in both books fail to explain how this came to pass or, far more disappointingly, how these changes in reality might be resisted or reversed.

Likely also congenial to many conservative readers is McAllister and Frohnen's claim that progressive elites "have constructed a globalist system that is corrosive to all the natural institutions necessary to human happiness" (111). This seems credible even if hyperbolic but what, once again, do they believe can and should be done? The authors provide a rather pessimistic answer in that these circumstances are "outside the normal reach of political or social resources to resolve or change" (118). If so, beyond lamenting the changes occurring daily ever more quickly, what hope or guidance do the authors' offer their readers in response? Their common prescription, though not exactly the same, is renewed American localism and a new appreciation of a sacred rather than

factual American founding history.

Localism, then, is of particular importance to the authors of *Coming Home,* who devote its entire second section to its defense. There the authors consider a number of public policy areas in which they suggest the battle against the onslaught of the left must be fought and won. First and foremost, McAllister and Frohnen hold that the critics of communalism are wrong in viewing "township life as socially narrow and boring, or insufficiently 'diverse,' while they [the critics] look to the national government to guarantee that 'the locals' abide by uniform rules" (84). Does their characterization really ring true? Lawler and Reinsch, too, end *A Constitution in Full* by asking "what could make our country less split?" (153). Their answer is to demand a citizenship "more fully attentive to our local communities" which is lived "in accordance with closely held meanings of the good life" (153-54). But as much as this is to be commended, will an increased emphasis on localism really lead to a less divided nation in which progressives insist on using federal bureaucracy in every corner of the country to protect what they perceive to be the interests and rights of women, blacks, gays, and other "victimized populations"? Again, does anyone agree that these remedies will lead to a less rather than a more divided country? If localism is to be made the backbone of the conservative vision defended by both sets of authors—as it rightly should—must it not go further in making local communalism less subject to federal intervention? And can this be done by pretending—as the authors do—that most local communities will readily follow the normative prescriptions and the pursuit of the good life of American progressive elites? The authors' overly romantic (and, still more surprising, progressive-compliant) view of localism ultimately robs their defense of it of much of its persuasiveness even if, in so doing, they may make progressive-leaning elitist readers more comfortable.

Similarly, McAllister and Frohnen also reasonably emphasize the necessity of families and religion for a well-lived life. In regard to the former, they argue "that so many people have rejected or rather forgotten what a family is supposed to be because they have lost contact with human nature," as they have forgotten the "real natural differences between men and women" (93). No doubt something along these lines is very much true but, again, the authors offer no real path capable of reversing ever more dominant national societal trends moving ever faster in the opposite direction. Defending what I view as 'localism light,' I fear, will prove inadequate for the task at hand; something more robust is needed.

When religion is discussed directly, McAllister and Frohnen focus, among other subjects, on school policies, while noting that public schools were "unabashedly religious until well into the twentieth century . . . and the law was unabashedly mor-

alistic" (103-04). With the changes wrought in the twentieth century in mind, they write that some form of compromise was reached in which Catholic schools were accepted (105). Is that really what occurred? Isn't it more the case that a real and novel separation of church and state began to emerge rapidly under the tutelage of the Second Klan, which sought to make schools more secular in order to prevent local school districts from providing financial support to public schools with a dominant Catholic population, while in 1924 nativists sought to ensure that Catholics from Ireland and Southern Europe would not be allowed into the country? (Philip Hamburger is an essential guide in these matters.)[3] Again, in this instance as well, both sets of authors are unwilling to confront fully the reality and challenges of localism in practice that they support in theory.

When focusing directly on education, while recognizing why conservatives have abundant reasons to condemn public schools (128), the only solution offered by McAllister and Frohnen "is a return to local control" (132). This sounds, on the face of it, commendable but, again, both sets of authors are reticent to confront one of the most important reasons for a loss of local control over the past century: the desire of national progressive elites to ensure that public schools racially integrate. By ignoring the historical nature of localism and the role played by intrusive progressives in creating an America that Lawler and Reinsch recommend, they confidently conclude that we need to reanimate localism but, of course, without compromising "the progress we've made on behalf of women, blacks, gays, and so forth as free and equal individuals and citizens in both the marketplace and the political arena" (152). The authors, then, recommend "a newfound growth in their [the states'] freedoms and responsibilities" while overcoming the legacy of "too much subsidiarity (racism)," especially in "the South" (154). But how is localism to be protected from national elite intrusion while ensuring that "too much subsidiarity" in racial matters is prevented?[4] Lawler and Reinsch, in their deeply dissatisfying equivocation, offer nothing other than their defense of aristocratic southern elitism in which the local racist buffoons are made to follow the guidance of their betters.

If localism and the need, especially in the South, to prevent racism are simultaneously defended by both sets of authors, then slavery must, even more so, be shown to be impossible in any conservative defense of localism. This is taken up by McAllister and Frohnen in their third

[3] See Philip Hamburger's pathbreaking work, *Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004).

[4] This is a question that might be asked, too, of the newly minted National Conservatives and their confusing stance vis-à-vis localism and nationalism. In particular, see Scott Yenor, "In Defense of National Conservatism," *Law and Liberty*, July 28, 2022 and Christopher DeMuth, "America's Right Confronts the 21st Century," *Wall Street Journal*, November 19-20, 2022, A17.

chapter. In response, the authors embrace what seems like a wholly implausible historical account in which they claim that localism must be limited—without showing how—by "higher moral principles" of English common law and that chattel slavery was, in reality, only a result of innovations that freed "the English and Americans from tradition" and enabled "them to introduce and then justify this specific form of barbarism" (23). Although most will strongly sympathize with their concern and aspirations, their history makes the "1619 Project's" characterization of the Declaration of Independence's equality claim far closer to historical reality than their—like so many others closely associated with the "1776 Commission's" fabricated history—wholly unconvincing argument that tradition, when married to localism in some manner, could have prevented, resisted, and/or ended Southern slavery. Like so much else in the two authors' prescriptions, it is utterly lacking in credibility. (Changing economics, of course, is another matter.) Nonetheless, if localism and populist conservatism, with which it is closely linked in America, is to prove defensible, there must be some way of viewing it as not necessarily making race-based slavery possible, both in the past and in any imaginable future.

An answer does exist, one that I think is more plausible than that offered by McAllister and Frohnen, but it is less moralistic and more legalistic than the authors might wish. This understanding might also prevent a supervening elite from intruding into the moral lives of diverse communities while still helping prevent chattel slavery and pernicious racism. Like localism more generally, it demands a stringent return to a vision of America—in a phrase I have come to use—as a land of islands of intolerance in a sea of tolerance, in which the supervisory federal authorities are dedicated to protecting one and likely only one right, that of individual exit, including to those in bondage. (Chandran Kukathas may be particularly helpful as a guide here.)[5] This would demand that each state joining the union would first have to accept the Constitution's first two paragraphs of Article IV section 2, the comity clause. A localism that follows these contours might have made it impossible to enforce slavery and the return of fugitive slaves in a country half free and half slave without needing to eradicate local autonomy and differing and competing constructions of a well-lived life.

Both sets of authors at times come close to defending something similar, but without focusing on the right of exit, without consistency, and often wholly lacking in the courage and needed vigor to defend the realities and particularism of lived American localism against progressive elite condemnation. Nonetheless, Lawler and Reinsch conclude that "a political gift would be to

[5] See Chandran Kukathas, *The Liberal Archipelago: A Theory of Diversity and Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

recognize . . . the rights of states to be self-governing, *even in controversial social ways"* (italics added, 154). As welcome as such claims are, both sets of authors seem too ready to believe that a defense of local cultural particularism can be mounted without challenges regarding racial, sexual, and religious intolerance coming to the fore; they are almost certainly wrong. Given that progressive elites wish to create a blacker and browner, feminist- and transgender-welcoming, and far less Christian, country, a conservative defense of localism has to meet resolutely the progressive onslaught, and this will prove, for many timid conservatives, including most likely Reinsch, hard to imagine. In fact, it is this unwillingness to resist boldly progressive transformational aspirations that renders the authors' defense of localism half-hearted and so unconvincing.

In addition to demanding a return to localism in a quest to save the country from progressive-advanced changes, McAllister and Frohnen emphasize the need for "a deep knowledge of one's history" that can provide substance for "a meaningful story," without recognizing that these two goals are almost certainly in conflict (p. 7). For example, they write in a sophomoric fashion that the War for Independence was due to "an overreaching king whose innovations threatened inherited rights and liberties" (6). In so doing, though, they enter the realm of national myth, and this is still truer when they claim that "the Constitution arose, not from a desire to forge a 'new nation,' but from a determination to protect Americans' way of life" (8). Even if one were prepared to believe these commonplace but false tropes, they are all offered without any evidence, primary or secondary. In particular, they seemed to have missed that George III's central demerit from the colonial perspective was his unwillingness to depart from his constitutional role, the opposite of a tyrant, and that the colonists had for 12 years sought a closer, not a more limited, relationship with their king. And that what the most celebrated Framers—maybe, as I would urge, we have chosen badly which ones to celebrate—sought was exactly what is denied here, that is, to move the country from being a confederation in which the central government had limited functions while acting on its component–elements (the states) to a more-or-less centralized national government that legislated for, conscripted, and taxed individuals directly, i.e. the America of the twentieth-century sought by both "Publius" and later, their Progressive admirers.

Lawler and Reinsch find in particular much to laud in the work of the political scientist Willmoore Kendall due to "his rebuttal of modern political science orthodoxy and its emphasis on the antidemocratic Constitution," and that is because the aims of "the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 were not to act against the principles of majority will, but were to build a republican order that would be governed by the people through

deliberation and compromise" (76). At the very minimum, each of these claims is open to contestation and much here is contradicted by the very words of the Constitution's Framers.[6] This does not mean that an accurate history that serves the authors' goal of resisting the pernicious aspirations of the left is unimaginable, but it cannot be found by creating a fanciful view of 1776-1787 with which to offset some of the equally or more improbable claims of progressive historians. Nonetheless, an accurate and useful history that emphasizes American local autonomy will likely demand, in many cases, that a different cast of localist Founders and Framers be celebrated and elevated and this, at least for the moment, would necessarily challenge numerous mythic constructions of American history, particularly those celebrated by the architects of the "1776 Commission" and their defense of Lincoln's imaginative re-founding of America.

McAllister and Frohnen might, in a certain sense, have anticipated this critique in that they recognize, even without full awareness of how it might especially apply to them, that "the most violent and consequential battles within the conservative movement were waged over history. . . . savage intellectual battles raged about Lincoln's place in the American story and about the peculiar nature of the South and its history of slavery and Jim Crow" (52). This seems right and this review, then, is very much in keeping with this tradition of conservative intramural contestation regarding American history and how to respond to the challenge represented by the South, the center of American conservatism, and to the putatively conservative defenders of Lincoln and his attack on the democratic and localistic America of 1776.

An American history based on evidence gets still further left behind as our authors elevate to religious dogma the historical musings of Orestes Brownson, as if they were apodictic historical truth without need of further corroboration by either primary or secondary evidence. His musings are simply to be accepted as matters of faith. And according to McAllister and Frohnen, of particular importance to Brownson's history is "that the fundamentally Protestant American founding was rooted in the tradition of natural law," if you will, a Roman Catholic import in a uniquely Protestant country (28). Among those elements of Brownson's thought which both sets of authors recommend is the idea of an unwritten constitution standing behind the written one and the idea of a territorially delimited democracy. Moreover, according to Lawler and Reinsch, it is only in Brownson that the truth about America is to be found, "somewhere between Virginia and New England: The Virginians were uncivilized criminals

[6] See Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787*. Vols. 1-3. Original 1911. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966). On Kendall's (and Leo Strauss') complicated views of these matters, see the instructive account in Arcenas, *America's Philosopher*, 147-62.

. . . but the Puritans criminalized sin" (137). More to the point, it was Brownson who first noticed that "the true interpretation of the American Constitution . . . combines Southern particularity with Northern universality," whatever this concretely means (141). Strangely, the wish to make Brownson some kind of national avatar has led both sets of authors to defend the centrality of Locke and individualism in the colonies and early nation, without ever questioning either claim, while using individualism as an antipode in Brownson's creative typology of the archetypical South and North.

Ironically, though, both sets of authors claim that the individualism that serves as part of the Browsonian imagined synthesis is destroying the country. Nonetheless, they do so while placing it and the thought of John Locke at the center of the American founding (though rather typically, it is only Locke's thought as found in one-half of a slim volume that is considered, while leaving aside all of the rest of his vast philosophical corpus).[7] Their (doubly narrow) focus on Locke is, thus, historically questionable and still more, again, unexpected given the hostility, latent or explicit, that both sets of authors hold towards individualism. Still, Lawler and Reinsch find in their usual perplexing ways that the Framers "were, on the level of theorists, innovating Lockeans who aimed at the revolutionary reconstruction not only of government but of all life" (15) and these same men understood themselves "as atheistic enlightened rationalists in the theoretical mold of John Locke," even if *they* were likely wrong about him (16). No evidence either primary or secondary, of course, is offered, and why this puzzling emphasis exists in light of the authors' hostility to individualism is, too, left unexplained.

McAllister and Frohnen similarly insist that property rights in the eighteenth-century were consistently viewed, following Locke of the *Second Treatise*, as natural rights, rather than attending to the active debate in the eighteenth century between those who followed Locke in viewing property as a natural right (109) and most seventeenth and eighteenth-century natural law theorists, French authors like Rousseau, and still more influential Swiss, German, and Scottish theorists who held that property was an adventitious right. This is not the place to decide which was the dominant view in the colonies—I have argued that the absence of property in the Declaration's list of inalienable rights likely resulted from the dominance in the colonies of the natural law theorists who would have excluded it from being a natural one—but our authors

[7] Again, see Arcenas, *America's Philosopher*, for her persuasive review of the Locke that was actually read in the eighteenth century, most particularly concerning epistemology, theology, horticulture, currency, morality, and education, and not the political matters in the second half of a book that came to be emphasized in the twentieth century as American publicists and educators sought a principal spokesman with which to confront Communism.

seem wholly uninterested in this debate with their focus on Locke that precludes even the most preliminary exploration of other authors, some of whom were in the late-eighteenth century equally or still more influential than Locke.[8]

In a curious way, then, both books unduly elevate liberalism in order to create an interplay of competing American traditions: in *Coming Home* these are liberalism and a dominant conservativism, and in *A Constitution in Full*, they include the North and South, with the former being, confusingly, liberal and egalitarian and the latter being conservative and individualistic. In keeping with their both needing and rejecting individualism, Lawler and Reinsch predictably challenge the prominent liberal legal historian Akhil Amar's view of the original Bill of Rights as intending to protect states and localities from federal intrusion by their insisting that in the debate "over the need for a declaration or bill of rights," they had discovered "evidence that protection of individual rights was clearly a concern voiced by both opponents and friends of the Constitution" (41). The conservative authors' goal, if you will, is to "prove" that the original Bill of Rights was more individualistic than Amar has convincingly shown it was and, thus, is more in keeping with the conventional Straussian tale of a largely individualist and Lockean founding.[9] So they conclude, without any evidence, that as "we have shown . . . incorporating enumerated federal rights in the Constitution against the states [in the 1870s or more likely the 1930s-60s] did not entail the constitutional revolution that Amar articulates" (42). How can this curious dualism of both trying to build up the centrality of individualism, often while ignoring copious evidence, both primary and secondary, to the contrary, while wishing later to denigrate it, be understood as anything other than an effort to help make sense of Brownson's juxtaposition of democracy and individualism, or North and South? But if so, to what end?

Well, of course, according to Brownson, it helps explain the social contract theory of Locke which "was the most consistent teaching among the Founders" that led to "their act of Independence and forging of the Constitution" (107). Further, we are told by Lawler and Reinsch that what led to the Civil War was the inability of American statesmen, including Lincoln, to control "the

[8] See Barry Alan Shain, "Rights Natural and Civil in the Declaration of Independence," in *The Nature of Rights at the American Founding and Beyond*, ed. Barry Alan Shain (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 116-62. Among the authors discussed here are authoritative Continental Natural Law theorists, including Burlamaqui, Vattel, and Pufendorf, who defended individual property rights as adventitious, i.e. social, rather than natural. Again, see Lutz, "The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought," 189-97.

[9] Straussians seem united in their belief in Locke's powerful influence uniquely shaping America while being divided in their view as to whether his influence is more or less pernicious (East Coast) or wholly salutary and even essential (Jaffa and his West Coast acolytes).

centrifugal tendencies of our Lockean Declaration of Independence" (116). Seemingly, it was not the misunderstood claim of equality that led to this end. As usual, contrary evidence, such as Congress' 1777 response to the New Hampshire Grants petitioners is never considered. In it, almost all the same delegates who had approved the 1776 Declaration rebuffed the petitioners' appeal to this document by reminding them that the Declaration's equality and rights claims were in defense of thirteen communities, not of individuals or any other communities, and thus, "it cannot be intended that Congress, by any of its proceedings, would do or recommend or countenance any thing injurious to the rights and jurisdictions of the several communities which it represents."[10] But, nonetheless, they claim that Locke does not offer the whole truth about who we are (139), as his unfettered individualism created an empty and unsustainable world to which must be added the world of Southern aristocrats that preserves, in the ever-perplexing and pretentious language of Lawler and Reinsch, "the greatness of the human person against the leveling atomism of the individualism that morphs into pantheism" (141). The amalgamation project of both sets of authors is, even if hard to follow as to which was individualist and which not, a remarkably bold effort, if you will, to reimagine Protestant America in the likeness that the Catholic Brownson preferred.

The authors of both books conclude, in spite of their confusingly both uncritical and critical view of Locke and individualism, that the true villain of their work is not individualism but rather Progressives who brought an alien body of thought to America "for the first time, usually among immigrants . . . in the first decades of the twentieth century" (McAllister and Frohnen, 26). And what, above all, are these not truly American immigrant Progressives guilty of having done? Well, they argued that by the early-twentieth century, the sacred American "founding was outdated" (36) while defending "the reach and power of the federal government beyond anything imagined at the founding," except in the unfulfilled aspirations of the likes of Hamilton and Madison (38). Similar arguments are advanced by Lawler and Reinsch, and neither pair of authors provide any evidence to support their challenge to Progressive historiography. Like things sacred, they are simply to be believed. More strikingly, in *Coming Home*, the authors find that "Progressives want[ed] to transform America—to destroy what it is and make it anew according to their vision of justice," but one wonders whether in the authors' ahistorical vision of the Constitution, something like Lincoln's, they are not doing much the same thing, that is, rewriting American history, while attempting to re-found America, just as they accuse the

[10] Barry Alan Shain, ed., *The Declaration of Independence in Historical Context* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), p. 593.

early-twentieth century Progressives of having done (146).

Under attack by Lawler and Reinsch are Progressives, like President Woodrow Wilson, for their unwillingness to treat the Constitution with appropriate religious reverence. In particular, our four authors are aghast at Wilson's stigmatization of the Founders' "'new science of politics' as [already when written in 1787] outdated," as it almost surely was when compared to evolving British constitutionalism and the unanticipated rise of political parties in both countries in the late-eighteenth century (95). Of still greater concern to the two sets of authors, Progressives saw in "federalism and [the] separation of powers unnatural and unscientific political limitations that enfeeble the [democratic] pursuit of the rightful objects of government," as the Progressives in their embrace of responsible party government sought "to move beyond, the political principles of the American founding," which must be treated forever with reverence (95-96). But, then, what is truly at stake in contending claims regarding the Progressives' future-looking and critical historiography versus the authors' claimed conservative backward-looking and reverential understandings of the Constitution?

In partial answer, McAllister and Frohnen write that "we belong to the natural order of things through the specific *stories* we each inhabit." And the great danger to keep in mind "is that we will lose our *stories* . . . [and] that 'each man [will] forget his ancestors'" (xviii, emphasis added). Similarly, when turning to the renewed tradition of conservatism in the 1940s and 1950s, the authors draw attention to "the historical mythmaking" of Russell Kirk (45), a theme which is repeated when the authors discuss President Ronald Reagan, who, like Kirk, they claim was "a master mythmaker who told a story a great majority of Americans could recognize as their own" (62). Accordingly, "conservatives must become the storytellers of our national identity. We must reclaim our own history . . . [by concentrating] on reaching larger publics with better stories of our national heritage" (78). It seems as if in *Coming Home*, the authors are not concerned with making sure they get their history right and instead are focused on making sure that the right is capable of providing mythic national narratives that can contend with those of the left. Maybe this is necessary, but for those who believe that truth, or at least the attempt to uncover it, is the highest calling of an academic, the quest after more salutary myths is sure to leave them unsatisfied and wanting to turn away from the authors' quest to become patriotic story-tellers, no matter how salutary these stories might be. Should not this be left to those—for example elementary school teachers and politicians—for whom truth is at best a subsidiary value?

What most readers of these two books will not need to be convinced of is that this country is facing an ever more aggressive threat from

the cultural, political, business, and intellectual left that views the country's political and social traditions and practices, as well as many of its citizens, in particular non-elite white male Christians, with virulent disdain. What is needed by the same audience, though, is a convincing account of what can and should be done to arrest these changes and aspirations. In part, both *Coming Home* and *A Constitution in Full* rise to this challenge in their common defense of localism and the need for a reverential American history. Their timid defense of localism, though, is marred by an unwillingness to recognize that true local autonomy, so much sought in these works, cannot be defended while simultaneously hoping, as one set of authors most clearly does, to please left elites and satisfy their insistence that their understanding of racial and gendered justice be protected against majoritarian and vulgar populist moral visions not to their liking. Similarly, a defense of American history most likely cannot both be preeminently concerned with the truth, that is, objective history, while simultaneously serving what Nietzsche, in his *On the Use and Abuse of History*, describes as the goals of monumental history. Nietzsche knew as much, and our authors should have taken heed. This is not to argue that conservatives cannot mount a compelling defense of localism and provide a salutary history that honestly and accurately highlights American strengths. In truth, both may be essential. But even if a needed conversation were begun here, these books failed to provide a courageous, consistent, and convincing game plan for resisting and taking back the country, if only half of it, from the onslaught and progressive aspirations of a revolutionary national elite. One, in these most trying times, must unfortunately look elsewhere for such guidance.