

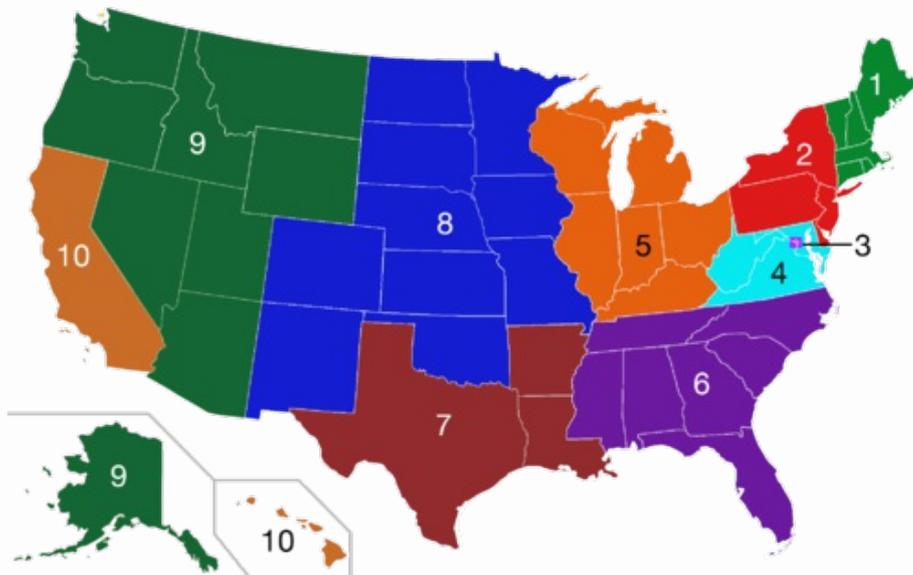
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“Secession and Messianic Statism: Evaluating the Current Union of the States, Part 1” By Allen Mendenhall

By Allen Mendenhall, February 7, 2014



Editorial Foreword: This essay by **Allen Mendenhall** is Part 1 of the second installment of a *Nomocracy in Politics* symposium, “Evaluating the Current Union of States.” Part 2 of Mendenhall’s essay will be forthcoming. This symposium will examine the various costs and benefits that Americans and others incur as a result of our current Union of States –a.k.a., the United States of America. The symposium will progress gradually over a period of weeks. *Nomocracy in Politics* would also like to credit **Mike Church** for providing the initial creative impetus for this symposium. Please also consider Bruce Frohnen’s earlier symposium essay [here](#).

Essay: One of my favorite literary critics, Harold Bloom, has said that “cultural prophecy is always a mug’s game.”^[i] While speculating about the nature and future of the American Union, I’m mindful not only of Bloom’s admonition, for the future of government is the also the future of the culture on which government is based, but also of Hamlet’s exhortation to Horatio: “There are more things in heaven and earth ... [t]han are dreamt of in your philosophy.”^[ii] A prophet advised that “as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”^[iii] To say that I’m dissatisfied with the current political order does not mean, therefore, that I fancy myself able to imagine a more desirable order that is also virtuous and tenable; nor does it mean that I believe fallen and fallible humans will ever design a system that would satisfy and protect all individuals subject to it. I hold to F. A. Hayek’s conviction that “perfectionism of one kind or another ... has often destroyed whatever degree of decency societies have achieved.”^[iv] Like Hayek, then, I do not concern myself with hypotheses or prophecies about the ultimate or ideal system of government but, instead, with “that condition of men in which coercion of some by others is reduced as much as is possible.”^[v] Russell Kirk was right that ideology “is a political formula that

promises mankind an earthly paradise," but that, "in cruel fact," has created "a series of terrestrial hells."^[vi] So it is with an abundance of caution, a resistance to ideology, and an awareness of my own intellectual limitations that I celebrate and support what I consider to be a gradual and subtle move away from the nation state paradigm that characterizes the current American political system.

Donald Livingston has pointed out that the "conflicts that divide Americans today are as profound as in any period in our history," and also that "the nation-state itself and national identities created after the French Revolution no longer have the salience they once had and, in some cases, have disintegrated through secession."^[vii] In 2013, the potential secession of Scotland from the United Kingdom was not the only proposed dissolution of political bands to make headlines in American newspapers: to varying degrees, counties in **Colorado**, **California**, **Maryland**, and **Alabama** determined they were better off divorced from their mother state. It is likely that the gradual disintegration of the American central government, which "has encouraged an abstract ideological style of politics that favors universalist, egalitarian solutions applying across the board to all elements of the population,"^[viii] will occur not at the state level, but at the more local level of municipalities and counties. In any case, it is reasonable if not commonsense to suppose that the United States of America, under its current boundaries and within its current constitutional framework, cannot last forever. Guessing, however, at the form and manner of the eventual demise of this country seems, to me, to involve hazardous predictions that prudent persons ought to avoid. It is far more agreeable to deal in experiential observations about the scale and scope of our existing institutions and to avoid designing and naming some future model. The object of this piece, then, is to consider the potential benefits of decentralizing the American federal government, perhaps by the secession of states or of parts of states, perhaps by other means.

The stigma attached to the word "secession" in America undermines the very prospect of secession in all parts of North America, but the fact of the matter is that all political orders come to an end. Although it is hyperbolic to suggest that secession is imminent or in the air, as it were, or that America is nearing the end of its lifespan, there is a possibility that in my children's lifetime or in their children's lifetime the political bands that tie America together will become unloosed. Let us hope that the process is voluntary and nonviolent. Such is the goal of secession properly conceived: the peaceful and consensual separation of the coercive institutions that bind people together.

Man has flourished within smaller forms of government than that which prevails today, and longstanding, tested theories of political organization have provided us with the datum we need to evaluate the current order with a cautious eye toward the future. What follows, however, is not prescriptive, but either descriptive, where I profess to explain the paradoxical function of the current American Union, or precautionary, where I warn against the continued expansion and even preservation of the current American Union. I am not interested in planning an untried future system, but in welcoming whatever decentralized system might arise by the secession of territories from the American Union to enable as many individuals as possible to improve their living and working conditions, practice their faith without government interference, support their families, and exercise their knowledge and skills free from the compulsion of an overreaching central power—one that seeks to authorize its monopoly on the use of force by appealing to the baser emotions and instincts of those who accept uncritically the present ethos.

I also undertake here to warn about the paradoxical nature of Statist ideologies that are expressed in messianic terms and invariably premised upon paternalistic fantasies about the ability of man to control other men for the benefit of all. (It is revealing that the paternalistic rhetoric once used to justify widespread human bondage in Western slave societies is now used to justify the expansion of State power and the infiltration of State activities into the quotidian practices and routines of private individuals.) I also venture to explain how and why power becomes centralized and conclude by explaining why secession is a desirable approach to counteracting State power and restoring an ethos of individual liberty that is in keeping with traditional mores and values.

Hayek points out in *The Road to Serfdom* that he spent about half of his adult life in Austria, where he witnessed firsthand the consequences of radical ideologies such as Nazism, and half in the United States and England, where radical ideologies were beginning to take hold.^[ix] He reminds us that, although in America and England the memory of the Second World War provoked a general suspicion of anything resembling totalitarianism, suspicions of that kind were also prevalent in Germany only

fifteen years before the rise of the ultimate form of totalitarianism, Nazism. Many of the premises of Nazism—including, he says, “the increasing veneration for the state, the fatalistic acceptance of ‘inevitable trends,’ the enthusiasm for ‘organization’ of everything (we now call it ‘planning’)”^[x]—are casually accepted and even promoted by so-called “mainstream” American politicians of both major political parties.

Hayek warns that the “supreme tragedy is still not seen that in Germany it was largely people of good will who, by their socialist policies, prepared the way for the forces which stand for everything they detest.”^[xi] By way of explanation, he adds, “Few recognize that the rise of fascism and Marxism was not a reaction against the socialist trends of the preceding period *but a necessary outcome of those tendencies*.”^[xii] The irony is that, today, “many who sincerely hate all of Nazism’s manifestations are working for ideals whose realization would lead straight to the abhorred tyranny.”^[xiii] If, during Hayek’s lifetime, we were on the road to serfdom, or to something worse, then we may very well be nearing an arrival—or something worse.

What Hayek professed to be an “irony” was also a paradox insofar as the rhetoric and ideology of equality and liberation tends to lead to the consolidation of power and the instantiation of tyranny. Having suffered through the American public education system during the 1980s and 1990s, I am familiar with what can only be called “official” or “establishment” treatments of history that leave little room for studying the French Revolution and the terrorism it inspired. Yet this bloody Revolution has provoked the ire and contemplation of several profound, humane, and sensible political minds: Edmund Burke, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Hilaire Belloc, Christopher Dawson, Robert Nisbet, Russell Kirk, and Claes Ryn, to name only a few. Because we have nearly erased the French Revolution from public education and, hence, from the public memory and have replaced cautionary narratives about government tyranny with messianic narratives about the alleged heroism of the American Union during the Second World War and the American Civil Rights Movement, we have deprived young people of a proper understanding of how centralized power and totalitarianism result from the seemingly laudable pursuit of high-minded ideals; no other moment in history than the French Revolution teaches more about the dangers of an abiding faith in absolute power, unbridled progress, and human goodness. Moreover, because socialism “began quite openly as a reaction against the liberalism of the French Revolution,” studying the French Revolution reveals that “socialism in its beginnings was frankly authoritarian” and that the “French writers who laid its foundation had no doubt that their ideas could be put into practice by a strong dictatorial government.”^[xiv]

Friedrich Nietzsche’s *On the Genealogy of Morals*, a polemic first published in 1887, exploded the prevailing moral prejudices of his age, or sought to do so. These prejudices, despite their noble-seeming appeals to egalitarianism, selflessness, compassion, equality, and charity, camouflaged and galvanized the will to power, that raw desire of man to control and coerce other men. Nietzsche’s target was the Judeo-Christian tradition, and because of his hostility to the faith, among other reasons, his ideas should be approached with restraint; but that does not mean his observations lack even a modicum of merit or represent pure evil to be dismissed out of hand. For in this, our secular era, the sacrificial and ascetic self, whose “slave morality” Nietzsche mocked for being weak and naïve and for playing into the manipulative designs of the “priestly class,” has been displaced from religious institutions to government institutions, i.e., to the State.

We do well to remember that “[a]ll secularizers bear the marks of those religious cultures whence they and their ideas come.”^[xv] Selflessness once allegedly in the service of Judeo-Christian principles now services the ideological functions of the State apparatus. The American Union, moreover, is to the ideals and principles of egalitarianism, progressivism, and collectivism what the Christian church is to the teachings of the scriptures. Educators and theologians on the Christian Right such as R. J. Rushdoony recognized the tendency among Americans, especially in the public schools, to supplant Judeo-Christian teachings with messianic Statism predicated on the “progressivism” that is “essentially a religious movement.”^[xvi] Rushdoony went so far as to proclaim that “Statist education is [an] entrance into the true catholicity of the civil religion of the modern state” as well as the “religious ideal of the French Revolution realized.”^[xvii] Rushdoony credits Nietzsche for the observation that “statist education” is meant “to ensure that the ‘masses’ follow ‘the guiding star of the State!’”^[xviii]

The narrative, allegorical world that Nietzsche envisioned persists, but not in the way he envisioned it; the priestly class in the current world order consists of apologists for State power and missionaries for

Statism, and the State itself has become a new religion, the supreme and ultimate instrument through which ideological fantasies may be realized. What Christopher Dawson referred to as the "attempt of totalitarian states to create historical myths as a psychological basis of social unity"[xix] has only intensified over the last sixty years. Such myths are so widespread and unquestioned that the totalitarianism they engender is now commonplace and unrecognizable to all but the most vigilant among us. State power has been distributed to all aspects of society such that it has become part of our normal and accepted routines. We may have reached that moment when, according to Dawson, "no one is left to criticize the official ideology which is imposed on the community not so much by deliberate propaganda as by the bureaucratic control of education, information and publicity."[xx]

Before I go further, I should define what I mean by the "State," a term that this essay uses interchangeably with the American Union unless I designate otherwise. I defer to Murray Rothbard's definition of the "State": "[T]he State is that organization in society which attempts to maintain a monopoly on the use of force and violence in a given territorial area; in particular, it is the only organization in society that obtains its revenue not by voluntary contribution or payment for services rendered but by coercion."[xxi] This definition necessarily excludes everyday systems of social organization such as church governance or family, which also discipline their members (churches excommunicate; parents spank their children). The State or American Union I refer to is a nation-state, which is a social construct that is only a few centuries old and that differs markedly from other such constructs: city states, monarchies, republics, or empires. The nation-state is not the phenomenon that Louis XIV of France glorified when he proclaimed, "I am the State." Rather, the nation-state is, in our time, what Paul Gottfried dubs the "managerial" or "therapeutic" state,[xxii] which is to say, the systematic organization of mass institutions along ideological lines in order to centralize power and redirect the values and priorities of as many people as possible.

The State is not merely monolithic monuments and armies and agencies and the like, but a company of people acting in concert and united by a common purpose: to facilitate the dominance of certain coercive institutions over the actions of individuals who are not party to those institutions.[xxiii] Several such institutions operating within a community of purpose are ultimately subject to the authority of certain powerful individuals whose opinions and beliefs are expressed through the medium of political figureheads and motivated by what Hayek calls "professional secondhand dealers in ideas." [xxiv]

Hayek is referring to intellectuals, but he does not necessarily mean university professors or academicians. He means, rather, people who can "talk and write" about "a wide range of subjects" and who are in a position to become "acquainted with new ideas sooner than those to whom [they address themselves]." [xxv] Examples include "journalists, teachers, ministers, lecturers, publicists, radio commentators, writers of fiction, cartoonists, and artists." [xxvi] These intellectuals push their ideas on the elite to limit the parameters of acceptable opinion; the elite then adopt those parameters and pass their received ideas to less educated groups that are easily controlled or manipulated. This process makes the intellectuals "the organs which modern society has developed for spreading knowledge and ideas, and it is their convictions and opinions which operate as the sieve through which all new conceptions must pass before they can reach the masses." [xxvii] On this score, Gottfried has described how the elite and the intellectuals, through "social engineering" and collectivist imperatives, derive and perpetuate State power:

Communities that depend for their legitimation on the managerial state are accorded collective recognition and special cultural protection that fly in the face of the radically individualist premises of social democracy. Ironically this situation renders the administrative state even stronger. Selective recognition of collective identities serves the same political end as maximizing individual autonomy. Both weaken the established loyalties of nonvictim groups, particularly those that flow from kinship patterns and a vigorous majority culture, and thereby enhance the state's social control. Admittedly social planners draw upon the momentum of economic and demographic change to achieve their work, but there is another side of this reality. Those in government have accelerated and shaped whatever changes suit their ends. [xxviii]

Like Hayek, then, Gottfried recognizes that the "new social engineering depends on and strengthens the fit created between popular morality, shaped by churches, schools, and the entertainment industry,

and the reforming role of the administrative state.”[xxix]

Because of the influence and discursive privilege enjoyed by the intellectuals, secession from the American Union is stigmatized and talk of it is either prohibited (in the case of certain publications or mainstream politics), condemned, or silenced. Because the State is cloaked in religious vocabularies and its institutions portrayed with quasi-religious iconography, any suggestion that the State should be dismantled, or its power minimized, is treated as heresy or worse.

Gottfried’s summary calls to mind Michel Foucault’s observations about the paradoxical nature of power: its strength is in its seeming weakness because strength itself depends upon weakness; without weakness, in other words, there can be no strength. The paradox is, perhaps, most evident in the workings of messianic Statism, which is premised upon ideologies that allegedly advance the cause of the poor and disenfranchised but that result in the increased power of the intellectuals and the elite, as those groups are defined by Hayek. Moreover, the public policies championed by the intellectuals and the elite, again as those groups are defined by Hayek, purport to aid the poor and disenfranchised but, instead, ensure that the poor remain poor and the disenfranchised remain disenfranchised. The intellectuals and the elite thereby have their cake and eat it too: their policies are celebrated as beneficent and charitable, even though such policies harm their purported beneficiaries. The intellectuals and the elite are adored for their altruism even as they preserve conditions of poverty so that future acts of altruism remain possible.

As long as supposedly altruistic policies continue to impoverish the already impoverished, the power of the intellectuals and the elite remains unthreatened; the intellectuals and the elite may continue their self-glorification at the expense of the supposed beneficiaries of their supposed altruism. The intellectuals and the elite are not conspiratorial or even necessarily aware of the power and poverty they perpetuate. As Hayek points out, “it is neither selfish interests nor evil intentions but mostly honest convictions and good intentions which determine the intellectuals’ views.”[xxx] In fact, Hayek explains, “it is necessary to recognize that on the whole the typical intellectual is today more likely to be a socialist the more he is guided by good will and intelligence and that on the plane of purely intellectual argument he will generally be able to make out a better case than the majority of his opponents within his class.”[xxxi]

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Endnotes:

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[i] Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and Schools of the Ages* (New York: Riverhead Books), p. 516.

[ii] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (approx. 1599-1602) (edited by A.R. Braunmuller) (New York: Pelican Books, 2001), p. 36.

[iii] Isaiah 55:9 (KJV).

[iv] F. A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) (edited by Bruce Caldwell) (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 54.

[v] *Ibid.* at p. 57.

[vi] Russell Kirk, *The Politics of Prudence* (Wilmington, Delaware: ISI Books, 1993), p. 5.

[vii] Donald Livingston, “Introduction: The Old Assumptions No Longer Apply,” in *Rethinking the American Union for the Twenty-First Century* (edited by Donald Livingston) (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2012), p. 15.

[viii] *Ibid.* at p. 19.

[ix] F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (1944) (Edited by Bruce Caldwell) (Chicago, Illinois: University

of Chicago Press, 2007), pp. 58-59.

[x] This language comes from a condensed version of *The Road to Serfdom* that appeared in the April 1945 edition of *Reader's Digest*. My source for the reproduction of this version is F. A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom (with The Intellectuals and Socialism)* (London, England: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 2012), p. 39. Whenever I wish to signal that I am citing to the *Reader's Digest* version of *Road to Serfdom* in this piece, I will add "*Reader's Digest*" in a parenthetical following the page number. All other citations to *The Road to Serfdom* are to the 1994 version as edited by Bruce Caldwell and republished by the University of Chicago Press in 2007.

[xi] Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, at p. 59.

[xii] Ibid. at p. 59 (emphasis added).

[xiii] Ibid. at p. 59.

[xiv] Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, at p. 76.

[xv] Paul Gottfried, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Toward a Secular Theocracy* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2002), p. 134.

[xvi] Rousas John Rushdoony, *The Messianic Character of American Education* (Vallecito, California: Ross House Books, 1963), p. 2.

[xvii] Ibid. at p. 323.

[xviii] Ibid. at p. 318 (Rusdoony quoting Nietzsche).

[xix] Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950), p. 6.

[xx] Ibid.

[xxi] Murray Rothbard, *Egalitarianism as a Revolt Against Nature and Other Essays, Second Edition* (1974) (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2000), p. 57.

[xxii] See generally, Paul Gottfried, *After Liberalism: Mass Democracy in the Managerial State* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[xxiii] According to Rothbard, "The first truth to be discovered by human action is that *it can be undertaken only by individual 'actors.'* Only individuals have ends and can act to attain them. There are no such things as ends of or actions by 'groups,' 'collectives,' or 'States,' which do not take place as actions by various specific individuals. 'Societies' or 'groups' have no independent existence aside from the actions of their individual members. Thus, to say that 'governments' act is merely a metaphor; actually, certain individuals are in a certain relationship with other individuals and act in a way that they and the other individuals recognize as 'governmental.' The metaphor must not be taken to mean that the collective institution itself has any reality apart from the acts of various individuals." Murray Rothbard, *Man, Economy, and State: With Power and Market, 2nd Edition (Scholar's Edition)* (1962) (Auburn, Alabama: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2001), pp. 2-3.

[xxiv] F. A. Hayek, "Intellectuals and Socialism," in *Socialism and War: Essays, Documents, Reviews* (Edited by Bruce Caldwell) (Indianapolis, Indiana: Liberty Fund, 1997), p. 221.

[xxv] Ibid. at p. 222.

[xxvi] Ibid. at p. 223.

[xxvii] Ibid. at 223.

[xxviii] Gottfried, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt*, p. 23.

[xxix] Ibid. at p. 140.

[xxx] Hayek, "Intellectuals and Socialism," at p. 227.

[xxxi] Ibid.

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2 R E S P O N S E S T O " " S E C E S S I O N C U R R E N T U N I O N O F T H E S T A T E



bobcheeks – February 7, 2014

Outstanding essay. One small critique: I believe it was Sam ??? who coined the phrase "managerial" elite/state.

As I read these learned essays, I've developed a theme that the current political/cultural dichotomy is established between those who embrace a "family, faith, republicanism" worldview and those who lean toward a "secularist, statist" regime, that latter grounded on certain blasphemous and gnostic constructs.

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gabe – February 7, 2014

"Friedrich Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, a polemic first published in 1887, exploded the prevailing moral prejudices of his age, or sought to do so. These prejudices, despite their noble-seeming appeals to egalitarianism, selflessness, compassion, equality, and charity, camouflaged and galvanized the will to power, that raw desire of man to control and coerce other men. Nietzsche's target was the Judeo-Christian tradition, and because of his hostility to the faith, among other reasons, his ideas should be approached with restraint; but that does not mean his observations lack even a modicum of merit or represent pure evil to be dismissed out of hand. For in this, our secular era, the sacrificial and ascetic self, whose "slave morality" Nietzsche mocked for being weak and naïve and for playing into the manipulative designs of the "priestly class," has been displaced from religious institutions to government institutions, i.e., to the State."

THANK YOU for saying this – someone finally has the guts to give Nietzsche his due and apply it to current times.

One gets the impression that Hayek's "intellectuals" fulfill the role of the Medieval clergy in spreading and reinforcing the religious doctrine of our statist age.

One quibble or perhaps a question:

I often see people employ the term "egalitarian" in place of equalitarian." I thought the former indicates equality of opportunity (which I support) while the latter indicates equality of condition (which the Statists support). Or is it simply that people nowadays do not discern a difference? It can be confusing.

Any help here, guys?

Great essay and

take care
gabe

BTW: Bobcheeks – have you given up on Pomocon?

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