



Make America Mobile Again

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The Way Back: Restoring the Promise of America

By F.H. Buckley

(Encounter Books, 384 pages, \$27.99)

This election season has proven that, regardless of who becomes the Democratic or Republican nominee for president, the American political landscape has been reshaped. Candidates expected to have a smooth path to their party's nomination have met, instead, a bumpy road. The rise of Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders as viable candidates reflects the growing feeling among ordinary Americans that the system is rigged, that they're stuck in conditions enabled and controlled by an amorphous cadre of elites from Washington and Wall Street.

Income inequality is higher today than it's been in nearly a century. Middle and lower class citizens of other First World countries enjoy more economic mobility than do middle and lower class Americans. The United States has fallen behind managerial and quasi-socialist governments in Europe in empirical rankings of economic freedom. The gap between the so-called 1% and the rest of America is growing, and recent college graduates, saddled with student loan debt and poor job prospects, are financially behind where their parents were at the same age.

Things don't look promising. But one law professor, F. H. Buckley of the freshly named Antonin Scalia Law School at George Mason University, outlines ways to repair structural, systemic burdens on the American economy. His new book, *The Way Back*, published today by Encounter Books, provocatively advocates for socialist ends by capitalist means.

Although the word *socialism* recalls revolution, stifled competition, attacks on private ownership, abolition of the price-system and sound economic calculation, hunger, mass-murder, off-brand goods and low-quality services, among other demonstrable horrors, Buckley has something less vicious in mind. By socialism, he does not mean a centralized government that replaces the market system with economic planning and state control of the means of production. His "socialism" is not socialism at all.

Leaving *socialism* undefined, he suggests that free-market economics (a term he avoids but implies) and the dismantling of the regulatory state will do more than actual socialism and its variants to lift people out of poverty and maximize their quality of life. The Left, in short, has asked the right questions about income inequality and economic mobility but supplied the wrong answers or solutions. "Sadly," Buckley complains, "those who loudly decry income disparities often support policies which make things worse."

It's the aristocratic elites, in Buckley's view, who benefit from mass bureaucracy, the welfare state, a broken immigration and public-school system, trade barriers, a flawed tax code, and a general decline in the rule of law. These unjust institutions, policies, and conditions, with their built-in advantages for a select few, cause and sustain economic immobility. They solidify the place of aristocrats — what Buckley also calls the New Class — at the top of the social stratum. Those with high levels of wealth game the system through special favors, government grants, shell companies, complicated tax schemes, offshore banking, and other loopholes designed to ensure that the 1% are excluded from the

regulatory barriers imposed and administered by government at the expense of the 99%.

The aristocracy that Buckley targets is not the natural aristocracy celebrated by certain American Founders for its virtue and political disinterestedness. It's an artificial aristocracy that has little to do with merit or talent. The Founders — probably all of them — would have been appalled by the likes of Bill and Hillary Clinton: figures who became multi-millionaires through partisan politics. The Clintons embody the new artificial aristocracy. They amassed their wealth by championing programs that have slowed economic mobility while purporting to do the opposite. The Founders, by contrast, believed that benevolent aristocrats would be free from economic pressure and thus would not succumb to the temptations to use government positions or privileges for personal gain.

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The Founders would have cringed to learn that public service has become a vehicle to riches. For all his many faults, Donald Trump appeals to disenfranchised Americans because he declares he's financed his own campaign and admits that a rigged system — exemplified by our federal bankruptcy laws — has worked in his favor. He knows the government system is unfair and claims he wants to change it.

"America was a mobile society for most of the twentieth century," Buckley says, citing statistics and substantiating his claim with charts and graphs. Trump's supporters no doubt long for those days of economic mobility that Buckley locates in the exuberant 1950s.

When Trump announces that he wants to make America great again, people stuck at the bottom of the rigid class divide respond with enthusiasm. On a subterranean level, they seem to be hoping that America can once again become a *mobile* society, a place where a lowly pioneering frontiersman like Abraham Lincoln (Buckley's favored symbol of social and economic mobility) can rise from humble beginnings to become the President of the United States. Buckley believes that "the central idea of America, as expressed in the Declaration [of Independence], became through Lincoln the promise of income mobility and a faith in the ability of people to rise to a higher station in life."

Class structure is more settled in America than in much of Europe. Yet America has always defined itself against the European traditions of monarchy, aristocracy, dynasty, and inherited privilege. Buckley states that "America and Europe have traded places." The trope of the American Dream is about rising out of your received station in life to accomplish great things for yourself and your posterity. What would it mean if U.S. citizens were to envy, instead, the European Dream? What if America is now the country of privilege, not promise? If the American financial and economic situation remains static, we'll learn the answers to these questions the hard way.

Perhaps the most interesting and unique feature of Buckley's book is his embrace of Darwinian theory — including the genetic study of phenotypes and kin selection — to explain why American aristocrats combine to preserve their power and restrain the middle and lower classes. In short, people are hard-wired to ensure the survival of their kind, so they pass on competitive advantages to their children. "American aristocrats," Buckley submits, "are able to identify each other through settled patterns of cooperation called reciprocal altruism." People organize themselves into social groups that maximize the genetic fitness of their biological descendants. If certain advantages are biologically heritable, then "a country would have to adopt punitive measures to handicap the gifted and talented in order to erase all genetic earnings advantages."

Eugenics measures were popular during the Progressive Era, before we learned about the horrors of Nazi genocide and eugenics, but surely the Left does not want to return to such inhumane and homicidal practices to realize their beloved ideal of equality. Yet Buckley reveals — more subtly than my summary suggests — that biological tampering is the only way for egalitarians to transform their utopian fantasies into a concrete reality.

To those who might point out that Buckley, a tenured law professor living in the handsome outskirts of D.C., is himself a member of this self-serving aristocracy, Buckley declares that he's a traitor to his class. Without bravado or boast, he presents himself as the rare altruist who recognizes the net gains realized through reasonable cooperation among disparate groups.

Trump and Ted Cruz ought to have Buckley's book on hand as they make their final case to the electorate before this summer's convention. Buckley explains why conservatives, libertarians, and Republicans alike should care about economic mobility and inequality. By ignoring the problem of economic disparity, he warns, "the Republican

establishment has handed the Democrats a hammer with which to pound it.” Buckley identifies the types of cronyism and economic barriers to entry that have caused social immobility and inequality. To resolve our troubles, he advocates “easy pieces of useful and efficient legislation” that he dubs his “wish list.”

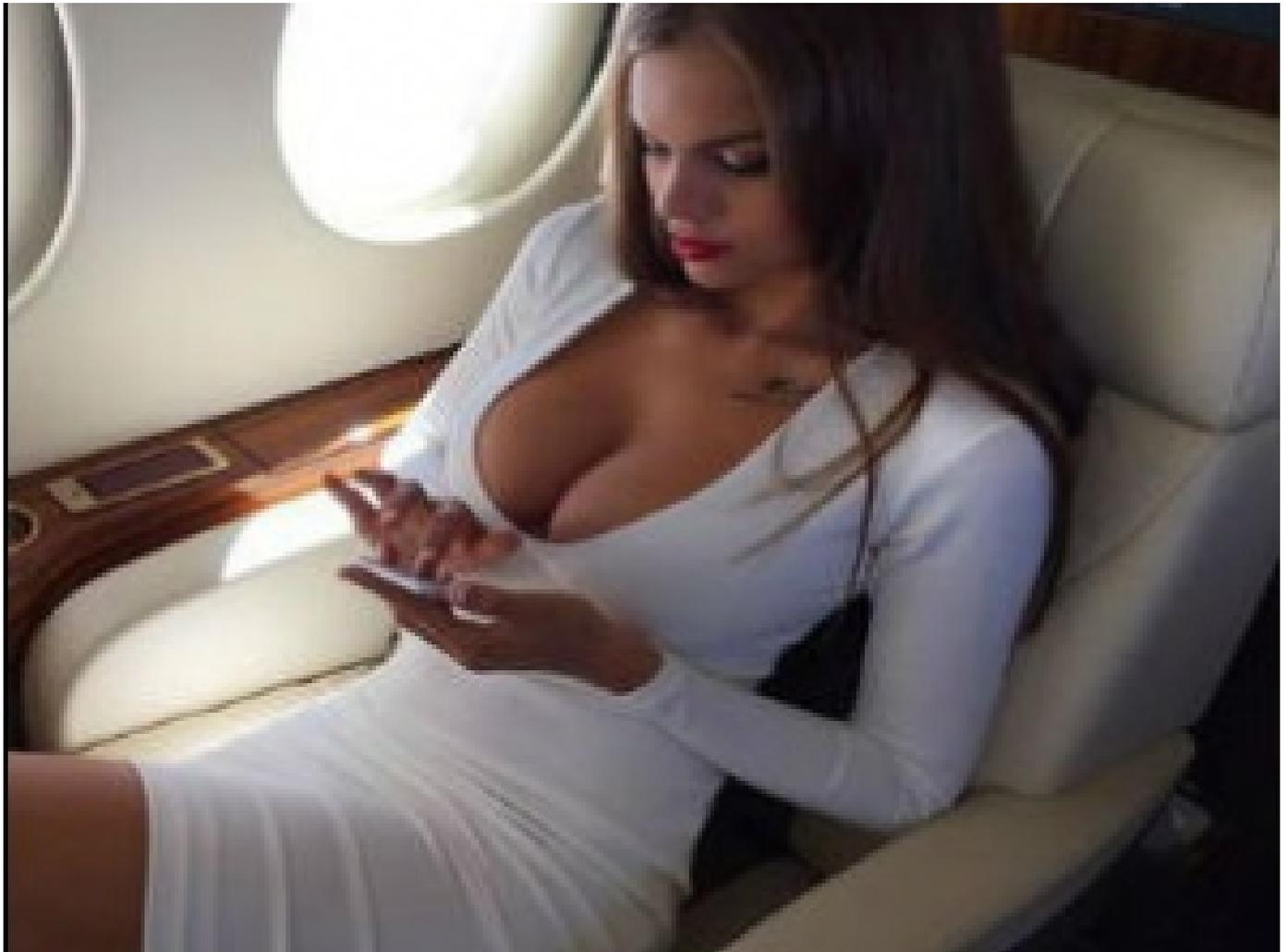
The final section of his book describes this “wish list” and sketches what Americans can do to reinvigorate their economy and make their country mobile again. By facilitating educational choice and charter schools, streamlining the immigration system, curtailing prosecutorial overreach and the criminalization of entrepreneurship, and cutting back on the financial regulations, tax loopholes, and corporate laws that are calculated to benefit rather than police those at the top, Americans can bring back the conditions necessary for the proliferation of individual liberty and prosperity — or, in Buckley’s words, restore the promise of America.



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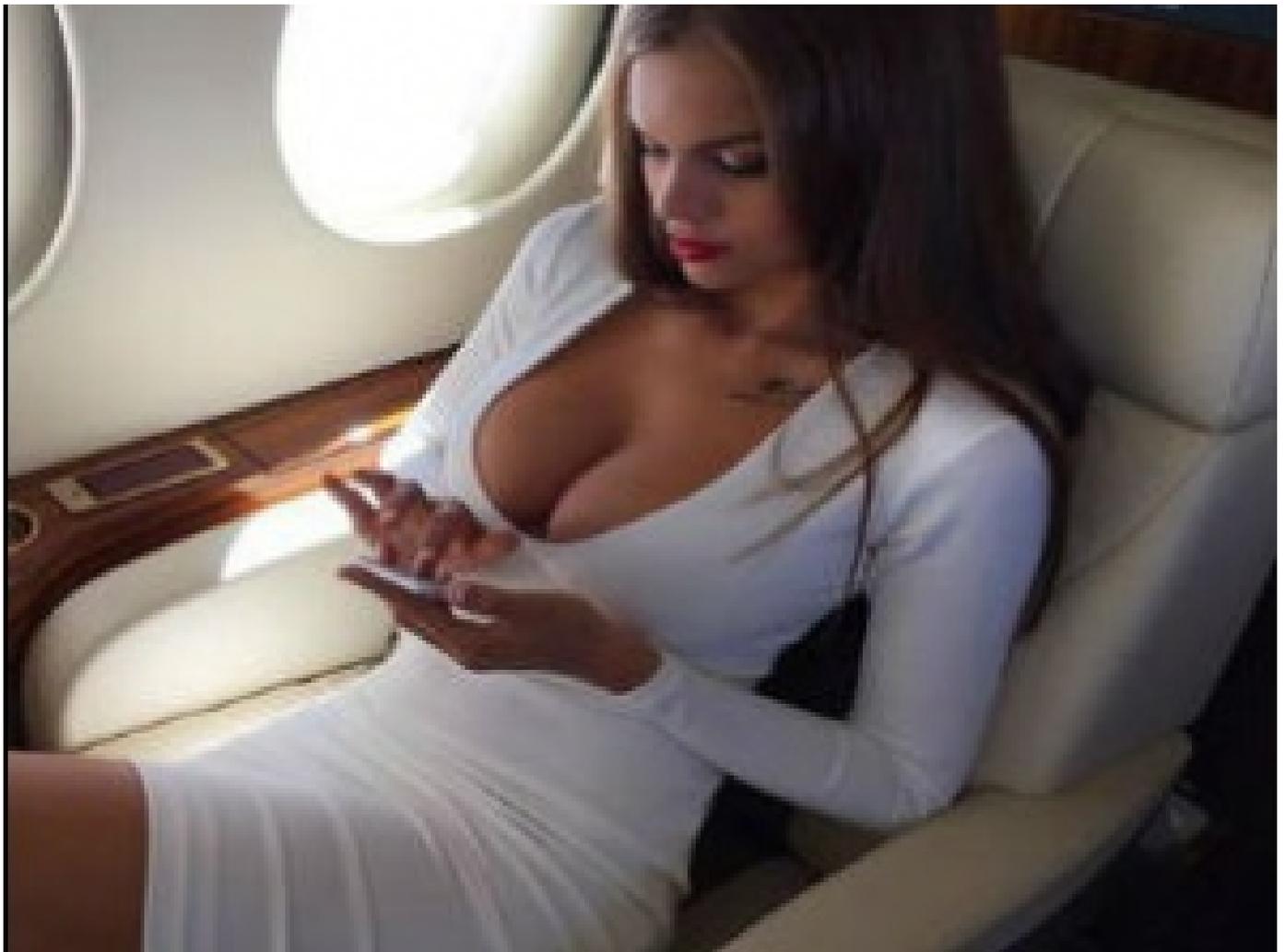
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