

Carlsbad 1819

Like another Chouannerie

Temporarily Embarrassed Patricians

August 15, 2017 by Nulle Terre Sans Seigneur

On July 4, 1838, the well-esteemed congregationalist minister Hubbard Winslow gave out an oration at Old South Church attended by the municipal authorities of Boston, in commemoration of the anniversary of American independence.

Having graduated from the Yale Divinity School by 1825, in 1832 he had succeeded the Rev. Lyman Beecher as Pastor of the Bowdoin Street Church in Boston. Lyman Beecher was the father of, most famously, Harriet Beecher Stowe, among 12 other children who would cement the family legacy as advocates of temperance, abolition and women's suffrage. Lyman Beecher himself was the co-founder of the American Temperance Society in 1826.

As such, I would reckon that Winslow is a decent proxy for the state of Boston Brahmin opinion at the time, and of the more conservative Old Light (non-revivalist) wing of evangelicalism.

Of the means of the perpetuity and prosperity of our republic, Winslow is quite clear (<https://books.google.com/books?jtp=7&id=OyLAAAAAYAAJ>):

That a monarchical government, of some kind, is the only power adequate to control an ignorant and vicious people, we are not slow to admit.

Well, that settles it then. New England intellectuals agree: normies need kings.

Actually, the entire oration is a fine exercise in Burkean conservatism — indeed, Burke is cited explicitly several times. At one point, Winslow devotes a sprawling footnote to him that lasts through four pages.

Burkean conservatism, at least as commonly practiced, is all about denouncing the medieval barbarism of hereditary aristocracy while at the same telling the radical democrats they should *slow down there* and get a well-ordered education in the classics, or something. Rights and liberties are the highest accomplishment of an enlightened people, but just as ceaselessly they will remind you *these things, they have their limits*. To what avail?

Either way, Winslow defines republican liberty (p.18) as the aggregate of four types of liberty: personal (do what thou wilt shall be the whole of law, but don't forget your duties to God and society [but I'm repeating myself here] too, fam), moral (the power and opportunity to do what is right), religious (muh

private conscience), civil (exemption from restraints not conducive to the public welfare):

While, therefore, we firmly advocate fearless inquiry, free discussion, the liberty of the press, human rights, and all reforms in politics, society, morals and religion, which tend to improve the condition and character of mankind, let us with equal firmness observe that temperance, gentleness, modesty and discretion, that due deference to the voice of history and the councils of age and experience—that determined spirit of conservation, which is as wisely intent on saving what is already gained as in adventuring for more—without which, all attempts at reformation must ever prove to be like the earthquake and tornado;—without which, they will but demolish the work of the wisdom and industry of former generations, destroy the good with the evil, set society backward, defeat their own professed ends, and distance the **desired millennial age**. [emphasis mine—Ed.]

In other words, snort that round of coke responsibly. The “desired millennial [sic] age” is great, but you have to do it gradually and piecewise. So I’ve heard from the National Review, anyway.

Nevertheless, Winslow prides himself on not being a liberal political economist, and so he says: “The true strength and glory of a republic lie *in the intelligence, genius, the integrity, the industry, the patriotism, the intellectual and moral worth of the people.*”

But that’s the milquetoast stuff.

No, the real deal comes when we’re informed of the mechanisms of consolidating the union necessary in a republic. *Very* importantly, we need these (p.23):

As ready vehicles of public intelligence and instruction, **newspapers are of indispensable service; they are eminently republican**. They are the most constant companions and teachers of the people. In their daily visits, they are at the doors of their patrons to give them the news, first in the morning and first in the evening; frequently they breakfast and dine and sup with them; they entertain them in the parlor and advise them in the counting room; they travel with them in all the coaches, cars and steam boats, upon the public ways ;—there is not an athenaeum, nor reading room, nor house of entertainment, nor any place of public daily resort, where their forms are not seen and their voices heard. **They are in truth the omnipresent geniuses and tutelary goddesses of the people**,—and if there be any truth in the proverb, that they who perpetually have our ears have at last our faith, their influence must be great and decisive upon the destinies of this republic.

That’s right. Newspapers are the eminently republican and tutelary goddesses of the people. You may *think* you’re looking at a shitlib reading the ~~Washington~~ Amazon Post, but in truth you are staring at the apogee of virtue and cultivation.

Or it could just be a bad paper editor behind this discrepancy, of course.

Winslow is sure, either way, that: “There must be no aristocracy of knowledge, wealth, or rank; the means of obtaining them must be, as far as possible, thrown equally open to all.”

Winslow also comes to a profound discovery in political science: monopoly is impossible in republics. Observe:

There are no monopolies, there can be none, in this republic. If the speaker believed there were, he would be among the first to condemn them. His entire sympathies are with the people at large; and had he any influence in public, it should always be employed to defend their common rights. But the truth is, we have no men of mammoth size and power, nor can we ever have, as they have in some of the hereditary governments of the Old World, who live by devouring the poor. The blessed genius of our institutions forbids it. On the contrary, our rich men are necessarily, from the nature of our government, public benefactors. The more we have of them, the greater are our means of carrying forward important public operations, of making internal improvements, of enhancing the property of other men, of promoting education, of giving employment to the idle and bread to the hungry, of imparting enterprise and prosperity to the nation.

Whether or not “the blessed genius of [its] institutions” have forbidden it or not is up to your call, but the underlying rationale is thoroughly American Whig developmentalist, rather than Manchesterite. He cites a speech by Daniel Webster to bolster his position.

Nevertheless, we have it asserted that for ignorant and vicious people, monarchy is a must. It is presumed the Americans are developed enough (by the 1830s) to observe temperance, modesty and discretion while reading their newspapers. Was this true?

But before we get to that, a little detour to speak of a contemporary of Winslow’s and another Burkean—although a more staunch one, a promoter of aristocracy as the bulwark of the people. More interestingly, however, is that this Tory had formerly been a Jacksonian-era labor radical.

His name was Thomas Brothers — a now forgotten hat manufacturer who emigrated from England and who during the early 1830s published the most prominent radical labor journal in Philadelphia, the *Radical Reformer and Working Man’s Advocate*, which extolled ideas grounded in Paine and Jefferson.

By the end of the 1830s, he became a fierce anti-democrat, went back to England, and in 1840 a series of his letters was published as *The United States of North America as they are; not as they are generally described: being a cure for radicalism*. So stark was his hatred of what he saw in America that he opposed abolitionism, not so much because of the lower endowments of slaves (he said that negro laborers were “among the best and most civil to be found”), but because he found the treatment of free blacks so appalling he was genuinely convinced that for them to be free democratic citizens would be a fate worse than slavery. In some respects, he proved prophetic.

Brothers never ceased being sympathetic to the workingman, and he wrote letters to Chartists sincerely telling them universal manhood suffrage would do nothing to alleviate their hardships. But his ideological shift was quite a thing to behold. He was a *republican mugged by reality*. He was converted and even convinced to emigrate because of Tom Paine’s *Rights of Man*, and then grew to despise it. To such an extent he is willing to declare (<https://books.google.com/books?id=HW0FAAAAQAAJ&pg=PA9>):

“What apparent cause of any riots may be,” says Paine, “the real one is want of happiness.” Then, certainly, his “beloved America,” where the light beamed, the veil was rent, and ignorance dispelled never to be restored, is at this time greatly in want of happiness, for riots and lawless proceedings abound in every part of the union, and these things “show that something is wrong in the system of government,” which, in fact, admits of every fraudulent scheme that can be devised to cheat the unsuspecting people, whose capacity for managing their own national affairs is, as it has, and ever will be, not sufficient to protect themselves from becoming the prey of the wicked and designing politicians, who are ramified into every part of the government, and, on account of their short periods of elections, are eternally shifting their places; and when the people discover that their pockets have been picked, there is no getting at the thieves; they have effected their purpose; have made way for another gang, whose deeds of darkness will not be discovered by the multitude until it is too late; and so they go on, and no kind of responsibility can ever exist. **Give me, instead of such a system, even a despotism centered in one man, who is to be found when we want him, who has no interest in oppressing his subjects, and who must be accountable for his conduct.**

But though he shares many unpleasant stories — of almshouses dissecting cadavers of the poor to sell to medical students; of mobs assaulting funeral processions; of magistrates arbitrarily suspending *habeas corpus* without rhyme or reason; of sons of governors getting away with gruesome murder, and so forth — I am interested in a highly revealing quote by the late Pennsylvania Governor George Wolf made in 1834, on the nature of combinations in republicanism (p.97):

It cannot be denied that every incorporation that is authorised, and every monopoly that is established, even for the most useful public purposes, is a deviation from that republican simplicity which the principles upon which our admirable form of government is predicated would seem to inculcate, and a virtual encroachment upon our liberties. By multiplying these formidable, irresponsible public bodies, we shall, in process of time, raise up within the commonwealth an aristocratical combination of power, which will dictate its own laws, and put at defiance the government of the people...

Brothers calls this a *confession*, and it indeed it is.

This is the paradox: republics are said to afford the best conditions for the free association of men, but by their entrusting every citizen with elective power, it occurs that every form of association, corporation and combination is at the same time a threat to the *public* nature of the republic, because it ends up constituting a non-elective corporative interest in contradistinction to the totalizing *polis*.

And from this paradox emerges the parasitic nature of the “informed and socially active citizen” — the very same thing that is claimed to be a benefit of free republican societies.

Our “informed citizen,” whenever he turns around, finds a myriad of things to complain about. The rich aren’t paying their fair share of taxes! That man is hiring children! That other man is an unlicensed street food vendor!

Now, certainly, some of these could constitute public safety issues worthy of the civil magistrates. However, the ultimate result of our “informed citizen” declaring crusades on every slight private vice is to weaken the same private associations that act as a countervailing power to the *polis*, by having their functions slowly nationalized. Informal social bonds are dissolved to make for a polity of nothing but formal contractual relations.

This is also the MO of investigative journalism, of course. We're just watchdogs fulfilling our civic duty! Our civic duty to atomize you.

Alright. Let's get back to the question of whether American republicanism circa the 1830s was sustainable on the basis of the qualities of its citizenry.

We will sample from Michel Chevalier's *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States* (<http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/chevalier-society-manners-and-politics-in-the-united-states>) (1839). That's the same Chevalier of the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty of 1860.

Chevalier was a Saint-Simonian liberal-socialist who believed in an *industrielisme* not quite unlike the utopian developmentalism of Mathew and Henry Carey. As such, he finds quite a lot to admire in the industriousness and decentralization of the Americans, whom he divides into the cultural-geographic archetypes of "Yankee" and "Virginian."

Chevalier describes the Yankee as "eminently a pioneer." By this he means that the Yankee is not only a working man, "but a migratory one.":

He has no root in the soil, he has no feeling of reverence, and love for the natal spot and the paternal roof; he is always disposed to emigrate, always ready to start in the first steamer that comes along, from the place where he had but just now landed. He is devoured with a passion for locomotion, he cannot stay in one place; he must go and come, he must stretch his limbs and keep his muscles in play. When his feet are not in motion, his fingers must be in action, he must be whittling a piece of wood, cutting the back of his chair, or notching the edge of the table, or his jaws must be at work grinding tobacco. Whether it be that a continual competition has given him the habit, or that he has an exaggerated estimate of the value of time, or that the unsettled state of everything around him, keeps his nervous system in a state of perpetual agitation, or that he has come thus from the hands of nature, he always has something to be done, he is always in a terrible hurry. He is fit for all sorts of work, except those which require slow and minute processes. The idea of these fills him with horror; it is his hell. "We are born in haste," says an American writer, "we finish our education on the run; we marry on the wing; we make a fortune at a stroke, and lose it in the same manner, to make and lose it again ten times over, in the twinkling of an eye. Our body is a locomotive, going at the rate of twentyfive miles an hour; our soul, a high-pressure engine; our life is like a shooting star, and death overtakes us at last like a flash of lightning."

This seeming rootlessness is held back by one thing. Chevalier emphasizes that the Yankee man has a strong sense of his marital duties: "The Yankee will sell his father's house, like old clothes or rags. In his character of pioneer, it is his destiny to attach himself to nothing, to no place, edifice, object, or person, **except his wife, to whom he is indissolubly bound night and day**, from the moment of marriage till death parts them."

Thus, by the 1830s, it seems Chevalier had foreseen the American habit of highly fluid identities (currently undergoing a massive crisis, leading to such outbursts as flying to Charlottesville to get an autograph from Dr. David Duke, P.hD.) and of the kinship norm being the "strict nuclear family."

What about their conduct as democratic citizens? Here, the picture is mixed (all of this occurred in 1834):

The New York elections are not only important in their results, but also on account of the order which prevailed while they were going on. During the last six months, the spirit of anarchy had raised its head in the United States in such a manner as to inspire serious alarm, even among those not prone to be timid. You know what happened in New York during the April elections; several months later, in July, the city became the theatre of a series of outrages against the poor blacks, which were repeated several nights. In August the same excesses were committed in Philadelphia, under the same pretext, and with no less audacity and perseverance: then came the brutal assault on the convent in Charlestown, when the retreat of peaceful nuns devoted to the education of young girls was attacked, plundered, and burnt down, without the Selectmen of the town having the power or the courage to make head against the rioters, and without the well-disposed citizens, taken by surprise by this act of savage intolerance, venturing to interfere. Hardly a month since, there was also an incendiary conflagration at Philadelphia on the evening of the election; six houses were burnt, and the fire-men were driven off by the rioters, as at Charlestown, by main force. The same evening, an event of a more grave character occurred; several muskets were discharged by some of the Opposition whom the mob had assailed with stones, several persons were wounded, and one or two killed. A week before, during the preparatory elections, an obscure and peaceable individual was killed by a stab with a dagger.

Certainly, the Americans took their right to elect representatives very seriously — plundering, torching, smashing and murdering with great frequency. The [Ursuline Convent riots](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursuline_Convent_riots) (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ursuline_Convent_riots) are well-documented, and a hallmark of that eternal American bugbear — the papist with his episcopal polity and other such hierarchical evils. The July events refer to the anti-abolitionist riots of 1834.

The April events which Chevalier says the reader already knows of, are ironically, now quite obscure. These were the first direct mayoral elections in New York City's history. The result? [Open brawling with knives and clubs, destruction of ballots, 1 death and 20 injuries.](http://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2013/11/new-yorks-first-mayoral-election-in.html) (<http://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2013/11/new-yorks-first-mayoral-election-in.html>).

Thank God for civil service reform, I suppose.

As for the republican paradox we mentioned above, Chevalier mentions NYC already beginning to “resolve” it by then: “The lessons of New York have turned to the profit of its neighbours; like it, they also begin the work of centralisation, in embracing schools, banks, and public works within the action of the State.” Nationalize everything, fam. It's the *public* interest.

And what are the means for doing this? Can you say *managerial state*?:

Still more; by the side of the power of Cæsar, in political affairs, another regular authority is beginning to show itself, which embraces within its domain the modern institutions and new establishments of public utility, such as the public routes, banks, and elementary schools, that, in the United States, have acquired an unparalleled magnitude. Thus there are Canal Commissioners, Bank Commissioners, School Commissioners. Their power is great and real. The Canal Commissioners establish administrative regulations, which they change at will, without previous notice. They fix and change the rate of tolls; they are surrounded by a large body of agents, entirely dependent upon them and removeable at pleasure; they are charged with the management of large sums of money; the sums that passed through the hands of the Pennsylvania Commissioners amounted to nearly 23,000,000 dollars.

All in all, let's revisit what Rev. Winslow had to say in the beginning:

That a monarchical government, of some kind, is the only power adequate to control an ignorant and vicious people, we are not slow to admit.

You were absolutely right, Rev. Winslow. An ignorant and vicious people like the Americans, who waged open warfare when they had to pick a mayor of a city, required a monarchical government, and though they by no means got anything near a perfect one, they still managed to get a rather fine *Beamtenstaat* worthy of Frederick II of Prussia himself.

Upton Sinclair got it wrong. Americans are temporarily embarrassed patricians, ever waiting for the republican superman inside them to come out.

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5 thoughts on “Temporarily Embarrassed Patricians”

1. Pingback: [Temporarily Embarrassed Patricians | Reaction Times](#)

2. [Imperial Energy](#) says:

[August 16, 2017 at 5:05 am](#)

“This is the paradox: republics are said to afford the best conditions for the free association of men, but by their entrusting every citizen with elective power, it occurs that every form of association, corporation and combination is at the same time a threat to the public nature of the republic, because it ends up constituting a non-elective corporative interest in contradistinction to the totalizing polis.

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Good point.

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Gangs of New York.

[Reply](#).

3. [quaslacrimas](#) says:

[August 16, 2017 at 9:19 pm](#)

Interesting piece. Two thoughts:

1. What makes Winslow a “Boston Brahmin” is that he was a Winslow, not that he was a Presbyterian minister or associated with Beecher. Your phrasing makes me wonder if you have perhaps been misled by a very loose application of the concept in the 20th c. — Btw out of curiosity, have you read “The education of Henry Adams”?

2. If the republican liberty concept interests you, Skinner’s books on the topic are good (one is framed around Hobbes, but largely they share the same content). Usefully paired with Geuss’s “Public Goods, Private Goods” (despite the quirky title it is a history study).

Reply.

4. quaslacrimas says:

August 16, 2017 at 11:43 pm

(also, irrelevant detail: The quote is Steinbeck, and about the Communist Party: "I guess the trouble was that we didn't have any self-admitted proletarians. Everyone was a temporarily embarrassed capitalist.")

Reply.

o marcusmontisursinensis says:

August 18, 2017 at 11:36 am

"A man is called a Communist if he fights for the state to assure him a bourgeois existence."
(Nicolás Gómez Dávila)

Reply.

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