

**Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America**

Nancy MacLean

New York: Viking Press, 2017, 366 pp.

Although not her intent, Duke historian Nancy MacLean's new book has been a great make-work program for libertarian scholars across several disciplines. *Democracy in Chains* tells the story (and I use that word purposefully) of the "radical right's stealth plan for America." The unsurprising central figure of her story is billionaire

Charles Koch. However, his surprising partner in plotting to destroy American democracy is the late James Buchanan, who won the Nobel Prize in Economics in 1986 for his contributions to public choice theory. MacLean sees that theory as the missing piece that Koch needed to put his “master plan” into effective practice.

Public choice theory is the application of the economic way of thinking—or “rational choice theory”—to politics. The theory starts from the assumption that political actors are no different from economic ones in wanting to improve their own well-being through exchange. Therefore both markets and politics can serve as institutional contexts for exchange, and public choice theory attempts to identify the results of such exchanges under those alternative institutional contexts. The analytical goal is to determine when “private choice” (the market) works better or worse than “public choices” (politics or other forms of collective choice). Public choice theory challenges the public-interest view of politics. It often shows how public-interest justifications for political action are unlikely to work because there’s no incentive for political actors to produce those outcomes via political exchange. It is, in Buchanan’s words, “politics without romance.” And, because public choice theory helps show why many things government does are really about benefiting particular individuals rather than the public at large, it is a theoretical framework that is often, though far from exclusively, deployed by people with libertarian inclinations.

There’s nothing especially radical about this theory. In fact, when Buchanan won the Nobel Prize, some in the media wondered why it was really necessary to give the Nobel to someone who had the ground-breaking insight that politicians are self-interested! Of course public choice theory is more sophisticated than that, but it is also true that we see its basic ideas as part of our nightly entertainment. The popular British TV series *Yes, Minister* was written with the explicit intent of illustrating public choice theory’s understanding of the political process. Shows such as *House of Cards* and *Veep* also give us a perspective on politics that nicely aligns with the insights of public choice. The characters in those shows are self-interested, if not often egomaniacal. They want to get reelected, so their behavior is partially dictated by an awareness of voter preferences, as well as an acute understanding of what voters are oblivious to. In fact, they often like it when voters are unaware because it allows them to work in the shadows. Deals are struck with special interests, and others are

stabbed in the back. Meanwhile, characters, such as *Veep's* Selina Meyer (Julia Louis-Dreyfus), offer public-interest justifications for legislation that viewers know are mere rhetorical smokescreens for the real rationale: the trading of political favors that occupies the days of most politicians. And do viewers regard those shows as nefarious, anti-democracy, right-wing propaganda? No, in fact, most probably believe that they are roughly accurate portrayals of what goes on in our hallowed halls of government. Part of Buchanan's project was to systematically explain such behavior with existing rational choice concepts. So, despite MacLean's efforts to make public choice seem both obscure and radical, not only is the theory widely used in economics—and not just by “right wingers”—but we also see its influence in popular culture.

In MacLean's telling, however, it was Buchanan's contributions to public choice theory that provided Charles Koch with the intellectual framework and vision he needed to institute his radical “stealth plan” to take over America's political institutions and restrict the power of democratic majorities in the name of protecting the wealth, power, and privilege of a rich, white, and male minority. Classical liberalism becomes not an intellectual inquiry with a long and noble history and deep concern for the least well off, but an intellectually bankrupt smokescreen by which various “Koch operatives” and “Koch-financed academics” serve as lackeys for the will to power of the capital-owning elite. MacLean believes she has revealed the full depths of this “master plan” by discovering Buchanan's key role, which has been overlooked by previous treatments of the evolution of libertarian ideas or the nefarious influence of the Koch brothers.

In particular, MacLean makes a great deal out of what she claims are two intellectual influences on Buchanan that explain the particular intellectual path he took. She argues that he was strongly influenced by the pre-Civil War politician and political theorist John C. Calhoun and the 20th century Southern Agrarians, especially the poet Donald Davidson. MacLean argues that Calhoun's defense of minority rights in the context of the Constitution made him the “intellectual lodestar” of the Buchanan-Koch “movement.” Calhoun, of course, was a defender of slavery, which fits MacLean's narrative that Buchanan and public choice theory serve to defend the privileges of rich white men and frustrate the desires of everyone else to use the political process to exercise countervailing power.

It also fits her claim that the key event in motivating Buchanan's work was the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that desegregated U.S. schools. Her evidence for this claim is an article by Warren G. Nutter and Buchanan (1959) that laid out the case for competing private schools as a better educational system in light of the deep controversy over *Brown*. In that article, written while both were at the University of Virginia, they back mandatory universal education funded by government through a voucher-type system. They argue that the institutions that deliver the actual education should be private. It's fair to say that Nutter and Buchanan left themselves open to MacLean's criticism by not explicitly mentioning the racially charged social and political context into which they made their argument, in particular the way it could be used to resist integration.

But the argument for school choice has a long history outside the context of race. For example, it appears in nearly identical form in John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) exactly 100 years earlier. Like Mill, Nutter and Buchanan genuinely believed that their proposed system would provide a better education for all students. Given the way integration had been so strongly resisted by state governments in the south, their proposal, with all of its imperfections, would have plausibly been better than the status quo at delivering more integration. This is consistent with Buchanan's career-long objections to utopian policy proposals, preferring instead imperfect changes that have a more realistic chance of improving people's lives on the margin, even if they fall short of an imagined ideal.

Nonetheless, because she contextualizes it within the pro-segregation forces of 1950s Virginia, MacLean sees Nutter and Buchanan's article as a thinly veiled defense of segregation and thereby opposing *Brown*. Combined with her claim that Buchanan took his concept of "Leviathan" from the racist Southern Agrarian Davidson, it becomes easy for her to tar Buchanan's entire project as racist, even as she is officially agnostic about whether Buchanan himself was a racist. When Charles Koch found Buchanan's work, with its intellectual critique of government, defense of restraints upon the majority, and commitment to markets, it became, she argues, a natural vehicle for Koch's master plan to create a white, plutarchical oligarchy in the United States.

By now, most readers familiar with public choice theory and the history of the libertarian movement in the United States are

straining to recognize much of anything that's accurate in this account. And that is why MacLean's book is best referred to as a "story" or "speculative historical fiction" in the words of public choice theorist Michael Munger (forthcoming). It also explains why the book has been a make-work program: libertarian scholars have spent the last several months picking apart MacLean's argument and supposed evidence. Not much has been left standing of her case, suffice it to say. In the rest of this essay, I will briefly review her errors of fact and interpretation but will then shift my focus to what I think is the most fundamental problem with the book: MacLean's inability to understand the ideas with which she is grappling. She starts by assuming, rather than demonstrating with evidence, that libertarian ideas are all about defending power and privilege. In combination with her inability to understand the contexts and questions that Buchanan and public choice theory were grappling with, her book became a massive exercise in confirmation bias resulting in misread and misinterpreted sources and factual claims unsupported by those sources. She had her story about libertarianism and, absent the intellectual tools to understand what she was reading, she interpreted her sources in ways that confirmed all of those prejudices. The result is a book that gets almost everything wrong, from the most basic of facts to the highest of theory.

Her factual and interpretive errors have been very well documented in a number of blog posts and reviews by classical liberal scholars such as Phil Magness, David Bernstein, Jonathan Adler, Russ Roberts, David Henderson, Art Carden, Don Boudreaux, Brian Doherty, J. C. Bradbury, and me, as well as several critical reviews by nonlibertarian historians and political scientists. The most comprehensive review has been from her Duke political science colleague Michael Munger (forthcoming), who is a past president of the Public Choice Society. As one example of her careless factual errors, Bernstein (2017) observes that she credits a 1985 speech by Ed Meese as being the inspiration for the creation of the Federalist Society (p. 189). Unfortunately, the Federalist Society was founded in 1982 and the speech has nothing to do with the Society. Bernstein also notes several factual errors about the George Mason University Law School. Several commentators have noted her claim that the Liberty Fund is "Koch-backed," when in fact all its funding comes from its founder, Pierre Goodrich. Russ Roberts (2017) and I (Horwitz 2017) both found places where MacLean's interpretation of

her sources is precisely the opposite of what they actually say, and we show how her creative use of quotation marks creates that result. Doherty (2017) shows that she completely misread a Charles Koch speech she claims was his endorsement of elements of Buchanan's ideas when it was, in fact, about Koch's own "market-based management" and ideas he adopted from Michael Polanyi. Bradbury (2017) carefully analyzes MacLean's treatment of a 1983 Buchanan article on Social Security that appeared in this journal and finds that she does not understand Buchanan's argument and selectively quotes to severely distort his meaning.

MacLean also claims that public choice theory involves no empirical work (p. 42), and that no empirical support exists for it, ignoring the vast quantity of empirical research in its flagship journal *Public Choice*, including in the very first issue. The irony here is that she employs zero quantitative or statistical data to back up any of the empirical claims she makes about the failures of free markets or the influence of ideas (e.g., the very questionable claim that James Buchanan was highly influential in bringing people to libertarianism). Her reference to Charles Dickens's novels, which are fiction, as a way to "grasp the reality of unregulated capitalism" is both an abuse of literature and nothing resembling empirical evidence.

And, most important, Phil Magness (2017a, 2017b) has pointed out that neither John Calhoun's nor Donald Davidson's name appears anywhere in the index of the 20 volumes of Buchanan's collected works. There is one mention of the Southern Agrarians in his autobiography, but not as an intellectual influence. Buchanan names his intellectual influences in several places in his work, and neither of those names appears in those lists. It is stunning to anyone reasonably familiar with Buchanan's work to read MacLean's passages in which she gives prominence to those thinkers. There is simply no evidence whatsoever to support that intellectual influence. They appear to be figments of her imagination. Finally, nearly absent from the book is Buchanan's teacher at Chicago, Frank Knight. He appears briefly as she discusses Buchanan's Chicago experience, but she has no discussion of his role as a deep influence on a number of aspects of Buchanan's thought. This is an enormous omission on her part, as anyone even casually familiar with Buchanan's work would recognize.

This catalogue of errors brings us to the central mystery of this book: MacLean is a well-regarded historian with a named chair at one of the top universities in the United States, so how is it possible

that she got so much wrong here? One hypothesis is that of pure mendacity: she hates libertarian ideas so much, and thinks that the influence of the Kochs is so nefarious, that she was willing to simply provide whatever evidence she could fabricate to bring them down. She thinks she is fighting back the forces of evil and is justified in doing so by whatever means necessary. Anyone familiar with Buchanan's work and libertarian ideas more broadly cannot rule this motive out after reading the book. Rather than adopt MacLean's preferred strategy of reading other authors in the worst light possible, however, I want to offer a different hypothesis.

It is clear throughout the book that MacLean simply does not have the intellectual background and tools to understand the ideas she is dealing with. She is not familiar enough with the economic and political theory, nor the social science more broadly, to understand the contexts and questions that motivate Buchanan's research and that of public choice theorists in general. Buchanan's intellectual context is not the South, either in the form of the Southern Agrarians (Buchanan's 1992 autobiography *Better than Plowing*, despite MacLean's claim to the contrary, makes clear his lack of a romantic view of farm life) or the slavery-defending Calhoun. The real context, made clear with a quick look at any of his major works, was figuring out how people choose in groups, and especially how choices can be made through the political process in ways that ensure that all voices get heard. Central to Buchanan's thought was the importance of consent in politics. One way to view his project is that it was an attempt to explain how nonmarket decisionmaking processes might also be made "mutually beneficial" in the way that market exchanges are. That is, how can we make it so that decisions made outside the market are ones that benefit all parties? These are the questions that lead him to grapple with Hobbes first and foremost, because one of Buchanan's concerns is how to enable both full participation and consent in political decisionmaking processes while still ensuring respect for the rights of individuals. His concern with consent and participation also explains the importance of John Rawls to his later work, as Rawls, like Buchanan, is concerned with how we justify collective decisionmaking and how people might consent to a set of governing rules.

Those questions arose out of Buchanan's earlier work on the fiscal elements of the state, where Buchanan's initial exposure to the work of the Swedish economist Knut Wicksell was, according to him,

formative to his development of public choice. A similar story can be told about the Italian public finance economists whom he constantly lists as an influence. MacLean briefly notes the importance of Wicksell and the Italians in a discussion of Buchanan's own account of his work. However, she spends only two paragraphs on it, dismissing it with a "This in fact may be true" (p. 42), and then notes the irony of his relying on Wicksell because Wicksell was a man of the left. That fact throws a rather inconvenient truth into her narrative: rather than explore the intellectually fascinating and complex question of why a supposed man of the right would find intellectual influence from a man of the left, she can see the world only in terms of overly simplistic partisan politics. In the very next paragraph she tries to tie his views on public finance to "the southern-state 'Redeemer' governments that had put an end to Reconstruction." She then adds, "although Buchanan did not comment on the similarity" (p. 43). Well, perhaps that's because, even if such a similarity exists, the relevant context for Buchanan was Wicksell and the Italians, as he consistently indicated throughout his work.

Good historians don't have to take the statements of historical figures at face value, but finding a meaning other than the plain words of the subject requires actual evidence from other sources or statements of the actors. Otherwise, one ends up with pages of confirmation bias. Unfortunately, a lack of such evidence is not a barrier to MacLean's continued insistence that what Buchanan and others are really talking about is something very different than their plain words, especially with respect to race. Such evidence-free interpretations violate what should be the canons of sound historical scholarship, but are plausibly explained by her assumption that her subjects have socially destructive beliefs in combination with her inability to understand the ideas they are exploring.

She makes a similar move in her discussion of the article on education vouchers, citing the fact that Nutter and Buchanan didn't talk explicitly about race or *Brown* as evidence that the article is a racial dog-whistle. Here MacLean discovers one advantage of uncovering a purported "stealth plan" (despite the fact that all of this material is very publicly available): the absence of evidence can be cited as evidence for just how stealthy the plan is. Like conspiracy theories more generally, MacLean's argument is, in many places, unfalsifiable. There is no imaginable set of evidence that would, in her mind, count against it. She certainly does not articulate what such evidence would

look like, which would have been the intellectually responsible move. It also might not be the best of strategies on MacLean's part to accuse defenders of free markets of stealthy racism while offering explicit and approving citations to Richard T. Ely and John Maynard Keynes. Ely and Keynes were both active eugenicists, and Ely in particular made his views about the inferiority of some races a key element of his case for the necessity of government intervention into markets (see Leonard 2016).

But MacLean's intellectual misunderstanding of the relevant ideas extends beyond their historical context to the ideas themselves. She cannot understand that the article on education vouchers was nothing radical, nor was it "Mont Pelerin Society economics." It was a standard issue mainstream analysis of the benefits of competition using basic ideas from the economic way of thinking. They might have been wrong that such a system would be better for all, but actually engaging the argument would require abilities that MacLean does not appear to possess.

In addition, she is unable to correctly explain the idea of concentrated benefits and diffuse costs in the context of public choice's explanation of the growth of government. Her discussion of Buchanan's Southern Economic Association presidential address "What Should Economists Do?" shows that she does not understand what economists mean by "allocation problems"—it's not about "resource distribution" and inequality. She gets the message of Buchanan's "The Samaritan's Dilemma" article completely backward. She also completely misreads Buchanan and Tullock's (1962) discussion in *The Calculus of Consent* about the tradeoff between external costs and decisionmaking costs in the context of the role of the Constitution in 1900 and 1960, claiming they argue the exact opposite of what they do, as the next sentence after her truncated quote shows (p. 80). She claims (p. 290, fn. 42) that Tyler Cowen's (1998) *In Praise of Commercial Culture* "elaborated on old shibboleths" from Ludwig von Mises's (1956) *The Anti-Capitalistic Mentality*, which only demonstrates that she either did not read or did not understand either book, as their overlap is minimal and their major claims are completely orthogonal to each other. At some point, her consistent pattern of misusing and misreading her sources, and always in the same way, has to lead even a sympathetic reader to wonder whether there is something more at work here than confirmation bias resulting from having exceeded her intellectual limits.

She also repeatedly takes the positive claims of economists and reads them as normative ones, especially in her discussion of Tyler Cowen's (2013) *Average is Over* and also in several discussions of Buchanan's work. She also does not appear to understand the role of analytical assumptions, even when clearly indicated as such, in doing social science. The ability to distinguish among positive statements, normative statements, and analytical assumptions is central to understanding work in the social sciences and philosophy, especially political economy. Her inability to do so, and her self-admitted lack of knowledge of economics, are clear on page after page of the book.

It is understandable that a historian might lack the needed economic knowledge to tackle a project like this one. Absent an economist co-author, what could one do? If one is concerned with getting the ideas right, the responsible path would be to find people who know a lot about Buchanan and public choice theory and take the opportunity both to learn from them and to use them as a check on your claims in the book. In MacLean's case, just such an opportunity was available to her with nothing more than a walk across the Duke campus. In Duke's political science department are the current and two past presidents of the Public Choice Society, one of whom (Geoffrey Brennan) was a co-author of Buchanan's on multiple major works. MacLean had absolutely no contact with any of them, nor did she contact any of the faculty at George Mason University's economics department, where many public choice ideas were further developed and where many of the later events of the book unfold. Ignorance of another discipline is forgivable. Writing a "history" book about a major thinker and willfully refusing to engage living persons who know his ideas inside and out as a way to ensure the accuracy of your scholarship is an unforgivable scholarly transgression. Of all of the many such transgressions MacLean commits in this book, this one does the most damage to any claim that she was interested in the truth as opposed to writing a pure ideological tract.

The intellectual error that is most frustrating, however, is her understanding of the relationship between public choice theory and questions of power and privilege. As Munger (forthcoming) points out in his review, MacLean is an unreconstructed majoritarian. She genuinely believes—at least in this book—that the majority should always be able to enact its preferences and that constitutional constraints on majority rule are ways of protecting the power and privilege of wealthy white males. That's why she chose "democracy

in chains” as her title and why she believes public choice theory is a tool of the powerful elite. As Munger also observes, normally such a view would be seen as a strawman because no serious political scientist believes it, not to mention that no democracy in the world lacks constitutional constraints on majorities. For some people, however, what is “normally” true becomes inconvenient when it comes to exposing “Koch-backed” conspiracies. In addition, one must presume that a progressive like MacLean thinks *Loving v. Virginia*, *Roe v. Wade*, and *Obergefell v. Hodges*, not to mention *Brown*, were all decided correctly, even though all of them put local democracies in chains and, in some cases, thwarted the expressed preferences of a majority of Americans.

For public choice theory, constitutions protect the citizens from two forms of tyranny: tyrannies of the majority when they wish to violate rights and tyrannies of coalitions of minorities who wish to use the state to redirect resources to themselves by taking advantage of the logic of concentrated benefits and diffuse costs. Buchanan’s political vision is, according to Karen Horn (2011), a world without discrimination and domination. Constitutional constraints, for Buchanan, are a central way of ensuring that democracy actually protects rights by preventing the powerful from exploiting the powerless and that political decisions involve the consent of all. Constitutional constraints make democracy work for all citizens—they do not put it in chains.

When MacLean argues that public choice is a tool to protect privilege, she gets it exactly backward. Public choice shows us how those with the power to influence the political process can use that power to create and protect privilege for themselves *at the expense of the rest of the citizenry*. Public choice’s analysis of rent seeking and politics as exchange enables us to strip off the mask of bogus “public-interest” explanations and to realize that a great deal of political activity is the socially destructive exploitation of the least well-off. To borrow a bit from the left’s rhetoric: public choice is better seen as a tool of resistance to oligarchy than a defense of it.

*Washington Post* criminal justice columnist Radley Balko’s (2017) work in exposing the abuses and discrimination in the criminal justice system beautifully shows the way in which public choice theory can be deployed to critique the powerful in the name of the powerless. Viewing political actors as just as self-interested as market actors and understanding the logic of concentrated benefits and dispersed costs

help to explain why police unions don't serve the needs of either the police or the communities they supposedly protect. They also explain why the police are more interested in arresting low-level drug dealers, who are more likely to be nonwhite, than dealing with other forms of crime. The complications that MacLean ignores in her single-minded praise of democracy are demonstrated when we think about police violence. As Balko points out, when large majorities wrongly believe that crime is rising, they vote for people and policies that continue to violate our civil liberties. They empower police to invade the homes of innocents and generally treat Americans as guilty until proven innocent. Public choice helps us understand why putting majorities in metaphorical chains can help stop "democracy" from putting innocent human beings in real ones.

Public choice theory also sheds light on why corporate welfare remains so common even as so many see it as a problem. It can explain the growth of the military-industrial complex while challenging public-interest explanations of that growth. Public choice theorists tell similar stories about immigration policy and a number of other issues that concern modern progressives. The battles over Uber and Lyft can be seen as the powerful government-licensed taxi companies fighting to protect their monopoly privileges and profits against less powerful upstart entrepreneurs better meeting the wants of the public. These are all excellent illustrations of how public choice theory can explain frustrating political outcomes, and why the theory is useful in understanding how the powerful can victimize the weak. Public choice theory, properly understood, is a tool of critical thinking that enables us to deconstruct political rhetoric to see the underlying forces at work that are allowing those with wealth and access to power to use politics to acquire and protect their privileges and profits.

Unfortunately, public choice scholars and libertarian thinkers more generally have perhaps not done enough to stress this aspect of the tools of classical liberal social analysis. Too often we have left ourselves open to MacLean's misinterpretation by appearing to side with those with power, including elements of the long-standing fusionist project of seeing libertarianism as part of "the right." The last decade or so has seen much more analysis of how classical liberal ideas can improve the lives of the least well off, for example in the attempts to blend Rawls and Hayek and the bleeding heart libertarian movement more broadly, or in the growth of work on race and gender and the

ways that the state harms minority groups. Public choice theory has played a role in that work, but there could still be even more emphasis on how the theory helps us understand how political rhetoric does not align with political reality and how those with access to political power benefit from that misalignment. There is no doubt that MacLean has grossly mischaracterized the public choice and libertarian projects in this book, but those of us who have been mischaracterized will not do ourselves any good if we refuse to look in the mirror and ask whether there is anything we can do differently and better to prevent it from happening again.

One of the really unfortunate aspects of this book is that it is a missed opportunity for people in the humanities to get a better understanding of what public choice theory is actually about and why it might be helpful to the work that they do. Public choice could be a really valuable addition to the toolkit of humanities scholars. For historians, the uses seem obvious. Public choice is an analytical framework that need not generate any normative conclusions. Historians could use it to explain the machinations of the powerful without having to endorse any particular political views. Public choice's focus on the pursuit of self-interest in politics as well as in private life enables historians to offer new interpretations of historical events. Such applications of public choice theory would make for fascinating work in the hands of historians, but the worry is that MacLean's book may have poisoned that well for the foreseeable future. If any time historians cite Buchanan or make use of public choice theory, the reaction is "isn't that the racist theory that hates democracy?" then a huge opportunity for generating new knowledge will have been lost.

In many of the same ways, public choice theory can provide a new and innovative framework through which to read works of literature and other artistic products. In a recent article, Sarah Skwire (2017) sketches out ways in which public choice might offer us enlightening interpretations of Shakespeare. One can imagine other literary scholars approaching other classic works with public choice's framework for understanding political interaction, especially its ability to get behind the rhetoric of public interest and see the private maneuvering at play. If MacLean's book gets traction in the humanities at large, the damage to public choice theory might be too much to allow this sort of work to happen. And that would be a huge loss for our understanding of literary texts. MacLean's inability to understand what public choice theory is really about has not just created the immediate harm of a book that

has problems from start to finish. It may well also create external costs for people in her own and neighboring disciplines who might well have done high-quality and interesting work with the theory, had their introduction to it been something other than MacLean's book.

Having had our work so deeply misunderstood and maligned, including our commitment to improving the lives of all citizens, it's understandable how strongly so many public choice scholars, and libertarian academics more broadly, have reacted to the book. In turn, MacLean has accused those scholars of a "coordinated attack," and, at one point, claimed that "Koch operatives" were trying to destroy her reputation and silence her. The truth is simpler: when you attack a well-respected and beloved scholar and the ideas that many other living scholars take very seriously, they aren't going to roll over and play dead. The pushback against MacLean's book has included very careful documentation of her errors and misrepresentations as summarized above. Her response has been not to address the particular criticisms but to, instead, maintain the rhetoric of being unfairly "under attack" by the forces of the right. Her unwillingness to respond to the chapter-and-verse criticisms of her misinterpretations, misuse of sources, and unsupported claims is further evidence that concern with the truth is not her primary objective.

Despite the numerous flaws that cause its story to completely crumble, *Democracy in Chains* does ask some of the right questions that could have served as the basis for a productive dialogue between the Nancy MacLeans of the world and the libertarian scholars who have rushed to the defense of Buchanan and public choice theory. In the end, what her book has revealed is that, for many on the left, there is simply no interest in engaging libertarian scholars in a serious, good-faith intellectual conversation. MacLean's own responses and the unwillingness of so many other progressive historians and scholars to call her out on her obvious scholarly transgressions are very sad outcomes. A serious attempt to engage public choice theory by progressive scholars would have been welcome, as would a subsequent exchange that involved more than progressives taking legitimate scholarly criticisms as coordinated attacks and then shouting "Koch!" as if that were an answer to said criticisms. Such a conversation will have to await the publication of a different book. Serious scholars from all perspectives can only hope that such a book is committed to the truth, honest scholarship, and good-faith engagement with criticism in all the ways that MacLean's book is not.

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## **The Big Stick: The Limits of Soft Power and the Necessity of Military Force**

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New York: Basic Books, 2017, 304 pp.

In the spring and early summer of 2017, Republicans and Democrats alike reacted angrily when President Donald Trump called for deep cuts in nearly every government department in order to offset large increases planned for the Pentagon and the Department of Homeland Security. The State Department took a particularly big hit—a nearly 30 percent reduction from the year before. When Secretary of State Rex Tillerson appeared before the Senate Foreign Relations committee in June, Chairman Bob Corker explained that he had stopped considering the administration’s budget request after five minutes. “This is a total waste of time,”

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