



THE BAFTI LER

The Wonderful Death of a State

Quinn Slobodian

April 4, 2023

It is not easy to start a new state. The earth's surface is already divided up. A new state implies territory taken from an existing one. For good reason, states prefer this not to happen. Not wanting their own borders challenged, states defend international law that sets them in stone. Even during decolonization in Africa and Asia, the often-arbitrary outlines of colonies usually retained their shape as new nations. Demands from minorities seeking self-determination were ignored or suppressed, and the international community agreed. Cartography was destiny.

In the 1990s, these assumptions collapsed. The dissolution of the Soviet bloc yielded a raft of new and reestablished nations, scrambling the contours of Europe. The red mass of the USSR on the map at my middle school sprouted a bloom of new republics at its edges; the oblong of Yugoslavia was in pieces by the time I left high school.

Czechoslovakia underwent mitosis. The breakup of socialist Europe seemed to open Pandora's box. The spirit of nation-making was afoot. New movements agitated for their own right to secede: Catalans in Spain, the Flemish in Belgium, Tamils in Sri Lanka. In my own country, the province of Quebec came within a percentage point of voting to leave Canada.

When I was fifteen, my family was living in Vanuatu, a tiny island nation between Fiji and Australia. The Chinese and the Americans jockeyed for influence there, donating Toyota trucks to local health projects and building infrastructure. This was not so much

humanitarianism as a testament to what a seat in the United Nations meant. Vanuatu was a nation of under two hundred thousand people and only a few thousand square miles, and it had only been independent since 1980—but it had the same vote in the General Assembly as a world superpower. Japan lobbied tiny Pacific nations for their support to continue commercial whaling, China to build support for its material and strategic interests. In the 1990s, the UN granted seats to tiny nations long excluded: Andorra, San Marino, Monaco, and Liechtenstein.

Most people saw this wave of nations through the lens of politics—some worried about resurgent “neo-nationalism.” Market radicals saw it through the lens of capitalism—and were happy with what they saw. Each state spawned by secession was a new jurisdiction, a start-up territory that might offer itself as a refuge for flight capital or a site of unregulated business or research. Micronations were zones, bound spaces of legal difference small enough to stage economic experiments. They were also what the [science-fiction author Neal Stephenson](#) called *phyles*—voluntary gatherings of like-minded residents. Secession was a way to subdivide the earth and bring new territories into the bustling marketplace of global competition. To some, neo-nationalism could be the harbinger of a coming golden age of social sorting defined by ever-shrinking jurisdictions.

In the United States, two groups formed an alliance in response to this moment of geopolitical churn: market radicals seeking passage to a capitalist polity beyond democracy and neo-Confederates seeking to resurrect the Old South. They wove together principles of decentralized capitalist competition and racial homogeneity and dreamed of Bantustans of choice—Grand Apartheid from below. Though their immediate goal failed, their vision of laissez-faire segregation lived on. For them, secession was the path to a world that was socially divided but economically integrated—separate but global.

The most important figure in the secessionist alliance was Murray Rothbard. Born in the Bronx in 1926, he came up through the world of neoliberal think tanks, becoming a member of the Mont Pelerin Society in the 1950s. Throughout his career, he developed a particularly radical version of libertarianism known as anarcho-capitalism. He had no tolerance for government of any kind, seeing states as “organized banditry” and taxation as “theft on a gigantic, and unchecked, scale.” In his ideal world, government would be eliminated altogether. Security, utilities, infrastructure, health care: all would be bought through the market with no safety net for those unable to pay. Contracts would replace constitutions, and people would cease to be citizens of any place, only clients of a range of service providers. These would be anti-republics, private ownership and exchange displacing any trace of popular sovereignty.

How to arrive at such an extreme destination? Although the idea of national self-determination was the basis of the modern state system he wanted to escape, he thought a radicalization of national self-determination might provide the means of exit.

Accelerating the principle of secession would spark a chain reaction of disintegration. Most new polities would not be anarcho-capitalist, but the process of breakup would strip the state of its most precious asset—its impression of permanence. Creating new flags and new countries eroded the legitimacy of old ones and chipped away at their self-serving mythologies. If new territories avoided being crushed by the vengeful central government, they would take on different shapes and forms. What if some opted for his preferred mode of statelessness? “The more states the world is fragmented into,” Rothbard wrote, “the less power any one state can build up.” It was a first principle for him that secession movements should be celebrated and supported “wherever and however they may arise.” Crack-up was the flywheel of human progress.

Radicals should not seize the state but get out—and make new polities of their own.

Rothbard’s life was marked by a search for signs of potential secession—fractures in the edifice of public faith in existing states. When he found them, he did his best to deepen them. In the 1960s, he saw promise in the New Left’s opposition to the Vietnam War. Rothbard hated the war too. He saw America’s self-appointed role of global policeman as a pretext for centralizing state power and expanding the cronyism, waste, and inefficiency of the military-industrial complex. A tax-funded standing army with a monopoly on modern weaponry was anathema to his principles, and conscription was “mass enslavement.” Although Rothbard’s anarcho-capitalism was rejected by the socialist New Left, he wondered if their opposition to *some* actions of the state might be converted into hatred of the state *as such*. Taken seriously, wouldn’t “dropping out” translate into exit? In a journal that Rothbard helped launch called *Left & Right*, he propagated secession as revolutionary praxis. Radicals should not seize the state but get out—and make new polities of their own.

As fuel for secession, Rothbard saw nationalism as a positive force. Separatist movements from Scotland to Croatia to Biafra were built on a common sense of group belonging in a nation or an ethnicity. In the United States of the 1960s, he was especially interested in the potential of Black nationalism. He admired those in the Black freedom struggle who aimed for communal self-help and collective self-defense and endorsed Malcolm X’s call for separatism over Martin Luther King Jr.’s call for restraint and nonviolence. Rothbard and his collaborators believed that Black secession from the United States was achievable; indeed, communities should respect the principle of racial separation. Yet he quickly became frustrated by the cross-racial collaboration of white and Black radicals. Blacks should work with Blacks, he thought, just as it was “the responsibility of whites to build the white movement.”

The deviation of the New Left from his preferred script of racial exit turned Rothbard violently against it by the early 1970s. Their dogged egalitarianism was an affront to his belief in the biologically hardwired hierarchy of talent and ability in both individuals and groups. He condemned affirmative action and quotas for underrepresented groups, comparing them to a British dystopian novel called *Facial Justice*, in which the state dictates medical operations to ensure that “all girls’ faces are equally pretty.” What was needed, he thought, was a countermovement—a revolt against human equality. After helping found the Cato Institute with Charles Koch in 1976, he aided with the launch of a new think tank in the Deep South in 1982: the Ludwig von Mises Institute for Austrian Economics in Auburn, Alabama, named after Friedrich Hayek’s mentor, the Austrian economist whose seminars Rothbard had attended in New York from 1949 to 1959.

Although Mises was no anarcho-capitalist himself, the institute which took his name became the flagship think tank for the most radical strain of libertarianism. Its distance from the Beltway signified its rejection of the politics of lobbying used by more mainstream groups like Cato and the Heritage Foundation. Instead, it pushed more politically marginal positions like the virtues of secession, the need for a return to the gold standard, and opposition to racial integration. Its director was Rothbard’s kindred spirit and closest collaborator, Llewellyn “Lew” Rockwell Jr., both a radical libertarian and an advocate of racial separatism ever since his first position at the conservative publisher Arlington House (named, with little subtlety, after the last residence of Confederate general Robert E. Lee). As an editor, Rockwell commissioned books on the disastrous effects of desegregation and the betrayal of white politics in southern Africa, published alongside David Friedman’s *Machinery of Freedom* and panic-mongering bestsellers like *How to Profit from the Coming Devaluation*. One book Rockwell pitched to the communist-cum-IQ-race-scientist Nathaniel Weyl was called *Integration: The Dream that Failed*; Rockwell’s personal opinion was that the only option was a “de facto segregation for the majority of both races.”

Like Rothbard, Rockwell combined extreme laissez-faire politics with a fixation on race. In 1986, he began editing the investment newsletter of the politician and coin dealer Ron Paul, which trafficked in similar themes. The newsletters were lucrative—subscriptions brought in close to \$1 million a year in revenue. A kind of IKEA catalog for the coming race war, the newsletter—which changed its name to the *Ron Paul Survival Report* in 1992—riffed on current events and listed books and services on how to bury your belongings, convert your wealth into gold or stash it overseas, turn your home into a fortress, and defend your family. “Be prepared,” it read. “If you live anywhere near a big city with a substantial black population, both husband and wife need a gun and training in it.”

South Africa appeared as a cautionary tale in the pages of the Ron Paul newsletters, with articles lamenting its “dewhiteization” and advocating cantonization. If Palestinians could have a “homeland,” the newsletter asked, why couldn’t white South Africans?

The *Survival Report* presented a vision of universal racial separatism. “Integration has not produced love and brotherhood *anyplace*,” it proclaimed. “People prefer their own.” The “disappearing white majority” meant that the United States was becoming South Africa in slow motion. Whites were “not replacing themselves,” and minority groups were capturing state resources. The solution proposed was an old one. “The Old South had it exactly right: secession means liberty,” the *Survival Report* stated in 1994.

Not coincidentally, the newsletters’ themes echoed the *Rothbard-Rockwell Report*, which the duo began publishing in 1990. (The publication was later renamed *Triple R*; when Paul returned to Washington, his readers were given free subscriptions.) Rockwell called the ideology he and Rothbard were developing “paleo-libertarianism.” The prefix signaled their belief that libertarianism needed to be “deloused” of the libertine trends of the 1960s in favor of conservative values. The paleo-libertarians hoped to “hive off” the “hippies, druggies, and militantly anti-Christian atheists” of the broader libertarian movement to defend Judeo-Christian traditions and Western culture and restore the focus on the family, church, and community as both protection against the state and the building blocks of a coming stateless society.

Paleo-libertarians wished for a capitalist anarchist future but they did not foresee an amorphous mass of atomized individuals. Rather, people would be nested in collectives scaling upward from the heterosexual nuclear family in what Edmund Burke called, in an often-repeated quote, the “little platoons we belong to in society.” It was taken for granted that these little platoons would divide according to race. “Wishing to associate with members of one’s own race, nationality, religion, class, sex, or even political party is a natural and normal human impulse,” Rockwell wrote. “There is nothing wrong with blacks preferring the ‘black thing.’ But paleolibertarians would say the same about whites preferring the ‘white thing’ or Asians the ‘Asian thing.’”

The revival of secession at the end of the Cold War looked to paleo-libertarians like a prime opening for a new political geography. “This is what it must have been like living through the French Revolution,” Rothbard wrote. “History usually proceeds at a glacial pace . . . And then, wham!” Of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Rothbard remarked that it was “a particularly wonderful thing to see unfolding before our very eyes, the death of a state.” By this he meant, of course, both a specific state but also, optimistically, the death of states altogether. Secession was the means; anarcho-capitalist society was the end. Paleo-libertarians hoped they could keep the dissolution rolling back across the Atlantic. Rothbard’s rhetoric was severe. “We shall [break the clock of social](#)

democracy,” he wrote. “We shall break the clock of the Great Society. We shall break the clock of the welfare state. . . . We shall repeal the twentieth century.”

Paleo-libertarians saw their task as preparing for the day after the collapse. Looking at the fate of the USSR, they asked compelling questions: What would happen in their own country if the regime crumbled overnight? How could collective life continue to function? The thought was not unpleasant. It offered the tantalizing prospect of sweeping away decades of quixotic state intervention, leaving a blank slate. Rockwell fantasized about a self-administered shock therapy, privatizing air, land, and water; selling off highways and airports; ending welfare; returning the dollar to gold; and letting the poor fend for themselves. Yet paleo-libertarians also recognized they would need some way to construct a new order out of the wreckage at ground zero. They found common ground with the far right in the need for tradition and civilizational values to bind collectives together. Both groups embraced explicitly racial consciousness, a move that banished them to the margins of mainstream opinion but offered a space for collaboration.

Rothbard brokered an alliance with a far-right group based out of the Rockford Institute in Illinois who called themselves “paleo-conservatives.” Both sides of the “paleo alliance” felt it was time to stop denying the reality of cultural and racial difference, and redesign political entities to reflect basic facts of psychology and biology. They both scorned the programs of the “warfare-welfare state.” Overseas military interventions, civil rights legislation, and federal antipoverty efforts were merely make-work programs for shiftless bureaucrats and platforms for parasitical politicians.

The paleo alliance held their first meeting in Dallas in 1990. The plains around Dallas and the veld of South Africa were not so different. Both places were crucibles of enduring myths. Both saw waves of white settlement and the nineteenth-century conversion of communally owned territory inhabited by indigenous people into individually owned properties. South Africa had Voortrekkers pushing into the interior; Texas had wagon trains that made their way from the West to the waters of the Gulf. A residue of stories remained in the wake of both migrations: about the malleability of political geography, white hands drawing value from supposed wasteland, and the need for racial solidarity against a darker-skinned existential enemy. Settler ideology united people half a world apart. Rothbard gave a special status to the pioneer and the settler, whom he saw as the ultimate libertarian actor—“the first user and transformer” of territory. He placed the ownership of “virgin land” seized and made valuable by labor at the core of “the new libertarian creed.” To the objection that settlers never found land truly empty of humans, Rothbard had a rebuttal. North America’s indigenous people, even if they did have a right to the land they cultivated under natural law, had lost this right through their failure to hold it as individuals. Indigenous people, he claimed, “lived under a collectivistic regime.” Because they were proto-communists, their claim to the land was moot.

The program was to accelerate the collapse while preparing for its arrival.

The new group was called the John Randolph Club, named after a slaveholder whose catchphrase was “I love liberty, I hate equality.” It was a who’s who of the far right. A founding member was Jared Taylor, whose white nationalist journal *American Renaissance* protested the ongoing “dispossession” of whites by non-whites. Another was Peter Brimelow, the most prominent opponent of non-white immigration, whose book *Alien Nation* brought an “explicitly white supremacist position” back into mainstream discussions. Others included the columnist Samuel Francis, who called on Caucasians to reassert “identity” and “solidarity” through “a racial consciousness as whites,” and the journalist and politician Pat Buchanan, whose nativist tirades against non-white immigration presaged the rhetoric of Donald Trump.

Rather than indigenous self-determination, the John Randolph Club championed the demand of autonomy for white Southerners, better known as the neo-Confederate movement. And it was these enthusiasts for the Old South who most directly brought the global spirit of secession into U.S. politics. The neo-Confederates attempted to make their case by constructing a wobbly body of research claiming that Southerners were ethnically distinct from Northerners, comprising migrants from Wales, Ireland, and Scotland rather than England. The so-called Celtic South Thesis, based in large part on a 1988 book called *Cracker Culture*, was full of obvious holes—not to mention the small problem of the history of slavery and its demographic legacy—but it sufficed as a makeshift translation of parallel developments across the Atlantic. The neo-Confederates were explicitly inspired by European examples. Their main organization, the Southern League (later League of the South), took its name from the Lega Nord, a right-wing political party that sought to separate northern Italy from the rest of the country. The Southern League’s “New Dixie Manifesto,” published in the *Washington Post*, called for exit from the “multicultural, continental empire” of the United States and the creation of a Commonwealth of Southern States. Their website included a page on “homelands,” with web links to secessionists ranging from southern Sudan and Okinawa to Flanders and South Tirol. “Independence. If it sounds good in Lithuania, it’ll play great in Dixie!” the site read. The page also linked to a party that would eventually help spark the successful departure of Great Britain from the European Union: the UK Independence Party (UKIP).

While the neo-Confederates were not anarcho-capitalists for the most part, Rothbard endorsed the need “to preserve and cherish the right of secession, the right of different regions, groups, or ethnic nationalities to get the blazes out of the larger entity; to set up their own independent nation.” He also held a revisionist interpretation of the Civil War. He compared the Union cause to the adventurist foreign policy of the United States in the 1990s: America roved the world looking for monsters to slay in the name of democracy

and human rights, a perverse campaign whose outcome was death and destruction rather than any of the stated aims. “The tragedy of the southern defeat in the Civil War,” he wrote, was that it “buried the very thought of secession in this country from that time forward. But might does not make right, and the cause of secession may rise again.”

At the inaugural meeting of the paleo alliance, Rothbard explained that their vision united around the twin ideas of social conservatism and exit from the larger state. In a world without central government, the shapes of new communities would be determined by “neighborhood-contracts” between property owners. Elsewhere, he called these entities, which closely resembled Neal Stephenson’s idea of the phyle, “nations by consent.” Disintegrate and segregate was the program, installing homogeneity as the basis of the polity. Merely stopping new immigration would not suffice. The “Old American republic” of 1776 had been swamped and overwhelmed by “Europeans, and then Africans, non-Spanish Latin Americans and Asians.” Because the United States was “no longer one nation,” he wrote, “we had better start giving serious thought to national separation.” They might start small, claiming only a portion of the national territory. “We must dare to think the unthinkable,” he said, “before we can succeed at any of our noble and far-reaching goals.” If he had his way, the wonderful death of the state would come to America too.

We often speak of secessionist and far-right movements such as the neo-Confederates in purely political or cultural terms, as symptoms of a sometimes pathologized fixation on ethnicity that crowds out all economic concerns. But this is wrong. We should also think of the radical politics of the 1990s in terms of capitalism. Rothbard and Rockwell’s own reasoning began with economics. As adherents of the gold standard, abandoned by the United States in the 1970s, they felt that the fiat money system was doomed to a coming period of hyperinflation. Breaking up large states was a way to get out ahead of the pending monetary meltdown and create smaller states more able to reorganize after the crash. Ron Paul spoke of his conviction that change would come “with a calamity and with a bang.” “Eventually the state disintegrates under the conditions we have today,” he said, comparing the United States to the Soviet Union. He described his daydream of a Republic of Texas with “no income tax and a sound currency and a thriving metropolis.”

Even for those without such dire prognoses of the near future, it was simply true that the globalization of the 1990s made small states more viable than ever before. Singapore showed that while focusing on exports and free trade might expose you to the vagaries of global demand, it was no longer necessary to grow your own crops to feed your population. As market radicals so often pointed out, microstates like Luxembourg and Monaco were among the richest in the world.

More



The Year the Clock Broke

By [John Ganz](#)

Paleo-libertarians hoped that the spread of secession as an option would help accelerate economic reform away from social democracy and toward a more stripped-down version of capitalism. The most eloquent proponent of this argument was Rothbard's protégé Hans-Hermann Hoppe, who carried the torch of his mentor's vision after Rothbard died of a heart attack in 1995. Trained as a sociologist in Frankfurt, Hoppe immigrated to the United States and joined Rothbard on the faculty at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas School of Business, in 1986. An active member of the John Randolph Club, he felt that a reversal happened after the end of the Cold War, as the once somnolent socialist bloc of Eastern Europe became the vanguard of global capitalism. Estonia was governed by a man in his early thirties who claimed that the only economic book he'd ever read was Milton Friedman's *Free to Choose*. Tiny Montenegro set up a libertarian private university. Countries across the region introduced low flat taxes on the advice of neoliberal think tanks. As Hoppe saw it, an Eastern Europe filled with small open economies would put pressure on the welfare programs of the West, as those economies sucked in investment and lured away manufacturing jobs. "The emergence of a handful of Eastern European 'Hong Kongs' or 'Singapores,'" he wrote, "would quickly attract substantial amounts of Western capital and entrepreneurial talent."

Hoppe foresaw a supercharging of the dynamic of national self-determination promoted by Woodrow Wilson after World War I, when the once-sprawling Hapsburg and Ottoman Empires were broken up into constituent states and mandates. These future states would be internally homogeneous, he wrote, replacing "the forced integration of the past" with the "voluntary physical segregation of distinct cultures." Hoppe believed that the new territories should be much smaller than the contemporary nation-state. "The smaller the country," he noted, "the greater pressure to opt for free trade rather than protectionism." Citing micronations and city-states as templates, he called for "a world of tens of thousands of free countries, regions, and cantons, of hundreds of thousands of free cities." It was a vision of something like Europe's Middle Ages—the continent in the year 1000 had been a dense pattern of thousands of different polities, reduced over time to a few dozen. Rothbard had said: repeal the twentieth century. Hoppe's message was more extreme: repeal the millennium.

In 2005, Hoppe held the first meeting of the Property and Freedom Society in the gilded ballroom of a hotel on the Turkish Riviera owned by his wife. In its annual gatherings, the PFS unites former members of the John Randolph Club (which dissolved in 1996) with new advocates of stateless libertarianism and racial secession. Prophets of racial and social breakdown share the stage with investment advisors and financial consultants. At one meeting, the psychologist and race theorist Richard Lynn presented his new book on

racial intelligence, *The Global Bell Curve*, while other speakers gave talks on “Public Health as a Lever for Tyranny,” “How to Enrich Yourself at Others’ Expense Without Anyone Noticing It,” and “The Mirage of Cheap Credit.” Leon Louw spoke the same year as Carel Boshoff’s son, Carel Boshoff IV, who gave a talk on what he called the “experiment” of Orania. One of the organizers praised Orania as a “rare example” of peaceful secession. Peter Thiel, at home in this mélange of social conservatism and anti-democratic market radicalism, was scheduled to speak at one of the PFS meetings as well but canceled at the last minute.

At the 2010 annual meeting, a white man raised in Texas, younger than the other speakers, took the stage. In a tweed blazer, with a MacBook on the lectern in front of him, Richard Spencer looked like the history grad student he had recently been. He had just launched an online magazine titled *The Alternative Right*, a term that would make him notorious. In his talk, Spencer painted a picture of a coming world that looked a lot like the paleo alliance’s vision. Racial separatism would be the new norm: “Latino nationalist communities” in California and the Southwest, Black communities in the “inner cities,” a “Christian reconstructionist Protestant state” in the Midwest. For Spencer, present-day politics were heading toward disintegration. The program was to accelerate the collapse while preparing for its arrival.

Spencer rose to prominence six years later when he translated the Nazi salute of “Sieg Heil” into English, shouting “Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!” at a rally in Washington, D.C. To some, the dream of fracture seemed to draw nearer after Trump’s election. The president of the Mises Institute wrote that Trump had shown “the cracks in the globalist narrative” of one-world government and that libertarians should capitalize by supporting all forms of secession.

Hoppe became an icon for the far right. His reputation rested especially on his book *Democracy: The God That Failed*, which cast universal suffrage as modernity’s original sin because it disempowered the caste of “natural elites” who had organized society under monarchy and feudalism. The welfare state spawned by democracy had dysgenic effects, Hoppe argued, encouraging the reproduction of the less able and keeping the talented from excelling. He drew on racial scientists to support his idea that it was necessary to split up into smaller homogeneous communities to reverse the process of “decivilization.” The passage that most delighted the far right was the one that openly embraced the expulsion of political undesirables. “There can be no tolerance toward democrats and communists in a libertarian social order,” Hoppe wrote. “They will have to be physically separated and expelled from society.” Hoppe’s face appeared in a variety of online imagery on the theme of removal, often accompanied by a helicopter, in reference to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet’s notorious disposal of the bodies of opponents from the air.

One of the last talks Rothbard gave before his death took place on a plantation outside Atlanta and envisioned the day when the statues of Union generals and presidents would be “toppled and melted down” like the statue of Lenin in East Berlin, and monuments to Confederate heroes would be erected in their place. Of course, many such [Confederate statues](#) already existed. The defense of one of them, a statue of General Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia, became a symbolic stand for white nationalists in August 2017. Dressed in matching white polo shirts and khaki pants, they carried tiki torches and marched through the city, channeling anxieties of white demographic decline in their chant: “You will not replace us.” One of the organizers of the rally, a white nationalist, was a Hoppe fan—he sold bumper stickers reading [I ♥ PHYSICAL REMOVAL](#).

Rather than disavow such support, Hoppe praised the insights. In 2018, he wrote the foreword for a book titled *White, Right, and Libertarian*; its cover features a helicopter with four bodies dangling from it, their heads displaying the logos of communism, Islam, antifa, and feminism. Hoppe felt that the far right’s emphasis on common culture and even common race showed how to create social cohesion in a future stateless society. Its militant opposition to non-white immigration was also compatible with the closed-borders position that the paleo-libertarians had been promoting since the early 1990s. In the end, he would seem to have no quarrel with an image that appeared on message boards. It showed Rothbard, Hoppe, and Mises (drawn in the style of the far-right icon Pepe the Frog) standing in front of the gold-and-black anarcho-capitalist flag, with Hoppe carrying an assault rifle. In this extreme version of crack-up capitalism, the zone was defined by race and marked by militant intolerance.

The dream of bringing back the Old South looked like an abject failure. No “Commonwealth of Southern States” emerged. Yet there was something more to the paleo alliance than a fever dream of taffeta and chattel slavery. The idea of an independent free-trading South reflected shifting geographies of investment and manufacturing as factories gravitated to places where union laws were weaker and tax breaks were larger. Global logistic hubs were operating in Memphis (FedEx) and Louisville (UPS). Atlanta’s airport was the busiest for passenger traffic in the world. The North Carolina Global TransPark brought sea, road, rail, and air links into a fifteen-thousand-acre zone.

The 1990s were not just a time of fracturing sovereignties in Europe. The same kind of thing was happening in the American hinterlands.

The rural stretches beyond Dallas, the city where the John Randolph Club first met, were grazing lands for most of the twentieth century, but in its last decade they became more profitable as fracking lands. As the shale revolution brought new wealth, the public

ownership of land became ever more politicized. Less than 2 percent of Texas land was federally owned, but in Nevada—where Rothbard and Hoppe taught—84 percent of it was. For those with a vision of a totally privatized country like the paleo-libertarians, this was a continually waving red flag. In the 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century, the desire for ownership fueled secessionist movements, ranging from the would-be Free State of Jefferson in Northern California to the militant ranchers who occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon. Such groups sought to seize territory from the collectivists of Washington, D.C., stake out their own homesteads, and create parallel structures of power. These were not nostalgic throwbacks to earlier eras of self-sufficiency but land grabs centered on the globally traded commodities of beef, oil, and timber.

Dallas itself could have showed the John Randolph Club that modern capitalism offered many ways to distance yourself from other populations without a flag or a seat in the United Nations while remaining interconnected economically. For over a century, the city had been a laboratory for the forms of contract, exclusion, and segregation that the paleo alliance dreamed of. In the 1920s, it passed a law prohibiting racial mixing on city blocks. Whites policed the divisions with vigilante violence. As the city grew, the whites seceded into incorporated enclaves; their tax dollars would pay for their own schools, not those of the city at large.

The 1990s were not just a time of fracturing sovereignties in Europe. The same kind of thing was happening in the American hinterlands. The decade saw an explosion of a new kind of housing complex: the gated community, the latest innovation in spatial segregation. Rothbard and Hoppe's home of Las Vegas was the fastest-growing city in the United States that decade, and the gated community was its favored form. An African American city councilor protesting the multiplication of the walled communities called them "private utopias." The phrase was well chosen. To those who said that the paleo visions were far-fetched, one might respond that their future was already here, in the segregated realities of the American city and its sprawling surroundings. The gated enclaves and walled settlements, the object of much angst and editorializing from centrists and leftist liberals concerned about the decline of public culture, were one of the more stimulating bright spots for libertarians. They asked the question: What if these hated suburban forms were good, actually? Maybe here, in miniature, the project of alternative private government could take root, the creation of liberated zones within the occupied territory. This could be "soft secession" within the state, not outside it. The crack-up could begin at home.