

Fixing America: Essays on Domestic and Foreign Policy offers original insights and pragmatic solutions to intransigent and entrenched political issues domestic and foreign.

Fixing America: Essays on Domestic and Foreign Policy

By James Matthew Sawatzki

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FIXING AMERICA



Essays on Domestic and
Foreign Policy

James Matthew Sawatzki

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Introduction

“Why don’t you write a book, Mr. Sawatzki?” was the most common question asked during my thirty-eight-year teaching career. This was closely followed by, “Why aren’t you teaching in college?” and finally, “Why aren’t you president of the United States?” The third one is easy; I didn’t want to get divorced. There are political wives, like Hillary Clinton, and there are nonpolitical wives like Michelle Obama.

Many political wives are second or third wives. They live for the limelight nearly as much as their career husbands. Bill Clinton was in constant campaign mode when he wasn’t engaged in a sexual tryst. He may have been campaigning then also. I’m sure his mistresses voted for him, as long as they were a “couple.” Hillary continued to vote for him, even after his multiple affairs were exposed — which was inevitable — as they were open secrets among the national media and the Arkansas State Patrol.

I did try my hand at politics during my twenties (a late start by most standards) because I was raised in a very conservative small town in southeast Washington state. It is now referred to as Napa Valley north, and had the industry developed a little earlier, I may never have left town. House Speaker Tom Foley was from my neck of the woods — home to practical farm people, distrustful of politics, who just want to be left alone. My father was active in the local Republican Party. During my youth I attended local Catholic schools. Dad was an insurance general

agent for Mutual and United of Omaha, having transported the family to Walla Walla, Washington from Omaha, Nebraska.

My earliest political memory involves traveling the back roads of Walla Walla County in a station wagon full of political signs supporting Barry Goldwater for president in 1964 and pulling over every mile or so. I held the sticks while my dad used a sledgehammer to place them. An early indication of his Libertarian politics.

I didn't want to go to college. I wanted to write for the local daily newspaper. They had already published a couple of my stories, but the local editor turned down my offer to be Jimmy Olsen and start with the obituaries and high school sports beat. He said I had to go to college to learn important things essential to my development, although he was quite vague about what those were exactly.

Saint Martin's College (now University) was the only college that recruited at my school, and they offered me an "activities scholarship." I also got one for having a Polish surname. The college is Catholic, so my mom was happy, and I filled out all the FAFSA forms (in longhand on paper) and pestered my father until he signed them. Essentially, I attended college with grants, scholarships and borrowed money. It was an excellent investment, but I was not aware of it at the time.

Being part of the "Woodward and Bernstein generation," as an Olympia, Washington editor called us, created youths of political idealism and passion for justice. Sadly, being from a small town, and without excellent high school counseling, I

went to the wrong school to become a journalist. I learned close to college graduation that I should have attend a university with a daily paper in order to have any chance of a career in the news business. I would have to write for it for several years, serve as editor for at least one year and start in some Podunk town in the hinterlands to work my way up.

But I did meet a mentor, who changed my life for the better, and inspired my learning for life: Dr. Michael Contris, emeritus editor of the *Daily Olympian* and professor of humanities, who studied at the University of Chicago under Mortimer Adler (he of the 102 Great Ideas). The one thing I knew the day I arrived on campus was that I couldn't wait for my parents to vacate back home. My father was more than willing to glad-hand professors and priests, while I searched for any upperclassman associated with a student paper or student government. But my ears and eyes lit on a shortish, grey-haired man with a great laugh, a loud voice and the darkest Italian tan I had ever seen.

He was holding court in the center of the student union building, such as it was, a 1960s multifunctional brick building that also housed the music room and the campus maintenance facility. I walked up to him, asked his name and what I should study in college. He told me I was now a student of the humanities and he would be my advisor. For lack of a better subject I had indicated English as my major on the application.

I have never lacked self-confidence — except on the sporting field — so I walked up to the freshman English faculty advisor with my student registration sheet and informed him that he would no longer be guiding my studies. Then I walked back to

Contris, handed him my sheet and told him to please indicate which courses I should take.

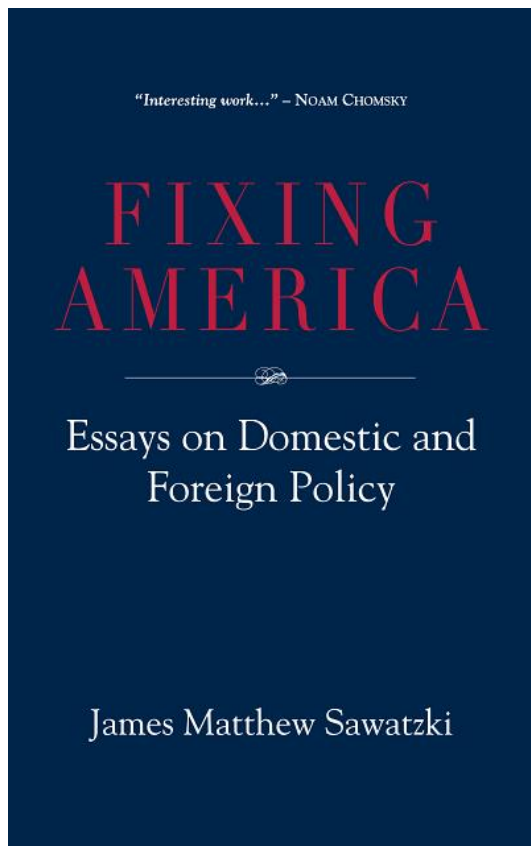
By that afternoon I was scheduled for the first year of studies, and I had started the school's first newspaper in decades. Finding a publisher was relatively easy. A local weekly offered to loan us their space for construction after hours, and I obtained startup money from the student government, which received money from "student activity fees" charged at registration. The student population numbered about 400, with an average age of 27. Many were military and married with children — and serious as a heart attack about their studies, which often involved their military career advancement and pay. As the 11th child of 13, I had no problem conversing with professors and 20- or 30-somethings, but I was not prepared for academic competition.

The military may not attract or promote divergent thinkers — and I was as divergent as they came. A 17-year-old, Catholic punk with an attitude against authority, I regretted being so young that I missed the 1960s civil rights movement and the Berkeley Free Speech Movement. I started one on campus a couple years later, but that's another story.

I was approached on three occasions by Benedictine monks as to whether I might feel a calling to the priesthood. I was never sure what they saw in me, but I loved philosophy, politics and religion in that order — much more a man of theory than one of practice. Each I time I responded, "Except for poverty, celibacy and obedience, I would." In college I was largely poor and mostly celibate, but *obedience* was — and is — the hard

one for me. Ten years later, I was a featured speaker at a reunion dinner. I told the crowd that I had been approached three times, and I always answered the same way. Now I came back, “a married, public school teacher. Which means I am poor, largely celibate, and completely obedient.” The priests fell off their chairs laughing.

I cannot answer why I am not president of the United States, except to say, I don't yet have the money or name recognition to run. Perhaps if you all purchase these essays, my name will be in the mix for 2028. As for college professor, I would need an honorary degree, like Joan Baez or Bob Dylan. But here is my first book, for your edification and enjoyment. Please tell your friends.



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