

of Genesis to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it.”

In all, Cooper wrote more than 40 novels, innumerable essays and letters, and an important handful of non-fiction works.

## Cooper's Legacy: The Republic Survives

During the 1840s, as the oligarchy of Europe pushed forward its attempt to split the United States between North and South, Cooper and others of the Cincinnati Society network began building a new republican political movement. The millions of German immigrants who had come to America after 1815, became one of the driving elements of this new movement, contributing an infusion of republican spirit and culture, helping to revive the great ideas of 1776. This movement, which was to found the Republican Party of Abraham Lincoln in 1856, used the dying Whig Party in 1852 to run Gen. Winfield Scott for President. Scott was a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, the hero of the War of 1812, and Commander of the U.S. Army for 30 years. During 1850 and 1851, Cooper, Scott, and Cooper's old friend Commodore William Schuylkill planed out Scott's campaign.

Cooper's unfortunate death in 1851 put Scott's campaign in the hands of Cooper's enemies, ensuring that Scott would lose the election. Yet, Cooper's work in helping to build the new republican movement in the United States, resulted eight years later in the victory of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln crushed the oligarchy-run insurrection of the Southern States and launched the American Industrial Revolution, ensuring the survival of the United States as, in the words of Lafayette, “the temple of liberty and beacon of hope for all mankind.”

---

### From *The Bravo*

---

## ‘A Republic, If You Can Keep It’

*There is no question that James Fenimore Cooper took Benjamin Franklin's words to heart in The Bravo, where, from the opening, he declares war on Sophists, especially those of the “Serenissima Republic,” who falsely claim title to “republic.” The Preface begins: “It is to be regretted the world does not discriminate more justly in its use of political terms. Governments are usually called either monarchies or republics.”*

*In the 1834 Letter to His Countrymen, Cooper is specific: “aristocracy” and “oligarchists” are the enemy of the American System. He writes “with the painful conviction*

*that many of my own countrymen were influenced by the fallacy that nations could be governed by an irresponsible minority, without involving a train of nearly intolerable abuses, I determined to attempt a series of tales, in which American opinion should be brought to bear on European facts. With this design The Bravo was written, Venice being its scene, and her polity its subject.” Nearly midway through, Cooper interrupts the gripping tale to directly address the reader. Here are his words.*

—Michele Steinberg

“Venice, though ambitious and tenacious of the name of a republic, was, in truth, a narrow, a vulgar, and an exceedingly heartless oligarchy. To the former title she had no other claim than her denial of the naked principle already mentioned, while her practice is liable to the reproach of the two latter, in the unmanly and narrow character of its exclusion, in every act of her foreign policy, and in every measure of her internal police. . . . At the period of which we write, Italy had several of these self-styled commonwealths, in not one of which, however, was there ever a fair and just confiding of power to the body of the people, though perhaps there is not one that has not been cited sooner or later in proof of the inability of man to govern himself! In order to demonstrate the fallacy of a reasoning which is so fond of predicting the downfall of our own liberal system, supported by examples drawn from transatlantic states of the middle ages, it is necessary only to recount here a little in detail the forms in which power was obtained and exercised in the most important of them all.

“Distinctions in rank, as separated entirely from the will of the nation, formed the basis of Venetian polity. Authority, though divided, was not less a birthright than in those governments in which it was openly avowed to be a dispensation of Providence. The patrician order had its high and exclusive privileges, which were guarded and maintained with a most selfish and engrossing spirit. He who was not born to govern, had little hope of ever entering into the possession of his natural rights: while he who was, by the intervention of chance, might wield a power of the most fearful and despotic character. At a certain age all of senatorial rank (for, by a specious fallacy, nobility did not take its usual appellations) were admitted into the councils of the nation. The names of the leading families were inscribed in a register, which was well entitled the ‘Golden Book,’ and he who enjoyed the envied distinction of having an ancestor thus enrolled could, with a few exceptions . . . present himself in the senate and lay claim to the honors of the “Horned Bonnet.” Neither our limits nor our object will permit a digression of sufficient length to point out the whole of the leading features of a system so vicious, and which was, perhaps, only rendered tolerable to those it governed by the extraneous contributions of captured and subsidiary provinces, of which in truth, as in all cases of metropolitan rule, the op-

pression weighed most grievously. The reader will at once see that the very reason why the despotism of the self-styled Republic was tolerable to its own citizens was but another cause of its eventual destruction.

“As the senate became too numerous to conduct with sufficient secrecy and dispatch the affairs of a state that pursued a policy alike tortuous and complicated, the most general of its important interests were intrusted to a council composed of three hundred of its members. In order to avoid the publicity and delay of a body large even as this, a second selection was made, which was known as the Council of Ten, and to which much of the executive power that aristocratical jealousy withheld from the titular chief of the state, was confided. To this point the political economy of the Venetian Republic, however faulty, had at least some merit for simplicity and frankness. The ostensible agents of the administration were known, and though all real responsibility to the nation was lost in the superior influence and narrow policy of the patricians, the rulers could not entirely escape from the odium that public opinion might attach to their unjust or illegal proceedings. But a state whose prosperity was chiefly founded on the contribution and support of dependants, and whose existence was equally menaced by its own false principles, and by the growth of other and neighboring powers, had need of a still more efficient body in the absence of that executive which its own Republican pretensions denied to Venice. A political inquisition, which came in time to be one of the most fearful engines of police ever known, was the consequence. An authority as irresponsible as it was absolute, was periodically confided to another and still smaller body, which met and exercised its despotic and secret functions under the name of the Council of Three. The choice of these temporary rulers was decided by lot, and in a manner that prevented the result from being known to any but to their own number and to a few of the most confidential of the more permanent officers of the government. Thus there existed at all times in the heart of Venice a mysterious and despotic power that was wielded by men who moved in society unknown, and apparently surrounded by all the ordinary charities of life; but which, in truth, was influenced by a set of political maxims that were perhaps as ruthless, as tyrannic, and as selfish, as ever were invented by the evil ingenuity of man. It was, in short, a power that could only be intrusted, without abuse, to infallible virtue and infinite intelligence, using the terms in a sense limited by human means; and yet it was here confided to men whose title was founded on the double accident of birth, and the colors of balls, and by whom it was wielded without even the check of publicity.

“The Council of Three met in secret, ordinarily issued its decrees without communicating with any other body, and had them enforced with a fearfulness of mystery, and a suddenness of execution, that resembled the blows of fate. The Doge himself was not superior to its authority, nor protected from its decisions, while it has been known



*The “Mouth of the Lion” graced the door to the Sala dei Tre Capi—the Council of the Three, of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice. It invites, “secret denunciations against those who conceal gifts and advantages or conspire to hide their true profit,” by dropping the secret “evidence” into its mouth.*

that one of the privileged three has been denounced by his companions. There is still in existence a long list of the state maxims which this secret tribunal recognised as its rule of conduct, and it is not saying too much to affirm, that they set at defiance every other consideration but expediency, all the recognised laws of God, and every principle of justice, which is esteemed among men. The advances of the human intellect, supported by the means of publicity, may temper the exercise of a similar irresponsible power, in our own age; but in no country has this substitution of a soulless corporation for an elective representation, been made, in which a system of rule has not been established, that sets at naught the laws of natural justice and the rights of the citizen. Any pretension to the contrary, by placing profession in opposition to practice, is only adding hypocrisy to usurpation.

“It appears to be an unavoidable general consequence that abuses should follow, when power is exercised by a permanent and irresponsible body, from whom there is no appeal. When this power is secretly exercised, the abuses become still more grave. It is also worthy of remark, that in the nations which submit, or have submitted, to these undue and dangerous influences, the pretensions to justice and generosity are of the most exaggerated character; for while the fearless democrat vents his personal complaints aloud, and the voice of the subject of professed despotism is smothered entirely, necessity itself dictates to the oligarchist the policy of seemliness, as one of the conditions of his own safety.”