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## **McCain's Self-Righteous Fakery**

**by Sheldon Richman**

If John McCain keeps up that self-righteous fakery about wanting to be our servant, we're in for two rather tedious months until election day.

First of all, he also says he wants to be our leader. How can he be both our leader and our servant? We know what's really going on here. The servant shtick is phony humility intended to soften us up. He has no intention of being our humble servant and every intention of being our know-it-all Great Leader, our commander in chief.

It will be disappointing if Americans fall for this. I can't think of a greater betrayal of the ideals expressed in the Declaration of Independence than to yearn for either a national servant or a leader. "All men are created equal" rules out both. It is no accident that McCain counts among his heroes Abraham Lincoln and Theodore Roosevelt, both of whom betrayed those ideals in ways America still hasn't recovered from. Both aspired to be Great Leaders at the helm of a big, managerial central government, in which individual liberty took a back seat and the mass murder of war was an acceptable way to settle disputes.

An earlier generation of Americans — even Republicans and conservatives — would have been sickened by the spectacle of a national political convention at which delegates waved signs saying, "Service" and "Country First." The rabid and belligerent "U-S-A! U-S-A!" chants would have had our ancestors heading for the doors. How deep we have sunk into the muck of bellicose nationalism. How unbecoming to our individualist heritage. McCain is the natural leader of this new America.

When John F. Kennedy called on us to "ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country," the Jeffersonians among us were properly appalled. Here was an American Mussolini, updated with a tan and brash boyish looks, but a Mussolini nonetheless. Conservatives who still had some Declaration in their hearts were justifiably concerned.

McCain now makes the same appeal, and conservatives — who a year ago despised the man — whoop and holler like a drunk college-football crowd.

Service to country is far too abstract a slogan to be any guide to living. In real terms it ends up meaning service to the state, which is to say, service to whatever manipulative, scheming politician happened to have clawed and double-talked his way into the White House at the time. Countries don't call men to war. White House occupants do, and they know that the surest way to be ranked among the "great presidents" is to embroil the country in war. We must stop dressing up the slaughter of foreigners as a great national cause.

When the Navy pilot McCain fell out of the sky over Hanoi, he wasn't delivering pizzas. He was trying to destroy civilian necessities such as dams and power plants. Did his *country* call on him to do that? No, it was not his country he was serving. If no White House occupant had sent him to North Vietnam to wreak death and destruction on innocents, no decent, productive American would have thought to do so. What had those North Vietnamese peasants done to us? Nothing. But John McCain is called a hero for surviving the wrath of people who resented his trespassing on their lives. We must stop identifying the country with the warmongers in office.

McCain's website says that "each and every one of us has a duty to serve a cause greater than our own self-interest." If he were seeking a university chair in ethical philosophy it might be worthwhile arguing with him. Generosity is a virtue; self-sacrifice is not. But McCain doesn't want to run a classroom. He wants to run the country, that is, you and me. In a free country he'd have no business telling us what our duties are. Anyway, it's a funny way for a servant to talk. But McCain doesn't really want to be our servant. He wants to be our leader.

Those who want neither to be served nor led will ask this man to leave them alone.

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