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What basis for war could there still be, once all peoples had been set free?

— *Ludwig von Mises*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The Future of Freedom Foundation

11350 Random Hills Road

Suite 800

Fairfax, VA 22030

...

www.fff.org · fff@fff.org

...

tel: 703-934-6101 · fax: 703-352-8678

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Why Kennedy Had to Be Removed

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



The current, ongoing brouhaha over Russia helps to show explain why the U.S. national-security establishment removed President John F. Kennedy from office in the regime-change operation that took place on November 22, 1963.

Yes, I know the official version that we are all expected to adhere to: that it is just inconceivable that the U.S. national-security establishment would initiate one of its storied regime-change operations within the United States. It just had to be a lone-nut operation because national-security regime-change operations are supposed to be carried out only against foreign leaders, not domestic ones.

Of course, there has always been at least one big problem with the

lone-nut theory: Motive. Oswald had no reason to kill Kennedy. In fact, it's the exact opposite — Oswald, if he really was a communist rather than a U.S. intelligence agent posing as a communist, had every motive for wanting Kennedy to remain president.

Why is that?

The answer is the same reason that the Pentagon and the CIA, the two principal components of the U.S. national-security state, had to remove Kennedy from office: Kennedy had decided to bring an end to the anti-Soviet, pro-Cold War system that the United States had embraced ever since the end of World War II and to establish a normal and friendly relationship with the Soviet Union and the rest of the communist world.

In the minds of the Pentagon and the CIA, that radical change in direction not only threatened the national security of the United States by subjecting it to a communist takeover, it also threatened the very need for a U.S. national-security state and its ever-increasing federal taxpayer-funded largess.

Kennedy had come into office as pretty much a standard Cold Warrior. I say “pretty much” because his perspective was different from that of the national-security

establishment when it came to nationalist movements in Third World countries — that is, movements that were devoted to ridding themselves of foreign rule by the British, French, Belgian, or other empires. The establishment view was that anti-colonialist movements were communist movements. Kennedy's belief was that they were simply nationalist, anti-imperialist movements, which made him suspect in the eyes of the U.S. national-security establishment.

The supposed communist threat was the reason the U.S. government was converted into a national-security state.

But except for nationalist movements, Kennedy's mindset in 1961 was the one that the Pentagon and CIA had inculcated into the American people ever since the end of World War II — that America was in grave danger of being taken over by the communists — that communist Cuba posed a grave threat to U.S. national security — that countries in Southeast Asia were in danger of falling like dominoes to the communists — that the communist Soviet Union (including communist Russia) and communist China were hell-bent on conquering the

United States — and that the U.S. government, including the army, was being infiltrated by communist agents.

In fact, the supposed communist threat was the reason the U.S. government, after World War II, was converted into a national-security state, a type of governmental structure inherent in totalitarian regimes, including China and the Soviet Union. The only way to prevent the United States from falling to the communists, U.S. officials believed, was to become like them by adopting their type of governmental structure — that is, by adopting a massive, permanent military establishment and secretive agencies with the power to kidnap, torture, spy on, and kill people and to bring regime change against foreign leaders who, in the opinion of the national-security establishment, posed a threat to U.S. national security.

Conversions

Most Americans today, it is safe to say, have no idea of the extreme change in U.S. governmental structure that the conversion to a national-security state entailed. Most people today genuinely believe that America has the same governmental structure it had once the Constitution was enacted.

Kennedy undoubtedly was taken aback as he listened to outgoing President Dwight Eisenhower's Farewell Address. Eisenhower pointed out that America's new governmental structure — which he labeled “the military-industrial complex,” including the massive arms industry this new structure had brought into existence — was entirely new to the American way of life.

No one was supposed to say that, much less a president of the United States. Everyone was expected to hew to the official line — that everything was still the same — that nothing had changed in any fundamental sense after World War II.

By the time he died, Kennedy had come to reject, fully and completely, the entire Cold War paradigm.

Ike went even further. He said that while he believed this new governmental structure was necessary to fight the Cold War, it also constituted a grave threat to the liberties and democratic processes of the American people. What he obviously meant by that was the possibility of a military takeover of America, either by controlling those in power or, more drastically, through a domestic regime-change

operation consisting of a coup, assassination, or some other means by which America's democratically elected leader would be ousted from power and replaced by someone acceptable to the national-security establishment.

Ike had seen what the national-security state had done in Iran in 1953, where it ousted the democratically appointed prime minister and replaced him with a brutal tyrant, the shah of Iran. He had also seen what it had done in Guatemala in 1954 (under his authorization), where it ousted the democratically elected president and replaced him with a brutal military dictator.

The justification for both of those regime-change operations? “National security.” The leaders in both of those countries were deemed to be adopting policies that placed the U.S. in a position of falling to the communists and becoming a communist nation.

What many Americans fail to realize, however, is that by the time he died, Kennedy had come to reject, fully and completely, the entire Cold War paradigm, which, of course, had placed him in severe opposition, not against the Russians or other communists, but rather against the U.S. national-security establishment. By November 1963,

Kennedy had decided that the entire anti-Soviet (and anti-Russia) mindset and the Cold War against the communist world were nonsensical and contrary to the interests of the American people. He had decided to put an end to it, which not only made him a threat to national security but also a threat to the entire national-security-state way of life that had come to envelop America.

Don't forget that the reason the federal government was converted from a limited-government republic to a national-security state was to fight the Cold War against the USSR and the rest of the communist world, with the aim of preventing the United States from going Red. Once Kennedy achieved a breakthrough that enabled him to see that as dangerous nonsense, one side or the other had to prevail in that vicious political/bureaucratic war. There was no way to reconcile the conflicting visions held by Kennedy and the national-security establishment.

The Cuba obsession

The war started with the Bay of Pigs invasion. Believing that America could not survive with a communist regime 90 miles away, the CIA convinced Kennedy that it was necessary to invade Cuba, oust the communist regime, and re-install a

pro-U.S. dictator, similar to the dictator that Fidel Castro had ousted from power in the Cuban Revolution, Fulgencio Batista. To ensure that no one would find out that it was the CIA that was behind the invasion, the CIA's plan called for using Cuban exiles to do the invading.

The CIA told Kennedy that the invasion could succeed without U.S. air support. It was a lie. The CIA figured that once the invasion came close to failing, Kennedy could be pressured into providing the needed air support in order to "save face" and to avoid having the communists win.

Kennedy was livid at the CIA for fraudulently setting him up and trying to manipulate him.

But Kennedy stuck with his position, refused to provide the air support, and let the Cuban communists win. The CIA and its army of Cuban exiles were livid. To them, the president was cowardly, weak, and incompetent in the face of communist "aggression." Some of them even considered him to be a traitor. In their minds, former Vice President Richard Nixon, whom Kennedy had defeated in 1960, would never have permitted the communists to win at the Bay of Pigs.

For his part, Kennedy was livid at the CIA for fraudulently setting him up and trying to manipulate him into providing the needed air support. He fired Allan Dulles, the highly revered director of the CIA. He is reputed to have vowed to tear the CIA into a thousand pieces and scatter them to the winds. He made his brother Bobby overseer of the CIA, infuriating the Agency.

Kennedy ended up striking a deal with the Soviets in which he vowed that the United States would not invade Cuba again.

The CIA and the Pentagon continued to be convinced that America was going to fall to the communists if Cuba remained a communist nation (notwithstanding the fact that Cuba never attacked the United States or had any interest in attacking the United States). After the defeat at the Bay of Pigs, the Pentagon and the CIA pressured Kennedy into conducting a full-scale invasion of Cuba, this time by U.S. troops. They presented him with Operation Northwoods, a plan unanimously approved by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which called for terrorist attacks and airplane hijackings carried out by U.S. agents posing as Cuban communists, which

would provide a pretext for invading Cuba. To the angry chagrin of the military but to his everlasting credit, Kennedy rejected Operation Northwoods.

To deter another U.S. invasion of Cuba, Castro invited the Soviet Union to install missiles on the island. The CIA and the Pentagon were more livid than ever. If Kennedy had adopted Operation Northwoods, they felt, this would never have happened. Once the Soviet missiles were discovered, the Pentagon and the CIA insisted that Kennedy order a bombing attack and invasion of the island.

Kennedy steadfastly refused, hoping instead to reach a negotiated settlement with the Soviet Union. Kennedy ended up striking a deal with the Soviets in which he vowed that the United States would not invade Cuba again. Once the Soviets were assured that the United States no longer intended to invade Cuba for the purpose of regime change, they removed their nuclear missiles and took them back to the Soviet Union. (North Korea undoubtedly learned a valuable lesson from this episode.)

The CIA and the Pentagon were more livid than ever. U.S. Air Force Gen. Curtis LeMay, a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called it the

worst defeat in U.S. history. Kennedy had left the communist regime in Cuba — the dagger pointed at America’s heart from only 90 miles away — in place permanently. In the minds of the Pentagon and the CIA, there was no way that America was now going to survive as a free country. The communists were going to win. America was going to end up under communist rule.

A flier entitled “Wanted for Treason” was being distributed in Dallas on the day Kennedy was assassinated. It accused Kennedy, among other things, of engaging in “treasonous activities against the United States.” The flier said that he had betrayed the Constitution, betrayed Cuba, endorsed a Test Ban Treaty, displayed laxity in enforcing communist-registration laws, supported communist (i.e., civil rights) race riots, and permitted known communists to serve in the federal government.

On the same morning, the *Dallas Morning News* published a one-page advertisement entitled “Welcome Mr. Kennedy to Dallas,” which asserted that under Kennedy, Latin America was turning anti-American and communist, that Kennedy’s policies were why Cubans were living under communist enslavement, that Kennedy was selling wheat to our communist ene-

mies, that communists were killing U.S. forces in Vietnam, that he had hosted the communist leader of Yugoslavia, that he was giving aid and comfort to communist regimes, that the head of the U.S. Communist Party had praised Kennedy, that Kennedy had banned an anti-communist movie on U.S. military bases, that he had ordered or permitted his brother Bobby to go soft on communism, and that the president had rejected the Monroe Doctrine in favor of “the Spirit of Moscow.”

A flier entitled “Wanted for Treason” was being distributed in Dallas on the day Kennedy was assassinated.

That flier and that advertisement reflected perfectly the mindset of the U.S. national-security establishment by November 22, 1963.

Kennedy’s reaction? Upon seeing the *Dallas Morning News* advertisement shortly before he was assassinated, Kennedy sarcastically remarked to his wife, Jackie, “We are heading into nut country today.” That’s correct: he considered anyone who held those views to be “nuts.”

While Kennedy’s war with the national-security establishment began with the Bay of Pigs fiasco and continued through Operation

Northwoods and Pentagon-CIA recommendations to initiate a surprise nuclear attack on the Soviet Union, his breakthrough occurred after the Cuban Missile Crisis. Realizing how close the United States and the Soviet Union had come to nuclear war over Cuba, Kennedy came to the realization that the entire Cold War was bunk. There was no reason, he concluded, that the United States and the communist world couldn't live in mutual peace despite their fundamental philosophical differences. He came to reject the anti-Soviet, pro-Cold War mindset that the Pentagon and the CIA had inculcated into the American people since World War II.

The last straw

In an act that undoubtedly shocked the military-intelligence establishment, Kennedy threw down the gauntlet in his now-famous Peace Speech at American University, which he delivered on June 10, 1963, where he declared an end to America's Cold War against the Soviet Union and the communist world. Pointing out that the United States and the Soviet Union had worked together to win World War II, he said that there was no reason why the two nations couldn't co-exist in friendship and peace. Later, he

even proposed that the United States and the Soviet Union work together on a joint project to go to the Moon, which meant sharing U.S. rocket technology with the Reds.

Kennedy even proposed that the United States and the Soviet Union work together on a joint project to go to the Moon.

Imagine the reaction of the Pentagon and the CIA upon hearing the following during Kennedy's speech at American University, which, by the way, was later broadcast all across the Soviet Union:

What kind of peace do I mean? What kind of peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war....

No government or social system is so evil that its people must be considered as lacking in virtue. As Americans, we find communism profoundly repugnant as a negation of personal freedom and dignity. But we can still hail the Russian people for their many achievements — in science and space, in economic and industrial growth, in culture and in acts of courage.

That was heresy. That was treason. It was considered much worse than Donald Trump's supposed collusion with Russia. Indeed, Kennedy's spirit of friendship and peaceful coexistence toward the Soviet Union was quite similar to that of Mossadegh in Iran, Arbenz in Guatemala, and Castro in Cuba and, later, Allende in Chile, which led to U.S. regime-change operations against those foreign leaders.

If Oswald really was a communist, why would he want to get rid of a president who was committed to peaceful coexistence with the communist world?

But there was no independent prosecutor to send after Kennedy. And many in the national-security apparatus believed that he would win the 1964 presidential election. They knew that there was only one way that this war could be won. They knew that there was only one way they could defeat him and "save" America from the Soviet Union and communism.

Kennedy didn't stop with his Peace Speech. He entered into a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty with the Soviets, which barred above-ground testing of nuclear weapons. Again, the CIA and Pentagon were

livid because they believed that above-ground testing of nukes was essential to national security (an ironic position, given their vehement objections to North Korea's doing the same today).

He began pulling troops out of Vietnam and advised close aides that he would complete the pullout after defeating Barry Goldwater, the likely GOP presidential nominee, in the upcoming 1964 presidential election.

That wasn't the worst of it. Kennedy began engaging in secret personal negotiations with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev to end the Cold War. While he intended to conduct these negotiations without informing the CIA, it is a virtual certainty that the agency became aware of them through secret surveillance of Cuban communications at the United Nations.

If Oswald really was a communist (rather than a U.S. intelligence agent posing as a communist infiltrator and agitator), why would he want to get rid of a president who was committed to peaceful coexistence with the communist world, especially since the vice president, Lyndon Johnson, held the same anti-communist, pro-Cold War mindset held by the CIA and the Pentagon?

It is not difficult to imagine what would have happened if Kennedy had not been removed from office. Peaceful and friendly co-existence with the Soviet Union, Cuba, and the rest of the communist world. No more need for U.S. troops in Europe, Japan, South Korea, or South Vietnam. No more embargo against the Cuban people. No need for sanctions against the North Korean people. No more ever-increasing budgets for the Pentagon, the CIA, and the army of contractors serving them. No more need for a national-security state.

Why wouldn't the CIA and the Pentagon effect a domestic regime-change operation on November 22, 1963? Isn't it their job to protect

“national security”? What other way did they have to save America from a president whose mindset and policies, from the perspective of “national security,” posed a much graver threat to national security than any of the foreign leaders whom the Pentagon and the CIA have ever targeted for regime change?

Jacob Hornberger is founder and president of The Future of Freedom Foundation.

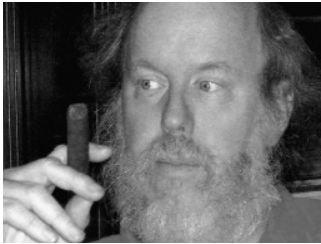
NEXT MONTH:
“Legalize Drugs — All Drugs”
by *Jacob G. Hornberger*

Government, in my humble opinion, should be formed to secure and to enlarge the exercise of the natural rights of its members; and every government, which has not this in view, as its principal object, is not a government of the legitimate kind.

— *James Wilson*

Your Tax Dollars Bankroll Afghan Child-Molesters

by James Bovard



Donald Trump was hailed by the media last August when he announced he was sending more U.S. troops to fight in Afghanistan. A *Washington Post* editorial praised his “principled realism” and saluted “a rare but welcome story of self-correction” (since Trump had portrayed Afghanistan as a lost cause when he was a presidential candidate). A *New York Daily News* op-ed praised the president because “Trump said ‘win’ and ‘victory’ more times in 15 minutes than President Barack Obama did in eight years.” CNN cheered that expanding the Afghan war allowed Trump to “stake out a more conventional presidential posture.”

Trump assured the American people that “to prosecute this war,

we will learn from history.” But his revised mission to Afghanistan — a low-wattage repeat of Obama’s 2009+ “surge” — ignores the atrocities that the U.S. government has long bankrolled in that sprawling nation.

Since 2002, the United States has spent more than \$70 billion financing Afghan security forces, including the Afghan military and police. A law sponsored by Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) prohibits the Pentagon from bankrolling any foreign military units if there is “credible information that the unit has committed a gross violation of human rights.”

But members of Congress have finagled to allow the U.S. military to continue bankrolling Afghan units who are committing atrocities. Congressional appropriations bills have specified that funds for Afghan Security Forces “shall be available to the Secretary of Defense, notwithstanding any other provision of the law.” This provision has allowed the Pentagon to completely ignore the record of Afghan units that the U.S. government supports. This clause, which is referred to by Pentagon policymakers as the “notwithstanding authority,” removes legal and moral limits on U.S. government spending in Afghanistan.

The Pentagon did not provide any guidance to troops on reporting human rights violations until a decade after the U.S. invasion. The U.S. government has long known that U.S.-funded Afghan units routinely engage in *bacha bazi* — boy play. Afghan military commanders and police kidnap boys and use them as sex slaves. American troops have complained of seeing boys chained to beds and hearing their screams at night as they are assaulted. U.S. soldiers who forcefully tried to stop the abuse were punished by their superiors. Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-Fla.) complained to the Pentagon, “It is bad enough if the Pentagon is telling our soldiers to ignore this type of barbaric and savage behavior, but it’s even worse if we are punishing those who try to stop it.”

Quinn complained that “we were putting people into power who would do things that were worse than the Taliban did.”

After the Taliban took control of Afghanistan, *bacha bazi* was punished with a death penalty, and the abuse became far less pervasive. But that prohibition ended after the U.S. invasion toppled the Taliban. Army captain Dan Quinn complained

that “we were putting people into power who would do things that were worse than the Taliban did — that was something village elders voiced to me.” Aaron MacLean, who served in Afghanistan with the Marines, observed that the “Taliban have long used reports of rapes committed by government agents as a recruiting tool. Indeed, among the elements of Mullah Omar’s rise to power was his reputation for taking violent action against those who kidnapped and raped children.”

“Not a priority”

The Pentagon ignored *bacha bazi* abuse until a 2015 *New York Times* exposé of American soldiers’ being punished for protesting atrocities against boys was published. The *Times* reported that U.S. troops were confounded that “instead of weeding out pedophiles, the American military was arming them in some cases and placing them as the commanders of villages — and doing little when they began abusing children.” Obama White House press secretary Josh Earnest responded to the *Times*’s bombshell, “The United States is deeply concerned about the safety and welfare of Afghan boys who may be exploited by members of the Afghan national security and defense

forces.... Protecting human rights, including by countering the exploitation of children, is a high priority for the U.S. government.” Thanks to the *Times* report, the U.S. military finally “issued clear guidance and required related training that personnel should report suspected child sexual assault,” according to a recent report — 14 years after the U.S. intervention began.

After the *Times*’s blockbuster article, 93 members of Congress requested that the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) investigate the problem. SIGAR finished and submitted its report in June 2017. In a brief section in its July 31, 2017, quarterly report, SIGAR noted, “Afghan officials remain complicit, especially in the sexual exploitation ... of children by Afghan security forces.” But the rest of the report was bottlenecked by the Pentagon. The *Washington Post* reported on November 26 that the Pentagon was blocking the release of the SIGAR report, instead releasing “its own report offering a far less authoritative review” of the abuses.

But the Pentagon’s report was also damning. The Pentagon Inspector General report revealed that some U.S. troops were “told that nothing could be done about

child sexual abuse because of Afghanistan’s status as a sovereign nation, that it was not a priority for the command, or that it was best to ignore the situation and to let the local police handle it.” Regarding pedophilia, the Navy gave its members training that “advises readers to control and overcome any frustration caused by cultural differences that they may experience during their deployments,” while Marines were told “to be mentally prepared to encounter this attitude, and to ‘move on,’” according to the IG report.

“Afghan officials remain complicit, especially in the sexual exploitation ... of children by Afghan security forces.”

Eleven allegations of child sexual abuse were reported to the Afghan government but the IG refused to disclose whether anything happened to the perpetrators. Steven Aftergood of the Federation of American Scientists said the Pentagon’s secrecy “looks like an attempt to evade public accountability for criminal acts.”

But the Pentagon still found a way to declare victory. Acting Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Robert Karam asserted that the IG

report vindicated the Pentagon because it “did not identify official guidance that discouraged DoD-affiliated personnel from reporting incidents of child sexual abuse.” If investigators did not find written proof of government malfeasance, then the Pentagon must be presumed innocent. The fact that no paper trail was discovered was no consolation to the vast number of Afghan boys who were molested.

This past February, the Pentagon finally approved release of the SIGAR report. SIGAR has done superb work exposing the failures and follies of U.S. operations in Afghanistan since 2008. It delivers clear English without the toxic fog of bureaucratism that blights most Washington reports.

Barbaric democracy

Abuses such as *bacha bazi* have proliferated in part because the Afghan justice system exempts vast classes of offenders. SIGAR reported that an Afghan government official was surprised that there were not more reports of child-molesting and that “‘maybe most of the cases are not reported or investigated’ because the police do not self-report cases, and people often do not report these cases because they feel they will get in more trouble....”

Low-level officers and soldiers have been prosecuted for child abuse because senior-level officers have money and power and can easily threaten someone to keep quiet about a crime.” A non-government organization official told SIGAR investigators that “even though her organization receives reports of child sexual abuse, it did not share information on the allegations with the U.S. government because of fear of reprisal toward victims, their families, or those who report incidents.” This is similar to the lawless situation that exists in some American cities where people are afraid to testify against well-known killers for fear of becoming the next homicide victim.

SIGAR has done superb work exposing the failures and follies of U.S. operations in Afghanistan since 2008.

The U.S. government has spent more than a billion dollars specifically to boost the rule of law in Afghanistan. A 2015 SIGAR report concluded that the program was a dismal failure that had produced almost zero visible benefit. Instead, deluges of U.S. aid have helped make Afghanistan one of the most corrupt nations on Earth. And the

United States has provided a horrible example to the Afghans with the games played by the “notwithstanding” clause in congressional appropriations. That Congress proudly bans financing of foreign atrocities, and then quietly adds an opaque phrase to appropriations bills permitting such funding, epitomizes why people cannot trust politicians to stand up for decency.

Too often, U.S. government interventions have merely covered up evil — at the same time that U.S. aid allows the evil to multiply.

The February SIGAR report warned that “the full extent of child sexual assault committed by Afghan security forces may never be known.” But part of the reason that the “full extent” will never be known is that U.S. government agencies did not want to know. Admitting the “full extent” of Afghan government crimes would have made it more difficult to justify the continued U.S. support of an oppressive Afghan regime. And what the American people didn’t know would not hurt Pentagon appropriations.

In his August speech announcing more troops for Afghanistan, Trump declared that “we will not

dictate to the Afghan people how to live.” But, similarly, Trump has no right to force Americans to pay taxes for activities that shock their conscience. Americans would never tolerate paying federal funds for a notorious child-rape regime in Cincinnati or Omaha. But your tax dollars are underwriting similar sordid abuses in Kandahar and Kabul. Doctors, teachers, and social workers can be jailed for failing to report child abuse here at home. But, 6,000 miles away, U.S. troops risk their career for protesting pederasty.

Bacha bazi is not the only barbaric Afghan practice countenanced by the U.S. government. In 2009, the U.S.-appointed president, Hamid Karzai, approved a law entitling husbands to starve their wives to death if they denied them sex. That edict did not deter Obama from boasting about America’s having brought “democracy” to Afghanistan.

In his August surge speech, Trump declared, “In every generation, we have faced down evil, and we have always prevailed.”

But too often, U.S. government interventions have merely covered up evil — at the same time that U.S. aid allows the evil to multiply. Americans have been encouraged to believe that U.S. foreign policy is

on moral automatic pilot and that good things happen wherever the United States intervenes. But piety too easily obscures atrocities. And the media cheerleaders for U.S. warring cannot be trusted to consistently expose the moral and other carnage abroad.

James Bovard is a policy advisor to The Future of Freedom Foundation and is the author of a new ebook,

Freedom Frauds: Hard Lessons in American Liberty, published by FFF, Public Policy Hooligan, Attention Deficit Democracy, and eight other books

NEXT MONTH:
“Pro-War Media Deserve Criticism, not Sainthood”
by James Bovard

RESOLVED: That the principle and construction contended for by sundry of the state legislatures, that the general government is the exclusive judge of the extent of the powers delegated to it, stop nothing short of despotism; since the discretion of those who administer the government, and not the constitution, would be the measure of their powers: That the several states who formed that instrument, being sovereign and independent, have the unquestionable right to judge of its infraction; and that a nullification, by those sovereignties, of all unauthorized acts done under colour of that instrument, is the rightful remedy.

— Thomas Jefferson

Mencken's Plan, Read's Rule

by Laurence M. Vance



H.L. Mencken and Leonard Read couldn't have been more different, but each of them said some important things about life in a free society.

Henry Louis Mencken (1880–1956) was born in the city of Baltimore, Maryland, lived nearly all of his life in the house he grew up in, and died in his bed. He was a third-generation Baltimorean. Although he was baptized in the Episcopal Church, Mencken was not religious in the least. He was a journalist, an editor, and a literary and social critic.

Leonard E. Read (1898–1983) was born in the small town of Hubbardston, Michigan, moved to California, and finally settled in New York. Read was a religious man, serving as a board member of a

Congregational church. After becoming the general manager of the Los Angeles branch of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, he founded The Foundation for Economic Education in New York, and spent his life in defense of individual liberty, private property, the free market, and limited government.

Mencken's plan

Of all the books that Mencken wrote in his lifetime, and others compiled after his death from his newspaper and magazine articles, none has included anything from his column in the *Baltimore Evening Sun* called “The Free Lance.” None, that is, until the recent publication of *A Saturnalia of Bunk: Selections from The Free Lance, 1911–1915* (Ohio University Press, 2017), edited, and with an introduction, by the literary critic S.T. Joshi, a leading authority on Mencken.

Mencken's 1,200-word column ran six days a week for four and a half years. His 1,228 columns — all typed on a manual typewriter — comprise a million and a half words. He said that his “Free Lance job was the pleasantest” he had “ever had on a newspaper,” and that he “enjoyed it immensely.” Joshi has assembled a selection of Mencken's columns and arranged them in eleven chapters,

with titles and their dates of publication. The title of the book is taken from the first column reproduced in the book, which was originally published on December 30, 1911. After detailing twelve “proposals and propositions before the people” that are “frankly and unequivocally ridiculous,” Mencken describes them as “an endless saturnalia of bunk, of bluff, of stupidity, or insincerity, of false virtue, of nonsense, of pretense, of sophistry, of parology, of bamboozlement, of actorial posturing, of strident wind music, of empty words — even, at times, of downright fraud.”

Mencken “followed Mill in advocating the most minimal government involvement in those aspects of social life.”

Joshi maintains that “the best of the Free Lance material ranks with the best of Mencken’s journalism overall — in its satirical pungency, its rapierlike strokes of logic, its deadpan exposure of fallacy, hypocrisy, and absurdity, and its intellectual cogency as the reflections of a man who had worked out his philosophy of life both in broad parameters and in the smallest details.” A systematic reading of Mencken’s columns “allows us to

ascertain a nearly complete view of Mencken’s political, religious, social, and cultural philosophy as it had evolved up to this point — and that philosophy underwent relatively few alterations in the course of his subsequent career.”

It is Mencken’s philosophy that we are interested in. Mencken “followed Mill in advocating the most minimal government involvement in those aspects of social life (particularly the legislation of morality) that have no direct relation to the protection of the citizen from external foes or internal threats.” A large number of Mencken’s Free Lance columns were devoted “to battling individuals and organizations who were seeking the moral reform of the city and the nation in such areas as prostitution, alcohol consumption, and cigarette smoking.” Although he acknowledged that “these things may in fact be vices,” Mencken “himself had no desire to engage in any of them except the moderate consumption of alcohol,” and “was averse to granting the government a heavy hand in their suppression.” He believed that it was the essence of freedom to allow people to engage in a vice, “so long as the enjoyment it produces is not outweighed by the injury it does.” In a 1913 column, he asserted that

the citizen is “bound to do nothing that will endanger [his neighbors’] lives or imperil their property. He is bound to respect their liberties so long as the exercise of those liberties does not invade his own.”

Mencken asserted that the citizen is “bound to do nothing that will endanger [his neighbors’] lives or imperil their property.”

It is in a column titled “Mencken and Materialism” that we see Mencken’s plan. Dr. Howard A. Kelly (1858–1943), as Joshi tells us in a helpful glossary of names, was a “gynecologist and surgeon who taught at Johns Hopkins Hospital from 1889–1943 and Johns Hopkins Medical School from 1893–1919” and “spoke out on moral and social subjects, advocating the abolition of prostitution and siding with Anthony Comstock and other vice crusaders.” Here is Mencken on how he differs with Dr. Kelly:

Even when two men pursue one and the same ideal, they often fall into irreconcilable differences over the manner of its attainment. Consider the commonplace ideal, visioned by practically all of us, of a

carefree and happy human race. I should like to see it realized, and Dr. Kelly would like to see it realized. But observe how vastly we differ in our plans for its realization.

My plan is to let people do whatever they please, so long as they do not invade the right and freedom of other persons to do the same: that is, I see liberty of desire, of taste, of action as the capital essential to happiness.

But Dr. Kelly, with the very same end in view, advocates a diametrically contrary route to its attainment. That is to say, he proposes to make people happy by force, by terrorism, by compulsion. His plan, in brief, is to decide what sort of life is a happy one, and then compel them to live it.

Mencken identified himself as a libertarian long before it was common to do so. In a book-review column of 1922 he wrote, “I am, in brief, a libertarian of the most extreme variety, and know of no human right that is one-tenth as valuable as the simple right to utter what seems (at the moment) to be the truth.”

Read's rule

Unlike Mencken's plan, which was only recently brought to light, Read's rule has been common knowledge since the publication of his book *Anything That's Peaceful* (Foundation for Economic Education, 1964). By his title, Read says that he means,

Let anyone do anything he pleases that's peaceful or creative; let there be no organized restraint against anything but fraud, violence, misrepresentation, predation; let anyone deliver mail or educate or preach his religion or whatever, so long as it's peaceful; limit society's agency of organized force — government — to juridical and policing functions, tabulating the do-nots and prescribing the penalties against unpeaceful actions; let the government do this and leave all else to the free, unfettered market!

Read's thesis is simply this: "Let anyone do anything he pleases, so long as it is peaceful; the role of government, then, is to keep the peace." Read explains that "keeping the peace" means "no more than prohibiting persons from unpeaceful

actions." This is "all the prohibition" he wants from government. The government should be strictly limited to "juridical and policing functions." Read said elsewhere that he

would have government defend the life and property of all citizens equally; protect all willing exchange; suppress and penalize all fraud, all misrepresentation, all violence, all predatory practices; invoke a common justice under law; and keep the records incidental to these functions. Even this is a bigger assignment than governments, generally, have proven capable of. Let governments do these things and do them well. Leave all else to men in free and creative effort.

"Let anyone do anything he pleases, so long as it is peaceful; the role of government, then, is to keep the peace."

When government goes beyond this and prohibits peaceful actions, "such prohibitions themselves are, *prima facie*, unpeaceful."

Read saw just two classes of people in society: "In suggesting that the function of government is

only to keep the peace, I raise the whole issue between statist or socialists, on the one hand, and the devotees of the free market, private property, limited government philosophy on the other.” He believed that “how much of a statist a person is can be judged by how far he would go in prohibiting peaceful actions.” He maintained that “the difference between the socialist and the student of liberty is a difference of opinion as to what others should be prohibited from doing.” This difference of opinion “highlights the essential difference between the collectivists — socialists, statists, interventionists, mercantilists, disturbers of the peace — and those of the peaceful, libertarian faith.” Read considered “such terms as communism, socialism, Fabianism, the welfare state, Nazism, fascism, state interventionism, egalitarianism, the planned economy, the New Deal, the Fair Deal, and the New Frontier” to be “simply different labels for much the same thing.”

Read went out of his way to make it very clear that the principle of individual liberty is not a license to just do as one pleases:

It is incorrect to think of liberty as synonymous with unrestrained action. Liberty does

not and cannot include any action, regardless of sponsorship, which lessens the liberty of a single human being. To argue contrarily is to claim that liberty can be composed of liberty negations, patently absurd. Unrestraint carried to the point of impairing the liberty of others is the exercise of license, not liberty.

Read believed that “how much of a statist a person is can be judged by how far he would go in prohibiting peaceful actions.”

Be it noted that the libertarian in his hoped-for prohibition of unpeaceful actions does not have in mind any violence to anyone else’s liberty, none whatsoever. For this reason: The word liberty would never be used by an individual completely isolated from others; it is a social term. We must not, therefore, think of liberty as being restrained when fraud, violence, and the like are prohibited, for such actions violate the liberty of others, and liberty cannot be composed of liberty negations. This is self-evident. Thus, any accomplished stu-

dent of liberty would never prohibit the liberty or the peaceful actions of another.

The caveat is that the exercise of one's liberty must be peaceful and not violate the personal and property rights of others.

Application

Stated briefly, here are Mencken's plan and Read's rule:

Let people do whatever they please, so long as they do not invade the right and freedom of other persons to do the same.

Let anyone do anything he pleases, so long as it is peaceful.

Mencken's plan and Read's rule can be applied to a host of personal-freedom issues.

Drug use. Although marijuana is legal for medical use in 29 states and legal for recreational use in 8 states, and 21 states have decriminalized the possession of small amounts of it, those same states still heavily regulate it and the federal government still classifies it as a Schedule I controlled substance under the Controlled Substances Act, with a high potential for abuse, no

currently accepted medical use, and a lack of accepted safety for use under medical supervision. And of course, the buying, selling, and possession of "harder" drugs is still illegal on the federal and state levels.

The war on drugs is anything but peaceful, and is an invasion of personal freedom, privacy, and property.

Using drugs may be addictive, unhealthy, and dangerous, but it is not for the government to decide what risks Americans are allowed to take and what kinds of behaviors they are allowed to engage in. Therefore, there should be no laws, restrictions, or regulations of any kind regarding the buying, selling, or possessing of any drug for any reason. What a man desires to inhale or ingest into his own body is his own business as long as his actions are peaceful and he respects the rights of others.

The war on drugs is anything but peaceful, and is an invasion of personal freedom, privacy, and property. If someone is high on drugs and commits murder, rape, armed robbery, assault, battery, theft, shoplifting, or burglary, then he should be arrested and charged with murder, rape, armed robbery,

assault, battery, theft, shoplifting, or burglary — just as he would be if he were high on alcohol; being high on drugs has nothing to do with it. And besides, it makes no sense for the government to wage war on illegal drugs, when tobacco, alcohol, and prescription drugs kill far more people every year.

Ticket scalping. Ticket scalpers are entrepreneurs who provide a needed service. They make it possible for events to sell tickets more quickly and efficiently right up to the day of the event. The exchange of tickets for cash between a willing buyer and a willing seller is a peaceful activity that should never be prohibited as long as the event does not violate the property rights of the owner of the ground where the exchange is made.

Prostitution. Every crime should have a tangible and identifiable victim with real harm and measurable damages. Prostitution may be immoral, sinful, and corrupting, but it is an illegitimate function of government to legislate morality. Activities that are peaceful, private, voluntary, and consensual should never be criminalized — no matter how immoral someone thinks they are. Those with moral objections to prostitution have the right to try to persuade women to not become

prostitutes and men not to seek their services. They do not have the right to use the force of government to stop people from engaging in activities that do not involve coercion or violence. And besides, if it is legal for a woman to provide free sexual services as often as she wants and to as many people as she wants, then why should it be illegal for her to charge for performing the same services? Especially since someone's indirectly paying for sex by paying for dinner and a movie is not a crime.

The vast majority of the millions of guns in the hands of Americans are never used to commit crimes.

Gun ownership. Governments regulate guns more than anything else. Dealers cannot sell guns without having a license from the government. A gun cannot be legally purchased without the buyer's having to undergo a background check and endure a waiting period. Only certain types of guns and ammunition are permitted to be sold. Yet, owning a gun is in and of itself a peaceful action. The vast majority of the millions of guns in the hands of Americans are never used to commit crimes. Although it has been said many times before, it is

nevertheless still true: Guns don't kill; people do. No one should be prohibited from buying, selling, or owning a gun. Those who use guns to threaten or harm people should, of course, be punished commensurately because they are violating someone's personal or property rights.

Gambling may be wasteful and ruinous, but it is not the job of government to prevent or discourage anyone from doing it.

Gambling. Casinos are illegal in most states. In states where they are legal they are heavily regulated. Most forms of public and private gambling are forbidden. Gambling may be wasteful, addictive, and ruinous, but it is not the job of government to prevent or discourage anyone from doing it. Anyone should be able to do with his own money as he sees fit, even if that means gambling it away. Those with moral objections to gambling have the right to try to persuade people not to gamble. They do not have the right to use the force of government to stop people from engaging in activities that do not involve force or fraud. Gambling is a personal and individual decision and none of anyone's business as long as the

gambler's conduct and interactions are peaceful, voluntary, and consensual, and the gambling doesn't violate the property rights of the owner of the ground where the bets are being placed.

Organ sales. Selling the organs in your body while you are alive (like a kidney) or after you are dead (most everything else) is currently a criminal action even though it is a peaceful, voluntary activity that violates no one else's rights. But if you own your own body, then you certainly also own the organs in your body. Since anyone should be able to do what he wants with his own body as long as his activities are peaceful and he doesn't violate the personal or property rights of anyone else, anyone should have the freedom to sell his organs.

Travel. In almost every city in the United States, a driver faces the possibility of being stopped by a sobriety checkpoint and checked by police searching for drivers who might be impaired owing to alcohol or drug use. In some states in the Southwest, drivers may encounter domestic immigration checkpoints miles from the border where government agents check the citizenship and immigration status of drivers who act suspicious, appear to be nervous, claim to be lost, or

just have a thick accent. Americans who wish to travel to countries such as Cuba face numerous restrictions and prohibitions. No American should be prevented from traveling wherever and whenever he pleases as long as he is not trespassing and as long as he is traveling peacefully.

Occupational licensing. Depending on the state, many occupations (barbering, practicing law, et cetera) require a certificate of permission and approval from a government-sponsored board. But why should anyone have to get permission from the government to open a business, engage in commerce, work in certain occupations, have a particular vocation, or provide a service to willing customers? Performing a service — as long as it is requested, mutually beneficial, peaceful, and respectful of the personal and property rights of third parties — should never have to be licensed.

Government should never punish individuals or businesses for engaging in entirely peaceful, volun-

tary, and consensual actions that do not aggress against the person or property of others. Only violent criminals should be incarcerated, and no one should ever be arrested or fined for committing a victimless crime. That is true no matter how many people support the government's doing such things. Mencken's plan and Read's rule are the foundation of a free society.

Laurence M. Vance is a columnist and policy advisor for The Future of Freedom Foundation, an associated scholar of the Ludwig von Mises Institute, and a columnist, blogger, and book reviewer at LewRockwell.com. Send him email: lmvance@laurencemvance.com. Visit his website at: www.vancepublications.com.

NEXT MONTH:
“Leave Social Security
Out of It”
by Laurence M. Vance

As the conditions of men become equal amongst a people, individuals seem of less, and society of greater importance; or rather, every citizen, being assimilated to all the rest, is lost in the crowd, and nothing stands conspicuous but the great and imposing image of the people at large. This naturally gives the men of democratic periods a lofty opinion of the privileges of society, and a very humble notion of the rights of individuals; they are ready to admit that the interests of the former are everything, and those of the latter nothing. They are willing to acknowledge that the power which represents the community has far more information and wisdom than any of the members of that community; and that it is the duty, as well as the right, of that power, to guide as well as govern each private citizen.

— Alexis de Tocqueville

Ralph Raico: Master Historian

by Joseph R. Stromberg



The death of historian Ralph Raico on December 13, 2016, robbed us of an erudite and insightful scholar whose long life made him witness to (and analyst of) massive changes in American society involving state building, imperialist wars, and loss of effective freedom. Born in 1936, Raico attended Ludwig von Mises's famous New York seminar and translated Mises's *Liberalism* into English in 1962. He did his Ph.D. under Friedrich von Hayek at the University of Chicago, writing a dissertation, *The Place of Religion in the Liberal Philosophy of Constant, Tocqueville, and Lord Acton* (1970), recently published. Raico taught European history at Buffalo State University for several decades and was a popular lecturer at Cato Insti-

tute functions in the 1980s. He was a contributor to many publications, including *New Individualist Review* (of which he was a founder), *The Libertarian Forum*, *Libertarian Review*, *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, *Inquiry* magazine (where he was book review editor), *Journal des Économistes et des Études Humaines*, and *Independent Review*, and he wrote four books (see below).

Liberalism and economics

Raico's education fitted him to grapple with such questions as the relationship of history to economics, the relationship of economics to classical liberalism, and the broader history of liberalism. Austrian economic theory tied liberalism to property and markets, while also imposing limits on what could have happened historically. Sound economics and the critique of the state were systematically related.

French liberal class analysis

Raico contributed to — and made good use of — the study of French Restoration liberalism pioneered by Leonard Liggio (see also the work of Australian historian David Hart). From the 1820s Charles Comte, Charles Dunoyer, and Augustin Thierry developed a liberal theory of class conflict in

which the state (old regime, feudal landlords, military commanders, bureaucracy) is fundamentally external to and parasitic on society. Productive classes had little need of the state, but the state and its allies needed them for their revenues and *there* was the seedbed of oppression, empire, and war.

Raico found this French liberal tradition analytically superior, while making room for Anglophone liberals of like views.

In contrast to Anglophile liberals such as Hayek, Raico found this French liberal tradition analytically superior, while making room for Anglophone liberals of like views (e.g., Richard Cobden, John A. Hobson, Albert Jay Nock, Frank Chodorov, and Murray Rothbard). He came to believe that the ideas found in this liberal tradition provided the best set of internal standards for liberalism as a theory of society and thus the best guidance in any search for its essence. (Here see the essays in Raico's *Classical Liberalism and the Austrian School*, 2012.)

The internal critique applied

In *Die Partei der Freiheit* [*The Party of Freedom*] (2000), Raico focused on the largely forgotten his-

tory of German liberalism, from the late 18th into the early 20th century. He unearthed a good many sound German liberals, recounted their successes and failures, and concluded that Germany's famous *Sonderweg* (historical "separate path") was less than inevitable.

Raico's account substantially rehabilitated Eugen Richter (1838–1906), leader of the left-liberal opposition *Freisinn* party, who held to firm principles, when most liberals were cooperating with Chancellor Otto von Bismarck. Dismissed by his enemies and later historians as a stinging, petty-bourgeois doctrinaire, Richter was, as Raico wrote, "the last genuine liberal who still remained in the parliament of a great nation," a judgment he supported with massive evidence.

In assessing Friedrich Naumann — seen by contemporary Germans as a "model" German liberal — Raico took on a quite different job. Naumann (1860–1919) began as a Christian socialist, but soon took up secular reforms, including a larger German navy. A self-proclaimed "social liberal," he hoped to do all manner of "national-social" good. This implied a great deal of state activity. Although it would be unfair to call Naumann a national socialist in some later

sense, Raico makes a good case that Naumann was a destroyer of German liberalism.

Late 19th-century liberal default and sellout

As his work progressed, Raico was increasingly disgusted by the degeneration of 19th-century European liberal parties into “machines for the exploitation of society by the now victorious predatory middle classes, who profited from tariffs, government contracts, state subsidies for railroads and other industries, state-sponsored banking, and the legion of jobs available in the ever-expanding bureaucracy” (*Great Wars and Great Leaders*, 2010, ix). Here his analysis echoed that of an earlier generation of historians that included Carlton J.H. Hayes, Robert Binkley, and John U. Nef. Raico cited the Italian “rent-seeking” state as a case in point (*Classical Liberalism*, 278–79).

In Raico’s opinion, it was war more than anything else that destroyed the emerging liberal order.

Liberal default, sellout, and internal rot could also involve an authoritarian turn, as when the pioneering German Liberal John Prince-Smith (1809–1874) suc-

cumbed to what Raico calls the “Pareto syndrome.” Alarmed by the supposed communist threat to liberal society, Prince-Smith looked for salvation in an all-powerful state. (Naturally, Raico asked the socialists and communists to take some responsibility for this development.) Once more, Italy in 1919–1920 was a case in point, when revolutionary bombast from anarchists, socialists, and communists drove property owners into the arms of fascism (Raico in *Journal of Libertarian Studies*, Spring 1996).

Revisionism, war, and foreign policy

In Raico’s opinion, it was war more than anything else that destroyed the emerging liberal order. His essay “World War I: The Turning Point” (in *Great Wars*) describes World War I as an utter disaster that set the tone for the rest of the dreadful 20th century, with its mass slaughter, ideological extremism, and massive and costly state-building, not to mention the war’s negative impact on American politics and life. Here Raico’s command of the historical literature and his hard-won immunity to wartime hysteria and official mythology served him well.

As I have written elsewhere, “In a typical Raico essay, the reader finds

solid research, detailed knowledge of relevant sources, deft deployment of quotations, and careful interpretation, complemented by wit, devastating understatement, and an occasional outburst that might seem intemperate had he not just written several pages that render the point both inevitable and obvious” (*Independent Review*, Summer 2012). This applies equally well to Raico’s treatment of any subject and not just questions of war and peace.

Raico came to believe that Americans would put up with anything and everything that the state could heap on them.

World War I was of course the seedbed of World War II, followed by the Cold War — and thereafter by the mind-numbingly senseless adventurism of U.S. elites after the fall of the Soviet Union.

State atrocities and genocide

With so much “surplus death” (to use R.E. Canjar’s phrase) inflicted by state-building elites in war and peace in the 20th century, Raico made serious inquiries into mass atrocities. His subjects included Britain’s World War I starvation blockade of Germany, Truman’s use of nuclear weapons, and Soviet and

other mass murders. Here he was above all the honest broker.

The lost America

Raico’s later writings reflect the righteous anger of a latter-day immigrant — the child of people who moved to a certain kind America, only to see it destroyed by a dramatic and degrading centralization of political power. This comes out in his poignant review of Arthur Ekirch’s *Civilian and the Military: A History of the American Anti-Militarist Tradition* (2010 [1972]) in *Classical Liberalism*. (Raico’s anger in this connection bears comparison with Michael Novak’s attack, in *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics* [1974], on the nagging political style of the old Northeastern WASP elite, a style which masked their coldly rational use of power.)

In any case, Raico came to believe that Americans would put up with anything and everything that the American Leviathan state could heap on them.

Trajectory

Raico’s views matured over time. Starting in the waning Old Right movement, where he met Murray Rothbard and Leonard Liggio, he adopted much of the New Left historical revisionism of the

1960s — not on faith but because his own researches confirmed much of what those writers said. His work treats respectfully such New Left historians as William Appleman Williams, Walter LaFeber (with whom he was sometimes in touch), Barton Bernstein, and Gar Alperovitz, as well as many other scholars not so neatly classified: Paul Boyer, Alfred de Zayas (an international lawyer concerned with ethnic cleansing), Martin S. Sherry, Gore Vidal, and many others.

At the same time, Raico never abandoned his old (and Old Right) sources, where he thought they were correct. He continued to cite Charles Callan Tansill, Edwin Borchard and William Potter Lage, Charles A. Beard, John T. Flynn, and others. In doing history Raico sought a left/right synthesis of all *worthy* revisionist history (not every revisionist thesis is necessarily sound), in the belief that constant correction of officially proclaimed history is vitally important, especially in the area of war and peace. Yet all the while, he remained a firm anti-communist, as his writings on the Soviet Union, Trotsky, and others show. Marxism, as the official ideology of a number of states, had disastrously demonstrated the folly of living by unworldly abstractions.

Raico resembled the left-wing historian Gabriel Kolko in one important respect: having studied matters in detail, neither historian had the slightest respect for the goals, abilities, or reputations of the American political elite (e.g., Raico's references to Franklin Roosevelt's "*constant lying*" [his italics]). Such candor is a valuable, if rare, trait in an American historian. Faced with what he saw as excesses of philosophy, he often remarked that *history* cannot be done "*a priori*."

Raico increasingly came to doubt that libertarianism can be applied without regard to historical facts on the ground.

Some might see a relative "conservative" turn in Raico's later work (in some generic sense). I think this much can be said: Raico increasingly came to doubt that libertarianism can be applied without regard to historical facts on the ground. He also showed, late in life, some engagement with classical republicanism or civic humanism, an outlook which had never been completely separate from the history of liberalism. He touched on these matters in his dissertation with respect to Benjamin Constant, and much later, in his treatment of

Eugen Richter. Constant saw, as Raico wrote, an “inner contradiction in the free society, which can only be compensated for by bringing into play anti-utilitarian forces, such as religious faith....” (*The Place of Religion in the Liberal Philosophy*). On another occasion, he wrote that “recent experience showed [Constant] that certain sacrifices had been necessary to fight tyranny. Who had fought Napoleon tooth and nail? Was it the bourgeoisie of Paris....? Or was it the peasants of Russia and Spain, who, having nothing to lose, risked their lives to throw off foreign domination?” (“La Contribution des Auteurs Liberaux Français du Dix-Neuvieme Siecle a la Controverse sur les Valeurs et Conflits Culturels,” 2001; my translation).

In the same essay Raico expounded Molinari’s “reactionary anarchism” and noted his anti-Union view of the American Civil War. Developing Molinari’s analysis of group relations in complex societies, Raico asked whether liberalism really requires an assault on entrenched cultural differences and a war against private “discrimination” (“La Contribution des Auteurs Liberaux Français du Dix-Neuvieme Siecle a la Controverse sur les Valeurs et Conflits Culturels,” my trans-

lation; <https://web.archive.org/web/0010221201335/http://www.euro92.org:80/edi/biblio/raico2.htm>).

Style

As for Raico’s style and delivery, the reader may consult YouTube, where many of his lectures can be found. They show off his sharp-witted New York Italian delivery, classic understatement, and biting humor. For example, “closest I ever came to being a communist, I was a Republican” (referring to his leadership role in the NYC Youth for Taft). Or his comment that, by “specializing in the collection of deserts” (Eritrea, Somalia, Libya), Italian imperialists apparently hoped to “have the world by the throat” when deserts became valuable. Or his paraphrase of the evasive official Russian reply in early August 1914 to German questions about rumored Russian mobilization: “Nothing to it. Some of the guys like to get together and sort of march....” (Quotes from Cato World at War Lecture, 1983.)

Philosopher David Gordon writes of being “impressed by [Raico’s] intelligence, his scholarship, and, not least, his humor” (*Classical Liberalism*, xxiii). And indeed, Ralph was always ready with devastatingly funny quips — a resource that served him well when handling

hecklers and hostile questions. And then there was his constant, impatient New Yorker's refrain, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." Last of all — it goes almost without saying — Ralph Raico was a friend and colleague who is sorely missed.

Books by Ralph Raico:

- *Die Partei der Freiheit [The Party of Freedom]* (2000).
- *The Place of Religion in the Liberal Philosophy of Constant, Toc-*

queville, and Lord Acton (2010 [1970]).

- *Great Wars and Great Leaders* (2010).
- *Classical Liberalism and the Austrian School* (2012).
- See also "FDR — The Man, the Leader, the Legacy" (Future of Freedom Foundation: 1998/1999; a 12-part study on the FFF website).

Joseph Stromberg is a historian and free-lance writer.

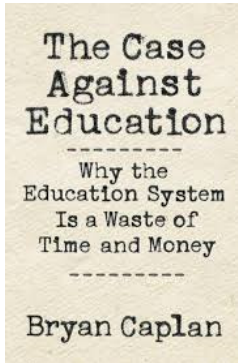
It is natural to man to indulge in the illusions of hope. We are apt to shut our eyes against a painful truth, and listen to the song of that siren, till she transforms us into beasts. Is this the part of wise men, engaged in a great and arduous struggle for liberty? Are we disposed to be of the number of those who, having eyes, see not, and having ears, hear not, the things which so nearly concern their temporal salvation? For my part, whatever anguish of spirit it may cost, I am willing to know the whole truth; to know the worst and provide for it.

— Patrick Henry

The Case against Schooling

by George C. Leef

The Case against Education: Why the Education System Is a Waste of Time and Money by Bryan Caplan (Princeton University Press, 2018, 395 pages).



Almost every book on education policy (and I have read a great many of them) springs from the set of assumptions that education “experts” embrace: that schooling builds our stock of knowledge and skill, that it needs to be done mainly by government, that it makes us better human beings, and that we owe our prosperity to our great “investment” in education, kindergarten through college.

Among the tiny number of books that challenge the conventional wisdom about education, the latest and perhaps the most daring is Bryan Caplan’s *Case against Education*. Caplan, a professor of economics at George Mason University, is not, of course, against people’s acquiring skills and knowledge, but contends that our current system of education does a poor job of that, and at inordinate cost to taxpayers. He would like to see government subsidies for education stopped and believes that in an ideal world, education would be kept separate from the government.

Caplan puts his case starkly: “Most critics of our education system ... miss what I see as its supreme defect: *there’s way too much education*. Typical students burn thousands of hours studying material that neither raises their productivity nor enriches their lives. And of course, students can’t waste time without experts to show them how.”

At this point, nearly all readers will be thinking, “Well, that is *obviously* wrong, since we know that college brings a handsome payoff to graduates. That college premium certainly shows that more years of education are valuable.”

Here is Caplan’s reply: “How could such a lucrative investment

be wasteful? The answer is a single word I want to burn into your mind: signaling. Even if what a student learned in school is utterly useless, employers will happily pay extra if their scholastic achievement provides *information about their productivity*.”

How signalling works

Among economists who study the effects of education, there is a great divide between those who believe that education augments your skills and thereby enables you to *do a better job* (the “human capital” crowd) and those who think that education mostly reveals your pre-existing abilities and thereby enables you to *get a better job* (the signaling crowd). Caplan is firmly in the latter camp. He argues that the education premium that people enjoy for having crossed various educational thresholds is about 80 percent due to signaling and only 20 percent due to human capital improvement.

Education signals three broad traits: intelligence, conscientiousness, and conformity. Employers of all kinds want workers with those traits. While it is possible for a person to acquire them in the absence of formal education, it’s almost impossible to let the rest of the world

know that — and without such knowledge, few employers will take a chance on you.

Americans have become so fixated on credentials that nearly everyone feels compelled to play the expensive “sheepskin” game.

Suppose you try to signal your employability in some way other than by getting educational credentials, say by dropping out of high school to prove the Riemann Hypothesis or something equally brainy. Unfortunately, even if you are able to convince some people that you’re a math genius with your proof, to most employers that actually sends a bad signal — your lack of conformity. Trying to get noticed without educational credentials rarely works. Consequently, Americans have become so fixated on those credentials that nearly everyone feels compelled to play the expensive “sheepskin” game.

How important is the signal compared with the education? Caplan points out that anyone can attend Princeton classes for free and learn as much as humanly possible, but nobody does that. That’s because if you aren’t officially enrolled, you can’t send any signal. Here’s the dilemma: “You can either have a

Princeton education without a diploma, or a Princeton diploma without an education. Which gets you further in the job market?” he asks.

Caplan argues that most students derive scant long-term benefit from their schooling, including college.

Going straight for the jugular vein of the human-capital theorists, Caplan argues that most students derive scant long-term benefit from their schooling, including college. He cites a mass of evidence showing that most students retain little knowledge or skill they were ostensibly taught. Literacy, numeracy, scientific method, reasoning — student achievement is remarkably poor in all. What students appear to learn most effectively are the things they work with steadily, such as statistics for those who are in quantitative fields — which is pretty much the same as learning work skills on the job. Too bad we can't start with the on-the-job learning.

Caplan's argument is that most people would be better off if they didn't have to go through the years and years of formal education just to signal their readiness to begin learning what they really need to

know. All those years of formal, state-approved education are mostly a needless prelude to the business of learning what you need to know to succeed in life.

Here I will add an illustration to bolster Caplan's case, namely law school. As most lawyers will attest, the knowledge they use in their work is rarely anything they recall from law school. Rather, it was learned *on the job*. But they are not allowed to just apprentice into law firms any longer; first they must go through college and then law school. That entails huge social costs that don't bring about any greater legal competence but merely drive up the fees lawyers must charge. The signaling to human capital ratio in legal education is probably around 99 to 1.

Defenders of formal education might grudgingly admit that students don't retain much of the precise content they were taught, but obtain other benefits that make it all worthwhile. Caplan responds this way: “*Most* of what schools teach has no value in the market. Students fail to learn *most* of what they're taught.... When you mention these awkward facts, educators speak to you of miracles: studying anything makes you better at everything. Never mind that educational

psychologists' century of research exposing these so-called miracles as soothing myths." For instance, studying a foreign language you'll never need supposedly builds your mental muscles, but Caplan says that you've just wasted time that could have been put to better use.

And finally there is the last line of defense, namely that education (particularly college) confers great social benefits. That is because graduates have lower unemployment, better health, are more law-abiding, are more civically engaged, and so on. Caplan easily overcomes the "social good" defense.

The fine arts flourished in America before we started demanding that everyone spend at least ten years in school.

More years of education do not, for example, make people healthier as is often claimed by the education establishment. It is the case, rather, that people who are naturally inclined to healthy lifestyles are also drawn to education. It's correlation without causation. Nor does education really lead to a decrease in crime. It might make the *individual* less inclined to crime, but doesn't lower crime *in general*. Caplan's argument is based on signaling. "Back

in the 1950s," he writes, "the average dropout stood at the 33rd percentile of achievement, so employer stigma against dropouts was mild. Today, the average dropout stands at the 10th percentile of achievement, so the employer stigma against dropouts is severe, making crime an appealing substitute for honest toil."

Seals of approval

But doesn't education (especially the standard four-year college), improve us by nourishing our souls? It is often said that college gives us "broad horizons" and introduces us to "the best that has ever been said or written." Supposedly, without courses on literature and art and music and philosophy, Americans would just be so many uncultured bumpkins. Caplan doesn't think that position holds any water. Students can and do take an interest in culture without having to sit through expensive classes that most find very boring. Moreover, the fine arts flourished in America before we started demanding that everyone spend at least ten years in school.

Our mania for mandatory education has not done the nation much good, but it has unleashed a serious bad — an arms race in cre-

dentials. They are the “seals of approval” that open doors for people who have them, or keep doors locked for those who don’t. As those seals have proliferated, Americans have had to devote more and more of their time and wealth to getting them. To get ahead of the pack, students now often have to earn master’s degrees to have a chance at jobs that not too long ago were open to good high-school graduates. Owing to that arms race, the size and cost of our education sector keeps growing, consuming resources that could be better used elsewhere.

The credential mania also creates a huge social cost for the people whom leftists usually say they are so ardent to help — the poor and handicapped. Because it’s difficult if not impossible for them to earn college degrees, they are kept from any chance at getting jobs they could readily learn. Those who don’t have college credentials are pushed into low-paying jobs that seldom have much upward potential. That’s very unfair. The damage to the life prospects of such persons is palpable, unlike the mythical “social benefits” we are said to enjoy as a result of pushing education.

Why we have such a fervent belief in education is a question Caplan devotes many pages to explain-

ing. For one thing, almost everyone who studies or at least writes about education is a product of the system. “When we academics reflect on our own lives,” he writes, “school almost automatically seems ‘relevant.’ To see the labor market clearly, professors would have to contemplate the alien career paths of the vast majority of students who never enter academia.”

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More important, though, the great belief in education stems from what Caplan calls Social Desirability Bias. Claims about the wonderful results of formal education create a pleasant glow inside most Americans. Few citizens and almost no politicians will suggest that increased educational spending might be wasteful. The educational establishment has been taking full advantage of that for many decades, growing like a tumor.

Will anything be done to arrest our education juggernaut? Caplan is not optimistic.

The combination of Social Desirability Bias and the education establishment’s lobbying power is an almost irresistible force. Caplan be-

believes that we would be far better off if we had kept school and state separate, but there's no prospect of that now. Online education, he argues, will at most have a small marginal impact on our overinvestment in education. The best thing we might actually do is to shift from pushing students into college and instead offer more vocational training and opportunities for people to work earlier in life.

"Ultimately," he states, "the debate is between two *kinds* of vocational education. 'Traditionalists' want to train everyone for long-shot, prestigious careers like author, historian, political scientist, translator, physicist, and mathematician. So-called vocationalists want to train students for careers they're likely to enter. The traditional route is painless for educators: teach whatever your teachers taught you. The vocational route is painful for educators.... To prepare youths for plausible futures, educators must feel the pain."

That's correct. We should stop putting the former kind of training on a pedestal while denigrating the latter. And if people had to *pay* for whatever kind of education they thought best, no doubt they would value it far more than the education they are mostly *given* today. Com-

pare the way Eliza Doolittle approached her paid-for English lessons in *My Fair Lady* with the indifference so many American students show their nearly free (pre-college) educational credentialing.

Caplan even dares to say that for many people, working would be preferable to being forced to sit in school.

Caplan even dares to say that for many people, working would be preferable to being forced to sit in school. His chapter "What's Wrong with Child Labor?" is certain to cause hysteria in "progressive" minds. He argues that there's no good reason to prevent young people from working and learning useful things as they do so. "When researchers compare working students to comparable nonworking students, work has a clear upside and no downside," he writes. "Early job experience has durable dividends, boosting post-graduation earnings by 5, 10, or even 20% for at least a decade. The link between work and academic success is, in contrast, weak. The same goes for crime and other bad behavior."

By forbidding work at a young age and mandating education, the

government has created a toxic stew of horrible consequences. Calling this out is arguably the bravest aspect of this brave book.

Caplan is up front that he's writing from a libertarian perspective. He states that he is against bossy government programs simply because people ought to be free to live their lives. His book invites readers to think about how much better off we would be if government would stick to a rights-defending and order-keeping role so that education — and everything else — could evolve naturally.

If the United States ever reaches a turning point where most of us reject the idea that government should mandate and subsidize certain kinds of education, Bryan Caplan's *Case against Education* will have a lot to do with it.

George C. Leef is the research director of the Martin Center for Academic Renewal in Raleigh, North Carolina.

*Some writers have so confounded society with government, as to leave little or no distinction between them; whereas they are not only different, but have different origins. Society is produced by our wants, and government by our wickedness; the former promotes our happiness **positively** by uniting our affections, the latter **negatively** by restraining our vices. The one encourages intercourse, the other creates distinctions. The first is a patron, the last a punisher*

— Thomas Paine

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11350 Random Hills Road
Suite 800
Fairfax, VA 22030

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www.fff.org

fff@fff.org

Tel: 703-934-6101

Fax: 703-352-8678