
FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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All men have equal rights to liberty, to their property, and to the protection of the laws.

— Voltaire

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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Socialism, American Style, Part 2

by Jacob G. Hornberger



The crown jewel of American socialism is Social Security, a program that originated among socialists in Germany in the late 1800s and then was imported into the United States, where it became an established program in the 1930s as part of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal system of welfare and regulation.

Contrary to popular opinion, especially among seniors, Social Security is not a retirement program and never has been. From the time that Social Security was enacted into law, it has always been nothing more than a welfare program, no different from food stamps, education grants, farm subsidies, corporate subsidies and bailouts, and foreign aid.

There is no Social Security fund into which people have made con-

tributions during their work lives. There are no lockboxes at Fort Knox containing everyone's Social Security "contributions."

What about all those payroll taxes that people have paid during their work years? They are simply taxes, not contributions. They are no different from other taxes that people pay and have paid throughout history. They are simply another way for the federal government to raise money to pay for the ever-burgeoning expenditures of what has become known as a "welfare-warfare state."

The government raises its money though taxation. It has a variety of ways it does that. On the federal level, the government imposes income taxation, tariffs (i.e., sales taxes on the purchase of foreign goods), excise taxes, the payroll tax, and others. All of these tax revenues go into the government's coffers, which it then uses to pay for its welfare-warfare-state programs.

The federal government doesn't save any of the money it collects in taxes. It spends all of its tax revenues in the same year that it collects them. In fact, the government spends more than what it collects in taxes. That's what its \$24 trillion debt is all about. That enormous debt reflects the fact that the federal

government has borrowed the amount by which expenditures exceed tax revenues.

What about the so-called Social Security fund? It's just smoke and mirrors designed to make it look as if the government is maintaining a fund with people's payroll taxes. It doesn't consist of the money that people have paid in payroll taxes. That money, again, is spent in the year it is collected, along with all the other tax revenues the government receives. The Social Security "fund" consists of nothing more than IOUs from the government. Those IOUs represent debt owed by the government, not actually cash savings that the government has accumulated and retained from people's payroll taxes.

Suppose a parent is saving money for his kid's college education. Each month, year after year, the parent puts away a large amount of cash in the family safe. When the kid reaches 16 years of age, the cash savings total \$100,000. One day the parent decides to buy a brand new Porsche that costs \$100,000. He uses his kid's college fund to pay for the car. But he inserts a paper into his safe that says, "IOU \$100,000." When the kid asks his parent how his college fund is doing, the parent responds, "It's doing great! The

fund is fully funded in the amount of \$100,000."

But the parent, like the federal government, is engaging in smoke and mirrors. There isn't really a college fund at all because IOUs are not the same as cash. For the government to replace the IOUs with cash, it would have to levy taxes on people, which is the same thing as simply levying taxes on people to get the money to send to Social Security recipients.

**The Social Security "fund"
consists of nothing more than
IOUs from the government.**

And that is precisely what all too many seniors do not want to recognize — that the money they are receiving is not a "refund" of their "contributions" but instead is being collected by the Internal Revenue Service from the younger people in the country — the people who are still working, many of whom are suffering severe financial constraints. Many young people have no savings or nest egg. They have no money for a down payment on a house. They live paycheck to paycheck. Some of them are deferring marriage for financial reasons. Some of them are still living with their parents into their late 20s and

early 30s. The burden of federal, state, and local taxes is breaking them.

Repeal, not reform

What about the formula that the Social Security Administration sends to people showing how much in Social Security payments they will be receiving? That's just a means by which they determine how much retirement welfare to send everyone.

Although they call Social Security an "entitlement," no one is actually entitled under the law to receive anything. Contrary to popular belief, the Social Security law did not establish a contract between the government and the citizenry. Moreover, there is no commitment under the law to continue the program. If Congress voted to repeal Social Security today, no one could sue and recover for breach of contract or breach of promise.

Social Security is nothing more than a straight confiscate-and-transfer program. The IRS confiscates money from people to whom it rightly belongs and gives it to people to whom it does not belong. That's the very essence of political stealing.

Suppose I accost you while you are withdrawing money from an ATM. I hold a gun to your head and

demand that you give me \$10,000 out of your account. Unwilling to lose your life over the money, you withdraw the ten grand and hand it over to me. I then go and distribute the money to seniors in town who are desperately poor. I do not retain any of the money for myself.

Social Security is nothing more than a straight confiscate-and-transfer program.

Am I a good and caring person for helping needy seniors with that money? I would think that everyone would say, "Of course not, Jacob. You're just a thief. You are being good with the money you stole, but you shouldn't be praised or thanked. You should be arrested, prosecuted, and punished."

Suppose that I instead go to the government and say, "Tax that guy \$10,000 and give it to needy seniors" and the government complies. Am I a good and caring person now? Many people would say, "Yes, Jacob, you are now a good person because you have supported a government program that takes money from people by force and gives it to seniors."

But why the difference? Isn't the moral principle the same? In the first instance, I am stealing someone's

money and giving it to needy seniors. In the second instance, the government is doing the dirty deed for me. In fact, in terms of morality, there is no difference at all. Stealing is stealing, whether it's done by a private thief or by the government and regardless of how the money is used.

**Stealing is stealing, whether
it's done by a private thief or by
the government.**

The only morally proper course of action is to repeal, not reform, Social Security.

No gradual reduction. No transition. Just end it. That's what must be done with any program that is founded on immoral principles and that violates individual liberty.

Freedom or "phasing out"?

Some people, including even some libertarians, claim that this position reflects a lack of compassion and an uncaring attitude toward seniors. But where exactly is their care and compassion? They aren't talking about voluntarily donating their money to seniors. They are talking about having the IRS continue taking money from younger people by force. Thus, their care and compassion is vicarious and indirect in that it comes

through the initiation of force by government.

Why do I favor the repeal, not the reform or gradual reduction, of Social Security?

I want to be free! To achieve freedom, it is necessary to identify infringements on liberty and then remove them. If all that we libertarians do is succeed in reforming the welfare-warfare serfdom under which we live, we will not have achieved liberty. Liberty necessarily entails the removal of infringements on liberty.

Imagine that you're living in 1850 Alabama. After years of effort, a group succeeds in getting a law enacted that reforms slavery. The law provides that there will be no more lashings, better food and health care, and shorter work hours.

Would the slaves be grateful? Undoubtedly! Nonetheless, they would know something important: Reform wasn't freedom. Freedom necessarily would entail the dismantling of the structure of slavery. Freedom today necessarily entails the dismantling of the structure of serfdom.

Thus, everyone has a choice: Social Security or a free society? You can't have both because Social Security, as a mandatory charity program, is a massive infringement on

liberty. In a genuinely free society, people have the right to keep everything they earn and decide for themselves what to do with it. Mandatory charity is the opposite of freedom and in fact isn't charity at all. Real charity can come only from the heart of a willing individual.

I want freedom now in my lifetime.

Thus, even when some libertarians propose “phasing out” Social Security over the next 40 years or so, their phase-out plan means that freedom will be delayed by 40 years or so. That delay doesn't interest me. I want freedom now in my lifetime, and, again, that necessarily necessitates the removal of infringements on liberty now.

A Social Security reform plan that is popular among some libertarians is one that would permit younger people to “opt out” of Social Security and require them to invest a certain percentage of their savings into government-approved retirement accounts. Under this plan, seniors and those who choose to “opt in” would continue receiving Social Security payments from the government.

The problem with that reform plan, however, is that it still isn't

freedom. Instead, it is a hybrid version of economic fascism and socialism. Fascism is a system whereby the government permits people to keep their money and businesses but directs and orders them on how to use them. Again, a genuinely free society is one in which people are free to keep everything they earn and to own property and decide for themselves what to do with it. Mandating that people invest in government-approved retirement accounts violates that principle and, therefore, leaves people unfree in that society for an indefinite period of time.

Moreover, since seniors and those who opt in must continue to receive their Social Security checks under this particular reform plan, the government must continue taxing younger people to get the money that needs to be sent out. Thus, a 20-year-old must not only save a certain portion of his money, he must also surrender a portion of his income to cover Social Security recipients for the next 40 years. What happens 40 years from now when those 20-year-olds say the same thing that seniors today say, “I've been contributing for 40 years into Social Security. I have a right to get my money back”?

Why not simply repeal Social Security, especially given that that is

a necessary prerequisite for anyone who wants to live in a free society?

The false assumption

Some people say that there isn't enough money in the private sector to fund seniors. But that argument is obviously fallacious because the only place that government gets the money to pay seniors is from younger people who are being taxed. If Social Security were abolished, all that money would then be back in the hands of people who today are having it taken from them by the IRS in the form of payroll taxes. In fact, younger people actually would have more money than what is distributed to seniors because there would no longer be money being spent on generous salaries and other administrative expenses for the tax collectors and the people who administer and distribute the Social Security checks.

At the core of Social Security is the assumption that freedom simply wouldn't work. Younger people, it is said, cannot be trusted to honor their mother and father on a voluntary basis. They are a bad, rotten group, the argument goes, that must be forced to be good and caring. The mindset is the same for church groups, charitable foundations, wealthy and middle-class

people, neighborhood groups, and friends and relatives of seniors. None of them can be trusted to do the right thing, we are told. They all must be forced to care for others, including their parents and grandparents.

I say, "Nonsense!" to all that. People can be trusted with freedom. After all, God trusted people with freedom. That's what the gift of free will is all about. But the government holds that God made a mistake in trusting people with freedom. And so the government has fixed God's "mistake" by forcing younger people to care for seniors and others.

If people are "free" to do only the "right" thing, then they cannot truly be considered free.

But God doesn't make mistakes. He knows that some people will turn their backs on others, but that is the system he chose. God wants people to have to make choices on when and to what extent to help others. It is through such choices that people's conscience is exercised. That's how people grow. That's what nudges a society to a higher level of morality and right conduct. Under what moral authority does the government interfere with that process?

There is no doubt in my mind that if we repealed Social Security today, which is what we should do, everything would be fine. No doubt whatsoever. A free people can be trusted to do the right thing, and they have the fundamental right to be free to choose, one way or the other. Some people will undoubtedly choose to turn their backs on others, but that is their right. If people are “free” to do only the right thing, then they cannot truly be considered free. Freedom necessarily entails the right to choose the wrong thing.

If Social Security were repealed today, many seniors have enough money to live without it. Others might have to return to work. There is nothing wrong with that. I see seniors working all the time. They are still in the mainstream of life, interacting with younger people, instead of sitting in a dark corner of their living room waiting to die.

There are some seniors who truly need help. No doubt about that. But that’s when children and grandchildren (who no longer would have to be paying the taxes that fund Social Security) would have the opportunity to step up to the plate and help those who helped raise them, feed them, clothe them, and educate

them. It’s one of life’s most meaningful actions.

In those cases where seniors have no children or grandchildren to care for them, that’s where nephews and nieces, friends and relatives, wealthy and middle-class benefactors, church groups, and charitable foundations come into play.

Let’s not forget, after all, that our American ancestors lived without income taxation, the IRS, Social Security, and other socialist programs for more than 100 years. They produced the most prosperous and charitable society in history.

What we need to do in America is to recapture a faith in ourselves, a faith in others, a faith in freedom, and a faith in God. When that happens, support for Social Security and other mandatory charity programs and the taxes that fund them will disintegrate, and we will be well on our way to a free, moral, prosperous, charitable, and harmonious society.

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

NEXT MONTH:
“Socialism, American
Style, Part 3”
by Jacob G. Hornberger

Roosevelt's Fraud at Yalta and the Mirage of the "Good War"

by James Bovard



This year is the 75th anniversary of the end of World War Two. One of the biggest frauds of the final stage of that war was the meeting at Yalta of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and President Franklin Roosevelt. Yalta has become a synonym for the abandonment of oppressed people and helped inspire the 1952 Republican campaign theme, "20 years of treason."

The American media uncorked a barrage of tributes to Roosevelt on the 75th anniversary of his death in April. CNN, for instance, trumpeted Roosevelt as "the wartime president who Trump should learn from." But there was scant coverage of one of his greatest betrayals.

Roosevelt painted World War II as a crusade for democracy — hailing Stalin as a partner in liberation. From 1942 through 1945, the U.S. government consistently deceived the American people about the character of the Soviet Union. Roosevelt praised Soviet Russia as one of the "freedom-loving nations" and stressed that Stalin is "thoroughly conversant with the provisions of our Constitution." But as Rexford Tugwell, one of Roosevelt's Brain Trusters and an open admirer of the Soviet system, groused, "The Constitution was a negative document, meant mostly to protect citizens from their government." And when government is the personification of benevolence, no protection is needed.

Harold Ickes, one of Roosevelt's top aides, proclaimed that communism was "the antithesis of Nazism" because it was based on a "belief in the control of the government, including the economic system, by the people themselves." The fact that the Soviet regime had been the most oppressive government in the world in the 1930s was irrelevant, as far as Roosevelt was concerned. As Georgetown University professor Derek Leebaert, author of *Magic and Mayhem*, observed, "FDR remarked that most of what he knew

about the world came from his stamp collection."

Giving Stalin everything

The Roosevelt administration engineered a movie tribute to Stalin — *Mission to Moscow* — that was so slavish that Russian composer Dimitri Shostakovich observed that "no Soviet propaganda agency would dare to present such outrageous lies." In his 1944 State of the Union address, Roosevelt denounced those Americans with "such suspicious souls — who feared that I have made 'commitments' for the future which might pledge this Nation to secret treaties" with Stalin at the summit of Allied leaders in Tehran the previous month. Roosevelt helped set the two-tier attack that permeated much of postwar American foreign policy — denouncing cynics, while betraying foreigners whom the U.S. government claimed to champion. (Someone should ask the Kurds if anything has changed on that score.)

Prior to the Yalta conference, Roosevelt confided to the U.S. ambassador to Russia that he believed that if he gave Stalin "everything I possibly can and ask for nothing in return, noblesse oblige, he won't try to annex anything and will work with me for a world of democracy

and peace." Stalin wanted assurances from Roosevelt and Churchill that millions of Soviet citizens who had been captured during the war by the Germans or who had abandoned the Soviet Union would be forcibly returned. After the war ended, Operation Keelhaul forcibly sent two million Soviets to certain death or long-term imprisonment in Siberia or elsewhere. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn called Operation Keelhaul "the last secret" of World War II and it was covered up or ignored by Western media until the 1970s. The fact is that those mass deaths that were facilitated by the U.S. and British governments rarely rated even an asterisk by the media-beloved historians who tout the "Good War."

Operation Keelhaul forcibly sent two million Soviets to certain death or long-term imprisonment in Siberia or elsewhere.

In the final communiqué from Yalta, Roosevelt, along with Churchill and Stalin, declared that "a new situation has been created in Poland as a result of her complete liberation by the Red Army." Liberation? Tell that to the Marines. A few weeks later, on March 1, 1945, he gave a speech to Congress tout-

ing his triumph at Yalta. In it he declared, “The decision with respect to the boundaries of Poland was, frankly, a compromise.... It will include, in the new, strong Poland, quite a large slice of what now is called Germany.” He agreed with Stalin at Yalta on moving the border of the Soviet Union far to the west — thereby effectively conscripting 11 million Poles as new Soviet Union citizens.

Roosevelt agreed with Stalin at Yalta on moving the border of the Soviet Union far to the west.

Poland was “compensated” with a huge swath of Germany, a simple cartographic revision that spurred vast human carnage. As author R.M. Douglas noted in his 2012 book *Orderly and Humane: The Expulsion of the Germans after the Second World War* (Yale University Press), the result was “the largest episode of forced migration, and perhaps the single greatest movement of population, in human history. Between 12 million and 14 million German-speaking civilians — the overwhelming majority of whom were women, old people, and children under 16 — were forcibly ejected from their places of birth in Czechoslovakia, Hungary,

Romania, Yugoslavia, and what are today the western districts of Poland.” At least half a million died as a result. George Orwell denounced the relocation as an “enormous crime” that was “equivalent to transplanting the entire population of Australia.” Philosopher Bertrand Russell protested, “Are mass deportations crimes when committed by our enemies during war and justifiable measures of social adjustment when carried out by our allies in time of peace?” Roosevelt signed those death warrants at Yalta. Freda Utley, the mother of the late publisher and author Jon Utley, did some of the first and best reporting on the vast suffering ensuing from the German expulsions. Chapters from her book *The High Cost of Vengeance* are available at fredautley.com. (The U.S. government approved similar brutal mass forcible transfers in former Yugoslavia during the Clinton administration.) But the German civilians killed after the war were simply another asterisk that could safely be ignored by Good War chroniclers.

Roosevelt boasted to Congress, “As the Allied armies have marched to military victory, they have liberated people whose liberties had been crushed by the Nazis for four long years.” At that point, he and

the State Department knew that this was a total lie for areas that had fallen under the control of the Red Army, which was busy killing or deporting to Siberia any potential political opponents. Roosevelt claimed that the deal at Yalta was "the most hopeful agreement possible for a free, independent, and prosperous Polish people." But he betrayed the exiled Polish government in London and signed off on Soviet-style elections with no international observers — effectively giving Stalin unlimited sway on choosing Poland's rulers. Any illusions about Soviet benevolence towards Poland should have been banished when the Red Army massacred the Polish officer corps at Katyn Forest — an atrocity that the U.S. government assiduously covered up (and blamed on the Nazis) during the war.

The façade of benevolence

In a private conversation at Yalta, Roosevelt assured Stalin that he was feeling "more bloodthirsty" than when they previously met. Immediately after the Yalta conference concluded, the British and American air forces turned Dresden into an inferno, killing up to 50,000 civilians. The Associated Press reported that "Allied air bosses" had

adopted "deliberate terror bombing of great German population centers as a ruthless expedient to hasten Hitler's doom." Ravaging Dresden was intended to "add immeasurably' to Roosevelt's strength in negotiating with the Russians at the postwar peace table," as Thomas Fleming noted in *The New Dealers' War*. Vast numbers of dead women and children became simply one more poker chip. Shortly after the residents of Dresden were obliterated, Roosevelt pompously announced, "I know that there is not room enough on Earth for both German militarism and Christian decency." Government censorship and intimidation helped minimize critical coverage of the civilian carnage resulting from U.S. carpet-bombing of cities in both Germany and Japan.

Roosevelt assured Stalin that he was feeling "more bloodthirsty" than when they previously met.

Roosevelt told Congress that the Yalta Agreement "spells the end of the system of unilateral action and exclusive alliance and spheres of influence." By the time he died the following month, he knew that democracy was doomed in any turf conquered by the Red Army. But

the sham had been immensely politically profitable for Roosevelt, and his successors kept up much of the charade.

Presidents have perennially used uplifting rhetoric to expunge their atrocities.

U.S. government secrecy and propaganda efforts did their best to continue portraying World War Two as the triumph of good over evil. If Americans had been told in early 1945 of the barbarities that Yalta had approved regarding captured Soviet soldiers and the brutal mass transfer of German women and children, much of the nation would have been aghast. War correspondent Ernie Pyle offered a far more honest assessment than did Roosevelt: “The war gets so complicated and confused in my mind; on especially sad days, it’s almost impossible to believe that anything is worth such mass slaughter and misery.”

In the decades after Yalta, presidents continued to invoke lofty goals to justify U.S. military intervention in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. In each case, massive secrecy and perennial lies were necessary to maintain a façade of benevolence. Americans have

still not seen the secret files behind the harebrained, contradictory interventions in Syria from the George W. Bush administration onwards. The only certainty is that, if we ever learn the full truth, plenty of politicians and other government officials will be revealed to be bigger scoundrels than suspected. Some of the orchestrators of mass misery might even be compelled to reduce their speaking fees.

“Presidents have lied so much to us about foreign policy that they’ve established almost a common-law right to do so,” George Washington University history professor Leo Ribuffo observed in 1998. Presidents have perennially used uplifting rhetoric to expunge their atrocities. On the 75th anniversary of Yalta, Americans have no reason to presume that presidents, top government officials, or much of the media are more trustworthy now than they were during the finale of the Good War. Have there been other Operation Keelhaul equivalents in recent years that Americans have not yet learned about? The fact that Yalta can now clearly be seen to have been a betrayal is another reason to be wary when pundits and talk-show hosts jump on the bandwagon for the next killing spree abroad.

James Bovard is a policy advisor to The Future of Freedom Foundation and is the author of the ebook Freedom Frauds: Hard Lessons in American Liberty, published by FFF, Public Policy Hooligan, Attention Deficit Democracy, and eight other books.

NEXT MONTH:
"The FBI's Forgotten Crimes
Against Richard Jewell"
by James Bovard

He that, in the state of nature, would take away the freedom that belongs to any one in that state, must necessarily be supposed to have a design to take away every thing else, that freedom being the foundation of all the rest; as he that, in the state of society, would take away the freedom belonging to those of that society or commonwealth, must be supposed to design to take away from them every thing else, and so be looked on as in a state of war.

— John Locke

Why Do Democrats Hate Donald Trump So Much?

by *Laurence M. Vance*



Democrats didn't much care for presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, or George W. Bush — mainly because they were Republican presidents. Just as Republicans weren't too fond of presidents Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, or Barack Obama — mainly because they were Democratic presidents. But it is no secret that Democrats, whether they call themselves liberals, leftists, progressives, Democratic socialists, or just plain socialists, hate Donald Trump. They focus on every single thing he says or does in a way that they never did with previous Republican presidents. Now, I realize that "hate" is a very strong word. But I really don't know how else to describe how many Democrats feel about Trump.

They loathe him. They despise him. They detest him. They abhor him. They have contempt and enmity for him. And now that Trump is running for reelection, hatred of the president has reached a whole new level of intensity.

Why?

Hatred and impeachment

Trump has been hated from the very beginning. About seventy House Democrats boycotted his inauguration and even before he was inaugurated, some House Democrats declared Trump to be an "illegitimate president." Democratic hatred for Trump goes back even to when he was still just the Republican nominee for president. Since that time, Democrats have referred to the president as "pond scum," a "human turd," "toxic sludge," a "sebaceous cyst," an "infectious microbe," a "bursting landfill of municipal solid waste," a "mountain of rotting whale blubber," a "walking staph infection," a "decomposing jack-o-lantern," a "fascist carnival barker," and a "snake-oil salesman." And those are just the epithets that can be listed in a family-friendly publication such as this.

The plot to impeach Trump was hatched long before his phone call to the president of Ukraine. In be-

tween his election and inauguration, some Democratic House members proposed that Trump be impeached. Just a few months into the Trump presidency, numerous Democrats in Congress were openly discussing impeachment. When Trump had been in office for less than six months, two Democratic House members introduced an article of impeachment. In December 2017, fifty-eight House Democrats voted to advance articles of impeachment after Trump criticized NFL players who knelt in protest during the national anthem. In January 2018, sixty-six House Democrats voted to advance articles of impeachment after Trump was said to have referred to some nations as “s**thole countries.” In July 2019, ninety-five House Democrats voted to advance articles of impeachment after Trump remarked that certain Democratic representatives should “go back and help fix the totally broken and crime infested places from which they came.”

Eventually, on December 18, 2019, Trump became the third U.S. president to be impeached. The Trial Memorandum of the House impeachment managers concluded that the president had “betrayed the American people and the ideals on which the Nation was founded.”

Unless removed from office, Trump would “continue to endanger our national security, jeopardize the integrity of our elections, and undermine our core constitutional principles.” House Democrats said that Trump was a “threat to the Constitution” and a “clear and present danger to our free and fair elections and our national security.” They insisted that the president had “fundamentally broken his covenant with the American people,” “betrayed his oath,” “betrayed the Constitution,” “abused the powers of the presidency in a manner offensive to and subversive of the Constitution.” Impeachment manager Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-N.Y.) termed the president a “dictator.” Although maintaining that “we do not hate President Trump,” Nadler said that “we do know that President Trump will continue to threaten the nation’s security, democracy, and constitutional system if he is allowed to remain in office.”

The hatred that Democrats have for the president was pointed out by some Republicans before the vote was taken in the House of Representatives on the articles of impeachment:

- This vote, this day is about one thing and one thing only. They

hate this president (Chris Stewart, Utah).

- This is a tragic day in our nation's history. We have individuals that hate this president more than they love this country (Greg Murphy, N.C.).

- It's obvious today that there's an intense hatred from the Democrats of President Donald Trump. Why do they hate the man so much (Paul Gosar, Ariz.)?

Why indeed?

President Trump is viewed by Democrats as rude, combative, arrogant, offensive, crass, crude, and politically incorrect. Many Democrats consider him to be a megalomaniac, a xenophobe, a homophobe, an Islamophobe, a racist, and a misogynist. But what is so interesting and intriguing about Democratic hatred for Donald Trump is that there is really no ideological basis for it.

The federal budget

President Trump submitted his fiscal year 2021 budget to Congress on February 10, 2020. Although the Constitution doesn't mention a federal budget, according to the Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 the president must annually submit a detailed proposed budget request to

Congress for the next fiscal year by the first Monday in February. Because the federal government's fiscal year runs from October 1 to September 30, the budget submitted in February is actually for the next fiscal year that begins in October. The president's budget is both a blueprint and a request because it is ultimately up to the Congress to decide how much money the federal government will spend in any given fiscal year.

Between his election and inauguration, some Democratic House members proposed that Trump be impeached.

According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the budget request is "developed through an interactive process between federal agencies and the President's Office of Management and Budget (OMB)." The budget request plays three important roles:

First, it tells Congress what the President recommends for overall federal fiscal policy: (a) how much money the federal government should spend on public purposes; (b) how much it should take in as tax revenues; and (c) how much of

a deficit (or surplus) the federal government should run.

Second, the President's budget lays out his relative priorities for federal programs — how much he believes should be spent on defense, agriculture, education, health, and so on.

The third role of the President's budget is signaling to Congress the President's recommendations for spending and tax policy changes.

There are two kinds of federal spending: mandatory and discretionary. Mandatory spending refers to the portion of the budget that Congress legislates outside of the annual appropriations process. It accounts for about 62 percent of the federal budget, and includes spending on entitlement programs, welfare, and subsidies. Discretionary spending refers to the portion of the budget that is decided by Congress through the annual appropriations process. It accounts for about 30 percent of the federal budget, and includes spending on defense, education, NASA, foreign aid, and job training. (The other 8 percent of federal spending is interest on the national debt, which is paid automatically.) The president's budget

spells out how much funding he recommends for each discretionary program.

There are two kinds of federal spending: mandatory and discretionary.

According to the Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act of 1974, within six weeks of the president's submitting his budget, the twelve congressional subcommittees of the Appropriations Committee in the House and Senate are required to submit their "views and estimates" of federal spending and revenues. The House and Senate budget committees hold hearings on the president's budget, draft budget resolutions, and then send the resolutions to the House and Senate floors to be debated and amended. After a conference committee resolves differences in the House and Senate versions of the budget resolution, a final version is voted on as a concurrent resolution on the budget. The budget resolution states how much money Congress is authorized to spend in each of the 21 "budget functions" (agriculture, education, health, defense, et cetera) and how much total revenue the federal government is supposed to collect, not only in the

next fiscal year, but over the next ten fiscal years. The difference between authorized spending and projected revenue is the budget deficit. The budget resolution can also include changes to the budget process. A report that accompanies the budget resolution takes the budget-function spending figures and distributes them by congressional committee.

Action on the budget resolution is supposed to be completed by April 15. It is only then that Congress enacts the twelve regular appropriation bills that fund discretionary programs for the coming fiscal year and sends them to the president for his signature. But if, as is usually the case, Congress fails to pass a budget resolution before the beginning of the next fiscal year (October 1), a series of continuing resolutions or an omnibus spending bill is passed and sent to the president for his signature to fund the federal government for a certain period of time.

Trump's budget

The first budget that Trump proposed soon after taking office (FY2018) was \$4.094 trillion, even though federal government receipts were projected to be only \$3.654 trillion — resulting in a budget def-

icit of \$440 billion. The actual deficit ended up being \$779 billion. The budget deficits for fiscal years 2019, 2020, and 2021 were each around \$1 trillion. For fiscal year 2021, Trump is proposing that the federal government spend \$4.829 trillion, even though receipts are estimated to be only \$3.863 trillion — again, resulting in a budget deficit of almost a trillion dollars. The national debt has increased by almost \$4 trillion since Trump has been in office — and that was before the first American was diagnosed with the coronavirus. Yet, in the introduction to the president's new budget ("A Budget for America's Future"), it says, "The President has laid out a vision to drive down deficits and debt through spending restraint in every Budget he has submitted to the Congress." The Trump administration's budgets "have proposed more spending reductions than any other in history." The fiscal year 2021 budget "continues to propose strategic reductions in spending." I guess this is why Trump would have the federal government spend 21 percent more in fiscal year 2021 than when he took office.

The introduction to Trump's budget reads like an indictment by his opponents of his last three years in office:

Unsustainable Federal deficits and debt are a serious threat to America's prosperity. Gross Federal debt is now more than \$23 trillion. The 2019 deficit was \$985 billion—the largest since the Great Recession — and will climb above \$1 trillion this year and for years after.

Such high and rising debt will have serious negative consequences for the budget and the Nation. It slows economic growth, as the costs of financing the debt crowds out more productive investments and could eventually limit the Federal Government's ability to respond to urgent national security needs, invest in key priorities such as infrastructure, and enact other pro-growth policies. In fact, by 2021, the United States will be spending more money on paying for the debt than for the budgets of the Departments of Veterans Affairs, Justice, Homeland Security, and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration combined.

Each year, billions of taxpayer dollars are wasted on programs that are duplicative, unnecessary, and ostensibly without priority. This has re-

duced the ability of the Federal Government to meet its constitutional responsibilities to the American people.

But instead of blaming all of this on his own budget priorities, Trump blames everything on the Congress:

Unfortunately, the Congress continues to reject any efforts to restrain spending. Instead, they have greatly contributed to the continued ballooning of Federal debt and deficits, putting the Nation's fiscal future at risk.

The Administration cannot simply sit by while the Congress continues to spend. In addition to providing a clear road map to a more fiscally responsible future in the Budget, the Administration is using all available tools and levers to restrain spending.

Now, although it is true that Congress is not obligated to pay a whit of attention to any president's budget, and although it is true that the president gets not so much as a thin dime to spend unless Congress appropriates it, Trump is ignoring the fact that it is he who has signed

every spending bill into law. He has vetoed only six bills since he has been in office, all in 2019, and none of them was a spending bill. Trump is on track to veto fewer bills than any president since Warren Harding — who died after less than 30 months in office.

Trump is on track to veto fewer bills than any president since Warren Harding.

To ensure the continued economic strength of the United States, says the president in the introduction to his budget, he has “called on the Government to reduce wasteful, unnecessary spending, and to fix mismanagement and redundancy across agencies” even as his budget “looks to reduce wasteful and unnecessary spending, and put in place procedures to keep a vigilant eye on fraud, abuse, and negligence with taxpayer dollars.” Trump’s budget puts forth six “universal tenets on which broad bipartisan action to reduce spending” should be based, but none of them even vaguely mentions that all federal spending should be authorized by the Constitution. The focus is all on eliminating “wasteful and unnecessary spending,” “overlap, duplication, and fragmentation in Federal

programs,” and programs that have “outlived their mission” while “reorganizing and repurposing” and “reforming and reducing” other programs.

Democratic pride

President Trump’s budget is a budget that Democrats can be proud of. Not only is it the largest budget ever proposed in the history of the United States, with the largest deficit ever proposed, it would basically fund the welfare/warfare state much as it is now. What spending reductions it actually contains are offset by even greater spending increases. Two examples will suffice. One, the proposed budget for the Department of Homeland Security eliminates \$535 million in unnecessary spending for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), but increases spending to \$8.2 billion for the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), including pay raises for TSA workers. And two, Trump’s budget eliminates funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS). That is a good thing. However, the funding for those agencies is a less-than-minuscule part of the

federal budget, and the money saved is squandered many times over by increased defense spending, including \$69 billion for “Overseas Contingency Operations (OCO),” meaning foreign wars. Overall, Trump’s budget has much for Democrats to be proud of. Here are just a few highlights:

- Trump’s budget requests \$21.8 billion for the Department of Agriculture. In addition to “funding the robust suite of farm safety-net programs, the Budget funds a variety of national, State, and local initiatives to help farmers succeed.” And no wonder, since under the president’s budget “roughly one-third of farm income will come from Government payments and crop insurance benefits.”

- Trump’s budget requests \$66.6 billion for the Department of Education. That includes \$749 million in funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, expanded eligibility for Pell Grants, and an additional \$100 million in grants to states for special education services.

- Trump’s budget requests \$94.5 billion for the Department of Health and Human Services. It includes \$716 million “for the second year of the multiyear initiative to

eliminate new HIV infections in America,” \$1 billion for the states to “fund child care and early learning,” \$225 million “to improve community mental health services,” and the creation of a new agency to “focus on tobacco regulation.” The president wants to “protect and improve” Medicare.

- Trump’s budget requests \$25.2 billion for NASA, a 12 percent increase over last year, with “robust funding for the programs” that support the goal of returning astronauts to the moon and on to Mars.

- Trump’s budget “invests in a better future for Americans with a proposal to provide paid leave to new mothers and fathers, including adoptive parents, so all families can afford to take time to recover from childbirth and bond with a new child.”

Overall, Trump’s budget has much for Democrats to be proud of.

Since when does the Constitution authorize the federal government to have departments of Agriculture, Education, and Health and Human Services or to spend money on those things? And the Constitution certainly doesn’t authorize the federal government to pay for space

travel and exploration. Trump's paid family-leave proposal is in line with a similar proposal in the Democratic Party platform.

President Trump's budget is fiscally irresponsible.

There are, of course, other problems with Trump's budget that, although Democrats might be ambivalent about them, are anathema to libertarians. For example, the drug war. Since 2014, Congress has effectively prohibited federal prosecution of marijuana users whose actions comply with state medical marijuana laws in spite of the federal prohibition of marijuana. Trump's budget would restore funding to the Department of Justice so it can prosecute medical marijuana users in states where it is legal, including "an additional \$6 million to support 10 new attorneys and support staff to ensure that the U.S. Attorney's Office will continue to generate drug cases for prosecution." Regarding drug-war funding, Trump's budget also provides:

\$2.4 billion in discretionary resources for the DEA, including an additional \$67 million to enhance efforts to identify, investigate, disrupt, and dis-

mantle major drug trafficking organizations and online illicit drug marketplaces.

\$5 billion in critical investments to combat opioid dependency and abuse, investing in research, surveillance, prevention, treatment, access to overdose reversal drugs, and recovery support services.

And yet, Trump maintains that his budget "cuts low-priority and wasteful Government spending, reduces duplication, and eliminates programs and agencies that do not fulfill a Federal role or demonstrate results." There is nothing more low-priority and wasteful that is not authorized by the Constitution and has deplorable results than the federal war on drugs.

Trump's budget is fiscally irresponsible, full of unconstitutional spending proposals, interspersed with cuts to the projected rate of growth of spending increases that are not actual reductions in the amount of spending and it is based on unrealistic assumptions. It is filled with "savings" that will never materialize, reliant on rosy economic projections of economic growth, and dead on arrival like the budgets of most of his predecessors. Democrats should love it. It makes

the bloated budgets of George W. Bush and Barack Obama look frugal. Why do Democrats hate President Trump so much when philosophically, he is one of them?

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NEXT MONTH:

“Should Social Security Be Expanded?”

by Laurence M. Vance

“The Coronavirus Crisis and Restoring the Spirit of Liberty”

by Richard M. Ebeling

Paying tribute to coercionists is indeed a sorry way to operate a business. But citizens who will let their own government close the market, sell protectionism to powerful lobby groups, and otherwise abandon its principled role, scarcely deserve a better fate, for they have given no thought and no support to freedom.

— Paul L. Poirot

The Conquest of the United States by China

by Richard M. Ebeling



In March 2020, America was put on a “war footing,” according to the president of the United States and other governmental officials. The enemy was declared to be the coronavirus, and to meet this “invader” many if not most politicians at all local, state, and federal levels called for government-directed command and control of social and economic affairs. Welcome to the conquest of the United States by China.

I mean this not only in the sense that it is generally said that the coronavirus began in the central Chinese city of Wuhan, and then spread throughout the world, and into the United States. I mean it in the sense that American sociologist and economist William Graham Sumner

(1840–1910) meant when he penned an essay in 1899 titled, “The Conquest of the United States by Spain.”

America’s victory over Spain was an ideological defeat

In the immediate aftermath of the short Spanish-American War of 1898, Sumner argued that while the United States had come out of the war victorious, after having successfully invaded Cuba and routed the Spanish forces in the Philippine Islands, America was now on the road to become more like the country it had defeated.

For the century from the establishment of the United States under the Constitution in 1789 up to the Spanish-American War, America may have swept across the North American continent by purchasing the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, annexing a huge swath of Mexican Territory all the way to the Pacific Ocean following its war with Mexico in 1846-1848, and buying Alaska from Russia in 1867. But it had resisted entering the great game of global imperialism by crossing oceans and seizing foreign lands and imposing American political rule on the people in those far-away places.

But now, following the Spanish-American War, the United States

was embarking on a path that would lead to its becoming more like the Spanish, Sumner said. The peace treaty of 1898 had resulted in Cuba's becoming an American protectorate, along with annexing Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands in the Caribbean, Wake Island in the Pacific Ocean, and in transferring the Philippine Islands to U.S. jurisdiction as its colonial and imperial toehold off the Asian mainland.

"If we believe in liberty, as an American principle, why do we not stand for it?"

Sumner argued that this war and the treaty that ended it, required the United States to give up its principle of self-government, since the conquered lands would now be ruled from Washington, D.C., rather than by the peoples in those places. America would now have budgetary burdens of financing the costs of managing an empire that would include an increased military to police its overseas territories. The United States government would no longer be the constitutionally limited servant securing the rights and liberties of the American people.

American adoption of Spanish imperialism

Imperial paternalism would be a new presumptuous principle guiding America's lordship over its global empire. It would contradict the founding principle of liberty upon which the United States had been established. Said Sumner,

Now, the great reason why all these enterprises which begin by saying to somebody else, We know what is good for you better than you know yourself and we are going to make you do it, are false and wrong is that they violate liberty; or, to turn the same statement into other words, the reason why liberty, of which we Americans talk so much, is a good thing is that it means leaving people to live out their own lives in their own way, while we do the same. If we believe in liberty, as an American principle, why do we not stand for it? Why are we going to throw it away to enter upon a Spanish policy of dominion and regulation?

Yet that is exactly what we set ourselves to do, "if this nation in its turn attempts to be school-mistress

to others,” Sumner feared. But then if those whom we are determined to make over in our image for their own good, of course, forcibly resist this imposed transformation, “we must send fleets and armies to kill them if they do it.” Which is precisely what was done in crushing the Philippine Insurrection of 1899-1902, with more than 200,000 Filipinos killed, along with 4,200 American soldiers.

Where did that leave the United States, with this mutation into a form of Spanish imperialism and compulsory paternalism as part of America’s price of victory? Sumner sadly opined,

I submit that it is a strange incongruity to utter grand platitudes about the blessings of liberty, etc., which we are going to impart to these people, and to begin by refusing to extend the Constitution to them [in the form of the same individual rights and political participation], and still more by throwing the Constitution into the gutter here at home. If you take away the Constitution, what is American liberty, and all the rest? Nothing but a lot of phrases.

Free enterprise versus central planning

Slightly more than one hundred years after Sumner warned of the conquest of the United States by Spain, I would like to suggest that today we see China’s conquest of America. No, we have not, as yet, gone to war with China (the last time that happened was during the Korean War). I mean that the Chinese way of facing a social and economic crisis in dealing with the coronavirus has been copied and followed in its political essentials by the United States.

It represents an adaptation of the central-directing mindset and policy perspective that in its implied comprehensiveness has not been fully presumed in America in any recent memory. I say “recent memory” because during the Second World War the U.S. government did commandeer and direct most of the American economy in the name of the war effort through systems of price and production controls that imposed on the American people a centrally planned economy that included rationing of virtually all everyday goods and services.

America retreated from its comprehensive war-mobilization system of central planning soon after

the end of the Second World War in 1945 to a freer market economy, though one burdened and beset by a significant overlay of government regulations and a growing welfare state. But in principle, both Republicans and Democrats said that however extensive the interventionist system may become, the premise was a private-enterprise economy within the United States.

There is no doubt about the fact that a little bit of market freedom goes a very long way.

It was taken to be one of the stark comparisons between the “free world” led by the United States and the communist-bloc countries dominated by the Soviet Union. In America, private property, personal initiative, and competitive free enterprise were said to be essential to the free society (however much that was contradicted in practice with the interventionist-welfare state), while on the other side of the Iron Curtain was the totalitarian state with the central commanding control of everyone’s personal and economic life through the planned economy.

With the end to the Cold War following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the So-

viet Union in 1991, it was widely cheered that America and the competitive market economy had triumphed over the socialist planned society. Democratic capitalism had won over dictatorial communism.

Central planning in China

Except for communist countries such as Cuba and North Korea, virtually all the other socialist centrally planned economies moved in the direction of reestablishing private property rights and greater or smaller degrees of competitive markets. That was the case in China as well.

After more than a quarter of a century under the tyrannical rule of Chairman Mao Zedong until his death in 1976, the communist government of China decided to move in the direction of forms of market freedom with private farming, small and medium-size private businesses, and, over time, private corporate giants that gained international stature and market shares.

And there is no doubt about the fact that a little bit of market freedom goes a very long way. Tens of millions of Chinese have been lifted out of age-old poverty and famine by the opportunities of individual initiative through the profit motive and market prices to serve as guides and incentives.

But the fact is that the Chinese economy has remained closely tied to and dominated by the Communist Party for direction and corrupt control. Party officials and their relatives sit on the boards of leading Chinese companies; nothing gets financed or invested in unless it serves the political or personal purposes of those in the various layers of governmental and Party power. Government planning agencies dictate interest rates as well as where investment funds will be employed in the various sectors of the Chinese economy.

China's totalitarian response to the coronavirus

The government of Chinese President Xi Jinping first attempted to cover up and deny the existence of the coronavirus. Chinese doctors and medical specialists were muzzled and were threatened to keep silent. Only in January 2020 could the Chinese authorities no longer hide the truth. The world stood amazed by the top-down commands for entire cities and provinces to be locked down. Overnight, it seemed that by government decree hospitals appeared that had not been there before.

The government propaganda agencies worked overtime to con-

trol “the story.” The Chinese government had not hidden the truth and had not delayed in swiftly acting. President Xi was not a culprit to blame for illnesses and deaths that might have been prevented from earlier action. No, he was the great leader who guided and directed the needed actions and resources to save China from an even worse catastrophe by central control of everything, everywhere, as well as everyone. Thanks be to the memory of Chairman Mao and the brilliant leadership of President Xi for still having in place the necessary and needed policy tools of the command and planned economy!

The premise was the socialist one, that “society” can deal with dangers and ensure its well-being and betterment only through political paternalism. Command and control, under which the individual is subservient and obedient to the government, ensures the speed and efficiency to meet the needs of a crisis such as the coronavirus.

Following China's road

As the coronavirus seemed to be stopped in its tracks through the Chinese draconian methods, versions of this model were rapidly followed and implemented in Italy, Spain, France, Great Britain, and a

growing number of other countries all around the world. The United States, at the federal, state, and municipal levels of government soon followed the Chinese example.

In the process of ordering retail establishments to shut down or curtail their services, of commanding entire populations of cities and states to stay at home and off the streets, and instructing multitudes of people to not go to work, the American economy went into a government-created economic tailspin.

Freedom of movement, the right of free association, and the liberty of individual choice were all radically set aside in the name of stopping the spread of the coronavirus in the middle of a declared global pandemic, all with little or no legislative processes or constitutional authority. Mayors, governors, and the president of the United States arbitrarily took these powers into their own hands as crisis dictators-in-chief.

What was the response of most of the American public? Passive and even supportive obedience to the dictates of those in political authority. Advocates of civil liberties were muted in their criticisms of abridgments of fundamental individual rights. Conservative and

even some libertarian writers all waffled in positively or grudgingly conceding that such a health crisis justified the assumption of exceptional powers by government, even if the forms and content of a few comments suggested that some of what was being done was a bit excessive or misdirected.

Those on the political Left were enthusiastic about the extension of the scope and reach of the government in the face of the coronavirus crisis. Their complaints mostly centered on government actions that were too little and not far-reaching enough in every conceivable direction. They only had one, well minor, hesitation and complaint: the implementation of the half-measures and wrongly arranged impositions of federal-level central planning were in the hands of Donald Trump, the person whom they have come to hate the most and trust the least in the arena of politics. Central planning is good! ... as long as the politically correct and “progressive” hands that are in charge of the levers of social and economic policy are those they like and want.

An American consensus

Except for a handful of principled classical liberals and libertarians, virtually everyone has hailed

with enthusiasm or pragmatic resignation the need for a budget-busting \$2 trillion federal government giveaway in the name of propping up an economic system driven into rising unemployment, falling production, and growing scarcity of many needed goods and services due to the government's own policy of bringing large segments of the U.S. economy to a halt.

The United States, at the federal, state, and municipal levels of government soon followed the Chinese example.

In other words, all along the political spectrum, left, right, and center, it is presumed that only the command-and-control economy can navigate through the storms of pandemic misfortune. That is how the United States has been conquered by China. That is how America goes further down that road to serfdom about which Friedrich A. Hayek warned long ago.

Of course, this has not happened overnight. For decades, now, collectivist trends have been at work in America. The classical liberal writer Garet Garrett (1874–1954) warned about it in his 1938 essay, “The Revolution Was,” in which he chronicled the extent to

which the road away from traditional American liberty had begun during the Progressive Era and the presidency of Woodrow Wilson and accelerated with the coming of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal in the 1930s.

What can be said is that all that has been happening over these decades has been laying the groundwork for the ideological conquest of the United States by China. In all this, how very far we have moved from the ideas and ideals upon which the American Republic was founded!

Original American ideals

Its spirit was appreciated and understood by the many waves of immigrants who came to the United States, especially during its first 100 years as a new country. As one example, Morris Bickbeck (1764–1825) was an Englishman who decided to leave his native land and immigrate to the United States in 1817. In 1818, he published *Notes on a Journey to America*, in which he shared his adventures in and his observations about the new country he had decided to make his own, as he traveled from Virginia to what was then the “wild west” of Illinois, where he helped to found the town of Albion.

Here is how he described Americans and their values as free men:

The simple maxim, that a man has a right to do anything but injure his neighbor, is very broadly adopted into the practical as well as political code of this country. A good citizen is the common designation of respect, when a man speaks of his neighbor as a virtuous man — “he is a very good citizen.”...

The social compact here is not the confederacy of a few to reduce the many into subjection; but is indeed, and in truth among these simple republicans, a combination of talents, moral and physical, by which the good of all is promoted in perfect accordance with individual interest. It is, in fact, a better, because a more simple state than was ever portrayed by an Utopian theorist....

... There prevails so much good sense and useful knowledge, joined to a genuine warmth of friendly feeling, a disposition to promote the happiness of each other, that the man who is lonely among them is not formed for society. Such are the citizens of these

new states, and my unaffected and well considered wish is to spend among them the remainder of my days.

Each man was free to pursue his own ends in his own way as his interests and his conscience guided him, with the one stipulation that the following of his own purposes did not infringe on the equal individual rights of all other men to peacefully do the same. This is what made a “good citizen.”

Morris Bickbeck also emphasized the generosity and philanthropy of the early Americans.

Here was the basis of a “social compact” under which the government and the law were not to place some men in the position to oppress or plunder any others. The cumulative outcome of each individual’s pursuing his own personal interests in this arena of equal individual rights, with common respect for the other’s similar rights, created a cumulative improvement in the conditions of all in society. America was the practical demonstration of Adam Smith’s metaphor of the “invisible hand” of interacting individual self-interests improving the common good of all.

Bickbeck also emphasized the generosity and philanthropy of the early Americans, even in the midst of transforming a continent of wilderness into a developing and wealthy society of commerce, industry, and trade, as well as the achievement of multitudes of those waves of immigrants who cleared vast tracts of land and dotted America with farms and towns of prospering civil society.

The spirit of liberty and the coronavirus crisis

But does all of this still hold in a time of life-threatening crisis from a new strain of virus that seems to be easily transmitted from person to person across countries and continents, and which is particularly deadly for the older members of society with any preconditions that may weaken a person's immunity system? Surely, extraordinary circumstances require out-of-the-ordinary actions from the government and demands upon the people.

I answer, "No." It is precisely at a time of a crisis like this that we should realize more than ever that it is essential to respect the autonomy of the individual to guide what he considers to be the best action for himself and his family. At such a time, we want the market to be

most adaptable, vibrant, and innovative to find ways to reduce the impact of disease and limit the deaths from such a viral "enemy."

It is at such a time that we need to rededicate ourselves to the founding principles of liberty as an end in itself, and as the means to discover the best ways to overcome the dangers from a coronavirus. It is not the time to straitjacket society with a command-and-control system of a few in government. We need to not limit our capacity to handle such circumstances to the minds of a few who possess barely a fraction of all the relevant knowledge and ability existing in society but which is decentralized and divided up among all the members of the human race.

It is why in our thinking and in our actions we should not stand idly by and watch the ideological conquest of the United States by China.

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The Tortured Legacy of the Mexican-American War, Part 3

by Danny Sjursen



Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory, and shed American blood upon American soil. War exists, and notwithstanding all our efforts to avoid it, exists by the act of Mexico herself.

— President James K. Polk’s War Message to Congress (May 11, 1846)

President Polk’s dreams were big, enormous in fact. He desired, and sought to make a reality, a United States that stretched from the Atlantic to the Pacific. While he made a fuss about Texas annexation, his eyes had long been on California, which he saw as the real prize. Nevertheless, drumming up the war he desired hinged on a relatively minor border dispute in

South Texas. Even though the long-established border of the Mexican province of Texas had been the Nueces River, the Texian Republic claimed its border was further south along the Rio Grande River. It was a ludicrous, unsubstantiated claim. Mexico hadn’t even recognized Texian independence in the first place, and nearly every Anglo advance south of the Nueces had been rebuffed. The new republic had managed to establish only one small settlement just across the river at Corpus Christi. No matter, in the border controversy, Polk sensed an opportunity.

Everything that subsequently unfolded proved one thing quite unassailably: Polk, for all his aw-shucks, vice-less, personal habits, was a liar! The new president perhaps genuinely believed that his obfuscations were in the service of “good,” in the interest, ultimately, of the nation. Nevertheless, his rampant dissembling was indefensible.

It was understandable that the formal annexation of Texas on July 4, 1846, caused Mexico to sever diplomatic relations and withdraw its minister in Washington. The Mexican people were fired up by America’s egregious insults. “Defeat and death [fighting the United States] would be glorious and beau-

tiful,” a relatively moderate Mexico City newspaper declared. Yet for all the responsive (and justifiable) jingoism among the Mexican populace, their government neither attacked nor declared war, and even signaled its willingness to negotiate.

Persistent as ever, Polk tried to instigate a Mexican attack for a third time in January 1846.

Polk, conversely, had readied his nation for war. He ordered a naval flotilla to the Gulf of Mexico, and covertly ordered his commodore in the Pacific to seize San Francisco and various other ports in California immediately upon the outbreak of war. As for the U.S. Army contingent, Polk ordered Gen. Zachary Taylor to march his small force across the Nueces River to Corpus Christi.

Casus belli

Next, to provide international diplomatic top-cover — in a move reminiscent of George W. Bush’s disingenuous deployment of WMD inspectors to Iraq in 2002-2003 — Polk sent a Democratic Party hack, John Slidell, to ostensibly negotiate a deal with Mexico. In reality, Slidell’s actual mission was to incense the Mexicans with unacceptable de-

mands in the hope they’d appear to start the expected war, or, even better — as Polk had hoped — concede to U.S. impositions. Even after it became clear that no Mexican official of substance would deal with the intransigent Slidell, the secretary of War ordered him to remain in Mexico a bit longer, as it was necessary to “satisfy the American people that all had been done ... to avoid the necessity of resorting to hostilities.” Nevertheless, by late December 1845, Slidell was totally disgusted with the “inferior” Mexicans, writing the president, “A war would probably be the best mode of settling our affairs with Mexico.” Up to that point, mind you, Congress had not been consulted on the crucial question of war or peace. Here was an early manifestation of the imperial presidency in action.

Just as Texas annexation hadn’t, Taylor’s order to occupy Corpus Christi didn’t provoke a violent Mexican response. Persistent as ever, Polk tried to instigate a Mexican attack for a third time in January 1846 — ordering the general to march his army right up to the Rio Grande River and take up defensive positions — supported by a U.S. naval blockade — in the heart of the contested territory. Taylor was reluctant, concerned not only by the

blatant aggression of the move, but by the tactically impracticable nature of his exposed defensive positions along the Rio Grande. Still, always the dutiful soldier, he hesitantly acquiesced. In response, a larger Mexican force was deployed to the southern bank of the river. A precarious standoff ensued. The situation was inherently unstable.

The resultant speech was vintage Polk: pure fiction, but loaded with crowd-pleasing, martial hyperbole.

Even then, before the first shots were fired, there were prominent officers in Taylor's army who vocally opposed Polk's military policy. Lt. Col. Ethan Allen Hitchcock confided to his diary, "We have not one particle of right to be here.... It looks as if the [U.S.] government sent a small force on purpose to bring on a war, so as to have a pretext for taking California and as much of this country as it chooses." It's remarkable how prescient Hitchcock proved to be, so far from Washington's corridors of power. He had diagnosed the Polk strategy to a T.

The long-awaited spark came on April 24, 1846, when Mexican cavalrymen crossed the Rio Grande, and ambushed an intercepting force

of U.S. dragoons, killing eleven. The limitations of mid-18th-century communications technology being what they were, Polk didn't receive news of the bloody skirmish for two weeks. In the meantime, he'd been overtly preparing for war. Democratic newspapers were reporting that "war will be immediately declared against Mexico." With hysterical war fever sweeping large expanses of the nation, Polk told his cabinet that since the country wanted war, he "would not be doing [his] duty," if he didn't oblige. Just hours later, he received news of the Mexican attack and immediately set about drafting a declaration of war to send over to Congress.

The resultant speech was vintage Polk: pure fiction, but loaded with crowd-pleasing, martial hyperbole. He didn't exactly ask Congress for the constitutionally required war declaration, but rather asked it to recognize that a war was already in existence. In the process, of course, he omitted any of the complicated context surrounding the Mexican attack. His penultimate line informed Congress that "after reiterated menaces, Mexico has passed the boundary of the United States, has invaded our territory and shed American blood upon American soil." Blood and

soil, it was an effervescent call to nationalism, to arms. Only none of it was true! American blood had, indeed, been shed. However, it had spilled on contested soil, in a territory that simple reason and international consensus agreed was actually Mexican.

Nevertheless, Polk's Democratic loyalists in Congress sprang into action in support of their president's war. They immediately, and in a cynical masterstroke, attached a preamble to the war-declaration bill that authorized funding for the troops. The move was brilliant, defensible, and completely new in American history. For now, if a skeptical Whig dared to vote against war with Mexico, he could easily be tarnished as "anti-soldier!" The tactic plays, and is masterfully used by both major political parties even today. Yet more flagrantly, the Democratic House leadership limited debate on the war to two hours — 90 minutes of which were taken up by a diligent reading of the many documents that accompanied Polk's war message. Only thirteen representatives, led by the stalwart, 78-year-old former president John Quincy Adams held out.

Mainstream Whigs, fearful for their political futures in Washington, were in a bind. Most folded and

acceded to war. In the Senate the next day, the vote was even more lopsided, with a 42-2 majority supportive of war. The U.S. Congress, hastily, and without sufficient information, had simply rolled over. It may have been the first time, but it wouldn't be the last. Unshackled from the feared congressional opposition, Polk proceeded to set expansive goals for the postwar settlement following what was expected to be a short, decisive war.

Only thirteen representatives, led by the stalwart, 78-year-old former president John Quincy Adams held out.

Polk lectured his secretary of State James Buchanan (a future president) — who had initially held circumscribed postwar expectations — that "though we had not gone to war for conquest, yet it was clear that in making peace we would if practicable obtain California and such other portion of Mexican territory as would be sufficient ... to defray the expenses of the war." It was a precursor to events in 2003: Iraq's oil would cover the costs of the 2003 invasion, Bush administration officials had assured the American people. Whether delusion, obfuscation, or a bit of both, the absurd, discred-

ited promise would prove to be, historically, in good company.

Race and jingoism: Justifying war

[Mexicans] are reptiles in the path of progressive democracy, [who] must either crawl or be crushed.

— From the *Illinois State Register*, a prominent newspaper in Abraham Lincoln's district (1846)

While the few congressional diehards led by John Quincy Adams stridently opposed the war, the louder and more numerous voices rose from pro-war populists on Capitol Hill, in the press, and among the people. Though the Polk administration may have drummed up the war, it largely relied on political and media supporters to sell it. Three ideological strands coalesced to justify war: racism, jingoism, and the desperate fear of being labeled unpatriotic, a fear that gripped most war-ambivalent Whigs. Thus, like modern mainstream Democrats, even outwardly anti-war Whigs continued to vote in favor of disbursements to fund a conflict most hated. To appear anti-military, then and now, was a political death sentence.

Many Americans held deep-seated beliefs regarding the inferiority of Hispanic, especially mestizo, Mexicans. Religious chauvinism,

too, played a role. Majority Protestant Americans believed Mexican Catholics to be servile, unenlightened, and in need of proselytization. The combination of Protestant and racial paternalism also infused the ranks of the military before and early in the war. Capt. R.A. Stewart, a minister and commander of Louisiana volunteers, declared, after an early American victory in Northern Mexico, that the battle “showed most plainly and beautifully, that it was the order of providence that the Anglo-Saxon race was not only to take possession of the whole North American continent, but to influence and modify the character of the world.”

Though the Polk administration may have drummed up the war, it largely relied on political and media supporters to sell it.

White Protestant chauvinism was strongest in the volunteer, rather than professional regular, regiments. One Ohio volunteer stationed near Matamoros, wrote of Mexicans that “it is now pretty generally believed that they are almost without exception snakes in the grass.... They are in short a treacherous race and have hearts the most of them as black as their skins.”

One fact perfectly demonstrated the contradictory character of the U.S. mission in Mexico and its clear racial overtures. Many officers in the invading American army brought their slaves — who served as personal servants — along with them. The paradoxical result was a U.S. slave army, representing a “free” republic. Indeed, many black “servants” in Mexico took the opportunity to flee the American lines and escape deeper into Mexico — the real land of freedom (for them). Even embedded journalists attached to General Taylor and Gen. Winfield Scott’s armies identified overmuch — as they would in the Persian Gulf and Second Iraq Wars — with their troops, and usually sympathized with the soldiers’ racialized and religious justifications for war with Mexico.

Many black “servants” took the opportunity to flee the American lines.

The ghost of the Federalist Party — a relic of America’s first political party system — haunted the Whigs. Though there was hardly a nationwide anti-war movement during the War of 1812 against Britain (1812–15), significant Federalist-based opposition had grown in New England

by 1814. The Whigs of 1846 remembered well how the Federalists — though they’d been largely correct in their war skepticism at the time — had been forever discredited as unpatriotic and anti-soldier in the wake of Andrew Jackson’s surprise victory at the Battle of New Orleans. The party never again ran a viable presidential candidate or maintained any support outside New England, and disappeared completely by 1820. All of that had occurred in recent memory, illustrated by the persistence of the Democratic disparagement of Whigs as “the Federal Party.”

Furthermore, the Whigs were hypersensitive to the Democrats’ charge that they associated with abolitionist (anti-slavery) “radicals.” The fatal flaw in Whig thinking early in the conflict — nearly identical to that of Iraq-invasion skeptics in the Democratic Party — was their assumption that their loyal (if tepid) support for the war would protect them from precisely the same attacks from their opponents in the other party. No matter how virulently the Whigs proclaimed their support for the war effort and soldiers alike, the Democrats nevertheless blasted them as “weak” on national defense, insufficiently pro-military, and (however

inaccurately) fatally connected to the hated abolitionists. Thus, while establishment Whigs, as a whole, were usually enthusiastic (if tactically so) cheerleaders for war at the start, many would later struggle to justify their hawkish positions when their party base and insurgent freshmen congressmen — including Abraham Lincoln — later unabashedly turned against the invasion and occupation of Mexico.

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He served combat tours in Iraq and Afghanistan and later taught at West Point. He is the author of Ghostriders of Baghdad: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Myth of the Surge. Follow him on Twitter at @SkepticalVet.

NEXT MONTH:
“The Tortured Legacy of the Mexican-American War, Part 4”
by Daniel A. Sjursen

The gift of the imagination is by no means an exclusive property of an artist; it is a gift we all share; to some degree or other all of us, all of you, are endowed with the powers of fantasy. The dullest of dullards among us has the gift of dreams at night — visions and yearnings and hopes. Everyone can also think; it is the quality of thought that makes the difference — not just the quality of logical thinking, but of imaginative thinking.

— Leonard Bernstein

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