
FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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*The World is my country, all mankind are my
brethren, and to do good is my religion.*

— *Thomas Paine*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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The Future of Freedom Foundation is a nonprofit educational foundation whose mission is to advance liberty and the libertarian philosophy by providing an uncompromising moral, philosophical, and economic case for individual liberty, free markets, private property, and limited government.

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<i>The Conflict of Visions That Shaped America</i>	2
Jacob G. Hornberger	
<i>Why Government Cover-Ups Succeed</i>	9
James Bovard	
<i>Puritanism: Then and Now</i>	15
Laurence M. Vance	
<i>The American Spirit of Liberty versus Modern Tribal Racism</i>	25
Richard M. Ebeling	
<i>There's No Such Thing as "Market Fundamentalism," Part 2</i>	36
George Leef	

The Conflicts of Visions That Shaped America

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



There have been two conflicting visions in American history that have shaped our nation. As conditions in the United States continue to worsen, it is important that Americans engage in serious soul-searching to determine which vision should be embraced going forward.

The original vision

The first vision was that which characterized the American people from the founding of the United States to the early part of the 20th century. There are various labels that we can put on this particular vision: a free-market system, a capitalist system, a free-enterprise system, and a limited-government re-

public. Regardless of which label is used, there is no disputing that this was the most unusual political-economic system in history.

Just think: There once existed a society in which there was:

No income tax and no IRS. Americans were free to keep everything they earned and do whatever they wanted with their own money: save, spend, hoard, donate, or invest it.

No government-mandated charity, including Social Security, farm subsidies, welfare, education grants, or any other type of government-provided philanthropy. Charity was considered an entirely voluntary action.

No education grants, foreign aid, corporate bailouts, SBA loans, government grants, or other types of welfare.

No Medicare or Medicaid. No Centers for Disease Control. No FDA. No medical licensure laws. Hospitals were privately owned. Essentially, no government involvement in healthcare.

No immigration controls. People from around the world were free to come to the United States, with almost no questions asked. There were no limits on numbers. There were no required credentials or educational background. There

were no literacy tests. Even knowing English was not a prerequisite for entry. As long as one didn't have tuberculosis or some other infectious illness and wasn't an "imbecile," entry was automatic.

Few economic regulations. No minimum-wage laws and price controls.

No gun-control laws. Americans understood that the right to keep and bear arms was a key to a free society. They would never have permitted government officials to enact gun-control laws.

No public-schooling systems. No compulsory school-attendance laws. Education was private and based on free-market principles.

No Pentagon or military-industrial complex. Americans opposed "standing armies." That's why there was only a basic, relatively small army throughout the 1800s.

No empire of domestic and foreign military bases.

No CIA. No state-sponsored assassinations. No coups or foreign regime-change operations. No torture.

No NSA. No secret mass surveillance schemes.

No FBI. Crime was considered a state and local matter. Americans didn't want what President Truman referred to as a Gestapo-like entity.

No wars in European, Asian, or African countries. No foreign aid, foreign interventions, and wars of aggression.

No Federal Reserve System. No fiat (i.e., paper) money. Gold coins and silver coins were the official money of the American people.

No U.S. Departments of Education, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Transportation, Energy, and Homeland Security.

Americans understood that the right to keep and bear arms was a key to a free society.

No U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, Federal Trade Commission, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Federal Communications Commission, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, Interstate Commerce Commission, National Labor Relations Board, and many other regulatory commissions.

America once had the finest healthcare system in history, one based on free-market principles. Healthcare prices were so low and stable that hardly anyone had or needed major medical insurance. Going to the doctor was like going

to the grocery store. Moreover, doctors and hospitals treated the poor on a purely voluntary basis.

I'm not suggesting, of course, that this was a 100 percent libertarian society. There was slavery. Women didn't have the right to vote. There were tariffs. There was the Sherman Antitrust Act in 1890 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

I am suggesting, though, that 19th-century Americans proved that it is possible to achieve all those libertarian principles listed above.

Employers were raising wages not because they were motivated by charity but rather by competition.

The result of this unique way of life was one of the most phenomenal occurrences in history. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, the standard of living of the American people was skyrocketing. No one had ever witnessed anything like this in history. People were going from rags to riches in one, two, or three generations. Thousands of penniless immigrants were flooding into America to partake in this "American Dream," many of whom couldn't even speak English.

At the beginning stages of U.S. history, the standard of living was

relatively low for most everyone. Many people struggled just to survive. In each generation though, families would save a portion of their income. Those savings would go into banks. The banks would lend it out to employers who, used it to make their businesses more productive.

As productivity increased, so did the firm's revenues and profits. That enabled businesses to pay higher wages to their workers. Employers were raising wages not because they were motivated by charity but rather by competition. Employees would go to those businesses that were paying the best wages.

Sound money played a role in the process as well. People were no longer concerned with the possibility that government would wipe out the value of their savings through the debasement of paper money. That's because the Constitution required the federal government and the state governments to use only gold coins and silver coins as the official money of the nation. Government couldn't print gold like it could paper money. People were willing to invest in 100-year corporate bonds because they were repayable in gold.

In a nation in which people were free to accumulate wealth,

there was the greatest outburst of charitable activity that mankind had ever seen. This was how the churches, hospitals, museums, and colleges and universities got built — with the money that multi-millionaires were making in a society where people were free to accumulate unlimited amounts of wealth. As the rising standard of living began providing people with the luxury of leisure time, many people used it as an opportunity to participate in philanthropic activity. After Alexis de Tocqueville visited the United States in the 1830s, in his book *Democracy and America*, he marveled at the enormous amount of voluntary associations and philanthropic activity in America.

In the early 1900s, interventionists induced some states to enact minimum-wage laws and maximum-hours legislation.

Sometimes, I have thought that if I could choose where and when I wanted to live, my choice would be the United States from around 1880 to 1910. It must have been a phenomenally exciting time in which to live. Yes, I know — no air conditioning, computers, GPS, and cell phones. But new inventions were coming into existence every day.

The standard of living of people was soaring. Most important, it was the period of time in which economic liberty reached its apogee.

The growth of statism

In the late 1800s, however, a segment of Americans began agitating for change — toward socialism, empire, and government management and control over economic activity. They saw all that wealth coming into existence and wanted government to confiscate it and distribute it to the poor and needy. They saw women and children working in factories and wanted government to put a stop to it. They saw other nations have overseas colonies and believed that that was the way to national greatness.

In 1890, they succeeded in getting the Sherman Antitrust Act enacted under the rationale that big, successful businesses were a danger to consumers. In 1882, based on racial grounds, they got the first immigration control act enacted — the Chinese Exclusion Act. In 1898, they embroiled the United States in the Spanish American War, which became the turning point toward empire and intervention. That's when the United States acquired its torture and prison center at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. In the

early 1900s, interventionists induced some states to enact minimum-wage laws and maximum-hours legislation.

In 1913, they succeeded with two major statist achievements: the enactment of the 16th Amendment and the Federal Reserve system, both of which would provide the engine for confiscation of wealth, both directly through income taxation and indirectly through debasement of the currency.

They got the United States into World War I and enacted a conscription law to force American men to fight in it. They also enacted laws providing for the criminal prosecution of people who spoke out against the draft or the war. The intervention established the conditions for Hitler's rise to power.

After the Federal Reserve caused the 1929 stock-market crash and resulting Great Depression, President Franklin Roosevelt used the crisis to complete the transformation of America to a welfare state and a government-managed and government-regulated economy. In the process, he nationalized gold, ordering all Americans to turn in their gold coins to the federal government. Declaring that irredeemable paper money was now the nation's official money, Roosevelt

opened the floodgates to future decades of out-of-control federal spending and monetary debauchery.

The crown jewel of Roosevelt's welfare state was Social Security, a socialist concept that had been imported from German socialists. It was based on the concept of using the government to take money from Peter in order to give it to Paul. Over time, generation after generation of Americans became psychologically dependent on this political narcotic, convinced that people would die in the streets without it.

Roosevelt opened the floodgates to future decades of out-of-control federal spending and monetary debauchery.

Early in the 20th century, public schooling started to come into existence, accompanied by compulsory-attendance laws. Americans become accustomed to having their children indoctrinated by the state. Over time, they became convinced that without government schooling, children would not become educated. Public schooling succeeding in attaining a deferential, obedient, regimented, and passive citizenry.

In the 1960s, President Lyndon Johnson brought Medicare and Medicaid into existence, which destroyed the finest healthcare system in history. These two socialist programs are the root cause of America's ongoing, perpetual healthcare crisis. They are the reason for soaring healthcare costs. As with Social Security, many Americans are convinced that without these two socialist programs, people would be dying in the streets.

After World War II, interventionists succeeded in converting the federal government from a limited-government republic to a national-security state. That conversion brought into existence a vast, permanent, voracious, and vicious military-intelligence establishment to wage a "Cold War" against America's WWII partner and ally, the Soviet Union. That would be followed by a giant empire of military bases, not only domestically but also all over the world.

The CIA and the NSA were called into existence, accompanied by their omnipotent, totalitarian-like powers of assassination and secret mass surveillance. What followed were decades of coups, assassinations, kidnappings, torture, secret surveillance, wars of aggression, regime-change opera-

tions, foreign aid, and alliances with brutal dictatorial regimes.

Welfare-warfare state dependency

Today, the American people are hopelessly dependent on government largess. The notions of self-reliance and independence that characterized 19th-century Americans is gone. Modern-day Americans look at the federal government as their daddy or, even worse, their god. In their minds, it takes care of them with retirement pay, medical services, education, food, housing, and other essentials of life and keeps them safe from the communists, the Muslims, the terrorists, Russia, China, and other official enemies.

**Today, the American people are
hopelessly dependent on
government largess.**

At the same time, Americans remain the most frightened people in the world. They are convinced that all those official enemies, as well as illegal immigrants and drug dealers, are coming to get them. They see the federal government as their savior who will protect from all the scary people who are supposedly coming to get them. Ironically, the more powerful the federal govern-

ment becomes, the more fearful the American people become.

The worst part of this is that most Americans have no idea of the two completely opposite visions that have governed our nation. They honestly believe that it's been the same system the entire time. They remain convinced that Roosevelt "saved" free enterprise through a welfare state and a regulated/managed economy. They are convinced today that they live in a free country.

In other words, notwithstanding the fact that they live under a totally different type of political-economic system than their ancestors lived, today's Americans are convinced they are as free as their 19th-century counterparts. They perfectly embody the words of the great German thinker Johann Goethe: None are more hopelessly enslaved than those who falsely believe they are free.

The second-worst part of all this is that when Americans of today

look upon the massive dysfunctional nature of American society — for example, the soaring suicide rates among young people, the drug addiction, the alcoholism, the police abuse, and the irrational acts of mass violence — they blame it on freedom and free enterprise, which causes them to want to move America toward socialism and interventionism.

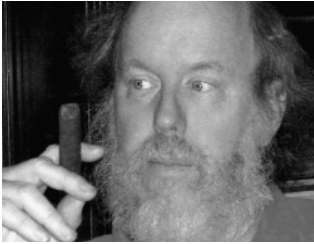
Two conflicting visions. Which one should Americans embrace going forward? It sure seems like a no-brainer to me.

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

NEXT MONTH:
**"Cuba and the
Destruction of Conscience"**
by Jacob G. Hornberger

Why Government Cover-Ups Succeed

by James Bovard



“It’s not necessary to censor the news, it’s sufficient to delay the news until it no longer matters,” Napoleon Bonaparte reportedly said. The same standard helps explain why Washington politicians and federal agencies usually get away with covering up their lies and abuses.

Many people assume that unless the government actively censors, people will learn what the government has done. But most government cover-ups succeed. Daniel Ellsberg, who risked life in prison to leak the Pentagon Papers, related in his 2002 memoirs: “It is a commonplace that ‘you can’t keep secrets in Washington’ or ‘in a democracy’... These truisms are flatly false. They are in fact cover stories, ways of flattering and misleading journalists and their readers, part of the process of keeping secrets well.

The fact is that the overwhelming majority of secrets do not leak to the American public.”

Cover-ups succeed because people defer to promises by government officials to investigate themselves. This was how the Nixon-era Pentagon buried scores of Vietnam atrocities even after confirming the carnage. After the My Lai controversy exploded, many U.S. soldiers reported other atrocities to the Pentagon. Nine thousand pages of documents were compiled confirming more than 300 war crimes, including seven other massacres of civilians by U.S. troops. David Hackworth, a retired colonel and the most decorated officer in the Army, later commented, “Vietnam was an atrocity from the get-go.... There were hundreds of My Lais. You got your card punched by the numbers of bodies you counted.” American soldiers faced more legal perils for reporting than for committing atrocities.

Nixon a mastermind of cover-ups

Nixon gave the order: “Get the Army off the front page.” Col. Jared Schopper, in charge of the war crimes files at the Pentagon in the early 1970s, later explained: “The only way to get them [articles on atrocities] off the front page is to say they are founded and appropriate

action was taken, or that they are unfounded and propaganda tools.” But the “appropriate action” usually meant simply burying the case regardless of how much evidence existed of war crimes. As long as the government claimed to be investigating an alleged atrocity, the media downplayed the story.

The Nixon cover-up of Vietnam atrocities played a role in the 2004 presidential election.

While the media deferred, the Nixon administration aggressively slandered critics. In early 1971, former Navy officer John Kerry electrified the media with testimony that American soldiers in Vietnam had committed a wide array of grisly atrocities. Even though the Pentagon quickly provided confidential information to the White House confirming Kerry’s charges, “the Nixon administration went ahead with an aggressive backroom campaign to discredit as fabricators and traitors Kerry and other veterans who spoke out about war crimes,” as Deborah Nelson, the author of *The War Behind Me*, noted in 2008.

The Nixon cover-up of Vietnam atrocities played a role in the 2004 presidential election. After the Democrats nominated Sen. Kerry, a

group known as “Swift Boat Veterans for Truth” sprang up to, in its own words, “counter the false ‘war crimes’ charges John Kerry repeatedly made against Vietnam veterans.” The group savagely attacked Kerry in a series of ads. Kerry suffered far more political damage than he would have if the Pentagon had not succeeded in burying the evidence of the vast majority of Vietnam war crimes.

Bush’s cover-ups

The George W. Bush administration used similar charades to stifle the scandal over its worldwide torture regime. The only thing necessary for a successful cover-up was for the president first to continually proclaim that everything will be investigated, and then, months later, to proclaim that everything has already been investigated. A year after the first photos from Abu Ghraib leaked out, Bush declared: “There have been over, I think, nine investigations, eight or nine investigations by independent investigators that have made the reports very public.”

In reality, none of the investigations had been independent, and none of the reports were available in full to the public. Most of the investigations were based on the prior reports, which themselves did little

or no honest digging. Yet, the Bush administration created the impression that anyone who refused to accept the good faith of the government's self-investigations was acting in bad faith.

George Orwell made the official fabrication and rewriting of history the occupation of the main character in *1984*. But nowadays, there is no need for a bureaucracy to rewrite history. Newspaper stories are “the first draft of history,” and the U.S. government routinely dictates the copy. If worse comes to worse, the military can simply delete photographs revealing too many victims.

The media as handmaiden to the state

The media elite happily plays lap dogs to the war machine. CNN chief Walter Isaacson explained: “Especially right after 9/11.... There was a real sense that you don't get that critical of a government that's leading us in war time.” Elisabeth Bumiller, the *New York Times* correspondent for the White House, explained why reporters did not ask tough questions at a Bush press conference just before he attacked Iraq: “It's frightening to stand up there. Nobody wanted to get into an argument with the president at this very serious time.” The *Washington Post* blocked or buried pre-war ar-

ticles exposing the holes in the Bush team's assertions on Iraq. *Post* Pentagon correspondent Thomas Ricks explained: “There was an attitude among editors: ‘Look, we're going to war, why do we even worry about all this contrary stuff?’” Jim Lehrer, the host of government-subsidized PBS's *Newshour*, explained his timidity in 2004: “It would have been difficult to have had debates [about invading Iraq] ... you'd have had to have gone against the grain.” The illusion that the media is independent makes its groveling more subsversive to citizens' understanding.

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After he launched an invasion of Iraq in 2003, Bush perennially proclaimed that the United States had given freedom to 25 million Iraqis. Thus, any Iraqi civilians killed by U.S. forces were both statistically and morally inconsequential. And the vast majority of the news coverage left out the asterisks.

A 2005 American University survey of hundreds of journalists who covered Iraq concluded: “Many media outlets have self-censored their reporting on the conflict

in Iraq because of concern about public reaction to graphic images and details about the war.” Individual journalists commented:

- “In general, coverage downplayed civilian casualties and promoted a pro-US viewpoint. No U.S. media show abuses by US military carried out on regular basis.”

- “Friendly fire incidents were to show only injured Americans, and no reference made to possible mistakes involving civilians.”

- “The real damage of the war on the civilian population was uniformly omitted.”

Quoting a government *official* carries its own absolution.

A 2008 *New York Times* article noted that “After five years and more than 4,000 U.S. combat deaths, searches and interviews turned up fewer than a half-dozen graphic photographs of dead U.S. soldiers.” Veteran photographers who posted shots of wounded or dead U.S. soldiers were quickly booted out of Iraq. The *Times* noted that Iraqi “detainees were widely photographed in the early years of the war, but the U.S. Defense Department, citing prisoners’ rights, has recently stopped that practice as well.” Privacy was the only “right”

the Pentagon pretended to respect — since the vast majority of detainees received little or no due process.

Cover-ups succeed because it is easier to recite official denials than to unearth official crimes. The Washington media takes its reality from the government. The Washington media’s idea of “factual reporting” is telling people what the government told them. Quoting a government *official* carries its own absolution. For the media, the official exonerates the falsehood almost every time. Controversial news that lacks a government seal of approval is often treated as scurrilous — or at least unfit for family newspapers. Pulitzer Prize-winning Associated Press correspondent Charles Hanley wrote about the U.S. use of torture in Iraq six months before the Abu Ghraib story broke. Hanley later explained why his expose was almost completely ignored: “It was not an officially sanctioned story that begins with a handout from an official source.”

How craven was the media during the Iraq war? In 2008, the *New York Times* revealed how the Pentagon created a cadre of 75 retired officers who, in return for confidential briefings and flattery from top officials, would appear on TV and repeat Pentagon talking points —

without admitting the source. The result was “a symbiotic relationship where the usual dividing lines between government and journalism have been obliterated.” Former Green Beret officer Robert Bevelacqua described the process: “It was [the Bush administration] saying, ‘We need to stick our hands up your back and move your mouth for you.’” Another retired officer described the whole process as “psy-ops on steroids.”

The *Times* noted: “Most of the analysts have ties to military contractors vested in the very war policies they are asked to assess on air.” Some of the commentators received lavish government contracts after gushing praise over the Pentagon’s policies. Even though the networks made no effort to screen their “experts” for brazen conflicts of interest, they denied they had done anything wrong.

Truth awards no licenses or regulatory exemptions. As former CBS news anchor Dan Rather explained in 2007: “Fear is in every newsroom in the country ... fear ... if you don’t go along to get along, you’re going to get the reputation of being a troublemaker. There’s also the fear that, particularly in [television] networks, they’ve become huge, international conglomerates. They have

big needs, legislative needs, repertory needs in Washington. Nobody has to send you a memo to tell you that’s the case.” The networks became wealthy because of government preferences — they received scores of billions of dollars’ worth of scarce broadcast spectrum gratis. The fact that the airwaves were a gift leaves the recipient dependent on government. Rather’s CBS colleague Eric Sevareid made the same point years earlier: “The bigger the information media, the less courage and information they allow. Bigness means weakness.”

The fact that the airwaves were a gift leaves the recipient dependent on government.

A government cover-up succeeds if it dissipates the outrage. Politicians routinely use controlled leaks of damaging information to blunt the impact of a government abuse or debacle. They choose a friendly media source who will frame the issue to their liking. A few embarrassing details leaking out is no substitute for the smoking gun. Coverups often aim to focus wrath on specific tidbits or people — and avoid or stifle fundamental questions about government powers. After the Hurricane Katrina debacle,

the firing of the head of FEMA chief Michael Brown (“Brownie, you’re doing a heckuva job!” President George W. Bush publicly declared) ensured that the heat would be greatly decreased on FEMA itself.

As long as the media uses a government-provided template, politicians have little to fear from the press. Information on government abuses is not self-propelled. If it were, political history would be radically different. The same people who wield power usually also determine what information is released. Politicians and pundits talk as if there is some divine law of democracy assuring that “truth will out.” In reality, the issue of whether truth will out is no different than any other political conflict.

Government lying is not simply a result of character defects in politicians, political appointees, and bureaucrats. Instead, it is often the result of a systemic bias against admitting systemic failures. The larger government becomes, the more the deck is stacked against honesty in public affairs. People in government and in power have far more tools and stronger incentives to deceive than the average citizen’s incentive and ability to discover the truth. This is not a problem that can be solved by finger-wagging or

moralistic lectures calling for politicians to repent. As philosopher Hannah Arendt noted, “the lie did not creep into politics by some accident of human sinfulness; moral outrage, for this reason alone, is not likely to make it disappear.”

But things will be different now that Joe Biden is president, right? Unfortunately, the media continues celebrating his election victory by ignoring almost all his falsehoods and failures. The mere fact that Biden is not Donald Trump will likely continue to give him a free pass from the media for at least another six months. Or maybe cold, hard reality will never catch up with the most media-beloved president since Barack Obama.

James Bovard is a policy advisor to The Future of Freedom Foundation and 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 Biden Crackdown on Thought Crimes”
by James Bovard

Puritanism: Then and Now

by *Laurence M. Vance*



Journalist, editor, and literary and social critic Henry Louis “H. L.” Mencken (1880–1956) adopted the moniker “libertarian” years before it became popular to do so. In a letter of 1920, he wrote: “I am an extreme libertarian, and believe in absolute free speech.” 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.”

Mencken has been called “the sage of Baltimore” (he was born and died there), “the most influential journalist of the first half of the 20th Century,” and “the greatest prose stylist of the twentieth century.” Wit and satire were two of his formida-

ble weapons. The Austrian economist Murray N. Rothbard referred to Mencken as “the joyous libertarian.” Yet, he likewise maintained that

Mencken’s guiding passion was individual liberty. To his good friend Hamilton Owens, he once solemnly declared: “I believe in only one thing and that thing is human liberty. If ever a man is to achieve anything like dignity, it can happen only if superior men are given absolute freedom to think what they want to think and say what they want to say. I am against any man and any organization which seeks to limit or deny that freedom.”

Mencken believed in absolute individual liberty “up to the limit of the unbearable, and even beyond.” He wrote to one of his biographers: “So far as I can make out, I believe in only one thing: liberty. But I do not believe in even liberty enough to want to force it upon anyone. That is, I am nothing of the reformer, however much I may rant against this or that great curse or malaise. In that ranting there is usually far more delight than indignation.” Mencken was “a serene and confi-

dent individualist, dedicated to competence and excellence and deeply devoted to liberty, but convinced that the bulk of his fellows were beyond repair.” The best kind of government, he said, “is one which lets the individual alone, one which barely escapes being no government at all.”

Mencken was one of the most quoted writers of the 20th century. Some of his most famous quips are:

The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.

People do not expect to find chastity in a whorehouse. Why, then, do they expect to find honesty and humanity in government, a congeries of institutions whose modus operandi consists of lying, cheating, stealing, and if need be, murdering those who resist?

There’s really no point to voting. If it made any difference, it would probably be illegal.

The aim of public education is not to spread enlightenment at all; it is simply to

reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed a standard citizenry, to put down dissent and originality.

Every decent man is ashamed of the government he lives under.

The most dangerous man to any government is the man who is able to think things out for himself, without regard to the prevailing superstitions and taboos. Almost inevitably he comes to the conclusion that the government he lives under is dishonest, insane and intolerable.

Puritanism — The haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.

It is this last quote in particular that stands out. It first appeared as a freestanding aphorism under the title “Clinical Notes” in the January 1925 issue of *The American Mercury*, which Mencken founded and co-edited with George Jean Nathan. The quote was later included in *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (1949), which Mencken defined as “a collection of choice passages from an author or authors.” And what a choice passage it is.

The Puritans

Puritan has always been a pejorative term. The original Puritans were those in the Church of England after the Act of Supremacy of Henry VIII in 1535 who sought a more pure Church, free from certain Roman Catholic practices. They favored a more complete Reformation. Whole families of Puritans relocated to America after 1620, settling first in Massachusetts. They were often as intolerant as the religious environment they had fled. Meanwhile, back in England, the Puritans increasingly gained political power after the First English Civil War (1642–1646). They were at their peak of power during the Interregnum (1649–1660).

Puritans were often as intolerant as the religious environment they had fled.

The definitive work on the Puritans during this period is *England's Culture Wars: Puritan Reformation and its Enemies in the Interregnum, 1649–1660* (Oxford, 2012) by Bernard Capp. Profane language, blasphemy, cursing, and the swearing of oaths could result in heavy fines. Working, unnecessary travel, drinking, dancing, sports, fishing, and commercial activity on the

Sabbath were likewise discouraged with fines. Puritans looked sternly on sexual promiscuity. The Adultery Act of 1650, “the most notorious legislation of the interregnum, laid down the death penalty for adulterous women and their partners, and imprisonment for fornicators.” Single mothers could be incarcerated. Adulterers and fornicators could be publicly whipped. Couples could be “prosecuted for pre-marital sex, when a child was born less than nine months after the wedding.” Sodomy was a hanging offense. The Interregnum “was characterized by harsh and frightening new laws, and the rigorous if patchy enforcement of old ones, within a moral climate that was fiercely contested.” Although alcohol itself “was not viewed as evil,” the “alehouse and tavern” were viewed with deep suspicion, as was the sport of football. Drunkards could be fined. Disorderly and unlicensed alehouses were suppressed. Sumptuary legislation was meant to enforce “proper distinctions between the sexes, and between those of different status.” Popular music was viewed “with deep suspicion, especially when associated with the alehouse world of dancing, bawdy humour, and drunkenness.” Any “fiddler or minstrel playing or offer-

ing to play in an inn, tavern or alehouse was to be whipped as a vagrant.” “Bawdy singing in alehouses” could result in arrest. Playhouses were closed and actors arrested and whipped “as rogues and vagabonds.” Even into the 1690s, “London alone saw hundreds of prosecutions for adultery and fornication.”

Puritanism in America

Mencken believed that the Puritan spirit had never gone into “actual eclipse” or “suffered more than a temporary damping.” He wrote about Puritanism in “The American: His New Puritanism” in 1914 and expanded that essay into “Puritanism As a Literary Force,” published as six chapters in *A Book of Prefaces* in 1917. He said about Puritanism and American history:

Make the most cursory review of American history that you will, and you must surely be impressed by the persistence of the Puritan outlook upon the world, the Puritan conviction of the pervasiveness of sin, the Puritan lust to make a sinner sweat and yell. If there is one mental vice, indeed, which sets off the American people from all other folks who walk the earth, not ex-

cepting the devil-fearing Scotch, it is that of assuming that every human act must be either right or wrong, and that ninety-nine percent of them are wrong.

At bottom, of course, it rests upon the inherent Puritanism of the people; it could not survive a year if they were opposed to the principle visible in it. That deep-seated and uncorrupted Puritanism, that conviction of the pervasiveness of sin, of the supreme importance of moral correctness, of the need of savage and inquisitorial laws, has been a dominating force in American life since the very beginning. There has never been any question before the nation, whether political or economic, religious or military, diplomatic or sociological, which did not resolve itself, soon or late, into a purely moral question.

American Puritanism was the new Puritanism. As explained by D.G. Hart in *Damning Words: The Life and Religious Times of H. L. Mencken* (2016): “Mencken recognized that the new Puritanism was a secularization of the old. Instead of being enforced by clerics and profes-

sors, Puritanism now enjoyed a raft of social science and policy experts, persons who had lost the ‘flavor of sacerdotalism,’ whose chief business was the ‘chase and punishment of sinners.’” According to Mencken, the impulse behind the new Puritanism was “a will to power” and “the disposition to domineer.”

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Mencken contrasted the old and the new Puritanism:

The distinguishing mark of the elder Puritanism, at least after it had attained to the stature of a national philosophy, was its appeal to the individual conscience, its exclusive concern with the demon within, its strong flavor of self-accusing.... But the new Puritanism — or, perhaps more accurately, considering the shades of prefixes, the neo-Puritanism — is a frank harking back to the primitive spirit.

That is to say, the sinner who excited his highest zeal and passion was not so much

himself as the other fellow; to borrow a term from psychopathology, he was less the masochist than the sadist. And it is that very peculiarity which sets off his descendant of today from the milder Puritan of the period between the Revolution and the Civil War.

The new Puritanism is not ascetic but militant. Its aim is not to lift up the saint but to knock down the sinner. Its supreme manifestation is the vice crusade, an armed pursuit of helpless outcasts by the whole military and naval forces of the Republic, a wild scramble into Heaven on the backs of harlots.

The original Puritans had at least been men of a certain education, and even of a certain austere culture. They were inordinately hostile to beauty in all its forms, but one somehow suspects that much of their hostility was due to a sense of their weakness before it, a realization of its disarming psychological pull. But the American of the new republic was of a different kidney. He was not so much hostile to beauty as devoid of any consciousness of it; he stood as

unmoved before its phenomena as a savage before a table of logarithms.

But in the end, “various Puritan enterprises” like anti-liquor and anti-gambling organizations and the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, although “differing widely in their targets and working methods,” have one characteristic in common:

They are all efforts to combat immorality with the weapons designed for crime. In each of them there is a visible effort to erect the individual’s offense against himself into an offense against society. Beneath all of them there is the dubious principle, indeed, of Puritanism — that it is competent for the community to limit and condition the most private acts of its members, and with it the inevitable corollary that there are some members of the community who have a special talent for such legislation, and that their arbitrary fiats are, and of a right ought to be, binding upon all. This is the essential fact of Puritanism, new or old: its recognition of the moral expert, the professional sinhound, the

virtuoso of virtue. The difference between the old and the new is merely a difference in organization, in magnitude and in virulence.

The culmination of Puritanism in the United States was Prohibition.

“At the bottom of Puritanism,” observes Mencken, “one finds envy of the fellow who is having a better time in the world, and hence hatred of him.” He told the novelist and journalist Theodore Dreiser (1871–1945) in 1915 that his “whole life” would be “devoted to combating Puritanism,” which he considered to be “a philosophy of taboos.”

Prohibition

The culmination of Puritanism in the United States was Prohibition. It is this that was behind Mencken’s hostility toward the Methodists and Baptists, not his agnosticism. A resolution proposing the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution was adopted by the U.S. House of Representatives on December 17, 1917. The Senate passed the resolution the next day. The ratification of the amendment was completed on January 16, 1919, and it took effect the next day.

The Eighteenth Amendment contains three sections:

Section 1. After one year from the ratification of this article the manufacture, sale, or transportation of intoxicating liquors within, the importation thereof into, or the exportation thereof from the United States and all the territory subject to the jurisdiction thereof for beverage purposes is hereby prohibited.

Section 2. The Congress and the several States shall have concurrent power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 3. This article shall be inoperative unless it shall have been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by the Legislatures of the several States, as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the States by the Congress.

The Volstead Act passed over Woodrow Wilson's veto.

The “appropriate legislation” mentioned in the text that was later

passed by Congress to institute Prohibition was the National Prohibition Act, also known as the Volstead Act, after House member Andrew Volstead (1860–1947).

The Volstead Act, which was passed over Woodrow Wilson's veto, stated that “no person shall on or after the date when the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution of the United States goes into effect, manufacture, sell, barter, transport, import, export, deliver, furnish or possess any intoxicating liquor except as authorized in this Act.” It defined “intoxicating liquor” as any beverage containing more than 0.5 percent alcohol by volume, granted exceptions and exemptions for medical and religious purposes, and provided penalties for the law's violation. And although the Volstead Act did not criminalize the possession of alcoholic beverages, it effectively curtailed their legal use because

after February 1, 1920, the possession of liquors by any person not legally permitted under this title to possess liquor shall be prima facie evidence that such liquor is kept for the purpose of being sold, bartered, exchanged, given away, furnished, or otherwise

disposed of in violation of the Provisions of this title.

The “burden of proof” was on “the possessor in any action concerning the same to prove that such liquor was lawfully acquired, possessed, and used.”

Alcohol prohibition laws have been the most violated and unenforceable of all laws. They simply drive alcohol consumption underground. According to the National Archives, “By 1925 in New York City alone there were anywhere from 30,000 to 100,000 speakeasy clubs.” Although the Eighteenth Amendment was repealed by the Twenty-first Amendment — which was proposed, passed, adopted, and made effective in 1933 — some states adopted or revived their own alcohol prohibition laws. Some of these laws are still with us today.

Alcohol prohibition laws are some of the greatest government violations of liberty and property.

Thirty-three states allow counties and municipalities to prohibit the sale and possession of hard liquor. In Arkansas, almost half of its 75 counties are dry, and Sunday sales of alcohol are prohibited state-

wide except in a few cities. About 10 percent of the landmass of the United States is made up of dry counties and municipalities. Although the Jack Daniel’s distillery is in Moore County, Tennessee, one cannot drink the distillery’s whiskey at any nearby restaurants since Moore is a dry county. Although anyone in the United States who is 18 or older is legally eligible to vote, run for office, enter into contracts, get married, engage in consensual sex with other adults, adopt children, join the military, be drafted, and purchase pornography, he cannot purchase a single can of beer because the drinking age in every state is 21. In many states and counties, no alcoholic beverages of any kind can be sold before a certain time on Sunday or sold for off-premises consumption at all. Surprisingly, these laws are not necessarily unpopular. A 2014 CNN poll found that nearly one in five Americans believed that alcohol consumption itself should be illegal. And just a few years ago, a writer for *Vox* advocated a minimum price on alcohol so that “America could save lives, combat crime, and slow the spread of sexually transmitted diseases.”

Alcohol prohibition laws are some of the greatest government violations of liberty and property.

They cannot be justified on any grounds. As succinctly explained by Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises (1881–1973): “If one abolishes man’s freedom to determine his own consumption, one takes all freedoms away.”

21st-century Puritanism

Puritanism is alive and well in the 21st century, and not just when it comes to alcohol. The government’s war on drugs is the greatest example. What makes this even worse than Prohibition is that at least the puritanical Progressives acknowledged that the Constitution had to be amended in order to institute Prohibition nationwide.

**The government’s
war on drugs is the greatest
example.**

But not only are laws against illegal gambling and sex work still prevalent, enforced, and accepted in the United States, there still exists blue laws that dictate what businesses can remain open on Sundays and holidays, what products they can sell, and what hours they are limited to.

The aforementioned writer for *Vox* who advocated a minimum price on alcohol concluded that the

government should be in the business of controlling people’s behavior: “Maybe you still oppose all of this on the grounds that the government simply should not be involved in controlling behaviors. That’s up to you to decide. I personally think the government should try to push people in society to be healthier and happier when it’s possible, especially when the issue at hand is a product that, frankly, isn’t necessary for human life.” What is sad is that millions of 21st-century Puritans in the United States agree with him.

This is the great divide in the country, not liberals and conservatives or Democrats and Republicans. As explained by former member of Congress and presidential candidate Ron Paul:

I like to divide things into two parts: authoritarianism and volunteerism. On the one side are people who think that your life ought to be done on voluntary terms, as long as you reject aggression. On the other side are the authoritarians and they think they know what’s best for others. They really do. People I knew in Washington are convinced that people are idiots and

therefore they can't be responsible for themselves.

And as Mencken said: "The urge to save humanity is almost always a false front for the urge to rule."

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NEXT MONTH:
"Predatory Pricing"
by Laurence M. Vance

The great thing to remember is that the mind of man cannot be enlightened permanently by merely teaching him to reject some particular set of superstitions. There is an infinite supply of other superstitions always at hand; and the mind that desires such things — that is, the mind that has not trained itself to the hard discipline of reasonableness and honesty, will, as soon as its devils are cast out, proceed to fill itself with their relations.

— Gilbert Murray

The American Spirit of Liberty versus Modern Tribal Racism

by *Richard M. Ebeling*



In a number of recent speeches, President Joe Biden has been repeating that America is founded not on an ethnicity or a religion or a language but on an “idea.” He has emphasized that the nature of this idea is that human beings do not derive their rights from the government but instead cede some of those rights for government to secure people in their “other” rights.

He references the Declaration of Independence and says, “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men and women.” Having rephrased those words to be more “politically correct,” he usually trails off at this point and then goes on to say, “We’ve never lived up to it, but we’ve never walked away from it before.” He most often references

America’s past of slavery and racism as aspects of the country’s history that requires us to, “Acknowledge our mistakes so we don’t repeat them.”

Stated in that way, the words almost sound like “self-evident truths.” The American people have not always lived up to its guiding ideas and principles, and acknowledging the mistakes of the past is part of the way of getting back on to a truer course. But what Biden emphasized in his campaign speeches a year ago before his election to the presidency was that what America had to face up to was that the country’s beginning was not in 1776 with the Declaration of Independence but rather in 1619 with the introduction of the first African slaves to Virginia that produced “400 years of racism in the United States of America.”

Expression of this dichotomy and contradiction in American history between a country proclaiming its dedication to liberty yet at the same time practicing human bondage with accompanying racial prejudice did not originate with the recent arrival of systemic race theory or identity politics on the political scene. It was highlighted and decried by advocates of equal rights for all before the law and the aboli-

tion of the institution of slavery in the decades before the American Civil War that was fought in the first half of the 1860s.

The two Americas of 1619 and 1620

As an example, Frederick Frothingham (1825–1891) was a fairly well-known Christian minister and strong abolitionist who delivered a widely read public address in the state of Maine on “The Significance of the Struggle Between Liberty and Slavery in America” (April 10, 1857). He reminded his listeners that in 1620 the Pilgrim Fathers had landed in Plymouth, Massachusetts, and, “Strong of heart were they, men of religion, filled with an awful trust in God and an indomitable love of Liberty.”

These two ideas came face-to-face in the debates leading to the establishment of the U.S. Constitution.

But the year before, in August 1619, “the unconscious waters of Chesapeake Bay bore and gave their sunny welcome to a sadder freight than that which the Plymouth Bay received. A dark slave-ship sailed to Jamestown with its freight of 20 human souls, stolen from Africa.” There was “no sympathy for the

woes of those broken-hearted men; but work, work, work, in a service harder than that of the children of Israel of old under the taskmasters of Egypt.”

The spirit of liberty shone brightly enough over time, said Frothingham, that “the great struggle for national independence began to dawn,” even though as yet, “The day of struggle for a higher independence [from slavery] had not begun to dawn.” This sentiment of liberty had spread to such a degree, and was so “strong and noble ... that it found expression in that magnificent paper, certainly to be forever treasured by every American — yea, by every man that loves his brother-man — the Declaration of Independence” with its emphasis on the “fundamental truths” of the universal and inherent right of every person to their life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

“America became free,” Frothingham continued. “And the struggle for the independence of man began to dawn. The two principles [of Liberty and Slavery], which had flowed silently side by side for a century, now began to be found incompatible.” These two diametrically opposed ideas came face-to-face in the debates leading to the establishment of the U.S. Constitu-

tion. “Northern delegates, and the Noblest of the Southern, held out against Slavery. South Carolina and Georgia were as firm as a rock on its behalf.” And, thus, the South’s “peculiar institution” was left intact to eat away at the soul and character of the new country.

The Founding Fathers and the spirit of liberty

But in spite of the “evil deed done,” Frothingham did not consider the country to be beyond redemption, nor did he scoff at those among the Founding Fathers who failed in their own personal deeds and in their implementation of a new country to do away with this sin against God and nature. The belief and spirit of liberty still persisted in people’s thinking and actions. Explained Frothingham:

Slavery was odious to the best and greatest of minds. It will be only necessary to mention such names as Franklin, Madison, Patrick Henry, Jefferson and Washington as its foes. The love of Freedom was strong in the public mind. The celebrated Ordinance of 1787, passed in the same year as the present United States Constitution, was adopted by a unanimous

vote. It excluded slavery from the then Northwest Territory. Energetic measures were taken to procure emancipation. The result was that gradually Slavery was abolished or died in the Northern States.

The South fought back with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which required forced repatriation of runaway slaves who had successfully escaped to free Northern states, and with the denial of a trial by jury for any person declared to be a slave. In addition, the domestic slave trade among the Southern states continued to grow and prosper even with the end of the importation of slaves from other countries after 1808. Virginia became notorious for specializing in the “breeding” of slaves and selling their human property to buyers in the other southern states.

The spirit of 1776 overcame that of 1619

Delivering his address in 1857, more than three years before beginning of the Civil War, Frothingham stated the situation in the country: “The two Ideas now fairly face to face, the one [Liberty] strong in the strength of truth and right, and the other [slavery] strong in the flush of success and the pride of power and will.” He feared that the slave states

were more unified, more certain and determined than the free states in the North or West, especially with the extension of slavery with the incorporation of Texas following the U.S. government's "most cowardly and wicked of wars — the war with Mexico [in 1846–1848]."

Frothingham did not see an America born into an inescapable "sin" with the importation of slaves in 1619.

Who could know the future in 1857, and Frothingham wondered if it would be liberty or slavery that would prevail? But he told his audience that "The Declaration of Independence, indeed was given forth and that Declaration was that Slavery must die." He did not see an America born into an inescapable "sin" with the importation of slaves in 1619. No, it is clear from Frothingham's words that in his mind, America had two heritages, one that looked to the past with the institution of slavery, when it was brought into those colonies on the eastern shores of North America.

But at nearly the same time, in 1620, with the Pilgrims at Plymouth, another heritage carried over from Europe and especially England, that of a liberty that looked to

the future. Absolute kings, plunder-based aristocracies, systems of power and privilege were set aside with the vision and hope of a new society based on the freedom of the individual secure in his life, liberty, and honestly acquired property. Where human associations, whether personal, commercial or political, were based on voluntarism and self-government.

Frothingham saw the emergence of

the final struggle between Liberty and Slavery. Slavery has disappeared from Europe. The European nations, except for Spain, have freed their slaves abroad. In Russia it is very different [serfdom] from ours and approaching gradually freedom. Slavery now awaits only America's decision to disappear from the earth and for the emancipated nations to chant one great triumph completed.... Liberty or Slavery, which will you have? Humanity waits breathless on the answer.

Secession was about preserving slavery

A number of historians have highlighted that for Abraham Lincoln, the crucial issue was the pres-

ervation of the Union and his notorious statement that if either maintaining or abolishing slavery in the South would keep the United States politically intact, he would accept it. It was only when the Civil War kept dragging on and he needed the budgetary support of the abolitionists in Congress in 1863 to fund the Northern cause that he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, which abolished slavery in those states still in open rebellion against the Union Army.

It was only when the Civil War kept dragging on that Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Historians have also have pointed out that there were other issues over which the Southern states viewed themselves as having grievances against the North. This included trade protectionism that benefited emerging Northern industrial areas against the competition of less expensive European manufactured goods for which the Southern states preferred to sell their exports. There was also the distribution of import taxes collected by the Federal government that seemed to be disproportionately used for “internal improve-

ments” — government infrastructure spending — to the benefit of Northern and Western states and territories at the expense of Southern taxpayers.

But the fact remains, for the South, the most important if not clearly paramount issue was the preservation of slavery. Reading the declarations of secession by Southern state governments makes it clear that the fear was that over time, the admission of new “free states” in the West, with the resulting change in the “balance of forces” in the Congress, along with the anti-slavery sentiments of someone like Lincoln being in the White House as a result of the presidential election of 1860, meant that their “peculiar institution” was facing doom in the longer run if they did not act aggressively to maintain their “way of life.”

Slaves had no say in Southern secession

But wasn't secession the “will of the people” in these Southern states? The question is, which people? The British classical economist and liberal, John Stuart Mill, said during the American Civil War:

Secession may be laudable, and so may any other kind of

insurrection, but it may also be an enormous crime when its purpose is the preservation of holding a portion of their population in perpetual bondage. If secession was meant to be an expression of the will of the people, have the slaves been consulted? Has their will been counted as any part in the estimate of collective volition? They [too] are a part of the population.... Remember, we consider them to be human beings, entitled to human rights.

The 13th Amendment formally became part of the U.S. Constitution, ending the practice of slavery within the United States.

According to the 1860 census, the black slave populations made up the majority of people in South Carolina and Mississippi, respectively, 57.2 percent, and 55.2 percent. In Louisiana, Alabama, and Georgia, the slaves made up, respectively, 46.9 percent, 45.1 percent, and 43.7 percent of the populations. These people's preferences for secession or remaining in the Union were, obviously, not polled. Hardly, therefore, was this an expression of a "freedom of choice,"

especially considering that the 1860 census recorded that out of the 9.103 million people in the states that seceded and formed the Confederacy, 3.52 million were slaves, or nearly 39 percent of the total population.

Even if Lincoln's reasons for taking up arms to prevent Southern secession may have been merely preservation of the United States as one political entity, it is nonetheless the case that by the end of Civil War, the abolition of slavery had become identified as the great moral reason and justification for the loss of life of what ended up being 600,000 people in the conflict. It is also the case that in December 1865, following the end of hostilities with the South's surrender in April, the 13th Amendment formally became part of the U.S. Constitution, ending the practice of slavery within the United States.

The persistence of racial ideas after the Civil War

While a legal institution can be eliminated by its formal repeal, a change in attitudes and personal actions is far more difficult and resistant to immediate transformation, in most instances. It is the case that biases and prejudices remained for much longer in the minds and con-

duct of many white Americans. Frederick Douglass may have successfully escaped from the slavery into which he had been born in that period before the Civil War and made of himself the model of the well-read, articulate, and independent self-made man. But he recounts in his autobiographies the discrimination and bigotry in the free North that made it sometimes difficult for him to successfully gain employment to earn a living due to the white workers in that corner of the market resisting his competition as a “black man” for work in their area of the economy.

For the nearly hundred years that separated the Civil War from the abolition of segregation laws in the Southern states, discrimination, bigotry, and abuse of black Americans remained a part of the American experience, and not just below the Mason-Dixon Line. Those who are not in their 70s or 80s cannot fully appreciate the extent to which racist rhetoric and actions persisted and prevailed in too many corners of American society.

Individual liberty over collective identity

I remember as a small boy in the late 1950s being at family gatherings and hearing the hypocrisy of

elders who bemoaned the mistreatment and violated civil rights of blacks, but in the next breath using derogatory terms and words about the very people who a few minutes before were empathetically referred to in terms of their plight.

Douglass recounts in his autobiographies the discrimination and bigotry in the free North.

But why was any empathy expressed at all? One answer might be that this side of my family was Jewish, and given the anti-Semitic abuse and violence experienced by Jews in the past, a sympathetic ear would be expected for those black Americans suffering some of the same merely due those inescapable accidents of birth. But I would suggest there was more to it than that, especially since so many other Americans who were “white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant” or Catholic also spoke up, at least in words if not always in deeds, against the racial discrimination being experienced by American blacks.

This gets us back to Frederick Frothingham, who so outspokenly contrasted the bringing of slaves to Virginia in 1619 and the arrival of the Puritans to Massachusetts the

following year in 1620, in his 1857 public address. The extension of slavery to the Americas that started in the early 1500s, first and far more to the Spanish and Portuguese colonies in South and Central America than to North America, was the continuation of a practice recorded in all of human history.

Ancient practice of slavery defeated by liberal idea of freedom

Historians of the ancient world have unearthed evidence of the capture and enslavement of defeated peoples in Mesopotamia in 6,800 B.C. Egyptian temples depict the capture and enslavement of black Africans from expeditions up the Nile River going back to 2,575 B.C. The Greek city-state of Athens used slaves for mining silver in 550 B.C. Slavery existed in ancient China going back at least to 2,000 years before Christ. Slavery was common in India as well, at least from 600 B.C. Slavery was a practice among black African tribes, also going back thousands of years and long before the arrival of Europeans and the slave trade to the Americas. In the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s, the Arabs were notorious as African slave traders, since under Islamic law the non-believer could be held in bondage.

The modern movement to end this ancient human institution only began to be organized into an effective form in the second half of the eighteenth century with the formation of the Anti-Slavery Society in Great Britain. From that point until the formal end of slavery in the British Empire in 1834 by Parliament, a determined abolitionist movement made up of British (white) men and women worked diligently to educate, inform, and transform the thinking of both their fellow British and others around the world. Their influence and the wider British tradition of liberty led to the Abolitionist movement in the United States. By the end of the nineteenth century — after existing for all those thousands of years of recorded human history — slavery was in principle and increasingly in practice abolished in all parts of the world being touched by enlightened and liberal European ideas.

It was the classical liberal ideas that slowly but surely brought about this radical change.

This may be “politically incorrect” to say nowadays, but, yes, it was the classical liberal ideas of individual rights, personal freedom,

rule of law, and freedom of association and trade, which had taken at least partial root in parts of, especially, Western Europe and most particularly in Great Britain and the young United States, that slowly but surely brought about this radical change in both people's thinking and institutions. All of this was brought about in just over one hundred years.

Slavery, as Frederick Frothingham said, was the idea of the past that was carried over from the "old world" to the "new" in that shipload of slaves to Virginia in 1619. But it was very soon confronted by the idea and ideal of the future, which was that each individual was a distinct and unique human being, who by God and the laws of nature should be seen and considered to have a "natural right" to their life, liberty, and peacefully and honestly acquired private property, as the basis upon which each such person was to have the freedom to pursue happiness in their own personally chosen way.

Individualism overcame the tribal mentality

For most of their history on this planet, human beings lived in small tribal bands of strongly clannish collectivism. The distinctions between

"them" and "us," as groups in primitive competition for food, water, grazing lands, and safe places to live, formed and dominated the very meaning of life and existence for tens of thousands of years. External physical differences naturally came to be among the means of distinguishing members of the "in-group" from those of the "out-group." Those not a part of one's own group were considered a threat and a competitor for primal existence, in a setting in which the mindset was implicitly of a zero-sum situation. That is, if another tribe gained, it could only mean that your's had lost in the struggle for survival.

Each such person was to have the freedom to pursue happiness in their own personally chosen way.

The ancient Hebrews may have referenced a "higher authority" to whom and a "higher law" to which an individual might have recourse if abused or violated by those asserting political power over him. The Greeks may have reasoned on the essential role of a freedom of thought and argument if the free citizens of the Athenian city-state were to "reason together" to develop an understanding of the shared world in which they lived. The Ro-

mans may have searched for the “universal law” of right and justice that all men of good will might reason over and agree to as just and right for all men. And Christianity may have emphasized the freedom of conscience without which each unique individual made in the common image of God could not accept salvation in a community of belief in which all men were brothers in the eyes of God.

**Humanity was now on course
for a growing respect for the free
human being.**

But it was only in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the emergence of the more modern idea of “natural rights” and its implication for the autonomy of the individual from the violent abuse of others in general and government in particular, that the modern ideal of personal liberty could fully take form and begin to capture the attention and adherence of increasing numbers of people. The idea of universal individual rights belonging to everyone, regardless of who they might be and where they may have come from, meant that humanity was now on course for a growing respect for the free human being.

There could no longer be a presumption and collective policies to assert and act on the notion that some men had rights that others did not; or, as Thomas Jefferson expressed it in 1826 shortly before his death, that “the mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs, nor a favored few boot-ed and spurred, ready to ride them legitimately.”

Systematic racism

While there has been slavery and there have been racists in the United States, the idea behind America was clearly captured and articulated in the words of the Declaration of Independence. Those words rejected any rationale or justification for the political identification of people with any group identity other than a community of free individual human beings who were to be viewed and treated as such.

While in a free society any person may choose to follow tribal and primitive attitudes about others in his own personal conduct, doing so remains inconsistent with the founding philosophical premise of America: that no matter a person’s place of birth or originating station in life due to accidents of life, or his biological appearance and physical characteristics, he should be seen,

treated, and interacted with on the basis of his characteristics and character as an individual human being.

In other words, all forms of tribalism, including racism, have no place in a liberal society of freedom. Some people, including some Americans, may still be guided by atavistic notions of race and racialist thought and conduct toward others. But the philosophical and political premises and institutional building blocks of America are inconsistent and incompatible with the very notion of “systemic racism.”

This is because the philosophy of individualism rejects the very conception of viewing and treating human beings in terms of collective group categories and characteristics. It is why racism and ideological “race consciousness” and conduct has slowly but surely continued to decline in the United States over the last half century.

It is also the case that if race identity and racial politics seem to be returning to the United States against the backdrop of its decline over recent decades, it is due to a growing number of academics and intellectuals who reject individualist ideas in all their political, economic, and cultural manifestations. And who are trying to restore the

tribal collectivism that has taken at least part of humanity so long to set aside in thought, deed, and public policy.

In other words, it is the “systemic racism” theorists who are trying to make systemic racist thinking and acting once more both legitimate and presumed to be morally right. That is its essential and central threat and danger to the remaining residues of individual liberty and voluntary association in America and why it needs to be opposed and defeated through all peaceful and legitimate means that remain at our disposal.

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NEXT MONTH:
**“The Importance of Liberty
and the Rhetorical Misuse
of Freedom”**
by Richard M. Ebeling

There's No Such Thing as "Market Fundamentalism," Part 2

.....
by George Leef



If “market fundamentalism” were a serious phenomenon, you would think the authors could give some clear examples of it — as they do for fundamentalist opponents of economic freedom. (There are a great many people who automatically dismiss arguments in favor of economic liberty, calling them “right-wing” propaganda motivated by sheer greed; to their credit, the authors criticize them.)

Morson and Schapiro, the authors of *Minds Wide Shut* (Princeton University Press, 2021), try to sneak past their lack of evidence here by citing people who are generally hostile to laissez-faire and the concept of spontaneous order. First,

they quote George Soros, who claimed in his book *The Crisis of Global Capitalism* that those who think government should play little or no role in economic regulation “believe their conclusions to be certain.” But believing that your conclusions are correct, even “certain,” just shows confidence in one’s thinking, not that it is fundamentalist.

The closest Morson and Schapiro come to demonstrating their point is to cherry-pick a statement by Nobel laureate Gary Becker to the effect that he was sure that Americans would agree with his stance in favor of allowing sales of human organs once they considered his arguments. Sorry guys, but it isn’t “fundamentalism” to say that you regard your case as persuasive, and if someone had disagreed with Becker, he would have replied with more arguments, not with a fundamentalist dismissal.

Morson and Schapiro also rely on economist Joseph Stiglitz, who decries what he regards as unwarranted confidence in free markets. That, however, does not show that market advocates are guilty of fundamentalism. It only shows that Stiglitz is not persuaded by them.

Too bad that an editor at Princeton University Press didn’t point

out how feeble the authors' case is here.

Authors offer weak evidence

Not only do Morson and Schapiro fail to demonstrate that “market fundamentalism” exists, but they give no reason for indicting it as divisive. Going back to the 19th century, numerous economists have argued that we would be better off if government stayed out of the economy. For the most part, their arguments were brushed aside by politicians and interest groups, which is why we today have a leviathan state. So why is it harmful for some economists today to make the case against, say, tariffs, federal student loans, or rent control laws? Elsewhere, the authors quote John Stuart Mill on the importance of counter-arguments to test and strengthen positions. That’s right, so what is divisive or harmful about subjecting any interventionist policy to a radical, free-market critique?

The notion that free markets are mostly all right but need a large dose of government control is deeply rooted in the minds of most Americans, including the authors. Very rarely do the “fundamentalists” convince authorities that some instance of government control is counterproductive and ought to be

abolished. There are, however, some such cases. We got rid of the Civil Aeronautics Board and its airline price fixing regulations. That, by virtually all accounts, turned out very well for consumers. Fortunately, that decision was not stopped by cries of “market fundamentalism.” If that worked out well, why dismiss other arguments against government economic intervention as “market fundamentalism?” As rationalists, Morson and Schapiro should understand that each argument for or against government control needs to be evaluated on its own merits, not ridiculed with an epithet.

What is divisive or harmful about subjecting any interventionist policy to a radical, free-market critique?

Just how feeble this part of the book is can be seen in the authors' discussion of the minimum wage. They write that while a few economists would abolish it and others would raise it to \$25 per hour, the best policy must lie somewhere in the middle. But that conclusion doesn't follow at all. Radical or extreme positions are not refuted just by pointing out that they are “out of the mainstream.” In fact, by calling

arguments for eliminating government intervention in the economy “fundamentalist,” the authors are actually doing exactly what they spend the book deploring, namely, dismissing arguments they don't want to engage with just by pinning a pejorative label on them.

Voluntary alternatives to regulation

Morson and Schapiro commit another common mistake (but one that seasoned academics should have avoided) in assuming that those who argue for government non-interventionism are also in favor of doing nothing to ameliorate whatever problems arise. That is simply untrue. Advocates of free markets are not unmindful that some people will be worse off, but they say that instead of government acting to help, it should be left to civil society, that is, voluntary action.

Consider free trade. Morson and Schapiro understand that free trade is highly beneficial but contend that government policy has to do something to help those who lose their jobs as a result. They overlook the fact that charitable efforts to assist individuals who find themselves in need are widespread, effective in targeting assistance, and don't have the waste and harmful

side-effects of government action.

Contrary to the authors, it isn't “fundamentalism” to argue in favor of free trade and against government programs to deal with any resulting economic hardship. Instead, it is to argue that government intervention is consistently harmful. The key word is argue. You don't find market advocates declaring that government programs are wrong per se.

The authors overlook the fact that charitable efforts to assist individuals who find themselves in need are widespread.

Here's another issue Morson and Schapiro get wrong because they depict advocates of the free market as “all or nothing” thinkers — student college debt. Some “progressives” cry that many college graduates are suffering under the heavy burden of their loans and want the government to bail them all out. Now, the authors correctly point out that many of those with large debts also have good careers and large incomes to pay their debts. Then, however, they point an accusing finger at the “market fundamentalists” who don't think the government should give any students debt relief. Again, that's erro-

neous. Just because you don't think the government should be "generous" with taxpayer money by wiping out student loan debts doesn't imply callous indifference toward those who are truly in distress. There are voluntary means of helping such students, like GoFundMe. Relying on them is far better than a blanket debt relief.

I would also like to know how the authors would respond to advocates of government minimalism who point out that there would be no student loan "crisis" if the government hadn't made the huge and unconstitutional move of starting federal financial aid in the first place. No students would be looking at six-digit balances today if we had listened to the opponents of federal student aid back during Lyndon Johnson's presidency. Many of today's problems have their roots in the unwise expansions of federal power over the last century.

Strawman arguments weaken their case

Market fundamentalism is a strawman. It's a shame that the authors thought they needed to include it in their attack on fundamentalist thinking. If anyone exhibits minds that are wide shut, it's Morson and Schapiro, who have utterly mis-

represented those who maintain that minimal government is best.

Despite their "market fundamentalism" blunder, Morson and Schapiro have identified a real problem. They earnestly implore people to listen to and reason with one another. Again, that's fine, but how do we get there?

Students are increasingly subjected to teaching that's meant to indoctrinate them.

What's missing from *Minds Wide Shut* is analysis of the causes for rising fundamentalism. The authors briefly adverted to a major cause when they mentioned their students who believe that fundamentalist thinking is actually *thinking*. Throughout our educational system, students are increasingly subjected to teaching that's meant to indoctrinate them, to see the world in black and white, to ignore the necessity of trade-offs. American students learn to accept and defend certain positions (positions that are invariably favorable to governmental control) rather than to identify and evaluate evidence before coming to any tentative conclusions. That begins in grade school and continues through high school and into college.

The demands that speakers be prevented from talking on campus and that books with "hurtful" material be cancelled come from students who have been steeped in "progressive" ideology for years. We won't successfully combat fundamentalist thinking unless we return our schools to teaching knowledge and pull the plug on political activism.

The resurgence of fundamentalism is a serious problem for liberal societies. *Minds Wide Shut* provides

a worthwhile introduction, but it calls for much more work. I would suggest to Morson and Schapiro that they revise the book to focus on true fundamentalist thinking and leave out their misleading and ill-conceived attack on "market fundamentalism."

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

It is horrible to think that the world could one day be filled with nothing but those little cogs, little men clinging to little jobs and striving for bigger ones.... It is as if we were deliberately to become men who need order, who become nervous and cowardly if for one moment this order wavers, and helpless if they are torn away from their total incorporation into it.

— Max Weber

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