
FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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Success is the sum of small efforts, repeated day in and day out.

— *Robert Collier*

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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9/11, Afghanistan, and Iraq, Part 1

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



Declaring that “veteran suicide is one of the greatest crises of our time,” Boston’s NPR news station, WBUR, reported that “since Sept. 11, 2001, just over 30,000 veterans have died by suicide — four times more than the number of U.S. military personnel who died in combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.” The website *military.com* stated that suicides among active-duty personnel rose by 15 percent in 2020 and consisted of 580 service members.

The common perception regarding these suicides is that U.S. military personnel suffer from PTSD — post-traumatic stress disorder — arising primarily from combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Actually, there is a better explanation, one that unfortunately many people are failing to grasp in the aftermath of the deadly and destructive debacles in Afghanistan and Iraq. Until U.S. soldiers, veterans, and the American people come to grips with that explanation, military personnel will continue to take their own lives.

Ever since the Taliban victory in Afghanistan and the withdrawal of U.S. forces from that country, commentators have been jumping on the bandwagon criticizing President Biden’s withdrawal strategy and, to a larger extent, the manner in which four presidents — George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden — mismanaged the long-term occupation of the country. If only these presidents had done things differently, the critics say, everything would have come out fine.

What these interventionists are claiming is that it was right for the United States to invade Afghanistan in the first place. The mistake, they say, was in remaining there too long to engage in “nation-building.” If U.S. forces had simply been sent into Afghanistan to wreak vengeance on the Taliban regime for “harboring” Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda and to kill or capture as

many al-Qaeda members as possible in a short period of time, U.S. forces could have quickly been brought home. In that case, interventionists claim, things would have turned out well.

FFF's stand against invading Afghanistan and Iraq

Twenty years ago, The Future of Freedom Foundation took a lonely stand against invading both Afghanistan and Iraq. We were among just a few libertarians who opposed invading Afghanistan. Much of the libertarian movement became enthusiastic supporters of Bush's plan to invade that country. They became known within the libertarian movement as "liberventionists."

Those of us who stood firmly against the invasion of Afghanistan — and then, later, Iraq — paid a high price for our stand. Day after day, week after week, we were inundated with nasty, vituperative correspondence and cancellations of support. One member of FFF's board of trustees resigned in protest against our non-interventionist stand.

To understand the real reason that there are so many suicides among U.S. troops, it is imperative that we revisit the principles that FFF was emphasizing 20 years ago

when we were opposing the interventions in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Otherwise, if the only lesson we learn from these debacles is that smarter interventionism was the key to success, we will have learned nothing, and the suicides will continue.

Motive and the 9/11 attacks

The first thing on which we must focus is the motive for the 9/11 attacks. This is something that the American people did not want to focus on after the attacks. All that mattered was that those foreigners — Muslims — had come all the way over here and killed thousands of innocent Americans. Since it was strongly believed that Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda had orchestrated the attacks, and since bin Laden and al-Qaeda were based in Afghanistan, it was a no-brainer for interventionists and liberventionists to support the invasion of the country, not only to kill or capture bin Laden and other members of al-Qaeda but to also wreak vengeance on the Taliban regime for "harboring" bin Laden and al-Qaeda.

Immediately after the 9/11 attacks, U.S. officials steadfastly maintained that what had motivated the terrorists was hatred for America's "freedom and values." It

was a position that was wholeheartedly embraced by interventionists. The underlying idea was that Muslims hated America for its Judeo-Christian society and its decadent lifestyle and just wanted to kill Americans. Some interventionists argued very seriously that the attacks were part of a centuries-old quest to establish a worldwide Islamic caliphate. After 9/11 and for some years thereafter, many interventionists were scared to death that the Muslims were coming to get us and force us all to begin living under sharia law.

All of that was sheer nonsense, as we argued after the attacks. The real reason the terrorists struck was to retaliate against the U.S. government for the massive death, destruction, and humiliation that U.S. officials had unleashed in the Middle East after the end of the Cold War.

That was not what Americans, including interventionists and liberventionists, wanted to hear. When we would bring it up — and we brought it up repeatedly — their favorite attack on us was, “You’re blaming America for 9/11! You’re saying that the terrorists were justified in killing all those innocent Americans!” That would normally be followed by a stream of nasty

and vituperative attacks about how we supposedly hated America and loved the terrorists and how cowardly we were for opposing the invasion of Afghanistan and, later, Iraq.

The real reason the terrorists struck on 9/11 was to retaliate against the U.S. government.

In the political world, Congressman Ron Paul bore the brunt of the massive sentiment against stating the real reason for the 9/11 attacks. During a Republican debate in his 2008 presidential race, Paul pointed out that the terrorists came over here to kill Americans to retaliate for all the killings that U.S. officials were committing over there.

Paul immediately incurred the wrath not only of his presidential opponents. There were also expressions of shock and outrage from the mainstream media moderators and massive boos from the Republican audience.

Paul’s opponents angrily intimated that he was “blaming America” for the attacks. One just wasn’t supposed to say such a thing, especially in the Republican Party. Everyone was expected to toe the official line — that the terrorists had struck on 9/11 because they hated

America for its “freedom and values” or the unofficial line — that the terrorists were part of the effort to establish a worldwide Islamic caliphate that would encompass the United States.

I’ll never forget watching Paul make that statement. I thought to myself, “Ron Paul, you are one courageous individual. You are one of my real heroes in life. But your Republican presidential campaign is now toast.”

Ironically, what actually ended up happening was the opposite. Paul’s observation on motive is what caused his campaign to take off. A large segment of American society knew or suspected that they were being lied to regarding the real motive behind the 9/11 attacks. They sensed that Ron Paul was telling them the truth as to why the terrorists had come all the way to the United States to kill Americans and commit suicide in the process.

America’s governmental history

To arrive at a deeper understanding of motive for the 9/11 attacks — and how such motive relates to suicides among active-duty troops and veterans — it is necessary to review the history of America’s governmental structure. By doing so, we gain a deeper under-

standing of what happened on 9/11 and why so many soldiers have been taking their lives.

Every American living today has been born and raised under a governmental structure known as a “national-security state.” It consists of the Pentagon, a vast and permanent military establishment, the NSA, and, to a certain extent, the FBI.

What many American fail to realize is that America hasn’t always been a national-security state.

Americans are taught that the national-security establishment falls under the control of the executive branch of the government. In actuality, it is a fourth branch of the federal government — the national-security branch — and it is the most powerful branch of them all. From its inception and with the full support of the other three branches, it has wielded omnipotent powers that normally characterize totalitarian regimes, such as assassination, kidnapping, coups, torture, indefinite detention, and mass secret surveillance.

What many American fail to realize is that America hasn’t always been a national-security state. For

some 150 years, America was what is termed a “limited-government republic,” a type of governmental system in which the powers of the federal government were extremely limited. No powers of assassination, coups, torture, indefinite detention, or mass secret surveillance. No Pentagon, no vast and permanent military establishment, no NSA, and no FBI. There was only a basic, relatively small military force.

That was how the American people from 1791 to 1945 wanted it. The last thing they wanted was to live under a government that wielded omnipotent, dark-side powers. In fact, if the Constitutional Convention had proposed a national-security state form of governmental structure, there is no doubt that the American people living at that time would have summarily rejected it. In that case, Americans would have continued living under the Articles of Confederation, a third type of governmental system, one in which the federal government’s powers were so weak and few that it didn’t even have the power to tax.

After World War II, U.S. officials converted the federal government to a national-security state. It is important to recognize that national-security states traditionally have “official enemies.” That’s the

way they justify their existence and their ever-increasing size, power, and taxpayer-funded money. The big official enemies that undergirded the U.S. national-security state during the Cold War were the Soviet Union, Red China, and other communist nations, as well as “godless communism.”

The argument was that there was an international communist conspiracy to take over the world that was based in Moscow. To defeat this conspiracy, it was necessary, they said, for America to be converted to a national-security state. The implicit promise was that as soon as America won the Cold War, Americans could have their limited-government republic back.

For some 150 years, America was what is termed a “limited-government republic.”

Most everyone assumed that the Cold War would go on forever. In 1989, however, it came to a sudden halt with the dismantling of the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Eastern Europe.

But the U.S. national-security establishment, which by now had become the most powerful branch of the federal government, was not

ready to go quietly into the night and let Americans have their limited-government republic back. It just needed to find a new official enemy, one that would strike as much fear in the American people as “godless communism” had done.

**The sanctions began
killing hundreds of thousands of
Iraqi children.**

That was when the CIA and the Pentagon embarked on a course of violent interventionism in the Middle East. It began with their intervention against Iraq in the Persian Gulf War. Claiming that Iraq’s dictator Saddam Hussein was a “new Hitler” for invading Kuwait over an oil-drilling dispute, President H.W. Bush ordered U.S. troops to invade Kuwait and oust Iraqi troops from that country. Ironically, Saddam, the “new Hitler,” had been a friend and partner of the U.S. government during the 1980s, when U.S. officials were helping his forces to wage war against Iran.

Despite a lot of bluster from Saddam, Iraq, a Third World nation, never had a chance against the most powerful military in history. During the Gulf War, U.S. troops massacred thousands of Iraqi troops and also killed many civil-

ians in the process. U.S. forces also intentionally bombed Iraq’s water-and-sewage treatment plants with the knowledge that this would spread infectious illnesses among the Iraqi people.

Much to the chagrin of American interventionists, President George H.W. Bush left Saddam in power. No nation-building for him.

At the same time, the U.S. government instigated one of the most brutal systems of economic sanctions in history on the Iraqi people. Over the next 11 years, the sanctions impoverished most Iraqis, with many Iraqi families having to sell their personal effects just to survive. Even worse, the sanctions began killing hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, especially given that the sanctions prevented Iraqi officials from repairing those damaged water-and-sewage treatment plants.

U.S. officials didn’t care. U.S. ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright expressed the sentiment of the U.S. government when she went on “60 Minutes” and declared that the deaths of half-a-million Iraqi children from the sanctions, while difficult, were “worth it.” That was in 1996. The sanctions continued for another five years, to the total indifference of U.S. officials.

As we saw after the 9/11 attacks, Americans get very angry when innocent Americans are killed by terrorists. Most Americans wanted revenge. Well, foreigners are not any different. The anger and rage among people in the Middle East over the deaths of those Iraqi children was growing, year after year.

That wasn't all. There were also the "no-fly zones" over Iraq, which enabled U.S. forces to kill even more Iraqis. Moreover, U.S. officials stationed U.S. troops near the holiest lands in the Muslim religion, knowing full well what effect that would have on Muslim sensitivities.

Of course, there was also the unconditional support that U.S. officials were giving to the Israeli government, which only contributed to the boiling cauldron of anger and rage against the United States.

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

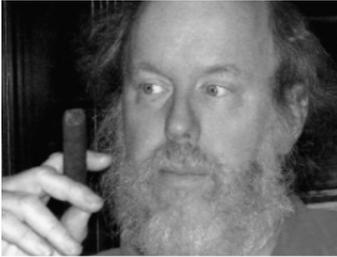
NEXT MONTH:
**"9/11, Afghanistan and
Iraq, Part 2"**
by Jacob G. Hornberger

What stymies the people in poor countries, as a rule, is not lack of aid. It is forms of government, often corrupt and tyrannical, that do not allow people to exercise free choice under fair law.

— Claudia Rosett

Will Politicians Revive American Slavery?

by James Bovard



In the wake of America's disastrous Civil War, the Thirteenth Amendment was enacted to prohibit involuntary servitude. Unfortunately, top newspapers, pundits, and think tanks are now campaigning to nullify that prohibition. Apparently, slavery was evil not because of the unjust subjugation but because plantation owners, not politicians, were the profiteers.

Politicians have long been hustling to establish their prerogative to commandeer young Americans' lives. At a "Volunteerism Summit" in Philadelphia in 1997, President Bill Clinton announced that America needed more "citizen-servants" and that "the will to serve has never been stronger." Clinton praised

Maryland and the District of Columbia for making "service" mandatory for any student seeking a high school diploma. In a *Playboy* article headlined, "The Return of the Hitler Youth?" I ridiculed Clinton for "crusading for a national kiddie draft — forcing all teenagers to labor in politically approved community service" for hundreds of hours before being granted a diploma.

But the "kiddie draft" was only the opening bid. There were plenty of progressives and conservatives itching to compel all young to sacrifice a year or more in "national service" — a perpetual fantasy inside the Beltway ever since military conscription was suspended in 1973. Unfortunately, the easiest way to prove your moral superiority in Washington is to champion destroying everyone else's freedom.

It began with AmeriCorps

AmeriCorps, a program created by Bill Clinton, is viewed as a prototype by many advocates who seek to shackle all young people to "serve" politically approved causes. AmeriCorps presumes that volunteering is such a wonderful thing that the federal government should subsidize it, paying AmeriCorps members as much or more than many of them could have earned in

real jobs. Subsidizing volunteering by some people was a stepping stone to mandating “volunteering” for all young Americans.

I investigated AmeriCorps in the late 1990s and found that it generated more boondoggles per tax dollar than any other federal program. When I interviewed AmeriCorps chief Harris Wofford, I asked him how sending out AmeriCorps members to sway people to accept food stamps meshed with his statement that “national service reduces our reliance on Government.” Wofford replied, “A self-reliant citizen knows what their opportunities are and figures out how to make use of those opportunities. You don’t have much self-reliance if there is a door [for handouts] there and you have not been shown the door.” Knowing the address of the welfare office became the new, improved self-reliance.

Knowing the address of the welfare office became the new, improved self-reliance.

Wofford epitomizes the moral pretensions permeating AmeriCorps. Wofford boasted that AmeriCorps provided its recruits with the “moral equivalent of war.” Dealing with preteen hecklers during an

AmeriCorps puppet show was as valiant as Marines dodging rocket-propelled grenades in a firefight. Wofford perpetually bragged about his own character-building experience in the Army Air Corps in World War II, but he never mentioned that he never saw any combat — thereby qualifying him for a D.C. Faux Courage Medal of Honor.

Despite its pratfalls, AmeriCorps remained exalted by politicians who sought to dragoon all young people into submission. In 2008, Republican presidential nominee John McCain championed conscripting all young people into at least a year of politically approved “service.” He got badly whupped by Barack Obama, who favored vastly expanding AmeriCorps. Immediately after he won, Obama’s change.gov website announced that it was “developing a plan to require 50 hours of community service in middle school and high school and 100 hours of community service in college every year.” Once that federal precedent was established, politicians could easily multiply the number of youthful hours commandeered in the name of service.

In March 2009, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly

passed the Generations Invigorating Volunteerism and Education (GIVE) Act — the GIVE Act — which aimed to triple AmeriCorps from 75,000 to 250,000 members. One provision of the bill should have been labeled the “TAKE Act” since it paved the way to make “service” compulsory for all young Americans. The bill called for appointing a Congressional Commission on Civic Service to examine “whether a workable, fair, and reasonable mandatory service requirement for all able young people could be developed.” It would also consider whether tacitly repealing the Thirteenth Amendment prohibition on involuntary servitude “would strengthen the social fabric of the Nation and overcome civic challenges by bringing together people from diverse economic, ethnic, and educational backgrounds.” Sacrificing Americans’ freedom was Washingtonian idealism at its best.

**Sacrificing Americans’
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idealism at its best.**

I thumped the mandatory service specter in the *American Conservative*, *Baltimore Sun*, and elsewhere, spurring an invitation to

appear on the Glenn Beck Show on Fox News. After the interview ended, Beck ran a video of himself wearing German lederhosen while reciting the AmeriCorps pledge: “I will get things done for America.... Faced with apathy, I will take action.” The Hitler Youth allusion amused viewers who failed to recognize Obama as a model of political perfection.

Despite scandals, politicians loved it

AmeriCorps spawned several scandals that did nothing to deter continuing demands for compelling all young people to submit to their political overlords. In 2013, retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal, who helped lose the Afghan war, proclaimed in a *Wall Street Journal* piece, “Universal national service should become a new American rite of passage.” *Time* magazine quickly followed with a cover story headlined, “How Service Can Save Us,” which approvingly quoted a retired Air Force officer: “There isn’t an 18-year-old boy who doesn’t need to get his butt kicked by someone in a position of complete authority.” Beltway elites had the same attitude toward the American people, and they were hot to volunteer their expertise and boots. I thumped that boomlet in a *Wall Street Jour-*

nal piece and tossed a 20th-anniversary bouquet to AmeriCorps in *USA Today*, which derided the program as a “political slush fund.” In a *Washington Times* op-ed, I wrote, “AmeriCorps puts a smiley face on Uncle Sam” and sways some gullible people to “view government as a vast engine of compassion.”

The commission’s members neglected to mention that such a scheme “might look like” a good-deeds chain gang.

In 2017, the *Washington Post* offered “38 ideas for repairing our badly broken civic life,” including conscripting all young people for three years in military or government civilian work such as AmeriCorps. Forcing adults to “spend time in compulsory service to our country” would be the same as going back to “kindergarten and relearn how to cooperate and share our toys,” declared author Kristin Henderson. But the Founding Fathers never intended to treat personal freedom as a political toy, as I chided in *USA Today*.

In 2019, the National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service, a pooh-bah Frankenstein created by Congress, lavishly praised AmeriCorps and an-

nounced it was “exploring what a program that requires every American to complete a dedicated period of military, national, or public service might look like.” The commission’s members neglected to mention that such a scheme “might look like” a good-deeds chain gang.

Democrats took the forefront in promising that subjugating Americans to more commands from Washington was the surest recipe for national uplift. In the 2020 presidential race, Democratic candidate John Delaney, a former congressman, championed imposing a one-year mandatory service requirement for every 18-year-old. Pete Buttigieg, another Democratic candidate who was briefly the front-runner, called for “a universal, national expectation of service for all four million high school graduates every year” to “repair the social fabric in our nation.” Buttigieg declared, “The goal is for ‘where did you serve?’ to be as important a question at a job interview as ‘where did you go to college?’” But how did politicians acquire the right to decree how young Americans will be judged? Buttigieg’s “call to service” was a “summons to submission” that could become a “glide path to the draft.” In an article for the *Daily Caller*, I warned, “The more people

who enlist in Buttigieg’s salvation scheme, the easier it becomes to make the program mandatory for everyone else — in the name of fairness.” The collapse of Buttigieg’s campaign did nothing to diminish demands for government shackling of all youth.

There is no known remedy for professors who are unable to detect the difference between citizenship and servitude.

On May 1, 2021, the *New York Times* editorial board endorsed compulsory service with an editorial headlined, “Should Young Americans Be Required to Give a Year of Service?” The editorial approvingly quoted a philosopher on how compulsory service could encourage “obedience to command.” The *Times* rhapsodized, “Many aging Vietnam-era veterans attest to the sense of community that came with ... involuntary military service.” Regrettably, the editorial writers were unable to survey the 58,000 Americans who died in that war to gauge their opinions on the benefits of involuntary military service. Last June was the 50th anniversary of the Pentagon Papers, which exposed how politicians perennially betrayed young Americans by

sending them to die on false pretenses. If military and political leaders didn’t hesitate to lie to the hilt about their wars, why would anyone expect them to be candid about the costs of mass subjugation?

Two months later, the *New York Times* published an op-ed headlined, “Compulsory National Service Could Unite America.” Professor Jonathan Holloway, the president of Rutgers University, declared, “Compulsory national service would make us more self-reliant and at the same time more interdependent... We need to heed the call for citizenship.” There is no known remedy for professors who are unable to detect the difference between citizenship and servitude. Neither Holloway nor anyone else has explained how mass subjugation sows the seeds for a harvest of self-reliance.

The philosophy behind national service

Compulsory national service is the deranged civics version of Modern Monetary Theory (MMT). MMT theory presumes that politicians can fabricate and spend unlimited amounts of fiat money without profoundly damaging the economy. Similarly, compulsory national service proponents presume politicians can destroy a vast

swath of freedom without harming America. Proponents tacitly assume that the time of young people is of zero value, so their scheme costs nothing. Since every 18-to-20-year-old is squandering all their time playing video games and watching Pornhub, why not round them up and make them serve? But where did politicians acquire the right to command young people to postpone building their own lives?

Compulsory national service would provide “attitude adjustment” for an entire generation. Many proponents stress that shackling young people is the best way to encourage them to be tolerant and appreciative of people of different backgrounds. Pulitzer Prize-winning plagiarist Doris Kearns Goodwin favors national service because “you get people from the city to the country, country to the city, you begin to create a new generation that has shared values.” Indoctrination would be a huge part of any such program, but the media wouldn’t use that term because progressive values would be inculcated. The vast majority of young Americans spend 12 years in government schools, but politicians want more control over their thoughts.

One of the clearest lessons from the burgeoning crusade for com-

pulsory service is that much of the nation’s elite media utterly disdain individual liberty. Since freedom for average Americans has zero value in itself, pundits and poohbahs have zero concern about politicians destroying it. Many of the advocates for national conscription are blinded by their own halos — they feel they are so morally superior that forcibly imposing their values on everyone else can only be a boon for humanity. Rather than becoming patriotic, conscripts would likely be embittered to realize that politicians wasted a swath of their lives in which they could have developed their minds and talents to make themselves self-sufficient citizens.

**Where did politicians
acquire the right to command
young people to postpone building
their own lives?**

Being obliged to argue against mass conscription is symptomatic of how the intellectual battle lines have shifted in recent decades. There was a time when politicians who claimed a right to temporarily enslave young people would have been denounced as scoundrels and ridiculed off the national stage. Nowadays, champions of compulsion are hailed as moral visionaries

paving the way to a Brave New World.

Few things are more perilous to freedom than permitting politicians to sanctify government's iron fist. We should not turn young people into cannon fodder for good deeds that exist only in White House press releases. At a time when the media endlessly denounces inequality, remember that the greatest and most dangerous inequality is that between haughty government officials and citizens stripped of their constitutional rights. Peaceful co-existence between all citizens is the recipe for an American revival, not a vast increase in subjugation to indoctri-

nate the latest Woke Catechism of the Week.

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:
“Liberals’ Love Affair with
Leviathan”
by James Bovard

Next to the general idea of virtue, I know of no idea more beautiful than that of rights, and, indeed, it would be more accurate to say that the two ideas are indistinguishable. The idea of rights is none other than the idea of virtue introduced into the world of politics.

— Alexis de Tocqueville

Boosting American Standing on the World Stage

by Laurence M. Vance



What do a member of the left-leaning *New York Times* editorial board and a senior fellow at the right-leaning American Enterprise Institute (AEI) have in common? Usually, not very much. But when it comes to how America can boost its standing on the world stage, they are in perfect agreement: The United States should give away more COVID-19 vaccines to poorer nations to ensure vaccine equity.

In addition to being a member of the *New York Times* editorial board, Jeneen Interlandi is also a staff writer at the *New York Times Magazine*. Although she writes primarily about public health, she has also written about immigration, education, bioethics, and health-

care policy. Before becoming a senior fellow at the AEI, Dalibor Rohac was affiliated with the Cato Institute's Center for Global Liberty and Prosperity. Armed with four degrees in economics, he studies European political and economic trends.

Vaccine equity

Interlandi (“The World Is at War With Covid. Covid Is Winning”) speaks of the need for “a truly global vaccination system” and “the race to vaccinate the world against Covid.” As she sees it:

While the world dithers, the virus is evolving. Given enough time and enough unvaccinated people, it could mutate its way past our best defenses, potentially sending the world — vaccinated and unvaccinated alike — back to square one. The best hope for preventing that from happening is to make many more vaccines — at least three times as many as the world has so far — and then deploy them as quickly and equitably as possible across the globe.

Although this will cost a lot of money, “almost any amount of money

will be worth it.” The problem, as she sees it, is that “more than 80 percent of the four billion vaccine doses that had been distributed as of early August went to high- and upper-middle-income countries.” And “while the United States has bought enough shots to vaccinate its entire population three times over, most low-income nations still don’t have enough to give even first doses to their frontline health workers or older citizens.”

President Biden should “take an unequivocal stance on global vaccine equity.” Vaccine donations from “the world’s richest nations” to “lower-income countries” are “a flimsy fix for such rampant inequity.” Wealthy nations should “hold off on boosters and possibly on shots for young children until at least the higher-risk groups in lower-income countries have received their first doses.” If “individualism is allowed to prevail instead, the world’s resources will only grow more concentrated, and the world’s poorest nations will continue to be left out.”

Rohac (“How We Can Boost Our Standing on the World Stage”) believes that “the solution to the pandemic is the same as before: to vaccinate the world.” Doing so “will both reduce the magnitude of pos-

sible outbreaks and the potential for future variants, enabling the world to return to normalcy.” The contribution of the United States to vaccinating the world “has been modest.”

Should the U.S. government be vaccinating the world?

The United States should send to developing countries “doses of the Oxford/Astra-Zeneca and Novavax vaccines (both approved elsewhere but not in the United States) as well as extra doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine.” He suggests that a “\$50 billion investment would bring the pandemic to a much faster end.” This investment is “peanuts” compared to “the multi-trillion dollar spending bills being thrown around Capitol Hill.” In addition to “the economic return on investment,” the “gains to America’s damaged standing in the world” would be “incalculable.”

If President Biden “wants to turn things around, vaccines are a cheap and effective way to save lives and fix the global economy.” If he “wants to turn the page from the Afghanistan fiasco, significantly boosting U.S. efforts to distribute the vaccine globally would do just that — and hopefully restore our

leadership position on the global stage.”

“The vaccines continue to be extraordinarily effective in preventing severe cases of COVID-19,” says Rohac, but the safety and efficacy of the COVID-19 vaccine is not the issue. Even if the COVID-19 vaccine is both a safe and effective preventative measure and a miracle vaccine with no side effects, there are still some important questions that must be asked.

It is unconstitutional for the U.S. government to now provide vaccines for its own citizens.

Should the U.S. government be vaccinating the world? Should the U.S. government donate more vaccines to Third World/developing/poorer countries? Should the U.S. government invest \$50 billion to accomplish these goals?

And here are three even more important questions. Should the U.S. government be helping pharmaceutical companies develop vaccines? Should the U.S. government be buying vaccines from pharmaceutical companies? Should the U.S. government be trying to get all Americans vaccinated?

From a constitutional standpoint, the answer to all of these

questions is a resounding no. Therefore, no matter how much U.S. standing on the world stage might be boosted by the giving away of vaccines, to do so would be unconstitutional, just like it is unconstitutional for the U.S. government to now provide vaccines for its own citizens. Moreover, it is illegitimate for the U.S. government to boost America’s standing in the world at the expense of the American people.

How not to boost our standing

So, then, just how can the United States legitimately boost its standing on the world stage? Before answering this question, it might be pertinent to explore how not to boost American standing on the world stage.

Foreign aid. Although it seems as though the U.S. government doling out foreign aid is a way to boost American standing on the world stage, doing so is — just like distributing vaccines — both unconstitutional and illegitimate. Foreign aid is unconstitutional because the Constitution nowhere authorizes the U.S. government to give money to foreign governments. Article I, section 8, paragraph 1 of the Constitution says that “the Congress shall have power to lay and collect

taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defence and general welfare of the United States.” The United States — not Israel, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Kenya, or Pakistan.

Foreign aid is illegitimate because it is money taken from American taxpayers and sent to foreigners without their input or consent. The purpose of government is supposed to be to protect the lives, liberties, and property of the people who form it. But if it is illegitimate for the U.S. government to provide welfare and relief to Americans, then it is even more illegitimate for the U.S. government to provide these things to foreigners. No American should be forced to “contribute” to the aid of the people or the government of any other country. All foreign aid, like all domestic charity, should be individual, private, and voluntary.

Military alliances. Again, although it seems as though the United States making military alliances with other countries is a legitimate way to boost American standing on the world stage, this is certainly not the case. NATO was established in 1949. It initially had 12 member countries, but, with the addition of North Macedonia in 2020, it now has 30 member countries. Since

NATO “is committed to the principle that an attack against one or several members is considered as an attack against all,” the United States is obligated to go to war over the invasion of a small country like North Macedonia that few Americans have ever even heard of.

All foreign aid, like all domestic charity, should be individual, private, and voluntary.

There are four big problems with military alliances. First, although it may boost our standing to have military alliances with some countries, this also means that it will hurt our standing with those countries that we do not have alliances with. Second, military alliances like NATO are obsolete. NATO was formed in response to the threat posed by the Soviet Union, but the Soviet Union has been defunct since 1991. Third, military alliances are contrary to the wisdom of the Founding Fathers. Both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson warned against entangling alliances with other countries. And fourth, military alliances do not serve American interests. As conservative commentator Pat Buchanan has well said:

And why is the defense of the Baltic republics and East Europe our responsibility, 5,000 miles away, not Germany's, whose economy is far larger than that of Russia?

But why is the defense of Europe seemingly more important to us than to the Europeans themselves?

And, of course, it is not just NATO in Europe. The United States has also obligated itself to defend South Korea and Taiwan. But again, as Buchanan states: "But what do we get out of these commitments, other than an obligation to go to war with a nuclear-armed China or North Korea over shoals, rocks and borders on the other side of the world that have nothing to do with the peace or security of the United States?" The United States should not guarantee the security of any country.

The United States should not guarantee the security of any country.

Military bases. When the United States builds military bases in foreign countries, many foreign nationals are hired, the local economy is stimulated, and, of course, that country is less likely to be attacked

by another country. But is this a legitimate way to boost American standing on the world stage?

The Department of Defense (DOD) has acknowledged the existence of about 800 U.S. military bases in 80 countries, but we know from the work of Nick Turse, David Vine, and the late Chalmers Johnson that that number could be over 1,000. And it is not just bases, for according to the DOD's Base Structure Report, the DOD is "one of the Federal government's larger holders of real estate managing a global real property portfolio that consists of over 585,000 facilities (buildings, structures, and linear structures), located on 4,775 sites worldwide and covering approximately 26.9 million acres."

There are also about 175,000 active-duty U.S. troops overseas in over 170 countries and territories. Because foreign military bases are not essential to the defense of the United States, however, they are an illegitimate way to boost American standing on the world stage. The only entities that benefit from these bases of empire are government contractors. They are certainly not beneficial to American troops or taxpayers. All foreign military bases should be closed, and all U.S. troops should be brought home.

How to boost our standing

So, then, just how can the United States legitimately boost its standing on the world stage? The answer is found in President Thomas Jefferson's first inaugural address, delivered on March 4, 1801. In the midst of Jefferson's annunciation of what he deemed "the essential principles of our government," he uttered the immortal words: "Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations — entangling alliances with none." The one negative point — alliances — we have already visited. There yet remains peace, which can best be maintained by non-intervention; commerce, which can be best maintained by free trade; and honest friendship, which can be best maintained by neutrality.

Peace. U.S. foreign policy is aggressive, reckless, belligerent, and meddling. Its history is one of hegemony, nation-building, regime change, imperialism, jingoism, and empire. In a word, it is a history of interventionism. U.S. foreign policy is downright evil. It sanctions the destabilization and overthrow of governments, torture, assassinations, extraordinary rendition, the destruction of industry and infrastructure, and downplays the slaughter of civilians. It supports

corrupt and tyrannical governments and brutal sanctions and embargoes. It results in discord, strife, hatred, and terrorism toward the United States. Peace is not possible without a foreign policy of non-interventionism.

**Peace is not possible
without a foreign policy of
non-interventionism.**

The United States cannot right every wrong or correct every injustice in the world. America "goes not abroad, in search of monsters to destroy," said secretary of state (and later president) John Quincy Adams. Not only is it not the job of the United States to police the world, put out fires around the world, or be the world's busybody, hall monitor, or social worker, "the only group to which Uncle Sam has transcendent moral and practical obligations is the United States' own citizens," as Doug Bandow has well said. Not intervening in other countries is a sure way to boost American standing on the world stage.

Commerce. Otto T. Mallery (1881–1956), the author of *Economic Union and Durable Peace* (Harper and Brothers, 1943), maintained that "economic interests based upon mutual interest" were preferable to

“political agreements between nations.” He also famously said: “If soldiers are not to cross international boundaries on missions of war, goods must cross them on missions of peace” (a similar phrase has sometimes been attributed to the French classical liberal Frederick Bastiat). Reducing or eliminating foreign commerce is exactly what countries attempt to do to each other during times of war.

Commercial freedom is one of the surest ways to boost our standing on the world stage.

Commercial freedom is one of the surest ways to boost our standing on the world stage. This means real free trade, not “fair” trade or managed trade. Free trade simply means that every individual and business in every country is free to trade, or conduct commercial activity, in any way with any individual or business in any other country for any reason, and without interference from the government. Free trade is the absence of any form of protectionism: tariffs, quotas, regulations, anti-dumping laws, restrictions, embargoes, or barriers. One look at the massive U.S. Harmonized Tariff Schedule shows that the United States is still very protec-

tionist. But trade does not result in winners and losers. It is mutually beneficial: No party loses anything by trading with another party. Trade is not a zero-sum game. It always makes both buyer and seller better off, or else they wouldn’t bother to trade in the first place. More choices and cheaper goods always benefit consumers in both countries that engage in trade. Freely trading with other countries is another sure way to boost American standing on the world stage.

Honest friendship. The United States has not been a friend to many countries in the world and has not been an honest friend to others. Instead of remaining neutral, the United States has taken sides in civil wars, territorial disputes, and controversies in other nations; picked winners and losers; crushed populist and nationalist movements struggling against tyrannical regimes; trained foreign soldiers and police to suppress their own people; influenced, sabotaged, financed, and otherwise interfered with elections in other countries; downplayed human rights violations by favored governments while condemning them elsewhere; and demonized countries as evil while committing acts of evil. The best way to maintain an honest friend-

ship with all nations and to boost American standing on the world stage is to practice neutrality.

After all, as Ron Paul once remarked about a dispute between Russia and Ukraine: “Why does the U.S. care which flag will be hoisted on a small piece of land thousands of miles away?” And as Pat Buchanan has said about disputes in the Far East: “As we have no claim to rocks or reefs in the South China Sea — Vietnam, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei and the Philippines do — why is this our quarrel?” Neutrality respects the sovereignty of other nations; guarantees a peaceful, non-interventionist foreign policy; prevents hatred of America and Americans; ensures that the military is not misused; keeps U.S. soldiers from dying in senseless foreign wars; and doesn’t cost the taxpayers anything. Neutrality is part of an “America first” foreign policy. It is a moral foreign policy, a sane foreign policy, and the right foreign policy.

“Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations — entangling alliances with none.” This often-cited statement by Jefferson was not just empty rhetoric like that which bellows from the lips of

modern politicians of both parties. The principles embodied in this succinct statement can be found throughout Jefferson’s writings and those of the other Founding Fathers. A Jeffersonian foreign policy not only puts America first, it is moral, just, legitimate, constitutional, and preserves American blood and treasure. To boost American standing on the world stage, we need look no further than the nation’s Founders.

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NEXT MONTH:
**“Time to Put
Uncle Sam on a Diet”
by Laurence M. Vance**

Government Planning Brings neither Freedom, Prosperity, nor Equality

.....
by Richard M. Ebeling



America is in the grip of a serious counterrevolution against the ideas and ideals upon which the country was founded. Whether it concerns fears about the physical environment or frustrations with the domestic economy or charges of society-wide “systemic racism,” the presumption is that the problem stems from people having too much freedom or the wrong types of freedom.

The alternatives proposed to grapple with these problems all share a common premise: There is a need for greater government paternalism and planning over everyone’s lives. For example, it is argued that the only serious remedy to the

presumed danger from global warming requires national and international governmental restrictions, commands, and controls over how we work, how we live, and the forms and contents of our standards of living.

The last two difficult years have been due to a government-created economic recession resulting from lockdowns and shutdowns on production, employment, shopping, and traveling as the political response to the coronavirus crisis. The sluggish recovery, especially in labor markets and supply-chains, have also been due to various government interventions. But proponents of government planning now insist that if more jobs are to be made available, if workers are to receive “living wages” and better work conditions, if goods and services are to be available in the face of these supply-chain disruptions, and if income inequalities are to be narrowed, there is only one answer: more government spending and more comprehensive government intrusions into how people work, on what terms, and making which products.

At the same time, America and, increasingly, various parts of Europe are facing the onslaught of a new brand of racism that rhetori-

cally disguises what it is really about by insisting that it is an ideology of “anti-racism.” To overcome the pervasive presence of an asserted white “systemic racism” against all “people of color,” the call is made for government planning and regulation of virtually every form of human association inside and outside of the marketplace. Governments must determine the social and financial just due for every politically designated and categorized racial, ethnic, gender, and social group in the country.

Only future historians who, many decades from now, look back at the unfolding events of the first half of the 21st century will know whether these collectivist and political paternalist trends will succeed in triumphing over the social vestiges and cultural residues of the spirit of individual liberty and economic freedom in America and other parts of the Western world.

Liberal freedoms have partly survived but are fading away

But before becoming too pessimistic, it is worth remembering that the last 100 years have seen the ascendancy and seemingly “inevitable” victory of earlier forms of philosophical collectivism and political paternalism as seen under

Soviet communism, Italian fascism, and German National Socialism (Nazism). Friends of freedom despaired of a coming twilight of what remained of any (classical) liberal ideas and social arrangements. And while the state has grown in size and scope over the last century, for most of this time, the leading Western nations successfully avoided falling into the abyss of a fully totalitarian collectivism. They have, until now, preserved degrees of the institutional prerequisites for still relatively free societies.

The leading Western nations successfully avoided falling into the abyss of a fully totalitarian collectivism.

But there is no doubt that with each passing year and decade, an understanding of the ideals derived from the classical liberal conception of a free society, based on a belief in the inviolable rights of the individual to his life, liberty, honestly acquired property, and free association with any and all others for peaceful mutual betterment, has faded further out of the societal memory of each new generation.

Perhaps this time the tribal collectivists will succeed in destroying the remaining philosophical, politi-

cal, and cultural ramparts protecting the residues of liberty. Nothing will be left but archeological artifacts for those future historians to excavate and wonder how a civilization built on the idea of the dignity and freedom of each and every individual human could have been ruined by a philosophical and ideological barbarian horde. We may well wonder how this came about when the vanguard of that barbarian horde was comprised of many among the intellectual, social, and cultural elite of Western society.

It is again insisted that the planning hand of paternalistic government will assure greater freedom.

But be that as it may, just as with the misplaced optimism of the political and economic collectivisms of the 20th century, the proponents of the Green New Deal and identity politics tribal collectivism of the 21st century possess a confident belief that a “climate-friendly” and “socially just” society of the future requires the pervasive and heavy hand of government central planning. Like the collectivisms of the last century, it is again insisted that the planning hand of paternalistic government will assure greater free-

dom, prosperity, and equality than anything possible or experienced under a more market-based economic system.

The old and new central planners on civil liberties

Many of the advocates of the socialist theme in the 20th century insisted that government central planning was compatible with existing conceptions of personal freedom and civil liberties. There was no reason why government control and direction of the economy was inconsistent with preservation of freedom of speech, the press, religion, assembly, and free association. Adding to these under socialism would bring newer and different freedoms, including a guaranteed job, a reasonable “living wage,” government provision of health care and retirement, a decent place to live, and equal access to the everyday amenities of life previously reserved for the privileged capitalist rich.

A significant difference with our modern collectivists who identify with identity politics, critical race theory, and cancel culture, however, is the wide absence of any references to or calls for personal freedom or civil liberties in the Western traditional sense. Indeed, there is frequently a conscious rejection of the

premises behind them. For many aligned with this modern collectivism, there is an implicit and even explicit rejection of personal freedom and civil liberties. It is insisted that they have been and are a ruse to use language and justify actions inherently and inescapably “racist.”

The new planners blend Marxism with a neo-Nazism

These people are a peculiar and perverse blend of Marxism and Nazism. They see society as divided into conflicting groups of oppressors and oppressed, capitalist exploiters versus all others in society. But replacing the traditional Marxist “class analysis” based on ownership or non-ownership of the means of production, per se, is a Nazi-like idea that what identifies and unifies people are their positions in different categories of social awareness and social status based on race and gender.

The more radical versions of critical race theory insist that no one can escape from their racial identity; it is who and what you are. White people are definitionally racists and oppressors of all “people of color,” whether they are aware of it or not. Being white gives you “privilege” by the biological necessity of the color of your skin. Just as the

same applies to all non-whites; being non-white means you have been and are an oppressed people, regardless of how an individual so classified thinks about himself and any actions he may attempt to undertake as a distinct and separate person.

This means that the version of a socialist planned society called for by identity politics and critical race theory is inconsistent with freedom in two senses. First, if government is to plan the social and economic affairs of the society, this necessarily abridges or abolishes those traditional notions of personal freedom and civil liberty. Both 19th- and 20th-century critics of all brands of socialism argued that by transferring control over the means of production from the private hands of individual owners, who compete in the marketplace for consumer business and the hiring of employees, to the single hand of government central planners, people’s freedom of choice as consumers and producers was done away with.

Government planning abrogates consumer and producer choice

The government central planners would now determine and dictate what was produced in terms of quantities manufactured, along

with the qualities and characteristics of what they considered to be socially necessary, desirable, and important. Consumers would be supplied with what the political paternalists in charge of the ultimate planning decisions decided the people “really” needed, not what those consumers might actually want to buy as reflected in their demands for and purchases of competitively supplied goods and services in a free marketplace.

There will be an officially approved and permitted system of language and action.

Also, as the monopoly controller and planner of all production activities, a socialist government becomes the single employer for all those looking for work in the society. Education, job opportunities and locations of employment, along with the salary to be paid and any fringe benefits accompanying it would be determined by the political authority. The loss of or exit from one job left the individual still confronting the same employer anywhere he tried to turn — the state.

But the twist with identity politics and critical race theory is that they deny even the illusion of desiring personal freedom. The 20th-

century socialists said they accepted and believed in civil liberties, even as they often, de facto, abolished them, especially in the communist regimes like the Soviet Union through the government’s control over the means of production. But our new race-based, tribal, collectivist would-be planners reject any rationale for personal freedom and civil liberties. All forms of racist and sexist thought and action becomes unacceptable, as these tribal paternalist planners define them. There will be an officially approved system of language and action. Any verbal and physical expressions of forbidden speech and actions are to be expunged, with the accused banished from employment, without any ability to defend himself, or to participate in autonomous networks of human association. Hence, the accompanying role of “cancel culture.”

Individuals disappear in planned categories of race and gender

Placing control and planning over the means of production in the hands of those in political authority in the government means the end to individual liberty, freedom of choice, and voluntary association as these ideas have been understood for more than 300 years, first in the

West and then in other parts of the world. Defined by the new political paternalists in power by collective and tribal categories of race, gender, and social status, individuals are no longer thinking, deciding, and choosing human beings. The individual's fate and fortune — from cradle to grave — is determined and dictated by those possessing and wielding the coercive planning powers of government.

Individuals are no longer thinking, deciding, and choosing human beings.

Our society has seen increasing instances of private organizations specifying, imposing, and policing rules of “politically correct” speech and action under the pressures of this new tribal collectivism, but it needs to be appreciated that it would be universalized to the extent that even greater degrees of governmental social and economic planning are introduced. The private-sector alternatives still free from this ideology of neo-Nazism in the name of “anti-racism” would be limited or closed off completely. Each person would find himself a slave to this race- and gender-based “anti-racist” totalitarianism.

The new planning scheme is economic fascism

Centralized government planning has long been identified with the name “socialism.” But many defenders of greater government control and command over social and economic affairs often insist that they are not advocating “socialism” because most of them do not call for outright government nationalization and ownership of the means of production. They, too, recognize and support the institution of private enterprise, they say, but in the current global environment, the laissez-faire of the past must be superseded by government oversight, rules, restrictions, commands, and controls guiding and directing how and for what purposes private enterprises go about their business.

There is, of course, another name for government command, control, and planning of social life and economic activity without direct government ownership of the means of production. It is called economic fascism. What is proposed in the name of fighting global warming, or for establishing race and gender “diversity” and “inclusiveness,” or greater racial and gender salary and status “equity,” is not strictly the Italian corporatist model of government-mandated

and directed cartels for all sectors of the market for pricing and production planning, but it comes closest to what is being proposed by many of the new proponents of economic planning

The Davos model for a fascist-type economy

For example, the World Economic Forum that meets every year at Davos, Switzerland, sponsored a detailed “white paper” in September of 2020 on how private businesses and corporations need to be reorganized and refocused in their structures and activities to meet the challenges of global warming and the need for greater race and gender “equity.” Corporations should set aside their archaic notion that their primary duty is to their shareholders and the making and maximizing of profits for these owners. They must view their essential duty to be to serve their “stakeholders” — those directly and indirectly impacted by anything and everything the private enterprise does, including the quality and sustainability of “the planet.”

Shareholders of the enterprise are to be viewed as merely one subgroup of claimants deserving of recognition and reward from the activities of the private enterprise.

Profitability, cost-efficiency, and consumer satisfaction are all to be made secondary considerations to assuring pay and promotion and decision-making “equity” within the firm. “Socially aware” wages and racial and gender employment balance will replace market-based hiring and remuneration for those employed and their place and role within the company.

Corporations and other private enterprises that sign up to “voluntarily” follow the goals and targets of this new vision are to commit to introducing technologies and methods of production geared to reducing any and all carbon footprints. Quantitative goals are to be introduced to replace fossil fuel use with “renewable” energy sources by specified dates.

Corporate duties are to serve society, not shareholders

As the Davos white paper expressed it: “Corporate global citizenship requires a company to harness its core competencies, its entrepreneurship, skills and relevant resources in collaborative efforts with other companies and stakeholders to improve the state of the world.... ‘Stakeholder capitalism’ ... positions private corporations as trustees of society.”

Every participating enterprise submits itself to follow a centralized plan of changing what and how they produce and sell to be consistent with the target goals of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Each participating member is to be obligated to issue an annual report summarizing what they have done to fulfill “the Plan” of zero-net fossil fuels emissions by 2050. This includes explaining how they have brought their company closer into “harmony with nature” to receive their “sustainability certification” from the association formed to represent, guide, and oversee the activities of all the participants.

Welfare fascism and Soviet-style planning targets

Besides the environment, all member enterprises are to directly take responsibility for the “mental, physical and social well-being of all people in their operations and value chains.” Thus, every private enterprise is to be a provider of comprehensive welfare-state services for all those within the firm as well as any others in some way related to or affected by the company. Wages and other employment benefits must place priority on paying a “living wage” and “a wage sufficient to meet the basic standards of life,”

and to “lift households and communities out of poverty.”

“Socially aware” wages and racial and gender employment balance will replace market-based hiring and remuneration.

Prices, costs, consumer satisfaction, and market-based balances between supplies and demands for inputs and outputs lose all meaning. Like under Soviet socialist central planning, the Davos model for economic fascism is simply to meet quantitative targets of input use and output amounts to reflect the climate change goals and social justice benchmarks set by the United Nations and the umbrella organizations monitoring and judging everything done by the private enterprise members.

But beyond the “voluntary” membership and participation by corporations and other private enterprises, the authors of the white paper see it as the basis of binding benchmarks, standards, targets, and goals that might result in legal penalties if not successfully met and fulfilled. Thus, it becomes a short step from the voluntary to the politically compulsory. Certainly, this is what President Joe Biden is insisting on when he commands that au-

tomotive companies meet production targets of so many new electric-powered motor vehicles to be sold and on the road by 2030. Or for regulatory plans to restrict other fossil fuel uses, with their replacement by mandated wind and solar sources of energy.

The relevance of the “Austrian” criticisms of central planning

Once these steps are more fully introduced and the economy is on a de facto economic fascist footing, all the “Austrian” criticisms of socialist central planning come into more applicable play. By preempting or prohibiting market-based pricing and autonomous entrepreneurial decision-making about what and how to produce, and, instead, imposing direct commands of output goals and production methods, the government central planners will undermine and then eliminate all remaining market rationality.

Is production directed to what actual income-earning consumers desire? Are the scarce resources of the society employed and utilized based on their market-determined opportunity costs? Do owners of the means of production have market-guided incentives to creatively devise new and better ways and

means of producing more and improved goods at lower costs to the benefit of the consuming public? The answers to these and similar questions under such a system of fascist-like economic planning is basically — No!

Resource use, production decisions, and price and cost relationships will be increasingly, then finally, completely dictated by the central planning political paternalists based on ideology and special interest politicking in the corrupt give-and-take of “democratic” decision-making. It becomes a “political” economy in the most pejorative sense. It will gravitate toward what Ludwig von Mises called “planned chaos.”

Classical-liberal ideal of equality before the law

The classical-liberal and free-market ideal concerning “equality” has been the idea of every human being possessing the same individual equal rights before the law. Equal individual rights to life, liberty, and honestly acquired property in arenas of voluntary human association. However, an equality of rights carries with it an inevitable inequality of outcomes in terms of relative income shares and social status in society.

But this inequality is not based on political privilege or favoritism arising from government protections, subsidies, or other regulatory or redistributive benefits. Market-based inequalities result from the value judgments of others in society about what they, as consumers and employers, consider to be our monetary worth in assisting in producing and supplying goods and services that our fellow human beings desire and are willing to pay for.

It becomes a “political” economy in the most pejorative sense.

The services of a brain surgeon usually carry a higher market value in the eyes of those needing a delicate neurosurgery than those same people or others see as the market worth of a gardener, or salesman in a shoe store, or an economics professor teaching at a college or university. As American economist Frank A. Fetter once expressed it, in the free marketplace, every penny spent by a consumer is a “vote” reflecting the buyers’ valuation of the product bought and, therefore, the worth of the services of those whose efforts have brought it to the market.

The dollar “votes” that each earns tells every income earner

what others directly or indirectly think of the services they can render in satisfying the wants and improving the lives of others. Therefore, some of those income earners have more dollar votes of income than others, which enable them as consumers to purchase more of what their fellow economic neighbors bring to market. But every one of those dollars has been earned through a voluntary and mutually beneficial exchange.

Collectivist “equity” means politically determined group shares

While relative incomes in the marketplace are simply the outcome of a series of mutually-agreed-upon terms of trade in the free, competitive process, once this process is politicized through government-planned pricing and redistribution, it no longer possesses the rationality or the justice of a free society. With government determining what people earn and their access to various goods and services, the production and supply of which has increasingly been decided on by paternalist planners, there is reintroduced a society of privilege and favoritism.

Power and pull, ideological pressures, and voting-bloc influences will now determine and de-

cide what any individual may or may not earn. It would not be the individual's relative market worth that will be evaluated in the new world of identity politics and critical race theory. Instead, any person's absolute and relative income share will be politically determined for him as a member of a racial, gender, or some other collectivist group to which he has been assigned based on the result of the rough and tumble of "democratic" real politick.

One consequence will be that individual initiative and effort is thwarted or redirected by government command or politicized incentives. This will have little or nothing to do with use of talent, creativity, or entrepreneurial expertise in ways that actually serve the properly understood "common good," meeting consumer demand with constantly improving, least costly ways of supplying things.

If fully or even partially implemented, such a new political paternalist planning scheme would lead to the same social and economic consequences as the central planning experiences of the 20th century. The only question is whether it

would be accompanied by the same reigns of terror and mass murders that were experienced under the Soviet, fascist, and Nazi versions of socialism. Let us hope that future historians do not have to record consequences similar those earlier ones.

(Based on a talk given for the Praxis Club at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan, on October 28, 2021.)

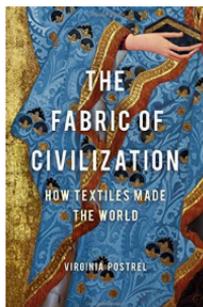
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NEXT MONTH:
"The Social Engineer as Ethical Authoritarian"
by Richard M. Ebeling

The Fabric of Civilization

by Neera K. Badhwar

The Fabric of Civilization: How Textiles Made the World by Virginia Postrel, Basic Books, 2021, 320 pages.



Virginia Postrel’s *Fabric of Civilization* is a fascinating, deeply researched tale of the development of fabric. Starting with fiber to make string, it takes us through the development of thread, to natural fabric, and finally to synthetics. It tells of the ever-improving machinery for spinning thread and weaving cloth, and the science, history, and politics woven into the quest for fabric. Before reading this book, I had no idea of how this quest led to life-changing discoveries, inventions, and innovations in areas far afield from fabric.

The first surprise is that “natural” fibers like silk, cotton, wool, and lin-

en, are not entirely natural. Rather, they are “the products of artifice so ancient and familiar that we forget it’s there.” All come from “genetically modified organisms” — the dreaded GMOs! — which Postrel describes as “technological achievements every bit as ingenious as the machines we honor as the Industrial Revolution.” The second surprise is that these genetic modifications started 12,000 years ago with the Neolithic Revolution: 8,500 years ago, the Chinese were making silk, and over 2,520 years ago, Indians in the Indus Valley were making cotton.

Textiles spawned many innovations

Postrel relates stories of heroic individuals who worked for years to manufacture silk or other fibers in Europe. In 1807, Agostino Bassi embarked on a long journey to find out why silkworms were dying in droves. After eight years of experiments, he found the cause: fungus. He also found that sanitation was key to stopping the spread of the fungus. Before hospitals started using modern sanitary measures, Bassi prescribed them for saving the silkworms: boiling instruments, disinfecting the silkworm eggs, tables, trays, and workers’ clothing, and washing hands frequently. Bassi also discovered that parasites were the

cause of many diseases, thus anticipating Louis Pasteur's and Robert Koch's germ theory of disease.

Hired by the French government to find the cause of, and prevent, pébrine, another silkworm disease, Pasteur succeeded after five years of experiments, discovering in the process how to prevent flacherie. This work led him to medicine and eventually to the vaccines against anthrax and rabies.

The quest for fabric also gave rise to labor-saving machines and was partly responsible for agriculture. Weaving led to the creation of the binary code, the development of math, and the spread of literacy. The desire for colorful fabrics gave rise to chemistry. Scientists are trying to create chemical finishes that will make wash-and-wear clothes seem "so yesterday." They are trying to create a universal finish, literally, a finish that protects the wearer against all unwelcome things: bacteria, stains, wrinkles, smells, shrinkage, oil, water, mosquitos, bedbugs. If they succeed, it will become unnecessary to ever wash clothes — a college student's dream!

Most of us learned in school that the desire for spices and gold led to trade across the oceans. What we did not learn is that the desire for textiles and dyes did the same.

The textile business funded the Italian Renaissance and the Mughal empire in India. It gave birth to double-entry bookkeeping and financial institutions that eventually led to banks. Alas, it also nurtured the slave trade, demonstrating once again that our intellectual and craft abilities and achievements are entirely compatible with immorality. However, contrary to some historians, slavery in the United States was not and could not have been responsible for the Industrial Revolution, because the Industrial Revolution is much older than U.S. slavery.

**The desire for textiles and dyes
was also one of the factors
behind global trade.**

The Industrial Revolution was the beginning of the process that, in the words of Deirdre McCloskey, led to "a Great Enrichment of three thousand percent" in most of the world. And what started it was the spinning machine, which finally made thread cheap and plentiful enough for clothes that even the poor could afford. It also freed women from the laborious task of making thread with a spinning wheel.

The origin of chemistry lies in the dyeing of cloth. Indeed, in Postrel's words, "[t]he history of

dyes is the history of chemistry, revealing the power, and the limits, of trial-and-error experimentation without fundamental understanding.” Several geographically separated civilizations made indigo from plants and acquired the skill of dyeing with it in pre-historic times. But 16th-century European merchants had to get it from India. In spite of its popularity, however, indigo dyeing had a serious problem: It stank! Queen Elizabeth I banned it within an eight-mile radius of her palace.

The economic lessons of textiles

In addition to educating the reader about the many scientific and medical advances that resulted from the quest for textiles, Postrel dots her book with humorous stories about human folly. One such story concerns Tyrian purple, a stinking purple dye that came from snails. (Experimenters have verified that it stank by dyeing clothes with it, and finding that they smelled two decades later, even after being laundered with Tide!)

But Tyrian purple was also very expensive, so purple clothes became a status symbol. To the detriment of others, rich people cared more about status than smelling sweet!

Another story, both amusing and depressing, concerns the be-

havior of various governments that tried to control people’s clothing out of a desire to control society and protect status. In 14th-century China, Zhu Yuanzhang, the founder of the Ming dynasty, decreed that only the nobility could wear silk, satin, or brocade, or the colors scarlet and dark blue. The regulations stayed in place for three centuries — as did disobedience to them, in spite of the threat of penal servitude, confiscation of goods, or corporal punishment. Similarly, Japan’s sumptuary laws stayed in force from the 17th to the mid-19th centuries and were flouted for as long by commoners who would wear the forbidden fabrics and colors as lining inside their clothes.

**To the detriment of everyone else,
rich people cared more about
status than not stinking!**

From 1300 to 1500, Italian city-states passed more than 300 sumptuary laws, including one that limited the number of silk dresses for women to two. But in the city-states run by merchants, the chief aim was to control extravagance, especially that of the merchants’ own wives and daughters. However, no amount of tweaking of the laws could get Italians to obey them, and

eventually, city-states started granting exemptions for a fee. In the end, there were nearly as many exemptions as prohibitions.

Several European countries, including England and France, banned cotton imports in order to protect the domestic wool, silk, and hemp industries from competition. France banned both printed and plain cottons from India, the most popular of cottons (1686). It also forbade the printing of domestic cotton. In a desperate attempt to get people to obey, the government increased the penalties for breaking the laws: sentencing “traffickers” in cotton to years in the galleys, and “serious traffickers” to death. French policy was “not just anti-foreign; it was anti-cotton and anti-print.”

**If they had been paid more,
the resulting cloth would have
been unaffordable.**

Of course, the guilty parties were not just governments but also the established industries that clamored for protection from competition. French Enlightenment economists pointed out that the ban on imported cotton was not only bad for the French economy, it was also unjust, as were the punishments. The Abbé André Morellet

wrote: “Is it not strange that an otherwise respectable order of citizens solicits terrible punishments such as death and the galleys against Frenchmen, & does so for reasons of commercial interest?”

Here we see a parallel with the actions of our own government and fellow citizens. Although the U.S. government doesn’t execute anyone for trafficking in drugs, or violating its protectionist laws, it does impose penalties on them: in the case of the former, draconian ones. Well might we ask those who wish to continue the War on Drugs, especially those in the police-prosecutor-prison complex: “Is it not strange that an otherwise respectable order of citizens solicits terrible punishments such as long sentences in dangerous prisons against Americans, and does so for financial reasons?”

Postrel’s book holds several economic lessons. For example, it provides a fascinating example of differential wages for males and females that clearly shows that wages are set (largely) by the market, not by sexism. Starting in the late 17th century, silk factories in Italy employed women — *maestres* — in the task of reeling, that is, “winding silk filaments off cocoons submerged in warm water” to make

silk thread. The work required a rare expertise, acquired through years of low-paid apprenticeship. Maestres worked seven days a week but made 50 percent more than their husbands employed in other tasks six days a week. By contrast, in England in the late 18th century, female spinners made only 1 shilling a week for full-time work, compared to 9 shillings for a male weaver.

Subsidizing some business activities has to come at the cost of preventing or reducing other business activities.

Some take this last fact as an obvious example of sexism. But why didn't sexism lower the wages of maestres? The explanation for the low wages of female spinners in England is that they were not very productive, thanks to the primitive technology: the spinning wheel. If they had been paid more, the resulting cloth would have been unaffordable. Spinners had to wait for the spinning jenny to produce more yarn per hour and earn more money.

With the help of this and other examples, Postrel also explodes the economic fallacy that labor-saving technologies immiserate workers,

noting that “despite immediate dislocations ... [such] technologies can create abundance and free people's time for more economically valuable and personally satisfying purposes.”

Government-funded research

The reader will notice that many of the advances in fabrics were the result of government intervention: funding researchers, subsidizing silk factories and new machines, and so on. But only libertarian and classical liberal readers will notice that the same government interventions stifled or harmed other research and enterprise. This is easily observable in the case of bans or tariffs on imported cotton in order to protect the wool and silk industries. With the help of some economic theory we can also see that subsidizing some business activities has to come at the cost of preventing or reducing other business activities. The taxes that enabled silk to flourish were taken from individuals who could have invested in other businesses, and from businesses that could have invested more in their own businesses.

Nevertheless, some of the most exciting research even now is being done with the help of government investment, whether necessary or not. Advanced Functional Fibers of

America, or AFFOA, is a nonprofit consortium founded by Yoel Fink, a professor of materials science at MIT. AFFOA's 137 members include "federal defense and space agencies." Fink wants to make clothes that can "sense, communicate, measure, record, and respond" by embedding "chips, lithium batteries, and other electronic essentials into fibers." A hat could serve as a GPS device and underwear as a health monitor. Embedding LEDs in trousers would make walking after dark safer.

At the same time, there was and is much privately funded research into preventing disease, inventing machines, discovering dyes, and so on. The polymer revolution, which Postrel calls "the greatest materials revolution since the development of ceramics and metallurgy," was due to a Dupont scientist, Wallace Carothers, who also established polymer science as a new field of science. Carothers and Julian Hill created the world's first synthetic fiber: polyester. But polyester melted at too low a temperature to be useful for clothing, so Dupont urged Carothers to come up with a fabric that could be used for clothes. The result was nylon.

The scientists at Bolt Threads bioengineer yeast to excrete silk proteins and make silk and use myceli-

um, mushroom cells, to make leather. Just as John D. Rockefeller saved the whale by refining and selling petroleum, Bolt Threads might save the silkworm and animals valued for their leather. The quest for fabric has led not only to smarter and smarter fabrics but also to a move away from the killing of animals.

Postrel's book displays the wealth of her knowledge of the history, science, chemistry, and economics of fabric. She even learned to weave in order to write authentically about weaving. Some readers may find it hard to get through her detailed descriptions of various thread-making and weaving machines, as well as of various chemical processes. But they can always skip such passages without losing anything essential to the story of fabric.

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