
FUTURE OF FREEDOM

VOLUME 33 | NUMBER 7

JULY 2022

The best we can hope for concerning the people at large is that they be properly armed.

— Alexander Hamilton

FUTURE OF FREEDOM

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Immigration Socialism, the Drug War, and a Police State

by *Jacob G. Hornberger*



I grew up on farm a few miles outside Laredo, Texas, which is located on the U.S.-Mexico border. Our farm was situated on the Rio Grande, so we irrigated our fields from water taken from the river. When we would drive down to the river to fix our irrigation pump, we could see Mexico and would oftentimes wave at people on the Mexican side.

The Border Patrol had the legal authority to trespass onto our farm whenever it wanted. No search warrant was required. They could drive their vehicles all over our farm, and there was nothing we could do to stop them. They never demanded to search our house, but they could

have if they had wanted to. If we put a lock on our gate and did not give them a key, they would shoot off the lock and then enter our property.

A few months ago, I returned to Laredo and, along with relatives and friends, visited the place where our farm had been located. Today, it is a fully developed residential area. We drove to the river. The lower pasture is now a park owned and operated by the city. When we arrived, we saw two Border Patrol vans with agents eyeing the Rio Grande, undoubtedly looking for immigrants crossing the river and illegally entering the United States.

There is something important to note about these types of Border Patrol trespasses and warrantless searches: They take place not only on farms and ranches along the Rio Grande but are also conducted on farms and ranches miles away from the border. The federal courts sustain their constitutionality by saying that these faraway farms and ranches are the “functional equivalent of the border.”

Everyone in South Texas familiar with ranch culture knows that there is an unwritten rule that one should always leave gates to pastures the way he found them. That is, if a gate is open, you leave it open. If it's closed, you leave it closed.

When I was in high school, I often heard of instances in which the Border Patrol would enter onto ranches and violate that unwritten rule, usually by leaving gates open that had been closed. Ranchers would complain, but usually the Border Patrol would arrogantly ignore them. There was nothing the ranchers could do about it.

Domestic immigration checkpoints

One Friday afternoon when I was in high school, I was headed to Port Aransas, Texas, to spend a weekend at the beach with friends. A Border Patrol vehicle came up behind me and turned on his flashing lights. I pulled over. The Border Patrol agent got out of his vehicle, came to my vehicle, and ordered me to exit my car and open my trunk. I objected, informing him that he had no authority to issue such an order. He exclaimed: “Don’t you know about the drug problem here along the border?” I replied, “Well, that confirms that you have no authority to search my vehicle.” He responded, “Well, I’m not going to be searching your car for drugs. I’m looking to see if you’re carrying an illegal alien, but if I happen to find drugs....” Convinced that I was illegally transporting drugs or illegal immigrants, he concluded, “You

can open the trunk here or follow me back to Border Patrol headquarters and open it up there. Either way, your trunk is going to be opened.” I opened the trunk. He found nothing and permitted me to go on my way.

Ranchers would complain, but usually the Border Patrol would arrogantly ignore them.

These are what are called “roving Border Patrol checkpoints.” Technically, they’re not legal, but the federal courts have carved out so many exceptions to the Fourth Amendment’s prohibition of unreasonable searches when it comes to vehicles near the border that for all practical purposes, they have become legal. Moreover, every Border Patrol agent knows that even if he stops someone without “probable cause” or even “reasonable suspicion,” nothing bad is going to happen to that agent.

On the way back from Laredo on my recent trip, we headed north on IH35. About 40 miles north of Laredo, one comes over the crest of a hill and encounters a surreal sight, one that makes you momentarily think that you’re in Mexico and approaching the U.S.-Mexico border. It’s a huge, permanent immigration

inspection station, where drivers are required to stop and be subjected, at the discretion of immigration officials, to a full-scale search of one's person and vehicle. Most of the time, they simply ask if you're an American citizen. If you refuse to answer, they will direct you to a side station, where agents will surround your vehicle. If you still refuse to answer, they will put you under arrest. If you refuse to exit your vehicle, they will forcibly remove you. They might even beat you up, as they did a pastor in Arizona.

If the driver and his passengers are able to speak English well, and if they are in a nice, late-model car, and if they show proper deference to the immigration officials, the driver will be waved through the checkpoint. But if the driver or any of the passengers appear poor or unable to speak English well, they had better have a driver's license or a passport with them. When we were growing up, we had a nanny living with us who never learned English. She was an American citizen but never learned to drive. When she would travel to San Antonio or Dallas via bus to visit my siblings, she would always have to carry her passport with her. If she failed to do so, immigration offi-

cial at the highway checkpoint would not permit her to continue her journey. If she were traveling by plane, she would not be permitted to board the plane without her passport.

If the driver or any of the passengers appear poor, they had better have a driver's license or a passport with them.

When I was in high school, that immigration checkpoint was only temporary and periodic. Sometimes, a couple of Border Patrol vehicles would park on the side of the highway and set up cones in order to direct traffic to the side of the highway to be stopped and inspected. I'd estimate that the checkpoint was there about two or three days a week. Thus, when transporters would take illegal immigrants north, they would have a spotter vehicle go first. If the checkpoint wasn't set up that day, the spotter would radio back to the transporting vehicle that the way was clear. I can only assume that that's why they ultimately made the checkpoint permanent.

There are also immigration checkpoints on highways running east-west in the American South-west. Just like the checkpoint north

of Laredo, people are required to stop and be searched. Many years ago, that's how they caught country-music singer Willie Nelson with drugs.

There is something important to note about all this: People are subjected to searches at these highway checkpoints without ever having entered Mexico. In Laredo, which, of course, was once part of Mexico, a large percentage of the populace, like our nanny, still cannot speak English. They cannot travel to other parts of the United States without carrying their passport.

An immigration police state

This is what an immigration police state is all about. Many years ago, I traveled to Cuba, which most everyone would acknowledge is a police state. They have these types of highway checkpoints in Cuba. If someone is unable to show proper identification, he is taken into custody and incarcerated.

This kind of police state is also part and parcel of America's system of immigration controls. Thus, when one advocates or endorses a system of immigration controls, he simultaneously advocates or endorses an immigration police state. Claiming that one supports a system of immi-

gration controls while, at the same time, opposing an immigration police state is like supporting lightning but opposing thunder.

The war on drugs

America's immigration police state is aggravated by the federal war on drugs. When I was in high school, Laredo was inundated with DEA agents, including undercover ones. With the war on drugs and the war on illegal immigration, people along the border truly live in a federal police state.

After I got my law degree, I moved back to Laredo to practice law. One evening, I was in a local bar having a beer. A guy struck up a friendly conversation with me. During the course of the conversation, I asked him what kind of work he did. He answered that he was a salesman. I innocently asked him what he sold. He smiled at me and responded, "Just a salesman."

Several months later, I happened to be in federal court on a case. Lo and behold, I saw that guy testifying in a hearing. It turned out that he was an undercover federal narc. If I had purchased some marijuana from this "salesman," I would have been busted, sent to prison, and lost my law license. That's what it's like to live in a police state.

When I was in high school, one of my classmates went into Nuevo Laredo and purchased an ounce of marijuana. As he crossed the international bridge back into Laredo, he dropped his package of grass into the high weeds below the bridge on the U.S. side of the river. When he returned that night to retrieve it, federal agents were waiting for him. They busted him. He got hit with a federal felony conviction at 18 years of age. He wasn't the only one. I also had another friend who got busted on a federal felony marijuana charge and sent away to a federal penitentiary. Another friend had a nationwide marijuana business. When they couldn't catch him, they sent the IRS after him. Knowing he couldn't beat the income-tax charge, my friend ended up committing suicide. He was about 23 years old.

The futility of immigration controls and drug laws

That was about 50 years ago. There is something else worth noting about all this immigration-war and drug-war nonsense: It's still going on. Nothing has changed at all, except the identities of the enforcers and the victims. Despite all the people they have put into jail and whose lives have been ruined by

felony drug charges, the drug war has never been won. In fact, there are more illegal drugs than ever being brought into the United States.

When I was growing up, it wasn't illegal for American employers to hire illegal immigrants.

It's no different with immigration. No matter how many immigration busts they have made over the years, and no matter how many police-state measures they have enacted, nothing has changed except the identities of the enforcers and the victims. They continue to enforce their immigration police state along the border, notwithstanding the fact that all it does is mean more immigration busts and expanded budgets for the immigration police-state enforcers.

When I was growing up, it wasn't illegal for American employers to hire illegal immigrants. American employers loved hiring them because they worked so hard. We hired illegal immigrants on our farm, and they were the hardest working people I've ever seen.

Then someone got the bright idea that if they made it illegal to hire illegal immigrants, the immigrants would no longer illegally come to the United States. The law

accomplished nothing, except convert countless American employers into felons. When it became apparent that the new law had done nothing to resolve America's immigration "crisis," the law prohibiting the hiring of illegal immigrants wasn't repealed. It became part and parcel of the immigrant police state.

It's been the same with the drug war. At some point, federal officials acquired the power to seize large amounts of cash from vehicles traveling down the highway. They didn't have to charge the owner of the money with any criminal offense. They needed no probable cause or reasonable suspicion that the cash was acquired through illegal drug sales. They could now just seize the money and use it for their own purposes. Once it became apparent that this asset-forfeiture law did not result in winning the drug war, it was not repealed. It remained on the books as part and parcel of America's decades-old, never-ending war on drugs.

Crisis, chaos, and death

Ever since I was a kid, there has been an immigration crisis. There is a good reason for that. America's immigration system is a socialist system because it is based on the socialist principle of central plan-

ning. Federal officials plan, in a top-down, command-and-control manner, the movements into the United States of millions of people. They determine the qualifications of immigrants and how many should be allocated to each country. They also look at job requirements and employment needs in the United States.

Socialist central planning is characterized by what Friedrich Hayek called "the fatal conceit."

There is a big problem with this type of socialist central planning: It cannot succeed. That's because socialism is an inherently defective economic system. No one can ever make it succeed. No matter how brilliant the immigration planners might be, they simply are unable to come up with an immigration plan that will not result in crisis and chaos. That's because it is impossible for the central planner to come up with the right number of immigrants, the right qualifications of immigrants, and the needs of American employers. It just cannot be done. Socialist central planning is characterized by what Friedrich Hayek called "the fatal conceit" — the conceit of the central planner, who honestly thinks that he has the

requisite wisdom and insight to plan something as complex as a labor market involving millions of people in constantly changing conditions and circumstances. It really shouldn't surprise anyone that America's immigration-control system has produced a never-ending, perpetual environment of crisis and chaos. The term that Ludwig von Mises used — “planned chaos” — perfectly describes the immigration system in American for the past 75 years.

There is no immigration reform that will ever end America's immigration crisis.

I always laugh when I read someone in the mainstream press say that Congress needs to enact “comprehensive immigration reform.” Don't you just love that phrase? The big problem, of course, is that there is no immigration reform that will ever end America's immigration crisis. That's because the crisis is rooted in America's system of immigration controls. No matter what reform is adopted and no matter how “comprehensive” it is, the crisis and the chaos will continue.

Of course, it's no different with the drug war. Decades of violence, corruption, crisis, and chaos, with

no end in sight. That's what happens when government attempts to control and regulate peaceful behavior. Recall Prohibition.

There is something else that is extremely important to note about America's system of immigration controls and its war on drugs: death. Both systems are notorious for bringing about the deaths of innocent people — lots of innocent people.

Just a few months ago, a Texas National Guardsman drowned in the Rio Grande trying to save a migrant woman who was trying to illegally enter the United States. A few years ago, a Mexican father and his young toddler daughter drowned in the same way.

Americans have become accustomed to the deaths of innocent people arising from the drug war. But the number of drug-war deaths arising in the United States pales in comparison to Mexico, where tens of thousands of people have been killed because of the drug war.

Only one solution

There is but one solution to all this death, suffering, crisis, chaos, and mayhem. Let me repeat that for emphasis: only one solution! That solution is liberty, free markets, and limited government. I repeat: There

is no other solution. For anyone who wants peace, prosperity, life, and harmony, necessary prerequisites are open borders and drug legalization. There is no other way. There is no “comprehensive immigration reform” that will work. There is also no drug-war “reform” that will work. The only thing that will work is open borders and drug legalization.

There is no immigration reform that will ever end America’s immigration crisis.

Think about the domestic United States. Think about how people are free to cross state borders, in both directions. There are no immigration-control agents at state borders. There is nobody keeping count of people who are crossing from state to state. No one is checking IDs or health certificates. Anyone — including murderers, rapists, terrorists, people with COVID-19, thieves, or simply people wanting to sell or buy goods, open businesses, or seeking employment — is free to cross state borders without control or restriction. No one asks where people are from or what their citizenship is. No one cares.

That is the solution to America’s never-ending, perpetual immigra-

tion crisis — the application of America’s system of domestic open borders to America’s international borders. No more deaths. No more immigration police state. Simply the free movements of people back and forth, just like across the domestic state borders.

Moreover, the total legalization of drugs — all drugs — is the only — repeat only — solution to America’s decades-long, never-ending drug-war crisis. Drug-war reform will simply not cut it. Any reform solution will continue to produce death, suffering, crisis, mayhem, and chaos.

Adhering to principles

One of the popular objections that both conservatives and conservative-oriented libertarians present in opposition to the libertarian case for open borders is that immigrants will come to the United States to get on welfare. In my entire life, I have never met one immigrant, legal or illegal, who has come to the United States to get on welfare. They have all — without exception — come here to work — to make money — to get rich.

But let’s assume that with a system of open borders 5 percent come to get on welfare. What conservatives and conservative-oriented lib-

ertarians are saying is that that such welfare recipients will cause taxes to go up. Conservatives and conservative-oriented libertarians do not want to pay higher taxes to fund that additional welfare. Therefore, they support America's socialist system of immigration controls and the immigration police state that comes with it.

However, where is the justice of preventing the 95 percent of people who want to work from freely coming to the United States just because 5 percent might go on welfare? Is it really fair to destroy their fundamental, natural, God-given rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness because some others might go on welfare? Moreover, it's not at all clear that the 5 percent going on welfare will result in higher taxes, given that the economic prosperity brought by the other 95 percent might far outweigh the higher taxes from those coming to get on welfare.

Most important, why should we libertarians abandon our principles simply because adhering to them might result in the payment of higher taxes? If we abandon our principles for the sake of expediency, then how are we different from conservatives and liberals (i.e., pro-

gressives) who do that all the time? I say: Let us libertarians continue to adhere to principle and continue to focus on ending welfare for everyone, including Americans.

After all, it's a virtual certainty that when drugs are legalized, some drug addicts will use Medicaid to seek treatment. Should we libertarians endorse the drug war until Medicaid is abolished? Perish the thought! That would bring a speedy end to our movement. We must continue to adhere to principle by advocating the complete legalization of all drugs and focus on ending Medicaid and all other welfare programs (including Social Security, Medicare, public schooling, school vouchers, farm subsidies, etc.)

Today, the world is mired in violence, death, suffering, crisis, and chaos. Libertarianism is the only way out of this morass. The world needs leadership, and the American people have the opportunity to do it. A great place to start is through the libertarian concepts of open borders and drug legalization.

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

Did the FBI Swing the 2020 Election?

by James Bovard



Joe Biden won the 2020 election as a result of 43,000 votes in three states. The election was far closer than the media has usually admitted. There were plenty of dubious factors that could have tipped the scales for a Biden victory, including machinations by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The long history of FBI abuse

Though the media usually portray the FBI as the ultimate good guys, the bureau has long history of intervening in presidential elections. Shortly after taking office after Franklin Roosevelt's death, President Harry Truman commented in his diary: "We want no Gestapo or Secret Police. FBI is tending in that direction. They are dabbling in sex-life scandals and plain blackmail.... This must stop." But FBI Director J.

Edgar Hoover outfoxed Truman and every subsequent president.

In the 1948 presidential campaign, Hoover brazenly championed Republican candidate Thomas Dewey, leaking allegations that Truman was part of a corrupt Kansas City political machine. In 1952, Hoover sought to undermine Democratic presidential candidate Adlai Stevenson by spreading rumors that he was a closet homosexual.

In 1964, the FBI illegally wiretapped Republican presidential candidate Barry Goldwater's presidential headquarters and plane and conducted background checks on his campaign staff for evidence of homosexual activity. The FBI also conducted an extensive surveillance operation at the 1964 Democratic National Convention to prevent embarrassing challenges to President Lyndon Johnson.

In 2016, the FBI whitewashed Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, protecting her despite her various crimes regarding handling of classified information and destruction of emails and other evidence from her time as secretary of state. An Inspector General report revealed in 2018 that the key FBI agents in the investigations were raving partisans. "We'll stop" Donald Trump from becoming

president, lead FBI investigator Peter Strzok texted his mistress/girlfriend, FBI lawyer Lisa Page, in August 2016. One FBI agent labeled Trump supporters as “retarded” and declared “I’m with her” [Hillary Clinton]. Another FBI employee texted that “Trump’s supporters are all poor to middle class, uneducated, lazy POS.” The FBI failed to make any audio or video recordings of its interviews with Clinton aides and staffers. It also delayed speaking to Clinton until the end of the investigation and planned to absolve her “absent a confession from Clinton,” the Inspector General noted.

The FBI knew that the laptop was bona fide but said nothing to undercut the falsehoods.

The FBI failed to stop Trump from winning in 2016, but FBI officials devoted themselves to crippling his presidency with fabricated evidence implying that Russia had illicitly intervened in the presidential election. One top FBI lawyer was convicted for falsifying evidence to secure a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act warrant to target Trump campaign officials. FBI chief James Comey leaked official memos to friendly reporters,

thereby spurring the appointment of Special Counsel Robert Mueller to investigate Trump. Mueller’s investigation generated endless allegations and controversies and helped Democrats capture control of the House of Representatives in 2018 prior to admitting in 2019 that there was no such Russian conspiracy. Not one FBI official has spent a single day in jail for the abuses.

The ongoing Hunter Biden laptop scandal

In December 2019, FBI agents came into possession of a laptop that Hunter Biden had abandoned at a Delaware computer repair shop. That laptop was a treasure trove of crimes, including evidence that Hunter and other Bidens had collected millions in payments from foreign sources for providing access in Washington and other favors. That laptop provided ample documentation that Joe Biden could be compromised by foreign powers.

When news finally leaked out about the laptop in October 2020, 50 former intelligence officials effectively torpedoed the story by claiming that the laptop was a Russian disinformation ploy. The FBI knew that the laptop was bona fide but said nothing to undercut the falsehoods by the former spooks.

The Justice Department commenced an investigation of Hunter Biden in 2019, but Attorney General William Barr made sure that information did not surface publicly before the 2020 election. (The investigation is ongoing.)

The FBI has continued its pro-Democrat campaigns

The FBI's most brazen intervention in the 2020 election consisted of fabricating a ludicrous plot to kidnap Michigan governor Gretchen Whitmer, one of Biden's favorite governors. Michigan was a swing state in the election. Whitmer enraged many Michiganders by placing the entire state under house arrest after the outbreak of COVID-19. Anyone who left their home to visit family or friends risked a \$1,000 fine, and business owners faced three years in prison for refusing to close their stores. Unemployment soared to 24 percent statewide, but Whitmer's policies failed to prevent more than 2 million Michiganders from contracting COVID.

The FBI exploited the anger against Whitmer to try to add some scalps to their collection. A few weeks before the 2020 election, the FBI announced the arrests of individuals who had been lured by FBI

informants and undercover agents to talk about capturing Whitmer and putting her on trial. After the arrests were announced, Whitmer speedily denounced Trump for inciting "domestic terrorism" and declared, "When our leaders meet with, encourage, and or fraternize with domestic terrorists, they legitimize their actions. They are complicit."

The FBI exploited the anger against Whitmer to try to add some scalps to their collection.

Joe Biden claimed that the arrests showed President Trump's "tolerance of hate, vengeance, and lawlessness to plots such as this one." Former FBI official Frank Figluzzi told MSNBC that Trump should be investigated for "aiding and abetting" the Michigan plot. Former FBI deputy director Andrew McCabe announced on CNN: "The person most responsible for fomenting this kind of unrest, this sort of division, this sort of violence in this country right now is the president of the United States." Law professor Jonathan Turley noted:

The media went into a frenzy, declaring that the case proved that: "Trump's rhetoric and

policies have unleashed a second pandemic in the form of far-right domestic terrorism.’ The breathless accounts of this plot by three ‘Boogaloo’ militiamen fit like a glove with the narrative just before the election.

There was plenty of reason to doubt the plot from the start. As I noted in an American Institute for Economic Research article on the day after the arrests were announced, “The alleged Michigan plot is almost too idiotic to believe.”

A Michigan jury in April effectively concluded that the plotters had been entrapped in an FBI-fabricated plot. There were as many FBI informants and undercover agents involved in the plot as private citizens. From the start, the FBI steered the participants into saying and doing things that would supposedly seal their legal doom. Stephen Robeson, an FBI informant with a list of felonies and other crimes, organized key events to build the movement. Dan Chapel, another FBI informant who was paid \$54,000, became second-in-command and masterminded the military training for the group, even as he helped the feds wiretap their messages.

FBI operatives took the participants, who prattled idiotically about stealing a Blackhawk helicopter, for drives near Whitmer’s vacation home, which supposedly proved they were going to nab the governor and unleash havoc. Shortly before that excursion, an FBI agent texted instructions to Chapel: “Mission is to kill the governor specifically.”

A Michigan jury in April effectively concluded that the plotters had been entrapped in an FBI-fabricated plot.

The conspiracy began unraveling even before the trial began in March. Robert Trask, the lead FBI agent and “the public face” of the kidnapping case, was fired after he was arrested for “beating his wife during an argument over an orgy that the two had attended at a hotel in Kalamazoo, Mich.,” the *New York Times* reported. Two other key FBI agents were sidelined from the case for misconduct (including creating a side hustle with their own cybersecurity firm).

Thanks to Supreme Court rulings minimizing entrapment defenses, federal Judge Robert Jonker blocked defense attorneys from informing the jury of almost all the

evidence of federal misconduct in the Whitmer case.

As BuzzFeed's Ken Bensinger reported, the jury refused to convict "despite the government's extraordinary efforts to muzzle the defense.... Prosecutors went to extraordinary lengths to exclude evidence and witnesses that might undermine their arguments, while winning the right to bring in almost anything favorable to their own side." BuzzFeed also noted that the judge "ruled that defendants could not inquire about the past conduct of several FBI agents, though the government would be allowed to question the defendants about episodes in their own past."

How many additional crimes or conspiracies is the FBI fomenting at this moment?

The jury saw enough to smell a federal rat. As Turley wrote:

The Whitmer conspiracy was a production written, funded, and largely populated by FBI agents and informants. At every point, FBI literally drove the conspirators and controlled their actions. That is worthy of investigation by Congress, but neither house

seems even marginally interested.

The Michigan jury verdict spurred plenty of howls by the friends of Leviathan. Former Justice Department lawyer Barbara McQuade lamented, "This verdict concerns me because it could embolden other anti-government extremists to engage in dangerous conduct in the name of vigilante justice. In a time when we see a growing number of threats of violence against public officials, it is important to hold such conduct accountable." But the establishment media has perennially disregarded holding government officials accountable for violating Americans' rights.

The ongoing FBI threat to liberty

Shortly before the Michigan trial began, the *New York Times* noted that it was "being closely watched as one of the most significant recent domestic terrorism cases, a test of Washington's commitment in the wake of the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol to pursue far-right groups who seek to kindle a violent, anti-government insurgency or even a new civil war." FBI chief Christopher Wray told Congress last year that the FBI has 2,000 ongoing do-

mestic terrorism investigations. How many additional crimes or conspiracies is the FBI fomenting at this moment? Will Americans ever learn what role, if any, the FBI had in goading some of those arrested in the Jan. 6 Capitol clash into committing a crime? And what about Team Biden's efforts to continually expand the definition of "dangerous extremist" to sanctify its power? Last June, the Biden administration revealed that guys who can't get laid may be terrorist threats due to "involuntary celibate-violent extremism." No wonder the terrorist watch list is expanding at breakneck pace.

The Founding Fathers wisely did not create a national police force, but federal law-enforcement agencies have multiplied like mushrooms. Almost 100 years ago, the American Civil Liberties Union warned that the FBI had become "a secret police system of a political character." Neither Congress nor federal courts have since effectively

reined in the most powerful domestic federal agency. What mischief will the FBI commit to influence future elections? And what are the odds that Americans will know about it before the polling booths close?

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:
"America's Culture of Death"
by Jacob G. Hornberger
**"Lessons from Biden's
Disinformation Board
Debacle"**
by James Bovard

It is not by the intermeddling of ... the omniscient and omnipotent State, but by the prudence and energy of the people, that England has hitherto been carried forward in civilization; and it is to the same prudence and the same energy that we now look with comfort and good hope. Our rulers will best promote the improvement of the nation by strictly confining themselves to their own legitimate duties, by leaving capital to find its most lucrative course, commodities their fair price, industry and intelligence their natural reward, idleness and folly their natural punishment, by maintaining peace, by defending property, by diminishing the price of law, and by observing strict economy in every department of the state. Let the Government do this: the People will assuredly do the rest.

— Thomas Babington Macaulay

Libertarian Litmus Tests

by *Laurence M. Vance*



It was hundreds of years ago that scientists discovered that litmus, a water-soluble coloring matter obtained from lichens, turns red in acid solutions and blue in alkaline solutions, thus functioning as a litmus test to indicate the relative pH of a substance. On a scale of 0 to 14, a neutral solution (water) has a pH of 7.0, while solutions with a pH below 7.0 are acidic (battery acid is 0) and solutions with a pH above 7.0 are alkaline (drain cleaner is 14). It has been less than a hundred years that the term “litmus test” has become a metaphor for a single-factor test that reveals the true nature of someone or something or that suggests what someone thinks about a wider range of related things. It is interesting that litmus test strips turn different de-

grees of red or blue, since for some time now, red has been associated with Republicans and blue has been associated with Democrats. And both political parties have their litmus tests.

Republican litmus tests

The number one litmus test for Republicans is abortion. According to the Republican Party platform:

We assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment’s protections apply to children before birth.

We oppose the use of public funds to perform or promote abortion or to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood, so long as they provide or refer for elective abortions or sell fetal body parts rather than provide healthcare.

We will not fund or subsidize healthcare that includes abortion coverage.

Since 1980, Republicans have imposed an abortion litmus test on judicial appointments to the Supreme Court.

Yet, for decades, Republicans have funded Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the country. In spite of what the Republicans say in their platform, because Planned Parenthood's funds are fungible, they are either directly funding abortions or, by ostensibly allocating money to other medical services, freeing up funds to provide abortions. Republicans also generally envision a federal role on the abortion issue even though the Constitution doesn't authorize the federal government to have one. Before *Roe v. Wade* (1973), some states had laws against abortion and some didn't. And that is how it should be under our federal system of government.

For decades, Republicans have funded Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the country.

Another litmus test for Republicans is a strong national defense, that is, higher defense spending. Although the Biden administration asked Congress to approve an increase in the Pentagon's budget to

\$773 billion in the next fiscal year — an increase of \$30 billion from last year — this was not good enough for the GOP militarists in Congress. Sen. James Inhofe (R-Okla.), the senior Republican on the Senate Armed Services Committee, said Biden's fiscal year 2023 budget neglects to "sufficiently account" for inflation. "America must spend more on defense," said Kori Schake, a senior fellow and director of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute (AEI):

Confronting emerging international dangers will require a dramatic increase in Washington's spending, and the administration's proposal is insufficient. The longer policymakers wait to make up this shortfall, the greater the risk the United States runs of operating without the forces it needs to win wars, and the more it tempts autocrats into taking advantage of American deficiencies.

Democratic litmus tests

The number one litmus test for Democrats is also abortion, but in the opposite direction. According to the Democratic Party platform:

Democrats are committed to protecting and advancing reproductive health, rights, and justice. We believe unequivocally, like the majority of Americans, that every woman should be able to access high-quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion.

Democrats oppose and will fight to overturn federal and state laws that create barriers to reproductive health and rights. We will repeal the Hyde Amendment, and protect and codify the right to reproductive freedom.

Democrats oppose restrictions on medication abortion care that are inconsistent with the most recent medical and scientific evidence and that do not protect public health.

It used to be the case that outside of abortion, Democratic Party platforms and acceptance speeches rarely imposed other litmus tests. Lately, though, several such tests have been entertained: free college, Medicare for all, abolition of the Electoral College, a \$15 minimum wage, expansion of the Supreme Court, the Green New Deal, and increased LGBT rights.

The latest Democratic litmus test is procedural rather than ideological: ending the filibuster in the U.S. Senate. According to *Washington Post* political columnist Paul Waldman, the case for the removal of the filibuster “is so obvious that we no longer need to spend time on that debate.” He believes that “it’s now time for a real litmus test.” Democrats must “place filibuster reform at the absolute center of their agenda and their identity.” To Democrats, he says: “It’s time to say that if you don’t want to reform the filibuster then you can’t call yourself a Democrat in good standing.” This means: “If you’re already in office, Democrats should run primaries against you if you don’t support filibuster reform. If you haven’t been elected yet, no primary voter should accept that you’re sincere in what you say you believe.”

Waldman laments that “many Democrats have gotten away with not taking a clear position on this issue,” and that only “34 of the Senate’s 50 Democrats have clearly advocated eliminating or altering the filibuster.” He would even “apply this litmus test to Democrats running for offices other than senator, if only as proof that they believe what they say.”

Libertarian litmus tests

Libertarianism is quite different from the conservatism and liberalism that Republicans and Democrats identify with, and libertarians have their own litmus tests as well. Libertarianism is the philosophy that says that people should be free from individual, societal, or government interference to live their lives any way they desire, pursue their own happiness, accumulate wealth, assess their own risks, make their own choices, participate in any economic activity for their profit, engage in commerce with anyone who is willing to reciprocate, and spend the fruits of their labor as they see fit. As long as people don't violate the personal or property rights of others, and as long as their actions are peaceful, their associations are voluntary, and their interactions are consensual, they should be free to live their lives without license, regulation, interference, or molestation by the government. What follows are four key issues and a libertarian litmus test for each issue to judge one's commitment to the libertarian philosophy.

Foreign policy. U.S. foreign policy is aggressive, reckless, belligerent, and meddling — and has been for over a century. Among other things, this results in a terrible mis-

use of the nation's military, which leads to the unnecessary expenditure of blood and treasure. This has happened only because the country's leaders have strayed far afield from the noninterventionist foreign policy of the Founders. The United States is not the world's policeman. Therefore, the United States should not guarantee the security of any country, go abroad "seeking monsters to destroy," change regimes, take sides in civil wars and territorial disputes, defend other countries, enforce UN resolutions, or carry out assassinations. And the United States certainly shouldn't garrison the planet with hundreds of bases and thousands of troops.

Libertarianism is the philosophy that says that people should be free from individual, societal, or government interference.

The best litmus test to judge one's commitment to the libertarian philosophy of nonintervention is the war in Ukraine. The war in Ukraine is different, say many people who would otherwise be inclined to the United States having a noninterventionist foreign policy. The reasons for their change of opinion are varied: Vladimir Putin is another Adolf Hitler; Russia

wants to retake Eastern Europe; Russian soldiers are killing civilians, including women and children; Russia wants to absorb Ukraine, like Germany did with Austria during World War II; Russia is committing genocide; or Russian soldiers are committing torture, rape, atrocities, and war crimes. What is then usually said or implied is that the United States (meaning, the U.S. government) should send money, weapons, and supplies to “help” Ukraine.

But the terrible truth is simply this: Even if Russia had killed every person in Ukraine — men, women, and children — razed every building, destroyed all the infrastructure, and turned the whole of Ukraine into a parking lot, the United States should still have not intervened. If Americans — individually or collectively — want to “do something” about Ukraine, then let them send their own money or go fight on behalf of Ukraine. But it is not the business of the U.S. government to force Americans to do either.

Drugs. There should be no laws at any level of government for any reason regarding the buying, selling, growing, processing, transporting, manufacturing, advertising, using, possessing, or “trafficking” of any drug for any reason. All govern-

ment agencies devoted to fighting the war on drugs should be abolished, and the war on drugs should be ended completely and immediately. There should be a free market in drugs without any government interference in the form of regulation, oversight, restrictions, taxing, rules, or licensing. Although this is true of government at any level, the federal war on drugs is especially egregious because the Constitution nowhere authorizes the federal government to have anything to do with criminalizing, prohibiting, or regulating any drug in any way.

Even if Russia had killed every person in Ukraine, the United States should still have not intervened.

The best litmus test to judge one’s commitment to the libertarian philosophy of drug freedom is the question of fentanyl. Fentanyl is a synthetic opioid pain reliever that is 50 times more potent than heroin and 100 times more potent than morphine. It is approved by the FDA for treating severe pain. Many who recognize the folly of marijuana prohibition laws draw the line at the government legalizing fentanyl. They say things like: fentanyl is just too dangerous, fentanyl overdoses

have risen substantially, just a little bit of fentanyl will kill you, America is in the midst of a fentanyl crisis, fentanyl is hugely profitable for drug dealers, fentanyl overdoses are the leading cause of death for adults between the ages of 18 and 45, unsuspecting Americans are being poisoned with fentanyl-laced drugs, or I know someone who lost a child to a fentanyl overdose.

But as bad and as dangerous as fentanyl is, the government still shouldn't prohibit it or lock people up for selling it, possessing it, or using it. In fact, laws against fentanyl are impossible to reconcile with a limited government and a free society. It is not the job of government to keep people from harming themselves — no matter how dangerous a substance is. It is not the purpose of government to punish people for using mood-altering or mind-altering substances — even if they might kill the user. It is an illegitimate function of government to concern itself with people's medical or recreational drug habits — no matter how reckless they are.

Trade. Trade is voluntary commercial exchange, usually of a good or service for cash. Although trade is properly just engaging in commerce, it is commonly what we call international commerce. And just

as people have the natural right to engage in domestic commerce, so they have the natural right to engage in international commerce. Free trade is simply the freedom of individuals or businesses to buy products from and sell products to other individuals or businesses in any other country without government regulations, sanctions, restrictions, subsidies, rules, barriers, tariffs, quotas, or anti-dumping laws. Free trade does not need trade ministers, trade representatives, trade negotiators, trade agencies, trade agreements, trade treaties, or trade organizations. It just needs a willing buyer and a willing seller, each of whom benefits from engaging in commerce across country borders. Free trade is part and parcel of a free society.

Laws against fentanyl are impossible to reconcile with a limited government and a free society.

The best litmus test to judge one's commitment to the libertarian philosophy of free trade is the question of trade with China. "We don't beat China in trade," said former president Donald Trump on many occasions, as if trade was a national game in which some countries are

winners and some are losers. Many conservatives who used to consider themselves “free traders” believe that an exception should be made when it comes to trade with China. The reasons are varied: China is a communist country, China has an authoritarian government, China disregards human rights, China has state-owned or partially state-owned industries, China has forced labor camps, China persecutes religious groups and ethnic minorities, or China does not practice fair trade. This is all based on the fallacies that trade takes place between countries and that the government should manage trade.

Countries don’t engage in trade, people do. One government doesn’t buy up goods from domestic businesses and sell them to other governments. And it is not the proper role of government to manage trade. In a free society, if someone in the United States doesn’t like what goes on in China, he can choose to not purchase goods from Chinese firms or American firms that have manufacturing plants in China. But it is wrong for the U.S. government to restrict trade with China or impose higher tariffs on imports from China.

Education. The federal government has been granted no authority

by the Constitution to have anything to do with the education of any student at any grade level. This means that there should be no federal student loans, Pell grants, school breakfast or lunch programs, school-accreditation agencies, Head Start, Higher Education Act, Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Education for All Handicapped Children Act, special-education or bilingual-education or Title IX mandates, Common Core, research grants to colleges and universities, math and science initiatives, and, of course, no Department of Education.

Countries don’t engage in trade, people do.

The federal government also has no authority to subsidize, regulate, or interfere in any way with a state’s public-education system. But that’s not all. At both the federal and state levels, there should be a complete separation of school and state. It is an illegitimate purpose of government to have anything to do with education. It is not the job of government to provide educational services any more than it is the job of government to provide other services. In a free society, there would be no property taxes earmarked for

public schools because there would be no public schools. In addition, there would be no regulation, accreditation, or control of private schools, no mandatory attendance laws, no teacher-certification standards, and no state departments of education. All education would be privately provided and privately funded. Parents would be solely responsible for the education of their children. No American would be forced to pay for the education of any other Americans or their children.

The best litmus test to judge one's commitment to the libertarian philosophy of separating education from the state is the question of vouchers. Many who decry the condition of the nation's public schools continually posit "school choice" as the answer to problems with public education. But what is libertarian about giving some Americans the choice of where to spend other Americans' money to educate their children? The essence of educational vouchers is that money is taken by force from some Americans and given to other Americans. Vouchers are not an intermediate step toward a free market in education. Government spending on vouchers doesn't mean that less money will

be spent on public schools. Vouchers are simply a form of welfare and education socialism. Once government vouchers for education are deemed to be acceptable, no reasonable or logical argument can be made against the government's providing vouchers for any other service.

Republicans and Democrats who are said to be libertarian-leaning or libertarian-esque because they say or do certain things need to take some libertarian litmus tests. And unfortunately, so do some libertarians.

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NEXT MONTH:
"It's Up to Them"
by Laurence M. Vance

Would You Abdicate If You Could Be the Dictator?

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by Richard M. Ebeling



Leonard E. Read, the founding and long-serving first president of the Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), once told a story about when he first met the famous Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises. It was in 1940, shortly after Mises had arrived in the United States from war-torn Europe. Read had invited Mises to Los Angeles to deliver a talk to the local Chamber of Commerce.

Later that evening, Read hosted a dinner party at his home with several prominent free-market-oriented economists and California businessmen. Toward the end of the conversations about collectivist trends in America, one of the guests asked Mises, “Now, let us suppose you were the dictator of these Unit-

ed States. What would you do?”

Read said, “Quick as a flash came the reply, ‘I would abdicate!’” Read went on to say that in his mind, Mises’s response was an instance of the wisdom of how little any one of us knows to presume to plan — “dictate” — what others in society should do and how they should live.

Political paternalists want to run your life

Alas, we are surrounded with far too many people who presume to do just that. These political paternalists and social engineers arrogantly advocate the use of political power to tell us how to live, where to work (and at what prices or wages), with whom to interact (and in which ways), and to design our wider societal future. Virtually none of them seem to have any doubts or hesitation that they know what is better for all of us than we do.

They know the salaries we should earn. They know the work environment that is right for us. They know the language people should use in communicating with each other. They know the forms and types of human associations that are to be prohibited or insisted on. They know what we should buy

and the prices we should pay. They know the medical care, the schooling, the retirement plans that each of us should have. They know whose incomes are “too high” and whose are “too low.” They know the cars we should drive, the houses we should live in, the kind of communities in which we should reside.

Reflect on practically anything in your private life or your social interactions, and the political paternalists know all about it better than you. This applies to both modern American liberals and conservatives. The types and content of the governmental rules, regulations, restrictions, and controls might vary, or the emphasis may differ, but almost all these modern liberals and conservatives have “a plan” that amounts to them playing dictator over your life and everyone else’s.

Many Americans want to change the constitutional order

Why do so many Americans accept this state of affairs and offer so little resistance? I would suggest that far too many of our fellow citizens have little or no idea about what a free society could or should look like or appreciate the value of such a free society now or in the future. That seems a stark statement, but let us look at the recent public

opinion poll results from a survey of Democrats and Republicans by Hart Research Associates that was reported in *The New Republic* online (April 14, 2022).

Modern liberals and conservatives have “a plan” that amounts to them playing dictator over your life.

While a majority of Democrats (52 percent) and Republicans (56 percent) said that the American constitutional order was basically sound and needed only minor changes to improve it, 48 percent of Democrats and 44 percent of Republicans called for a complete or major change in the U.S. constitutional system. When asked what “democracy” means to them, only 47 percent of Republicans said “individual rights and liberties are protected,” and that number dropped to 28 percent among Democrats. On the other hand, nearly 40 percent of Democrats said democracy means straight majority rule, implying little regard for threats to individual liberty from majority decision-making.

Part of the federalist system under the American Constitution is the Electoral College, which is meant to prevent domination by a

few heavily populated areas over the rest of the country in presidential elections. The same applies to the U.S. Senate, with two senators for each state, while the membership in the House of Representatives reflects the population sizes of the various states. But in this opinion survey, 84 percent of Democrats think presidents should be elected by simple national majorities. Almost half of Republicans in the poll (48 percent) agreed with them. Also, 41 percent of Democrats thought it was a bad thing (anti-democratic) that each state has two senators regardless of population size. Nearly 30 percent of Republicans said the same.

Many Americans want more paternalism and less freedom

The survey also asked people if they thought the federal government should have the power to “get things done and solve problems.” Seventy-three percent of Democrats said yes, and 45 percent of Republicans agreed. Not surprisingly, therefore, only 27 percent of Democrats supported limiting the powers of the federal government; a small majority of Republicans (55 percent) wanted to limit the federal government. When asked whether government mandates for vaccina-

tions and mask-wearing were threats to democracy in America, 80 percent of Democrats and 40 percent of Republicans said no.

Only 27 percent of Democrats supported limiting the powers of the federal government.

Asked if people should have “the personal freedom to do as they please,” merely 21 percent of Democrats thought that would be a good idea, while only 38 percent of Republicans thought greater personal freedom would be desirable. In line with this, 53 percent of Republicans wanted political leaders in power reflecting and implicitly imposing their values on others. About 40 percent of Democrats agreed. Clearly not liking some recent Supreme Court decisions, 72 percent of Democrats said the number of justices on the court should be increased. Thirty percent of Republicans also wanted this. This used to be called “court packing.”

Summing up part of this, the survey asked Democrats how they view Republicans, as political opponents who they disagreed with (57 percent) or as political enemies who are a threat to their values and way of life (43 percent). Fifty-three percent of Republicans said they

viewed Democrats as political opponents, and 47 percent of them considered Democrats as enemies of their values and way of life. Asked the hypothetical question of where they would want to live if the United States were to be divided into two separate nations, 85 percent of Democrats would want to live in a “blue” America, and 89 percent of Republicans would prefer to live in the “red” part of America.

Of course, it is always necessary to be leery of public-opinion polls, since the answers closely depend on the way the questions are framed and how the selection has been made as to whom will be polled. Plus, the survey was done for *The New Republic*, which has its own “progressive” political axes to grind. Nonetheless, it does give a certain snapshot of attitudes about politics and the role of government in America today.

Not only political and ideological elites want more paternalism

One thing that especially stands out, in my view, is that political paternalism and social engineering is not merely a governmental power grab by an ideological elite against the wishes and beliefs of the American people. Far too many of our fellow Americans want that paternal-

ism and social engineering, as reflected in the answers to a good number of these survey questions.

**In the political arena,
getting things done means
government telling people what
to do and how to do it.**

The responses to the questions about whether the federal government should have the power to “get things done and solve problems” and whether individuals should have more “personal freedom to do as they please” are really two sides of the same coin. If the federal government is to have the authority to “get things done,” individuals cannot be allowed “to do as they please.” In the political arena, getting things done means government telling people what to do and how to do it. The government takes on the role of social planner, and the people must be the obedient responders to the plans, regulations, and restrictions imposed on them.

A lot of Americans, in other words, want that dictator over them to tell them how to live, work, earn, and act. Of course, ask any of those who responded in this way to the survey questions as to what they expect any political paternalist or social engineer to actually implement,

and they would assume, no doubt, that the political agenda imposed would be the one they wanted.

Each wants more paternalism for what they want

This is seen in the answers to the question about whether you see those in the other major political party as merely an “opponent” or as an “enemy” threatening your values and way of life. Either my values and way of life are imposed on others, or theirs are imposed on me. It is my preferred paternalist dictators setting government policy, or it is theirs. Government is getting things done the way I want them to be done, or government is using its authority to get things done the way they want.

A number of our fellow Americans want to weaken or abolish those constitutional barriers.

Either way, one of us is made to live in ways and with values with which we may partly or totally disagree. It is not too surprising, therefore, that within this political mindset and governmental system, Democrats would prefer to live in a “blue” America and Republicans would want to live in a “red” America. Otherwise, you are not only un-

der the control of a political opponent but what amounts to your fundamental ideological enemy. If democratic government is presumed inescapably to be a form of paternalist dictatorship, then better mine than yours.

It is often said that a paternalist elite wants to undermine the traditional American constitutional order precisely because it limits their ability to control, plan, and direct the society. Federalism, with its various elements of checks and balances to restrain and inhibit undo concentration and abuse of political power, had long been considered essential as a means to prevent government from abridging or abolishing the liberty of individuals. Yet, this survey highlights that a noticeable number of our fellow Americans want to weaken or abolish those constitutional barriers precisely so government will have more centralized and arbitrary authority to “get things done.”

Democratic despotism in place of constitutional limits

What many of those Democrats and Republicans seem to want is a greater “democratic despotism.” Eliminating the Electoral College in presidential elections would make selection of who occupies the White

House, with all the executive power that the office holds, a matter of a simple national majority. A handful of more “blue” paternalist states would be able to easily impose their will on all others in the country. This preference was held not only by a large majority of the Democrats in the survey but also by almost half of the Republicans. A lot of Americans think that sheer numbers at the voting booth should decide what freedoms people will be left with, under a government expected to “get things done.”

What many of those Democrats and Republicans seem to want is a greater “democratic despotism.”

This is shown in the desire by over 70 percent of Democrats to pack the Supreme Court with additional members so as to ensure that the “biases” among Supreme Court justices can be more in line with a presumed majority of the electorate and its government representatives. Not a rule of law based on general principles of individual rights and limited government but rather the unrestrained democratic “will of the people” should determine what the court decides to be the law of the land.

De Tocqueville’s warning of tyranny with a democratic face

The French social philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville explained the nature of such a democratic despotism in a famous passage in his *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (1840):

After having thus taken each individual one by one into its powerful hands, and having molded him as it pleases, the sovereign power extends its arms over the entire society; it covers the surface of society with a network of small, complicated, minute, and uniform rules, which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot break through to go beyond the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them and directs them; it rarely forces action, but it constantly opposes your acting; it does not destroy, it prevents birth; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, it represses, it enervates, it extinguishes, it stupefies, and finally it reduces each nation to being nothing more than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.

I have always believed that this sort of servitude, regulat-

ed, mild and peaceful, of which I have just done the portrait, could be combined better than we imagine with some of the external forms of liberty, and that it would not be impossible for it to be established in the very shadow of the sovereignty of the people.

Elites have influenced people, but people now want paternalism

It might be said that while many in society may express a desire for or an acceptance of government as political paternalist and social engineer, this sentiment is still the product of a political elite that greatly influences the government educational system through which most in the society pass. It also includes an elite in the information media that espouses the same democratic despotism and which is supported by ideologically motivated and various special interest groups who want their ideas and policies imposed on everyone.

All this is most certainly true. Many, if not most, people in society accept the prevailing ideas in the country into which they have been born and which have enveloped the culture and politics of the communities in which they live. There is a reason that some people who ap-

pear to break out of this mold are call “free thinkers,” and very often not as a compliment. They swim against the stream of the ideas and ideals of the society in which they find themselves. That is why frequently they get labelled as “fringe” or “extremist” or “radical.”

There is a reason that some people who appear to break out of this mold are call “free thinkers,” and very often not as a compliment.

When Ludwig von Mises responded to that questioner at Leonard Read’s dinner party who asked what he would do if he was “dictator” of the United States, that he, Mises, would “abdicate,” that was a fringe or extremist or radical answer. After all, if “I” or “you” were in absolute power, wouldn’t it be possible to, finally, set everything right? Cut government down to size; free people from the hindrances and restrictions of government regulations and controls; cut government spending, reduce taxes, and end the budget deficits; stop the central bank from controlling and printing money; and follow a general policy of non-interventionism at home and abroad.

Pushing a button ending paternalism would not end it

If only you or I were in charge, we could all be “free at last.” Or would we? Shortly after Leonard Read opened the doors of FEE in 1946, he delivered a talk at the Detroit Economic Club with the title, “I’d Push the Button.” He said that if there was a button on the podium from which he was speaking that, if pushed, would abolish all the government regulations and controls over all economic and social activities in America, he would push that button. With one push of the button, the United States would have a fully free-market, limited-government society.

But Read went on to say that if it was possible to push such a button, within little time, that new freedom would be reversed. Many, if not all, the regulations, restrictions, and redistributions would be back in place. Why? Because far too many Americans want government for all of those paternalistic things. The reason no such button pushing was necessary through a good part of nineteenth-century America was because most Americans during that earlier time believed in and wanted a society of widespread individual liberty, freedom of enterprise and trade, and a government limit-

ed to securing people’s individual rights rather than abridging them.

Most Americans during that earlier time believed in and wanted a society of widespread individual liberty.

That dramatically began to change in the twentieth century. Yes, an elite of intellectuals, academics, and ideological proselytizers made the case for a bigger, a more intrusive, a more paternalistic political and economic system. These molders of ideas succeeded in changing people’s minds and therefore the climate of opinion and beliefs about the role of government in society and what people should expect from those in political office.

Is America worth defending, and if so, why?

But the fact remains that this view of government is now shared and believed in by a large number of Americans. This is exacerbated, I would say, by how little the average American knows about the founding ideas and history of his own country. Again, the intellectual, academic, and ideological elites have helped create this dilemma, and they continue to maintain it.

That is why, for instance, they are so intent on embedding the 1619 Project into the educational curriculum from grade school through the university. If America was founded in and is based on racism since the first slaves arrived in colonial Virginia, then the notions of individual freedom, freedom of association, freedoms of speech and the press, etc., have all been shams, ruses to rationalize the oppression by one racial and gender group over all others. The spirit of 1776 is just a lie.

How little the average American knows about the founding ideas and history of his own country.

Who would want to defend or justify that? As one indication, in an opinion poll taken in March 2022, shortly after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, those surveyed were asked if they would stay and defend the United States if it were to be invaded by a foreign country like Putin's Russia. In the 18 to 34 age group, only 45 percent said yes to that question. For those over 50, that number rose to 66 percent. Only 40 percent of Democrats said they would stay and defend America against an invader. After all, if America is an inescapably racist na-

tion, who cares if someone like Putin were to conquer the country and impose his own authoritarian regime? Six of one, half a dozen of the other.

But for those who say they would stay and defend the United States against an aggressive invader, what would they be fighting for? If that Hart Research opinion survey is in any way accurate, too many Americans would be fighting to protect the American version of the paternalist and social engineering state.

There is nothing wrong for wanting to defend one's family, community, or nation when threatened and attacked by either domestic or foreign aggressors. That is the meaning of self-defense in protection of one's rights and liberty. But if a successful defense against some foreign tyrant were to leave America with its own version of a democratic despotism of the interventionist-welfare state, it would be a hollow victory.

Our fellow Americans need to be reasoned with to better understand that we should not only not want a dictatorship imposed from outside but we should also not want a domestic dictatorship, even when democratically elected, to paternalistically "get things done." We each

must give up the idea, “If only I was dictator, I know how to set things right.” Each of us has to see the correctness in Ludwig von Mises’s answer to that question and say, “I would abdicate.” That is the answer that any free person should know to and want to give.

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ics at Northwood University and at Hillsdale College and president of The Foundation for Economic Education, and served as vice president of academic affairs for FFE.

NEXT MONTH:
**“Out of Control Government
and Isaiah’s Job”**
by Richard M. Ebeling

The fundamental problem is that we believe that health insurance is something that only should be received as a gift — never obtained for oneself. Thus, we immediately assume that when a family does not have health insurance, they are to be pitied for not having received the gift, rather than being blamed for not having taken responsibility.

— Arnold Kling

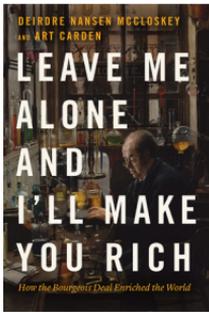
Mankind soon learn to make interested uses of every right and power which they possess, or may assume. The public money and public liberty ... will soon be discovered to be sources of wealth and dominion to those who hold them; distinguished, too, by this tempting circumstance, that they are the instrument, as well as the object of acquisition. With money we will get men, said Caesar, and with men we will get money. Nor should our assembly be deluded by the integrity of their own purposes, and conclude that these unlimited powers will never be abused, because themselves are not disposed to abuse them. They should look forward to a time, and that not a distant one, when a corruption in this, as in the country from which we derive our origin, will have seized the heads of government, and be spread by them through the body of the people; when they will purchase the voices of the people, and make them pay the price.

— Thomas Jefferson

Leave Me Alone and I'll Make You Rich, Part 2

by George C. Leef

Leave Me Alone and I'll Make You Rich — How the Bourgeois Deal Enriched the World by Deirdre Nansen McCloskey and Art Carden (University of Chicago Press, 2020).



McCloskey and Carden also devote many chapters to refuting mistaken ideas about the reasons for the Great Enrichment.

Many economists have explained it as a result of capital accumulation, but the authors disagree. They point out that capital, while *necessary* for progress, is not sufficient. Capital has existed in most societies above bare subsistence, and yet no enrichment took

off. There won't be any noticeable progress unless capital can be used by people to try out new ideas, and that requires the liberal "Bourgeois Deal."

How about education? No, that isn't the reason either. In England and elsewhere, the enrichment was not driven by "educated" people. Most had little formal schooling. Instead, they had practical knowledge acquired from their work as mechanics, artisans, and engineers. To give just one revealing example, the problem of calculating longitude was not solved by an eminent scientist but by John Harrison, a carpenter from rural Lincolnshire. Of course, McCloskey and Carden are not against schooling but see no reason why government should subsidize it.

And while on the subject of education, the authors observe that one of the reasons why Britain developed and prospered faster than its long-time rival France was that its industrious young men were more likely to go work in business than the military. That was part of the price the French paid for the aggression of rulers like Louis XIV — talented people were drained away from the innovism of commerce to serve the national ambitions of kings.

Many statisticians are certain that the reason why the West got rich is because it used imperialism to exploit hapless native peoples. That belief is useful to them since it paves the way for government programs to redistribute wealth internationally. While the authors have nothing good to say about the imperialism of Spain, France, England, Portugal, and other nations, they show that it had nothing to do with their economic advancement. Quite the opposite, imperialism absorbed wealth that would otherwise have been used productively.

McCloskey and Carden quote the great French liberal Jean-Baptiste Say: "Dominion by land or sea will appear equally destitute of attraction, when it comes to be generally understood that all of its advantages rest with the rulers, and that the [home] subjects derive no benefit whatever." Imperialism existed long before the Great Enrichment and never sparked any improvement in life for regular people. The Enrichment came about not because of imperialism but in spite of it in those countries that adopted liberalism.

Another currently popular explanation for the wealth of some nations (especially the United States) is that it was due to slavery.

Among "progressives" in recent years, it has become fashionable to maintain that slavery was the cause of society's wealth, and since the unfairness of slavery still has lingering effects, government reparation programs must be undertaken. The problem is that enslaving others is no way to earn great profits, much less catalyze economic growth. "Slavery," the authors write, "is a common if horrible human institution. If slavery led to Great Enrichment, it would have happened in the slave societies of Greece or Rome."

Imperialism existed long before the Great Enrichment and never sparked any improvement in life for regular people.

McCloskey and Carden then take a scalpel to the academic literature that supports the idea that slavery was what made western nations rich, finding it riddled with errors, and conclude by observing that slavery was ended due to the efforts of people who had earned fortunes the liberal way — through commerce.

For readers who still might not be sold on the attractiveness of "the Bourgeois Deal," the authors contrast it with four other "deals" that

humans have had thrust upon them. There was the Blue Blood Deal, where people had to bow down, pay taxes, and fight wars for aristocrats, who might end up protecting them from the coercion of other aristocrats. There's also the Bolshevik Deal, the essence of which was (and is): "Do your assigned task, turn over the fruits of your labor for distribution by the Communist Party, and above all, do not criticize the party. Obey ... and at least we will not have liquidated you."

Don't care about those deals? How about the Bismarckian Deal, which bribed the poor to behave themselves with promises of government security, which is the essence of the modern welfare state. What it requires of the people "is to forsake the animation of adult life and become children of the government." Or there is the Bureaucratic Deal, which reduces economic life to an endless "Mother May I" game of seeking permission from well-paid, high-handed functionaries who have never produced anything themselves. Obey all the bureaucratic rules and regulations, pay your taxes, and you can stay out of jail. Modern America, of course, is a blend of the Bismarckian Deal and the Bureaucratic Deal. Unfor-

tunately, it appeals to a lot of people who can't imagine how much better off they would be if we embraced the Bourgeois Deal. That's the point of the book — to persuade them.

**Obey all the bureaucratic rules
and regulations, pay your taxes,
and you can stay out of jail.**

Humans have benefited enormously from the happy accident that in a few places, the Bourgeois Deal took hold, permitting people who had innovative ideas the freedom to try them out. But historically, the authors know, liberalism is not the norm. The United States enjoyed liberalism for about two centuries, but the forces of statism have been strongly reasserting themselves. They say that our surge of prosperity will continue, provided that "we keep our wits about us." To quote Hamlet, "there's the rub." Many of our political and intellectual leaders have lost their wits.

The response to COVID in formerly liberal countries like the United States, the UK, Canada, New Zealand, and others has given us a frightening look into the minds of many of our leaders, eager to assert extraordinary powers over the lives and minds of many ordinary people, who were happy to demand

conformity with mask mandates and other “safety” restrictions. These are not people who have liberal inclinations. It is evident that a great many of our fellow citizens are authoritarians at heart.

If liberal society is to be preserved, there is no time to lose in attempting to shore up its philosophical foundations. *Leave Me Alone* is an estimable effort at doing

that. It is an easy, engaging read that will cause thoughtful statisticians to question their premises. If you know anyone like that, give him a copy.

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Periodically wealth is redistributed, whether by the violent confiscation of property, or by confiscatory taxation of incomes.... Then the race for wealth, goods, and power begins again, and the pyramid of ability takes form once more; under whatever laws may be enacted the abler man manages somehow to get the richer soil, the better place, the lion's share; soon he is strong enough to dominate the state and rewrite or interpret the laws; and in time the inequality is as great as before.

— Will Durant

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