7. People and Encounters

Lincoln, Secession, and Slavery

Cato Institute Daily Commentary (Washington, D.C.), June 1, 2002

Over the last few years, I have become obsessed with a question: Was Abraham Lincoln a good American? By this I mean, was Honest Abe conducting his political life and, especially, his presidency in line with the principles of the Declaration of Independence? No, not the Constitution, although for many that is the major issue. But for me, what defines a good American is that he or she lives by the principles of the Declaration, by respecting the unalienable rights of all human beings to, among other things, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. And as a politician, does such a person follow the Declaration's explicit statement that governments are instituted to secure our rights?

Lincoln made many statements that suggest he believed what the Declaration says, but he also initiated quite a few policies that suggest he was all too willing to compromise those principles. Consider the following clearly pro-Declaration statement from Lincoln: "The expression of that principle [political freedom], in our Declaration of Independence was most happy, and fortunate. Without this, as well as with it, we could have declared our independence of Great Britain; but without it, we could not, I think, have secured our free government, and consequent prosperity" (quoted by Harry V. Jaffa, *How to Think about the American Revolution*, 1978). Yet, Lincoln has a blemished record of following the ideal of free government in his political life,

as when he issued this order on May 18, 1864: "You will take possession by military force, of the printing establishments of the New York World and Journal of Commerce . . . and prohibit any further publication thereof. . . . You are therefore commanded forthwith to arrest and imprison . . . the editors, proprietors and publishers of the aforementioned newspapers" (quoted by Dean Sprague, *Freedom under Lincoln* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965]).

Granted, one might believe that during a war there is little else a president and commander in chief can do but lay aside certain principles, such as the writ of habeas corpus, even the ideals of the First Amendment of the Constitution—which extended those of the Declaration, specifically, everyone's unalienable right to liberty, into the sphere of speech and worship. This is no slam dunk, however—perhaps those principles are so basic that they should never be compromised, even during war. It certainly looks as if Lincoln's fanatical belief in the union went against the Declaration's view of when people have the right to dissolve their government, a view he himself seems to have held at one time in his political career. As he said in January of 1848, "Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better" (Sprague, *Freedom under Lincoln*). So, what then is so sacred about the American union? Why cannot a substantial part of the population separate off from the country and go its own way? This is a good question, especially when we consider that Lincoln allows for secession on far flimsier grounds than does the Declaration, which requires "a long train of abuses and usurpations" that reduce a government to "absolute despotism," before tossing out the gang is justified!

Despite all this, there is that undeniable evil of slavery associated with the southern rebels, an evil that would appear to make a great deal of difference in deciding whether secession was justified. And many of the leaders of these rebels made no secret of their enthusiastic support for chattel slavery. They endorsed out-and-out racist ideas, to the effect that blacks were less than human and that whites had not just the authority but even the responsibility to hold them as slaves. Lincoln, oddly enough, shares some of these views, as when he said in his 1860 inaugural address: "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so." And two years later, as the sitting president, Lincoln wrote: "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union" (Letter to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862). Then there is this, as well, from 1858: "I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races. I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people. There is a physical difference between the white and black races, which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality" (Sprague, *Freedom under Lincoln*).

Still, when it comes to endorsing the southern secession, it is not enough to point out Lincoln's failures in his position on slavery. Much more important is whether one

group may leave a larger group which they have been part of, and in the process, take along unwilling third parties. The seceding group does not have that right, not by any stretch of the imagination. Putting it in straightforward terms, yes, a divorce (or, more broadly, the right of peaceful exit from a partnership) may not be denied to anyone unless—and this is a very big "unless"—those wanting to leave intend to take along hostages. Seceding from the American union could perhaps be entirely morally unobjectionable (if not perhaps prudent in all circumstances, because the union may be strong enough to repel enemies which the separated countries may not be capable of repelling). It isn't that significant whether it was legally objectionable because, after all, slavery itself was legally unobjectionable, yet something had to be done about it. And to ask the slaves to wait until the rest of the people slowly set about changing the Constitution seems to me obscene.

So, when one considers that the citizens of the union who intended to go their own way were in effect kidnapping millions of people, most of whom would rather have stayed with the union that held out some hope for their eventual liberation, the idea of secession no longer seems so innocent. And whatever Abraham Lincoln's motives were, however tyrannical his aspirations or ambitions may have been—either as feeble rationalizations or as serious, albeit misguided, convictions—when the situation of slavery is factored in, it is doubtful that one can justify secession by the southern states during Lincoln's leadership of the American union. Indeed, by the terms of the Declaration of Independence, secession is fully justified because everyone has the right to his or her life and liberty, so leaving a country with all of what belongs to one cannot be considered in any

way morally objectionable. Even the Constitution could have been designed to make secession legally possible, akin to how modern marriage makes divorce possible.

Secession can be a sound idea—indeed, it comes under the principle of freedom of association, taken into the sphere of politics. It is a special case of the broader principle of individual sovereignty.

But secession cannot be justified when it is imposed on unwilling third parties, no matter what the ultimate motivation (in this instance, even if the reasons for seceding may have had little to do with slavery itself). Thus I conclude that, however flawed Lincoln was, he was a good American.

Which now leaves us with the odd and disturbing possibility that the American revolution may have had some improprieties, since the colonists who left England also took slaves with them. However, England didn't object to that, except to offer to free the slaves who would fight on its side. It had no offer on the table to abolish slavery in the colonies, so perhaps this is a moot issue, after all.

Margaret Thatcher, a Voice to Be Heard

Daily Objectivist website, July 25, 2000

For years I have been encountering nasty put-downs of this woman, mainly allegations about her being doctrinaire and stodgy, so it was with some eagerness that I attended a recent shindig at the Stanford University–based Hoover Institution on "War, Revolution and Peace," where the "Iron Lady" was to give the keynote address.

When you consider the impressive members of the Hoover team of scholars—Edward Teller, Milton Friedman, Thomas Sowell, Shelby Steele—little need be said on that score. Hoover has had F. A. Hayek, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Aaron Director, and a good many other luminaries among its fellows, and now Lady Thatcher has been named an honorary fellow there.

As for me, I was selected as a national fellow for a year, early in my academic career, and returned recently as a research fellow and was subsequently asked to edit a series from their press, *Philosophic Reflections on a Free Society*. (For me it was like letting a child loose in a candy store!)

In any case, Lady Thatcher was not only a formidable presenter of her conservative ideals—in Paul Johnson's words, "open markets, vigorous debate and loyal alliances"—which veer more toward classical liberalism than to mere Tory traditionalism, but something of a hoot, as well.

First, here's a woman who minces no words in her praise

for Ronald Reagan and, especially, his foreign policy acumen, something rarely done by professors at institutions such as Stanford University. Although intellectuals love to ridicule Ronny, still, Mrs. Thatcher does not hedge her bets with them by downplaying her admiration for that American president, with his Hollywood associations and cowboy style, something I suspect he relished in part because it irked those academicians so much! Then, Thatcher does not hide from her critics but answers their exact criticisms (unlike many politicians who distort the critics before they then don't answer them). She takes them on frequently in her public speeches and essays which, by the way, aren't just a string of sound bites but offer up considerable fuel for thought on several fronts.

What stood out for me in her talk, however, is how delightful the woman is, mentally agile and quick on her feet, with sharp, to-the-point comments and a twinkle in her eyes.

Not too many politicians of age seventy-five would expose themselves to unedited questions from an audience of twelve hundred, after having been guided around for over an hour to meet the guests, and then give another hour-long talk of her own. Even fewer would respond to these questions with verve, humor, and extraordinary lucidity.

I won't try to summarize what Lady Thatcher told us except to say that she was foursquare in favor of liberty as against government regulation and regimentation. I might doubt the complete wisdom of her continued support of a very strong and ready American military. But I do join her campaign of spreading the Western values of individual liberty and political democracy around the world.

One may not find all of what she champions completely sound, but what stands out about this woman when com-

paring her with such people as George W. Bush and Albert Gore is her unabashed approval of unambiguous values. These are the ones that define Western classical liberalism—"free minds and free markets." (This phrase, by the way, adorns the cover of *Reason* magazine and was the title of an essay written by Edith Efron in the early 1970s. We decided to select it as the slogan for the magazine when I was still closely associated with it.)

It is not often that one can find anything halfway decent about politicians in our era. And, true, Mrs. Thatcher isn't an active politician any longer, so her words can more easily sound uncompromising. Yet, I recall that she has been attacked, as was Ronald Reagan, for her words apart from her deeds, and that because she didn't give quarter to those who kept soft-pedaling what the Soviet Union stood for. In many circles she is still not forgiven for that moral stance.

As a reader of the British press, I know Mrs. Thatcher has been repeatedly denounced by Social Democrats and Socialists for her confidence that a regime which preserves individual liberty will do far more for people than all the "feel your pain" masquerading of her opponents will do. Maybe those folks over there have forgotten all about John Locke, Adam Smith, and John Stuart Mill, the thinkers whose vision of society Mrs. Thatcher is determined to work tirelessly to realize around the globe.

A Medal of "Freedom" for John Kenneth Galbraith

Orange County (California) Register, August 15, 2000

It is a pretty good measure of how far we have come in America in our understanding of freedom from the ideas of the American founders that the medal of freedom was given to John Kenneth Galbraith on August 9, though he has been a stalwart champion of the very opposite idea of freedom from that laid out by those founders.

Galbraith, a professor emeritus at the department of economics at Harvard University and a fine writer and charming human being—so much so that William F. Buckley Jr. has been his longtime friend despite their deep political differences—has been a socialist for nearly all his career. He has been a relentless critic of capitalism and the market system, based on his essentially elitist and paternalistic idea of what governments must do for the people they serve—that is, make them all abide by tenets of fairness or, at least, his socialist version of that ideal.

Galbraith, though an avowed statist—not of the Marxist-Leninist but more of the democratic socialist variety—has been one of the most fervent bashers of the rich in contemporary American society. While not an explicit Marxist, he accepts the Marxist idea that capitalists create nothing and take a great deal that they should not be allowed to have. In his most popular book, *The Affluent Society*, he laid out a case for a powerful welfare state. He has written in some of

the most prominent publications in our society, including the *New York Review of Books*, *New York Times*, *American Prospect*, *Dissent*, *Nation*, and so on.

One of his most well-known and widely studied legacies was created from a section of his book dealing with advertising. Here, Galbraith asserts that advertising is a device by which business creates desires in consumers that must be acted on and thus produce what he calls "the dependency effect." In other words, consumers become dependent on corporations because the latter create desires in them for the goods and services that corporations offer for sale. By this means, corporations become wealthy and make huge profits while resources are taken away from far more important projects—you guessed it, those the government wants to provide for us. The public sector is diminished, and the private sector unfairly benefits.

This famous section of *The Affluent Society* is reprinted in nearly all business ethics readers serving as textbooks for business school students across the world. Far fewer of these volumes offer the decisive rebuttal to Galbraith's position, penned by the great economist, the late F. A. Hayek. Hayek noted that Galbraith's claim is true but not just for business and advertisers but also for all human creative endeavors. The difference is that unlike Galbraith, Hayek did not believe that the desires that people may have for what is presented to them must be acted on. Instead, we have the freedom to choose whether to try to fulfill our desires, however they may be created. Advertising appeals to us but cannot make us do anything. It is a promotional project by which producers call out to us hoping we will consider what they have to offer and purchase it. But there

is no guarantee at all that we will act as advertisers wish we would.

In what sense does Galbraith deserve a medal of freedom? Only in the sense that a certain conception of freedom does underlie his thinking. This freedom, which he calls "positive" freedom, is a condition in which people are given by the government, and at the expense of other people, what they can use to advance their lot. Such provisions "free" them to move forward.

The freedom of the American founders is different, backed by a different idea of human nature, one which recognizes that people in communities require first not to be thwarted in their efforts to make headway in life. One group of people will not conscript another group into involuntary servitude if the first group isn't thwarted by government and can thus provide what it needs on its own. Not equally rapidly, not to the same extent, perhaps, but if they apply themselves, they will flourish without coercing others.

Galbraith has never championed this "negative" freedom. So his views are alien to the American political tradition. It is not surprising, then, that he receives the medal of freedom from President Bill Clinton, someone who has done nothing at all to further freedom in this truly American sense.

To Galbraith's minor credit, however, he did, a few years ago, finally admit that capitalism is a far better economic system than socialism. He did this only in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet empire. And even then with great reservations and regret.

He was asked, in an interview published in Alitalia's October 1996 "in flight" magazine: "You spoke of the failure of socialism. Do you see this as a total failure, a counterpro-

ductive alternative?" He replies this way: "I'd make a distinction here. What failed was the entrepreneurial state, but it had some beneficial effect. I do not believe that there are any radical alternatives, but there are correctives. The only alternative, socialism, that is the alternative to the market economy, has failed. The market system is here to stay."

Al Gore, the Dixie Chicks, and Censorship

Yuma (Arizona) Sun, April 5, 2003

On March 31, 2003, Al Gore spoke to a college audience in Tennessee, claiming that the Dixie Chicks, a popular singing group, had been "made to feel unAmerican" and risked economic retaliation because of what they said. "Our democracy has taken a hit," he continued. "Our best protection is free and open debate."

Once again Al Gore, former vice president of the United States of America and Democratic presidential candidate in 2000, showed how little understanding he has of the American political system.

The simple fact is that when people speak out on issues, others who do not like what is said may decide not to associate with the speaker, in the sphere of commerce or elsewhere. Cesar Chavez, a famous labor activist in California, used to dispute the views of grape farmers and organized boycotts to protest, for example, the farmers' view of how much migrant workers should be paid, which was less than Chavez believed their labor was worth. The Dixie Chicks spoke out against President George W. Bush's policies and urged others to oppose them. One member of the group, Natalie Maines, declared to a London concert crowd that she was "ashamed the president of the United States is from Texas." Because of this they were criticized and experienced an adverse market response, including a minor boycott of

their records and less airtime for their songs on several radio stations.

Now, in a free society one does not have to purchase products from those one does not like, even if this choice is for political or ideological reasons. The Dixie Chicks, for example, aren't legally owed an audience. Those who might become their customers may decide not to purchase their work, as is their right as free citizens. This is so even when the potential buyers are major corporations, radio stations, and the like.

None of this means that "our democracy has taken a hit." Indeed, it is quite the opposite. In a constitutional democracy people may either buy or not buy products for sale, may or may not patronize vendors, including producers of popular music.

But it is a blow to our democracy, one in which individuals have rights that even the majority is barred from violating, when government bans certain kinds of expression, be they political or even musical. It is this government intervention that amounts to censorship, not the refusal of free citizens to purchase products, whether newspapers, songs, novels, or whatever.

But Mr. Gore just doesn't get it. He regards it as an attack on democracy when people freely choose to boycott products they find objectionable, including products made by people whose politics others find objectionable. These boycotts are not censorship but freedom of choice.

Why is Gore so confused about this? It is because he does not see the difference between an economic boycott and a legal prohibition. But the difference is crucial.

People who exercise their right to refuse to purchase something from others, for whatever reason, do not force others to abstain from similar purchases. Economic power

means using one's resources, large or small, to invest them as one sees fit, peacefully, with no power of the gun to back the decision. But when government bans some product, say marijuana, no one may purchase it. When government forbids certain expressions, everyone is forbidden to use them. Government, in short, wields legal power that should be used only to defend the rights of citizens. When it does anything else with its power, that power is no longer just.

We often hear it said that opposition to government programs that extort people's resources and use them in ways only some people want these resources used is itself violence to the intended beneficiaries. Governments pretend to be compassionate when they engage in such wealth redistribution. When private firms or individuals refuse to part with their resources for some favored purpose, this refusal has to be accepted in a free society, and resisted only by advocacy and persuasion, peacefully.

Since Mr. Gore seems unable to make the distinction, he construes the boycott of what the Dixie Chicks produce as an undemocratic, coercive activity. He couldn't be more wrong. But those on the Left, like Mr. Gore, take their lead from major socialist figures, like Karl Marx, who peddled the notion that when those with wealth did not help out the workers but insisted on paying them wages that were set by market forces—which means, the freely expressed wants of those in the marketplace—they were attacking the workers.

But that idea is misguided. When one legitimately owns one's resources, to withhold them or to part with only so much of them, and not more, is something one decides by one's own priorities. But, and here is the rub, the priorities of these market agents are considered irrelevant by socialists; to socialists, only what the government decides for us all counts as important.

Mr. Gore should rethink his warped notions. The Dixie Chicks are free to think and say what they will about Mr. Bush. But so are millions of others who dislike what the Dixie Chicks think and say, and decide to stay away from their wares. That is the only way one may protest the views and peaceful actions of other people in a free country.

Has Libertarianism Fallen?

Orange County (California) Register, May 7, 2002

Francis Fukuyama, the author of the famous book of prophesies, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992), penned an essay for the May 2, 2002 *Wall Street Journal*, "The Fall of the Libertarians," in which he makes several critical points, allegedly about this political outlook. I wish to address the more important ones.

Fukuyama labels Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan "classical liberals." Just to clear up a misunderstanding on his part, these political leaders were in fact conservatives. The difference is that although both liked the free market because it yielded more goodies than the alternatives, both also wanted substantial control over personal behavior and favored more religion in public institutions (schools), hardly a classical liberal, let alone libertarian, stance. Ronald Reagan talked a good game about personal responsibility and freedom but then failed dismally to deregulate the market and mainly played the supply-side gambit, one that gives support to business to garner more taxes and thus make the government rich. This is not libertarian public policy, for sure.

The second point to note is Fukuyama's claim that libertarians are anarchists, which is just wrong. Libertarians are not all of one kind, of course—some are more anarchist, some less. For example, R. C. Hoiles, the original owner of Freedom Newspapers, was not an anarchist but came close,

as did the former libertarian adviser at his company, the late Robert LeFevre. Many libertarians are far from anarchists. They do not believe that a government is necessarily evil but hold, instead, that once corrupted, a government (not a "state," as Fukuyama, in his Hegelian jargon, calls it) is more dangerous than any private institution that is corrupt! (Enron's collapse because of misconduct is far less hazardous to us all than when the feds go bad since the feds command guns, to put the matter squarely.)

Even libertarians who call themselves "anarchists" aren't really anarchists but believe in what we might call competitive government or the handling of dispute adjudications and law enforcement by private defense or justice agencies. That's not classical anarchism at all, which renounces all law and even defensive force (see, again, Robert LeFevre as one rather exceptional libertarian who didn't even believe in the morality of the defensive use of force).

Another related claim Fukuyama makes is that libertarianism is isolationist. Most libertarians, however, are not that but what we might call "defensivists." They hold that military or any other physical force must be defensive, or at most retaliatory, but never offensive and intrusive. The military of a free country is duty bound to "secure our rights," not gallivant about the globe, trying in typically futile fashion to right all wrongs. Things can get rather complicated, through mutual defense treaties and such, but the basic idea is that human beings should not use force against those who haven't initiated force against them, and this is as true of criminals as of aggressive governments.

Fukuyama then zeroes in on libertarians for advocating an essentially deregulationist approach to cloning and other forms of biotechnology. So what about the issue of cloning? True, libertarians look with great suspicion on government

efforts to do the right thing in this or any other area where the issue isn't "securing our rights." Why is that a bad thing? Does government have such a sterling record righting other types of wrongs? No.

More substantively, libertarians also hold that once a new person has been cloned, his or her rights need respect and protection, and if provided with these, there should be no cause for alarm. Indeed, it is only in libertarian political theory that the cloned being would be seen as fully human and thus endowed with unalienable rights that governments are instituted to protect. A vigilant devotion to this task, in turn, would be far more just and safer than any large-scale government meddling in yet another area of social life that has no justifiable need for government regulation.

Sadly, Francis Fukuyama, who has done some respectable scholarship on many fronts, does a terrible job in this *Wall Street Journal* piece—he never mentions any libertarian by name, gives no quotations to back up his assertions about what libertarians believe, and just invents most of the claims he makes with no discernible support for any of it. So the essay is rather useless as a means of learning anything about a serious political alternative that people might find useful to consider as they formulate their political convictions. Fukuyama's piece, in other words, is a very bad example of punditry, approximating not even a modicum of scholarship. If Fukuyama is supposed to have shown that libertarianism has fallen—that is, failed as a good guide to public policy—he has botched the job royally. Unfortunately, his reputation may make it appear otherwise.

Yet discerning readers will probably spot just how ill-supported Fukuyama's points are and go on to read about libertarianism from a more responsible source.

The Courage and Wisdom of Shelby Steele

Orange County (California) Register, February 17, 2002

There are popular trends, fads, and the like in every culture, but the intellectuals—educators, theorists, critics, even pundits—are supposed to strive to be above those. Their oath of office is supposed to be "I will judge without prejudice, without trusting my mere gut reaction." And they are supposed to encourage the rest of us to spend some time being critical, too. This has been the calling of the intellectual since the time Socrates chose to die, rather than shut his mind to the truth in favor of received public opinion, back in ancient Greece.

Yet many intellectuals are by no means followers of this tradition. Instead they attach themselves to certain sentiments that rule their culture and that shut out dissidents. Sure, some matters are beyond the pale—a Nazi dissident is so obviously vicious that hearing him out would be too tolerant. Or a communist or racist.

But what of those who are fundamentally decent, indeed, extraordinarily intelligent and conscientious thinkers but who find themselves ostracized by an entrenched group who love their power and influence over people? Such a person is Professor Shelby Steele, the author of several incisive books on race relations in America, most recently, *A Dream Deferred: The Second Betrayal of Black Freedom in America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), in which he lays out a detailed argument showing that since

the civil rights movement, much political activism intended to support black people has done blacks more harm than good. Indeed, he is rather blunt on the point that much of the legislation, embraced, sadly, by many widely published and paraded black leaders, has been insulting and condescending to blacks and has done little more than allay the guilt of many whites, making them feel they are being good people, rather than doing anyone much good.

Professor Steele was a featured speaker at Chapman University on Tuesday, February 15, 2002, with a merciless schedule in which he spoke to students and luncheon guests, took part in a panel discussion, and gave a public address. I was honored not only to meet finally someone whose work I have been following over the years, along with the work of those who are often intemperately critical of him, but also to introduce him to some of his audience at Chapman.

Unfortunately, the student group in the first audience was rather small, and only a few gained the benefit of his discussion of current American politics. The gist of his calmly laid-out and extremely well-spoken presentation—remarkable for its low-key and analytic, yet fascinating, tone and content—was that America is suffering from a schizophrenic disposition that is seriously affecting race relations and public policy. Using the term "triangulation," for which he gave credit to Washington operative Dick Morris, Steele noted that today politicians must all voice deference toward, and give license to, blacks and other minority groups.

Deference involves doing for them whatever they ask because, well, they have shamed nearly all white Americans for their alleged part in past and present racial injustice. The whites stand accused of, and many willingly buy into, the collective guilt syndrome and want to bail themselves

out by supporting demeaning programs, such as mandated affirmative action, unconditional welfare, and even large-scale reparations (as advocated by Randall Robinson, in his book *The Debt, What America Owes to Blacks* [New York: Dutton, 1999]). License means not making any demands of blacks at all, exculpating them from nearly anything because, well, they are hopelessly injured and cannot help themselves. Such an attitude is not simply insulting but awfully damaging in our time. After all, while there may be pockets of racism around, there is no slavery or segregation, and with some self-confidence and the conviction that this is what must be done, millions of blacks could turn to helping themselves, to rising out of their dire straits, and to becoming competitive. Why not? Why should they not be capable of recovering from the damage the culture has inflicted on them? And why should they not now enter society on the terms laid out in the Declaration of Independence as basic principles, even though these principles weren't followed in other times for all citizens?

Those, however, who insist that what blacks need most is inducements to rise to levels of performance that enable them to compete effectively with others, are declared mean, even racist, and if they are themselves black, Uncle Toms. They have lost all sense of moral authority by now because, as Steele so poignantly noted, in our time what counts most is how much you care about social issues. (He noted that while Bill Clinton could get away with the Monica affair, had he been caught using the "n" word or something equally offensive, he wouldn't have lasted two weeks in office! Though in the 1950s just the opposite would have been the situation—adultery would bury you, but a bit of racism wouldn't even have been noticed. The puritan attitude has switched from the private to the social moral realm!)

Today, Steele went on to suggest, a politician must somehow have his feet in both camps—with those who stress deference and license as well as with those who stress the traditional values of hard work, self-sufficiency, sacrifice, and initiative. Americans haven't quite given up on these values, only repressed them because of the shame they have accepted for themselves for the past injustices done to blacks and others. So we have Bill Clinton parading as a "new democrat," being deferent toward blacks, giving them license, but also stressing, here and there, that they need to do stuff for themselves in order to recover and not wait for the whites, especially in government, to do it for them. And you have George W. Bush calling himself a compassionate conservative, still stressing the old values but making a big point of looking understanding, of accepting responsibility for the plight of minorities.

All in all—and there is much more to Professor Steele's ideas and presentation—Chapman University selected one of America's most stimulating, not to mention civilized and decent, intellectual dissidents to enlighten its students, faculty, and guests. One can only hope that some of what Professor Steele offered will take and have an effect that will help not just blacks but all Americans.

Time Is Not Just Money

Yuma (Arizona) Sun, October 19, 2002

Over the years I've noticed that punctuality is treated as a minor virtue, at best, and even as an annoyance by many people. Entire regions of the globe seem to pride themselves on being regularly, routinely late.

Once when I was invited to give a presentation at a conference in Milan, Italy, I made sure I reached the place from Lugano, Switzerland, where I was living, at the announced start of the event, 9:30 A.M. Just for beginners, this was a bit late to start things off—at least from my experience, since in the United States morning sessions at conferences usually begin at 8:30 or 9:00.

I waited until 11:00, walking back and forth in front of the building where the conference was held, before anyone showed up. The organizers were astonished that I had arrived at the time stated in their invitation. I, needless to say, was astonished at their astonishment. I had thought that all those jokes about Italian trains running routinely late (Mussolini being credited with the solitary achievement of making them run on time) were, well, just jokes. But the Italians I have met keep telling me I should get used to it.

However, the practice of tardiness isn't confined to places abroad, by any means. My students over the thirty-odd years I have been teaching indulge in it with ease, I must say. Never mind that I keep imploring them to, please, at least notify me ahead of time if a paper will be handed in

after it's due; never mind my begging that if a test is likely to be missed, please call me ahead of time. No, there are always slackers who ignore all this and are tardy and shocked that I am not merciful, not unless they have a really solid excuse (and having a funeral for dear departed grandma for the fifth time just won't work any longer).

Then there are those other cases that baffle me, when people in business say, "I'll call you back in five minutes," but the call never comes and you need to hunt them down yourself. Recently, I was trying to find a skilled service for a particularly difficult household task and answered some ads in our local newspaper. On one of these calls, I was told that the chief of the outfit would get back to me in five minutes. Alas, this was not a promise that was kept—the call came about twenty minutes later.

OK, OK, so what's the big deal? five minutes or twenty, why sweat about that? And why be concerned about keeping promises about time at all? Isn't that some sort of fetish, a sign of being obsessive, of being—well, you put the label to it, I am sure you've heard them all.

There are times when time is crucial—if I don't show up for my classes in time, I am breaching a professional promise, and my students let me know this by leaving after about ten minutes. If one doesn't show up at the doctor on time—never mind that doctors hardly ever turn up when they ask you to be there—your appointment is canceled and you may even be charged. (And no, I do not believe that every doctor who fails to meet a patient on time has an emergency on hand!) But there is also the problem that many people make promises they do not keep because, well, they want to please you. Those little white lies are motivated by the feeling that one doesn't wish to be the bearer of bad news—"I cannot call you back for a day or so," "I will not arrive until much

later than you hoped I would," "I am not going to get the paper despite what you have asked me to do," and so on. These are akin to the white lies told when one asks how far something is down the road, and the answer comes back, "Oh, just a couple of blocks" when, in fact, it's close to twenty blocks one still needs to walk.

The thing that's most notable, though, about the vice of tardiness is that it shows lack of concern for one's word and for other people's plans. When I waited outside that Milan convention center, walking back and forth looking at my wrist watch, I was frustrated because I could have been doing something much more productive, and I kept having mean thoughts about the people who organized the event. Isn't this disincentive enough to get folks to become more punctual, to keep their word more vigilantly? I think it should be—but what do I know?

And then there is the money. All the tardiness around the globe may have rather impressive downsides, economically speaking, to say the least. So, while that's not all that's wrong with the lack of punctuality, it's part of it, yes.

The Death of a Little-Known Friend of Mine

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I ran into him everywhere around Auburn. I used to joke about how he must be following me. He said no, it was me following him.

A couple of days ago he came to my office to say that he was considering taking my upper-division political philosophy class this fall. Then our department secretary told me he was looking for odd jobs. Would I have anything? And I had arranged to give him my library card, so he could pick up some books I needed for the next few weeks. He was a bit late, given his plan to be at the department around 11:00. It was 11:30.

Unexpectedly, Charlie, our department chairman, came to my office. He looked grim. "I have bad news, though not about you. Chris Young has died in a car crash. They found him only this morning. He must have run off the road."

I was stunned—I went cold inside, dead in a way. Although I had never had Chris in a class, he was a fixture around the philosophy department.

A 6-foot-6-inch boy—a bit dangerously overweight but recently dropping some forty pounds after he started running regularly and eating right—he was the picture of boyish innocence. His eyes shone bright, and he always had a hint of a warm smile. He was polite but light-hearted. He was a delight just to have around, never mind what you were doing or what he was doing. His presence always appeared

to promise some joy in the air. He was like a merry bird about to bring forth some cheerful melody.

Cliff Perry, who teaches medical ethics and philosophy of law, worked with him a lot, preparing for the New Mexico bar exams. Chris was his sparring partner. They sat for hours in Cliff's office, Chris with the questions and Cliff struggling to get it right. On and on. Chris, too, was preparing for law school, so both were getting the most out of the exercise. I walked by often and usually said a brief hello, made some joke, mainly to acknowledge Chris because he was such a sheer plus, and I needed to affirm this.

And suddenly he is no more! As I am a father of three, with one already in college, driving back and forth from home on weekends, this terrified me. I couldn't shake the thought. What if one of mine died suddenly, without warning? I thought of Chris's parents and how horrible they must feel.

I was traveling later that day, and on the long flight from Atlanta to San Francisco, I was reading my last Laurie Colwin novel, *Shine On, Bright and Dangerous Object*, about a woman who had lost her husband in a reckless boating accident. This didn't serve to keep Chris's death out of my mind, although I wasn't sure I had wanted to keep it out actually. I felt he deserved to be thought of, often. Maybe that way he would still live somehow. (Aristotle said that immortality consists in remaining in the memories of others after one dies.)

I wanted to talk about Chris to my seat mate; but I felt I would be spreading the pain of his death, so I didn't. I wanted to call my children and tell them to be careful, not to take silly chances when they drive, never to take their eyes off the road or drive incautiously. But I felt that perhaps I was only trying to dump my own anxiety about losing Chris

on other people. Yet why not? I realized that those who hadn't known him would not experience what I did, certainly not what those who were his intimates do now and will for quite some time. One cannot mourn without knowing the person; one cannot experience the loss of someone who is an abstraction to you.

So I decided to jot down some lines about Chris, as I am doing now. I know millions of people die every day, some of them catastrophically, tragically, too young. I am angry at those who talk away the loss of death by fabricating stories to soothe our sense of loss or fear of it. There is no way to make the death of a good youth acceptable. I was worried, however, that all I was doing was trying to find some way to help myself, in which case why drag others into it?

But in the end I don't care about some possibly hidden motive. I realize that I will not hurt others by trying to memorialize this young man who unbeknownst to him meant so much to me.

Chris Young was a delightful young man, a student of great promise and cheerful company. There is no way to make up for him. No substitution will do. All those who decry individualism should hold their tongues—it is the individual person, Chris Young, who is the being we mourn and miss. The reason we do this is that there is only one of him and his terrible death cannot be repaired by focusing on anything else. Those who knew him simply have to grieve. There is no escaping that.