

PART IV

POLITICAL ISSUES

Spoiled Brat Politics

An editorial in a recent issue of the *National Geographic's Traveler* magazine complained that kayakers in Maine found “residential development” near national parks and urged its readers to use their “influence” to prevent such things.

“You are the stakeholders in our national parks,” it said.

Really? What stake do kayakers and others of like mind have that is not also a stake held by people who build the vacation homes whose presence offends the kayak set? Homeowners are just as much citizens and taxpayers as kayakers are, and they are even entitled to equal treatment under the 14th Amendment.

The essence of bigotry is denying others the same rights you claim for yourself. Green bigots are a classic example.

The idea that government is supposed to make your desires override the desires of other citizens has spread from the green bigots to other groups who claim privileges in the name of rights.

In California, a group of golfers in wheelchairs are suing a hotel chain for not providing them with special carts that will enable them to navigate the local hotel's golf course more comfortably and play the game better.

According to a newspaper account, the kinds of carts the golfers in wheelchairs want “have rotating seats so a golfer can swing and strike a ball from the tee, the fairway and on the green without getting out of the vehicle.” If golfers want this kind of cart, there is nothing to stop them from buying

one—except that they would rather have other people be forced to pay for it.

One of the golfers in this lawsuit has been confined to a wheelchair as a result of a diving accident and another as a result of a gunshot wound. Apparently the hotel had nothing to do with either event.

There was a time when people would have said that the hotel is not responsible for these golfers being in wheelchairs and therefore it has no obligation to spend additional money for special carts in order to help their scores on the links. But that was before the Americans with Disabilities Act, under which the hotel is being sued.

If the government wanted to do something for the disabled or the handicapped, it could have spent its own tax money to do so. Instead, it passed the Americans with Disabilities Act, which created a right to sue private institutions, in order to force them to spend their money to solve the problems of individuals with special problems or special desires, whether serious or frivolous.

It was a lawyer's full-employment act, creating another legally recognized victim group, empowered to claim special privileges, at other people's expense, in the name of equal rights.

Nor could such legislation make the usual claim that it was coming to the defense of the poor and the downtrodden. Golf courses are not the natural habitat of the poor and the downtrodden.

One of the plaintiffs in the golf-course lawsuit has been the managing partner in a large law firm. He says, "I just want the same opportunity as everyone else" to "get out and play 18 holes with my friends and colleagues."

Equal opportunity does not mean equal results, despite

how many laws and policies proceed as if it does, or how much fashionable rhetoric equates the two.

An example of that rhetoric was the title of a recent *New York Times* column: “A Ticket to Bias.” That column recalled bitterly the experience of a woman in a wheelchair who bought a \$300 ticket to a rock concert but was unable to see when other people around her stood up. This was equated with “bias” on the part of those who ran the arena.

The woman in the wheelchair declared, “true equality remains a dream out of reach.” Apparently only equality of results is “true” equality.

A recent publication of the American Historical Association shows this same confusion when it says that doors “are largely closed” to people who want to become historians if they didn’t graduate from a top-tier college. In other words, unequal results proves bias that closed doors, according to this rhetoric.

Confusion between equal opportunity and equal results is a dangerous confusion behind many kinds of spoiled brat politics.

Spoiled Brat Politics: Part II

The idea that what I want overrides what you want has increasingly become part of our thinking, our policies and even our laws. There is literally a federal case before the Supreme Court over the fact that many colleges and universities refuse to allow military recruiters on campus.

Why? Because, as the academics will tell you, they are opposed to the military, either in general or because they think the military are discriminating against homosexuals or for whatever other reasons they have.

These academics have every right to be against the military, for any reason or for no reason.

If they don't like the military, they can stay away from the military, since there is no draft. But what they want is to keep other people away from the military, by preventing students from hearing what the military recruiters have to say, as students hear what recruiters from all sorts of other institutions and movements have to say on campus.

The reason there is a legal issue is that a federal law has been passed, saying that colleges and universities that forbid military recruiters from coming on campus are no longer eligible to receive federal money.

Academics are outraged. They see this law as a violation of their freedom—including their right to violate their students' freedom. It is classic spoiled brat politics, based on the idea that what I want overrides what you want.

The same principle underlies growing legal restrictions

on building anything that existing residents in a community don't want built.

A young "planning consultant" to a local politician in New York says: "These neighborhoods substantially have not changed in 40 years. What we are trying to do is make sure they are recognizable 40 years from now. I don't think there is anything wrong with that. In fact, in many other places in the country, that is celebrated. So why shouldn't we celebrate it here?"

That young man probably has a bright future in politics, where the ability to confuse the issues is a highly rewarded talent.

"Everybody is doing it" is a very effective political argument, requiring neither facts nor logic, and widely accepted in this era of dumbed-down education. Focusing on the benefits to some and ignoring the costs to others is another tried-and-true political tactic.

Since people who are already in a community are the ones who vote, making what they want override what other people want is a winner in spoiled brat politics.

At one time, courts took seriously the 14th Amendment's guarantee of equal rights for all, regardless of where they lived and voted. Courts even enforced the 5th Amendment's guarantee of property rights.

In other words, local voters and local politicians could not arbitrarily deprive other people of the right to come in and buy and use property as they saw fit, simply because some planning consultants or planning commissions preferred that they do otherwise. But Constitutional protection of property rights is no longer "in the mainstream" of fashionable legal thinking.

Let's go back to square one. The people who bought homes in a neighborhood 40 years ago did not buy the

neighborhood, nor did they pay for a guarantee that the neighborhood would stay the same for 40 years, much less in perpetuity.

The only way the government can give current residents such a guarantee is to take away other people's property rights, which exist precisely in order to keep politicians at bay.

Buying a chance and asking the government to turn that chance into a guarantee has become a common occurrence under spoiled brat politics.

When you buy a home with a great view of the ocean, you do not pay for a guarantee that nothing will ever be built between you and the ocean. You ask politicians to give that to you, at someone else's expense.

Some people even call that idealism because you are "preserving" something good. But preserving it from whom? And why is what you want more important than what they want?

The “Compassion” Racket

Our hearts automatically go out to the people of Florida, who are being battered by a series of hurricanes in rapid succession. But we have brains as well as hearts—and the time is long overdue to start using them.

Hurricanes come through Florida every year about this time. And, every year, politicians get to parade their compassion by showering the taxpayers’ money on the places that have been struck.

What would happen if they didn’t?

First of all, not as many people would build homes in the path of a well-known disaster that comes around like clockwork virtually every year. Those who did would buy insurance that covers the costs of the risks they choose to take.

That insurance would not be cheap—which would provide yet another reason for people to locate out of harm’s way. The net result would be fewer lives lost and less property damage. Is it not more compassionate to seek this result, even if it would deprive politicians of television time?

In ABC reporter John Stossel’s witty and insightful book *Give Me A Break*, he discusses how he built a beach house with only “a hundred feet of sand” between him and the ocean. It gave him a great view—and a great chance of disaster.

His father warned him of the danger but an architect pointed out that the government would pick up the tab if anything happened to his house. A few years later, storm-

driven ocean waves came in and flooded the ground floor of Stossel's home. The government paid to have it restored.

Still later, the waves came in again, and this time took out the whole house. The government paid again. Fortunately for the taxpayers, Stossel then decided that enough was enough.

In politics, throwing the taxpayers' money at disasters is supposed to show your compassion. But robbing Peter to pay Paul is not compassion. It is politics.

The crucial fact is that a society does not have one dime more money to devote to the resources available to help victims of natural disasters by sending that money through government agencies. All that it does is change the incentives in such a way as to subsidize risky behavior.

The same money can just as well come through insurance companies. Even if most insurance companies are unwilling to insure people living in particularly vulnerable areas, or living in homes that are inadequate to withstand hurricane-force winds, there are always insurers who specialize in high risks—and who charge correspondingly higher premiums.

Lloyds of London, for example, has already been moving into the market for insurance for homes costing half a million dollars or more and located along coastal waters, whether in Florida or the Hamptons or elsewhere. If rich people want to put their mansions at risk, there is no reason why they shouldn't pay the costs, instead of forcing the taxpayers to pay those costs.

What about "the poor"? As in so many other cases, the poor are the human shields behind which big-government advocates advance. If you are seriously concerned about the poor themselves, you can always subsidize them and avoid subsidizing others by having means tests.

Means tests are anathema to the political left because it puts an end to their game of hiding behind the poor. Compassion is a laudable feeling but it can also be a political racket.

As with so many government programs that people have come to rely on, phasing out state and federal disaster relief programs would not be easy. In an election year, it is impossible.

Fortunately, there are years in between elections, in which it is at least theoretically possible to talk sense. Whether the risks are hurricanes, earthquakes, floods or forest fires, people who have gotten themselves out on a limb by taking risks in the expectation that the government will bail them out can be gradually weaned away from that expectation by phasing out disaster relief.

The alternative is to keep on forcing taxpayers to be patsies forever, while politicians bask in the glow of the compassion racket by throwing the taxpayers' money hither and yon, while the media applaud the courage of those who rebuild in the path of known disasters.

Ronald Reagan (1911–2004)

There are many ways to judge a President or anyone else. One old-fashioned way is by results. A more popular way in recent years has been by how well someone fits the preconceptions of the intelligentsia or the media.

By the first test, Ronald Reagan was the most successful President of the United States in the 20th century. By the second test, he was a complete failure.

Time and time again President Reagan went against what the smug smarties inside the beltway and on the TV tube said. And time and again he got results.

It started even before Ronald Reagan was elected. When the Republicans nominated Governor Reagan in 1980, according to the late *Washington Post* editor Meg Greenfield, “people I knew in the Carter White House were ecstatic.” They considered Reagan “not nearly smart enough”—as liberals measure smart.

The fact that Ronald Reagan beat President Jimmy Carter by a landslide did not cause any re-evaluation of his intelligence. It was luck or malaise or something else, liberals thought.

Now the media line was that this cowboy from California would be taught a lesson when he got to Washington and had to play in the big leagues against the savvy guys on Capitol Hill.

The new President succeeded in putting through Congress big changes that were called “the Reagan revolution.” And he did it without ever having his party in

control of both houses of Congress. But these results caused no re-evaluation of Ronald Reagan.

One of his first acts as President was to end price controls on petroleum. The *New York Times* condescendingly dismissed Reagan's reliance on the free market and repeated widespread predictions of "declining domestic oil production" and skyrocketing gasoline prices.

The price of gasoline fell by more than 60 cents a gallon. More luck, apparently.

Where the new President would really get his comeuppance, the smart money said, was in foreign affairs, where a former governor had no experience. Not only were President Reagan's ideas about foreign policy considered naive and dangerously reckless, he would be going up against the wily Soviet rulers who were old hands at this stuff.

When Ronald Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as an "evil empire," there were howls of disapproval in the media. When he proposed meeting a Soviet nuclear buildup in Eastern Europe with an American nuclear buildup in Western Europe, there were alarms that he was going to get us into a war.

The result? President Reagan's policies not only did not get us into a war, they put an end to the Cold War that had been going on for decades.

Meanwhile, Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, who was the media's idea of a brilliant and sophisticated man, had a whole Communist empire collapse under him when his policies were put into effect. Eastern Europe broke free and Gorbachev woke up one morning to find that the Soviet Union that he was head of no longer existed—and that he was now a nobody in the new Russian state.

But that was just bad luck, apparently.

For decades it had been considered the height of political wisdom to accept as given that the Soviet bloc was here to stay—and its expansion was so inevitable that it would be foolhardy to try to stop it.

The Soviet bloc had in fact expanded through seven consecutive administrations of both Republicans and Democrats. The first territory the Communists ever lost was Grenada, when Ronald Reagan sent in American troops.

But, once again, results carried no weight with the intelligentsia and the media.

Reagan was considered to be completely out of touch when he said that Communism was “another sad, bizarre chapter in human history whose last pages even now are being written.” But how many “smart” people saw the end of the Soviet Union coming?

Ronald Reagan left this country—and the world—a far better place than he found it. And he smiled while he did it. That’s greatness—if you judge by results.

Gun Control Myths

Professor Joyce Lee Malcolm of Bentley College deserves some sort of special prize for taking on the thankless task of talking sense on a subject where nonsense is deeply entrenched and fiercely dogmatic. In her recently published book, *Guns and Violence*, Professor Malcolm examines the history of firearms, gun control laws and violent crime in England. What makes this more than an exercise in history is its relevance to current controversies over gun control in America.

Gun control zealots love to make highly selective international comparisons of gun ownership and murder rates. But Joyce Lee Malcolm points out some of the pitfalls in that approach. For example, the murder rate in New York City has been more than five times that of London for two centuries—and during most of that time neither city had any gun control laws.

In 1911, New York state instituted one of the most severe gun control laws in the United States, while serious gun control laws did not begin in England until nearly a decade later. But New York City still continued to have far higher murder rates than London.

If we are serious about the role of guns and gun control as factors in differing rates of violence between countries, then we need to do what history professor Joyce Lee Malcolm does—examine the history of guns and violence. In England, as she points out, over the centuries “violent crime

continued to decline markedly at the very time that guns were becoming increasingly available.”

England’s Bill of Rights in 1688 was quite unambiguous that the right of a private individual to be armed was an individual right, independently of any collective right of militias. Guns were as freely available to Englishmen as to Americans, on into the early 20th century.

Nor was gun control in England a response to any firearms murder crisis. Over a period of three years near the end of the 19th century, “there were only 59 fatalities from handguns in a population of nearly 30 million people,” according to Professor Malcolm. “Of these, 19 were accidents, 35 were suicides and only 3 were homicides—an average of one a year.”

The rise of the interventionist state in early 20th century England included efforts to restrict ownership of guns. After the First World War, gun control laws began restricting the possession of firearms. Then, after the Second World War, these restrictions grew more severe, eventually disarming the civilian population of England—or at least the law-abiding part of it.

It was during this period of severe restrictions on owning firearms that crime rates in general, and the murder rate in particular, began to rise in England. “As the number of legal firearms have dwindled, the numbers of armed crimes have risen,” Professor Malcolm points out.

In 1954, there were only a dozen armed robberies in London but, by the 1990s, there were more than a hundred times as many. In England, as in the United States, drastic crackdowns on gun ownership by law-abiding citizens were accompanied by ever greater leniency to criminals. In both countries, this turned out to be a formula for disaster.

While England has not yet reached the American level

of murders, it has already surpassed the United States in rates of robbery and burglary. Moreover, in recent years the murder rate in England has been going up under still more severe gun control laws, while the murder rate in the United States has been going down as more and more states have allowed private citizens to carry concealed weapons—and have begun locking up more criminals.

In both countries, facts have no effect whatever on the dogmas of gun control zealots. The fact that most guns used to murder people in England were not legally purchased has no effect on their faith in gun control laws there, any more than faith in such laws here is affected by the fact that the gun used by the recent Beltway snipers was not purchased legally either.

In England as in America, sensational gun crimes have been seized upon and used politically to promote crackdowns on gun ownership by law-abiding citizens, while doing nothing about criminals. American zealots for the Brady Bill say nothing about the fact that the man who shot James Brady and tried to assassinate President Reagan has been out walking the streets on furlough.

Gun Control Myths: Part II

Talking facts to gun control zealots is only likely to make them angry. But the rest of us need to know what the facts are. More than that, we need to know that much of what the gun controllers claim as facts will not stand up under scrutiny.

The grand dogma of the gun controllers is that places with severe restrictions on the ownership of firearms have lower rates of murder and other gun crimes. How do they prove this? Simple. They make comparisons of places where this is true and ignore all comparisons of places where the opposite is true.

Gun control zealots compare the United States and England to show that murder rates are lower where restrictions on ownership of firearms are more severe. But you could just as easily compare Switzerland and Germany, the Swiss having lower murder rates than the Germans, even though gun ownership is three times higher in Switzerland. Other countries with high rates of gun ownership and low murder rates include Israel, New Zealand, and Finland.

Within the United States, rural areas have higher rates of gun ownership and lower rates of murder, whites have higher rates of gun ownership than blacks and much lower murder rates. For the country as a whole, hand gun ownership doubled in the late 20th century, while the murder rate went down. But such facts are not mentioned by gun control zealots or by the liberal media.

Another dogma among gun control supporters is that

having a gun in the home for self-defense is futile and is only likely to increase the chances of your getting hurt or killed. Your best bet is to offer no resistance to an intruder, according to this dogma.

Actual research tells just the opposite story. People who have not resisted have gotten hurt twice as often as people who resisted with a firearm. Those who resisted without a firearm of course got hurt the most often.

Such facts are simply ignored by gun control zealots. They prefer to cite a study published some years ago in the *New England Journal of Medicine* and demolished by a number of scholars since then. According to this discredited study, people with guns in their homes were more likely to be murdered.

How did they arrive at this conclusion? By taking people who were murdered in their homes, finding out how many had guns in the house, and then comparing them with people who were not murdered in their homes.

Using similar reasoning, you might be able to show that people who hire bodyguards are more likely to get killed than people who don't. Obviously, people who hire bodyguards already feel at risk, but does that mean that the bodyguards are the reason for the risk? Similarly illogical reasoning has been used by counting how many intruders were killed by homeowners with guns and comparing that with the number of family members killed with those guns. But this is a nonsense comparison because most people who keep guns in their homes do not do so in hopes of killing intruders.

Most uses of guns in self-defense—whether in the home or elsewhere—do not involve actually pulling the trigger. When the intended victim turns out to have a gun in his

hand, the attacker usually has enough brains to back off. But the lives saved this way do not get counted.

People killed at home by family members are highly atypical. The great majority of these victims have had to call the police to their homes before, because of domestic violence, and just over half have had the cops out several times. These are not just ordinary people who happened to lose their temper when a gun was at hand.

Neither are most “children” who are killed by guns just toddlers who happened to find a loaded weapon lying around. More of those “children” are members of teenage criminal gangs who kill each other deliberately.

Some small children do in fact get accidentally killed by guns in the home—but fewer than drown in bathtubs. Is anyone for banning bathtubs? Moreover, the number of fatal gun accidents fell, over the years, while the number of guns was increasing by tens of millions. None of this supports the assumption that more guns mean more fatal accidents.

Most of the gun controllers’ arguments are a house of cards. No wonder they don’t want any hard facts coming near them.

A Painful Anniversary

August 20, 2004 marked the 40th anniversary of one of the major turning points in American social history. That was the date on which President Lyndon Johnson signed legislation creating his “War on Poverty” program in 1964.

Never had there been such a comprehensive program to tackle poverty at its roots, to offer more opportunities to those starting out in life, to rehabilitate those who had fallen by the wayside, and to make dependent people self-supporting. Its intentions were the best. But we know what road is paved with good intentions.

The War on Poverty represented the crowning triumph of the liberal vision of society—and of government programs as the solution to social problems. The disastrous consequences that followed have made the word “liberal” so much of a political liability that today even candidates with long left-wing track records have evaded or denied that designation.

In the liberal vision, slums bred crime. But brand new government housing projects almost immediately became new centers of crime and quickly degenerated into new slums. Many of these projects later had to be demolished. Unfortunately, the assumptions behind those projects were not demolished, but live on in other disastrous programs, such as Section 8 housing.

Rates of teenage pregnancy and venereal disease had been going down for years before the new 1960s attitudes toward sex spread rapidly through the schools, helped by

War on Poverty money. These downward trends suddenly reversed and skyrocketed.

The murder rate had also been going down, for decades, and in 1960 was just under half of what it had been in 1934. Then the new 1960s policies toward curing the “root causes” of crime and creating new “rights” for criminals began. Rates of violent crime, including murder, skyrocketed.

The black family, which had survived centuries of slavery and discrimination, began rapidly disintegrating in the liberal welfare state that subsidized unwed pregnancy and changed welfare from an emergency rescue to a way of life.

Government social programs such as the War on Poverty were considered a way to reduce urban riots. Such programs increased sharply during the 1960s. So did urban riots. Later, during the Reagan administration, which was denounced for not promoting social programs, there were far fewer urban riots.

Neither the media nor most of our educational institutions question the assumptions behind the War on Poverty. Even conservatives often attribute much of the progress that has been made by lower-income people to these programs.

For example, the usually insightful quarterly magazine *City Journal* says in its current issue: “Beginning in the mid-sixties, the condition of most black Americans improved markedly.”

That is completely false and misleading.

The economic rise of blacks began decades earlier, before any of the legislation and policies that are credited with producing that rise. The continuation of the rise of blacks out of poverty did not—repeat, did not—accelerate during the 1960s.

The poverty rate among black families fell from 87

percent in 1940 to 47 percent in 1960, during an era of virtually no major civil rights legislation or anti-poverty programs. It dropped another 17 percentage points during the decade of the 1960s and one percentage point during the 1970s, but this continuation of the previous trend was neither unprecedented nor something to be arbitrarily attributed to the programs like the War on Poverty.

In various skilled trades, the incomes of blacks relative to whites more than doubled between 1936 and 1959—that is, before the magic 1960s decade when supposedly all progress began. The rise of blacks in professional and other high-level occupations was greater in the years immediately preceding the Civil Rights Act of 1964 than in the years afterwards.

While some good things did come out of the 1960s, as out of many other decades, so did major social disasters that continue to plague us today. Many of those disasters began quite clearly during the 1960s.

But what are mere facts compared to a heady vision? Liberal assumptions—“two Americas,” for example—are being recycled this election year, even by candidates who evade the “liberal” label.

The High Cost of Shibboleths

A recent e-mail from a reader said that he could not find the word “shibboleth” in his desk dictionary, even though he had seen this word in my column. That was an unfortunate omission in his dictionary because shibboleths explain a lot about what is said and done in politics today.

Back in Biblical times, the word “shibboleth” was used as a password, because people from one side could say it easily and their enemies couldn’t. It identified who you were and which side you were on.

Today, many things that are said and done in our political life serve that same purpose—and often make no sense otherwise. When people say that they are for “diversity” or gun control or campaign finance reform, they are declaring themselves to be on one side in the political wars as a whole. In their own eyes, their positions on such issues identify them as one of the good, caring and compassionate people.

What political shibboleths do is transform questions about facts, causation and evidence into questions about personal identity and moral worth. Shibboleths are also a great labor-saving device. You don’t need to find out what the actual consequences of affirmative action have been if being for “diversity” serves the purpose of identifying you as one of those good people who care about racial justice and the advancement of the disadvantaged.

You don’t have to find out what actually happens when there are more relaxed or more stringent gun control laws,

if you only need to show that you are on the side of the angels. How many lives have actually been lost under one policy versus the other is a factual question whose answer you need not bother learning.

Mere facts cannot compete with shibboleths when it comes to making people feel good. Moreover, shibboleths keep off the agenda the painful question of how dangerous it is to have policies which impact millions of human beings without a thorough knowledge of the hard facts needed to understand just what that impact has actually been.

Shibboleths are the life blood of the media. Stories which seem to support the side of the angels are trumpeted from coast to coast, while stories which support the other side are either downplayed or ignored altogether.

For example, vicious crimes committed by white people against black people are big news because these stories fit the shibboleths which establish the moral identity of the journalists who tell these stories. Vicious crimes committed by blacks against whites are not big news because these stories undermine the shibboleths—or, as it is phrased, “feed stereotypes.” Ditto with stories about crimes committed by the homeless, homosexuals and others favored by current shibboleths.

Shibboleths are dangerous, not only because they mobilize political support for policies that most of the supporters have not thought through, but also because these badges of identity make it harder to reverse those policies when they turn out to be counterproductive or even disastrous. When admitting a mistake means renouncing one’s identity as one of “us” and being identified with a demonized “them,” do not expect as many people to do it as if all that was involved was the question whether policy *A* produces better results than policy *B*.

Those who strain for moral equivalence—itsself one of the shibboleths of our time—may assume that shibboleths are part of all political or ideological positions. But, for at least two centuries, shibboleths have been at the heart of the ideology of the left, whether moderate left or radical left.

Assumptions of being more concerned, caring and compassionate than their opponents can be found on the left from Godwin and Condorcet in the 18th century to a whole galaxy of liberal-left journalists, academics, organizations and movements today. But there were no such assumptions in the writings of Adam Smith in the 18th century or in those of Milton Friedman today. It was enough for them to say that their opponents were mistaken and their policies harmful—and why.

What we need are more factual arguments and counter-arguments. With shibboleths, we are flying blind into the future, through mountains of hard facts that are being ignored when they contradict the vision that gives many people their sense of self-worth.

“Why Do They Hate Us?”

The idea that what goes around comes around applies not only to individuals but to nations and whole civilizations. It was just a few centuries ago—not long, as history is measured—that China had the highest standard of living in the world and the Dutch were the world’s largest exporters, while North Africans were enslaving a million Europeans.

Nowhere have whole peoples seen their situation reversed more visibly or more painfully than the peoples of the Islamic world. In medieval times, Europe lagged far behind the Islamic world in science, mathematics, scholarship, and military power.

Even such ancient European thinkers as Plato and Aristotle became known to Europeans of the Middle Ages only after their writings, which had been translated into Arabic, were translated back into European languages.

Today that is all reversed. The number of books per person in Europe is more than ten times that in Africa and the Middle East. The number of books translated into Arabic over the past thousand years is about the same as the number translated into Spanish in one year.

There are only 18 computers per thousand persons in the Arab world, compared to 78 per thousand persons worldwide. Fewer than 400 industrial patents were issued to people in the Arab countries during the last two decades of the 20th century, while 15,000 industrial patents were issued to South Koreans alone.

Human beings do not always take reversals of fortune

gracefully. Still less can those who were once on top quietly accept seeing others leaving them far behind economically, intellectually, and militarily.

Those in the Islamic world have for centuries been taught to regard themselves as far superior to the “infidels” of the West, while everything they see with their own eyes now tells them otherwise. Worse yet, what the whole world sees with their own eyes tells them that the Middle East has made few contributions to human advancement in our times.

Even Middle Eastern oil was largely discovered and processed by people from the West. After oil, the Middle East’s most prominent export has been terrorism.

Those who look at the world in rationalistic terms may say that the Middle East can use some of its vast oil wealth to expand its own educated classes and move back to the forefront of human achievement. They did it once, why not do it again?

All sorts of things can be done in the long run, but you have to live through the short run to get there. Moreover, even the short run, as history is measured, can be pretty long in terms of the human lifespan.

Even if the Islamic world set such goals and committed the material resources and individual efforts required, they could not expect to pull abreast of the West for generations, even if the West stood still. More realistically, it would take centuries, as it took the West centuries to catch up to them.

What will happen in the meantime? Are millions of proud human beings supposed to quietly accept inferiority for themselves and their children, and perhaps their children’s children?

Or are they more likely to listen to demagogues, whether political or religious, who tell them that their lowly place in

the world is due to the evils of others—the West, the Americans, the Jews?

If the peoples of the Islamic world disregarded such demagogues, they would be the exceptions, rather than the rule, among people who lag painfully far behind others. Even in the West, there have been powerful political movements based on the notion that the rich have gotten rich by keeping others poor—and that things need to be set right “by all means necessary.”

These means seldom include concentration on self-improvement, with 19th-century Japan being one of the rare exceptions. Lashing out at others is far more immediately satisfying—and modern communications, transportation, and weaponry make it far easier to lash out destructively across great distances.

Against this background, we may want to consider the question asked by hand-wringers in the West: Why do they hate us? Maybe it is because the alternative to hating us is to hate themselves.

Foreign “Allies”

To those who do not want to face up to hard and brutal choices in a nuclear age, the magic formula is to turn to something called “the international community”—or, more concretely, the United Nations or “our European allies.” As with so many rhetorical solutions to hard problems, the specific realities behind the rhetoric get very little attention.

What is the actual track record of the UN or Europe? Is it something to rely on, in life and death decisions?

The UN stood idly by in Rwanda while mass slaughters went on. The UN passed resolution after resolution on Iraq for years, without taking any action to enforce them. Indeed, the UN was part of the massive corruption in the oil-for-food program, which enabled Saddam Hussein to divert money intended to feed the Iraqi people into buying weapons and palaces for himself.

When the UN seated Libya on its human rights committee, that was a sign of its moral bankruptcy. So was its conference on racism, which featured anti-Semitic propaganda by Arab countries.

What of our European allies, who are automatically assumed to be so much wiser and more sophisticated than American “cowboy” presidents, whether Reagan or Bush?

Europe’s track record throughout the 20th century was one unbelievable disaster after another. European countries blundered their way into two world wars—from which every country involved emerged worse off than before, with a

continent devastated and its people hungry amid the rubble. Both times American food fed them.

The two biggest ideological disasters of the 20th century—Communism and Fascism—were both created in Europe. Both of these blind fanaticisms led to innocent civilians being killed by the millions, during peacetime as well as in wars.

For more than half a century, Western Europe has not had to defend itself because it has been protected by the American nuclear umbrella. Without that, there was nothing to stop the Soviet army from marching right across the continent to the Atlantic Ocean.

American protection enabled Western Europe to neglect its own military defenses, and in some cases use their armed forces as another government featherbedding program. NATO's forces include unionized soldiers who absorb a much higher share of Europe's military spending than do American soldiers in the U.S. That leaves less money for NATO to buy up-to-date equipment.

NATO's troops get generous vacations and light enough schedules that many of them have part-time civilian jobs. The average age of soldiers in Belgium is 40, compared to 28 for American soldiers.

No country could afford to have to fight a war with over-age soldiers and obsolete equipment, unless its military defense was left to someone else. That someone else is the United States.

Like so many people who have been sheltered from the harsh realities of life and not forced to stand on their own two feet, Western Europeans have been able to indulge themselves in illusions. The most unrealistic of these illusions has been that we can just talk our way out of

international threats with “negotiations,” treaties and UN resolutions.

That approach was tried for two decades after the First World War. That is what led to the Second World War.

France was the worst. In the 1920s, its foreign minister Aristide Briand negotiated much-ballyhooed agreements renouncing war—agreements that won him the Nobel Prize but did nothing to deter war. In fact, such things lulled peaceful countries into a dangerous complacency that emboldened aggressor nations.

France’s record of cowardice and betrayal of its allies during the 1930s, was climaxed by its own surrender to Hitler after just six weeks of fighting in 1940. At the 11th hour, France appealed to the United States, which was not in the war at that point, for military equipment—that is, for the kind of “unilateral” American intervention at which the French would sneer so often in later years.

Are these the people to whom we should defer on life-and-death questions? Are our actions to be limited to what is acceptable to the lowest common denominator at the UN or in Europe? Are the lofty rhetoric and condescending airs of foreigners to impress us more than their dismal track records?

My Platform

From time to time some kind readers suggest that I run for public office, including President of the United States. No need for those on the left to panic. It is not going to happen.

Such suggestions, however, cause me to imagine what my platform would be if I were in politics. Once you see what that platform would be, you can understand why it will never happen.

Since politicians like to have campaign slogans, instead of “Bring it On!” my slogan might be “Get rid of it!” to describe all the laws, policies, and government agencies that I would abolish.

A more positive slogan would be “Conservative Radicalism.” That is, my policies would be based on traditional values but would make radical changes in order to restore or enhance those values.

Cabinet-level departments, for example, would be reduced to just two—the Defense Department and the State Department, with the latter purged of the weak-kneed internationalist crowd who have dominated it for so long. Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, etc., would all be abolished as just money-wasting bureaucracies serving outside special interests, instead of the people whose taxes support them.

Government subsidies would be drastically reduced, starting at the top. That is, there would be a prohibition against giving a dime of government money to anyone

whose annual income or total assets exceed one billion dollars. Why should agricultural subsidies be going to Ted Turner and David Rockefeller, or “universal health care” pay for their medicine?

Who could object to cutting off subsidies to billionaires? Once that was done, however, the next step would be to cut off millionaires. Then we could proceed on down the income scale until people making a hundred grand a year could no longer expect to be subsidized with the taxpayer’s money.

The great advantage of this way of proceeding is that it would rob the media of opportunities to run sob stories about how some poor person was hurt by cutbacks in some government program—even when the vast majority of those who were hurt were the bureaucrats who run these programs and slick special interests who hide behind the poor.

By the time we got down to cutting off all government subsidies to people making \$100,000 a year or more, the federal budget would probably not only be balanced but have a surplus. Of course, there would be hordes of unemployed bureaucrats being interviewed on TV, complaining that the world was going to end without their vital contributions. But that could be brushed aside.

With all the money saved by ending vast numbers of subsidies, the government could afford to pay the kinds of salaries that would attract highly qualified people from the private sector. For example, if every member of Congress were paid a million dollars a year, that would cost less than one percent of what it costs to run the Department of Agriculture.

As things stand today, a successful doctor, lawyer, executive, engineer or economist would lose money by

becoming a member of Congress. This means that Congress is largely filled with people who either already have great wealth or people who don't have what it takes to earn a high income in the private sector—or people hungry for power, who are the worst of all.

These are not the kinds of people who should dominate the making of laws in Congress or enforcing them in the courts. Short-sighted critics might object that the kinds of people we have in politics and the courts don't deserve to get a million dollars a year. But that is the very reason for trying to get better people.

If a million dollars a year won't do it, you could raise the pay to ten million and it would still be chump change compared to what is wasted by cheap politicians, who turn out to be very expensive politicians when wasting the taxpayers' money.

Then there should be term limits. In fact, elected officials should be limited to just one term. Otherwise, they and their staffs would be spending most of their time doing things to get re-elected in all but the last term.

These are just some of the things I would do in the name of "conservative radicalism." But it may be enough to show why there is no clear and present danger of my being nominated, much less elected.

The Oldest Fraud

Election frauds are nothing new and neither are political frauds in general. The oldest fraud is the belief that the political left is the party of the poor and the downtrodden.

The 2004 election results in California were only the latest evidence to give the lie to that belief. While the state as a whole went for Kerry, 55 percent versus 44 percent for Bush, the various counties ranged from 71 percent Bush to 83 percent Kerry. The most affluent counties were where Kerry had his strongest support.

In Marin County, where the average home price is \$750,000, 73 percent of the votes went for Kerry. In Alameda County, where Berkeley is located, it was 74 percent Kerry. San Francisco, with the highest rents of any major city in the country, gave 83 percent of its votes to Kerry.

Out where ordinary people live, it was a different story. Thirty-six counties went for Bush versus 22 counties for Kerry, and usually by more balanced vote totals, though Bush went over 70 percent in less fashionable places like Lassen County and Modoc County. If you have never heard of them, there's a reason.

It was much the same story on the votes for Proposition 66, which would have limited the "three strikes" law that puts career criminals away for life. Affluent voters living insulated lives in places well removed from high-crime neighborhoods have the luxury of worrying about whether

we are not being nice enough to hoodlums, criminals and terrorists.

They don't like the "three strikes" law and want it weakened. While most California voters opposed any weakening of that law, a majority of the voters in the affluent and heavily pro-Kerry counties mentioned wanted us to stop being so mean to criminals.

This pattern is not confined to California and it is not new. There were limousine liberals before there were limousines. The same pattern applies when you go even further left on the political spectrum, to socialists and communists.

The British Labor Party's leader in the heyday of its socialist zealotry was Clement Attlee, who grew up in a large home with servants—and this was not the only home his family owned. Meanwhile, Margaret Thatcher's family ran a grocery store and lived upstairs over it.

While the British Labor Party was affiliated with labor unions, it was the affluent and the intellectuals in the party who had the most left-wing ideologies and the most unrealistic policies. In the years leading up to World War II, the Labor Party was for disarmament while Hitler was arming Germany to the teeth across the Channel.

Eventually, it was the labor union component of the party that insisted on some sanity, so that Britain could begin preparing to defend itself militarily—not a moment too soon.

When Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels wrote the *Communist Manifesto*, they were a couple of spoiled young men from rich families. All their talk about the working class was just talk, but it appealed to other such young men who liked heady talk.

As Engels himself put it, when the Communist group for

whom the *Manifesto* was written was choosing delegates, “a working man was proposed for appearances sake, but those who proposed him voted for me.” This may have been the first rigged election of the Communist movement but it was certainly not the last.

All sorts of modern extremist movements, such as the Weathermen in the United States or the Baader-Meinhof gang in Germany, have attracted a disproportionate number of the affluent in general and the intellectuals in particular.

Such people may speak in the name of the downtrodden but they themselves are often people who have time on their hands to nurse their pet notions about the world and their fancies about themselves as leaders of the poor, saviors of the environment or whatever happens to be the Big Deal du jour.

Osama bin Laden is not someone embittered by poverty. He is from a very rich family and has had both the time to nurse his resentments of the West and the money to organize terrorists to lash out in the only way that can give them any significance.

The belief that liberal, left-wing or extremist movements are for the poor may or may not be the biggest fraud but it is certainly the oldest.

The Left's Vision

Santa Monica, California, has decreed a fine of \$2,500 a day—for not cutting your hedges!

Has someone discovered some terrible health hazard or other danger from hedges that are too high? Not at all. The politicians who run Santa Monica have simply decided that people should not be able to build a high wall of hedges around themselves.

Santa Monica has long been called “the People’s Republic of Santa Monica” for all the far left laws and rhetoric it generates. Like other governments called “people’s republic,” the last thing they care about is people. The ideology, or even whims, of those in power routinely take away other people’s right to live their own lives as they see fit.

Santa Monica is not unique. Wherever you get enough far left people in power, you can find a similar willingness to force everyone into collectivist conformity at all costs.

Too often these selfish ego trips of the left are called idealism, and issues are discussed in terms of the wonderful goals they proclaim—“social justice,” “open space” or “saving” this or that—rather than in terms of what is actually being done and the costs entailed on others, even when that cost is \$2,500 a day.

None of this is peculiar to the United States. In fact, the same mindset is more prevalent in a number of Western European countries and has been carried even further in practice.

In Britain, for example, the right to defend yourself is being taken away in many ways. Gun control laws there have not only tightened restrictions on gun ownership—with the murder rate rising as they do—these laws ban anything that looks like a gun, especially if it is used in self-defense.

Britons who have held burglars in their homes until the police arrived, by using toy pistols, have been arrested along with the burglars. To the collectivist mindset, independent self-help of any sort is a threat to their vision of the government as the sole source of protection and direction.

If someone attacks you in Britain and you knock him down, you are not allowed to hit him again or you will be charged with assault. Apparently they think that someone who has been knocked down is now harmless. People who have led sufficiently sheltered lives may believe such things—and impose such notions on others through the power of government.

The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has even advised that you are not to yell “help” when you are attacked in a public place. You are to yell “Call the police.”

Both self-defense and coming to the aid of others are lumped together as “vigilante” actions. That mindset has made inroads into the American media as well.

Years ago, Bernard Goetz was called “the subway vigilante” in the media because he shot some young hoodlums who attacked him directly. He had sat quietly minding his own business while the thugs harassed other people in the same subway car. But even to defend himself was “vigilante” action, as far as those in the liberal media were concerned.

The left takes its vision seriously—more seriously than it takes the rights of other people. They want to be our shepherds. But that requires us to be sheep.

Even in the raising of our own children, the left wants to take charge—without taking responsibility. Schools have long ago taken over the role of introducing children to sex when, how, and with whatever beliefs are in vogue. But, if your child ends up pregnant or stricken with AIDS, that is your problem, not theirs.

In some European countries, it is illegal to spank your own children. They apparently believe, like Hillary Clinton, that “it takes a village” to raise a child. But, if the child ends up rotten, it is not the village that lies awake at night. It is the parents.

Making other people’s decisions for them without being held accountable for the consequences is the left’s vision in many different contexts—including outsourcing our foreign policy to the United Nations or to the International Court of Justice, whom nobody elected and whom nobody can hold accountable.

Hedges in Santa Monica are just one of the signs of our times. The left wants to cut our freedom down, not just hedges.

The Left's Vocabulary

A recent angry e-mail from a reader said that certain issues should not be determined by “the dictates of the market.” With a mere turn of a phrase, he had turned reality upside down.

Decisions by people free to make their mutual accommodations with other free people were called “dictates” while having third parties tell all of them what they could and couldn't do was not.

Verbal coups have long been a specialty of the left. Totalitarian countries on the left have called themselves “people's democracies” and used the egalitarian greeting “comrade”—even though some comrades had the arbitrary power of life and death over other comrades.

In democratic countries, where public opinion matters, the left has used its verbal talents to change the whole meaning of words and to substitute new words, so that issues would be debated in terms of their redefined vocabulary, instead of the real substance of the issues.

Words which have acquired connotations from the actual experiences of millions of human beings over generations, or even centuries, have been replaced by new words that wipe out those connotations and substitute more fashionable notions of the left.

The word “swamp,” for example, has been all but erased from the language. Swamps were messy, sometimes smelly, places where mosquitoes bred and sometimes snakes lurked. The left has replaced the word “swamp” with “wetlands,” a

word spoken in pious tones usually reserved for sacred things.

The point of this verbal sleight-of-hand is to impose the left's notions of how other people can use their own land. Restrictive laws about "wetlands" have imposed huge costs on farmers and other owners of land that happened to have a certain amount of water on it.

Another word that the left has virtually banished from the language is "bum." Centuries of experience with idlers who refused to work and who hung around on the streets making a nuisance—and sometimes a menace—of themselves were erased from our memories as the left verbally transformed those same people into a sacred icon, "the homeless."

As with swamps, what was once messy and smelly was now turned into something we had a duty to protect. It was now our duty to support people who refused to support themselves.

Crimes committed by bums are covered up by the media, by verbally transforming "the homeless" into "transients" or "drifters" whenever they commit crimes. Thus "the homeless" are the only group you never hear of committing any crimes.

More to the point, third parties' notions are imposed by the power of the government to raise our taxes to support people who are raising hell on our streets and in parks where it has often become too dangerous for our children to play.

The left has a whole vocabulary devoted to depicting people who do not meet standards as people who have been denied "access."

Whether it is academic standards, job qualifications or credit requirements, those who do not measure up are said

to have been deprived of “opportunity,” “rights” or “social justice.”

The word games of the left—from the mantra of “diversity” to the pieties of “compassion”—are not just games. They are ways of imposing power by evading issues of substance through the use of seductive rhetoric.

“Rights,” for example, have become an all-purpose term used for evading both facts and logic by saying that people have a “right” to whatever the left wants to give them by taking from others.

For centuries, rights were exemptions from government power, as in the Bill of Rights. Now the left has redefined rights as things that can be demanded from the taxpayers, or from private employers or others, on behalf of people who accept no mutual obligations, even for common decency.

At one time, educators tried to teach students to carefully define words and systematically analyze arguments. They said, “We are here to teach you how to think, not what to think.”

Today, they are teaching students what to think—political correctness. Instead of knowledge, students are given “self-esteem,” so that they can vent their ignorance with confidence.

Abstract People

Most people have to deal with the reality that confronts them. They start with that reality and try to do the best they can within its limitations and within their own limitations.

But there are large and growing numbers of people—especially among the intelligentsia—whose starting point is some abstraction that they wish to apply to reality. For example, even in the face of a worldwide terrorist organization that has declared open warfare on every American man, woman and child, those whose starting point is abstraction focus on the “civil rights” of terrorists.

No one in World War II worried about Hitler’s or Goering’s civil rights. The very concept would have been considered absurd. Hitler and Goering were not part of our civil world. In fact, they were trying to destroy that world and replace it with their own tyranny. That is exactly what the world terrorist networks are trying to do today.

How can anyone have rights within a framework that he rejects and is trying to destroy? Rights are not just abstractions plucked out of thin air. Rights are part of a whole set of mutual obligations binding people together. If enemy soldiers have any rights, it is as a result of international agreements such as the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war. And they have those rights only after they have surrendered and become prisoners of war.

So long as they are still fighting, enemy soldiers do not even have the right to live, without which all other rights are meaningless. If these enemy soldiers have infiltrated wearing

civilian clothes or disguised in the uniform of some other country, then they can be killed legally, even after surrendering. Spies have been shot or hanged for centuries.

At one time, all this would have been considered too obvious to require saying. But today, when some people talk blithely about “animal rights,” as if animals were part of some system of mutual obligations, even the obvious has to be explained to some of the products of our dumbed-down education.

A sense of decency limits what we do to enemies or to animals, but this is not a matter of rights, civil or otherwise. Nor is it a threat to the rights of American citizens when we fail to treat foreign terrorists as if they were American citizens. Citizens are people who have a legal obligation to play by certain rules, and who are therefore protected by that same national system of rules. But people who are trying to destroy both the citizens and the rules they live by have no such claim.

The hand-wringers among us seem to be worried that foreign terrorists are not being treated as nicely as they would like or that illegal aliens from the Middle East will be “singled out” to be sent back where they came from. In the abstract, there is no more reason to focus on Middle Eastern males than on Scandinavian females, when it comes to deporting illegal aliens. It is just that we do not live in the abstract. We live in the world that exists. And we want to keep on living.

Some of these hand-wringers even seem to think that we have to “set an example” that will vindicate us in the eyes of “world opinion.” In short, they put these abstractions first—ahead of the deadly realities facing us now and in the years ahead.

Why the United States of America needs to vindicate

itself in the eyes of the despotic and failing governments that make up much of the rest of the world is a mystery. Whether foreigners will in fact respect us for bending over backward or despise us for our apologetic weakness is another question.

Worse yet, other nations considering whether to cooperate or ally themselves with us—at some risk to themselves—will have to consider whether we are dependable and realistic enough to make the gamble worthwhile or whether we are terminally addicted to shibboleths that can jeopardize ourselves and them.

The great political affliction of the 20th century was putting abstractions ahead of flesh-and-blood human beings, especially in ideological totalitarian states under Nazism and Communism. Do we need to repeat that staggering tragedy in the 21st century?

Looking Back

We may look back on some eras as heroic—that of the founding fathers or “the greatest generation” that fought World War II—but some eras we look back on in disbelief at the utter stupidity with which people ruined their economies or blundered into wars in which every country involved ended up worse off than before.

How will people a century from now look back on our era? Fortunately, most of us will be long gone by then, so we will be spared the embarrassment of seeing ourselves judged.

What will future generations say about how we behaved when confronted by international terrorist organizations that have repeatedly demonstrated their cutthroat ruthlessness and now had the prospect of getting nuclear weapons from rogue nations like Iran and North Korea?

What will future generations think when they see the front pages of our leading newspapers repeatedly preoccupied with whether we are treating captured cutthroats nicely enough? What will they think when they see the Geneva Convention invoked to protect people who are excluded from protection by the Geneva Convention?

During World War II, German soldiers who were captured not wearing the uniform of their own army were simply lined up against a wall and shot dead by American troops.

This was not a scandal. Far from being covered up by the military, movies were taken of the executions and have since

been shown on the History Channel. We understood then that the Geneva Convention protected people who obeyed the Geneva Convention, not those who didn't—as terrorists today certainly do not.

What will those who look back on these times think when they see that the American Civil Liberties Union, and others who have made excuses for all sorts of criminals, were pushing for the prosecution of our own troops for life-and-death decisions they had a split second to make in the heat of combat?

The frivolous demands made on our military—that they protect museums while fighting for their lives, that they tiptoe around mosques from which people are shooting at them—betray an irresponsibility made worse by ingratitude toward men who have put their lives on the line to protect us.

It is impossible to fight a war without heroism. Yet can you name a single American military hero acclaimed by the media for an act of courage in combat? Such courage is systematically ignored by most of the media.

If American troops kill a hundred terrorists in battle and lose ten of their own men doing it, the only headline will be: “Ten More Americans Killed in Iraq Today.”

Those in the media who have carped at the military for years, and have repeatedly opposed military spending, are now claiming to be “honoring” our military by making a big production out of publishing the names of all those killed in Iraq. Will future generations see through this hypocrisy—and wonder why we did not?

What will the generations of the future say if we allow Iran and North Korea to develop nuclear weapons, which are then turned over to terrorists who can begin to annihilate American cities?

Our descendants will wonder how we could have let this happen, when we had the power to destroy any nation posing such a threat. Knowing that we had the power, they would have to wonder why we did not have the will—and why it was so obvious that we did not.

Nothing will more painfully reveal the irresponsible frivolity of our times than the many demands in the media and in politics that we act only with the approval of the United Nations and after winning over “world opinion.”

How long this will take and what our enemies will be doing in the meantime while we are going through these futile exercises is something that gets very little attention.

Do you remember Osama bin Laden warning us, on the eve of the 2004 elections, that he would retaliate against those parts of the United States that voted for Bush? The United States is not Spain, so we disregarded his threats.

But what of future generations, after international terrorists get nuclear weapons? And what will our descendants think of us—will they ever forgive us—for leaving them in such a desperate situation because we were paralyzed by a desire to placate “world opinion”?