



Written by [Beverly K. Eakman](#) on January 28, 2010

Saving Civil Society and a Culture of Merit

A flurry of new conservative websites, groups, and talk-show hosts have emerged in the wake of failing dominoes: ObamaCare, federal takeovers, bailouts, and stimulus packages. Tea-Partiers represent but a smattering of upstart activists that increasingly feel alienated from old stalwarts of the conservative movement: among them, the Heritage Foundation, American Conservative Union, Conservative Political Action Committee and Americans for Tax Reform, Empower America, and even the old Silent Majority and the Dr. Laura show.



Today, the very term “conservative” has a bad rap. The trusty dictionary and thesaurus define *conservative* variously as “conformist,” “unadventurous,” “old-fashioned,” “old school,” “cautious,” and “conventional.” Nothing exciting, expansive, or smacking of the can-do spirit there. Thus, the “conservative” moniker fails to reflect the level of political anger of those who once were loyalists of a constitutionalist-traditionalist Republican Party, the one fashioned out of the old Revolutionary War-era Whig Party that supported the supremacy of Congress over the Executive Branch and fought for independence as opposed to autocratic rule in alignment with the Founding Fathers.

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By contrast, the term *liberal* enjoys a more upbeat characterization. Liberalism is portrayed as “open-minded,” “broadminded,” “freethinking,” “tolerant,” “generous,” and even “noninterventionist.” Never mind that today’s liberalism is quite the opposite.

The average school child, of course, is clueless as to significant differences between the political ideologies behind these labels. The typical high-school, and even college, graduate has never studied the term *Marxist socialism*, doesn’t know what Karl Marx advocated, has no idea how communism morphed into elitist-versus-proletariat under Lenin, Stalin, and Khrushchev, and is similarly ignorant of the origins of terms like *capitalism*, *democracy*, *independence*, and *self-determination*. Instead, they are taught to value “interdependency” (as in sharing), with nary a clue as to how this version of “sharing” undercuts everything the Framers incorporated into the U.S. Constitution. If schools had been doing their job these past 40 years, the oft-used political expression “leveling the playing field” would conjure up “from each according to his ability, to each according to his need.” Youngsters would know who made the latter statement (Karl Marx), and why it contradicts the ideals of the Founding Fathers.

Since youth are ignorant, occasionally someone illuminates them — as Carly Fiorina did in a Wednesday [Washington Times column](#): “Conservatism is really about a return to basics that every responsible family understands. Don’t spend what we can’t afford; make tough priority calls ... and keep track of where dollars go; ... restrain the power of centralized and potentially heavy-handed government...; opportunity, not opposition.”

Simple truth, simply stated. Except that many “responsible folks” don’t see it quite that way — and they



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don't know what they believe. The creeping socialism we have experienced over the past 40 years is kind of like that first garbage disposal our parents (or maybe grandparents) bought for their kitchen. Once accustomed to it, depositing potato peels and eggshells in a smelly sack every night was understandably a disgusting prospect. Which is probably why, according to an article by Sam Tanenhaus in last Sunday's *New York Times* entitled "[Making Sense of the New Political Anger](#)," an angry voter last summer told House Republican Bob Inglis at a town hall meeting: "Keep your government hands off my Medicare." To which Inglis appropriately replied, "Actually, sir, your health care is being provided by the government."

At the time, says Tanenhaus, "this incident was widely cited as a sign of public ignorance about health care. But it can be interpreted differently — as a reflection of the helplessness many Americans feel at a time of growing dependency on a growing government: one that gives health-care coverage, and can take it away or reduce its benefits."

True. But the other side of *that* coin is the *liberal* socialist ideal that is okay for government to bait, then force, Americans — especially the middle class — to subsidize all manner of socialist programs in the name of helping the less fortunate, ensuring savings "for a rainy day" (especially as people age), guaranteeing universal education, helping the underclass achieve the American Dream through easy mortgages, and on and on, until programs first thought of as a stop-gap to keep people from falling through the cracks, become critical to the nation's survival. This is what leads to unchecked government spending, and it comes loaded with consequences, primary among them being that average folks no longer understand that they "shouldn't spend what they can't afford." After all, government definitely spends what it can't afford — and encourages Americans to do likewise at other Americans' expense, via taxes.

Other side-effects soon follow, especially an all-for-me-via-government-clout mentality. For example, despite the fact that the nation's blue-collar workers have become increasingly disenchanted with unions — what with jobs flowing overseas to get around the outrageous demands of union bosses who think nothing of shutting down vital industries to assure that menial laborers make the salary of a Ph.D. — project labor agreements in the District of Columbia, at the behest of a pro-Big Labor Congress, are set to shut out some 92 percent of the nation's capital's construction workforce, workers who don't belong to a union, in the process of massively renovating three federal buildings "[managed by the U.S. General Services Administration and funded by stimulus dollars](#)."

This sort of hidden giveaway, writer Brett McMahon assures us, will hit our wallets hard. In response, average citizens will do everything they can to get as much as they can from the government, whether that means signing on to the federal prescription drug benefit, or taking advantage of cash-for-clunkers, or something else. It's a vicious cycle. The more ham-fisted government becomes in its preferential assignment of dollars, the more determined is the rest of the population to get back a share of the earnings they have been forced to spend in taxes. This is not conducive to preserving a civil society — the type of society that the Framers of our Constitution envisioned.

The whole rationale behind the Framers' design of our government was to allow average people to be in a position to make choices for themselves and their families, better choices than government could make for them, and to appeal to people's nobler instincts instead of their baser ones. This was intended to produce a civil society.

And in many ways, it did. It is why the United States is the first to rush to the aid of disaster victims and other unfortunates everywhere in the world. Our country got the reputation for being the "shining city



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on the hill” because we were seen as an empathetic, charitable people. Not that there aren’t pockets of such individuals in other countries. But “pockets” is the key here. Compassion is not sewn into the fabric of most societies. This is why we are often seen as “a Christian nation,” too:

I was hungry and you fed me.
I was in prison and you visited me.
I was thirsty and you gave me to drink.
I was naked and you clothed me.

The words of Jesus resonated with American ideals about empathy, to the point of personal sacrifice, and they are literally etched into the American consciousness — some would say to an excessive degree — topping every other nation on the planet.

Not that there isn’t contention as to whether empathy and sacrifice are valid elements of a “civil society.” Contradicting philosophers like Ayn Rand (*Atlas Shrugged*) have argued that self-interest, and even selfishness, were key to our nation’s high standard of living; that so-called selfishness — putting oneself and loved ones first — is at the heart of what the Declaration calls the “pursuit of happiness.” The endless “sacrifices” that are part and parcel of the Christian ethos, they maintain, has had the unintended consequence injecting the heavy hand of government into every aspect of people’s lives, its most prominent manifestation today being political correctness. Political correctness, of course, is the inverse of free and open debate, and thus runs counter to a government that is “of the people and by the people.” The result is a decidedly uncivil society, they say.

Well, the point is debatable. What is not debatable is that none of the political parties command much loyalty, and that the populace is bitterly divided, almost diametrically, on every key issue: 47 percent for this, 53 percent for that, and with a 2 percent margin of error. Such statistics hardly translate to a landslide for much of anything. No surprise, then that the shouting is getting louder, or that tension is heightening.

But maybe the uptick in incivility doesn’t boil down to an ideal of sacrifice and empathy versus an ethic of “selfishness.” More problematic is that people’s shouted opinions are mostly knee-jerk reactions — as opposed to well-thought-out, rational responses.

Schools do not encourage “critical thinking” when they sell that term to parents and the media. What they preach to students is: “You feel, therefore you are!”

Take, for example, the oft-repeated phrase by politicians: that government needs to create jobs. Conservatives once knew that it isn’t the function of government to “create jobs”; government is supposed to create an environment that is friendly to and supportive of job creation by the private sector — unless, of course, that government is socialist. Only nanny-state governments “create” jobs, and in so doing they produce an ever-thinner slice of the “pie” available to individuals, save for the Government Elite.

Which is precisely what we have elected, and keep on electing: a system of government elitists, who inhabit the equivalent of dachas on the Black Sea and travel to exotic locales for meetings, conventions and “fact-finding” missions, all on the taxpayers’ dime, which unsurprisingly often winds up involving [“trysts, golf, skiing”](#) and other pastimes reminiscent of the old Soviet top echelon.

We tend to forget how quickly the Marxist version of “equality” morphs into a two-tiered system of enormously wealthy haves, who dispense “gotcha justice” via bloated bureaucracies, and produce empty shelves through overregulation. Meanwhile, the hodge-podge of lesser beings — the bourgeoisie



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(“middle class”) and proletarian (“blue collar”) workers — muddle through (or not) by gaming the system.

Today, the Democratic Party is the domain not of the “common man,” but of an obscenely wealthy, political elite (e.g., House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senators John Kerry and John Edwards, philanthropist George Soros, the Kennedy clan), all grossing over \$400 million a year in personal or family income. No wonder John Edwards thought nothing of a \$400 haircut, philandering on his wife who is dying miserably of cancer, failing to own-up to a baby he fathered with his lover until it became the stuff of late-night TV jokes. Yet, the man had the temerity to pretend outrage over “two Americas” along the campaign trail. This reflects a person so out-of-touch with the mainstream that no amount of flak by the public would give him pause, including losing an election. He will continue to live the “high life” regardless.

The problem for Republicans is that, as shown by Barack Obama both on the campaign trail and in his State of the Union address, liberal-leftists articulate their hooey well. That is their litmus test, not each position on every issue. They tailor their claptrap to the audience-of-the-moment and, if necessary, grease the proffered palms of union bosses, education leaders, media and entertainment moguls, and Big Business — all of whom are expected to repeat and proliferate it to curry favor with government at such time as they need its blessing. Democrats have thus identified the key to consolidating power, leaving Republicans to emulate them in the name of “the Big Tent,” retooling their messages over and over till they sound sufficiently socialistic that young Americans will “buy.”

The Internet, with its huge offerings, is having an effect in circulating alternate views, but its success cuts two ways: Because no one can keep up with the sheer volume of information, many avail themselves only of those items that conform to the views they assimilated in high school and through Big Screen entertainment. The rest, they filter out or ignore as “not credible.” Self-censorship is made ever-easier via sophisticated math-based algorithms used in search engines like Google, Yahoo and Bing.

Which brings us back to the schools: The young-adult socialists who inhabit voting booths are not interested in a “culture of merit,” save maybe in sports; they are possessed of an “entitlement mentality,” even when they reject ObamaCare. Indeed, the mindset of entitlement is so complete that many who reject ObamaCare do so not because it is socialist or an expansion of Big Government, but because they expect the same Cadillac plans that the political elite gets handed to them on the government dime! These people are a completely different breed of “detractor”: They insist that government provide a job, not because they have worked hard to stand out in a particular field, but because, by golly, they have networked, Face-booked, put in hours of community service, and pursued extra-curricular activities till they drop! Therefore, they reason, society owes them! And “society” in this context is Government.

Leftists have known from the late 1940s that education was their ace-in-the-hole to assure that socialism (especially redistribution-of-wealth) and elitism is passed along from one administration to another. They have always understood the primary directive: to institutionalize cultural and economic Marxism by incapacitating the education system — from day-care to grad schools. No wonder year-round schooling is in the offing.

We will not restore either a civil society or a culture of merit as long as we fail to grasp the political reality that devolution of our schools has been key to uprooting the foundational principles set by the Framers of our Constitution. And we cannot remedy it unless and until we insist on a whole new



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approach to teacher training and schooling itself. The school is truly the only route out the abyss.

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