

What We Have Forgotten

Mark W. Hendrickson Ph.D.

I. Introduction.

One of the most exhilarating experiences a scholar has is the occasional “Eureka!” moments of sudden clarity. I had one of those epiphanies not so long ago.

Herb Meyer, the right-hand man to Bill Casey—President Reagan’s CIA director—and the third guest in The Center for Vision & Values’ annual Reagan lecture series, returned to our campus in October 2010, to give an intimate and illuminating talk to a small group of students and faculty. Partway through his talk, Mr. Meyer shared a conversation he had had with his friend, Dr. Jonas Salk, best known as the hero who saved countless lives by discovering the vaccine that wiped out polio, in 1995. Meyer asked Dr. Salk, who was 80 at the time and passed away just two days later, what his biggest concern was. The venerable doctor replied, “We’re beginning to forget things we’ve already learned.”

Eureka! In one simple yet profound statement, Dr. Salk identified the root of what has gone wrong in America.

Perhaps Dr. Salk had read E. D. Hirsch, Jr.’s 1987 best-seller, *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs To Know*, which surveyed the pathetic state of American education and found gaping holes in what schools and colleges were teaching young Americans about history, science, literature, etc., which earlier generations of Americans had been taught. Stripped of our cultural DNA—the building blocks of basic knowledge that served as our cultural glue—Hirsch raised the disturbing question as to whether America could survive without retaining its intellectual and cultural heritage.

It has now been a quarter of a century since Hirsch sounded the alarm about cultural illiteracy, and 17 years since Jonas Salk expressed a similar concern. The signs today are not encouraging. The trend identified 25 years ago remains intact, and we have advanced farther down the path of forgetting who we are and what made America the preferred destination for people from around the globe.

The generation who came of age in the 1980s are now the parents, teachers, ministers, journalists, etc., shaping the intellectual landscape which today's youth occupy. The blind are now leading the blind. It seems that most young Americans today are woefully unfamiliar with the basic political, economic, and ethical principles and practices that defined, molded and prospered America for most of our country's history. In the classrooms here at Grove City College we encounter startling gaps in the cultural literacy in many of our students, and these are some of the best and brightest in the country.

Indeed, the very ABC's—the simplest, most fundamental tenets—of the American identity seem to be slipping away. Let's examine a few specific examples in some basic areas.

II. Law and government.

What is the purpose of government? What is the government of free men and women supposed to do?

The answer to these questions of paramount importance is given in the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence: “WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness—That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men....” The Declaration goes on to say “that whenever any Form of

Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it.”

In a book I used in a course that I taught last semester, an author wrote, “Human beings [are] entitled to clean air, clean water, open spaces, and a pristine and inspiring environment as well as the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness enshrined in the United States Constitution.”¹ I will return to the themes of entitlement and environmentalism raised in this quote presently. For now, I’ll confine myself to one comment: Can an American author, who presumes to write a book with the grandiose title *Saving the Planet*, and who doesn’t even know the difference between the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America, be trusted to lead us to salvation?

Another, and more ominous, example of how the Declaration of Independence has been forgotten and downgraded came during the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan. When asked about the inalienable, pre-existing, God-given rights enumerated in the Declaration, Ms. Kagan declined to endorse that view that the Constitution’s design was to uphold the principles propounded in the Declaration—in other words, that the primary purpose of government is to protect each individual’s pre-existing rights. While she was technically correct that her job would be to uphold the Constitution, to divorce the Declaration from the Constitution is to repudiate America’s foundational principle and to remove the Constitution from its historical context.

The fall of the Declaration of Independence from a place of preeminence and respect in our country today is more than an intellectual curiosity; it has had destructive practical

¹ Hal K. Rothman, *Saving the Planet: The American Response to the Environment in the 20th Century* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), 110, quoted in Andrew P. Morriss, et al., *The False Promise of Green Energy* (Washington: The Cato Institute, 2011), 206.

consequences. It has dulled our fidelity to the Constitution, and therefore, has contributed greatly to the ongoing disintegration of the American republic.

Nowhere is this baneful trend more apparent than in the decades-long assault on property rights. Most Americans either passively accept or actively demand political efforts to abrogate some citizens' property rights for the purpose of redistributing property—efforts that are passively acquiesced to by most and actively demanded by many.

Let me offer just a partial list of the mischief, the harm, that the progressive/socialist aggression against property rights has wrought.

A. Subversion of our Constitution.

The property right is made explicit in the Fifth Amendment: “No person shall be... deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law.” Jefferson deliberately substituted the phrase “the pursuit of happiness” for “property” (the third right listed in the Lockean/biblical trio “life, liberty, and property” that the founders cherished) for a reason that I will touch upon below. It is indisputable, though, that the founders believed that the legitimate purpose of government was to protect individuals' property, not to take it and give it to others. James Madison, the principal architect of the Constitution, wrote, “Government is instituted to protect property of every sort;...”²

B. Perversion of justice.

Madison went on to write, “that alone is a *just* government which *impartially* secures to every man whatever is his *own*.”³ [Emphases in original.] Furthermore, the phrase “due process

² James Madison, *Letters and Other Writings*, “March 27, 1792,” vol. IV, 478-480, reprinted in *Free Market Economics: A Basic Reader*, compiled by Bettina Bien Greaves. (Irvington, NY: The Foundation for Economic Education, 1975), 20.

³ Madison, *Letters*, IV, 478-480.

of law” in the Fifth Amendment does not authorize legislators to redistribute wealth according to some intellectual theory, numerical formula, or economic plan. The only legitimate taking of a citizen’s property without compensation under the Fifth was a court proceeding that penalized an individual for a crime that he had committed or to provide restitution for fraud or theft. The property of a citizen who did no harm to his fellow citizens was to be sacrosanct; it would receive the full protection of the government.

For the government to lay claim to part of the property of citizens who, through their labor, industry and business acumen, have prospered by serving others in the marketplace, and then give it to businesses and individuals who, in many cases, haven’t served the interests of others, is to penalize the productive and reward the unproductive.

C. Inversion of the relationship between citizens and government.

As stated in the Declaration, the founders affirmed that the purpose of government was to defend, protect, and uphold the rights of individuals, including their property rights. By taking property from some citizens to give to others is to engage in activity that would be criminal if done by private citizens. The 19th-century French economist and essayist Frederick Bastiat coined the pithy phrase “legal plunder” to describe legislation that redistributes property. “Legal plunder” fundamentally alters the relationship between the people and the government. It makes the government the master, rather than the servant, of the people; an enemy, rather than an ally; the major threat to rights rather than the champion of those rights.

Once government begins to take from some to give to others, then the government is like a sheepdog that, instead of protecting sheep, has begun to attack them. Once a sheepdog has tasted blood, it can never again be relied upon to serve as a trustworthy guardian.

D. Conversion of our constitutional republic into a democracy.

The modern welfare state is predicated on the dubious principle of crude democratic majoritarianism—that is, if some members of the society can muster enough votes in government, then they can have and take what they want from others. This is diametrically opposed to the founding principle that individual rights are inalienable. It also sows the seeds of social discord by arraying the interests of citizens against each other as opposed to the natural harmonies that exist when rights are secure and exchanges between citizens are, therefore, voluntary. The founders did not believe that rights were inalienable *except* if a majority voted to nullify them. To them, rights were sacrosanct, untouchable.

As students of history, the founders understood that a democracy could be at least as destructive of liberty and property rights, and thus, as tyrannical, as an individual despot or ruling oligarchy. Thus, John Adams wrote, “The moment the idea is admitted into society that property is not as sacred as the laws of God, and that there is not a force of law and public justice to protect it, anarchy and tyranny commences. Property must be secured or liberty cannot exist.”⁴

E. Controversion of the rule of law.

The Declaration invoked the biblical principle that all men are created equal, and therefore, that they are to be treated equally under the law. Madison wrote, “That is not a just government, nor is property secure under it, where the property which a man has...is violated by arbitrary seizures of one class of citizens for the service of the rest....”

One of the flaws in our republic was the longstanding practice of exempting women and minorities from equal treatment under the law. Eventually, we rejected and removed policies that discriminated against those segments of our population. The left retains, however, a huge blind

⁴ Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams*, 10 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1850-56), 6:9, 280.

spot when it comes to rich people. While discriminating against an American on the basis of gender and race is anathema to the Left, they loudly demand policies that discriminate against Americans based on how economically successful and prosperous they are. Note what Madison stated,

“A just security to property is not afforded by that government, under which unequal taxes oppress one species of property and reward another species; where arbitrary taxes invade the domestic sanctuaries of the rich, and excessive taxes grind the faces of the poor...”⁵

Our tax code is an affront to the principle of equal treatment under the law. There are two possible interpretations of “equal treatment by the law” that could be embodied in our tax code: Everyone could be taxed the same amount (only viable if government is extremely small); everyone is taxed at the same rate, i.e., a “flat tax” (which is similar to private insurance policies, that charge higher dollar amounts to insure properties of higher value). Instead, we have a graduated income tax—the second plank in Karl Marx’ ten-point platform for how to impose socialism on a society—whereby Americans who earn large incomes are taxed differently from other Americans. This is an outright repudiation of the principle of equality under the law.

The rule of law has been supplanted by an elaborate system of privilege as Progressive politicians strive to guarantee that everyone has the good things of life. Note how this differs from what Jefferson wrote in the immortal second paragraph of the Declaration. Jefferson asserted that “the pursuit of happiness” is one of our inalienable rights. He did not aver that happiness itself is our right—only the freedom to pursue happiness, however each of us may define the word. For each of us to have that right, it is implicit that none of us may define

⁵ Madison, *Letters*, 20-21.

“happiness” in a way that allows anyone to trample anyone else’s rights, for that would infringe on their right to pursue happiness.

America was to be “the Land of Opportunity,” not a land of entitlement where some have arrogated a spurious “right” to be subsidized or bailed out by others. While most Americans do not yet feel justified in breaking into their neighbor’s house and helping himself to their neighbor’s property, it seems that a majority of Americans feel that it is perfectly legitimate to enlist the government to confiscate some of their neighbor’s property in order to redistribute it to their chosen beneficiaries. This is how we came to be fifteen trillion dollars in debt.

III. Keys to prosperity.

Just as we have lost sight of the purpose of law and government and have done violence to our foundational charters, so many have forgotten the keys to prosperity: hard work, thrift, honest money and free-market capitalism (based on the principle of private property which, as we have seen, has been attacked and undermined).

A. Erosion of the work ethic.

America’s once-renowned Protestant work ethic is at risk of becoming a faded memory. One of the common complaints of employers that I have encountered repeatedly is that they can’t find good workers. Today’s young people come to work with a sense of entitlement: “Here I am, you lucky employer, so pay me.” Many seem totally unaware that they are supposed to earn their pay by making a conscientious effort to serve customers and make themselves valuable to their employer.

The reasons for the decline of the work ethic are several, the principal ones being: 1) the moral hazard created by various government programs that implicitly proclaim, “You aren’t

responsible for your economic status, and we will make sure that you have what you need”⁶; 2) today’s unprecedented levels of affluence that tempt many into believing that prosperity is a given and one doesn’t have to strive for it; 3) the corrupt ethos of many American labor unions.

Reasonable people may differ as to how much good labor unions have accomplished, but in recent decades, to the extent that they have adopted the corrupt ethos of “more money for less productivity,” their influence has been pernicious. Over four decades ago, I worked as a janitor for Chrysler Corporation and paid UAW dues. I saw repeated attempts to dismantle America’s proud tradition of an honest day’s work for an honest day’s pay. Workers would arrive drunk, drugged, or otherwise unfit to work, and were allowed to sleep through their shifts. The UAW official on my shift told me to lean on my broom because we don’t work like that here.

Traditionally, Americans were raised to believe that if they worked harder, they would earn more. One of the basic tenets of our social ethos was that hard work would be rewarded. With tragic results, too many leaders in the American labor movement have scuttled that ethos of success, often crippling the competitive viability of American businesses and killing the jobs on which their rank and file members were counting.

B. The abandonment of thrift.

We have also forgotten that besides freedom and property rights, the other primary engine of economic vigor is abundant capital. Thrift is the deferment of present consumption to accumulate the capital to invest in a more prosperous future.

Our modern addiction to debt has impaired capital formation, indeed, binging on debt amounts to eating the seed-corn of the future. The Left’s strange, Ahab-like obsession with

⁶ Charles Murray, *Losing Ground* (New York: Basic, 1984). You may also wish to google “Robert Rector, incentive system from hell”—Mr. Rector’s memorable phrase for how our welfare state often rewards, encourages, and incentivizes behaviors (such as not making the commitment of marriage) that conduce toward poverty, crime, and dependency.

raising taxes on the rich is not only unjust, but economically destructive. To seek to consume capital—the economic fuel that raises standards of living for the masses—is to work for the impoverishment of John Q. Public. Though leftists congratulate themselves for what they believe is their moral superiority, they pursue policies that stifle economic growth and reduce opportunities for economic advancement among the less fortunate.

Wearing ideological blinders, the Left can't see the obvious: Capital, far from being a pitiless exploiter of human beings, has raised standards of living wherever it has been deployed around the world. The most exploited people in the world are Americans. Throughout our history more capital has been invested in the United States than in other countries. One of the common denominators of Third World countries is that they are the countries where the least capital has been accumulated and invested. Millions of the world's poor go to bed at night praying that they might be exploited half as much as America's children have been exploited. What a tragic price we are paying by consuming capital and jeopardizing our future through chronic indulgence in debt when it was the old virtue of thrift that did so much to make our country prosperous in the first place.

In a very important way, today's debt problem is a first cousin of the “legal plunder” of the redistribution-of-wealth policies that we have adopted. Both problems stem from people wanting to enjoy things without paying for them. Welfare-state redistribution schemes enable those who are politically favored or more numerous to compel others (most egregiously, those not yet old enough to vote) to pick up the tab for what they consume. The millions of Americans who are over-indebted promise to pay later for what they consume now, although the widespread incidence of bankruptcy leads one to question how committed to repaying their debts many of

these Americans really are. “Party now and worry about paying for it later” has been their credo—an attitude that would have been anathema to their grandparents.

Today’s debt epidemic is both individual and collective. We all know the anecdotal stories about Americans with tens of thousands of dollars in credit card and/or college debt, and those who got burned by imprudent purchases of houses, and financial institutions that failed in their primary fiduciary responsibility to assess credit-worthiness of borrowers.

The larger problem, though, has been the unfathomably astronomical debt of the federal government. Driven by the democratic imperative of doling out money in exchange for votes, we already might have passed the point at which the accumulated debt of the country can be repaid without serious depreciation of the currency. Numerous financial promises have been made that cannot be fulfilled. Like the prodigal son in the Gospel of Luke, our profligate government has wasted its substance. The wealthiest country in the world is bankrupt. What a disgrace and an embarrassment. We should be ashamed.

The economics profession has been particularly culpable in aiding and abetting the federal government's debt debacle. In the 1930s and 40s, American economists were seduced by the sophistries and beguiling mysticism of Keynesian economics—a curious set of theories that, in Keynes' own words, enabled men to perform the “miracle...of turning a stone into bread.”⁷

According to this mystical doctrine, all that governments need to do to stimulate prosperity is to spend more and incur additional debt. Despite the egregious failure of such policies in the 1930s and the 1970s, Presidents Bush (the second) and Obama have adopted the same tactic. The result has been the same, too: grinding stagnation, this time purchased at the price of trillions of dollars of additional debt.

⁷ J.M. Keynes, *Paper of the British Experts*, 8 April 1943, quoted in Ludwig von Mises, *Planning For Freedom*, 4th ed. (South Holland, IL: Libertarian, 1980), 51.

Common sense knows that we can't spend ourselves into prosperity. Elementary economic analysis explains why government stimulus is counterproductive: Whenever Washington elitists intervene in free markets through fiscal or monetary policy, they distort the structure of production by falsifying the price signals upon which economic coordination depends.

Government spending overrules the normal supply-and-demand mechanism that coordinates economic activity. Because it disrupts the normal flow of commerce, it results in the production of less highly valued goods and services over more highly valued goods and services—a surefire formula for making a society poorer. Prospects for future economic growth are further dampened by the crushing burden of the cost of servicing the mountainous federal debt.

C. Unconstitutional (and unreliable) money.

The founders lived through the horrible hyperinflation of the Continental currency during the Revolutionary War. Having experienced and suffered firsthand from the horrors of paper money, they sought to spare us, their posterity, from similar pain and hardship. In Article I, Section 8, of the Constitution, therefore, they conferred upon Congress the power “to coin money.” The word “coin” is deliberate; it means that constitutional money is metallic, not paper. This theme is repeated in Section 10, where the Constitution stipulates, “No state shall... make any Thing but gold and silver coin a tender in payment of debts.” Clearly, gold and silver coins were to be the money of the United States of America.

I can attest that schools aren't teaching their pupils (at least, not very well) about elementary economic issues like sound money. Every semester in my Economics 101 course, I ask how many students have ever heard the phrase “not worth a Continental.” Invariably, only

three or four out of fifty are familiar with the phrase. We all knew that the phrase referred to something that was worthless when I was in school. That is one of the important things that we have forgotten. As a result, most people can't even conceive of money that's of a higher quality than today's unconstitutional, un-backed paper Federal Reserve Notes—pseudo-money that has caused much grief and considerable loss of wealth since they were imposed upon us nearly a century ago. We have paid a great price, indeed, for having forgotten why our founders stipulated the use of real money in our Constitution.

D. “Kill capitalism!”

One of the slogans that has been displayed prominently on signs at various protest movements (with the notable exception of Tea Party events) in recent years, including the recent “Occupy Wall Street” events, is “Kill capitalism!”

While those carrying the signs are certainly entitled to their opinions, their historical lack of awareness is astonishing. Have they already forgotten the lessons of the Cold War? We have problems, of course, but what viable alternative to capitalism can these poor souls offer? It is capitalism that has played the unique role of lifting masses of people far above the subsistence standard of living for the first time in history. The alternative ideologies—socialism, fascism, or communism—have impoverished people while suppressing their liberty and often stunting their lives. To call for scrapping capitalism and replacing it with some Big Government ideology must be evil, moronic, or ignorant; there are no other possibilities.

To be fair here, it isn't just people on the far Left that have been enemies to capitalism. Numerous Republicans, moderates, and even self-styled conservatives, share in the blame. I refer to all those who have played the game of political rent-seeking, exploiting the political process to line their pockets with loot extracted from their fellow citizens.

Here we have a possible meeting ground for conservatives and those who have not yet seen the light: We can both agree that the government bestowing special privileges on the rich, powerful, and well-connected is not defensible on either economic or ethical grounds. Crony capitalism is not capitalism. State capitalism is not capitalism. Capitalism means private property and free markets. If some of our fellow citizens believe that capitalism is what is wrong with our country, please correct them by informing them much of what goes on today—often the very practices that they find most distasteful—are repudiations, not the practice, of capitalism.

IV. Man and nature.

One of the more perplexing developments in the last half-century has been a profound change in attitude about nature. One manifestation of this change has been the emergence of an environmentalist movement that rebels against human exploitation of natural resources. Indeed, one may question whether this development is even rational.

The food that humans consume, the raw materials that we process for our use, and the energy that powers our modern lifestyle—all these must be taken, usually by strenuous efforts, from nature. Radical environmentalists frequently go far beyond the prudence of earlier conservationists, who urged us to harvest what we needed with care and respect, and actively discourage production. The radicals in the movement go so far as to advocate slower rates of economic growth, lower standards of living and in some cases, outright economic de-development.⁸

⁸ Cf. Al Gore, *Earth in the Balance* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1992); Paul Ehrlich, multiple sources, e.g., http://www.whale.to/a/ehrllich_h.html; John P. Holdren (Pres. Obama's science advisor), <http://cnsnews.com/node/75388>.

The “green” hostility to economic growth is most apparent in their incessant campaign against the development of domestic energy sources, even though the United States probably contains the richest treasure trove of energy resources in the world.⁹

It is significant that environmentalism’s popularity appears to be concentrated in large cities where people are most removed from the everyday realities of nature. Insulated from the harshness of the natural world, urbanites are prone to entertain romantic notions about nature, and ivory-tower professors dream about utopian societies where everyone has a right to all good things. The 20th-century journalist and author, Rose Wilder Lane, commented on this phenomenon more than sixty years ago. Writing in her excellent book, *The Discovery of Freedom*, she observed:

Living is fighting for life, and when anyone does not know this fact, someone else is doing his fighting for him.

Everyone must constantly be defended [against the forces of nature—heat, cold, storm, drought, earthquakes, etc.]. Farmers and sailors and doctors always know this. Linemen know it, and engineers, chemists, truck drivers and railroad men and oil drillers and sand-hogs and construction workers and airplane pilots and weather forecasters—all the fighters who protect human lives in modern civilization, and keep this civilization in existence.

These men, who know the human situation on this Earth and stand the brunt of it, enable others to forget it.

The thinkers—scholars, teachers, writers, politicians—fed and warmed and lulled like babies, can forget their real situation....¹⁰

Living is fighting for life, and when anyone does not know this fact, someone else is doing his fighting for him. Anyone who says that economic security is a human right, has been too much babied. While he babbles, other men are fighting the sea, fighting the land, fighting diseases and insects and weather and space and time, for him, while he chatters that all men have a right to security and that some pagan god—Society, The State, The Government, The

⁹ Mark W. Hendrickson, “The Global Energy Superpower,” www.visionandvalues.org, May 23, 2011.

¹⁰ Rose Wilder Lane, *The Discovery of Freedom* (New York: Laissez Faire, 1984), vii. Ms. Lane herself grew up on the prairie (quite literally, since she was the daughter of Laura Ingalls Wilder of *Little House on the Prairie* fame), so she was acutely aware of the battle between man and nature.

Commune—must give it to them. Let the fighting men stop fighting this inhuman earth for one hour, and he will learn how much security there is.¹¹

Just as many of our contemporaries have adopted the pagan notion that humans have no right to disturb Mother Nature (often reified and deified), so they have a view of human sexuality that our forebears would find strange. Indeed, many Americans seem to have forgotten what sex is for. For many, sex is a form of recreation rather than the means of procreation. Forget for a moment about the moral aspects of sexuality and remember that it has a vital utilitarian role: It is the means by which we perpetuate the human race. To the extent that we cease to reproduce the human race, we are flirting with cultural and national suicide. Our future enemies will thank our generation for voluntarily reducing our numbers.

Although we haven't tipped over into a clear-cut demographic decline, as have China, Russia, Japan, and many European countries, American birthrates have fallen.¹² Current population trends will lead to all sorts of economic problems, not the least of which will be the other people involved in Social Security and Medicare, because Americans have not procreated enough children to make good on all the promises made in those federal entitlement programs.

V. Concluding thoughts.

When a society is losing its cultural heritage and moorings, major change is the natural outcome. If we are paying a price for drifting apart from our cultural roots (and I think we are) then we need to re-examine our culture and reclaim it. The root word for *culture* is the Latin *cultus*, which refers to the meta-beliefs that prevail in a society. Historically, America's meta-beliefs were firmly grounded in Judeo-Christian ethical and metaphysical values and concepts.

¹¹ Lane, *Discovery*, 60.

¹² Cf., Marilyn Marchione, "U.S. Birth Rate Sets Record, Hits Lowest Level In A Century," AP 27 August 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/27/us-birth-rate-sets-record_n_697131.html; Mark Steyn, *America Alone* (Washington: Regnery, 2006).

This suggests that the key to a political revival would be a spiritual revival, reaffirming our trust in God, “from Whom all blessings flow.”

In practice, of course, there are many different brands and schools of conservative thought, but at the risk of offending somebody, I would say that they all share a respect and an affinity for the ideas, values, attitudes, policies, institutions, etc. that have been proven to serve us well.

Most Americans are essentially pragmatic; we tend to favor what works. The advantage that we have is that we are not proposing brand new, untested concepts; rather, we are merely offering time-tested practices with an admirable track record. Limited government works: It maximizes liberty, personal fulfillment, and social harmony. Free-market capitalism works: No other system can compare with its record of producing widespread prosperity. Mankind is important. Whether you believe we are the product of material evolution and/or the creation of a divine Creator, the human race is at the top of the food chain, and as such, we have unique privileges, opportunities, and responsibilities.

Contrary to what our critics assert, we conservatives do not favor conservative policies today because of some romantic, sentimental attachment to the past. On the contrary, we agree with founding fathers such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, who were acutely aware that our country’s founding was the beginning, not the end, of the journey toward a fairer, freer, and more prosperous society.¹³

Of course, change is inevitable and necessary. Of course, 18th-century thinkers and political leaders, though wiser than their counterparts today, did not have all the answers for 21st-

¹³ Cf. Washington’s Farewell Address and such Jeffersonian statements as “The dead should not rule the living” and “...one generation has no more right to bind another to its laws and judgments than one independent nation has the right to command another.” http://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1673.Thomas_Jefferson.

century Americans. But if old ways of doing things yielded better results than new ways, then let us avail ourselves of those old ways. We should never be too proud to favor what works.

Our task today is to provide our fellow citizens with a clear understanding of the principles that made our country great. Though imperfect, as all things human must be, on a net basis, America brought freedom and prosperity to more people and to a greater degree than any other republic in history. That is a truth worth defending, broadcasting, promoting, and upholding. It is our joy and privilege—it is our paramount task—as conservatives to do this essential work.