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# A Patriot's History of the United States

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FROM COLUMBUS'S GREAT DISCOVERY  
TO THE WAR ON TERROR

Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen



SENTINEL

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INTERVIEW WITH LARRY SCHWEIKART AS  
SEEN IN *THE LIMBAUGH LETTER*\*

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*I was delighted to speak with the eminent professor of history at the University of Dayton in Ohio and co-author of the seminal text **A Patriot’s History of the United States**, a book I highly recommend:*

**RUSH:** Larry, how are you?

**SCHWEIKART:** Hi Rush, great to talk to you.

**RUSH:** Thank you for making time for us here, I appreciate it. Did using the word “patriot” in the title of your book get you into any trouble with your colleagues, not just in Dayton, but around the country?

**SCHWEIKART:** Not so far. We’ve been lambasted on liberal websites, but the History News Network gave us a pretty balanced approach. First they had some article by the radical leftist historian Howard Zinn, and then they had an article I wrote, “Why It’s Time for a Patriot’s History of the United States.” That used to be our subtitle. Our original title was, *The Beacon of Liberty*. Our publisher, Sentinel, was right on about this; they said, “No, you have got to go with *A Patriot’s History*.” Boy, that was a great call.

**RUSH:** What inspired you and Michael Allen to write the book?

**SCHWEIKART:** You know our environment; you’ve been talking about it for 15 years. The academy, as you well mentioned, is overwhelmingly left. We found, in looking at dozens and dozens of history textbooks, that they were overwhelming to the left. There wasn’t one you could rely on to tell the story of Ronald Reagan, or to explain the damage done by the New Deal. That alone required us to write the book. As we went along, of course, we found a lot of other problems. But those were two of the most egregious errors that we found in all the books.

**RUSH:** It doesn’t surprise me. How, historically, did it happen, that the American academy is basically anti-American in perspective? As you say there are exceptions to this all across the country, but it seems on balance that the desire is to portray the country’s history as negative.

\* The following interview conducted by renowned radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh of Larry Schweikart was originally published in the March 2005 edition of *The Limbaugh Letter*.

**SCHWEIKART:** Exactly.

**RUSH:** The focus of evil in the modern world is the United States, and our Founders were evil, white slave owners. Has the academy always been this way, or is this relatively new? When did this shift begin?

**SCHWEIKART:** The academy always has been slightly left-leaning. But the real shift began at the end of the McCarthy era, when leftist professors were driven out, lost their jobs. At the end of that period, say the late 1950s, a lot of colleges went the other direction. To kind of make up for what they had done, they went so far the other direction that they started to welcome in leftists, especially in the social sciences, the arts, and history.

If you look at the 60s, you could have predicted those student riots just by noticing the three streams converging at that time. The first stream was us—the baby boomers. I am your age exactly. We had a bunch of kids coming of age around 1962, '63—a whole generation of kids was coming into college at that time. The second stream was the money that came as a result of Sputnik; the federal government dumped millions and millions of dollars into the university system—supposedly to go into engineering and math, but if you know anything about the way money works in the university, it doesn't stay where it is put. You know that from the athletic department: they bring in the money and then it goes everywhere throughout the campus. So this money ended up in the bigger departments, which were always the arts and sciences, and the liberal arts departments.

The third stream was these radical professors. My best take on it is that when these leftists came in, they were only a part of the department. But the people they were around were gentlemen and gentlewomen. They didn't believe in fighting, they didn't see all activities as political, and of course Marxists see everything as political. I knew a lot of these people. They just didn't want to fight these battles when these young liberals came in and took over. They took over the search committees, they started hiring more of their own. They started doling out money so it only rewarded radicals.

By the late 60s, most of the humanities, political science, sociology, were pretty much dominated by leftists. There were still some conservatives, but they had no power, they had no influence in the academy, and it was only a matter of time before they retired.

**RUSH:** Is there any hope? Here is your book, which stands out like a sore thumb. Do you see any potential shift? The reason I ask this is because I started my radio program in 1988, and in the 16-plus years since, the left wing has lost its monopoly in the media. The Democratic Party is imploding.

**SCHWEIKART:** Right. It is remarkable.

**RUSH:** There are a number of outposts still left, which I view as targets. And the overstuffed left wing of the academy seems to be one of them. Do you see any hopeful signs there?

**SCHWEIKART:** There are some signs. We do have a lot more conservative students than I have ever seen before. And there are a lot more students who are

kind of middle-of-the-road, who are not interested in heavy ideology of any sort. They want to raise families, get their jobs, and they are especially put off by leftist propaganda. You're right, we have witnessed an incredible shift in the media. Honestly, even when you started I didn't know we'd ever get here. If you told me that CBS, ABC, and NBC would be fairly insignificant today, I would have said you are smoking something.

**RUSH:** Exactly.

**SCHWEIKART:** So I'm not going to be totally pessimistic. But there's something about the academy that's a bit different from the media. You introduced competition; *The Washington Times* introduced competition; Drudge, the internet, and Fox all introduced competition against the majors. Where will the competition come from in the university system? The universities are essentially isolated and immunized from all competition.

**RUSH:** True. But look at what happened with Ward Churchill. It wasn't long ago that Ward Churchill would say and do what he said, write what he wrote, and there might be a few howls of protest, but that would be it.

**SCHWEIKART:** You are absolutely right, and those are great signs. But just between you and me, I hope Ward Churchill is on TV every night. Every time he talks we sell another hundred books.

**RUSH:** I have said the same thing. I don't want to shut these people up. I think that is the key to it all now. There is a more informed, sophisticated public, a more educated news and information consumer. Plus the "red state" people feel like winners. They are finally winning, and it is giving them some confidence—after 40 years of wandering in the desert, so to speak, being laughed at and impugned on television. Now they feel a little power and they are exerting it. We don't want to silence Churchill's speech on First Amendment grounds. But at the same time, the taxpayers don't have to pay for it.

The media transformation these past 16 years has been a very slow process, and it wasn't apparent all along the way. Over a one-year or two-year period I began to get the feeling "something is different, something is changing." The media was so in-the-tank for Kerry last year that it is a new era out there. And then Rather comes along with his obviously forged documents. I don't think any leftist bastion is safe anymore. But I am not under any illusions. I think your point about competition is exactly right, and I don't know where it will come from.

**SCHWEIKART:** I am optimistic that change will come, but right now I don't see the vehicle for it. There are a lot of new internet universities out there like [www.YorktownUniversity.com](http://www.YorktownUniversity.com), [AmericanMilitaryUniversity.com](http://AmericanMilitaryUniversity.com), but these are limited. A college campus is mostly about social life, and you aren't going to replace that with internet universities. Do I see a lot of conservative Hillsdales, Grove City Colleges, Claremonts out there? Not really. Whatever happens will, I think, happen to the major universities. Will that come from the student? The parent? I don't know.

There are conservative professors, but they're in the business schools, the engineering schools, and in the sciences. All the ultra liberals are in the arts,

humanities, history, political science, sociology, and so on. And guess which courses every freshman or sophomore has to take? At my school, UD, every student has to take philosophy, religious studies, history, sociology, or political science. None of them have to take engineering or business. So the chances that they will be exposed to a conservative or alternative viewpoint on my campus are literally about one in ten. I've seen the statistics across the country, they are about one in ten for any campus. Some are much worse.

**RUSH:** Here's my hope. What has actually brought this change about elsewhere is the people. The people have been informed, true, by this new media. But they still have to accept it, admit it, and sign on to it. Then they have to take action, such as at the polls, or by refusing to believe what they hear on ABC, CBS, NBC, or not watching it. Now these people have kids. I think the kids of these parents have a chance, as a result, sort of like a trickle-down effect, of showing up at these universities a little bit more informed than some students in the past.

Let me get back to your book here, because I think books like yours are equivalent to the new electronic media that has dealt its blow to the old mainstream media. With the right kind of distribution, a book like yours is another chink in the armor, and will inform people of things that are not being taught any longer. That, to me, is the great value of your book.

You write in your introduction that "the past usually speaks for itself."

**SCHWEIKART:** That's right.

**RUSH:** But does it? Wasn't one of the reasons that you needed to write this book because America's past requires a defense?

**SCHWEIKART:** Yes; it's sad it has come to that. We say that if you just tell the story of America's past honestly, you can't help but be proud of this country. But over the last 40 years, people have told the story of this country's past dishonestly. They have over-exaggerated racism and sexism. They have lied. Take, for instance, the destruction of the buffalo. We point out it was white ranchers and entrepreneurs who saved the buffalo, and, in fact, restocked all the herds, and even sold the main herd to Yellowstone. But nobody knows about that.

So, yes, you are right. Our book is on the cutting edge of this revolution. When we went into this, Mike Allen and I insisted that it had to be fully researched and documented. Unlike some competitors, who will go nameless, we don't make assertions about the past, and just wish things were the way we wanted them to be. We tell the accurate story, and it's fully documented, so the liberals would not be able to come after us on the facts. They could only come after us on interpretation.

**RUSH:** I think when people read your book they will be mesmerized. They think they know history, but the stuff in your book is not taught. I remember John Silber, when he was president of Boston University, surveyed the three most widely used history textbooks in American high schools. He found the largest reference to Lincoln—and I am not making this up—was one paragraph. You can find chapters on Bill Clinton and his greatness, or JFK. So in a way, you can say you are pessimistic, since you had to do this. I am optimistic that you did it.

In the book you say the reason so many academics miss the real history of America is that they assume—and I think this is profound—that "ideas don't matter, and that there is no such thing as virtue." Now, why do you believe that understanding virtue and morality is necessary to understanding our real history? My opinion is that if it weren't for the morality of George Washington, we wouldn't be here today.

**SCHWEIKART:** That is right. In fact, I wrote a piece on that for National Review Online, answering the question, "What was so indispensable about George Washington?" I said, "There wasn't one other person at that time—not Adams, not Jefferson—who could have done what Washington did." He alone had the character, the clout with both parties, the common sense, and the war record to bring everybody behind the government. I know liberals go nuts when you talk about whether certain people were put in place by God. I personally believe George Washington was set in that office by God Himself, because no other human could have done that job and had things turn out as well as they did.

**RUSH:** Yet the popular notion of Washington, taught today in way too many places, is that he was a slave owner.

**SCHWEIKART:** Yes, but he freed his slaves at his death. All his life he fought to end slavery; whenever he could throw his influence behind an anti-slave measure, he did. Yes, we find virtue to be absolutely critical. That is why we spent so much time—and I was a primary author of the section on Lincoln—on Lincoln's virtue and his religious conversion. Because it was clear that as Lincoln came to see slavery as more and more of an evil, he also came to a greater relationship with God. I think the two went hand and hand.

**RUSH:** That explains why virtue cannot be included in the left wing's pursuit of historical facts. Because they don't believe in virtue, and they don't believe people have it. And certainly if it is in any way related to somebody's religiosity, then it has to be condemned.

What is your view of the concept of American exceptionalism?

**SCHWEIKART:** We believe that America was a city set on a hill. It was founded by extremely devout people. With the exception of the Jamestown colony, which was an economic colony, all the other early colonies were first and foremost religious colonies. They got economic charters to come here, because that was the only way the king would allow them to have a charter in the New World. The king wasn't going to give a grant to a bunch of religious nuts. So they had to frame their appeal for a charter in the context of, "and we will do this business for you, and we will make England rich." But their real goal at Plymouth, and at Massachusetts Bay, and at Salem, and all the other early colonies, was to set up religious colonies.

Not to get away from your question, but this whole notion that America has a separation of church and state just defies logic. If you look at the Mayflower Compact and the Massachusetts Bay colony, in all of these early colonies, you had to be a church member before you could have stock in the colony. And you had to have stock in the colony before you could vote. So your church

membership decided whether or not you were a citizen. That is how tightly church and state were wound in the early colonies.

**RUSH:** George Washington's first Thanksgiving proclamation is also replete with references to God.

**SCHWEIKART:** All the Presidents, Rush—not just Washington. Even Jefferson supported public funding of preachers when he was President. So yes, we do take the view that America is special, that we are different. Now could other countries also be special and different? Absolutely.

**RUSH:** What is it that makes it special?

**SCHWEIKART:** What makes it special is that we have a Judeo-Christian basis. We embrace private property rights, and we are a democratic republic.

**RUSH:** And we have enshrined in our documents the source of our freedom, which is God.

**SCHWEIKART:** That's right.

**RUSH:** Freedom is the natural yearning of the human spirit, which dovetails exactly with the President's inaugural and State of the Union addresses. The reason I love this book is because it sort of confirms for me the instinctive thoughts I have about this: We are special, but we are no different as human beings. We are not better human beings than anybody else. You might say we are more fortunate because of people like Washington, and the Founders. But the theory is that any human being, or any group of human beings, if given the same types of leaders and circumstances, will essentially choose the same type of life for themselves that we have chosen for ourselves. Most people will not vote themselves into slavery or bondage or rape rooms or torture centers, if given a choice.

**SCHWEIKART:** To plug another author, it is sort of like Victor Davis Hanson's analysis of warfare. He argues that we are no more courageous than anybody else, but we have a certain method of warfare that embraces free men with private property with civilian audit fighting in sharp combat for unconditional surrender. Now if you take those five principles and apply them to any other army on the globe, they will be successful. So why are they not successful? An article titled, "Why Arab Armies Lose" explained that they don't apply all those principles. They will take one or two of them but then keep aspects of their culture intact. You can't do it. You can't have a free market and a tyranny. Or you can't have a democracy and a completely socialized economy. It just doesn't work.

**RUSH:** Excellent point. Now, in one interview, Larry, you said you were working on a history of journalism, and you said, from roughly 1865 to 1955, the media tried to be genuinely fair and balanced. You pointed out opinion pages were separate from news, but that changed in the 60s.

**SCHWEIKART:** Right.

**RUSH:** Why is not totally clear, but some analysts believe the Vietnam War and Watergate had something to do with it. Can you give us a sneak preview, and your thoughts on the melding of the editorial page and the front page that happened in the 60s?

**SCHWEIKART:** Okay, but let me preface this by saying I already have a con-

tract for my next book with Sentinel, which is: *A Patriot's History of the American Soldier: Why Americans Win Wars*.

**RUSH:** You just gave us a preview.

**SCHWEIKART:** Right. And it is going to be, in essence, applying Victor Hanson to the United States. I think he is right, but he doesn't go far enough. I have a lot of contacts in the military who feed me information. It is really remarkable what our armed forces are doing.

But regarding this other book that you are referring to, let me give you a brief history of the media up to the 50s. In the 1820s as a result of the Missouri Compromise, Martin Van Buren—and you're going to love this, Rush—founded a political party. The sole goal of this political party was to gain and hold power. It was not interested in any principles.

Van Buren's focus for this political party was to avert civil war, an altruistic motive. The party's purpose was to not talk about slavery, so we wouldn't have a war. They were going to reward people who would run for office and hold office who would not talk about slavery. So if you think about it, the foundation for this party was essentially very base. It was, ideas don't count, ideology doesn't count; only money counts. And if we wave enough money in front of you, you will forget about your principles. Guess which party that was?

**RUSH:** The Democratic Party!

**SCHWEIKART:** Exactly.

**RUSH:** I would get an "A" in your class.

**SCHWEIKART:** Yes. This party went on to found dozens and dozens of newspapers for the specific purpose of getting its candidates elected. They were very honest. They called themselves names like *The Arkansas Democrat*. Guess which party it supported? *The Richmond Whig*. Guess which party it supported? They only carried news about their own candidates. They weren't interested at all in objective news. It was strictly to advance the party's propaganda.

**RUSH:** It doesn't sound like anything has changed.

**SCHWEIKART:** No, it hasn't. But what did change was in the Civil War, people were desperate for facts. I have a quotation from one editor in the 1860s: "Facts, facts, facts—that is all people care about anymore." They needed to know information on the war. Was Johnny killed? What is the 14 Pennsylvania regiment doing? Where is Robert E. Lee? And this created a style you may recognize. We used to call it the "who, what, when, where, why" reporters' questions. It created what is called the inverted pyramid style of reporting, where you begin with the most important facts, and then you get down to the drivel. I challenge you to read any paper today, whether it is *USA Today* or *The Washington Post*—what do they always start with? A human interest story: "Twenty years ago, Marge Schott had her little dog on the sidewalk until it was hit by a car, and then blah, blah, blah." Three or four paragraphs down, you will get to the key information. You are always mentioning this on your show. You will say, "The nut of this is buried 20 paragraphs down."

**RUSH:** They bury the lead.

**SCHWEIKART:** Right. Well, in the Civil War they didn't bury the lead. They started moving the lead to the very front. All they would report is facts. From about 1860 to about 1900, this became entrenched in almost all the major papers. For a lot of reasons, some of it having to do with business, most of them became objective. They viewed reporting the news as separate from editorial content. They tried to get both sides of the story and they tried to be fair and balanced.

Were there exceptions? Of course. You had the yellow press. But basically this model held until about 1960. Now currently I am doing some research with a conservative journalism professor at Dartmouth—I won't give his name away in case he gets blackballed—and a guy from the American Enterprise Institute named John Lott. We are working on the question, Can we pin down exactly what caused this change?

My theory is that it was not Vietnam or Watergate that caused the change. I think you see clear indications of this change happening earlier. My gut feeling is it involves John Kennedy. That the press, especially the males in the press, so identified with Kennedy that they started to throw fairness out the window and became terribly attached to his Administration, creating the whole Camelot myth. So by the time Kennedy was assassinated and Johnson came in, and the Vietnam War, they were already moving in the other direction. Vietnam just accelerated something that had already happened, in my view, but I can't prove that just yet.

**RUSH:** No, but it is a fascinating theory. Howard Fineman, in a fit of frustration, admitting that the mainstream press has lost a large measure of respect, actually wrote a piece about a month ago postulating that it was the Vietnam War that actually helped the media focus its true political desires. They finally became fed up with the war and were upset that the Democrats were not leading the movement to get out of it. Fineman actually asserts in this piece that the media became a political party.

**SCHWEIKART:** Yes, I know the piece you are talking about. And he's right, to an extent, Rush. I don't want to sound like a kook—I think Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone—but I do want to introduce something for you to think about here. Let's assume that the media, in fact, did totally buy off on Kennedy, that they were completely in his camp.

**RUSH:** True, and I think the female journalists did too, wishing they were Jackie.

**SCHWEIKART:** Right. But here's the upshot. When Kennedy was assassinated, journalists couldn't report the story. They couldn't immediately say, "This was possibly the work of the Mafia," because they couldn't talk about Kennedy's ties to the mob. They couldn't say, "This is possibly the result of a jilted lover, or Jackie hiring a hit man, because she was fed up with this guy." You see the dilemma: they couldn't even begin to report on all the possibilities before they were sure it was Oswald. This is what gave rise to these nuts and kooks who did uncover some interesting information—even though it didn't prove anything in

the long run. These loose ends went nowhere. But nevertheless it was the media's job to unravel them and show us that they went nowhere. But they didn't.

**RUSH:** That generation is still reporting, so how do you explain that their descendants, if you will, have kept it up?

**SCHWEIKART:** Once you are in the 60s, you start to see a shift in the journalism school, which starts getting into this view that journalists—as you say on your show all the time and I have dozens of quotations to back this up—are "out to change the world." They are not out to report news or facts or events; they are out to shape public policy.

**RUSH:** Right. There is no question about that.

**SCHWEIKART:** So once the journalism schools are teaching students that, it is very difficult to come out of a journalism school with any other views. Some do, but not very many.

**RUSH:** On balance, you sound like an optimistic guy. Are you optimistic that the country will continue to be properly understood historically by future generations and that America, as we have known it, will survive? My father was so concerned about what was happening with the media and their apparently siding with our enemies, not seeing a real danger in communism, and so forth. A lot of people were concerned that we had gotten decadent, and are going to get more decadent. Having written this book, what is your view of the future?

**SCHWEIKART:** I am optimistic. Americans are smarter than the media thinks, which is one reason they are not listening to the media anymore. And they are smarter than a lot of academics. They know good academics from bad academics. They know good history from bad history. The popularity of books like Paul Johnson's *Modern Times*, and *History of the American People*, demonstrate that Americans know when something is junk. To put it another way, I don't think we need the endorsement of the academic establishment to be successful with our book. I am hearing already that homeschoolers are adopting this in droves. We have teachers at junior colleges who teach thousands of students across the country every year, who don't have these big faculty committees that decide textbooks, who are adopting this book. So the truth will win out. As we say again and again, if people know the facts of America, they will be proud and patriotic. If this book and others like it are available, they will know the past of America. I am not concerned. People will find the truth.

**RUSH:** That is terrific. I am excited that you wrote this book. I love the title too, I think your publisher is exactly right: A Patriot's History of the United States. We will do what we can here, Larry, to get as many people to buy it as possible.

**SCHWEIKART:** Well, Rush, we are just thrilled. One of the reasons I started writing this book was because in 2000 I had written a history of American business called *The Entrepreneurial Adventure*. In looking at how historians treated the history of American business, I said, "Boy, this is really bad. These guys are getting it all wrong." I found charts in one of the most popular American history college texts about debt and deficits. These two charts, if you could see them, look like the deficits and the debt go off the map in the Reagan era. And to make

absolutely sure that the students knew what was going on, they had these labels: "World War II Ends"; "Vietnam War"; "Reagan." Everything else is an event except Reagan. They want to make absolutely sure that the students get that Reagan was an idiot. But I found that in their charts, they hadn't used real dollars. So I recalculated, and they weren't even the same charts.

**RUSH:** I have seen the real charts, which show that the deficit started to plummet in '86 when the tax cuts kicked in.

**SCHWEIKART:** Absolutely right.

**RUSH:** I have made a big deal out of that in my newsletter over the years. But see, there is another reason for optimism too, despite all their efforts. Reagan's funeral week had to be the worst of the American leftists' lives. They did everything they could to revise the history of that man to make him hated, despised. And look at the spontaneous outpouring of love that came forth for Ronald Reagan.

**SCHWEIKART:** Right.

**RUSH:** As you said, the people know. They recognize character when they see it; they recognize virtue and honesty when they see it. Look, he won in landslides. People weren't going to be persuaded that he was an idiot. But the left lived its illusion that they had succeeded in revising history. And when they found out that they had failed, I think it was just another nail in their coffin. I am not trying to overdo this, but your book is going to have the same kind of impact. It is just another element in the whole package out there that is finally slowing down this inexorable turn to the left, and we are straightening out here. It isn't going to be long before we start turning right.

**SCHWEIKART:** Well, and the great thing, Rush, is that thanks to the internet, thanks to shows like yours, we are no longer dependent on a bunch of stupid reviews in the *American Historical Review*.

**RUSH:** Excellent point.

**SCHWEIKART:** We don't have to rely on them. We are not dependent on the historical establishment because now we have other ways to expose their hypocrisy. So what if some leftist professor at Pinkston U gives us a negative review? Who is going to read that compared to *The Limbaugh Letter*?

Interview by Rush Limbaugh as it appeared in *The Limbaugh Letter*, March 2005, ©2005 Radio-Active Media, Inc., all rights reserved.

## INTRODUCTION

Is America's past a tale of racism, sexism, and bigotry? Is it the story of the conquest and rape of a continent? Is U.S. history the story of white slave owners who perverted the electoral process for their own interests? Did America start with Columbus's killing all the Indians, leap to Jim Crow laws and Rockefeller crushing the workers, then finally save itself with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal? The answers, of course, are no, no, no, and NO.

One might never know this, however, by looking at almost any mainstream U.S. history textbook. Having taught American history in one form or another for close to sixty years between us, we are aware that, unfortunately, many students are berated with tales of the Founders as self-interested politicians and slaveholders, of the icons of American industry as robber-baron oppressors, and of every American foreign policy initiative as imperialistic and insensitive. At least Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* honestly represents its Marxist biases in the title!

What is most amazing and refreshing is that the past usually speaks for itself. The evidence is there for telling the great story of the American past honestly—with flaws, absolutely; with shortcomings, most definitely. But we think that an honest evaluation of the history of the United States must begin and end with the recognition that, compared to any other nation, America's past is a bright and shining light. America was, and is, the city on the hill, the fountain of hope, the beacon of liberty. We utterly reject "My country right or wrong"—what scholar wouldn't? But in the last thirty years, academics have taken an equally destructive approach: "My country, always wrong!" We reject that too.

Instead, we remain convinced that if the story of America's past is told fairly, the result cannot be anything but a deepened patriotism, a sense of awe at the obstacles overcome, the passion invested, the blood and tears spilled, and the nation that was built. An honest review of America's past would note, among other observations, that the same Founders who owned slaves instituted numerous ways—political and intellectual—to ensure that slavery could not survive; that

the concern over not just property rights, but all rights, so infused American life that laws often followed the practices of the common folk, rather than dictated to them; that even when the United States used her military power for dubious reasons, the ultimate result was to liberate people and bring a higher standard of living than before; that time and again America's leaders have willingly shared power with those who had none, whether they were citizens of territories, former slaves, or disenfranchised women. And we could go on.

The reason so many academics miss the real history of America is that they assume that ideas don't matter and that there is no such thing as virtue. They could not be more wrong. When John D. Rockefeller said, "The common man must have kerosene and he must have it *cheap*," Rockefeller was already a wealthy man with no more to gain. When Grover Cleveland vetoed an insignificant seed corn bill, he knew it would hurt him politically, and that he would only win condemnation from the press and the people—but the Constitution did not permit it, and he refused.

Consider the scene more than two hundred years ago when President John Adams—just voted out of office by the hated Republicans of Thomas Jefferson—mounted a carriage and left Washington even before the inauguration. There was no armed struggle. Not a musket ball was fired, nor a political opponent hanged. No Federalists marched with guns or knives in the streets. There was no guillotine. And just four years before that, in 1796, Adams had taken part in an equally momentous event when he won a razor-thin close election over Jefferson and, because of Senate rules, had to count his own contested ballots. When he came to the contested Georgia ballot, the great Massachusetts revolutionary, the "Duke of Braintree," stopped counting. He sat down for a moment to allow Jefferson or his associates to make a challenge, and when he did not, Adams finished the tally, becoming president. Jefferson told confidants that he thought the ballots were indeed in dispute, but he would not wreck the country over a few pieces of paper. As Adams took the oath of office, he thought he heard Washington say, "I am fairly out and you are fairly in! See which of us will be the happiest!"<sup>1</sup> So much for protecting his own interests! Washington stepped down freely and enthusiastically, not at bayonet point. He walked away from power, as nearly each and every American president has done since.

These giants knew that their actions of character mattered far more to the nation they were creating than mere temporary political positions. The ideas they fought for together in 1776 and debated in 1787 were paramount. And that is what American history is truly about—ideas. Ideas such as "All men are created equal"; the United States is the "last, best hope" of earth; and America "is great, because it is good."

Honor counted to founding patriots like Adams, Jefferson, Washington, and then later, Lincoln and Teddy Roosevelt. Character counted. Property was also important; no denying that, because with property came liberty. But virtue came first. Even J. P. Morgan, the epitome of the so-called robber baron, insisted that "the first thing is character . . . before money or anything else. Money cannot buy it."

It is not surprising, then, that so many left-wing historians miss the boat (and miss it, and miss it, *and miss it* to the point where they need a ferry schedule). They fail to understand what every colonial settler and every western pioneer understood: character was tied to liberty, and liberty to property. All three were needed for success, but character was the prerequisite because it put the law behind property agreements, and it set responsibility right next to liberty. And the surest way to ensure the presence of good character was to keep God at the center of one's life, community, and ultimately, nation. "Separation of church and state" meant freedom *to* worship, not freedom *from* worship. It went back to that link between liberty and responsibility, and no one could be taken seriously who was not responsible to God. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." They believed those words.

As colonies became independent and as the nation grew, these ideas permeated the fabric of the founding documents. Despite pits of corruption that have pockmarked federal and state politics—some of them quite deep—and despite abuses of civil rights that were shocking, to say the least, the concept was deeply imbedded that only a virtuous nation could achieve the lofty goals set by the Founders. Over the long haul, the Republic required virtuous leaders to prosper.

Yet virtue and character alone were not enough. It took competence, skill, and talent to build a nation. That's where property came in: with secure property rights, people from all over the globe flocked to America's shores. With secure property rights, anyone could become successful, from an immigrant Jew like Lionel Cohen and his famous Lionel toy trains to an Austrian bodybuilder-turned-millionaire actor and governor like Arnold Schwarzenegger. Carnegie arrived penniless; Ford's company went broke; and Lee Iacocca had to eat crow on national TV for his company's mistakes. Secure property rights not only made it possible for them all to succeed but, more important, established a climate of competition that rewarded skill, talent, and risk taking.

Political skill was essential too. From 1850 to 1860 the United States was nearly rent in half by inept leaders, whereas an integrity vacuum nearly destroyed American foreign policy and shattered the economy in the decades of the 1960s and early 1970s. Moral, even pious, men have taken the nation to the brink of collapse because they lacked skill, and some of the most skilled politicians in the world—Henry Clay, Richard Nixon, Bill Clinton—left legacies of frustration and corruption because their abilities were never wedded to character.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, there was a subtle and, at times, obvious campaign to separate virtue from talent, to divide character from success. The latest in this line of attack is the emphasis on diversity—that somehow merely having different skin shades or national origins makes America special. But it was not the color of the skin of people who came here that made them special, it was the content of their character. America remains a beacon of liberty, not merely because its institutions have generally remained strong, its citizens free, and its attitudes tolerant, but because it, among most of the developed world, still cries out as a nation, "Character counts." Personal liberties in America

are genuine because of the character of honest judges and attorneys who, for the most part, still make up the judiciary, and because of the personal integrity of large numbers of local, state, and national lawmakers.

No society is free from corruption. The difference is that in America, corruption is viewed as the exception, not the rule. And when light is shown on it, corruption is viciously attacked. Freedom still attracts people to the fountain of hope that is America, but freedom alone is not enough. Without responsibility and virtue, freedom becomes a soggy anarchy, an incomplete licentiousness. This is what has made Americans different: their fusion of freedom and integrity endows Americans with their sense of right, often when no other nation in the world shares their perception.

Yet that is as telling about other nations as it is our own; perhaps it is that as Americans, we alone remain committed to both the individual and the greater good, to personal freedoms and to public virtue, to human achievement and respect for the Almighty. Slavery was abolished because of the dual commitment to liberty and virtue—neither capable of standing without the other. Some crusades in the name of integrity have proven disastrous, including Prohibition. The most recent serious threats to both liberty and public virtue (abuse of the latter damages both) have come in the form of the modern environmental and consumer safety movements. Attempts to sue gun makers, paint manufacturers, tobacco companies, and even Microsoft “for the public good” have made distressingly steady advances, encroaching on Americans’ freedoms to eat fast foods, smoke, or modify their automobiles, not to mention start businesses or invest in existing firms without fear of retribution.

The Founders—each and every one of them—would have been horrified at such intrusions on liberty, regardless of the virtue of the cause, not because they were elite white men, but because such actions in the name of the public good were simply wrong. It all goes back to character: the best way to ensure virtuous institutions (whether government, business, schools, or churches) was to populate them with people of virtue. Europe forgot this in the nineteenth century, or by World War I at the latest. Despite rigorous and punitive face-saving traditions in the Middle East or Asia, these twin principles of liberty and virtue have never been adopted. Only in America, where one was *permitted* to do almost anything, but *expected* to do the best thing, did these principles germinate.

To a great extent, that is why, on March 4, 1801, John Adams would have thought of nothing other than to turn the White House over to his hated foe, without fanfare, self-pity, or complaint, and return to his everyday life away from politics. That is why, on the few occasions where very thin electoral margins produced no clear winner in the presidential race (such as 1824, 1876, 1888, 1960, and 2000), the losers (after some legal maneuvering, recounting of votes, and occasional whining) nevertheless stepped aside and congratulated the winner of a different party. Adams may have set a precedent, but in truth he would do nothing else. After all, he was a man of character.

## A Patriot's History of the United States